



# Annual Report 2021





# 2001

Precisely twenty years ago, at the time of the initial accreditation by the Accreditation Council, the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute ACQUIN was launched with 57 members from four German federal states. By the end of 2021, its membership was held by 155 higher education institutions as well as professional societies and associations from all over Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Lebanon, Egypt, and Mongolia.

In 2006, 2011 and 2016, the Accreditation Council approved the reaccreditation of ACQUIN for a period of five years. Since 2018, the agencies have been accredited to operate in Germany on the basis of their registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). In the year covered by the report, the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) confirmed the compliance of ACQUIN with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), whereupon the membership of ACQUIN with ENQA was renewed and the listing with EQAR was extended to 30 June 2026.

In the year under review, 139 decisions were made in programme accreditation procedures (in Germany and abroad, including fulfilment of conditions and resumptions of procedures) under the previous legislation and 240 evaluation results were ascertained under the new legislation; in addition, one institutional accreditation was completed. Upon conclusion of a procedure, the 36th system accreditation procedure under the previous legislation was completed, and in three procedures under the new legislation, the evaluation results were ascertained.

# 2021

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Committees and Head Office .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Partnership and Dialogue.....</b>	<b>20</b>

**IMPRINT**

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## Committees and Head Office

The evaluation, certification, and accreditation procedures were carried out jointly by the accreditation commission, the expert groups as well as the ACQUIN head office in a carefully structured process and in the context of clearly defined division of responsibilities.

According to the procedure requirements, the **committee structure** is made up as follows:

- The effective cooperation of the bodies and committees of ACQUIN is insured by its **board** and **general assembly**. Both strategic steering committees of ACQUIN are focused on the application and implementation of the objectives and operational principles of ACQUIN when using the criteria and procedures for accreditation and certification. Board elections are held every three years. The board was newly elected in 2019.
- The **accreditation commission** renders a comprehensive contribution to the thorough and reliable task fulfilment by ACQUIN. It is composed of representatives of universities, colleges of art and music, universities of applied sciences, professional practice, and students. According to its statute, the chairmanship of the accreditation commission is held by a chairperson. The accreditation commission members are appointed for a period of two years. The accreditation commission was newly elected in 2021.
- Following the dissolution of the expert committees in 2020 due to the amended framework conditions, ACQUIN set up a **network of experts** as a sub-committee of the accreditation commission in order to retain the expertise of long-standing expert committee members for the quality assurance of the evaluation procedures.
- The **appeals commission** has been appointed to ensure an orderly and independent appeal procedure to address objections of contractual partners of ACQUIN with respect to accreditation decisions. The appeals commission is made up of five members, with one member per each group of universities, colleges of art and music, universities of applied sciences, professional practice, and students. The term of office shall be three years. The appeals commission was newly elected in 2020.
- In 2021, on behalf of ACQUIN just under 800 **experts** — university faculty members, students, and representatives of professional practice — evaluated study programmes, advanced training programmes, and internal quality assurance systems at higher education institutions taking into account the criteria of the regulations on accreditation in specific German federal states and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as well as the relevant country-specific legal requirements.
- In order to meet the requirements of the evaluation and accreditation procedures and to provide the appropriate degree of publicity, the **head office** of ACQUIN is always sufficiently staffed. From December 2017 onwards, the operations have been carried out under a dual leadership in the spirit of a collegial management.

## THE BOARD

In addition to the general assembly of ACQUIN, the board is a major strategic steering committee of the agency. The board bears the economic responsibility and thus has a particular interest in the efficiency and effectiveness of the ACQUIN operations. The board plays a crucial part in keeping track of the developments and results of the work of the agency necessary for making essential decisions on the further development of the performance capability of ACQUIN.

The board convened several times in 2021 to decide on membership applications, make personnel decisions and discuss matters of fundamental relevance to ACQUIN. The effects on the structures and processes of ACQUIN associated with the reorganisation of the accreditation system also remained on the agenda.

A successor to Marion Moser, who resigned from ACQUIN on 1 November 2021, Dr. Alexander Rudolph, a long-standing project manager, was appointed Managing Director. In April 2021, the board held a strategy meeting at which the draft ENQA evaluation report for the renewed registration of ACQUIN with EQAR (and thus authorisation to operate as an accreditation agency in Germany) was discussed in particular. Topics for

thematic analyses were discussed as well as possibilities for differentiating the product portfolio of ACQUIN.

In the year under review, the board also held an online meeting with all ACQUIN employees and met with the members of the works council to exchange views, particularly on the topics of workload and distribution of tasks.

### **Meetings of the Board:**

15 January 2021, Bayreuth  
29 April 2021 (online meeting)  
15 July 2021 (online meeting)  
13 December 2021 (online meeting)

### **Strategy meeting:**

30 April 2021, Bayreuth

### **Meeting with the employees:**

13 July 2021 (online meeting)

### **Meeting with the works council:**

4 August 2021 (online meeting)

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

On 20 May 2021, the general assembly was held in a virtual format for the second time in a row due to the pandemic-related travel and contact restrictions. The meeting of the members for the election of the new accreditation commission was held separately as the election meeting was to be convened in person.

Professor Dr. Sebastian Kempgen, Chairman of the board of ACQUIN, gave the opening address at the general assembly in May. After clarifications on the format of the meeting professor Dr. Evelyn Korn, Vice-President of Teaching and Learning at the University of Marburg, presented the Innovation in University Teaching project as a guest speaker and explained the main tasks (project funding,

exchange/networking and knowledge transfer) of the eponymous foundation in the state of Hesse. In the discussion that followed, matters of digital teaching, the increasing intra-university networking of various departments and possible points of contact to accreditation were tackled.

