



# ACQUIN Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation

ACQUIN

Akkreditierungs-,  
Certifizierungs- und  
Qualitätssicherungs-  
Institut



# **ACQUIN Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation**

*As of December 2015*

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## 1. GENERAL ASPECTS

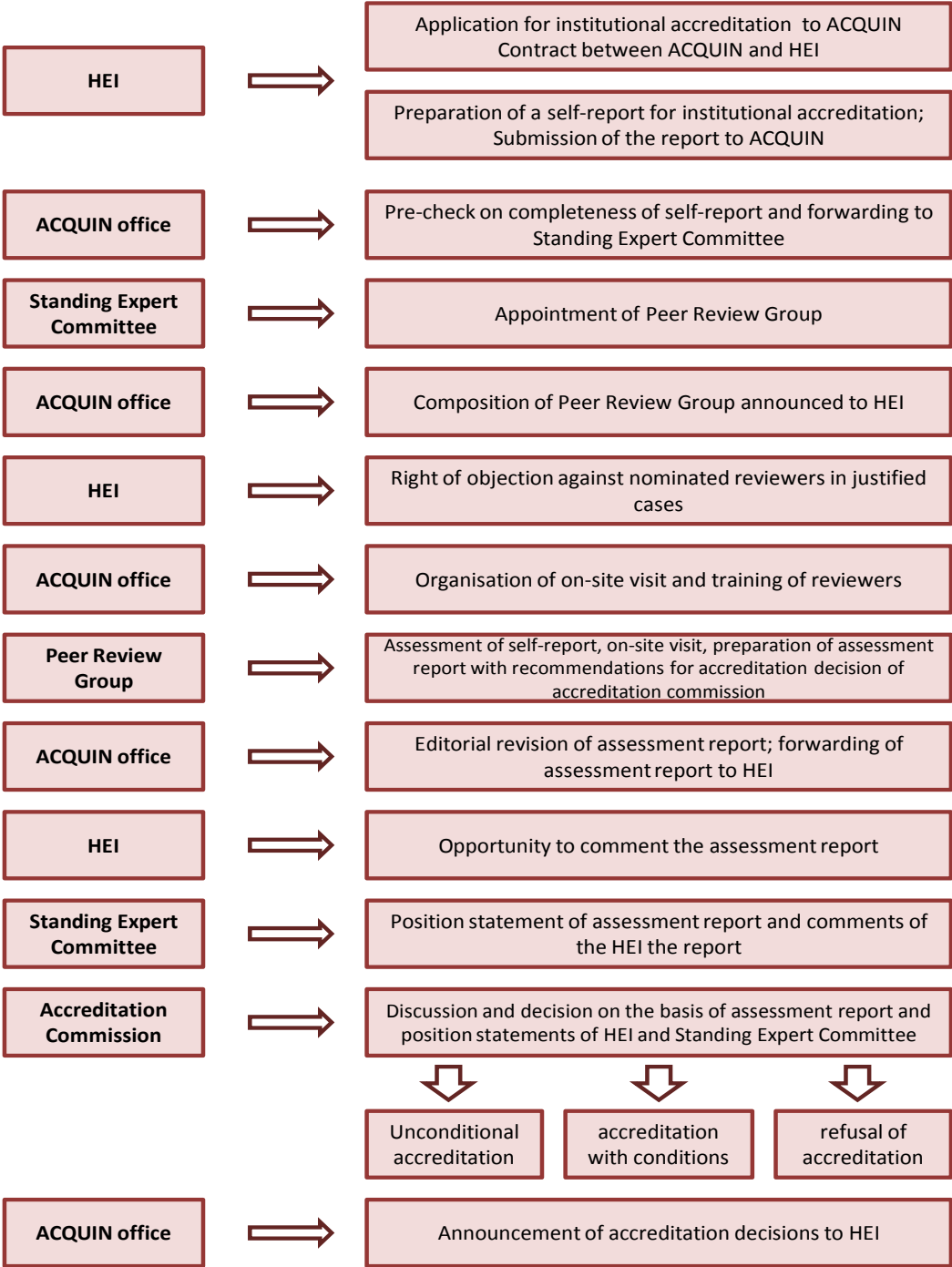
The institutional audit is an accreditation procedure which should clarify whether the performance of a higher education institution in teaching and research is in accordance with scientific standards. The objective of an institutional accreditation is therefore the safeguarding of the scientific performance of a higher education institution (HEI) including the internal quality assurance.

