



GUIDELINES FOR SYSTEM ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

ACQUIN

Accreditation,
Certification and
Quality Assurance
Institute

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SYSTEM ACCREDITATION

Purpose

According to the resolutions of the Accreditation Council for system accreditation the internal quality assurance system of a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the area of teaching and learning is the purpose of the system accreditation: The relevant structures and processes for teaching and learning will therefore be reviewed, to see whether they are capable of meeting the qualification objectives and to ensure high quality. The "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG), specified by the "Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs" (KMK) as well as the criteria set up by the Accreditation Council apply.

Objective

A positive system accreditation certifies the HEI that its quality assurance system in the field of teaching and learning is suitable to achieve its qualification objectives, to ensure the quality standards of its study programmes and to create a quality culture, which is supported by broad quality awareness throughout the HEI. Study programmes, which are set up after the system accreditation or have already been subject to internal quality assurance in accordance with the requirements of the accredited system, are therefore accredited.

Quality dimensions

- Quality planning: The existing processes include the elements necessary for generating study programmes of high quality.
- Quality steering: The HEI ensures that the processes of development, implementation, ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement have an impact on all study programmes.
- Quality promotion: The participants from the HEI support the processes amicably, are capable to fulfil their respective tasks within the processes and to contribute to improvements.
- Quality of results
 - The study programme has clearly defined and valid objectives.
 - The concept of the study programme allows for the scheduled realisation of objectives; the necessary organisational and material conditions are in place.
 - The concept is implemented in line with the objectives.
 - Using recognized evaluation methods, the HEI regularly reviews the study programme to see whether the objectives are achieved and/or whether the programme must be changed. In this context the HEI undertakes improvements, where appropriate.



Quality Control Cycle

The elements described in the quality definition create in their sequence a Quality Control Cycle which aims at continuous improvement. The control cycle is based upon valid objectives of the study programme as central starting point. Valid objectives are those objectives which are reviewed conceptually and/or empirically on their admissibility and usefulness. Concept, implementation of the concept, review concerning the achievement of the objectives and possible improvements are consequently set in relation to the objectives. This quality control cycle has to be applied to all processes in the field of teaching and learning.

As quality is understood as validity and achievement of the objectives, the above-defined quality elements are identified as requirements for each study programme (programme accreditation). The system accreditation will first determine whether the HEI has a defined understanding of quality and whether it is used as a binding premise action is based upon.

The requirements of the Quality Control Cycle apply not only to the study programmes but also to the (quality) processes themselves. This allows to check if the processes are purposeful, consistent and efficient, and if the processes cover elements of systematic quality control and quality improvement.

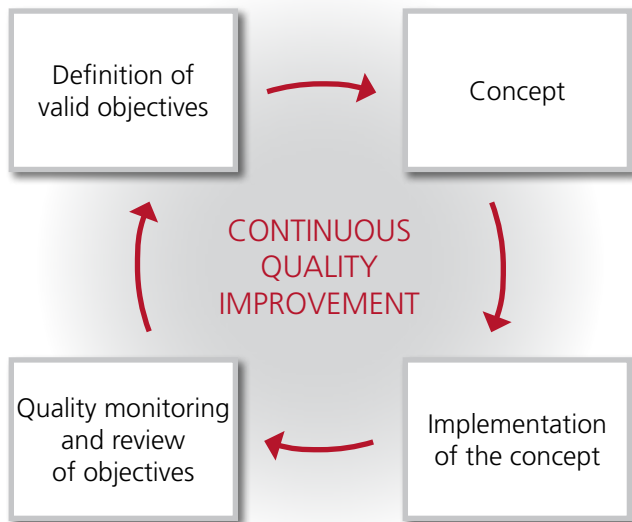


Figure: Quality Control Cycle

CRITERIA

Notes on documentation

ACQUIN takes into account the existing legal and political regulatory frameworks under which the HEIs systematically realise the development, establishment and implementation, review and further development of study programmes as well as their closure. ACQUIN uses this information to review the effectiveness and efficiency of this quality management system in the

area of teaching and learning on the basis of the Accreditation Council's resolution **"Criteria for System Accreditation"**: 1. Qualification objectives 2. Management system in teaching and learning 3. Internal quality assurance procedures 4. Data collection and reporting system 5. Responsibilities 6. Documentation

