

## **Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation Procedures**

Specification of procedural principles

Instructions for the preparation of the self-assessment report

Since its foundation in 2001, the German Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) has been carrying out assessments and accreditations in the higher education sector. The main aim of ACQUIN is to contribute to shaping the European Higher Education Area and to ensure the comparability of the quality of higher education qualifications. Based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ACQUIN carries abroad international programme and institutional accreditations as well as certifications in all subjects and at all types of higher education institutions. ACQUIN staff has intercultural and multilingual competences and offers native language proficiency in English, French, German, Greek, Kazakh, Portuguese, Russian and Ukrainian.



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## **I OVERVIEW**

ACQUIN Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation apply to the structured external audit which should clarify whether the structures and the performance of a higher education institution (HEI) 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 including the internal quality assurance.

These guidelines describe the contents, the criteria and the process of the external quality audit. ACQUIN Guidelines provide assistance to the HEI in preparing for the accreditation procedure. The following chapters introduce the objectives, criteria and process of the institutional accreditation.

As an external quality assurance instrument, institutional accreditation aims both at assessing the existing quality and at recommending improvements. Accountability and enhancement are at the core of the accreditation. Peer-review experts evaluate and assess the institutional structures of the higher education institution. To guarantee impartiality, the experts scrutinize the existing aims, governance and quality assurance against a set of criteria. The competence of the experts in their respective field of expertise assures the quality of the external audit.

ACQUIN's accreditation procedures base on the "*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*" (ESG). The ESG define both assessment criteria and criteria for the accreditation process. For a thorough and comprehensive assessment, the ESG standards are supplemented with additional criteria especially for institutional accreditation.

### **1 Accreditation criteria**

The ESG represent the essential basis for ACQUIN's approach covering three areas: internal quality assurance, external quality assurance and quality assurance agencies. While part 1 describes the standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance, part 2 defines the approach of the external quality assurance and is therefore relevant for ACQUIN's international programme accreditation procedures. Part 3 specifies the standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies.

These principles provide a framework for quality assurance processes, which may also integrate national and/or subject-specific standards. Hence, they are universally applicable – even outside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Under certain circumstances, incompatibility between national standards and the ESG can occur. The experts will address this issue in the assessment report and the Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN will consider this when making a decision.

In addition to the criteria defined by ESG part 1 the assessment of institutional structures follows most of the criteria for the institutional accreditation of non-state higher education institution of the *German Council of Science and Humanities* (WR) („Guidelines for the accreditation of non-state higher education institutions" Section B.IV).

## 2 Process

ACQUIN's accreditation process follows the structure according to the ESG:

- ACQUIN and the HEI define the design and scope of the institutional accreditation based on the criteria mentioned above and in accordance with legal requirements. (ESG 2.1, 2.2)
- The HEI submits a self-assessment report to ACQUIN. In addition, ACQUIN conducts a site visit, which includes discussions with all relevant stakeholders, e.g. executive board, board of governance, representatives of the holding company, deans, heads of the study programmes, professors, lecturers, administrative staff, students, alumni resulting in an assessment report by the experts with clearly defined follow-up measures. (ESG 2.3)
- The external audit is performed as a peer-review procedure. ACQUIN composes a group of experienced and trained experts in consensus with the HEIs. The experts are both qualified in matters of accreditation and the subject of the respective HEI governance. The expert group consists typically of professors, professional practitioners and students. It may include national and/or special experts if necessary, e.g. from national institutions of the HEI's country. (ESG 2.4)
- The peer-review experts evaluate the institutional structure by pre-defined and published criteria and scientific standards. Depending on the level of compliance with these standards, experts propose conditions, recommendations and suggestions. (ESG 2.5)
- ACQUIN publishes the assessment report of the experts. The report includes general information about the accreditation procedure and the experts, evidence, analysis, findings, and conclusions regarding the institutional structures and performance as well as a context description of the HEI. The HEI may point out factual errors before the report is finalised. The Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN supplements its appraisal to the experts' recommendations for follow-up actions based on the HEI's statement to the report. (ESG 2.6)
- The HEI has the right to complain and appeal at any given step of the accreditation process. The HEI may object to one or more experts chosen by ACQUIN if reasonable evidence is brought forward (e.g. suspicion of bias, conflict of interest). Finally, the HEI may appeal against the accreditation decision. The Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN takes a decision on the appeal. If the HEI does not agree with the result of this revision, it may turn to ACQUIN's Appeals Commission. (ESG 2.7)