Subsequently, the Managing Director of ACQUIN, Marion Moser, presented the continuation of the thematic analysis with regard to discretionary powers in the Specimen decree with an evaluation of the accreditation recommendations of expert groups and the subsequent decisions of the Accreditation Council. Observations could be made that the points of criticism of the Accreditation Council in the cases in which additional conditions

had been decided were focused on four formal and six subject-specific thematic groups. In this context, the statement procedure of the Accreditation Council was also discussed in the case of a decision deviating from the decision recommendation of the expert group.

Following these two presentations and discussions, the board and management informed the members of the current status of the third-party funded ACQUIN projects. The agency was involved in eight ERASMUS+ projects in the reporting year and expanded its own perspectives by participating in the implementation and quality assurance of these international projects.

This was followed by the establishment of a quorum, the discussion on the annual report 2020 and the auditor's report. The financial report drawn up for 2020 was adopted. The general assembly also voted to discharge the board and to adopt the economic plan for 2021.

The election assembly took place on 22 October 2021 in Bayreuth. Following the new election of the accreditation commission (see *attachments for composition*), two workshops on programme and system accreditation were held.

## MEMBERSHIP BASE

In 2021, ACQUIN was once again able to gain new members. In the corresponding period, the resignations of five member universities took effect and there was one expulsion due to non-payment of membership fees, so that the total number of members subsided slightly once again: as of 31 December 2021, ACQUIN consisted of 155 members — in the vast majority higher education institutions (in balanced proportions universities, universities of applied sciences, and colleges of art and music), scientific societies,

and science-related professional associations.

The highest number of members amounted to 172 and was attained in 2014.

In the year under review, the geographical reach of the membership extends across all German federal states, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Lebanon, Egypt, and Mongolia.

**In 2021, the board approved the following higher education institutions as new members of ACQUIN:**

Dresden International University  
German International University Berlin  
Landshut University of Applied Sciences  
FHD University of Applied Sciences Dresden – Private Fachhochschule GmbH  
Offenbach University of Art and Design

## COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS COMMISSION

The complaints and appeals commission has been appointed to ensure an orderly and independent appeal procedure. The appeals commission is made up of five members, with one member per each group of universities of applied sciences, universities, colleges of art and music, professional practice, and students. The term of office shall be three years.

The appeal procedure covers the rules of the procedure, substantive and legal matters and - in procedures outside the scope of the Specimen decree - accreditation or certification decisions.

The procedure provides that complaints or objections from higher education institutions are initially submitted to the accreditation commission and then, if the appeal is not rectified, they are forwarded to the appeals commission for a revision and statement issuance. Recommendations of the appeals commission are to be considered by the accreditation commission.

In the case of appeals against the nomination of experts, a decision is made directly by the accreditation commission.

In the year under review, no complaints were submitted to the appeals commission.

## ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

The accreditation commission is the central decision-making body in the evaluation, certification, and accreditation procedures. It has a number of key tasks related to the overall coordination of the procedure: it determines the procedural principles and guidelines, discusses and reaches decisions on the evaluation results, and makes accreditation decisions based on them (in proceedings outside the scope of the Specimen decree). In addition, it appointed members of the expert committees — up until their dissolution in 2020. Since their abolition, the accreditation commission has been responsible for appointing expert groups.

In accreditation procedures that take place outside the scope of the Accreditation Council, the accreditation commission decisions

for accreditation of an individual study programme (programme accreditation) or internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions in the area of teaching and learning (system accreditation) are based on the expert report and the statement of the concerned higher education institution on the expert report. The procedures of certification and institutional accreditation are carried out along the same lines.

In procedures under the new legislation, the accreditation commission determines the recommendations of the expert groups and also takes into account the statements of the higher education institutions.



## MEETINGS OF THE ACCREDITATION COMMISSION IN 2021

In 2021, the accreditation commission held meetings four times — in March, July, September, and December — in order to come to an agreement regarding the evaluation criteria and procedural principles, to make accreditation decisions, and to deal with the appointment of expert groups. Each of these meetings was once again held virtually due to travel and contact restrictions over the course of the reporting period.

The decision to transform the expert commit-

### Meetings of the Accreditation Commission

AK 80 on 16 March 2021 (online meeting)

AK 81 on 28 June 2021 (online meeting)

AK 82 on 27 September 2021 (online meeting)

AK 83 on 6 December 2021 (online meeting)

### Expert network meeting:

25 October 2022, Bayreuth

tees into a network of experts was enacted in the year under review. In October 2022, 32 former expert committee members met in Bayreuth and constituted themselves as a sub-committee of the Accreditation Commission. In the case of content-related questions that arise during an evaluation process, the project managers of the head office can now contact individual members of the network on a case-related basis. Case-related support for special expert appointments or expert participation in procedures is also envisaged. This way, the long-standing expertise of the expert committees can further be used for the quality assurance of the evaluation procedures.

At the December meeting, the newly elected commission constituted itself, unfortunately it was held also in the form of a virtual meeting. The newly elected members of the Accreditation Commission were briefed on the operation of ACQUIN in more detail at a preparatory meeting conducted a day ahead of the meeting.

In the reporting year, the members of the Accreditation Commission engaged once more with the decisions and specifications of the Accreditation Council on the new accreditation system and with process adjustments at their meetings. With regard to accreditation

procedures within Germany, the Accreditation Commission sees itself as an interdisciplinary quality assurance body in which the structural possibility of a subject-specific opinion for complex procedures has been retained, especially for procedures with a disagreement between the expert group and the higher education institution. Discrepancies between the expert decisions recommendation and the decisions of the Accreditation Council in the individual procedures were analysed with the aim of being able to draw conclusions for the interpretation of the accreditation ordinances. Procedures in which the Accreditation Council had assessed expert reports as 'not ready for decision' and had returned them to the higher education institutions with the request for clarification were also discussed in detail.

