ACQUIN Guidelines for
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ACQUIN
Akkreditierungs-, Certifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungs-Institut
Guidelines for Certification Procedures of Advanced Training Programmes

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CONTENTS

1. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE CERTIFICATION PROCEDURE .................................................. 3
2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE CERTIFICATION PROCEDURE .................................................. 4
3. POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF THE CERTIFICATION PROCEDURE ...................................... 5
4. PREPARATION OF SELF-DOCUMENTATION ................................................................. 6
5. SELF-DOCUMENTATION OF THE INSTITUTION ......................................................... 6
6. REMARKS ON THE PROCEDURE .............................................................................. 13
1. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF THE CERTIFICATION PROCEDURE

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

The certification decisions in procedures of ACQUIN are based on transparent criteria. The applied criteria are partially based on the so-called standards. Standards are especially important, in particular, for the insurance of transparency, definition of interfaces and with regard to legal requirements, which are necessary for the recognition within the scope of study programmes or in the context of the classification of levels in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework (NQR). As for the content of the programme, reference to standards is deliberately avoided.

The following elements can be regarded as relevant to the quality for the programmes:

✓ The programme has clearly defined and valid objectives.
✓ The concept of the programme enables the (intended) achievement of its objectives.
✓ The necessary organisational and resource-related requirements are met.
✓ The provider regularly checks whether the objectives of the study programme are reliably achieved and whether the programme should be modified and, if required, makes improvements.

The certification is primarily based on the provisions that are applicable to the programme accreditation procedures. This should ensure that competencies from advanced training programmes can be transferred into other programmes in the simplest way possible. The self-documentation should be compiled based on the provided guidelines and illustrate the quality profile of the programme specifying strengths and weaknesses of its individual elements.
## 2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE CERTIFICATION PROCEDURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution offering the Programme</th>
<th>Submission of a certification application to ACQUIN and conclusion of a contract between the institution and ACQUIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head Office</td>
<td>Compilation of the self-documentation for the programme to be certified and its submission to ACQUIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing Expert Committee</td>
<td>Checking for completeness of the self-documentation and forwarding it to the standing expert committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head office</td>
<td>Appointment of an expert group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution offering the Programme</td>
<td>Information about the members of the expert group is forwarded to the institution offering the programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head office</td>
<td>Possibility to object to the appointment of individual experts in justified cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Group</td>
<td>Creation of the evaluation schedule (documentation, on-site visit, telephone conference) and preparation of the experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head office</td>
<td>Review of the self-documentation, evaluation, drawing up of an expert report with a certification recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution offering the Programme</td>
<td>Finalising of the expert report in consultation with the expert group; submission of the report to the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing Expert Committee</td>
<td>Possibility to comment on the expert report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation Commission</td>
<td>Statement on the expert report and the comment of the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head office</td>
<td>Deliberation and decision on the basis of the expert report, the comment of the institution and the expert committee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certification without conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certification with conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rejection of certification</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informing the institution of the decision</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF THE CERTIFICATION PROCEDURE

The certification procedure can lead to the following decisions:

Certification without conditions
The study programme exhibits no inconsistencies in terms of its content and structure, and its quality requirements are met. However, every study programme can and should be continually developed further. Therefore, the expert report can offer some recommendations that should be considered with regard to quality development in terms of the possibility of their implementation by those in charge of the study programme.
The certification period is seven years. In the case of a first-time certification, the certification period is five years.

Certification with conditions
The study programme is certified with conditions because there are inconsistencies in terms of its content and/or structure, and the institution is expected to remedy the existing deficiencies within a period of nine months.
In the case of a certification with conditions, the certification period is reduced and only granted for a limited time. This time period is extended to the regular period once these conditions are fulfilled.

Rejection of certification
The study programmes that are not granted certification exhibit inconsistencies in terms of their content and/or structure, and the institutions cannot be expected to remedy the existing deficiencies within a period of nine months. The institution can request a one-time suspension of the procedure for a maximum of 18 months if it is to be expected that the institution is able to remedy the existing deficiencies within the determined period.
4. PREPARATION OF SELF-DOCUMENTATION

A prerequisite for the initiation of a programme certification procedure is the compilation of self-documentation with the description of essential elements of the advanced training programme. A cover page with the following information must be provided for self-documentation.

5. SELF-DOCUMENTATION OF THE INSTITUTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact person for the advanced training programme</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of the programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional classification</td>
<td>e.g. Economics, Medicine, Physics, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awarded degree/certificate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum number of participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee for the course participation</td>
<td>e.g. annual, monthly, one-time; total cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td>e.g. working adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of the advanced training programme</td>
<td>e.g. alongside their work, distance learning, part-time, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous certification procedures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission requirement</td>
<td>e.g. completed vocational training (if applicable, with a specialization); University degree, professional experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of the implementation of the programme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of the programme (in semesters) and awarded ECTS credits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme start dates</td>
<td>e.g. monthly, annually, winter semester, summer semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of the offered programme</td>
<td>e.g. monthly, annually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The self-documentation for the advanced training programme to be certified should include the objectives of the programme, its conceptual implementation and information on the persons involved. The following structure for the compilation of the self-documentation and for the external evaluation can be used as a guide.