## II THE INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE AT A GLANCE

| Phases                                | ACQUIN   | Peer-review experts                      | Higher Education Institution (HEI)  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Contract between HEI and ACQUIN       |  |  |   |
| Nomination of the peer-review experts |  |  | HEI sends preliminary information about the institution (profile information)   |
|                                       | ACQUIN appoints experts  |  |   |
|                                       |  |  | HEI accepts the peer-review experts   |
| Self-assessment report                |  |  | HEI prepares and submits self-assessment report   |
|                                       | ACQUIN checks validity and completeness of the self-assessment report                                      |  |   |
| Organising the site visit             | ACQUIN programme manager as a contact person accompanies and supports the HEI in organising the site visit |  | HEI organises the site visit in coordination with the programme manager   |
|                                       | ACQUIN programme manager provides experts with the essential information and prepares them for their task  |  |   |
| Site visit and reporting              | Programme manager coordinates and accompanies the site visit   | Experts discuss with HEI representatives | HEI management, board of trustees, representatives of the holding company, deans, head of study programmes, teaching and administrative staff, students and alumni provide comprehensive insight in the institution |
|                                       |  | Experts compile an assessment report     |   |
| Accreditation decision                |  |  | HEI gives a statement on the report – if necessary  |
|                                       | Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN decides about the accreditation   |  |   |
|                                       | ACQUIN publishes the assessment report including the formal accreditation decision                         |  | HEI is informed about the decision and receives certificates and documents  |

### ACQUIN's programme managers

The programme manager is responsible to experts and HEI representatives concerning all emerging questions regarding the course of the procedure, the interpretation of formal and subject-specific criteria, deadlines etc. The programme manager accompanies experts during the site visit and is responsible for all organisational issues regarding the visit as well as for the flow of information between the HEI, the experts and ACQUIN. They do not act as experts during the accreditation procedure.

## **Accreditation procedure**

Accreditation procedure is the entire process of the accreditation from conclusion of a contract between the HEI and ACQUIN to the decision by the Accreditation Commission.

## **Self-assessment report**

Self-assessment report is the basis for the evaluation of the institutional structures by peer experts. Prior to the site visit, the HEI prepares and submits the self-assessment report to ACQUIN. The self-assessment report indicates the ways in which the institutional design complies with the standards. If applicable, the HEI can address national criteria in the report. Experts are asked to review the self-assessment report prior to the visit.

## **Peer-review experts**

A group of experts consists of professors, professional practitioners and students. The number of experts (per subject area) depends on the profile of the HEI. Experts usually have broad international experience; if appropriate, national expertise is embedded (by bringing in one or more national experts). The Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN officially appoints peer-review experts. ACQUIN informs the HEI about the officially nominated experts.

Experts are prepared for their role in the accreditation procedure by individual training or workshops and by an extended preliminary meeting and discussion with the programme manager of ACQUIN preceding the site visit.

## **Site visit**

The purpose of the site visit is to assess compliance with the standards, as well as to clarify information provided in the self-assessment report. The site visit to the HEI typically lasts three or more days. It starts with a preliminary meeting of experts and the ACQUIN programme manager. The programme manager introduces experts to technicalities of the visit and the role of experts during the discussions with the HEI's representatives. A spokesperson will be selected among the peer experts. This role may be rotating in the course of the talks. The spokesperson mainly chairs the discussions during the visit.

The site visit consists of meetings with the representatives of the HEI (HEI management, board of trustees, (where applicable) representatives of the holding company, deans, head of study programmes, administrative staff, students and alumni) and observation of the facilities.

### **Assessment report by the experts**

Following the site visit, members of the expert group compile the assessment report. The report includes information on the fulfilment of accreditation criteria, as well as observations of the strengths and weaknesses and findings concerning the institutional structure. The HEI may comment on the report for the purposes of correcting or clarifying factual matters relevant to the accreditation of the institutional structure.

