



# GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

ACQUIN

Accreditation,  
Certification and  
Quality Assurance  
Institute



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## BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE

The objective of the accreditation procedure is to evaluate and to assess the admissibility of the study programme in terms of quality. The accreditation decision is based on the self-documentation of the Higher Education Institution (HEI) and the on-site visit by an expert group. ACQUIN's accreditation procedure is criteria-based throughout. The applied criteria only partially depend on so-called standards. Standards are important, particularly with regard to the creation of transparency, the definition of interfaces, and the compliance with legal regulations. Reference to standards is deliberately avoided when evaluating the contents of the study programme.

The following elements are considered as quality-relevant for the study programmes:

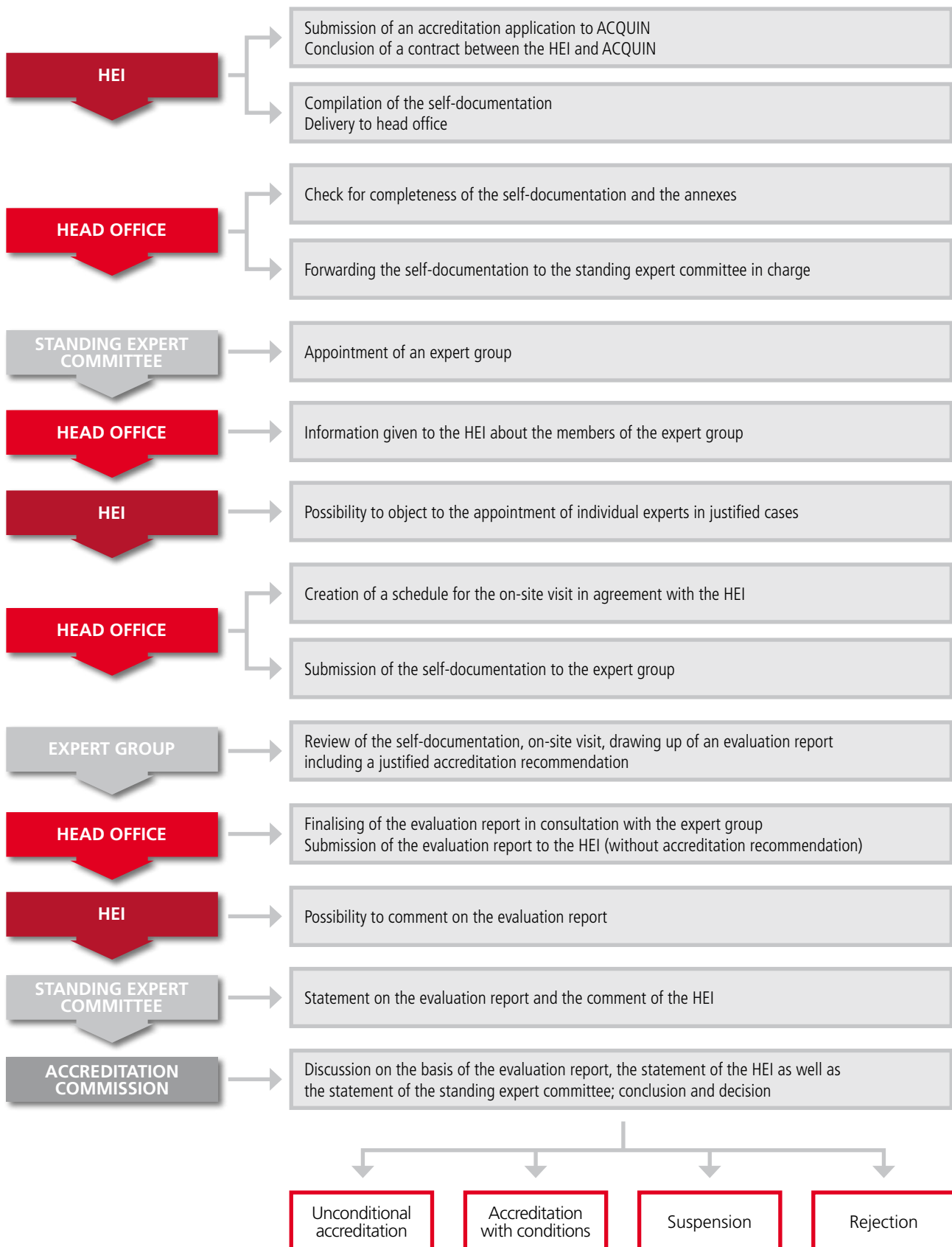
- The study programme has clearly defined and valid objectives.
- The concept of the study programme enables the (intended) realisation of the objectives.
- The necessary organisational and resource-related requirements are met.
- The concept is implemented accordingly.
- Using recognised evaluation methods, the HEI periodically checks whether the objectives of the study programme are successfully reached and if the study programme needs modification. Consequently the HEI improves the programme if necessary.

