



AGENTUR FÜR  
QUALITÄTSSICHERUNG DURCH  
AKKREDITIERUNG VON  
STUDIENGÄNGEN E.V.

# QUALITY ASSURANCE CONCEPT OF AQAS E. V.

Decision of the Management Board of 6 May 2021

## **AQAS**

Agency for Quality Assurance through the Accreditation of Study Programmes

Hohenstaufenring 30-32

50674 Cologne

[info@aqas.de](mailto:info@aqas.de)

<http://www.aqas.de>

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## Foreword/preamble

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Back in 2016, when preparing for the last reaccreditation by the German Accreditation Council (GAC), the Management Board of AQAS e. V. (AQAS) decided that the Agency's internal quality assurance concept should be based on the 2015 European Standards and Guidelines. Owing to the sweeping changes in the German accreditation system as a result of the legal restructuring brought about by the Interstate Study Accreditation Treaty (StAkkStV) and the Specimen Decree (MRVO), the concept was revised again in 2021 and adapted to the current circumstances.

The quality assurance concept is based on Part III of the ESG (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies) and pursues the following objectives:

1. The long-term positioning of AQAS e. V. as an agency for quality assurance in the education sector
2. Recognition of AQAS e. V. in the national and international context
3. Safeguarding of the high quality of procedures conducted by AQAS e. V.

The starting point is the Agency's **understanding of quality**, as expressed in its **Mission Statement**, which is fundamental to all quality assurance procedures in higher education for which AQAS is responsible.

Four **internal stakeholders**, each with different competencies and tasks, are responsible for the implementation of quality measures: Management Board, Standing Commission, the Complaints Commission (CC) and AQAS Head Office staff. The experts act as **external stakeholders**; their qualifications and expertise are a prerequisite for the quality of procedures.

The QA concept refers to the various AQAS rules, basic decisions and procedure materials that have been adopted by the responsible body in each case for the purpose of fleshing out accreditation procedures.

### 1. Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

*Basis: ESG 3.1*

*AQAS undertakes external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. AQAS has clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of its publicly available mission statement. These translate into the daily work of AQAS. AQAS ensures the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.*

#### Objective

The "Agency for Quality Assurance through the Accreditation of Study Programmes" (AQAS) is a registered membership association that sees itself as an institution supported by universities and academic societies that is dedicated to the quality assurance and quality development of learning and teaching at universities. The assessment procedures within the national accreditation system and the international accreditation procedures conducted by AQAS advance the diversity of study programmes, assure their quality, and create transparency. Consequently, these procedures contribute to the international comparability and recognition of study programmes, and offer reliable guidance to prospective students.

AQAS is one of the stakeholders involved in the creation of the European Higher Education Area and contributes to the development of reliable and comparable quality assurance systems in a national and international context.

AQAS acts on the basic premise that universities take their own responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning, while quality assurance procedures are appropriate to assess whether specific quality assurance criteria have been met and if there are areas of concern for which quality improvement measures need to be developed. This understanding of quality by AQAS is a guiding principle that is also reflected in the Agency's **Mission Statement**.

AQAS works on the basis of continuous strategic planning, which is undertaken by the Management Board. Strategic planning is aimed at shaping the Agency's activities in line with national and international developments and requirements in the education sector.

### Structure of the Agency

According to the Agency's Articles of Association (Section 5), the association's bodies are

- the General Assembly,
- the Management Board,
- the Standing Commission and
- the Complaints Commission (CC).

