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The internal quality assurance system of the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany

Resolution of the Accreditation Council of 18.06.2007, amended on 08.12.2009 and on 12.09.2012

I. Fundamental principles

Pursuant to § 2 para. 1 no. 1 of the Law Establishing the *Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany* (ASG), the Foundation has the task of accrediting accreditation agencies. It grants the time-limited authority to accredit study programmes or the internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions by awarding the seal of the Foundation. The Foundation has the additional tasks of compiling the common and state-specific structural guidelines of the Länder into binding guidelines for the agencies (§ 2 para. 1 no. 2), of regulating the minimum requirements for accreditation procedures including requirements and limitations of cluster accreditations (§ 2 para. 1 no. 3), and of monitoring accreditations carried out by the agencies (§ 2 para. 1 no. 4).

The bodies of the Foundation comprise the Foundation Council, the Accreditation Council and the Board. The Accreditation Council performs the statutory tasks and the Board the tasks in current business. The Foundation Council monitors the legal compliance and efficiency of the Foundation's business management by the Accreditation Council and the Board. As an additional committee, the Accreditation Council has instituted an Appeals Commission, which, pursuant to § 3 Cl. 8 of the rules of procedure of the Accreditation Council, consults regarding complaints of agencies against decisions made by the Accreditation Council for the accreditation and reaccreditation of the agencies, the revocation of accreditation, and decisions tied to the monitoring of accreditations, and subsequently submits a recommendation for a decision to the Accreditation Council for its final decision. In performing its tasks, the Foundation is supported by a head office.

1. Objectives and understanding of quality of the Foundation

The objectives and the understanding of quality of the Foundation are stipulated in the mission statement.

2. Objective of the internal quality assurance

The central objective of the internal quality assurance of the Foundation is the continuous monitoring and, if required, enhancement of internal processes in order to ensure a qualitative performance of the Foundation's statutory tasks that is simultaneously as efficient as possible.

The quality assurance measures also contribute to guaranteeing consistency of the decisions of the Foundation's bodies and committees.

In addition, the systematic internal quality assurance allows concrete and comprehensive feedback on the performance of the statutory tasks and the expectations of stakeholders toward the Foundation.

The main emphasis of the internal quality assurance comprises internal processes tied to performance generation and support, along with the processes in the relationships with the agencies, and the internal communication processes of the Foundation.

The quality of these internal processes has its point of reference in the fulfilment of the statutory tasks, the expectations of stakeholders and, finally, in securing and developing the quality of study programmes at state- and state-recognised higher education institutions.

By defining binding guidelines for accreditation, and through the certification and assessment of agencies, the Accreditation Council is to positively influence the quality of study offers or quality assurance systems in higher education institutions that ensure this quality.

The internal quality assurance measures correspond with the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG) and thereby ensure international recognition of the Foundation's work.

3. Subject of the internal quality assurance

Subject of the internal quality assurance are processes and decisions of the Foundation on the accreditation of study programmes in Germany. Here, the Foundation differentiates between performance generating processes for fulfilment of the statutory tasks and support processes.

Performance generating processes:

- Definition of the criteria and rules of procedure

- Accreditation of accreditation agencies

- Monitoring of the agencies' work

Support processes

- Strategic planning

- Finance planning and accounting

- Personnel recruiting and -qualification

- Communication and transparency

- Other processes in the head office

Through its national and international networking, the Foundation obtains feedback on these processes from the relevant interest groups and new impulses for the fulfilment of its statutory tasks. It represents the accreditation system nationally and internationally.

4. Structure of the internal quality assurance

To secure sustainable internal quality assurance, the Foundation has instituted the working group "Internal Quality Assurance" comprising three members of the Accreditation Council.
The working group "Internal Quality Assurance" works independently, annually reports to the Accreditation Council and presents recommendations for further development to the Accreditation Council.

II. Process-related procedures for internal quality assurance

1. Quality assurance in the performance generating processes

1.1 Definition of the criteria and rules of procedure

The Foundation defines binding criteria and rules of procedure for the accreditation of agencies, study programmes and internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions. For this purpose, it compiles the common and state-specific structural guidelines of the Länder into binding criteria. The criteria and rules of procedure comply with the European guidelines ("Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area").

Demand for quality:

In a swift, transparent and efficient procedure, the Accreditation Council drafts and decides criteria and rules of procedure that guarantee best-possible predictability and consistency of the decisions. The decisions of the Accreditation Council are based on its understanding of quality, are easy to comprehend, easy to apply, and have found wide acceptance among all involved.

Quality assurance measures:

- In developing criteria and rules of procedure, the Accreditation Council is supported by a working group with participation of all stakeholders represented in the Accreditation Council and representatives of the agencies. The Accreditation Council considers international developments and experience from other accreditation systems in its work.