The guidelines, which comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European "Higher Education Area" (ESG), can be applied in both national and international evaluation procedures. The guidelines should not be

understood as rigid organisational and conceptual requirements; rather, they should be conceived as offering flexible assistance with a list of questions whose answers can also be derived from study and examination regulations. The self-documentation should be compiled freely on the basis of these guidelines and illustrate the quality profile of the study programme by specifying the strengths and weaknesses of the individual elements. The guidelines also apply for the programme random sample as part of the system accreditation procedure.



# AN OVERVIEW OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE



## AN OVERVIEW OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE

### Unconditional accreditation

The study programme has no deficits with regard to content and structure. However, every study programme can and should be further developed. Therefore recommendations can be given that should be considered with regard to quality development by those in charge of the study programme.

### Suspension of the procedure

The study programme is not accredited now, but there is the prospect of accreditation. Essential deficits with regard to content and structure must first be corrected, before the study programme can be presented again to the accreditation commission after another review.

### Accreditation with conditions

The study programme is accredited. It has, however, weaknesses or inconsistencies that are nonessential with regard to content or structure, but must be corrected to ensure the long-term quality of the study programme. This means that the study programme needs, at least in some areas, improvement. But it does not imply any disqualification of the study programme, which in fact may be demanding in terms of quality. The HEI must make these improvements within a certain time period.

### Rejection

The accreditation is denied as the study programme has fundamental deficits which further revision cannot correct.



## THE SELF-DOCUMENTATION BY THE HEI

The introduction of an accreditation procedure requires the compilation of a comprehensive self-documentation.

The cover sheet of the self-documentation needs to have the following information:

- Provider of the study programme (HEI, department/faculty)
- Title of the study programme
- Degree
- Date/planned date of introduction
- Location(s) of the study programme
- Subject field (multiple classifications possible)
- Regular study duration
- Beginning of studies (winter semester/summer semester)
- Frequency of the offered programme (annually/semi-annually)
- Contact person for study programme information
- Number of ECTS credits
- Modules/course/academic schedule (annex)
- Number of students to be admitted
- Tuition fees
- Target group/addressees
- Type of studies (full-time/extra-occupational/distance learning/part-time)
- Admission requirements
- Master's programmes: more practice-oriented/more research-oriented
- Master's programmes: consecutive/non-consecutive/further educational



# THE SELF-DOCUMENTATION BY THE HEI

## Guidelines for the compilation of self-documentation and for external evaluation

### 1. Objectives

Does the study programme have clearly defined, reasonable and valid objectives?

#### 1.1 Objectives of the institution, overarching objectives, and (state) restrictions if applicable

Which overall strategy do the HEI and the study related organisational unit pursue

#### How is the study programme integrated into this strategy?

- Current situation of the HEI
- Strategic development and planning, quality policy
- Description of the study related organisational unit, foci and profile of teaching and research
- Links between the current study programme and other courses of study in the study related organisational unit
- Reasons for the establishment of the study programme (academic or artistic, strategic, professional, organisational, financial, etc.)
- Technical objectives and beyond

#### Which quantitative objectives does the study programme have? What is the current demand?

- (Envisaged) admission capacity of the study programme
- (Expected) number of first-year students, students, and graduates; for the study programmes that are already in progress:
  - Number of students/number of graduates (broken down by number of semesters, sex, field of study, national/foreign, age at start and completion of studies, educational background, professional experience, average specialised study duration, final grade, etc.)
  - Number of students that have changed to other universities or dropped out (incl. reasons for this)
- Demand from prospective students
- Application/admission ratio (admission statistics from previous years, if applicable)

#### How was compliance with legal regulation taken into consideration and guaranteed during the development of the study programme?