### **ACQUIN's Accreditation Commission**

ACQUIN's Accreditation Commission is an independent decision-making body, which makes official decision on the accreditation of an institution. Thus, the expert group's judgement is in a way a preliminary result. Based on the experts' report, the responding statement of the HEI, the decision of the Accreditation Commission may differ concerning fulfilment of specific conditions or recommendations. This procedure guarantees an independent, comprehensible and balanced accreditation result.

### **Reporting**

ACQUIN publishes the decision accompanied with the full assessment report. The reports are publicly available on our website. In addition, the report, certificate of accreditation and a letter confirming the decision of the Accreditation Commission are sent to the HEI. Furthermore, the full assessment report and the result of the procedure are published on the website of Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR).



### III **ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**

The focus of the institutional accreditation is the institution and its performance 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

According to the ESG, the following ten basic criteria of internal quality assurance are evaluated:

ESG Standard 1.1 – Policy for quality assurance

ESG Standard 1.2 – Design and approval of programmes

ESG Standard 1.3 – Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

ESG Standard 1.4 – Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

ESG Standard 1.5 – Teaching staff

ESG Standard 1.6 – Learning resources and student support

ESG Standard 1.7 – Information management

ESG Standard 1.8 – Public information

ESG Standard 1.9 – On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

ESG Standard 1.10 – Cyclical external quality assurance

Within the ESG framework, the accreditation procedure may check the compliance of the institutional structure with national legislation, as well as national and international scientific standards.

The currently valid version of the ESG (including additional information and supplementing commentaries) is available in several languages on the website of the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA) [www.enqa.eu](http://www.enqa.eu).

Further, the evaluation is based on several of the criteria for the institutional accreditation of non-state higher education institution of the *German Council of Science and Humanities (WR)* („Guidelines for the accreditation of non-state higher education institutions“ Section B.IV): Thereby, the following fields of examination are distinguished:

- Examination Area 1: Institutional conception, profile, and development objectives
- Examination Area 2: Governance structure, organization, and quality management
- Examination Area 3: Staff
- Examination Area 4: Study and teaching
- Examination Area 5: Research
- Examination Area 6: Equipment (rooms and facilities)
- Examination Area 7: Funding

#### **IV POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF THE PROCEDURE**

In the assessment of each standard, peer experts distinguish between (*full or substantial*) compliance, *partial compliance* and *non-compliance*. Depending on the level of fulfilment, the procedure of doctoral programme accreditation can have three different results:

##### **Unconditional accreditation: Compliance with the standards**

The institutional design fulfils all criteria. In case of substantial compliance, the experts may express recommendations for further improvement. These recommendations may be taken into account by the HEI with regard to the further improvement of quality.

##### **Accreditation with conditions: Partial compliance with the standards**

The institutional design does not completely fulfil at least one criterion. Certain aspects must be revised to ensure compliance with the standards. Unfulfilled criteria are likely to be met and must be fulfilled within the specified time period. As soon as condition(s) are fulfilled, the accreditation is granted for the complete accreditation period.

##### **Refusal of accreditation: Non-compliance regarding one or more standards**

The institutional design does not fulfil one or more standards. Major deficiencies and weaknesses are so significant that they are unlikely to be rectifiable within a reasonable period of time. In this case, the Accreditation Commission refuses the accreditation.

The HEI can suspend the procedure in order to extend the timeframe to rectify the major deficiencies.

## **V STRUCTURE OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT**

The HEI's self-assessment report is the essential document for the discussions during the site visit and the evaluation by the peer-review experts.

The self-assessment report of the HEI should address the ESG and the criteria of the *German Council of Science and Humanities (WR)*. Additional (national) criteria can be integrated in the assessment, if appropriate.

The self-assessment report should contain the following parts:

1. General information: Cover sheets, background of the national higher education system, background of the institution
2. Description of the institutional design addressing ESG Standards Part 1 and criteria of the *German Council of Science and Humanities (WR)*:
  - Institutional Profile and Strategy
  - Governance
  - Teaching and learning
  - Research
  - Transfer
  - Resources
  - Quality Assurance
  - Internationalisation
3. Appendix (official / legal / supplemental documents)

The requirements on the composition of these three parts will be described in more detail in the next chapters.

