

***Drs. AR 69/2013***

**Decision on application of Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Programmes of Studies in Germany (AKAST) of 31 January 2013 for reaccreditation**

Resolution of Accreditation Council of 13 December 2013

**I.**

The Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany (Foundation) accredits the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Programmes of Studies in Germany (AKAST) pursuant to § 2 para. 1 no. 1 of the German Law on the Establishment of a Foundation (Gesetz zur Errichtung einer Stiftung) "Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany" in accordance with the following provisions and insofar thereby grants it the authority to accredit study programmes by awarding the seal of the Foundation.

**II.**

The decision pursuant to Point I above shall become effective on 13 December 2013. It shall, however, become ineffective again if the Agency does not sign an agreement by 31 January 2014 pursuant to § 3 of the German Law on the Establishment of a Foundation "Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany" in the version resolved on by the Accreditation Council on 20 March 2013.

**III.**

The accreditation and authorisation pursuant to Point I above shall be granted for a period of five years; revocation shall remain reserved pursuant to Point V below. Pursuant to Paragraph 3.2.1 of the resolution "Rules for the Accreditation of Agencies" of 8 December 2009 in the version of 10 December 2010, the accreditation shall expire on 31 December 2018.

#### IV.

The Accreditation Council establishes that the AKAST does not fulfil some of the quality requirements; these defects shall be resolved within six months pursuant to Paragraph 3.1.3 of the resolution "Rules for the Accreditation of Agencies" of 8 December 2009 in the version of 10 December 2010. The accreditation shall therefore be granted under the following conditions:

**Condition 1:** AKAST provides evidence, in the form of a model contract that the Agency shall in future be a contracting partner of the HEIs in processes of accrediting study programmes, even if ACQUIN is providing administrative support (Criterion 2.2.1).

**Condition 2:** AKAST provides evidence for the adjustment of its documents of the accreditation procedure to satisfy the current grounds for a decision of the Accreditation Council (Criterion 2.2.1).

**Condition 3:** AKAST, in the make-up of the Accreditation Commission, regularly accommodates for the commissioning of a further person of professional practice in addition to the one director of a seminary set in the statutes regarding the variety of occupational areas for theologians already planned for in the statutes of association (Criterion 2.2.2).

**Condition 4:** AKAST presents a published systematisation of internal quality assurance, on the basis of the experiences of the first accreditation period, which incorporates all committees, and defines targets, measures, and feedback cycles (Criterion 2.5).

The Accreditation Council refers explicitly to the recommendations contained in the expert opinion.

#### V.

If AKAST fails to provide evidence for the fulfilling of the conditions within the period in question, or if the conditions appear unfulfilled upon expiry of the period in question, the Foundation can revoke the accreditation pursuant to Paragraph 3.5.3 of the resolution "Rules for the Accreditation of Agencies" of 8 December 2009 in the version of 10 December 2010.

## VI. Reasoning

### General:

On the basis of the expert opinion and taking into consideration the opinion of the Agency, the Accreditation Council came to the conclusion that the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Programmes of Studies in Germany (AKAST) shall be accredited once more on the basis of the particular state-church construction, although not all aspects of the criteria pursuant to Chapter 2 of the resolution "Rules for the Accreditation of Agencies" of 8 December 2009" in the version of 10 December 2010 are satisfied, and this shall not be resolved in the course of satisfying the conditions.

The Accreditation Council maintains its assessment which it already explained in the resolution on the first-time accreditation of AKAST on 31 October 2008. In the German Accreditation System, AKAST assumes an exceptional position in so far as the Agency, pursuant to Paragraph 8 of the resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (Kultusministerkonferenz) "Benchmarks for Study Structure in Study Programmes with Catholic or Evangelic Theology/Religion" of 13 December 2007 (abbreviated to Benchmarks), operates exclusively in the area of Catholic, fully-theological study programmes pursuant to Paragraph 3 of the Benchmarks. Hence, AKAST is bound to a large extent to specifications, which are established outside the accreditation system and therefore do not fall within the area of responsibility of the Accreditation Council. On the basis of these framework conditions, difficulties arise in the fulfilling of the relevant criteria, in particular regarding the requirement of accreditation covering several types of HEIs (see Criterion 2.1.2), the full cost basis (Criterion 2.3.2), and the freedom from instructions of the organ (see Criterion 2.3.3.).

Since the Accreditation Council, pursuant to § 2 para. 2 no. 1 of the Accreditation Foundation Law, is bound to guarantee fair competition amongst the agencies, and AKAST does not fulfil all requirements of the criteria for the accreditation of agencies, the Accreditation Council shall limit the scope of business in the agreement with the agency, as was already the case for the first accreditation in 2008, as follows:

*"The validity of the accreditation of the agency is limited to theological study programmes pursuant to no. 3 of the "Benchmarks for Study Structure in Study Programmes with Catholic or Evangelic Theology/Religion" in the version of 13 December 2007 which qualify for the parish office, priesthood, and the profession of pastoral officer ("theological full-time study"), and to Bachelor and Master degrees with canonical effects on German HEIs."*

The Accreditation Council has gained a positive impression of the work of the AKAST, and acknowledges the development of the agency since its initial accreditation.

**Regarding condition 1:**

Pursuant to Criterion 2.2.1, the agency provide evidence for binding structures and processes which guarantee the correct application of the "Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation" in the most recent version. It is ascertained here, in Paragraph 1.1.1, that the agencies shall transfer to the HEIs a complete description of services before entering into the process. On page 21, the expert group ascertains that the overall responsibility of AKAST for an accreditation process in case of administrative accompaniment by ACQUIN is not expressed sufficiently, since the contracts with the HEIs are currently not concluded by AKAST, in these cases, but rather by ACQUIN. This contradicts the transparency requirement set out in Paragraph 1.1.1.

**Regarding condition 2:**

Pursuant to Criterion 2.2.1, the agency guarantee the correct application of the "Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation" in the most recent version. As is ascertained on p. 20 of the expert opinion, the guidelines of the Agency (version of 18 March 2011) must be adjusted to satisfy the current grounds for a decision of the Accreditation Council.

**Regarding condition 3:**

Pursuant to Criterion 2.2.2., the Agency guarantee the participation of the interest groups relevant for the fulfilling of tasks (academia, students, and professional practice). On p. 24 of the expert report it is ascertained that the representation of professional practice with a director of a seminary in the Accreditation Commission is, pursuant to the statutes of the agency, restricted only to the road to priesthood.

The Accreditation Council agrees with the argumentation in the expert report, according to which a further representative of the professional practice should be regularly included in the Accreditation Commission in order to involve an assessment of the requirements and development prospects for theologians from an individual's own practical work in the decision process regarding the accreditation of study programmes. Here, professional areas both inside and outside the church can be given equal consideration.

**Regarding condition 4:**

Pursuant to Criterion 2.5, the Agency continuously uses a formalised, internal quality management system which is suitable for assessing the effectiveness of the internal control processes, and guarantees the assurance and continuous assessment of the quality of operations. This system is publicly available and incorporates systematic internal and external feedback processes.

On p. 44 of the expert opinion it is ascertained that a systematic internal quality assurance processes was not identifiable pursuant to the requirements of Criterion 2.5. The Accreditation Council agrees with the argumentation in the expert opinion, according to which the Agency, on the basis of its experiences, should present and publish a systematisation of its internal quality assurance process which creates a coherence of aims, instruments, and measures, and defines control loops for the implementation of the results. Here, the responsibilities of the advisory board should also be set out, and its functions and work approach described.