ACQUIN Guidelines for Doctoral Study Programmes
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As of 1st June 2017
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1. GENERAL ASPECTS

The ACQUIN guidelines for doctoral study programmes apply for structured study programmes on a doctoral level, such as PhD programmes or Doctorates.

The objective of the accreditation procedure is to evaluate and to assess the admissibility of doctoral study programmes in terms of quality. ACQUIN’s accreditation procedure is based on the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG, 2015). The accreditation decision is based on the self-documentation of the Higher Education Institution (HEI) and the on-site visit by an expert group.

Within the ESG framework, the quality assessment of doctoral study programmes checks the compliance of programmes with national legislation, as well as national and international scientific standards and trends. The overall aim is to make recommendations for improving programmes.

Hence, the following elements are considered to be relevant for the assessment of doctoral 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.
- Using recognised evaluation methods, the HEI periodically checks whether the objectives of the study programme are successfully reached and if the study programme requires modifications. Consequently, the HEI improves the programme if necessary.
2. THE ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE AT A GLANCE

**HEI**
- Submission of an accreditation application to ACQUIN
- Conclusion of a contract between the HEI and ACQUIN
- Compilation of the self-documentation
- Delivery to head office

**HEAD OFFICE**
- Check for completeness of the self-documentation and the annexes
- Forwarding the self-documentation to the standing expert committee in charge

**STANDING EXPERT COMMITTEE**
- Appointment of an expert group

**HEAD OFFICE**
- Information given to the HEI about the members of the expert group

**HEI**
- Possibility to object to the appointment of individual experts in justified cases

**HEAD OFFICE**
- Creation of a schedule for the on-site visit in agreement with the HEI
- Submission of the self-documentation to the expert group

**EXPERT GROUP**
- Review of the self-documentation, on-site visit, drawing up of an evaluation report including a justified accreditation recommendation

**HEAD OFFICE**
- Finalising of the evaluation report in consultation with the expert group
- Submission of the evaluation report to the HEI (without accreditation recommendation)

**HEI**
- Possibility to comment on the evaluation report

**STANDING EXPERT COMMITTEE**
- Statement on the evaluation report and the comment of the HEI

**ACCREDITATION COMMISSION**
- Discussion on the basis of the evaluation report, the statement of the HEI as well as the statement of the standing expert committee, conclusion and decision

- Unconditional accreditation
- Accreditation with conditions
- Suspension
- Rejection
3. POSSIBLE RESULTS OF THE PROCEDURE

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

Unconditional accreditation
The doctoral study programme has no deficits with regard to strategy and structure. However, each 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.

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

Refusal of accreditation or suspension of the procedure
The accreditation is denied since the doctoral study programme has fundamental deficits which further revision cannot correct. In case of a suspension of the procedure, the programme is not accredited, but there is the prospect of accreditation. Essential deficits with regard to strategy and structure must first be corrected, before the doctoral study programme can be presented again to the accreditation commission after another review.
4. PREPARATION OF THE SELF-REPORT

Before the 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact person</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of the institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal status</td>
<td>public/private, state approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Founding year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study programme</td>
<td>Doctoral Study Programme / PhD programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic field of the doctoral programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of doctoral students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of full time academic staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration and ECTS</td>
<td>According to ECTS User’s Guide: 25-30 hour/ECTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment period(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees</td>
<td>Tuition fees / Grants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The length of reports depends upon the number of study programmes to be assessed. The maximum length of the general part is 15 pages, and the estimated length of a self-analysis of one study programme is 10 pages. Self-evaluation reports are presented in English.
5. ASSESSMENT STANDARDS AND STRUCTURE OF THE SELF-REPORT

Core Criteria and Assessment Standards for Doctoral Study Programmes

✓ The launch and development of doctoral study programmes are based on the national legislation, national strategies, university development plans, the performance of research and development, various analyses (including labour market and feasibility analyses); striving for the best overall programme quality.

✓ Doctoral study programmes contain at least 70 percent of research, development or other creative work by doctoral students, making the results thereof public in (international) peer-reviewed research journals or in other ways.