### **1 Part 1: General information**

#### **1.1 Cover sheet**

The self-assessment report should contain a cover sheet with the following information:

- Official name of the HEI
- Status (public, private, ecclesiastical, other)
- Location(s)

- Founding year
- Number of study programmes offered
- Numbers of faculties / departments
- Numbers of students, teaching staff, administrative staff
- Number of students currently enrolled
- Average number of graduates per year
- Tuition fees
- Type of studies (e. g. full-time / extra-occupational / distance learning / part-time)
- Other particularities

## **1.2 Short portrait of the HEI**

- History and profile

## **2 Part 2: Description of institutional design**

Considering the ten ESG criteria and several standards defined by the *German Council of Science and Humanities (WR)* this part should be structured into eight sections in which all relevant criteria has been integrated.

Each chapter should describe in detail how the criteria are met. Thereby, exemplary documentation for the verification of fulfilment for each single standard is pointed out: Supporting records or otherwise supplemental documents should be listed as appendices. Although some documents may apply to more than one standard, it should be attached only once.

### **2.1 Institutional Profile and Strategy: Strategic Planning, Mission and Vision**

*Description of profile and objectives of the HEI, definition of mission and vision, adequacy and feasibility of objectives and strategy*

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.

Therefore, these aspects should be addressed:

- 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 HEI with regard to the society? How does this fit into the institutional profile and strategy? How does the HEI react to societal needs of the region? With which services? Is there any cooperation with societal actors?
- Which objectives in the areas of teaching and learning, research, internationalisation, institutional governance has the HEI defined? How do they relate to the profile of the HEI? 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 HEI deal with conflicts in objectives or strategies between faculty and institutional level?
- How does the HEI assure that the strategy is realistic?
- How does the HEI 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?

**Examination Area 1:** *Institutional conception, profile, and development objectives*

- The HEI has a clear understanding of its current and future institutional aspirations and profile, which is in line with its public image.
- The profile of the HEI in terms of its subject orientation, its study programmes and formats, research activities and further education offers as well as its location concept is plausible.
- The HEI has defined its target groups according to its institutional requirements and profile.
- The HEI has a viable equality concept.
- The HEI is embedded through cooperation in its scientific and social environment.

- The HEI has strategic planning in line with its institutional requirements.

**Exemplary documentation for appendix:**

- Institutional Profile and Strategy (Mission and Vision)
- Strategic plan
- Equal opportunities and diversity policy
- Governance strategy
- Basic regulation
- Cooperation agreements
- If applicable, internationalisation strategy

**2.2 Governance, Organization and Administration**

*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*

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.

Therefore, these aspects should be addressed:

- Information about the legal status of the HEI 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 HEI 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 HEI and how are they distributed within the institution?

**Examination Area 2:** *Governance structure, organization, and quality management*

- The relationship between the interests and control options of the operating company, the holding institution and the HEI is balanced and protects the HEI, its bodies, and members against the non-scientific influences of third parties.
- The bodies, academic committees, and offices of the HEI, as well as their tasks and competencies, are clearly and transparently laid down in a basic order or statute.
- The constitutive legal basis for the HEI holding institution (e.g. partnership agreement, association statutes, foundation statutes) is in accordance with the basic order or statutes of the HEI.
- The bodies and academic committees of the HEI have sufficient competence in all academic matters at all levels.
- All members of the HEI should have adequate opportunities to participate in academic self-administration. They should be adequately represented – in accordance with their status – in the organs and academic bodies of the HEI.
- If existing, the central self-governing body should have the right of initiative with regard to the design and amendment of the basic order or statutes of the HEI. It shall adopt the basic rules or statutes in agreement with the supporting institution or the operator.
- Persons with substantial participation in the host institution and senior officials of the operating company or the holding institution should not hold any offices in the HEI management associated with academic responsibility (e.g. president or president).
- Academic management positions should be assigned for a limited period of time.
- Persons who are not members of the higher education institution should only be able to participate in the meetings of the governing bodies and academic committees of the higher education institution with the consent of the governing bodies and committees concerned.