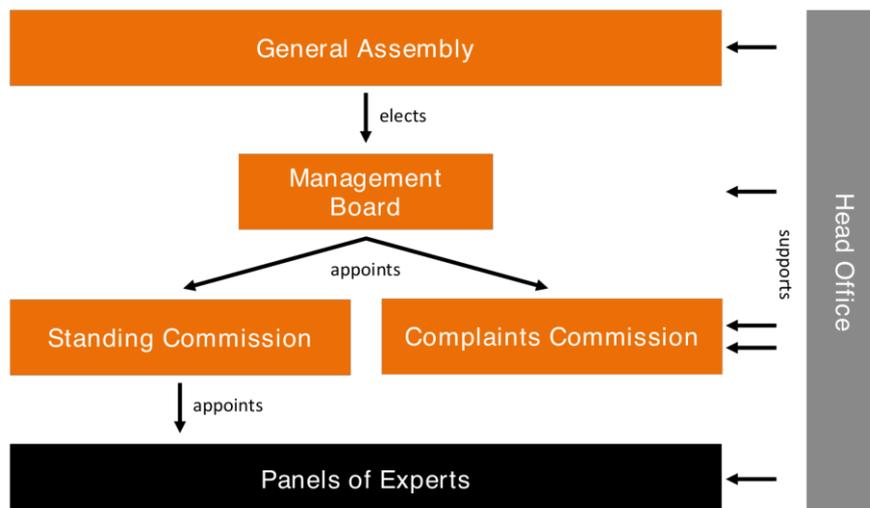


Figure 1: Organisational chart of AQAS e. V.

Reputable academics with experience in managing universities or universities of applied sciences are elected by the members of AQAS and appointed as **members of the Management Board**. They identify with the goals of the Bologna Process and share the understanding of quality assurance in teaching and learning as expressed in the Agency's Mission Statement. The Board is in charge of the strategic management of the agency.

**All procedures** are closely monitored by the **Standing Commission**, as the responsible body; the stakeholder principle is taken into account when appointing its members. In **national assessment procedures**, the Standing Commission decides on the proposal regarding compliance with the formal criteria in preparation for programme and system accreditation; it also appoints panels of experts, and takes note of the experts' assessment of compliance with the academic criteria in the experts' report.

In **international procedures**, the Standing Commission makes decisions concerning programme accreditation and institutional accreditation on the recommendation of the relevant panel of experts. The Standing Commission also addresses external assessment procedures concerning evaluation or certification and, if necessary, takes decisions accordingly. It is also responsible for

the adoption of resolutions regarding process principles and criteria for these procedures (Section 8 of the Articles of Association).

Within the framework of the appeals and complaints procedure, the **Complaints Commission** has the task of assessing objections of universities against the outcome of a procedure that could not be resolved through further consultation in the Standing Commission.

All commission members are appointed by the Management Board for a period of three years. Re-election is permitted.

All AQAS bodies have adopted Rules of Procedure.

The work of all bodies is supported by the Head Office, which also continuously provides information on national and international developments relevant to the work of the Agency.

### **Implementation of external quality assurance procedures**

The purpose of the Articles of Association is fulfilled through the implementation of procedures at national and international level. They consist of the assessment of study programmes and quality assurance systems with external involvement and, where applicable, their accreditation. The activities of the association are aimed at securing a high level of quality in education at universities and promoting the international recognition of final degrees, taking into account national and international requirements. The publication of the results makes it easier for prospective students to select a university and a study programme that suits them.

### **Assessment procedures in preparation for national programme accreditation**

The subject matter of programme accreditation in accordance with the MRVO are Bachelor's and Master's programmes offered by state or state-recognised universities in Germany. The following aspects are assessed in the context of programme accreditation procedures: the appropriateness of a study programme's qualification goals and the competences expressed therein, as well as their implementation in a coherent study programme concept and the subject-content organisation of the study programme, the resources, the organisation of studies and examinations, and the university's internal procedures for ensuring academic success. The procedures are intended to promote the further development of study programmes and contribute to enhancing their quality.

The following aspects apply to the implementation of programme accreditation procedures:

- The procedures comply with national and European standards (MRVO/ESG).
- The procedure aims to ensure the comparability of study programmes, hence equivalence rather than similarity.