The focus of the institutional accreditation is the institution as a whole and not the single study programme. The institutional accreditation focuses on:

- ✓ Decision making processes
- ✓ The analysis of institutional structures
- ✓ Effectiveness of strategic management
- ✓ Relevance of internal quality management processes and the degree to which their outcomes are used in decision making and strategic management as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms.
- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Teaching and learning
- ✓ Quality assurance

The basis for the assessment is first of all part 1 of the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European" (ESG). Further, the evaluation is based on the criteria for the institutional accreditation of non-state higher education institution of the German Scientific Council („Institutionelle Akkreditierung nichtstaatlicher Hochschulen" (Abschnitt B.IV) des Deutschen Wissenschaftsrates).

2. THE INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION PRECEDURE AT A GLANCE



### **3. POSSIBLE RESULTS OF THE PROCEDURE**

The process of institutional accreditation can lead to three possible outcomes:

#### **Unconditional accreditation**

The institutional design has no deficits with regard to strategy and structure. However, every institution 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 institution.

#### **Accreditation with conditions**

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

#### **Refusal of accreditation or suspension of the procedure**

The accreditation is denied since the institution has fundamental deficits which further revision cannot correct. In case of a suspension of the procedure, the institution is not accredited, but there is the prospect of accreditation. Essential deficits with regard to strategy and structure must first be corrected, before the institution can be presented again to the accreditation commission after another review.

4. PREPARATION OF SELF-REPORT

Before the institutional accreditation can be started, a self-report of the higher education institution has to be prepared. The self-report should contain a cover sheet with the following information:

Contact person	
Name of the institution	
Legal status	public/private, state approved
Founding Year	
Study programmes offered	Study programmes with Bachelor's degree/Master's degree/PhD programmes/Further Education programmes
Number of enrolled students	
Number of doctoral students	
Number of full time academic staff	
Number of non-academic staff	
Specifics of the institution	

## 5. STRUCTURE OF HEI's SELF-REPORT

The self-report of the HEI should address the ESG and the criteria of the German Scientific Council (GSC). Therefore it is recommended to structure it into the following sections, which are operationalised with several questions: "Institutional Profile and Strategy", "Governance", "Teaching and learning", "Research", "Transfer", "Resources", "Quality Assurance" and "Internationalisation". Sub-questions might help to take as many crucial aspects into account; however, not all questions are applicable to every institution.

### **Institutional Profile and Strategy (GSC IV.1, ESG 1.1)**

*[Description of profile and objectives of the university, definition of mission and vision, adequacy and feasibility of objectives and strategy]*

- ✓ What is the institutional profile in teaching, learning, research, services? How does this profile fit into the national and regional context? What is the positioning of the institution in local, regional, national and international respects?
- ✓ What is the strategy of the university with regard to the society? How does this fit into the institutional profile and strategy? How does the university react to societal needs of the region? With which services? Are there any co-operations with societal actors?
- ✓ Which objectives in the areas of teaching and learning, research, internationalisation, institutional governance has the university defined? How do they relate to the profile of the university? What are the institution's objectives in developing its relationship to society?
- ✓ On which levels are objectives defined (on institutional and faculty level)? What is the process to define objectives?
- ✓ What is the strategy to reach objectives? How is the strategy defined on institutional and faculty level? How do faculties succeed in implementation? How does the university deal with conflicts in objectives or strategies between faculty and institutional level?



- ✓ How does the university assure that the strategy is realistic?
- ✓ How does the university evaluate the success of its strategy and the achievement of its objectives?
- ✓ What are the institution's present and future priorities, which development plans exist for the future?
- ✓ How does the institution assure equal opportunities and diversity? Is there a strategy for equal opportunities and diversity?
- ✓ How do the study programmes reflect the profile and the strategy of the institution?

### **Governance (GSC IV.2, ESG 1.1, 1.2)**

*[Description of the internal governance structures, explanation how decisions are taken, involvement of the different stakeholders into the decision making process, funds and allocation of funds]*

- ✓ Information about the legal status of the university with the rights and duties
- ✓ Independence from the funding body? How is a balance between the interests of the funding body and the institution's academic freedom assured?
- ✓ What are the decision-making structures and bodies of the university and the faculties? How are management- and decision-making structures organised? How are decision-making powers and competencies divided between different levels (institutional level, faculty level, level of individual professors)? What opportunities do professors, scientists, employees, students have to participate in management and decision making processes?
- ✓ How are the different areas of the institution (teaching and learning, research, further education, services to society) interconnected? What are the roles of central-level administrators, offices and faculties/institutions? Does co-ordination among faculties/institutes take place and if so how?

- ✓ What is the total budget of the institution, what percentage is allotted by the funding body, by student fees, by private sources (research projects, foundations etc.)?
- ✓ How are funds distributed within the institution? Who decides what and how? Is there a performance-based granting of funds? Is there a further incentive system?
- ✓ What are the tuition fees of the university and how are they distributed within the institution?