For procedures which are carried out outside the scope of the German Accreditation Council, the Accreditation Commission continues to function as the decision-making body.

In addition, the feedback of the expert group from the ENQA Peer Review was discussed, which among other things dealt with a more international composition of the committees and the necessity of preparing thematic analyses, but also with the future financial planning of the board.

The Specimen decree adopted by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany on 17 December 2017 provides for an evaluation of the Specimen decree three years after its entry into force in order to review its application and impact. Within the framework of a survey of states launched by the Standing Conference of the Ministers, a working group of the German Rectors' Conference compiles a paper that was discussed in draft form within the accreditation commission.

In the year under review, the accreditation commission made 139 decisions in programme accreditation procedures (in Germany and abroad, including fulfilment of conditions and resumptions) according to the previous law and established 240 assessment results according to the new law. One system accreditation procedure under the previous

law was completed, and the assessment results were determined in three procedures according to the new law. A decision was made in one institutional accreditation procedure. ACQUIN is involved as a partner in a total of nine projects of the EU's programme

to support education, training, youth and sport (Erasmus+). (See *below Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures: Accreditation Summary, Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures in the International Domain*).

## EXPERT GROUPS

In 2021, the accreditation commission appointed 794 experts for a total of 149 evaluations in accreditation and certification procedures. One third of the members of the expert groups were female, seven percent came from abroad.

For procedures carried out according to the new accreditation system, the experts are appointed in accordance with the documents developed and adopted by the German Rectors' Conference, and namely the Binding Guidelines for the Appointment of University Teachers for Expert Groups according to Art. 3 Para. 3 Interstate Study Accreditation Treaty and the Guidelines on the Appointment of Experts and the Composition of Expert Groups for Accreditation Procedures dated 24 April 2018.

The composition of each expert groups takes into account academic requirements, students' interests, and requirements of professional practice, so that in addition to academia, professional practice and students are also represented in the expert groups.

For the evaluation of an individual study programme, an expert group size of four members has proven to be effective, two of them are professorial representatives, one representative from professional practice, and one student working jointly. In bundled procedures, the number of experts is increased according to requirements. In many cases, the expert groups include international experts. The groups are composed of both experts who have already participated in the procedures of ACQUIN and new experts who have no previous experience in accreditation procedures.

The preparation of the experts involves several stages. It includes initial information on

the accreditation procedure, its dates and content as well as the role, self-perception and tasks of the expert group in the accreditation procedure. Subsequently, the self-documentation and other relevant documents are made available in order to get the expert group acquainted with the evaluation criteria and rules of the procedure. If necessary, experts can consult with a respective project manager from the head office. The expert groups are provided with a handout containing detailed information on their roles and responsibilities throughout the procedure.

A preliminary meeting of the experts is always held before the on-site visit. It is intended to elucidate the course of proceedings, to exchange views on the self-documentation, and to compile a list of potential questions as well as in general to prepare for the discussions with the higher education institution members. In addition, a reiterated consensus is reached on the role and the self-perception of the experts.

To ensure the independence and impartiality of the expert groups, the persons involved in the respective accreditation procedures are requested to sign a declaration of impartiality. Since 2018, this document also contains information on data protection in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

The online format for evaluations, which has been necessary since the end of March 2020, was further developed by ACQUIN staff in the reporting year. In isolated cases, on-site visits took place in the summer of 2021 at the special request of individual higher education institutions, as long as the pandemic situation allowed. In the vast majority of cases, however, virtual meetings were held.

## HEAD OFFICE

The project managers of the head office are responsible for the implementation and organisation of the procedures; they also provide a support system for committees, public relations and internal quality assurance. In addition, their scope of responsibilities includes participation in national and international conferences and meetings of scientific associations, maintenance of contacts with higher education institutions in Germany and abroad, and initiation of new co-operation projects.

In the year under review, a new business distribution plan was drawn up with different organisational areas, subject allocations, and thematic areas. The areas of programme accreditation and certification (national), system accreditation, international affairs (programme accreditation, institutional accreditation, and certification), EU projects as well as quality management were each assigned a project manager as head of a designated department. Decisions are centralised at the management level. The organisational areas also include finance & controlling, IT, process management and secretariat. In addition, personnel assignments were made for specialised disciplines and cross-sectional subject areas. The efficiency of the work within the structures of ACQUIN is improved through the preparation of area-specific information in small teams and the dissemination of this information to colleagues.

In the reporting year, just as in the previous year, the reaccreditation of ACQUIN played a central role. In February 2021, the four-day peer review by the expert group of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) took place (in an online format). Successfully passing the ENQA review is a prerequisite for renewing the listing in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR) and thus also the basis for

obtaining authorisation to carry out accreditation procedures under the new law in Germany. Compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) was confirmed, whereupon the membership of ACQUIN with ENQA was renewed and the listing with EQAR was extended to 30 June 2026.

In the year under review, the management and the project managers were supported by two employees in the areas of secretariat, finances and controlling, a process manager, a project manager for EU projects as well as student assistants. The staff of the office comprised 18 employees (as of 31 December 2021), three of whom are employed part-time.

Following the resignation of the Managing Director Marion Moser on 1 November 2021, Dr Alexander Rudolph was appointed as her successor.

Dr. Julien Bérard and Professor Dr. Cornelia Wilhelm were recruited as new project managers.

### WORKS COUNCIL

In the year under review, the works council organised two staff meetings and conducted a staff survey.