### **Assessment procedures in preparation for national system accreditation**

By assessing the quality assurance systems of universities, AQAS provides an alternative to assessment in preparation for programme accreditation that places greater emphasis on the university's self-responsibility. Here, too, the process and criteria of the procedure are stipulated by the MRVO or the relevant state decree. Universities that assure the quality of their study programmes themselves are given the opportunity to demonstrate that their QA system enables them to ensure that their programmes meet the qualification goals and quality standards. The procedure involves examining whether the university has a closed QA system within which it systematically reviews and implements the formal and academic criteria for programmes laid down in the MRVO, with the involvement of external expertise. After successful system accreditation, therefore, universities are granted the right to refrain from undergoing programme accreditation and to award the GAC seal for study programmes that they have assessed themselves.

## International accreditation procedures

International procedures are not subject to the framework of the German accreditation system, but are clearly structured in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines. International procedures have no legal effect and do not intervene with the national requirements of the relevant accreditation system.

The criteria set out by AQAS for programme accreditation are based on the ESG, and address all of the areas defined therein:

Criteria
1. Quality of the curriculum
2. Procedures for quality assurance
3. Learning, teaching and assessment of students
4. Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification
5. Teaching staff
6. Learning resources and student support
7. Public Information

In international procedures the aim is to ensure the quality of study programmes, as well as to promote the enhancement of programmes for students.

The following aspects apply to the implementation of international programme accreditation procedures:

1. The assessment of study programmes within this form of accreditation is based on the goals set by the university.
2. The accreditation procedure involves reviewing
  - the appropriateness of the goals and of the concepts and
  - the suitability of the study programme, resources and the organisation for achieving those goals.
3. The procedure is based on the ESG and the European Qualifications Framework.
4. The procedure aims to ensure the comparability of study programmes, hence equivalence rather than similarity.

Institutional accreditation procedures at foreign universities focus on the extent to which the aforementioned criteria are taken into account by the university's internal quality assurance system. This involves evaluating whether the university's own system can ensure that its study programmes meet the requirements. This assessment is also in keeping with the ESG and the European Qualifications Framework.

## Procedures based on the European Approach

Procedures based on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (or European Approach for short) are a special case. This is mentioned in Section 10 of the Specimen Decree (MRVO) as a potential procedure for ensuring the quality assurance and quality development of individual study programmes with external involvement (programme accreditation), meaning that procedures based on the European Approach may also be conducted in Germany. However, the MRVO is defined in such a way that only joint programmes leading to a joint degree may be implemented as a procedure based on the European Approach. The AQAS Standing Commission is responsible for taking decisions in these procedures. In case a German University is involved, the result must be recognised by GAC.

## Other activities

Based on a resolution of the General Assembly, AQAS founded **AQAS ARCH GmbH (“Accreditation, Reviews and Consulting in Higher Education”)** as a spin-off on 1 January 2015 in order to achieve a transparent distinction between accreditation based on the ESG, which is conducted by the association (e. V.), and other services in higher education (e.g. workshops, trainings, consultancy) to be conducted by the limited liability company (GmbH).

## Objective

By separating areas of activity – with the traditional implementation of assessment and accreditation procedures in the association and other projects beyond those activities in the GmbH – the Agency sought to achieve greater transparency, both internally and externally, and to avoid mixing consultancy and accreditation within a single organisation. Consequently, the association (AQAS e. V.) now only serves its actual purpose (assessment/accreditation of universities’ quality assurance systems and study programmes). Projects of a different nature (e.g. in the international context) are carried out via the GmbH.

Although this goes far beyond the association’s core business (implementation of assessment and accreditation procedures), it still serves the association’s purpose of promoting education and training, and is often related to the activities of German universities or German and European scientific organisations (e.g. TEMPUS or DAAD projects).

It is unacceptable for AQAS to be involved in a procedure, whether programme accreditation or institutional accreditation, if it has previously provided (or is currently providing) consultancy to the same university. The ESG and the “Code of Good Practice for the Members of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education” apply (and applied from the time of establishing the GmbH onwards).