Requirements for quality assurance

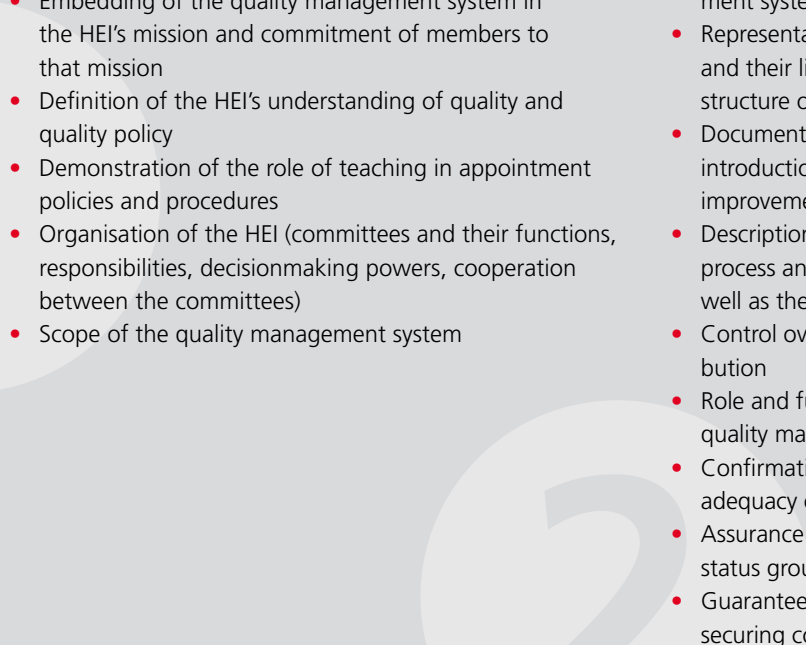
1 Quality policy

Quality policy as an element of the strategic development plan, from which a clearly defined understanding of quality is derived and integrated into the decisions of the HEI.

2 Quality assurance processes

Adequate documentation and implementation of quality assurance processes (responsibilities, competencies, binding regulations)

Aspects of quality assurance

- 
- Description of the objectives of the HEI
 - Profile of the HEI in the fields of teaching and learning, research, service
 - Embedding of the quality management system in the HEI's mission and commitment of members to that mission
 - Definition of the HEI's understanding of quality and quality policy
 - Demonstration of the role of teaching in appointment policies and procedures
 - Organisation of the HEI (committees and their functions, responsibilities, decisionmaking powers, cooperation between the committees)
 - Scope of the quality management system
- Decisionmaking authority and responsibility of HEI management with regard to the design, implementation, review, improvement, and approval of the quality management system
 - Representation of the processes in teaching and learning and their links with the operational and organisational structure of the HEI
 - Documentation of processes for the development, introduction, implementation, review and continuous improvement of the quality of study programmes
 - Description of the normative guidelines concerning the process and study programme documents by the HEI as well as the tools and processes to verify compliance
 - Control over the issuance of documents and their distribution
 - Role and function of HEI leading management in the quality management system
 - Confirmation of the existence, reasonableness and adequacy of decisionmaking structures
 - Assurance of the participation of the different status groups
 - Guarantee of the competence of all parties involved; securing continuous staff qualification

These guidelines are not meant as checklist, in which all points have to be ticked off. Instead irrelevant points should be omitted and special features of the HEI – in regard to its quality assurance processes and its individual elements, which are not included in the given points – should be described.

