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The Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute ACQUIN is a registered non-profit association with a recognized status. Its members now include over 120 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary and the U.S.A as well as academic affiliated professional associations.

ACQUIN's concern is to contribute to the internationalisation and flexibility of German higher education as well as improving the efficiency of education.

ACQUIN set itself the goal of comprehensive accreditation for all types of HEIs, both bachelor and master degree programmes, nationwide and in all subject fields. This is in order to ensure a high quality of study programmes, market transparency, enhance the attractiveness of HEIs for foreign students and to promote the comparability of academic qualifications and degrees.

As a self-regulatory body of HEIs, ACQUIN is free from government interference and independent in the spirit of academic standards and tradition. Scientific freedom and HEI autonomy are guiding principles of all decision-making processes.

ACQUIN affiliated HEIs cultivate consistent exchange with the professional world and representatives of student bodies.

ACQUIN's accreditation procedure is designed in such a way that neither the content nor the outcome is predetermined by the applicant's institutional framework. At ACQUIN, the desired objectives of the study programme to be accredited determine the process and the result of the accreditation.

The internal structures of ACQUIN and the composition of its decision-making bodies allow carrying out objective procedures, lead to results of far reaching objectivity and thus increase their acceptability.

The decision-making bodies are composed in such a way that potentially biased people are not involved in relevant decision-making processes.

Independent representatives of professional practice and students are represented in the committees and thus to a reasonable degree involved in the decision-making processes.
Organisational Structure

Board

Strategic planning
Decision on business plan
Membership and staffing matters

The Board consists of two representatives each from universities and universities of applied sciences and a representative of professional practice.

Supports all organisational units, coordinates procedures, accompanies the expert groups and is responsible for marketing and public relations.

Accreditation

Appointment of Standing Expert Committees

Decisions related to assessment criteria, procedure principles, guidelines et al.

The Accreditation Commission is composed of university and university of applied sciences representatives, representatives of professional practice as well as students.

Standing Expert Committees

Appointment of expert groups
Ensuring uniformity in the implementation of procedures from an expert’s viewpoint in the respective academic field
Guaranteeing the application of assessment standards

Each Standing Expert Committee is made up of at least five representatives of academia and professional practice.

Strategic planning

Decision on business plan
Membership and staffing matters

The Board consists of two representatives each from universities and universities of applied sciences and a representative of professional practice.

The head office consists of a managing director, coordinators, committee support staff and a secretariat.

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Head Office

Supports all organisational units, coordinates procedures, accompanies the expert groups and is responsible for marketing and public relations.

The head office consists of a managing director, coordinators, committee support staff and a secretariat.
General Assembly

Election and discharge of the Board
Election of the Accreditation Commission
Approval of statute amendments

The General Assembly is composed mainly of HEIs from Germany, Austria and Switzerland as well as from specialist associations.

Expert Groups

Examination of self-documentation
Implementation of peer reviews
Drawing up of evaluation report

The expert groups are composed of university and university of applied sciences representatives, representatives of professional practice as well as students.

COMMISSION

Accreditation decisions
Discussion and conclusion of evaluation results

The expert groups and is responsible for marketing and public relations. Head office acQUIN e.V.

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The Accreditation Commission is composed of university and university of applied sciences representatives, representatives of professional practice as well as students.
OBJECTIVES

ACQUIN's central concern is to promote and anchor quality culture in higher education. For this purpose, ACQUIN brings the quality debate into the HEIs to enable the HEIs to comprehensively fulfill their autonomous quality assurance mission.

ACQUIN reviews the effectiveness of quality assurance through appropriate procedures for the introduction, evaluation and assurance of quality processes in teaching and learning in higher education. Continuous quality improvement is ensured by ACQUIN through regular review and enhancement of its procedures.

The results of these reviews and discussions are published by ACQUIN in an appropriate form.

Within the framework of the Bologna Process, ACQUIN supports the creation of a European Higher Education Area as well as the strengthening of the attractiveness of German higher education.

Besides carrying out national and international evaluation procedures ACQUIN participates in conferences and projects on the Bologna Process (such as internationalisation, market transparency, and academic qualification comparability). Through this participation, ACQUIN intends to constructively contribute to the quality debate at national and international level.

ACQUIN disseminates latest results through appropriate publication.