In addition, it exchanged views with the board at its invitation on the work processes in the office and, in cooperation with the management, drew up a draft for a works agreement for the recording of working hours and mobile working. Due to changes in the staff structure, it was decided to hold new elections for the works council, which was elected in April 2021. This is to be carried out in the third quarter of 2022 so that all newly recruited employees of ACQUIN with active and passive voting rights can participate.

## ACQUINUS GMBH

In 2021, ACQUINUS GmbH continued pursuing the goal of opening up new business fields in the area of consulting and services for higher education institutions and university-related institutions through careful selection of reference projects.

ACQUINUS GmbH evaluates, advises, and coaches institutions in the higher education

sector comprehensively on all topics of science and science management of study, teaching, research, administration, and the Third Mission. After Dr. Alexander Rudolph took over the management of ACQUIN, he was succeeded by Clemens Bockmann, who had been a consultant for many years, as Managing Director of ACQUINUS.

## ACCREDITATION AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Since the foundation of ACQUIN, **programme accreditation** has been one of the main tasks of the agency. A high-quality implementation is ensured in each procedure. With regard to accreditation procedures in Germany, in 2021 ACQUIN remains to be one of the four agencies with the most accreditation decisions per year, the market share stands at approximately 27 per cent.

The German accreditation system has been further developed with the process of **system accreditation**: from programme accreditation to evaluation of the internal quality assurance system of a higher education institution. ACQUIN announced its first nationwide completion of a system accreditation procedure at a German university in 2011, and now its market share for completed procedures under the previous law is 33 per cent, and it is currently 20 per cent for procedures under the new law.

In addition to the accreditation of study programmes and quality management systems in the field of teaching and learning, ACQUIN ensures achievement of a similar programme quality in academic advanced training that does not lead to a degree by carrying out **certification procedures**.

Another procedure type carried out abroad is **institutional accreditation and evaluation procedures**. The focus of such procedure is the organisation and functioning of an entire higher education institution and it involves evaluation of the areas of teaching and learning, research and internal self-government. In this context, an institutional accreditation procedure was completed in Switzerland in 2021.

- The **decision-making framework** was again very differentiated in 2021, with no conditions being imposed or recommended for the third time in a row in a majority of the decisions in the programme accreditation procedures.
- In compliance with the internationalisation principles of ACQUIN, the agency collaborated with foreign partner institutions in procedures at **higher education institutions abroad** in 2021 as well.
- The project managers of ACQUIN were responsible for the **support of higher education institutions**, they were in charge of providing comprehensive information to the programme and system managers on preparation, implementation and follow-up procedures as well as on the committee work associated therewith prior to signing agreements.

## ACCREDITATION SUMMARY OF 2021

In the year under review, ACQUIN made 139 programme accreditation decisions (in Germany and abroad) under the previous law, including the fulfilment of conditions and resumptions, as well as 240 evaluation results in programme accreditation procedures according to the new law.

With reference to the programme accreditation according to the new law, it can be noted that the proportion of conditions imposed in the proposed decisions has again decreased on the whole. This is also related to the fact that the procedures in some cases included a deficiency rectification loop with the consequence that an accreditation without conditions could be recommended. Overall, accreditation with conditions was proposed in about 17 per cent of the cases. Both in the case of accreditation with conditions and refusal of accreditation (under the previous law), it is possible to suspend the accreditation procedure for a maximum period of 18 months if requested, so that the higher education institution can make improvements and prepare for a resumption of the procedure. In the course of 2021, no higher education institution applied for a suspension of the procedure, nor was one resumed in the reporting period.

Higher education institutions are obliged to notify major changes in accredited study programmes. In all study programmes accredited under the previous law, the agency that issued the accreditation is responsible in this regard. The agency checks whether the changes made or planned reduce the quality of the study programme and whether the accreditation can remain in force. In many cases, experts are involved once again, and in some procedures, approval for the continuation of accreditation is associated with conditions. In the year under review, the accreditation commission examined the notified significant changes in 28 procedures and made a decision on them.

It could be observed that the number of notified significant changes had again increased significantly.

### In 2021, ACQUIN has within Germany

- reaccredited **9** study programmes (under previous law)  
of which **1** with conditions
- checked the fulfilment of the conditions for **64** study programmes
- the assessment results were determined in **240** programme accreditation procedures according to the new law  
thereof **94** initial accreditation procedures  
(thereof **16** with proposed conditions)  
and **146** reaccreditation procedures  
**24** of which with proposed conditions)
- in **28** procedures substantial changes were examined
- system accreditation for **1** higher education institution (under previous law) was granted
- in **2** system accreditation procedures (under the previous law), the fulfilment of conditions was ascertained
- in **3** system accreditation procedures according to the new law, the assessment results were determined

### outside Germany

- **18** study programmes accredited for the first time  
(all without conditions)
- **45** programmes reaccredited  
of which **11** with conditions
- for **3** study programmes, the fulfilment of the conditions has been verified
- **1** higher education institution institutionally accredited

### as well as

- **1** joint degree programme accredited within the scope of the application of the European Approach

At one higher education institution, the system accreditation procedure (under the previous law) was completed and in two procedures the fulfilment of conditions was determined. In three system accreditation procedures according to the new law, ACQUIN determined the evaluation result and sent the accreditation report to the higher education institutions, with which they could apply to the Accreditation Council for system accreditation.

One higher education institution in Switzerland was institutionally accredited. Abroad, programme accreditation procedures were also carried out or completed at various higher education institutions in Kazakhstan as well as in Luxembourg, Switzerland,

Mongolia, Egypt and Oman (See *below Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures in the International Domain*).

For the first time, a joint degree programme was evaluated and accredited within the framework of the application of the European Approach.

In addition to the accreditation of study programmes and quality management systems, ACQUIN also carries out certification and evaluation procedures in which the quality of academic continuing education programmes, individual modules or other projects is examined. No certification procedure was carried out in the reporting year.