Framework

Presentation of the legal and political framework and scope of the HEI in terms of implementation, review and continuous improvement of study programmes and their development, introduction and closure (autonomy)

3 Information and communication

Measures of information and for communication between all parties

- Basic principles of the HEI's internal information and documentation
- Information measures
- Safeguarding of communication and participation



4 Verification and further development

- Safeguarding of processes
- Coordination of the processes in accordance to the objectives and resources
- Regular and systematic review of the implementation and effectiveness of the processes
- Management of process deviations
- Measures for commonly faced problems
- Regular review of the adequacy and effectiveness of control measures
- Description of the internal quality assurance processes (organisation, implementation and analysis of results, as well as development of follow-up measures)
- Strategic concept or priority list for necessary modifications in the area of process quality concerning teaching and learning; implementation of necessary measures

CRITERIA

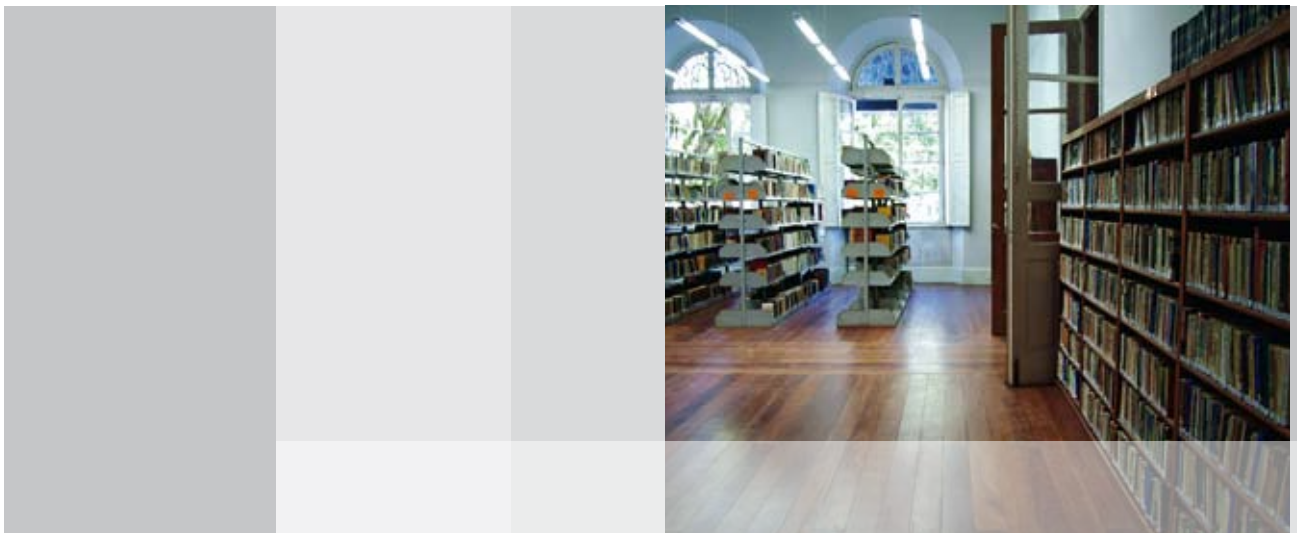
Example catalogue: criteria in the procedure of feature random sample

Features that are chosen in the procedure of feature random sample are usually taken from this example catalogue. In this catalogue features are listed that are deemed to be relevant for having an influence on the programme quality of a degree course.

The following features of the design of study programmes may be part of the feature random sample:

- Definition of qualification objectives
- Compliance with the framework regulations for the introduction of a credit system (ECTS) and the modularisation of study programmes
- Definitions of admission requirements, recognition of externally acquired competences and selection procedures
- Student work load
- The provision of material, spatial and human resources taking into consideration interdependent structures
- Organisation and coordination of studies
- Module specific and competence orientated examination system (examination complexity and modality) and sufficient information thereon
- General and subjectrelated student advisory service

The selection of features takes place according to the "Rules for the compilation of the feature random sample" of the Accreditation Council in the most actual version.



PROCEDURE

System accreditation is a multistage procedure made up of different elements to determine the effectiveness of process quality. The procedures of system accreditation include both feature and programme random samples, resulting in a thorough statement about the results of process quality and therefore about the quality of the HEI's study programmes. Procedural basis is the adaption of the most actual version of the Accreditation Council's resolution "General Rules for carrying out System Accreditation Procedures".

1. Preparatory conversation

ACQUIN holds conversations with representatives of the HEI about the purpose of the system accreditation procedure, the relevant criteria for evaluation and accreditation and the various procedural steps.