- The Accreditation Council updates its resolutions based on the experience of higher education institutions and agencies, and takes international developments into consideration. The head office continuously assesses enquiries from higher education institutions and agencies, and makes these findings available for the revision of resolutions.

Feedback:

-Through regular surveys once per office term of the Accreditation Council with the agencies and members of the Accreditation Council possible requirements for revision are assessed. The members of the Accreditation Council and the agencies are asked to provide feedback on the criteria and rules of procedure. The results are discussed together with the agencies and possible recommendations for amending criteria and procedures are presented to the Accreditation Council.

1.2 Accreditation of accreditation agencies

The Accreditation Council accredits and reaccredits accreditation agencies.

Demand for quality:

The Accreditation Council accredits agencies in a swift, comprehensible and efficient procedure on the basis of its criteria and rules of procedure with the aim of ensuring predictability and consistency of its decisions.

Quality assurance measures:

- Prior to an accreditation, a schedule for the procedure is drawn up in agreement with the agencies.

- As experts, the Accreditation Council appoints qualified specialists in the field of quality assurance, students and practitioners of professions with experience with or in quality assurance agencies. It develops criteria for possible impartiality and presents these as a basis for the appointment procedure. The agency receives the opportunity to make a statement on possible impartiality.

- Experts for procedures for the accreditation and reaccreditation of agencies are normally comprehensively informed of criteria, rules of procedure and their roles prior to the on-site visit in a preparatory session. This serves to ensure consistent application of the criteria.

- The head office publishes materials on requirements and the routine of an accreditation procedure and provides them to the agencies and the experts in advance.

- Model versions of all important documents help to secure efficiency and consistency in the management of accreditation procedures by the head office. Relevant questions are discussed in regular team meetings.

Feedback:

- On completion of the procedures for the accreditation or reaccreditation of agencies, the Accreditation Council gives those involved in the procedures (agencies, experts, members of the Accreditation Council) the opportunity to provide feedback on the routine, transparency and effectiveness of the processes, along with comprehensibility and consistency of the decision. This information is to be collected through a guided interview with the management of the agency or questionnaires for experts and members of the Accreditation Council. The working group "Internal Quality Assurance" discusses the results and possibly prepares recommendations for improvement.

- At regular intervals, the working group "Internal Quality Assurance" discusses the consistency of decisions on the the accreditation of agencies.

1.3 Monitoring the work of the agencies

The Foundation monitors the decisions of the agencies with regard to compliance with the criteria and rules of procedure for accreditation on a random sample or specific-purpose basis.

Demand for quality:

The Accreditation Council assesses the accreditations performed by the agencies in a swift and efficient procedure based on its decisive criteria and rules of procedure with the aim of ensuring predictability and consistency of the decisions. It assesses the implementation of its decisions and further develops the monitoring procedure.

Quality assurance measures:

- In the annual plan of the head office, the schedule for processing the random sample assessments is determined. The fee schedule is oriented on the actual work load of the head office.

- The results of the assessment procedures are shared with the agency along with a rationale and internally documented in a comprehensible manner. For each specific-purpose assessment procedure, the work load is assessed.

- Significant findings from the assessment procedures are internally compiled by the head office and referred to in reassessments in order to ensure comprehensive consistency.

- Regular team discussions in the head office regarding the procedures serve exchange and consistency.

Feedback:

- All decisions and results of assessment procedures are subject to the internal revision. The working group "Internal Quality Assurance" evaluates the results and possibly presents recommendations for further development to the Accreditation Council. The Accreditation Council regularly discusses the results of the assessment procedures.

- The head office assesses feedback and complaints from agencies regarding results of assessment procedures as an indicator for comprehensibility.

- At regular intervals of two years, the working group "Internal Quality Assurance" discusses the consistency of the decisions in assessment procedures based on the report of the head office.

2. Quality assurance in support processes

2.1 Strategic planning

Demand for quality:

The work of the Accreditation Council is oriented on strategic planning.

Quality assurance measures:

- At the beginning of each office term, the Accreditation Council drafts plans for the strategic direction of its work.

- The head office prepares a medium-term work plan and presents this at each meeting of the Accreditation Council.

- The head office maintains a "watchlist" with relevant questions that have not yet been handled by the Accreditation Council and presents this at each meeting of the Accreditation Council.

Feedback:

- At two-year intervals, a questionnaire survey on the work approach and organisation of the Accreditation Council and its head office is carried out among the members.

2.2 Finance planning and accounting

Demand for quality:

The Foundation's finance planning is transparent and ensures the fulfilment of its tasks at all times. Transactions are processed in a timely manner.