## Involvement of stakeholders

AQAS attracts competent individuals who identify with the goals of the Bologna Process and share the understanding of the quality of teaching and learning, as expressed in the Agency’s Mission Statement, to work voluntarily on the Standing Commission. In accordance with its Articles of Association, these individuals are academics, representatives of professional practice and students. AQAS attaches great importance to the equal involvement of all relevant stakeholders in its commissions, as laid down in its Articles of Association. International members also participate in the Standing Commission.

## 2. Official status

*Basis: ESG 3.2 Official status*

*AQAS has an established legal basis and is formally recognised as a quality assurance agency by the competent public authorities.*

An important element of the self-conception of AQAS as an agency for quality assurance is that the organisation and its work is also periodically and systematically reviewed. Given that AQAS has been authorised by GAC to implement assessment procedures under the MRVO in Germany, it has the status of a nationally recognised organisation for external quality assurance. Since registration on EQAR is a prerequisite for recognition in Germany, conformity of the Agency’s work with the ESG is also a necessary condition for authorisation by GAC.

## National recognition

AQAS e. V. was accredited for the first time by the **German Accreditation Council (GAC)** on 14 March 2002, and has been authorised to implement programme accreditation procedures in Ger-

many ever since. This has also been the case for system accreditation procedures since 2008. Since the entry into force of the Interstate Study Accreditation Treaty on 1 January 2018, GAC has been responsible for accreditation decisions and the associated awarding of seals. In procedures where the contract was concluded before 31 December 2017, AQAS remains entitled to award the GAC seal.

### International recognition

AQAS e. V. has been a full member of **ENQA** since 19 November 2008 and has been listed on the European register **EQAR** since 2010.

## 3. Independence

*Basis: ESG 3.3 Independence*

*AQAS is independent and acts autonomously. AQAS has full responsibility for its operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.*

### Organisational independence

AQAS e. V. is an **organisation of universities**, each of which is represented in the General Assembly by a member of the university management. The supporting association is organised under private law and operates independently of the state or ministries.

It is of central importance to AQAS that member universities have no influence on the implementation of procedures, whether national or international: the Standing Commission operates independently of the General Assembly and the Management Board, and is not accountable to them. Personnel interdependencies are ruled out. Consequently, neither the Management Board nor the General Assembly can influence the content of decisions taken by the Standing Commission. According to the AQAS complaints procedure, only the Complaints Commission, which acts independently of the other AQAS bodies, can reverse decisions of the Standing Commission or work towards their amendment.

In international procedures and in procedures under the old legal regime, the Standing Commission is responsible for taking the final decision on accreditation of a study programme or a quality assurance system. In justified cases, the commission may decide to deviate from the experts' vote. Within the Standing Commission, members are not involved in decision-making regarding procedures relating to their own university.

### Operational independence

In national procedures, the course of assessment procedures in preparation for programme or system accreditation in Germany is laid down in binding form by the Specimen Decree (MRVO). In international procedures, the Standing Commission determines the general course of procedures. This is part of the contract, possibly also taking into account other relevant specifications.

The Standing Commission appoints panels of experts for all assessment procedures conducted by AQAS. For assessment procedures in Germany, the composition of panels of experts is based on the specifications of the Specimen Decree and the relevant guidelines of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) on the nomination of professors for review panels of 24 April 2018.

The processes for the nomination and appointment of experts in international procedures are laid down in corresponding resolutions of the Standing Commission, taking into account the stakeholder principle. The resolutions reflect the "Principles for the Selection of Experts" of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

The Head Office notifies the university in good time of the composition of the panel of experts, and gives the university a certain period of time to raise reasoned objections to members of the panel of experts. In national procedures, the mandatory guidelines on the nomination of professors for re-

view panels must be taken into account in this connection. Reasoned objections must be submitted in writing. The university has no right of proposal and/or veto.

Experts in national and international procedures sign a **declaration for involvement in expert activities**, in which they declare, among other things, their impartiality and their obligation to maintain confidentiality in the procedure.

#### **Impartiality of results**

The Management Board defines the **criteria for the recruitment of members** to the Standing Commission. Standing Commission members from academia and the representatives of professional practice have specialist expertise and professional experience relevant to the commission's work. The student members of the Standing Commission usually have experience as student experts in national assessment and/or international accreditation procedures.