2. Application

The HEI submits an application for system accreditation. In case of a relevant state-specific regulation, the application has to be submitted via the responsible ministry.

The application includes:

- a description of the HEI's quality management system applied to the field of teaching and learning as well as
- a systematic overview of the existing and planned study programmes of the HEI, differentiated according to the current state of planning and realisation, assignment to organisational units, as well as to designated degrees.
- In case of a system accreditation the documentation additionally has to comprise a report about the results of the half-time random sample.

3. Preliminary evaluation

Involving the Standing Expert Committee „System Accreditation“ the Accreditation Commission draws a conclusion on the result of the preliminary evaluation.

4. Contract on carrying out a system accreditation procedure

After having successfully checked that the prerequisites for the admittance to system accreditation have been met by the HEI, ACQUIN and the HEI make a contract on carrying out the system accreditation procedure. This procedure includes the following elements:

- evaluation of the process quality on the basis of the provided documentation as well as two on-site visits
- evaluation of selected features of all study programmes offered by the HEI in the frame of the evaluation of the process quality (feature random sample)
- evaluation of selected study programmes (programme random sample)

The contract will define the time frame and cost of the procedure.



5. Submission of documentation by the HEI

The HEI provides ACQUIN with all documents relevant for the accreditation procedure.

These include:

- a documentation showing internal management and decision-making structures, the HEI's mission and profile, its offer of study programmes, defined quality objectives and the system of internal quality assurance in the field of teaching and learning
- a statement from student representatives of the HEI and
- the self-documentation for the programme random sample of the selected degree courses.

6. Evaluation of the documentation and the first on-site visit

The Standing Expert Committee "System Accreditation" appoints an expert group for evaluating the process quality and nominates a spokesperson for the expert group. The expert group consists of at least five people, whereby usually three persons have professional experience in managing decision-making and implementation processes in HEIs, especially in the field of teaching and learning. These experts should have leadership experience (academic deans, committee members, members of faculty and HEI management), show openness to different organisational structures and have experience with different institutional cultures. Additionally, the expert group should comprise one student representative with experience in HEI self-administration, and one representative of the professional practise.

If decisions on supplementary determinations in terms of professional law must be taken during the procedure, an adequate expert must be involved – as far as this is required due to state regulations.

The expert group "Process Quality" evaluates the documentation provided by the HEI. On this basis the expert group conducts conversations with different status groups of the HEI to resolve open questions and to deepen their knowledge about the quality management system.

On the basis of the evaluation results the expert group formulates a proposal for the timing and content of the second on-site visit. The HEI is informed about the results and is given the opportunity to submit additional or revised documents in preparation for the second on-site visit. The experts decide on the composition of the feature random sample. The HEI provides ACQUIN with the necessary documents for the feature random sample in time and before the second on-site visit.

7. Feature random sample

The feature random sample serves for the evaluation of relevant features concerning the design, implementation and quality assurance of study programmes. Rather than evaluating the subject specific content the experts check the formal compliance and implementation of process regulations and the compliance with the guidelines specified by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) as well as with state-specific guidelines, and the criteria set up by the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of study programmes.

8. Second on-site visit (in-depth analysis)

During an on-site visit of several days the expert group “Process Quality” evaluates the compliance and effectiveness of the quality assurance system in the field of teaching and learning according to the documentation. The experts conduct conversations with the persons in charge of quality assurance, the leading management of the HEI, the management of study-related organisational units, teaching personnel, students, administrative staff, as well as the equal opportunities commissioner(s). The evaluation serves for an in-depth analysis of the existing quality management system and to formulate recommendations for its continued improvement.

The evaluation of the process quality covers the assessment of the defined features, which have been examined in all study programmes of the HEI. The expert group writes a preliminary evaluation report, which is made available to the expert group of the programme random samples.

9. Programme random sample

The programme random sample includes a review of objectives, concept, content, resources, implementation procedures, and programmerelated quality assurance of selected study programmes (see ACQUIN-Guidelines for Programme Accreditation Procedures). Accordingly, the subject specific expert group reviews, in an exemplary manner, the effectiveness of the quality management system through a results-oriented evaluation of the quality of these study programmes without taking an accreditation decision.