- The management and self-administration structure of the HEI is functional and effective. Even in cases of conflict, it ensures that the HEI is run in a way that is adequate for science.
- Responsibilities, competences, and procedures relevant to appointment procedures should be governed by rules adopted by the central self-governing body of the HEI.
- The regulations of the HEI provide for conflict regulations that preserve academic freedom.
- The HEI sees quality management as a strategic task. Its quality management is consistent and comprehensible and binding for all members of the HEI and lecturers. Responsibilities for quality management are clearly defined.
- The organizational structure of the HEI is appropriate to its size and profile and allows it to adequately perform its teaching, research, and administrative tasks.

**Exemplary documentation for appendix:**

- Licence of approval
- Basic regulation
- Organogram / Organisational structure chart
- Annual financial report

### **2.3 Teaching and Learning**

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

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.

Therefore, these aspects should be addressed:

General:

- Is there a common teaching and learning concept within the HEI or the faculties? How was it developed?

- Who decides on the introduction and implementation of new study programmes? How are new programmes developed?
- 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)?
- How do the objectives and the content of study programmes align with HEI profile/strategy?
- 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 structured (e.g. duration, credits, internship, part/half time, etc.)?
- Are there international elements in the study programmes?
- Does the HEI 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:

- How does the institution differentiate its study programmes from its competitors? How does the HEI evaluate the own competitiveness of the national educational market?

**Examination Area 4:** *Study and teaching*

- The existing and planned study course offerings are consistent with the profile, development goals and strategic planning of the HEI.
- The courses of study, including the study and examination requirements, correspond to the scientific standards of the respective subject area and are appropriately differentiated with regard to the degrees to be awarded.
- The range of courses conveys a variety of scientific contents, methods and theories in a subject-specific manner and offers the opportunity to take courses with various full-time professors during the course of studies.
- In all courses of study, teaching is underpinned by the professors' own research, which is appropriate to the respective institutional requirements.
- Students are taught scientific skills. These include knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for understanding, evaluating, and applying scientific concepts and methods and for gaining knowledge in research.
- The admission requirements for taking up a course of study are presented transparently and are consistently implemented.
- The HEI offers all students services appropriate to its study programmes and formats as well as its institutional standards.
- The HEI guarantees reliability and predictability in teaching and examination operations.
- Within the framework of its studies and teaching, the HEI maintains cooperative relationships with partners from the fields of science, business, culture, and its other social environment, which correspond to its study programmes and formats.
- In dual study programmes, a structural and content-related dovetailing of the learning locations HEI, companies and, if applicable, vocational or technical school as well as quality assurance of the practical phases and quality assurance in the selection of practical partners by the HEI are guaranteed.

- In distance learning courses, the HEI takes measures to ensure that students receive appropriate guidance and support during the self-study phases. The quality assurance of the teaching materials and, where applicable, the virtual learning environment and its technical infrastructure is guaranteed.

**ESG Standard 1.2:** *Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes.*

*The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.*

### **ESG Guidelines:**

Study programmes are at the core of the higher education institutions' teaching mission. They provide students with both academic knowledge and skills including those that are transferable, which may influence their personal development and may be applied in their future careers.

#### Programmes

- are designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes;
- are designed by involving students and other stakeholders in the work;
- benefit from external expertise and reference points;
- reflect the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (cf. Scope and Concepts);
- are designed so that they enable smooth student progression;
- define the expected student workload, e.g. in ECTS;
- include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate;
- are subject to a formal institutional approval process.

**ESG Standard 1.3:** *Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.*

### **ESG Guidelines:**

Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. This means careful consideration of the design and delivery of study programmes and the assessment of outcomes.

The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching

- respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;
- considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;
- flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;
- regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods;
- encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher;
- promotes mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship;
- has appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.

Considering the importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers, quality assurance processes for assessment take into account the following:

- Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field;
- The criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance;
- The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process;
- Where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;
- The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;
- Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;
- A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.