### **Teaching and Learning (GSC IV.4, ESG 1.3, 1.4)**

*[Organisation of teaching and learning, definition of learning outcomes, achievement of learning outcomes]*

- ✓ Is there a common teaching and learning concept within the university or the faculties? How was it developed?
- ✓ Who decides on the introduction and implementation of new study programmes? How are new programmes developed?
- ✓ What are the general learning objectives (including general skills and competences) of the study programmes and how are they defined and adapted to further developments? How are learning objectives integrated in the study programmes?
- ✓ How are the following aspects considered in study programmes: scientific/academic approach, employability, personal development of the students, balance between theory and practice?
- ✓ How is assured that the content of study programmes meets current academic standards?
- ✓ Which teaching and learning methods are used? What assessment procedures are used? Are they competence-based?
- ✓ Workload of students: how is it calculated, how adapted (based on which information)?

- ✓ What are the relevant national standards and regulations for study programmes, how is the compliance with the legal national regulations assured?
- ✓ How are study programmes organised?
- ✓ Are there international elements in the study programmes?
- ✓ Which new study programmes were developed within the last years and why? How is the demand for new study programmes identified (on the basis of which information)?
- ✓ Does the university offer programmes in the area of continuing education? How are these programmes linked to the other study programmes and to research?

#### Students:

- ✓ Development of student numbers: recent development and expected development in the future
- ✓ Composition of the student body, are there differences between study programmes? Changes within the last years? Expected changes in the future? Reaction to the developments?
- ✓ Average length of study compared to the regular period of study? Drop-out rate? Reasons for drop-out? Reactions to the drop-out rate?
- ✓ What are the target groups (desired profile of the students)? Which strategy for the recruitment of students exists? What are the admission requirements, how is the admission procedure organised and how are student selected?
- ✓ Which support services for students exist?

#### Placement in the Higher Education Area:

- ✓ Which are the competitors of the institution? How does the institution differentiate its study programmes from other providers? How does the university evaluate the own competitiveness of the national educational market?

## **Research (GSC IV.5, ESG 1.8, 1.9)**

*[Description of the research strategy, organisation of research, support for research]*

- ✓ How does the university develop its research concept? How is it adjusted? How is the academic staff involved into this process?
- ✓ How are research activities integrated into the organisational structure?
- ✓ What are the current research topics, how are these topics related to the profile and the strategy of the university?
- ✓ How is research integrated into the study programmes? How are study programmes and students integrated into research?
- ✓ How are junior researchers supported? Is there a concept for support?
- ✓ What kind of research co-operations exist with other higher education institutions, research institutes, companies, other organisations? Is the university part of national and international research associations? Are further co-operations planned?
- ✓ Which internal instruments and incentives exist in order to support research?
- ✓ What is the research budget per year? From which resources does the university obtain these funds? What kind of third-party funds does the university acquire, how was the development within the recent years, what is the expected future development?
- ✓ Number of doctoral students, number of completed PhDs per year?
- ✓ What is the amount of the university's technology transfer? How does the university support technology transfer? Is it successful?

## **Resources (GSC IV.6, IV.3, ESG 1.5, 1.6)**

### Personal Resources

- ✓ What different types and numbers of staff for teaching, research and administration does the university have?
- ✓ How are the different functions of teaching, research, administration and other tasks distributed in terms of the staff?
- ✓ What are the recruitment requirements for academic staff? How are research profile and teaching qualification considered in the recruitment and selection process? How is the recruitment process organised?
- ✓ What is the ratio between permanent and temporary staff?
- ✓ How does the university assure the academic qualification of temporary staff?
- ✓ What percentage of teaching load is done by permanent staff?
- ✓ Which tasks are carried out by non-academic personal?
- ✓ What is the student-teacher ratio? How did it develop within the last years?
- ✓ How does the university assure that the human resources and the human resource policy and practice are adequate to current and future needs? (e.g. gender policy, age profile, recruitment, promotion, redeployment and staff development)

### Financial Resources

- ✓ What are the main funding sources of the university? How sustainable are these sources?
- ✓ What is the development of earnings and expenses during the last years? What future development is expected?
- ✓ Is there a financial controlling at the university? How is it organised? Which personal resources exist? Are the annual accounts checked by a financial auditor? How are financial decisions made at the university?
- ✓ Do the university plan investments? Which ones?