- Criteria set up by the Accreditation Council, state-specific regulations, requirements specified by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education & Cultural Affairs ("KMK"), guidelines for study programmes leading to professions regulated by national laws or church laws, qualifications framework
- Current documents: see [www.acquin.org](http://www.acquin.org)

#### ACQUIN checks

- the relationship between the study programme and the HEI or its profile as well as the introductory modalities,
- whether the HEI pursues certain qualification objectives with the study programme, whether they are explicitly and sufficiently presented and whether they are valid,
- whether the occupational fields are sufficiently defined and whether the requirements for relevant professional experience are taken appropriately into consideration.



## 1.2 Objectives of the study programme

**Describe and substantiate the objectives of the study programme, the development of the objectives as well as the measures taken to assure the validity of the objectives:**

- Description of the objectives and the target group
- Description of the development of the objectives in consideration of relevant interest groups (students, teaching staff, employers, etc.)
- Evaluation of the objectives

**Which specific competences – both related to the specific study field and beyond – should be taught?**

- Subject-related competences
- General and professional abilities, skills and knowledge

**How are the following aspects implemented in the objectives of the study programme?**

- Scientific/academic or artistic approach
- Employability
- Personality/personal development of the students
- Commitment to democratic citizenship
- Gender equality

**For which fields of activity does the study programme prepare its students for?**

- Reflection and integration of the requirements of the professional practice and the labour market in the development of the study programme (e.g. career field analysis), employability
- Participation of representatives from the professional practice

**To what extent does the study programme have its own profile?**

- Description of this special profile, e.g.
  - Joint degree programmes
  - Distance learning programmes
  - Further education study programmes
- Differences between previous and other/similar study programmes at the same HEI or other institutions
- Master's programmes: additional qualifications compared to a bachelor's degree



## 2. Concept

How are the objectives implemented in the concept of the study programme? How do individual modules contribute to the achievement of the study programme's objectives?

### 2.1 Study programme structure

**Please describe the structure of the study programme with regard to its internal coherence and its achievement of the objectives set:**

- Structure of the study programme regarding time and content
- Integration of latest scientific or artistic developments into the curriculum
- Structuring, integration and supervision of practical phases and/or periods spend abroad
- Description of an interdisciplinary course offering
- Description of a concept for part-time studies, where applicable
- Consideration of gender equality and the concerns of students in special situations

### 2.2 Learning objectives, modularisation, ECTS

**How is the study programme structured?**

- Use of ECTS
- Modularisation concept
- Scope of the obligatory, elective-obligatory and elective offerings, offering cycle
- Feasibility of the programme within the standard period of study

- Assessment and description of the student workload
- Content of the module descriptions: content and learning outcomes, forms of teaching, participation requirements, applicability of the module, requirements for awarding credit points, credit points/workload, frequency of the module offering, duration of the module, classification by semester, etc.

**How do the individual modules contribute to the overall competence of graduates?**

- Conveyance of an integrative view of the individual disciplines
- Development of transferable knowledge and skills
- Conveyance of key qualifications
- Appropriateness of the skills, which the students are expected to acquire, in relation to the respective level of education (Bachelor/Master)

### 2.3 Learning context

**Which didactic means are used to provide the students with adequate professional and social skills in their field of expertise and (to what extent) are they appropriate?**

- Intended course structures and teaching methods
- Justification of the selection and appropriateness of the forms of examination
- Integration of distance learning elements and new media
- Integration of foreign languages
- The required qualifications of teaching staff is guaranteed

#### ACQUIN checks

- whether the concept is appropriate to achieve the specified objectives,
- whether the coherence of the curriculum and modules is assured with regard to achieving the objectives and the feasibility of the study programme,
- whether the concept itself is consistent,
- whether the learning context supports the achievement of the objectives.