**Guidelines on the Compilation of Self-Documentation**

During the compilation of the self-documentation refer to the chapters listed below. Include the necessary special features of the programme not mentioned in the guidelines in appropriate places.

If possible, please create the double-sided documents and pay attention to the clear structure of the application (for example, segmentation of the annexes using interleave pages); do not forget to provide page numbers.

We require the self-documentation in printed and digital form. The number of copies to be submitted in printed form is determined upon agreement with the ACQUIN head office.

If you have any questions regarding the preparation of the self-documentation and the submission of the documents, do not hesitate to contact the employees of the head office.

**Suggested Structure and Guiding Questions for the Self-Documentation**

1. **Objectives**

1.1. **Objectives of the Institution(s), Overarching Objectives, and (Governmental) Restrictions if applicable**
   - What overall strategy does the institution pursue by offering this programme?
   - What is the current situation of the institution?
   - What strategic developmental planning, quality policy, priorities and profile development does the institution strive for?
   - What quantitative objectives does the study programme have?
   - What is the current demand?
   - *(Designated) number of participants?*
   - *(Current and previous number of applicants / situation of demand)*

1.2. **Qualification Objectives of the Programme**
   - What qualification objectives are conveyed?
   - How were the qualification objectives developed?
• For what target groups were the qualification objectives developed?
• Which specific professional and interdisciplinary competencies and what specialised and interdisciplinary knowledge should be conveyed?
• For which fields of activity does the study programme prepare its students for and what is the work profile of a graduate?
• To what extent is the programme distinguished via a specific profile?
• Does the programme provide an obtainment of a state-regulated professional qualification?

1.3. Further Development (if applicable)

• Description of the review and further development of the qualification objectives taking into account the results of the quality management of the institution (graduate questionnaires, evaluation results, employer surveys).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACQUIN checks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ the integration of the programme into the overall strategy and the quality policy of the institution,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ which qualification objectives the programme pursues (professional and interdisciplinary aspects, in particular with regard to the fields of scientific competence, opportunity to take up a qualified employment or to improve the vocational qualification),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ whether the programme can be attributed to the study programmes which have to meet the requirements of the Common structural guidelines of the Länder for the accreditation of Bachelor’s and Master’s study courses dated 10.10.2003 in their currently valid version, as well as Länder-specific structural guidelines for the certification of the Bachelor’s and Master’s study courses,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ whether the professional fields are adequately defined and the requirements of professional practice are properly taken into account,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ in what way the objectives were further developed and the results of the internal quality management system were taken into account in the further development of the objectives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Concept

2.1. Study Programme Structure

• What are the structure and content of the study programme?
• Does the structure of the study programme ensure the achievement of the set programme objectives?
2.2. ECTS Capability and the Qualification Objectives

- How is the study programme structured?
- What is the designated workload for the programme?
- What is the ratio of the attendance and self study time as well as the examination period?
- What for are ECTS credits awarded or can be awarded?
- How does the study programme ensure the achievement of the qualification objectives (competences)?
- Are the acquired competencies appropriate for the respective educational level (Bachelor / Master) or the requirements of the Qualifications Framework for (German) Higher Education Degrees or the German / European Qualifications Framework?
- How the qualification objectives of the programme contribute to the overall competency of the graduate that can be achieved through previous and subsequent study programmes?

2.3. Learning Context

- Which didactic means and methods are used to provide the students with adequate professional and social skills in their field of expertise?
- What teaching forms and methods are provided?
- How is the modern media (e.g. eLearning, Internet platforms, and elements of distance learning) used?
- Are foreign languages integrated?

2.4. Admission Requirements

- What admission requirements or job profiles requirements exist for participants?
- What specific competencies, skills and knowledge are required?
- Is there a selection process?

2.5. Further Development (if applicable)
• Description of the review and further development of the qualification objectives taking into account the results of the quality management of the institution (graduate questionnaires, evaluation results, employer surveys),

• Description and justification of the implemented changes (course content, modularisation, content, adjustment of the workload / ECTS credits, teaching forms),

• If applicable, the way the recommendations from the previous certification were addressed.

**ACQUIN checks**

✓ whether the programme concept is coherent and suitable for the achievement of the specified qualification objectives and the provision of specialist and interdisciplinary knowledge as well as technical, methodological and generic competences,

✓ whether the programme meets the requirements set in order to allow its attribution to the study programmes which meet the requirements of the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications and the Common structural guidelines of the Länder for the certification of Bachelor’s and Master’s study courses dated 10.10.2003 in their currently valid version (and/or Länder-specific structural guidelines),

✓ whether the programme concept corresponds to the requirements of the designated level of the German Qualifications Framework (DQR) or the European Qualifications Framework (EQF),

✓ whether the learning context facilitates the achievement of the objectives,

✓ whether the admission requirements and, if applicable, the selection procedures are appropriate,

✓ in what way the programme concept was further developed and the results of internal quality management were taken into account in the further development of the concept.

