

Principles of Procedure and Rules of Decisional Practice in international procedures

Decision of the Standing Commission of 30.08.2021

1. Procedural principles

The activities of AQAS e. V. are based on an understanding of quality that follows the following maxims:

- The responsibility for study and teaching and their quality assurance is borne by the higher education institutions.
- The assessment of study programmes by AQAS is based on the objectives set by the higher education institution on the one hand, and on the requirement standards to be met on the other.
- The accreditation procedure checks
 - the appropriateness of the objectives and the competences expressed therein as well as the concept, and
 - the suitability of the study programme, the resources, the organisation and the quality assurance procedures of the higher education institutions for the achievement of these objectives.
- The implementation of the procedures is based on the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* in their current version.
- The procedure corresponds to European good practice for assessment procedures and is based on the recommendations of ENQA, ECA and, if applicable, other quality assurance organisations.
- The procedure aims at the comparability of study programmes and thus at equivalence, not at homogeneity.

The following general procedural principles are derived from this background:

The accreditation procedure is based on a fundamentally common understanding of study and teaching by all those involved in the procedure. **Indicators** for a **qualitatively good** study programme are:

- The degree programme is organised in such a way that it can be studied **full-time in the standard period of study** by students of average ability. The requirements for students (admission requirements, content requirements, examination forms) are clearly defined.
- Objectives are defined for the degree programme that correspond to current academic and professional requirements ("**fitness of purpose**"). The fitness of purpose is checked by the university.
- The **teaching of the targeted competences** takes place within the framework of modules, the acquisition of competences is differentiated according to study phases. There is a consistent sequence of courses/modules.

- The curriculum complies with **scientific standards**. The competences imparted enable graduates to participate in scientific discourse.
- The curriculum takes into account the requirements of the **targeted occupational fields**.
- Within the study programme, **knowledge and skills are imparted**, also in the sense of personality development, which makes it easier for students to gain a foothold in the labour market. In addition, graduates are regularly assured of their place in the labour market.
- Study structure and organisation contribute to **equal opportunities for students**.
- There is a **professional programme management** (examination administration, etc.) for the degree programme and there are offers for professional counselling and support for students.
- **Qualified teachers** are available. A plurality of teaching opinions is also guaranteed. The material and human resources are sufficient for the implementation of the study programme.
- The offering institution has systematic and regular forms for the **conception and further development of the study programmes** with the participation of the relevant actors/stakeholders. There are instruments for reflection and quality assurance.
- The accreditation procedure requires **transparent self-documentation** by the higher education institution in binding documents.

With regard to the implementation of the accreditation procedure, the following rules apply:

- In order to relieve the experts, the AQAS office carries out a preliminary check of the self-documentation with regard to completeness and, if necessary, requests a revision of the documents and/or additions.
- The Standing Commission opens the procedure and appoints the expert group.
- The review group usually consists of academics, a student and a representative of professional practice. The representative of professional practice should come from a professional field that is typical or relevant for the degree programme. Committees and reviewers act independently in the procedure.
- As part of the site visit, discussions are usually held with the university management, the head of the department or degree programme, representatives of the labour market and students.
- Following the inspection, the expert group prepares a joint expert report in which the AQAS' criteria are taken into account.
- The expert group formulates a joint proposal for the accreditation decision for each degree programme in the expert report. Deviating votes are noted as such.
- The Standing Commission decides on the basis of the expert opinion of the expert group and the university's statement on the expert opinion:
 - accreditation without conditions (possibly with recommendations for the further development of the degree programme) or
 - accreditation with conditions and/or recommendations for the further development of the study programme or

- postponement of the accreditation or
 - denial of the accreditation procedure.
- The Standing Commission makes an accreditation decision for each degree programme.
 - For the bundling of several study programmes within one accreditation procedure (cluster accreditation), the following also applies:
 - Affinity programmes can be grouped into a cluster. Affinity refers to subject matter or subject culture, in special cases also to structure.
 - The number of programmes within a cluster must be limited to ensure sufficient review of each programme within the procedure.
 - The expert group for a cluster consists of a sufficient number of experts from academia, professional practice and students. The subject profile of the expert group must be aligned in such a way that all study programmes combined in the cluster can be adequately reviewed.
 - For a study programme cluster, the expert group prepares an expert report which, in addition to cross-programme comments, also contains sections on the individual study programmes.
 - The AQAS Standing Commission makes a separate accreditation decision for each degree programme. If necessary, cross-degree programme conditions and recommendations can be issued.