### 3. Implementation

Are the resources and organisational requirements adequate to implement the concept in a consistent and target-oriented way?

#### 3.1 Resources

**Are the human resources required for the implementation of the study programme and the fulfilment of its profile available?**

- Current employment situation:
  - Jobs for full-time teachers, visiting professors and lecturers; gender ratio
  - Currently occupied positions which differ from the staff appointment scheme
  - Prospective vacancies
  - Import and export of teaching
  - Administrative, technical and other staff
- Capacity planning and overview of the teaching load available for the study programme
- Distribution of the teaching and examination workload to the teaching staff
- Qualifications of the teaching staff
- Role of teaching in the professorial appointment policy of the HEI
- Student/teacher ratio

**Are the current resources/concerning equipment and budget sufficient and appropriate for the objectives of the study programme?**

- Complete description of current equipment

- Teaching resources
- Other material resources for the study programme
- Financial resources for lecturers

#### 3.2 Decision-making processes, organisation and cooperation

**How is the study programme organised?**

**How are responsibilities and contact persons defined and made transparent?**

- Committees for teaching and studies
- Participation of students
- Participation of external people
- Cooperation and projects within the study related organisational unit or with others, with national HEIs or abroad, with teaching and research institutes and with industry
- Existent and prospective joint degrees

#### 3.3 Examination system

**How is the examination system organised?**

**How does it contribute to achieving the study programme's objectives?**

- Examination modalities; selection of the kinds of examination and their suitability for reaching the competence-oriented objectives of the respective module
- Frequency and organisation of examinations, workload of students
- Compilation of examination documents (record, certificate, diploma supplement, transcript of records)



#### ACQUIN checks

- whether the resources support the concept and its realisation,
- whether the resources (personnel, equipment, infrastructure) are appropriate to attain the qualification objectives and used according to their purpose,
- the organisation, appropriateness, and transparency of the decision-making processes and the general organisation of the study programme with regard to its concept and the achievement of the objectives.

## THE SELF-DOCUMENTATION BY THE HEI

### 3.4 Admission requirements

What is the requirement profile for admission to the study programme: which specific abilities, skills and knowledge are required of the applicants?

**Are the admission requirements, selection and recognition criteria appropriate and is the suitable target group addressed consequently?**

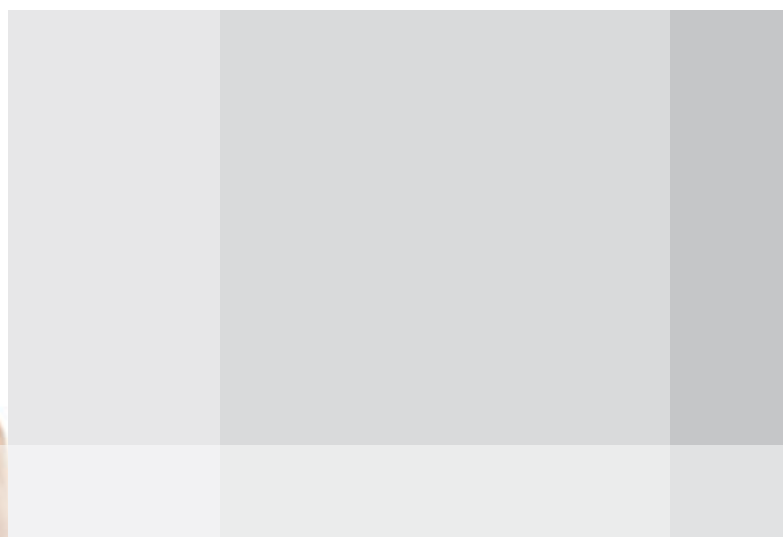
- Admission requirements
- Criteria and process of the selection procedure
- Recognition of (non-) HEI qualifications
- Opportunities for entry to and transfer between different degree systems
- Preparatory courses for foreign students, first-year students, and for students who are new to the subject (to create an equal starting level)
- Master's programmes: opportunities for furthering academic careers e.g. for doctoral studies

### 3.5 Transparency

Which possibilities exist regarding access to relevant information?

