



WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS OF JOINT EVALUATION PROCEDURES FOR JOINT UNIVERSITIES?

A CASE STUDY OF THE EVALUATION OF THE FRENCH UNIVERSITY IN ARMENIA BY TWO NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES



SPEAKERS

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October 2024

A GROWING CONCERN FOR THE QUALITY OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION (TNE)



- more **information** sharing
- ensuring that quality assurance **agencies** and **national authorities** have clear guidelines for TNE and that **institutions** clearly explain how they are externally evaluated
- using existing tools and guidelines for the quality assurance of TNE, including the **ESG** (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area)

- ⇒ Could fostered cooperation between ESG-compliant quality assurance agencies be a way forward to evaluate joint universities?
- ⇒ What is the impact of a tailored external quality assurance approach on the internal quality assurance system of such universities?

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT UNIVERSITIES

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

A joint university is an independent higher education institution **founded through collaboration** between foreign higher education institutions and host country institutions or governments (Knight, 2017)

Benefits for sending countries

- Answer geopolitical strategies
- Use of the joint universities as “lighthouse institutions”
- Internationalise the universities of the sending countries

Benefits for host countries

- Answer geopolitical strategies
- Internationalisation at home
- Answer the needs of the local community in the host countries

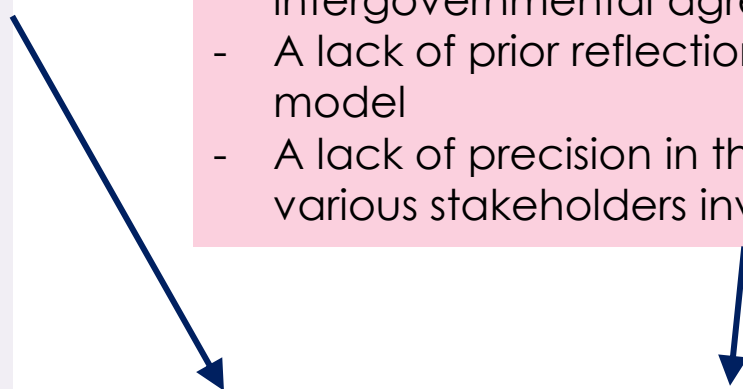
FRENCH CONTEXT

“**Franco-X university**” is the umbrella term used in France to define an institution created by an intergovernmental agreement

⇒ 42 “Franco-X universities” in the world

Challenges faced by “Franco-X universities”

- The concise nature of the initial intergovernmental agreements
- A lack of prior reflection on the economic model
- A lack of precision in the respective roles of the various stakeholders involved.



No universal model of a joint-university – each joint university is unique!

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT UNIVERSITIES BY HCÉRES

Not mandatory by law – institutional evaluations of joint universities carried out on demand

- 3 joint universities evaluated by Hcéres
- French standards and guidelines adapted to suit an international context