10. Evaluation report on process quality

The expert group “Process Quality”, taking into account the results of the feature random sample, writes a final evaluation report on the process quality of the HEI. Additionally, this report includes a decision recommendation to ACQUIN’s Accreditation Commission to be used as a basis for the decision on system accreditation. ACQUIN forwards the expert’s evaluation report without the proposed decision recommendation to the HEI for comment.

11. Comment from the HEI

The HEI has the opportunity, within an agreed period (usually four weeks), to comment on the evaluation report and give corrections, if necessary, or to describe already initiated improvement measures. The evaluation report and the HEI’s comments thereon are passed on to ACQUIN’s Standing Expert Committee “System Accreditation”.

12. Statement of the Standing Expert Committee and decision of the Accreditation Commission

Based on the evaluation report and the comment of the HEI, the Standing Expert Committee “System Accreditation” checks, if the evaluation of process quality has been handled well concerning content and procedure. As a result, the Standing Expert Committee “System Accreditation” issues a statement. This statement contains a recommendation to the Accreditation Commission. The Accreditation Commission takes the final accreditation decision.



PROCEDURE

13. Accreditation results

The following decisions are possible:

Accreditation

System accreditation is announced, if quality requirements are met. That means that process quality and programme quality are comprehensive without systemic deficiencies. All study programmes of the HEI, which are set up after the system accreditation or have already been subject to internal quality assurance in accordance with the requirements of the accredited system, are therefore accredited. The decision and the names of the evaluators are published and the Accreditation Council is notified.

Suspension of the procedure

The process quality has deficiencies. The programme quality is comprehensive or deficiencies exist. A one-time suspension of the procedure is possible.

Rejection

The process quality and programme quality do not meet the requirements. There is no accreditation.

14. Half-time random sample

According to the resolutions of the Accreditation Council, the HEI commissions an accreditation agency to carry out an in-depth evaluation of study programmes after half of the accreditation period. ACQUIN compiles a report on the outcome of this half-time random sample that, where appropriate, gives recommendations regarding the remedy of deficiencies. The report is made available to the HEI, is published and must be submitted for system accreditation.