In order to ensure that its objectives are sustainable, ACQUIN uses an internal quality management system to guarantee the quality of its own work. ACQUIN constantly questions its processes and continues to further develop them.
“It does not matter which path one wants to take to the realisation of a quality culture. One always has to bear in mind that a quality culture is formed with the help of two components. The creation of a quality culture and its presence is always formally reliant upon technical instruments of quality management being used properly. However, this alone does not suffice. A quality culture is only created when there is, on the one hand, a realisation from quality aspiring individuals who are lead by a sense for quality, and at the same time the organisation, which acts on behalf of these people, and integrates quality awareness into its structures and rules.”

By asking for validity, consistency, transparency, consequent implementation, and maintenance, the relation between the control cycle and quality is reflected.

“The requirements of the Quality Control Cycle that are applied to the study programmes also apply to the processes themselves. This allows comprehensive verification whether the processes are suitable to fulfil the objectives, consistent, economical and transparent and whether they comprise elements of systematic quality control and quality improvement.”

ACQUIN bases its work with HEIs on the achievement of the objectives in combination with their admissibility and validity. Thus the design and implementation of any process refers to valid objectives, a coherent and functional concept to reach the objectives, the possibility of their realisation, and the competence and capacity to verify, secure and modify quality.

ACQUIN’s approach is based on the idea of a four-step control cycle: (1) objective, (2) concept, (3) implementation and (4) quality improvement.

“Definition of valid objectives” → “Concept” → “Implementation of the concept” → “Quality monitoring and review of objectives” → “Definition of valid objectives”

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Figure: Quality Control Cycle

ACQUIN’s central concern is the institutional autonomy of HEIs. As early as 2004, the members of ACQUIN in their “Bologna Resolution” declared: “HEIs affiliated to the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute ACQUIN will continue to develop the current system of programme accreditation through the development and safeguarding of process quality in teaching and learning and recognize that

- their merger in ACQUIN is evidence of the full realisation of these objectives and tasks,
- they themselves initiate to take the responsibility for the quality assurance system; this includes also the design and implementation concerning content and organisation of all defined features of the quality assurance system
- they consider not just the fulfilment of the minimum requirements to be necessary, but rather the purpose and implementation of quality as the core element of a quality assurance system,
- they, in the implementation of the quality assurance system and in all phases of action, will work together cooperatively and in a goal-orientated manner with all state institutions, members of professional practice and students.”

(Resolution of ACQUIN’s General Assembly of March 25, 2004)

As a consequence ACQUIN initiated a pilot project together with the German Rectors’ Conference (HRK): “Process Quality for Teaching and Learning”, sponsored by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF). The project gave a central inducement for the procedure of system accreditation in Germany which was introduced 2008.

The purpose of the system accreditation is the implementation of the processes, which are installed in the HEI to regularly, systematically and reliably ensure that all its newly developed and established courses are of a high standard.

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”.

A positive system accreditation certifies an 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.
INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

With the accreditation of bachelor and master degree programmes in Germany ACQUIN also promotes quality in the European Higher Education Area. In addition ACQUIN participates actively in the discussion about quality outside of the European area. As part of its internationalisation strategy ACQUIN has defined key regions and core areas of activity:

Selected key regions:
- Region D-A-CH (Germany-Austria-Switzerland)
- North Africa – Arab-speaking countries
- Middle and Eastern Europe, Southeastern Europe

Carrying out of international evaluation and accreditation procedures
ACQUIN evaluates internationally oriented study programmes at German and foreign HEIs within the frame of evaluation or accreditation procedures.

The seal of the German Accreditation Council is only awarded when significant involvement of German HEIs takes place. In those procedures ACQUIN attaches value to the participation of local partners – in particular quality assurance organisations, HEIs, and occasionally ministries. In Switzerland, ACQUIN is recognized as an accreditation agency for universities of applied sciences and their study programmes and thus is free to act independently.

Cooperation in international networks
ACQUIN is a member in all relevant European and international associations and project initiatives that are helpful to enable reaching its organisational objectives. ACQUIN is engaged internationally, particularly in European consortiums of institutions for external quality assurance:
- Arab Quality Assurance and Accreditation Network (AQAAN), associated member
- European University Association (EUA), associated member
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA), full member
- Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN)
- International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)

By the confirmation of full membership of ENQA in September 2007 it was officially stated that the work of ACQUIN corresponds to the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG).