The impartiality of results is ensured by the **criteria for the nomination and appointment of experts**, which, in national procedures, are determined by the HRK guidelines, and, in international procedures, by resolution of the AQAS Standing Commission. All communication within the procedure takes place via the AQAS Head Office, which also accompanies the site visit and coordinates the preparation of the experts' report in both national and international procedures. In national procedures, the structure stipulated by GAC must be used.

In **national assessment procedures**, the Standing Commission decides on the Agency's proposal regarding the fulfilment of **formal criteria** in procedures in preparation for programme and system accreditation. It is the sole responsibility of the panel of experts to review whether the **academic criteria** have been met. The experts' assessment is not bound by instructions and is undertaken on the basis of their expertise. The specifications give the university the possibility to comment on the experts' report. No resolution is passed by the Standing Commission in this connection.

In **international accreditation procedures**, the experts' report and the **recommendation for decision provided by the panel of experts** are the basis for decisions by the Standing Commission. The decision is made in consideration of the **university's comments**. The Standing Commission takes its decisions autonomously and without being bound by instructions. This separation of the assessment and the decision-making levels complies with usual good practice in the European Higher Education Area.

All commission members are aware that they perform this task on account of their personal expertise, and not as representatives of their organisation.

#### **4. Thematic analyses**

*Basis: ESG 3.4 Thematic analyses*

*AQAS regularly publishes reports that describe and analyse the general findings of the external quality assurance activities of AQAS.*

AQAS considers sharing experiences and feeding them back into the system to be an important instrument for actively participating in the discourse on accreditation issues at both national and international levels. On the one hand, this refers to the production of **thematic analyses** that address specific issues, thus covering the two main thematic areas of AQAS. A self-declared goal of AQAS is to publish at least one thematic analysis per year.

AQAS also considers it important to publish or present the outcomes and experiences gained in the course of accreditation and assessment procedures and other projects in a theme-based and concise manner. The aim is to feed key findings back into the system, by way of "reporting back", enabling other stakeholders to benefit, too. For this reason, the forms in which AQAS presents its experience vary.

These **thematic activities** include:

- Conference contributions, lectures and presentations
- Publication of news on the website and in ad hoc newsletters
- Provision of training and workshops
- Participation in interviews and panel discussions
- Publications.

In addition, AQAS is represented on several committees, e.g. as an agency representative at GAC and on various ENQA working groups.

## 5. Resources

*Basis: ESG 3.5 Resources*

*AQAS has adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out its work.*

As a legal entity, AQAS e. V. is responsible for the internal administration of the Agency. The management is responsible for the implementation of strategic planning, including financial planning. It reports regularly to the Management Board and provides it with extensive information on the development of the Agency. AQAS must follow the legal requirements for registered associations in its internal administration.

### Planning and Resources

- The annual budget plan for AQAS is prepared by the association's Management Board in co-operation with the management and adopted by the General Assembly. In addition, AQAS voluntarily prepares balance sheets for the information of its members.
- In order to keep costs to a minimum in the universities' interest, costs of procedures are calculated tightly.
- The IT equipment is organised, updated and maintained by a system administrator. Information security and data protection are also ensured.

### Human resources

- The AQAS Head Office is divided into several areas with clear responsibilities: the Head Office is led by the Managing Directors. The contextual oversight of accreditation procedures is the responsibility of consultants, who are supported by two project assistants and one organisational assistant.
- AQAS operates in three areas (assessment procedures in preparation for programme accreditation and system accreditation, as well as international); one Senior Consultant (or two in the case of international procedures) acts as a contact person for each of these areas.
- The topic of "quality assurance" was established as an independent area that acts across divisions with a divisional head, who cooperates closely with all three areas.
- Staff are recruited on the basis of previously agreed criteria and as part of an appropriate procedure. AQAS attaches great importance to all consultants having relevant experience. In the International division, importance is attached to them also having worked or studied abroad.
- The Head Office has developed measures for integrating new consultants, preparing them adequately for their work.
- General staff training is provided on a regular basis. Special measures are offered as required. Consultants are expected and specifically encouraged to participate in relevant conferences.