**ESG Standard 1.4:** *Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.*

**ESG Guidelines:**

Providing conditions and support that are necessary for students to make progress in their academic career is in the best interest of the individual students, programmes, institutions and systems. It is vital to have fit-for-purpose admission, recognition and completion procedures, particularly when students are mobile within and across higher education systems.

It is important that access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner. Induction to the institution and the programme is provided.

Institutions need to put in place both processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression.

Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students’ progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on

- institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;
- cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country.

Graduation represents the culmination of the students’ period of study. Students need to receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.

**Exemplary documentation for appendix:**

- Guidelines for designing study programmes
- Samples of:
  - Learning outcome matrix
  - Curricular overview
  - Syllabi
  - Internship regulation

- Diploma Supplement
- Graduation certification
- Transcript of Records
- Rules and Regulations for study programmes
- Study and examination regulations
- Blended Learning concepts
- Admission regulations
- Recognition regulations
- Mentoring/Tutoring guidelines
- Mentoring/Supervision Agreement

## **2.4 Research**

*Description of the research strategy, organisation of research, support for 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.

Therefore, these aspects should be addressed:

- How does the HEI 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 HEI?
- 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 HEI 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 HEI obtain these funds? What kind of third-party funds does the HEI 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?
- How does the HEI support technology transfer?

**Examination Area 5:** *Research*

- The importance of research also corresponds to the institutional aspirations of the HEI.
- The regular teaching obligations of full-time professors should be designed in such a way that there is sufficient time for research. On an annual average, a proportion of the regular weekly working hours is available for research that is appropriate to the institutional requirements of the HEI.
- There should be an incentive system for the promotion of research, which can comprise various components (e.g. research-related reductions in teaching obligations, budget for the start-up financing of research projects).
- The financing of the research is secured in the long term.
- The achievements of the full-time professors in research at the HEI correspond to the institutional standards and the subject culture. The income from research is primarily documented through academic publications.
- The full-time teaching staff of the HEI are integrated into the research landscape of their respective subject (e.g. through academic publications, participation in conferences, editorships, memberships and functions in professional associations, research cooperation).
- The HEI promotes a culture of cooperation in research appropriate to the respective subject cultures. In addition to the individual cooperation of full-time teachers (e.g. in the context of joint publications), the HEI maintains institutionally anchored cooperation (e.g. joint third-party funded projects, collaborative projects) and is integrated as an institution into the wider research landscape.

**ESG Standard 1.8:** *Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.*



### **ESG Guidelines:**

Information on institutions' activities is useful for prospective and current students as well as for graduates, other stakeholders and the public.

Therefore, institutions provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer and the selection criteria for them, the intended learning outcomes of these programmes, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students as well as graduate employment information.

### **Exemplary documentation for appendix:**

- Annual (research) report
- Research Ethics Policy / Code of Conduct
- Publication Guidelines of the HEI
- Guidelines for safeguarding Good Research Practice in cases of misconduct
- Guidelines for Research Data Management

## **2.5 Resources**

### *Description of human and financial resources, facilities, and equipment*

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

Therefore, these aspects should be addressed:

Personal resources:

- How are the human resources in the areas of teaching, research and administration structured? What is the current number of employees in each field?
- 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 HEI 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 HEI 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 HEI? 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 HEI? How is it organised? Which personal resources exist? Are the annual accounts checked by a financial auditor? How are financial decisions made at the HEI?
- Does the HEI plan investments? Which ones?

Facilities and Equipment:

- Is the HEI the owner of the facilities it is using?
- Which facilities does the HEI dispose of? How should these facilities be upgraded according to the future planning of the HEI?
- What library and media equipment does the HEI 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). Is there cooperation with other libraries? Are there plans for the future development of the library?
- Which lab and equipment does the HEI dispose of? (number of lab working places, equipment with PCs, special equipment).

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| <b>Examination Area 3:</b> <i>Staff</i> |
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- Irrespective of its size based on the number of students and the legal requirements, the HEI has an academic core of full-time professors.