**How are requirements made transparent for all target groups?**

- Individual student support and advice (information, subject-related advisory service, consultation hours, support through tutorials, etc.)
- Documentation and publications with regard to the study programme, admission criteria, study plan and examinations, measures for disadvantage compensation
- Access to the relevant study documents (e.g. module handbook)



## 4. Quality Assurance and Development

How is the quality of the study programme assured? Which measures aimed at the further development of objectives, the concept and implementation exist?

**Do the study programme, the study related organisational unit and the HEI have a quality management system with defined organisational and decision-making structures to guarantee the systematic further development of the study programme?**

- Compilation of study data and mechanisms for their implementation into the development of study plans, selection of personnel, student admission modalities, teaching evaluation, etc.
  - Mechanisms for the systematic further development of the programme:
    - Internal/external evaluations, analysis and feedback
    - Strategic concept or priority list for necessary modifications
    - Measures to assure the effectiveness and quality of teaching
    - Validation and assurance of the appropriateness of the courses with regard to teaching content and the overall concept, adaption of the latest developments and knowledge in science, art, research and the professional world into course contents
  - Description of the decision-making processes and committees involved in quality assurance and quality development
- Existing and prospective evaluation of study success (graduate analysis, studies on alumni activities, duration of job search, income, career path analyses, alumni association)
  - Measures with regard to high drop-out rates, unsatisfactory graduate analyses or unsatisfactory grade point averages
  - Does the HEI have a procedure to evaluate and promote the qualifications and skills of the teaching staff?
  - Professorial appointment policy
  - System of performance evaluation of teaching staff; measures
  - Personnel development measures
  - Promotion of future academics and/or artists

### ACQUIN checks

- whether a quality evaluation is carried out,
- whether instruments exist to assure the validity of set objectives, the quality of the concept and the implementation of the concept with regard to the set objectives,
- whether the measures taken are appropriate, whether steering capacity is assured with regard to the objectives, concept and implementation of the programme,
- how the quality management of the study programme is integrated into the overarching quality management system during a programme random sample as part of system accreditation.

## REACCREDITATION

Has the study programme been further developed in accordance with current (academic) developments?

Has the current legal framework been respected?

Have evaluations been carried out and have corresponding measures based on the results been implemented to further develop the study programme?

**In addition to a short description of the study programme in the four areas (objectives, concept, implementation, quality assurance), the HEI is asked to attach special importance to the following aspects in the self-documentation for reaccreditation:**

- Description of the modifications that indirectly or directly affect the study programme (study content, modularisation and credit points [ECTS], human and material resources, cooperation contracts, etc.)
- Study success (evaluated by means of graduate surveys and studies of current alumni activity)
- Calculations/evaluation of student workload in the individual modules
- Results from evaluations and resulting measures

- Statistical data:
  - Relation between admission capacity and actual enrolments
  - Examination results
  - Drop-out rate
  - Number of first-year students
  - Percentage of foreign students
  - Gender Ratio
- Follow-up according to the recommendations given in the first accreditation



### ACQUIN checks

the further development of the study programme as well as the modifications made since the first accreditation. Particular focus is thereby placed on quality assurance, i.e. it will be checked whether and how the results from the evaluations are implemented in concrete measures.

## APPENDICES TO THE SELF-DOCUMENTATION

### Required annexes:

- Study and examination regulations, diploma supplement, transcript of records, learning agreement, and, if existent, internship regulations
- Module catalogue with a detailed description of the individual modules (content, learning outcomes, credit points, obligatory/elective courses, etc.)
- Study plan
- Qualification profiles of the teaching staff (specialisations, publications, research activities)
- Capacity plan for the entire duration of the study programme (target/realisation)
- Description of existing and prospective cooperation agreements (justification, codes of cooperation, joint study programmes, mutual recognition of academic performance and degrees, reporting system for the progress achieved in the (further) development of cooperation agreements, and accreditation status of the partner programme)