The annual in-house retreat is also a key further training opportunity. Among other things, the retreat enables staff to discuss new developments in the field of education.

- The Management Board adopted a concept for individual further development and training of all staff members. The regulations are in line with the statutory regulations of the Further Education and Training Act for Employees in North Rhine-Westphalia. At the employees' request, this budget can also be used in the context of occupational health care.
- The Management Board also adopted a concept for the reconciliation of work and family life.

## 6. Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

*Basis: ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct*

*AQAS has in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of its activities.*

### Accountability and transparency

AQAS is subject to both internal and external **accountability**:

- The Head Office is accountable internally to the Agency's bodies, including the Management Board. In view of this, the agenda item "Report of the Management" is an integral part of all committee meetings. The Management Board is in turn accountable to the members of AQAS e. V. The Management Board reports to them annually during the General Assembly.
- AQAS is commissioned by German universities/universities of applied sciences as well as foreign universities to assess study programmes or their quality assurance systems. To this end, a contract under private law is concluded stipulating the rights and obligations of the parties to the contract.
- In this context, the universities consent to the publication of the accreditation report, which in national procedures comprises the formal report on the fulfilment of the formal criteria and the experts' report by the panel of experts on the fulfilment of the academic criteria, and in international procedures comprises the experts' report and the decision on accreditation, after the conclusion of the procedure; this is in compliance with the ESG.
- The experts' reports and accreditation reports on all procedures completed by AQAS are published on the AQAS website. In procedures where AQAS took the final decision, the experts' report is made available to the university together with the associated decision. In the case of national procedures under the new law, the procedure is listed on the website and linked to the corresponding entry in the ELIAS database of GAC. This enables interested individuals to find the experts' report together with the corresponding accreditation decision. The AQAS website also provides information on activities currently being undertaken by the Head Office. In this way, the Agency can inform the interested public.

**Transparency** of the procedures implemented by AQAS is especially ensured by the following individual measures:

- Concerning national assessment procedures, AQAS provides all key information on its website as well as links to other websites that may be relevant for universities. These include links to the GAC website, as the decision-maker, and to the state decrees that essentially determine the criteria and the course of procedures. The AQAS website also provides information on the course of assessment procedures at the Agency; information on special study programmes (such as teacher training programmes or joint programmes); and information on the procedure for appeals and complaints. The website also contains details on who to contact at the AQAS Head Office.
- In the case of international procedures where – in contrast to procedures in the national ac-

creditation system – the decision falls within its area of responsibility, the Standing Commission adopts the following documents, which are published in the relevant information material on the procedure as well as on the AQAS website: Course of the procedure and a short version of the AQAS'criteria.

- In preparation for the procedure, the AQAS Head Office draws up the following documents: a cost estimate (including a timeline) and in case of acceptance of the quotation, a contract.
- For each procedure, a consultant is designated early on as the responsible contact person; this is announced to the university. The consultant responsible provides the university with feedback on the status of the procedure at regular intervals.
- The selection criteria and the procedure for the nomination and appointment of experts in international procedures are stipulated by the Standing Commission. In national procedures, the HRK guidelines are binding.
- Decisions taken by AQAS for international procedures and those taken in accordance with the binding requirements of GAC and the federal states for national procedures have been published.
- In international procedures, the Standing Commission also takes its final decision on international programme and institutional accreditation. The Commission has set out its decision-making principles concerning this in an explicit resolution which has been published.

### **Professional conduct and integrity**

The profession conduct and integrity of all stakeholders involved with procedures is ensured as follows:

#### **Consultants**

- Consultants at the Head Office are recruited and trained. Their professional suitability takes centre stage in this process.
- As a matter of principle, consultants are not deployed to oversee procedures at universities where they studied and/or obtained a doctorate and/or were employed.
- AQAS consultants regularly reflect on their role (e.g. during the annual in-house retreat).