- The number of full-time professorships – irrespective of the academic core – is commensurate with the scope of teaching, research, and self-administration tasks.
- The quantitative ratio of part-time and full-time professorships is appropriate to the profile and institutional requirements as well as the overall size of the full-time professorial teaching staff.
- A HEI that offers courses of study at more than one location ensures that the achievements of the academic core or full-time professorship in teaching, research, art practice and self-administration benefit all students at all locations equally (especially by anchoring professorships at the locations).
- The employment requirements for full-time professors correspond to the legal requirements and the institutional demands of the HEI.
- The full-time professors are sufficiently qualified for the (e.g. artistic, creative, application-related, scientific) requirements of the position.
- The full-time professors are appointed in a scientifically guided and transparent procedure.
- The core subject areas of the course offerings are covered by full-time professorships.
- The study programmes are adequately and equally staffed with full-time professors.
- The working hours of the professors are transparent and, in accordance with the institutional claim of the HEI, are divided between the areas of teaching, research and academic self-administration.
- The provision of other academic/non-academic staff corresponds to the institutional requirements and specific needs of the HEI.
- The lecturers are appropriately integrated into the teaching organisation and quality assurance of the HEI.

**Examination Area 6:** *Equipment (rooms and facilities)*

- The HEI ensures that there are adequate facilities at all locations.
- The HEI ensures that all its locations are adequately equipped in terms of both quantity and quality for studying, teaching, and research and that the facilities are appropriate to its profile. The equipment with devices (in laboratories, training rooms, studios, workshops etc.), media and information technology (computers, computer capacities, cameras etc.) as well as software corresponds to the state of the art.

- The access of teachers and students to all spatial and material resources necessary for teaching and research is guaranteed.
- The HEI ensures the supply of literature to all its members. It has a contemporary stock of scientific literature (electronic and/or print) appropriate to its institutional standards and profile and the disciplines represented. In addition to this, access to relevant literature stocks is guaranteed for all members of the HEI, for example through cooperation agreements. A sufficient number of work and research stations are available.
- If the HEI is dependent on external resources (e.g. seminar and lecture rooms, information and communication technology, laboratories, literature) over and above appropriate basic equipment of a spatial and material nature, access to these resources is secured by contract or by other legal or entitlement bases.

#### **Examination Area 7: Funding**

- The financing of the HEI is sustainable. If the HEI depends to a considerable extent on foundation revenues or other regular third-party grants to cover the costs of its ongoing operations, the sustainability of these grants is plausibly demonstrated.
- The HEI's financial and earnings planning shows a plausible correlation between the scope of the courses on offer, the number of students, the size of the teaching staff and the expenditure necessary for the ongoing operation of the HEI. The HEI 's corporate planning is congruent with its financial and earnings planning.
- The HEI shall have recourse to suitably qualified personnel to professionally carry out financing and profit planning, their implementation and accounting.
- The HEI has access to suitably qualified personnel in order to professionally carry out its financial and earnings planning, its implementation and its accounting.
- The budget of the HEI should be documented in an annual financial statement, provided that the legal form of the supporting institution permits this.
- If a HEI is managed under commercial law as a non-independent operating unit of a company, separate cost accounting is prepared for the HEI operating unit.
- Prospective students will be fully informed before the conclusion of the contract about the study, examination and other fees due during the standard period of study. Students have reasonable possibilities to terminate current study contracts before the end of the standard period of study. Any advance payments made should be reimbursed proportionately in the event of termination.

**ESG Standard 1.5:** *Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.*

**ESG Guidelines:**

The teacher's role is essential in creating a high quality student experience and enabling the acquisition of knowledge, competences and skills. The diversifying student population and stronger focus on learning outcomes require student-centred learning and teaching and the role of the teacher is, therefore, also changing (cf. Standard 1.3).

Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff and for providing them with a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively.

Such an environment

- sets up and follows clear, transparent and fair processes for staff recruitment and conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching;
- offers opportunities for and promotes the professional development of teaching staff;
- encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research;
- encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.

**ESG Standard 1.6:** *Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.*

**ESG Guidelines:**

For a good higher education experience, institutions provide a range of resources to assist student learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries, study facilities and IT infrastructure to human support in the form of tutors, counsellors and other advisers. The role of support services is of particular importance in facilitating the mobility of students within and across higher education systems.

The needs of a diverse student population (such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities), and the shift towards student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources and student support.