### Additional annexes, if applicable, e.g.:

- Relevant committee decisions
- Notification of the approval of the study programme (depending on the respective Federal State) or statement of the Ministry, respectively
- HEI and state-specific regulations on the establishment of the study programme
- Admission regulations and regulations on fees and payments
- Summary of evaluation results
- Results from graduate interviews
- Information material for prospective and current students
- Presentation of the quality management system



## REMARKS ON THE PROCEDURE

### Members of the expert group

The expert group usually consists of three professors, one practitioner and one student. In regard to professorial representation special attention is paid to the fact that members belong to different HEI types. In cases of cluster accreditation procedures, the size of the expert group is increased accordingly.

### Responsibility of the ACQUIN programme coordinator

The ACQUIN programme coordinator, who accompanies the expert group on-site, is responsible for organisational aspects of the on-site visit. In addition, the coordinator explains the course of the accreditation procedure, but he/she does not act as an evaluator him/herself.

### The on-site visit

At the beginning of the on-site visit, which usually lasts two days, a spokesperson of the expert group is chosen. The spokesperson takes the role of chairing the discussions at the HEI and might act as main contact person for the head office in the later stages of the process. During the on-site visit the expert group talks to representatives of the HEI and inspects the facilities to check whether the laboratories, libraries, working and computer rooms are equipped adequately to run the study programme successfully.

The evaluation procedure is based on the examination of the submitted self-documentation of the HEI and conversations on-site with the directors of the study programme, core teaching staff, students, and the HEI management. Focus should be attached to the consistency of the objectives, concept and implementation of the programme in consideration of the respec-

tive HEI-specific circumstances. The evaluation of the study programme should on the contrary not be determined by the experts' individual scientific or artistic conception.

The accreditation is a collegial advisory process based on constructive critique: If the experts perceive ways in which the study programme could be improved, they should discuss them with the directors of the programme.

The ACQUIN accreditation commission is the sole decision-making body. For this reason, the members of the expert group are requested not to make any statements on the expected accreditation results towards their discussion partners at the HEI. As soon as the accreditation commission has made its decision, the HEI will be informed about the result and, if applicable, about the conditions and recommendations.

### Evaluation report

Usually the individual members of the expert group take responsibility for different parts of the evaluation report, which does not imply separate judgements by the experts, but a division of labour in writing the report. The evaluation report should comprise a descriptive and an evaluative section for each of the following items: objectives, concept, implementation, and quality assurance. Both the positive and negative aspects should be specified. The report must be sufficiently informative and conclusive so that the responsible persons of the HEI, the standing expert committee and the accreditation commission are able to understand the recommendations of the expert group without any further background information (self-documentation, on-site discussions). A clear distinction is therefore to be made between recommendations, which can contribute to the optimisation of the study programme, and conditions, on whose fulfilment in due course and time the accreditation status is based.





# THE EVALUATION REPORT

## I. Course of the Evaluation and Accreditation Procedure

## II. Initial Situation

### 1. Short Portrait of the HEI

### 2. Context of the Study Programme(s)

## III. Evaluation

### 1. Objectives

Existence, transparency, validity of the objectives:

- Reference to the general objectives of the HEI (integration into the HEI profile)
- Objectives of the study programme (career qualifications/"employability", etc.)
- Definition and appropriateness of the target group

### 2. Concept

Existence, consistency, coherence and consequence with regard to:

- Structure and content of the study programme
- Learning outcomes, modularisation and ECTS
- Learning context

### 3. Implementation

Existence, plausibility, appropriateness of:

- Resources (human, material, spatial and infrastructural)
- Decision-making processes, organisation and cooperation
- Examination system
- Admission requirements
- Transparency

## 4. Quality Assurance and Development

Existence, plausibility, appropriateness of a quality management system with regard to:

- Task/function
- Structure
- Implementation
- Appropriateness

## 5. 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.



## NOTES

### For current information regarding

- Accreditation results
- Member institutions
- Committee members
- Projects
- etc.

please see:

[www.acquin.org](http://www.acquin.org)

Further information is also available  
through our head office:

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