#### **Commissions**

- When selecting members of the Standing Commission, AQAS strives to recruit renowned experts with previous experience in “learning and teaching” and/or with a genuine background in quality assurance. They are appointed by the Management Board.
- Student members of the Standing Commission are usually proposed by the Student Accreditation Pool. They are appointed by the Management Board.
- The Head Office informs the Standing Commission about current developments and decisions within the accreditation system.

#### **Experts**

- Experts are nominated and appointed in accordance with the resolution of the Standing Committee in international procedures or in accordance with the mandatory HRK guidelines in national procedures.
- All status groups are treated equally in both national and international procedures, i.e. every member of the panel of experts has the same rights and obligations to participate in the procedure. The involvement of students in procedures is expressly welcomed; they are also consistently included in international procedures.
- All experts sign a declaration confirming their willingness to participate in the procedure and their impartiality and confidentiality with regard to the relevant procedure.
- To prepare for their work, national and international experts receive a written handout on the

procedure, which also contains the criteria to be reviewed.

- Before each site visit, in both national and international procedures, the panel of experts meets for half a day to discuss the criteria with regard to the specific procedure and to prepare the individual discussions.
- Each year AQAS offers workshops on specific issues, ensuring the experts' professional development.

### **Internal feedback mechanisms**

The following mechanisms are implemented at the commission level:

- The AQAS Head Office discusses the Standing Commission's decisions on international procedures for consistency. Adaptations are made, where necessary.
- In addition, all processes and decisions are discussed with the members of the Standing Commission in an annual feedback session. In turn, the members of the commission assess the quality of the preparatory work performed by the Head Office. Where necessary, measures to improve quality are arranged.

At the **AQAS Head Office level**:

- A regular Jour Fixe (held twice a month) institutionalises information sharing among staff. These meetings enable the early identification of weak points in procedures and processes. The Jour Fixe also serves as a platform to discuss current national and international resolutions and requirements and, where necessary, to implement them into the Agency's materials and procedures.
- For the purpose of reflecting on current procedures, regular team meetings are held at the Head Office, chaired by the Head of Programme Accreditation and/or the Head of Quality Assurance.
- Experts' reports that present problems or peculiarities of general interest or that serve as examples for other procedures (e.g. for large cluster procedures, teacher training) are discussed at team meetings.

### **External feedback mechanisms**

- Since 15 years, universities and experts have been surveyed on the quality of national programme accreditation procedures conducted by AQAS, following their completion. For reasons of objectivity, these surveys were consciously outsourced to an external institution. The procedure is conducted by the Center for Evaluation and Methods (ZEM) at the University of Bonn. ZEM usually summarises the results of surveys in half-yearly reports. These are sent to the Management Board, the Standing Commission and Head Office staff, and discussed within the commissions.

### **Compliance with formal requirements (MRVO/ESG)**

- The Head Office regularly informs members of the Standing Commission about the latest discussions and changes to the relevant resolutions of GAC and of the federal states, and of the European bodies.
- The decisions on compliance with the formal criteria in national assessment procedures in preparation for programme or system accreditation in the formal reports are made in accordance with the structure specified by GAC, covering the criteria to be taken into account. The relevant requirements of GAC and the federal state concerned are taken into account in the process. To help universities prepare their self-evaluation report, the Head Office provides them with a working aid covering all criteria of the MRVO.
- The criteria set by AQAS for the accreditation of study programmes at foreign universities and the criteria for institutional accreditation are based on the ESG.

## **7. Cyclical external review of agencies**

*Basis: ESG 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies*

*AQAS undergoes an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate its compliance with the ESG.*

AQAS underwent a review by GAC every five years prior to 2018 and, based on the review report and decision of GAC, AQAS applied for renewal of its membership to ENQA and registration on EQAR every five years; these two bodies separately assessed compliance with the ESG before making their respective decisions on membership and registration. The requirements and procedural regulations are based on the European Standards and Guidelines.