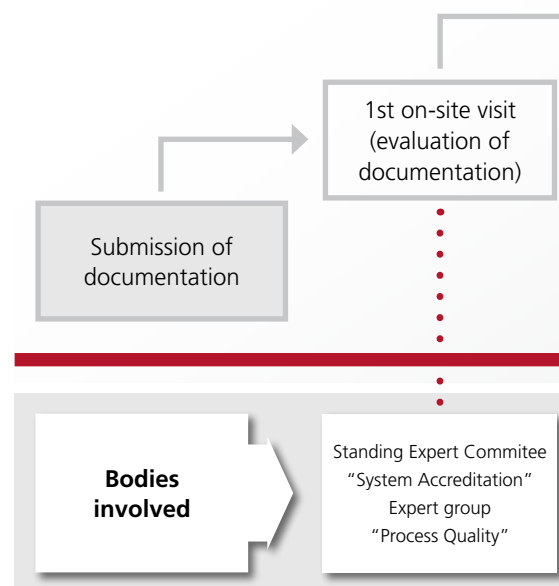
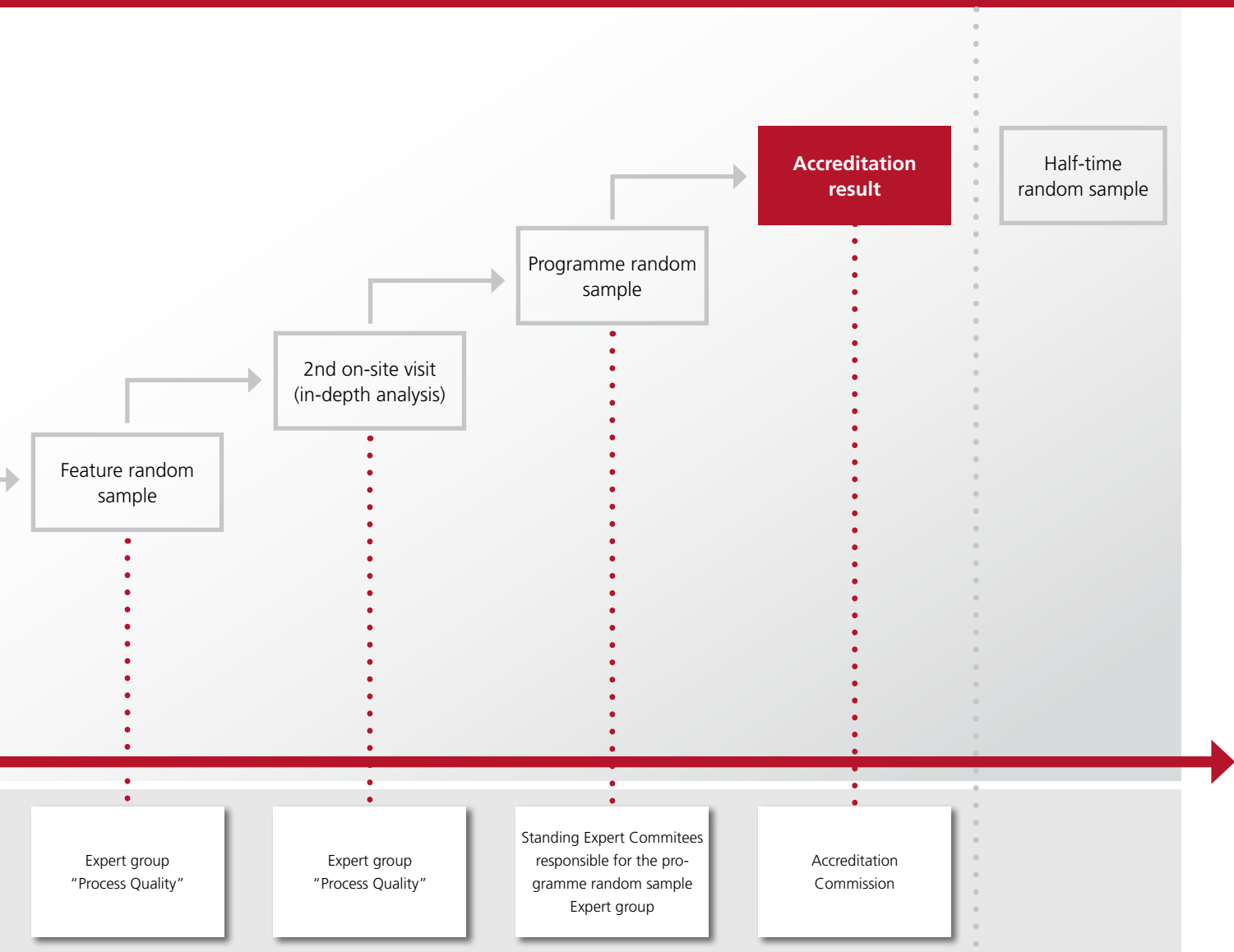


Figure: Procedure of the system accreditation





STRUCTURE OF THE EVALUATION REPORT

I. Course of the Evaluation and Accreditation Procedure

II. Initial Situation

1. Short Portrait of the HEI
2. Existing Legal and Political Framework
3. Study Programmes offered by the HEI

III. Evaluation

1. Quality Policy
2. Quality Assurance Processes
3. Information
4. Quality Control Cycle
5. Feature Random Sample
6. Programme Random Sample
7. Resume

IV. Recommendations to the Accreditation Commission

Sections I and II are completed by the head office, section III by the expert group. These sections are submitted to the HEI. Section IV is not given to the HEI; only the standing expert committee in charge and the accreditation commission receive this section.

Appendix – Resolutions of the Accreditation Council

- General Rules for carrying out System Accreditation Procedures
- Criteria for System Accreditation
- Rules for Composing the Feature Random Sample



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Editor

ACQUIN e.V.
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ACQUIN

Your intention. Our focus.

ACQUIN e.V.

Brandenburger Straße 2
95448 Bayreuth
Germany

Phone +49 (0) 9 21 / 53 03 90-50

Fax +49 (0) 9 21 / 53 03 90-51

sekr@acquin.org

www.acquin.org