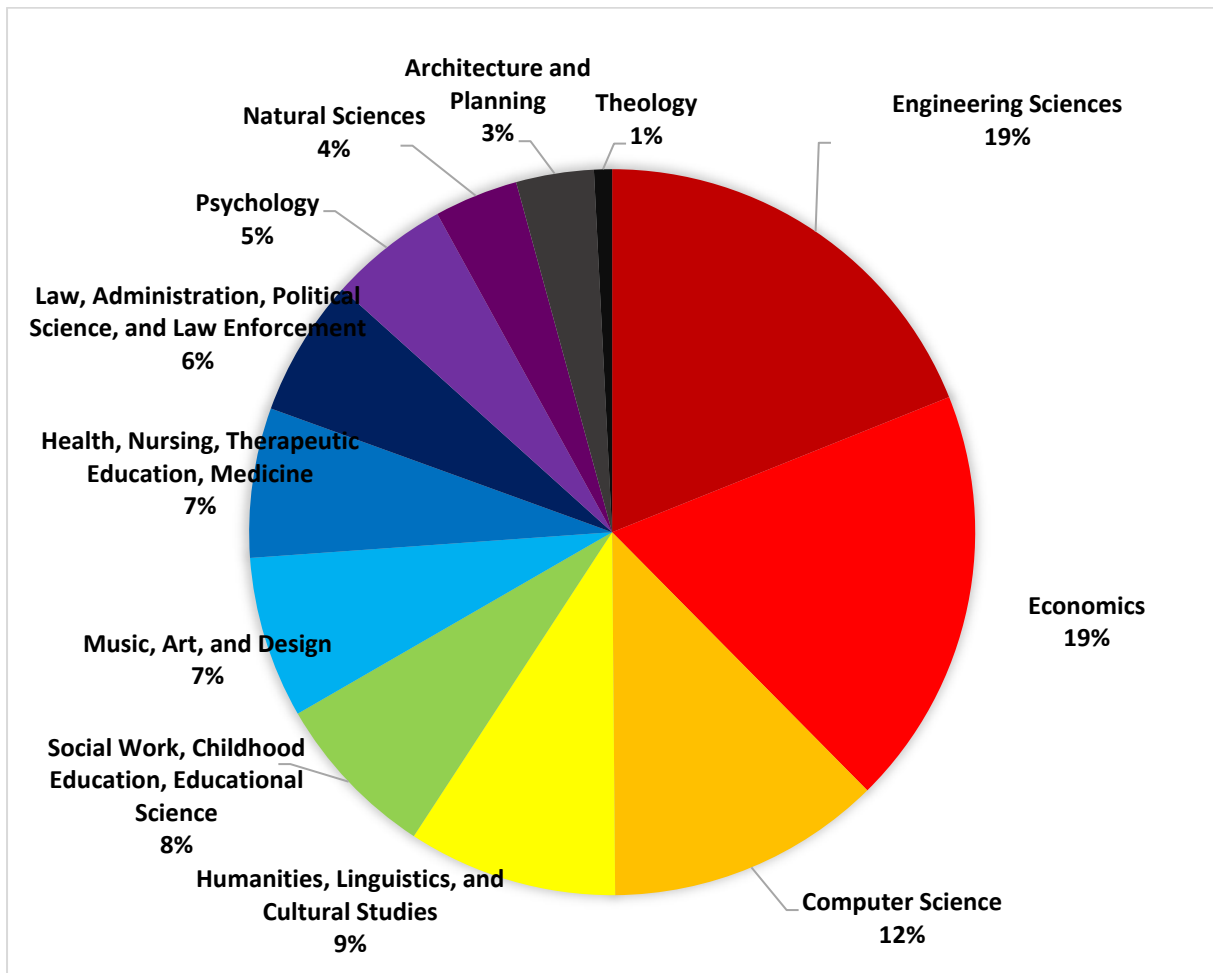
### DISTRIBUTION OF SUBJECTS

For the year 2021, the distribution of the assessed study programmes across individual subjects was differentiated more strongly for the statistical presentation (up to now, the allocation was carried out according to the previously existing subject committees). This was also done in consideration of legislative reforms, which led to far-reaching adjustments and realignments in numerous study programmes, particularly in the area of psychology (new licensing regulations for psychotherapy) and nursing (Nursing Professions Reform Act), resulting in a higher volume of procedures than in previous years.

The proportion of procedures in the fields of economics, law and social sciences as well as humanities, linguistics and cultural studies as a whole rose by a further 11 percentage points compared to 2020, while an increase of four percentage points was recorded in the field of medicine and health sciences.

A slight increase was also recorded in the fields of music, art and design as well as computer science, while the share of procedures in the field of natural sciences as well as in the field of architecture and planning decreased.

**Distribution of Subjects in 2021:  
Decisions (previous law) and recommendations for decisions (new law)**





## CURRENT STATE OF SYSTEM ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

In 2021, ACQUIN completed one system accreditation procedure under the previous law and determined fulfilment of requirements in two procedures.

In three procedures according to the new law, accreditation reports were prepared and submitted to the higher education institutions for application to the Accreditation Council.

In a total of 16 procedures, documents were examined, expert groups were appointed, on-site visits were organised and loops for correcting deficiencies were initiated.

Alternative accreditation procedures were not carried out in the reporting year. Further procedures were initiated.

### FIRST AND SECOND ON-SITE VISIT, SELECTION OF SAMPLES

At the Fresenius University of Applied Sciences, the University of Regensburg, the Würzburg University of Music, the Wildau University of Applied Sciences, the Free University of Berlin, the University of Duisburg-Essen, the University of Tübingen, the University

of Hamburg, the Technical University of Kaiserslautern, and the University of Applied Sciences Hof, on-site visits as well as online assessments took place in 2021 as part of the system accreditation or system re-accreditation and random samples were selected.