## Facilities and Equipment

- ✓ Is the university the owner of the facilities it is using?
- ✓ Which facilities does the university dispose of? How should these facilities be upgraded according to the future planning of the university?
- ✓ What library and media equipment does the university dispose of? How is it organised (opening hours, stocks of books, journals, online journals and media, databases, availability, lending, technical equipment, personnel, working places for students). Cooperation with other libraries? Are there plans for the future development of the library?
- ✓ Which lab and equipment does the university dispose of? (number of lab working places, equipment with PCs, special equipment).

## **Quality Assurance (GSC IV.2, ESG 1.1, 1.9, 1.10)**

*[Regular evaluation of the activities and integration of evaluation results to institutional planning and development]*

- ✓ Do a quality concept and a quality management system exist? How is it organised? Which areas are involved in the quality assurance system (teaching and learning, research, administration)? How are the quality goals of the university linked to the institution's mission and strategy?
- ✓ Which quality assurance instruments and processes are used and/or planned? How are they linked to each other? Are all stakeholders involved in the quality management process? How are they involved?
- ✓ Does the university use regular evaluations of the study programmes and research programmes?
- ✓ Are there student and alumni surveys? How are they organised? Who receives the results? How get students informed about evaluation results?

- ✓ How is the quality cycle closed (quality feedback loops) How are the results of the quality assurance procedures used within the university, what are the consequences? How are quality assurance results used for enhancement?

### **Internationalisation (Optional Criterion)**

This criterion only applies in those cases where internationalization is part of the institutional strategy.

*[Vision and Objectives on Internationalisation]*

- ✓ Does the university have defined and reasonable objectives concerning internationalisation (strategy)? How does the internationalisation strategy fit into the institutional profile and strategy?
- ✓ Number of incoming and outgoing students? Are there differences between the study programmes? Expected development? Support for mobility?
- ✓ Internationalisation of the curricula international and intercultural learning outcomes (generic, subject-related, soft skills like social / communicative skills, behavioural skills)?
- ✓ Qualification and international experience and competence of staff members?

## **6. ANNOTATIONS TO THE PROCEDURE**

### **Peer review 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. Experts in institutional accreditations have management experience in HEI's.

### **Responsibility of ACQUIN programme managers**

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.

### **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. The evaluation procedure is based on the examination of the submitted self-report of the HEI and discussions during the on-site visit. The evaluation of the institution 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 institutional settings could be improved, they should discuss them with the responsible representatives of the HEI.

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.



## **Assessment 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: "Institutional Profile and Strategy", "Governance", "Teaching and learning", "Research", "Transfer", "Resources", "Quality Assurance" and "Internationalisation". 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 institutional setting, and conditions, on whose fulfillment in due course and time the accreditation status is based.

The assessment criteria can be summarized as follows:

### Institutional Profile and Strategy (Mission and Vision)

The HEI has a clear mission statement in which the institutional profile, strategy and objectives of the HEI are defined. The mission is consistent and complies with international standards. Academic bodies have adopted the mission, which is publicly available. The HEI has adequate resources to fulfil its mission and strategic planning.

### Governance, Organisation and Administration

Responsibilities, decision-making processes and decision-making competencies are clearly defined and integrated into statutes. Organisation and management structures are adequate to the tasks and objectives of the institution and assure freedom in teaching and learning.

### Teaching and Learning

Objectives and content of study programmes are in accordance with the HEI's mission and strategy. Study programmes have an adequate academic standard, are well structured and have an adequate workload. They comply with national legal regulations. The processes of creating and implementing as well as revision of study programmes are clearly defined.

The HEI offers professional support services for students. Support services have adequate staff.

### Research

Research activities fit into the mission of the institution. The structure of the HEI and the general conditions support research activities. The teaching workload allows room for research. Recruitment policy should correspond to the research activities and research strategy of the institution.

### Resources

The institution has adequate human and financial resources, infrastructure and equipment to achieve its objectives. The academic staff recruitment process meets academic standards.

### Quality Assurance

The institution has adequate quality assurance procedures and mechanisms to ensure that the results of quality assurance procedures are for continuous improvement.

### Internationalisation (Optional Criterion)

The HEI has an internationalisation strategy which is consistent with the strategy of the institution. The activities in the area of internationalisation fit into the internationalisation strategy.

For each criterion reviewers should state whether it is *fulfilled*, *partly fulfilled* or *not fulfilled*.  
Assessment for each criterion:

**For further information contact:**

**ACQUIN e.V.**

Brandenburger Straße 2

95448 Bayreuth

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

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

[sekr@acquin.org](mailto:sekr@acquin.org)

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

DISCLAIMER

**EDITOR**

ACQUIN e.V.

Thomas Reil

(Managing Director)

**ACQUIN e.V.**

Brandenburger Straße 2

95448 Bayreuth

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

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

[sekr@acquin.org](mailto:sekr@acquin.org)

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