Quality assurance measures:

- Before the commencement of a fiscal year, the Board prepares a business plan that is adopted by the Accreditation Council with approval of the Foundation Council. It considers findings from reports on the finance status of the expired years.

- Within the first half of the year, the Board presents the Annual Financial Statements to the Accreditation Council and the Foundation Council. It monitors the finance status semi-annually and reports to the Accreditation Council and the Foundation Council.

Feedback:

- The Foundation Council assesses the legal compliance of the finance management.

- The budget- and finance management is subject to auditing by the regional court of auditors and the annual audit.

2.3 Personnel recruiting and qualification

Demand for quality:

All individuals who work for the Foundation possess relevant expertise that is continuously developed through appropriate measures.

Quality assurance measures:

- On their appointment, the members of the committees receive all essential information on the work of the Foundation and may take part in conferences at any time.

- The Foundation recruits personnel for the head office based on an individually pre-defined qualification profile.

- The training of new staff members for the head office is based on a structured training plan and is accompanied by a contact partner.

- The staff of the head office regularly takes part in the meetings of the Accreditation Council, relevant conferences and conventions, and annually performs observation audits for procedures of the accreditation agencies.

Feedback:

- The management carries out annual on-site discussions with the staff for assessment of individual performance and for feedback on satisfaction and possibilities for improvement in the routines.

2.4 Communication and transparency

Demand for quality:

The Accreditation Council informs of its work and the accreditation system in a comprehensive and target-group-specific manner. The accreditation and assessment of the agencies takes place in a transparent procedure that is comprehensibly documented.

Quality assurance measures:

- The Accreditation Council publishes its decisions in a timely manner. In the case of the accreditation of an agency, it additionally publishes the relevant documents from the procedures, such as self-documentation, the expert report and statement of the agency, with removal of personal references or sensitive information.

- The Accreditation Council regularly informs of its work and the accreditation system in a newsletter.

- Enquiries to the head office are assessed with regard to frequently repeated questions.

- The Accreditation Council presents its work at events that it – depending on the budget – regularly organises.

Feedback:

- The number of newsletter subscribers and of visits to the website reflects the public interest.

2.5. Further processes of the head office

Demand for quality:

The head office swiftly and professionally performs the tasks assigned to it by law, the statute, and by commission of the bodies and committees. In addition, it develops impulses for the work of the Foundation from the daily work.

Committee meetings are organised by the head office in a timely manner and with an effective use of funds. The head office provides all committee members with the information required for their activity in a timely manner.

Quality assurance measures:

- The managing director provides the head office with a Schedule of Responsibilities and regularly updates this. The most important work tasks and their distribution are annually documented in a schedule.

- The managing director normally carries out weekly joint discussions on short- and medium-term planning of the activities to be performed.

- The documents for bodies and committees are normally made available two weeks before the meeting.

Feedback:

- At two-year intervals, a questionnaire survey regarding the work approach and organisation of the Accreditation Council and its head office is carried out among the members of the Accreditation Council.

III. Overarching quality assurance procedures

1. National networking

Demand for quality:

The Accreditation Council works closely together with relevant actors at higher education institutions, in the Länder, students, and practitioners of professions.

Quality assurance measures:

- Members of the Accreditation Council and the staff of the head office actively make use of networking opportunities e.g. through participation in working groups, associations, presentations or publications. They also maintain contact to relevant institutions and organisations.

- Members who perform external appointments for the Accreditation Council are supported by the head office and report on the results in order to allow an assessment of the information.

- The Accreditation Council receives written reports on significant networking activities of the head office.

- The head office performs an assessment of national contacts to ensure compatibility.

Feedback:

- The Board utilises the annual meetings with the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder to assess the work of the Accreditation Council and the Foundation as a whole. The chairperson reports to the Accreditation Council and the Foundation Council.

- As part of the semi-annual meetings of the members of the Accreditation Council and the agencies (Round Table), the Accreditation Council holds discussions for feedback on its work and the head office. The results are documented by the head office, evaluated and implemented for the purpose of concrete improvements.

2. International networking

The Accreditation Council actively participates in European and international associations or quality assurance projects and their decision-making processes. In this manner, the Accreditation Council ensures the consideration of international developments in the German system.

Quality assurance measures:

- Members of the Accreditation Council and the staff of the head office actively participate in international institutions and organisations.

- The Accreditation Council appoints international experts in working groups.

- The Accreditation Council regularly receives reports on developments at the international level.
- The head office undertakes an assessment of international contacts in order to ensure compatibility.

IV. External quality assurance

Pursuant to §10 of the statute of the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany of 23.06.2006, the work of the Foundation is regularly evaluated at five-year intervals by an expert group instituted by the Foundation Council with the inclusion of external experts.