### DECISION-MAKING (UNDER THE PREVIOUS LEGISLATION)

The internal quality assurance system of the University of Erfurt was accredited for the first time.

The University of Ilmenau and the University of Applied Sciences Darmstadt were both found to have fulfilled their conditions.

### DETERMINATION OF THE EVALUATION RESULT (UNDER THE NEW LEGISLATION)

The internal quality assurance system of the University of Hamburg was assessed by ACQUIN, and an accreditation report was prepared, with which the university submitted its first application for system accreditation to the Accreditation Council.

In the course of the re-accreditation, ACQUIN assessed the internal quality assurance system

of the University of Hof and prepared an accreditation report, which the university submitted to the Accreditation Council.

The re-accreditation procedure was also completed for the Ruprecht Karls University of Heidelberg.

## ACCREDITATION AND ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES IN THE INTERNATIONAL DOMAIN

In 2021, ACQUIN continued to carry out and completed a number of accreditation procedures outside of Germany. These programmes are not offered in cooperation with German higher education institutions, so ACQUIN does not grant the seal of the German Accreditation Council, instead it awards the quality seal of ACQUIN; if required, an evaluation result is determined, and an accreditation recommendation is provided to a country-specific accreditation authority.

To meet the demands of growing interest of foreign higher education institutions in evaluation procedures by ACQUIN, the agency promotes international composition of its committees wherever possible. As a rule of thumb, this approach enriches the group work by engagement of experts with international experience.

### **OSTWESTFALEN-LIPPE UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES IN COOPERATION WITH UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE, UNIVERSITY OF COIMBRA, UNIVERSITY OF LISBON**

As part of the application of the European Approach, a joint degree programme at the Ostwestfalen-Lippe University of Applied Sciences, which is run in cooperation with four universities in Antwerp, Belgrade, Coimbra and Lisbon, was assessed and accredited.

The assessment was based on the European Standards and Guidelines. The accreditation decision was rendered by ACQUIN. According to the rules of the European Approach, the participating universities can apply for recognition in their respective countries of domicile following the accreditation decision.

### **SWITZERLAND, LIECHTENSTEIN, LUXEMBOURG**

In the year under review, the accreditation commission adopted a decision on the institutional accreditation procedure for the Schaffhausen Higher Education Institute, which was commenced in spring 2020. In a programme accreditation procedure at the Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training in Zollikofen, compliance with the requirements was ascertained.

An online evaluation was carried out as part of an institutional accreditation procedure at the private university in the Principality of Liechtenstein. In 2021, the accreditation commission at the University of Luxembourg adopted programme accreditation decisions for five study programmes.

### **KAZAKHSTAN**

In 2021, accreditation decisions were made for five study programmes at the Kazakh-German University in Almaty. At Zhetysu University in Taldykorgan, 18 study programmes were accredited. At the Kazakh National Agrarian University in Almaty, nine study programmes were accredited. Six study programmes were accredited at the Karaganda Technical University. Ten programmes were

accredited at the Kazakh National Women's Teacher Training University in Almaty. One study programme was accredited at the Electrotechnical College in Semey. One degree programme at the Kazakh National Academy of Arts in Almaty and one degree programme at the Kazakh-German University in Almaty were found to fulfil the conditions.

#### **EGYPT, OMAN**

Accreditation decisions were made for four study programmes in two programme accreditation procedures at the German University in Cairo.

At the German University of Technology in Oman, accreditation decisions were made for three study programmes in one programme accreditation procedure.

#### **MONGOLIA**

The accreditation commission 2021 made programme accreditation decisions for two

study programmes at the Mongolian National University of Education in Ulaanbaatar.

## PARTNERSHIP AND DIALOGUE

*In order to achieve its objectives, a continuous dialogue and partnership in national and international context is of great importance for ACQUIN. Goal-oriented cooperation is crucial for the discussion, development and reception of further advancement in the field of quality assurance procedures, and it supports the recognition of the work of ACQUIN.*

- **Cooperation with higher education institutions**  
*ACQUIN cooperates with the mergers of higher education institutions and their initiatives at a European, national and local level in order to jointly analyse the requirements for quality assurance and develop appropriate measures for comprehensive development, assurance, monitoring and improvement of quality in teaching and learning.*
- **Cooperation within the German accreditation system**  
*In the national context, ACQUIN cooperates with the Accreditation Council and the accreditation agencies accredited by the Accreditation Council in order to contribute to the maintenance and development of the accreditation system.*
- **Cooperation with students**  
*ACQUIN cooperates with students and student organisations in order to analyse the concerns of students regarding quality assurance measures and to seek the appropriate solutions jointly.*
- **Cooperation within subject areas**  
*ACQUIN cooperates with the organised forms of disciplines, the departments and faculty conferences as well as scientific societies in order to discuss the subject-specific requirements and conditions in the process of external quality assurance through accreditation and to find the appropriate solutions jointly.*
- **Cooperation in international networks**  
*ACQUIN is a member of the central international organisations and project initiatives that contribute to the achievement of the association goals. ACQUIN is involved in international and particularly European groupings of institutions of external quality assurance. This way ACQUIN is engaged in the development of the European Higher Education Area.*
- **Cooperation in partnership-based projects**  
*The exposure to national and international projects helps ACQUIN to expand its base of experience. Specific concepts are discussed and common solutions for specific issues are developed. The project work is a learning opportunity for ACQUIN as an organisation and the individual experience and expansion of expertise for its employees.*

## CONTACTS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

ACQUIN staff continued to hold a large number of discussions in the reporting year to inform those responsible at the higher education institutions about the criteria and procedures of evaluation and accreditation. In particular, numerous consultative sessions were held on the reorganisation of the system accreditation procedure.