### 3. Implementation

#### 3.1. Resources

• To what extent are the human resources required for the implementation of the study programme and the fulfilment of its profile available?

• Current staff situation: full-time teaching staff and contract lecturers

• Which criteria exist for the selection of teaching staff / lecturers?

• Are there any measures for the further qualification development of the staff?

• Capacity planning or overview of the teaching capacity available for the programme
• What is the faculty-student ratio?
• What facilities / equipment are available?
• How is the programme financed??
• Which cost calculation exists and what capacity ensures the cost-feasibility of the programme?

3.2. Decision-making Processes, Organisation and Cooperation

• How is the study programme organisationally integrated?
• How are responsibilities and contact persons defined and made transparent?
• If there are cooperations and projects with internal and external parties, including higher education institutions in the country and abroad, with teaching and research institutes and with the industry: organisation of cooperation, definition of responsibilities (attach cooperation agreements), decision-making processes, ensuring implementation and quality of the programme concept in cooperations

3.3. Examination System

• How is the examination system organised, i.e. when are examinations offered?
• What examination forms are available?
• In what way does the examination system contribute to the achievement of the programme objectives?
• How is the competence orientation of the examinations ensured?
• What is the validity period of the certificate of the advanced training programme?
• Is there a special consideration of participants in special circumstances (e.g. pregnancy, illness, disability) in the case of examination performance?

3.4. Transparency and Documentation

• How are the requirements made transparent for all target groups?
• Documentation and publications regarding the programme, admission requirements, course of the programme and examination requirements, regulations for disadvantage compensation
• Access to the relevant programme documents
• Examination documents (reports, charters, certificates, etc.)
• What information and consulting services are available?

• What individual support and consultations are provided for the participants (information options, information events, financial support)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACQUIN checks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ whether the quality and quantity of the personnel, equipment and facilities are adequate for the implementation of the programme,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ whether there are measures for personnel and further qualification development,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ whether decision-making and organisational processes are appropriately defined and documented,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ whether the implementation and the quality of the programme are ensured in case of programme-related cooperations,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ whether the examination system is suitable for ascertaining the achievement of the qualification objectives, the examinations are knowledge-based and competence-oriented, and the regulations for disadvantage compensation for handicapped participants are used,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ whether the program, examination requirements and admission requirements for participants are adequately documented and made available,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ whether information and consulting services are provided.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Quality Assurance

• Do the study programme and/or the institution have a quality assurance instruments (evaluation, etc.) in order to guarantee the systematic further development of the study programme?

• How is the quality of the study programme assured and what measures for the further development of objectives, concept and implementation exist?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACQUIN checks</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ 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,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ whether evaluations and examinations of the workload of the participants and the academic achievements have been included into the further development of the programme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. REMARKS ON THE PROCEDURE

Composition of the Expert Group

The number of experts and the composition of an expert group are determined on a case-by-case basis upon agreement of the ACQUIN head office and the institution. The expert group usually consists of one to three professors, one practitioner and one student / a representative of the target group of the advanced training programme. In some specific cases the evaluation based on the documentation only is possible by one professor provided that it is appropriate in the context of the advanced training programme in question.

Scope of Responsibility of the ACQUIN Programme Coordinator

The ACQUIN programme coordinator is responsible for organisational aspects of the evaluation and the explanation of the course of the accreditation procedure. He/she does not act as a member of the expert group.

On-Site Visit or Evaluation of the Documentation

The evaluation of the programme can be carried out either by means of an on-site visit or on the basis of the submitted self-documentation. In the case of an evaluation of the documents, it is possible to organise an additional conversation between the experts and the directors of the study programme as part of a telephone or online conference. In case of an on-site visit the expert group talks to directors of the programmes and teaching staff and inspects the facilities to check whether the laboratories, libraries, working areas and computer rooms are equipped adequately to implement the study programme successfully.

The evaluation procedure is based on the examination of the submitted self-documentation of the institutions and/or conversations on-site with the directors of the study programme, teaching staff, participants and graduates of the programme. Focus should be attached to the consistency of the objectives, concept and implementation of the programme in question.

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

**Expert Report**

The expert report should include a descriptive part and an evaluative part and take into account the provided bullet points (objectives, concept, implementation, quality assurance). Both positive and critical aspects should be listed.

The report must be informative so that the institution offering the programme as well as the members of the standing expert committee and the accreditation committee can follow the recommendations of the expert group without further background information (self-documentation, on-site discussions). A clear distinction must be drawn between recommendations which may contribute to the further development of the program and conditions which timely fulfillment influences the certification status.
For more detailed information please contact our head office:

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