✓ Doctoral study programmes incorporate doctoral student participation in conferences and/or other professional activities, and are counted towards the completion of the study programme.

✓ Doctoral study programmes enable doctoral students to acquire leadership and teamwork skills, develop coaching and teaching skills as well as a proficiency in foreign languages at the level needed for successful participation in international working environments.

✓ In conducting doctoral programmes, an adequate number of teaching staff and researchers participate, who hold the appropriate qualifications required to carry out doctoral studies and supervise doctoral theses in a given study programme.

✓ Teaching staff further their skills at foreign universities or other research institutions, participate in international research and creative projects, and present papers at high-level conferences.

✓ Resources (teaching, learning and research environments; libraries; resources required for teaching, learning and research) support the achievement of objectives set out in doctoral study programmes as well as the actual teaching, learning and research at the level of doctoral studies.

✓ Uniform principles, based on best international practices and agreed upon at the university level, shall be followed while implementing doctoral programmes and assuring the quality of the doctoral studies (including supervision of doctoral theses).
Document Structure

The self-report of the HEI should be structured into the following sections, which are operationalised with several questions: “Objectives of the HEI and for the Doctoral Study Programme”, “Concept of the Doctoral Study Programme”, “Implementation of the Doctoral Study Programme” and “Quality Assurance”. Below mentioned aspects might help to take as many crucial issues into account as possible; however, not all questions are applicable to every institution and every programme.

1. Objectives of university and faculty

2. Objectives of the study programme [ESG Part 1, Standard 1.2]
   2.1 Short summary of the study programme
      ✓ overall objectives of the study programme
      ✓ the target group
      ✓ the development of the qualification targets

2.2 Objectives and competences
   ✓ professional competences
   ✓ methodical competences
   ✓ generic competences

2.3 Personal development and capability for civic engagement

2.4 Employability

3. Concept of the study programme

   3.1 Admission criteria and recognition of competences [ESG Part 1, Standard 1.4]
      ✓ Admission criteria
      ✓ Quantitative targets and demand
      ✓ Rules of crediting achievements from other HEI or external achievements

   3.2 Structure of the study programme [ESG Part 1, Standard 1.2]
      ✓ Contents of the programme
      ✓ Appropriateness according to educational level

   3.3 ECTS and modularisation [ESG Part 1, Standard 1.2]
✓ Modularisation
✓ Workload

3.4 Teaching methods and study contexts [ESG Part 1, Standard 1.3]

4. Implementation

4.1 Resources [ESG Part 1, Standard 1.5; Standard 1.6]

Personal resources
✓ Number of professors, fellows, academic staff, non-academic staff
✓ Involvement of professional personal for the study programme/ duties beyond the study programme
✓ Personal qualification programmes and professional training/ development

Financial Resources
✓ Tuition fees and
✓ Public and third party-funding

Infrastructural Resources
✓ Facilities
✓ Instruments
✓ Access to literature (library, electronic media)

4.2 Organisation, counselling and cooperation [ESG Part 1, Standard 1.2]
✓ Organisational procedures
✓ Responsibilities
✓ Cooperation partners
✓ Involvement of cooperation partners

4.3 Examination system [ESG Part 1, Standard 1.3]
✓ Examination procedures
✓ Suitability of examinees (quantity, frequency, variation etc.)

4.4 Documentation and transparency [ESG Part 1, Standard 1.7; Standard 1.8]
✓ Availability of information and documents
✓ Consultation opportunities for students and interested third parties

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4.5 Gender justice and compensation opportunities for disabled people

5. Quality Management

✓ Organisational Framework
✓ Evaluation procedures and data analysis
✓ mechanism for enhancing the study programme
✓ activities to improve the quality management
6. ANNOTATIONS TO THE PROCEDURE

Peer review group

The expert group usually consists of at least three professors, one practitioner and one student. Experts in procedures of doctoral study programme accreditation have some proven expertise in supervising doctoral work and conducting research.

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 doctoral 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 institutional settings and/or characteristics of the study programme 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. Both the positive and negative aspects of an assessed programme 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).
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