



ACQUIN

AKKREDITIERUNGS-,
CERTIFIZIERUNGS- UND
QUALITÄTSSICHERUNGS-
INSTITUT

CODE OF ETHICS

Your intention. Our focus.



I. Preamble

1. The mission statement of the agency ACQUIN

The objective of the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) is to contribute to the shaping of the European Higher Education Area and to ensure the comparability of the quality of university degrees.

The core task of ACQUIN is to promote the quality of higher education programmes and to support the establishment of a culture of quality at higher education institutions. ACQUIN carries out accreditations of Bachelor and Master programmes, of all disciplines on a national and international level and across all types of higher education institutions in order to ensure the high quality of study programmes, create market transparency, enhance the attractiveness of higher education to students and promote comparability of academic qualifications. In this sense, the accreditation of entire universities, their quality management systems in teaching and learning, as well as other performance areas contribute to the further promotion of the academic quality and to the support of the higher education development. ACQUIN sees itself as a partner of higher education institutions abroad that want to offer Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes at European level.

The implementation of all quality assurance procedures in Germany and abroad is based on the international standards of good practice, especially on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). As a self-governing higher education organisation, ACQUIN is free from government interference and is independent in the spirit of academic standards and traditions. Academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions are guiding principles of all decision-making processes. The universities affiliated with ACQUIN cultivate a consistent exchange with the professional practice and the representatives of the student body.

The opportunity to get to know other cultures and ways of thinking through cooperation in higher education sector is an asset to all employees and committee members of ACQUIN. Our alignment with national and international task areas requires the establishment of a system of common values and principles to serve as a guideline for the conduct of all employees. Employees, committee members and experts of ACQUIN jointly convey the mission statement of the agency ACQUIN and are guided by the ethical principles set out in the *Code of Ethics* which ensure that the work of ACQUIN is characterised by excellent quality, independence, integrity and legality.

2. Expectations regarding the employees of the agency ACQUIN

The employees of the agency ACQUIN act professionally. This means that in addition to the sense of responsibility, accountability, integrity and exemplary behavior, there is a pursuit of our principles of cooperation in our system of values. Moreover, ACQUIN strives for the principles of direct and open communication.

The executives of ACQUIN bear a particular responsibility. It is their duty to exemplify the core values in their day-to-day work. They set the direction and serve as a role model for other employees. The executives support tolerant and fair treatment through the implementation of value-based management and provision of the necessary leadership. Their behavior contributes to the respect shown for the personality and dignity of all employees. With their open-minded attitude towards employees they cultivate the treatment of each other that is characterised by politeness, respect, kindness, and mutual consideration. As part of their management responsibilities, they prevent unacceptable behavior and act as a neutral mediator in possible conflicts.

3. Expectations regarding committee members and experts

Committee members of ACQUIN and experts in quality assurance procedures work for the agency on a voluntary basis and for a limited period of time. In carrying out their respective functions, committee members and experts are guided by the ethical principles of ACQUIN. In particular, they shall not be influenced by personal interests or relationships, and they shall always make decisions based on objective criteria.

II. Internal Relations

1. Culture of the agency

All employees, committee members and experts of ACQUIN contribute to the agency culture that is characterised by fair and cooperative collaboration. Tolerance and trustful relationship in daily interactions with each other are the core beliefs. The agency ACQUIN has a flat hierarchy and thus offers quick decision-making to higher education institutions and other partners. At the same time a high level of self-responsibility is required from the employees. ACQUIN is committed to responsible, transparent and sustainability-focused work of the agency.

2. Competencies

ACQUIN relies on the motivation, expertise and sense of responsibility of its employees, committee members and experts. The professional competencies of the employees and the task-related competencies of the committee members and experts are continuously developed in order to comply with the highest quality standards in the constantly changing context of quality assurance in higher education.

3. Unfair treatment and discrimination

Acts of discrimination based on ethnic background, religion, age, gender, disability, sexual identity, beliefs, affiliation to a political, religious, and trade union organisation or other characteristics, will not be tolerated.

III. External Relations

1. Interaction with Third Parties

ACQUIN acts as a fair competitor in a competitive environment. Under no circumstances are other agencies or institutions vilified. The conduct towards higher education institutions, external partners and participants in the context of the agency is professional, transparent, respectful, confidential and contributing to the well-being of the community.

2. Compliance with legal regulations and cultural characteristics

ACQUIN is subject to laws, regulations and comparable rules in all areas of the activity of the agency. This applies both to national and international regulations. It is a matter of course to respect and follow the laws and regulations in the various jurisdictions in which ACQUIN operates.

3. Presentation

The conduct of employees, committee members and experts always reflects on ACQUIN. It is a specific requirement to avoid conduct that has an unfavorable impact on the reputation of ACQUIN at higher education institutions as well as in the eyes of other employees and / or of the public opinion.

ACQUIN generally supports the volunteer commitment of its employees. If the commitment is related to the activity at ACQUIN, the prior consent of the executive board is required, provided that the commitment qualifies as a secondary activity that is a subject to authorisation or if a conflict of interest may arise.

4. Protection of the environment

The protection of the environment and the sparing use of resources are important elements of the philosophy of the agency ACQUIN. The objectives are the conservation of natural resources, the development of environmental awareness and the provision of services in a resource-saving manner. As part of the fulfillment of tasks at ACQUIN they include, in particular, the minimisation of use of paper and other work materials, the use of environmentally friendly means of transport in business trips and the general promotion of environmental awareness of all employees, committee members and experts.

5. Prevention of corruption

ACQUIN is determined to achieve highest ethical standards in all areas of activity of the agency. ACQUIN does not tolerate immoral or corrupt practices, extortion or bribery performed by employees, committee members or business partners. The agency maintains transparency of

interaction with all members, higher education institutions and public authorities. ACQUIN rejects all forms of corruption, whether public or private, active or passive. Therefore, ACQUIN complies with clear anticorruption principles:

a. Gifts

To ensure our independence and as an expression of high ethical principles of the agency, employees, committee members and experts of ACQUIN are prohibited from demanding, accepting or receiving any monetary contributions, gifts - except for locally accepted small giveaways - other benefits, personal services or favors from individuals with whom they have a business relationship. Only gifts - occasional gifts, hospitality, or other presents – that arise from national and usual cultural course of business practices are allowed to be received or granted as long as they do not influence entrepreneurial decisions.

b. Hospitality

The employees, committee members and experts of ACQUIN shall not request invitations to meals or events from business partners. As guests of business partners, they may accept invitations to events or business meals only if they are offered voluntarily, serve a justified business purpose and the meal takes place within the scope of normal business practice.

c. Financial benefits

It is not permitted to request or accept any payments, loans or other financial benefits of any kind for personal gain from higher education institutions or other customers.

IV. Scope of the Code of ethics

1. Scope

The *Code of ethics* is a binding internal standard. When it was drawn up, different cultures and the diversity of social values have been duly acknowledged and taken into account. The *Code of ethics* extends to official matters in the agency and to all areas where employees, committee members and experts are perceived as its representatives.

2. Continuous adaptation

Although no legal claims can be derived from the *Code of ethics* by employees, committee members, experts or other persons, ACQUIN periodically reviews the internal code and evaluates experiences in order to continually improve the compliance of the principles and values laid down in the *Code of ethics*.

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