In the vast majority of cases, information events and procedure-related workshops in 2022 took place in the form of online conferences.

During the annual general assembly in May 2021, the Innovation in Higher Education Teaching project was presented to the participants as well as a thematic evaluation of the

accreditation recommendations of expert groups and decisions of the Accreditation Council (see *Committees and Head Office: General Assembly*).

In connection with the electoral assembly taking place in October 2021 in Bayreuth, two workshops on programme and system accreditation were again offered for the member universities and enjoyed lively participation. The procedural support by ACQUIN was once again explained, among other things, in the preparation of the self-assessment reports and the current decision practice of the Accreditation Council was reported on.

## COOPERATION WITH THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL AND THE AGENCIES

ACQUIN regularly meets with its partners within the German accreditation system in order to exchange ideas on the advancement in the field of quality assurance procedures.

### COOPERATION WITH THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

Professor Reinhard Zintl, a member of the appeals commission of ACQUIN, has participated in the meetings of the Accreditation Council as a permanent representative of the agencies with an advisory vote since 2013 in order to ensure the continuity of the agencies' representation there. Following his retirement for age-related reasons, the agencies decided to appoint a new representative of the agencies for this function in the reporting year.

The Managing Director of ACQUIN, Dr. Alexander Rudolph, took over the representation of the agencies in the Appeals Commission of the Accreditation Council after Marion Moser left.

Within the framework of the (online) Accreditation Council meeting in March 2021, an exchange between agencies and the Accreditation Council took place, as in the previous year in the first meeting of the year, in the course of which, among other things, the interaction of agencies and the Accreditation Council, the accreditation of quality assurance systems, a more efficient design of the

programme accreditation procedures, matters of interpretation, bundling procedures, and expert expectations were discussed.

In addition, there was an exchange on the evaluation of the Accreditation Council by ENQA and the need for explanation of the German accreditation system in the European context.

In the course of the year, further online meetings and phone calls were held with the staff of the office of the Accreditation Council where required.

Project managers from ACQUIN also participated in the events of the Accreditation Council (each offered in a digital format) on the topic of dual study programmes: Quality Dialogue 2021 - Dual Study Programmes from the Perspective of Accreditation on 21 June and The Accreditation Council in Dialogue - Topic of the Day: Dual Study Programmes on 8 September 2021.

### AGENCIES MEETINGS

The five agency meetings in January, March, June, September, and November 2021 were each attended by ACQUIN management.

ACQUIN hosted the meeting in September in Bayreuth; the other meetings were held partly in person and partly online. The representatives of the agencies approved in Germany from the neighbouring countries are also invited to the meetings.

In addition to the coordination and preparation of the joint meetings with the Accreditation Council, the participants also dealt intensively with the resolutions of the Accreditation Council in the reporting year and lamented the practice of rejecting accreditation reports by the head office of the Accreditation Council, in which no consistent approach could be discerned. In connection with the evaluation of the Specimen decree, the agencies positioned themselves critically with reference to the role attributed to them in the accreditation system with regard to the

consultation documents of the Accreditation Council and developed their own statement in the draft. Once again, the deficiency loop and the distribution of roles between higher education institutions, agencies and the Accreditation Council were also discussed.

#### **COOPERATION WITH AKAST**

Within the framework of the cooperation with the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Study Programmes in Germany e.V. (AKAST), ACQUIN takes over the implementation of accreditation procedures for non-canonical study programmes. The cooperation between the agencies ACQUIN and AKAST was also continued in the reporting year through mutual participation in the meetings of the accreditation commissions of ACQUIN and AKAST.

### **PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS**

ACQUIN cooperates with students and student organisations in order to analyse the concerns of students regarding quality assurance measures and to seek the appropriate solutions jointly.

#### **STUDENT ACCREDITATION POOL**

The pool is a self-governing body of students who want to get involved in evaluation and accreditation procedures. It regularly organises pool networking meetings and training seminars for its members. The Coordination Committee of the Student Accreditation Pool (KASAP) makes the decisions concerning the operation and current activities of the pool. ACQUIN contributes to the financing of the pool with an annual base contribution as well as support for training seminars.

In its cooperation with the Student Accreditation Pool, ACQUIN has adhered to its principle that the final decision on the appointment of experts lies solely in the hands of the agency's own committees.

#### **ACCREDITATION COMMISSION**

Students are full voting members of the ACQUIN accreditation commission. According to the statutes, the accreditation commission is composed of one student from a university and one student from a university of applied sciences as well as their deputies. In the last election of the accreditation commission in 2021, one position was filled by a member of the Student Accreditation Pool; students nominated by member universities were elected to the other three positions.

#### **EXPERT GROUPS**

Students have always been represented in the expert committees appointed by ACQUIN. ACQUIN continues to work together with the Student Accreditation Pool.

### **EVENT PARTICIPATION**

Due to the travel and contact restrictions caused by the Corona pandemic, in 2021 the project managers and the management of ACQUIN mainly attended conferences of scientific associations in virtual form, e.g., the annual meetings of CEENQA and ENQA in April and October, respectively, as well as the

European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) titled Building Trust and Enhancement: from Information to Evidence on 18 and 19 November and the international German Rectors' Conference (project MODUS) on the topic of recognition and credit on 25 and 26 November 2021.

Other events at which ACQUIN was represented were the CEENQA Online Seminar titled Supporting the Lisbon Recognition Convention on 16 April, the plenary meeting of the Trade Union Experts Network (virtual network meeting) on 23 and 24 September, the

ENQA webinar titled Online Quality Assurance - Experiences from ENQA Members on 5 May and the ENQA CEO Networking Event on 20 October 2021.