Support activities and facilities may be organised in a variety of ways depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are fit for purpose, accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.

In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.

**Exemplary documentation for appendix:**

- Staff recruitment policy (including level of competence)
- Staff development policy
- Overview of the faculty staff
- Resource overview:
  - Infrastructure
  - Equipment
  - Finances
  - IT infrastructure
  - Libraries
  - Study facilities
- Support Staff overview

**2.6 Quality Assurance**

*Policy of quality assurance; Regular evaluation of the activities and integration of evaluation results to institutional planning and development*

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

Therefore, these aspects should be addressed:

- 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 HEI 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 HEI 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 HEI, what are the consequences? How are quality assurance results used for enhancement?

**Examination Area 2:** *Governance structure, organization, and quality management*

- The HEI sees quality management as a strategic task. Its quality management is consistent and comprehensible and binding for all members of the HEI and lecturers. Responsibilities for quality management are clearly defined.

**ESG Standard 1.1:** *Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.*

**ESG Guidelines:**

Policies and processes are the main pillars of a coherent institutional quality assurance system that forms a cycle for continuous improvement and contributes to the accountability of the institution. It supports the development of quality culture in which all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the institution. In order to facilitate this, the policy has a formal status and is publicly available.

Quality assurance policies are most effective when they reflect the relationship between research and learning & teaching and take account of both the national context in which the institution operates, the institutional context and its strategic approach. Such a policy supports

- the organisation of the quality assurance system;
- departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units as well as those of institutional leadership, individual staff members and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance;

- academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud;
- guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff;
- the involvement of external stakeholders in quality assurance.

The policy translates into practice through a variety of internal quality assurance processes that allow participation across the institution. How the policy is implemented, monitored and revised is the institution's decision.

The quality assurance policy also covers any elements of an institution's activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties.

**ESG Standard 1.7:** *Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.*

**ESG Guidelines:**

Reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making and for knowing what is working well and what needs attention. Effective processes to collect and analyse information about study programmes and other activities feed into the internal quality assurance system.

The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the institution. The following are of interest:

- Key performance indicators;
- Profile of the student population;
- Student progression, success and drop-out rates;
- Students' satisfaction with their programmes;
- Learning resources and student support available;
- Career paths of graduates.

Various methods of collecting information may be used. It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.

**ESG Standard 1.9:** *Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.*



### **ESG Guidelines:**

Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programmes aim to ensure that the provision remains appropriate and to create a supportive and effective learning environment for students.

They include the evaluation of:

- The content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline thus ensuring that the programme is up to date;
- The changing needs of society;
- The students' workload, progression and completion;
- The effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students;
- The student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme;
- The learning environment and support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme.

Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised programme specifications are published.

**ESG Standard 1.10:** *Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.*

### **ESG Guidelines:**

External quality assurance in its various forms can verify the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance, act as a catalyst for improvement and offer the institution new perspectives. It will also provide information to assure the institution and the public of the quality of the institution's activities.

Institutions participate in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account, where relevant, of the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate. Therefore, depending on the framework, this external quality assurance may take different forms and focus at different organisational levels (such as programme, faculty or institution).

Quality assurance is a continuous process that does not end with the external feedback or report or its follow-up process within the institution. Therefore, institutions ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.

**Exemplary documentation for appendix:**

- Quality management:
  - Quality management policy
  - Quality management manual
  - Quality management report
- Evaluation regulations
- Data collection policy

**2.7 Internationalisation (optional criterion)**

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

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.

Therefore, these aspects should be addressed:

- Does the HEI have defined and reasonable objectives concerning internationalisation (strategy)? How does the internationalisation strategy fit into the institutional profile and strategy?
- Number and structure of incoming and outgoing students
- Are there differences between the study programmes? Which targets are set?
- 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

**Exemplary documentation for appendix:**

- Institutional Profile and Strategy (Mission and Vision)
- International strategy plan
- Basic regulation
- International cooperation agreements

### **3 Part 3: Appendix**

Particularities, amendments, supporting materials (if needed official, legal or otherwise supplemental documents) should be placed in this section. It is important to structure this section comprehensibly (e. g. proper naming of the files).



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