2. Rules on accreditation decisions

The accreditation decisions of the Standing Commission are based on the AQAS criteria for international programme accreditation procedures. Accordingly, the Standing Commission accredits study programmes with or without conditions, denies accreditation or postpone the accreditation procedure.

The basis for the accreditation decision is the expert opinion of the expert group as well as the statement of the higher education institution on the expert opinion. In order to ensure the comparability of the decisions, each expert report usually follows the same structure. Each report point is divided into a descriptive and an evaluative part.

The assessment for Bachelor's, Master's and PhD programmes is structured as follows:

1. Quality of the Curriculum / Aims for the doctoral programme (ESG 1.2)
2. Procedures for Quality Assurance (ESG 1.1, 1.7 & 1.9)
3. Learning, (Teaching) and Assessment of students (ESG 1.3)
4. Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification /Legal status (ESG 1.4)
5. Teaching Staff / Academic level of supervisory staff (ESG 1.5)
6. Learning Resources and Student support / research environment (ESG 1.6)
7. Public Information (ESG 1.8)

AQAS uses criteria that are aligned with the ESG. They ensure:

- the completeness of the criteria to be evaluated,
- a uniform basis of information for the Standing Commission and thus
- the consistency of the Standing Commission's decisions with the applicable guidelines.

Decision-making principles for study programmes

The AQAS Standing Commission grants **accreditation without conditions** if in total:

- a) the concept of the study programme is coherent; "coherent" means that the objectives of the study programme take into account the requirements of the Qualifications Framework, subject-specific scientific requirements as well as knowledge about the requirements of the labour market; the curriculum in its entirety is oriented towards the objectives, and
- b) studyability is guaranteed, and
- c) sufficient material and human resources are available; and
- d) adequate quality assurance mechanisms are in place.

The AQAS Standing Commission issues an **accreditation with conditions** if the quality requirements for the accreditation of study programmes are basically fulfilled, but deficiencies are identified which appear to be remediable within twelve months.

Conditions are therefore formulated in particular for one of the following deficiencies:

- a) the study objectives, although formulated, are
 - are not in line with the requirements of the European Qualifications Framework in parts,
 - are in need of revision from a professional point of view
 - are not documented in a sufficiently transparent manner.
- b) the curriculum
 - is not consistently oriented towards the formulated study objectives (also with regard to the use of suitable forms of examination) and/or
 - is not consistent in parts and/or
 - does not contain required subject-specific or interdisciplinary elements and/or
 - shows deficiencies in the didactic concept and/or
 - is not properly structured (or modularised) and/or
 - is not transparently documented.
- c) the vocational field orientation
 - has not been formulated in a sufficiently clear or concrete manner and/or
 - is not reflected in corresponding curricular elements and/or
 - has not been sufficiently taken into account in the formulation of the study objectives and/or
 - there are contradictions between the title of the degree programme and the study objectives and/or the curriculum
- d) studyability appears to be generally given, but individual measures need to be taken to improve the organisation of the degree programme and/or examinations
- e) the resources in the core area of the degree programme need to be supplemented and these supplements can be made within twelve months.

- f) the degree programme does not have adequate quality assurance procedures .
- g) the module handbook does not meet the requirements, especially with regard to the formulation of learning outcomes.

If necessary, the Standing Commission **shall withdraw the accreditation** if the higher education institution fails to demonstrate compliance with the conditions in due time. In justified cases, the Standing Commission may set a grace period for the fulfilment of the requirements.

The AQAS Standing Commission **denies accreditation** if the quality requirements for the accreditation of study programmes are not met and the deficiencies identified do not appear to be remediable within 18 months.

This is the case in particular if:

- a) the defined study objectives and/or the curriculum do not meet academic requirements, or
- b) the defined study objectives and/or the curriculum do not correspond to the level defined in the European Qualifications Framework, or
- c) the staffing and/or equipment is insufficient to ensure the qualitative or quantitative operation of the degree programme, or
- d) it is demonstrably not possible for a significant number of students to study due to structural aspects of the study programme or there are considerable doubts about this.

The AQAS Standing Commission **postpones the accreditation** procedure if

- a) the quality requirements for accreditation are not met, but it can be expected that the higher education institution applying for accreditation will remedy the deficiencies identified within 18 months.

The AQAS Standing Commission **makes recommendations** on what is to be addressed during re-accreditation. Recommendations are usually made if the study programme can still be specifically improved with regard to features that do not represent deficiencies in the fulfilment of the criteria for the accreditation of study programmes. The handling of recommendations is the subject of re-accreditation.