## MEMBERSHIP AND COOPERATION IN INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

ACQUIN defined priority areas for its activities, and they are characterised by partnership projects, cooperation in networks, as well as evaluation and accreditation procedures. In 2021, ACQUIN continued to pay particular attention to the Central, Eastern, and South-eastern Europe as well as to Asia and the Arab world.

- Since 2003 ACQUIN has been a 'full member' in the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and maintained an active exchange of information with interested partner institutions from around the world within this global network.
- Since 2004 ACQUIN has been a member of the European Platform European University Association (EUA) with the status of an 'affiliate member'. The EUA is now an association of approximately 800 higher education institutions and other members in 48 European countries.
- Since 2003 ACQUIN has been a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), since 2009 ACQUIN has been listed in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR) created by the E4 group (EUA, ENQA, EURASHE, and ESU).
- ACQUIN is focused on the region of Central Asia and Central, East and Southeast Europe, and this focus illustrates that the Agency is an active member in the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA).

## ENQA

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was transformed into a stronger representation of the interests of agencies in the European Higher Education Area on the basis of a draft strategy of the board over the course of the previous years.

Hitherto, within the scope of the evaluation and reaccreditation by the Accreditation Council, the conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA was at the same time the subject of the procedure, since the entry into force of the Interstate study accreditation treaty in 2018, the Accreditation Council

makes the decision on the accreditation of an agency exclusively on the basis of its registration in EQAR. The continuation of registration in EQAR is in turn linked to the renewal of membership in ENQA.

In the year under review, the peer review for the renewal of membership with ENQA took place. Conformity with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) was subsequently confirmed, whereupon the membership of ACQUIN with ENQA was renewed and the listing with EQAR was extended to 30 June 2026.

## ERASMUS+ EXTERNALLY FUNDED PROJECTS

ACQUIN is involved in various projects of the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport (Erasmus+) because there is a stronger networking with universities, educational institutions and international organisations which help to broaden the own perspective. There is added value for participants to get involved in projects where appropriate.

The following projects, which have been running since 2018, were completed in the reporting year:

**EldiCare** – Modernisation and adaptation of qualifications in the field of elderly care (<https://eldicare.eu/>).

**DataPRO** - Professionalisation of data protection officers in general (<http://datapro-project.eu/>).

**GDPR4H** - Qualification of data protection officers under the new data protection law for the healthcare industry (<https://gdpr4h-project.eu/>).

**DEQAR Connect** – Improving connectivity and database use within the European Higher Education Area (<https://www.eqar.eu/about/projects/deqar-connect/>)

ACQUIN is involved as a partner in the following ongoing projects:

**CHAISE** - Development and enhancement of block-chain competences and development of a training programme (<https://chaise-blockchainskills.eu/>)

**KAZDUAL** – Introduction of a dual education system for Kazakhstan (<http://kazdual.kz/>)

**MentorME** – Promoting social participation through the development of mentoring programmes (<https://mentorme-programme.eu/>)

**VETEntre** – Improving the attractiveness of vocational education and training and promoting entrepreneurial spirit in European education systems (<https://vetentre.eu/>)

**RegAgri4Europe** – Providing web-based training on regenerative agriculture (<https://regagri4europe.eu/>)

The projects run for two, three, or four years. Giorina Maratsi is the project manager at ACQUIN responsible for the implementation of the projects.

## SWITZERLAND

ACQUIN is recognised by the Swiss Accreditation Council as an accreditation agency in accordance with the Swiss Ordinance of the

Higher Education Council on Accreditation within the Higher Education Sector.

## REGION OF CENTRAL, EASTERN, AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE, AS WELL AS ASIA

In order to ensure the implementation of the accreditation procedures in the region ACQUIN maintains contacts with numerous higher education institutions that request information about the organisation and preparation for the evaluation processes from the head office.

The contract volume of accreditation procedures in Eastern Europe declined in 2020 and 2021. This can be explained by the proliferation of national agencies.

In the reporting year, ACQUIN was again able to carry out and conclude a whole series of programme accreditation procedures in Kazakhstan.



## KAZAKHSTAN

In 2012, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan founded the Accreditation Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan and set up the so-called Accreditation Register. The Kazakh Accreditation Council is composed of representatives of the Ministry, Parliament, higher education institutions, and employers.

The Register includes accredited higher education institutions, accredited programmes, and accreditation bodies that are approved in Kazakhstan and thus are entitled to carry out accreditation of institutions and study programmes. ACQUIN was added to the register in 2012. The registration was renewed in 2018.

The relationship with Kazakhstan was also expanded by ACQUIN with the establishment of a branch office. The foundation of the KAZ-ACQUIN LLP in Almaty was completed

in May 2017. The subsidiary of ACQUIN serves as a point of contact for universities in Kazakhstan in the preparation of evaluation procedures. In 2019, KAZ-ACQUIN temporarily ceased operations due to the lack of sufficient contract volume.

In addition to conducting its own accreditation procedures in Kazakhstan, ACQUIN cooperates with the National Agency IQAA (Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) and IAAR (Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating).

In the reporting year, ACQUIN was able to conclude 49 accreditation procedures and established compliance with the conditions in two procedures (*see above Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures in the International Domain*).

## MONGOLIA

In April 2019, ACQUIN entered into a cooperation and partnership agreement with the Mongolian National Council for Education Accreditation (MNCEA) and conducted a

workshop for Mongolian higher education institutions in Ulaanbaatar.

In the year under review, an accreditation process at the Mongolian National University of Education was completed.

## ARABIAN REGION

The cooperation with the German University in Cairo was continued.

In the year under review, four study programmes were accredited and further evaluations were planned.