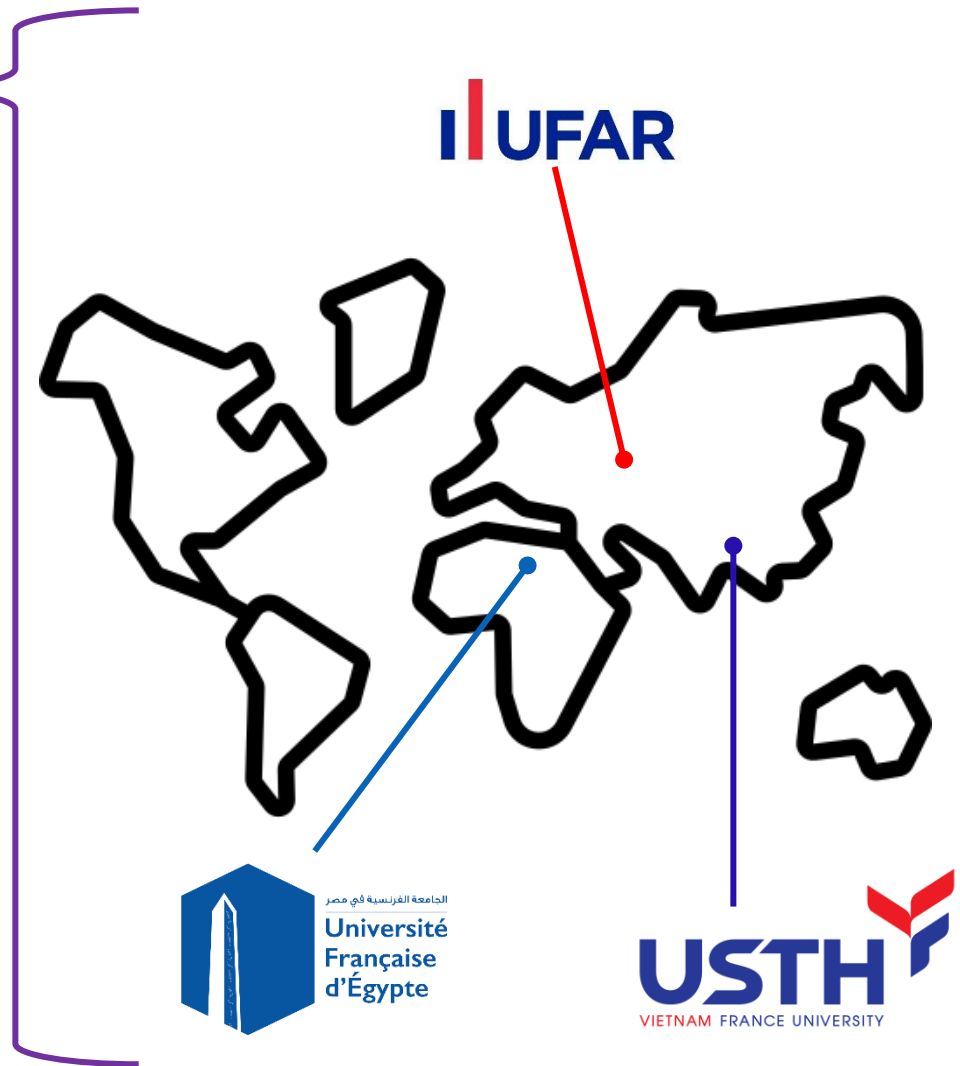
FIELD 1: STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Eight standards (1 to 8) specify the scope of this field. They are intended to assess the institution's positioning, strategy, governance, organisation and operational management. More specifically, the aim is to assess their impact on the institution's activities and results, as well as the way in which it monitors them in the light of its strategic objectives.

Standard 1. The institution defines its institutional positioning at local, national and international level.

Common strength and weakness identified in the three evaluations of joint universities by Hcéres:

- The intergovernmental character was seen as an asset (attractive double diplomas; multilingual environment...)
- Lack of support from the French government whose financial help was limited and decreasing, leading to premises issues



CASE STUDY – JOINT EVALUATION OF UFAR

SPECIFICITIES OF THE FRENCH UNIVERSITY IN ARMENIA (UFAR)

- **Founded in 2001** through a bilateral partnership between Armenia and France.
- **Joint collaboration with two French HEIs**, creating a distinctive educational framework that merges **academic standards, curricula, and cultural elements from both countries.**

Mission

to create favorable conditions for the University's development as a HEI inspired by the French model of “Grandes Ecoles” in accordance with international and European standards.

- Focus on **job insertion and industry-aligned curricula** to support Armenia's economy.



CASE STUDY – JOINT EVALUATION OF UFAR

A FIT FOR PURPOSE APPROACH

Preparation	Evaluation				Accreditation
1 preparatory mission	1 expert panel	1 evaluation framework	1 site visit	1 evaluation report	2 accreditation decisions
• Hcéres' visit to Armenia to meet with UFAR, the Armenian agency (ANQA) and the French Embassy ⇒ Getting to know the context better	• 3 French academic experts • 3 Armenian experts, including 1 student and 1 from the socio-economic sector	• Hcéres evaluation framework for foreign institutions • Additional ANQA criteria as guidelines ⇒ ESG as a common ground	• Interviews in Armenian with simultaneous translation into English (legal requirement)	• 1 single report written in English by all the experts • Review of the report by Hcéres and ANQA • The report is sent to UFAR to check for factual errors	• 1 national accreditation by the Armenian agency • 1 Hcéres international accreditation