Cooperation through partnership projects
Involvement in international projects is intended to widen the experience of all parties involved. Their own approaches are discussed. Together solutions for specific issues developed and the conceptual basis of the work of ACQUIN and its project partners is established. Through projects with partners such as the EUA, in the context of TEMPUS, as well as through individually organized projects, workshops and seminars ACQUIN participates actively in the development of quality assurance at the international level.
ACQUIn takes measures to ensure that all expert groups understand their evaluation mandate, the purpose of the assessment and the evaluation criteria. This includes ensuring discretion and confidentiality regarding the HEI.

Systematic precautionary measures are intended to avoid conflicts of interest for all parties involved in the procedure. HEIs, with founded objections, can appeal against the nomination of members of the expert groups.

In order to receive advice and suggestions for improving quality and for the continued development of its performance, ACQUIn supports the exchange of experience between members of committees, expert groups and employees.

ACQUIN's publications on quality assurance in higher education serve the foundation, analysis, presentation as well as information and transparency.

ACQUIn bases its internal quality management as well as its work with HEIs on the quality terms of the fulfilment of objectives in combination with the admissibility and validity of the underlying objectives. Thus the design and implementation of any process refers to valid objectives and a coherent and functional concept to reach the objectives. In addition, the processes are guided by the fact that the implementation of the concept is secured, and the degree to which objectives have been achieved are regularly reviewed and where necessary readjusted.

To ensure the regular and reliable realisation of high quality performance, ACQUIN has consequently anchored elements of quality assurance and quality improvement in its activities:

- ACQUIN's work is based on an explicit quality concept, which is shared by all parties concerned.
- All activities are regulated by a systematic legitimacy which is derived from ACQUIN's mandate.
- Board, head office and members of the committees and expert groups share the understanding of ACQUIN's guiding principles and objectives.
- In the selection and appointment of committee and expert group members, as well as employees it is determined whether candidates have the necessary skills and expertise.
- ACQUIN takes measures to ensure timely, regular and systematic communication with and information for all parties.
CHRONOLOGY: PAST AND FUTURE

2008
- Introduction of system accreditation
- Recognition as an accreditation agency for universities of applied sciences and their study programmes in Switzerland

2007
- Establishment of the Standing Expert Committee “System Accreditation”
- European project “Quality Assurance for the Higher Education Change Agenda”
- Associate member of the Arab Quality Assurance and Accreditation Network (AQAN)
- System accreditation workshop for ACQUIN’s member institutions
- Change of ACQUIN Board Chairman – Professor Dr. Klaus Dieter Wolff has been replaced by Professor Dr.-Eng. Gerd Zimmermann
- Confirmation of full ENQA membership

2006
- Reaccreditation of ACQUIN
- ACQUIN / AUQA / HETAC benchmarking project
- Completion of project “Process Accreditation”
- Workshops on process accreditation with the Bavarian State Ministry of Sciences, Research and the Arts and the Thuringian Ministry of Education and the Arts
- Staff training “Process Quality at BMW”
- Partner in the Tempus project “Formation à l’évaluation à Maroc”

2005
- 2nd phase of the project “Process Accreditation”

2004
- 1st phase of the project “Process Accreditation”
- Members’ Bologna Resolution
- Establishment of the Standing Expert Committee “Architecture and Planning”

2003
- International expert seminar (ACQUIN, HRK, EUA) “Institution-related questions – Institution-related answers...”
- Partner in the Tempus project “Evaluation de la qualité – Région MEDA”
- Establishment of the Standing Expert Committees “Art, Music and Design”, and “Medicine and Health Sciences”
- Tempus project “Qualification of Palestinian Quality Experts (Quality Assurance and Improvement in Tertiary Education)”
- Project “Mapping External Quality Assurance in Central and Eastern Europe

2002
- Founding member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEEN)
- Carrying out of the first accreditation procedure
- Accreditation granted by the Accreditation Council

2001
- Establishment of ACQUIN
Subject fields

- Architecture and Planning: 26%
- Humanities, Languages, and Cultural Sciences: 24%
- Computer Sciences: 10%
- Engineering Sciences: 7%
- Art, Music, and Design: 6%
- Mathematics and Natural Sciences: 4%
- Medicine and Health Sciences: 2%
- Economics, Law, and Social Sciences: 2%

Last updated: February 2008
Accredited study programmes according to type of HEI and degree level

Last updated: February 2008
Accreditations in total

- Accreditation with conditions: 68%
- Unconditional accreditation: 21%
- Suspension followed by accreditation: 10%
- Rejections: 1%

Last updated: February 2008
For current information regarding

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

please see:

www.acquin.org

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