CASE STUDY – JOINT EVALUATION OF UFAR

BENEFITS OF THE JOINT EVALUATION of UFAR

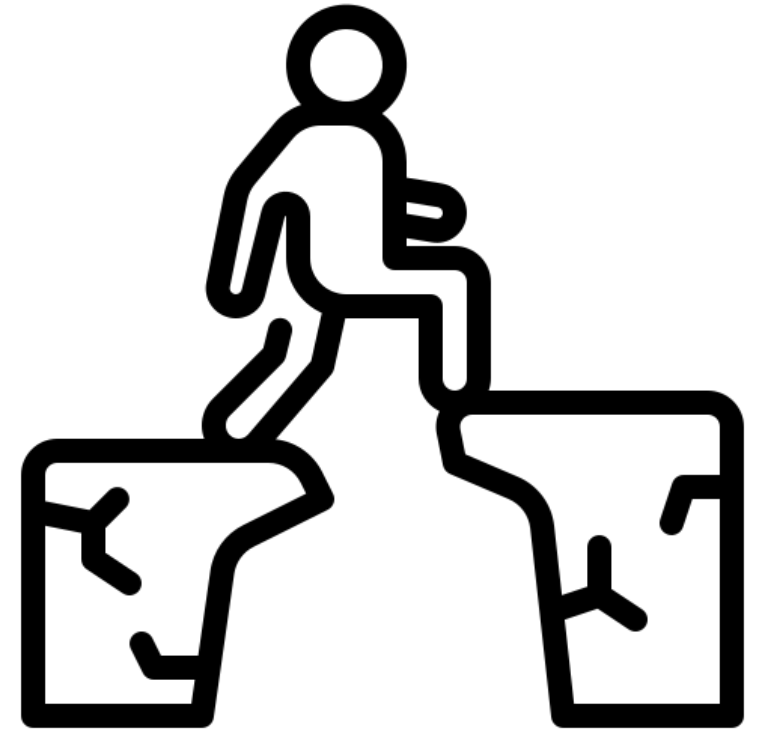
- **Dual Recognition:** Secured national accreditation and an international quality label from Hcéres
- **Strengthened French-Armenian Relations:** Reinforced dialogue with the French government, including financial aspects
- **Customised Feedback:** The binational panel, with expertise in both Armenian and French higher education systems, delivered feedback that was specifically adapted to UFAR's unique context
- **Detailed multi-year planning framework:** This framework incorporates specific strategic monitoring and indicators that translate broad objectives into actionable goals



CASE STUDY – JOINT EVALUATION OF UFAR

CHALLENGES OF THE JOINT EVALUATION OF UFAR

- **Understanding UFAR's Specific Context:** UFAR's focus on job placement rather than research sometimes conflicted with traditional university expectations.
- **Complex Accreditation Criteria:** Differing standards between French and Armenian agencies made alignment challenging. The "one-size-fits-all" approach didn't fully account for local contexts.
- **Balancing National and International Standards:** Adapting to local needs while meeting international standards was difficult. Hcéres' standards, though adjusted, still reflected a French model, creating some misalignment with UFAR's mission.



CONCLUSION – KEY TAKEAWAY OF A JOINT EVALUATION FOR QA OF JOINT UNIVERSITIES

TAKEAWAYS FOR HEIs

Benefits

- National and international recognition
- Recommendations that align with both local and global standards
- Continuous enhancement

Challenges

- HEIs may face difficulty harmonising expectations from different QA agencies
- Substantial time and financial resources for preparation and execution

TAKEAWAYS FOR AGENCIES

Benefits

- Learning from other agencies' practices
- Getting to know/regulating the transnational education offer involving the agency's country

Challenges

- Hard to find a common set of standards and guidelines for the 2 QA agencies involved in the evaluation
- Complex and long procedure

CONCLUSION ON ENQA RECOMMENDATIONS

- ⇒ **Information sharing** is key
- ⇒ **Clear and transparent guidelines** from the national authorities and agencies, although hard to get, ease the process
- ⇒ The **teaching & learning focus of the ESG is not sufficient** to capture the whole functioning of a joint university



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- **Have you also experienced or been involved in a joint evaluation?**
 - What were the benefits and downsides in your opinion?
 - What modalities can facilitate joint accreditation processes in managing differences in standards between participating countries, ensuring a balanced and effective joint evaluation?
- What does the evaluation of joint universities teach us for the external evaluation of **European university alliances**?
- What are **the best practices for adapting academic programmes** from one country to fit the context and labour market of another?

