

Work Report 2001/2002

(Period under report: August 2001 through December 2002)

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Preface

Following the end of its trial period, the Akkreditierungsrat now presents the report at hand to show how the accreditation system in Germany is continuing to be developed and to provide information on the roles of the Akkreditierungsrat and the results of its activities.

The work carried out by the Akkreditierungsrat in the trial phase also had an impact on higher education policy. In a majority of the *Länder* and higher education institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany, the use of accreditation, which became possible with the creation of an accreditation system, led to intensive discussion on the curricular and content structure and on the quality assurance of the new university study programmes.

The Akkreditierungsrat sees its role and responsibility as that of guaranteeing equivalency and quality in diversity, while, at the same time, continuing to advance the discussion on reforms and quality assurance in higher education and the academic study system.

The work of the Akkreditierungsrat led to the accreditation of two-cycle programmes being given structure and standards which need to be further developed and consolidated. The *Kultusministerkonferenz* resolution on the continuation of the accreditation system in Germany means that the Akkreditierungsrat will be able to proceed with this work. In view of the significance which quality assurance has for the successful progress of the Bologna Process, the Akkreditierungsrat will focus its attention even more strongly than in the past on establishing and carrying forward international networks.

Bonn, June 2003

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1. The Continuing Development of the Accreditation System in Germany

1.1 Evaluation of the Akkreditierungsrat

The amendment of the German higher education act (*Hochschulrahmengesetz - HRG*) of 20 August 1998 enabled Germany's universities to establish Bachelor's and Master's programmes, albeit initially on a trial basis. In a concerted action, the *Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK)*¹ and *Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK)*² used the structural freedom which the amendment provided to introduce an accreditation system for these two-cycle programmes. Responsibility for the transparent and consistent application of comparable quality standards was transferred to the Akkreditierungsrat, in its capacity as the central accreditation body within a decentralised system; the Akkreditierungsrat was initially established on a trial basis for a period of three years. Agreement was reached that the Akkreditierungsrat and its office would be subjected to an evaluation after an operational period of two years.³ The auditors⁴ responsible for this evaluation were appointed by the *KMK* and *HRK* in July 2001. Their evaluation report on the Akkreditierungsrat, submitted in September of the same year, came to the following conclusion:

"Germany found a good answer to the challenge from international competitors by creating a cross-*Länder* Akkreditierungsrat and a system in which accreditation is performed by a number of various agencies. The auditors view accreditation as an integral component of a comprehensive system of quality assurance and as a building block in modernising the higher education system. From the perspective of the European neighbours, in particular, the *Länder*⁵ in the Federal Republic of Germany and the universities will be encouraged to continue along this path."⁶

¹ Association of Universities and other Higher Education Institutions in Germany.

² Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany.

³ KMK resolution: "Einführung eines Akkreditierungsverfahrens für Bachelor-/Bakkalaureus- und Master-/Magisterstudiengänge" of 3 December 1998, sub-para. 8.

⁴ The members of the audit team "Evaluation des Akkreditierungsrates" were: Dr. Stephan Bieri, Delegate and Vice-President of the ETH-Council; Dr. Harry Brinkman, President of the FU Amsterdam, retd.; Professor Dr. Evelies Mayer, Minister of State, retd., TU Darmstadt; Professor Dr. Konrad Osterwalder, Rector of the ETH Zurich; Professor Dr. Winfried Schulze, Chairman of the Wissenschaftsrat, retd.

⁵ The 16 federal states in the Federal Republic of Germany.

⁶ Bieri, Stephan; Brinkmann, Harry; Mayer, Evelies; Osterwalder, Konrad; Schulze, Winfried: Bericht der Gutachtergruppe "Evaluation des Akkreditierungsrates", Freiburg im Breisgau 2001, p. 4.

While the auditors emphasised the flexibility, transparency and objectivity of the German accreditation model in their report as well as its positive impact on the international integration of Germany's universities, they criticised the - in the long term - inadequate funding for the Akkreditierungsrat and called for the organisational structure of the accreditation system to be placed on a reliable statutory basis.⁷ The auditors above all identified key areas of responsibility for the future work of the Akkreditierungsrat in the continuing development and intensification of international networking, the regulation of competition policy questions and the coordination and promotion of information and experience exchange between the individual accreditation agencies. For the future, however, the auditors found that programme accreditation should be the responsibility of the agencies alone, especially since feedback on accreditation activities following the establishment of the system could also be ensured by maintaining contact with the individual agencies.⁸

1.2 The decision to continue the accreditation system

Since the Akkreditierungsrat was constituted on 7 July 1999, its trial period ended mid 2002. To bridge the time until the Akkreditierungsrat was reconstituted in January 2003, the members of the Akkreditierungsrat stated their willingness, at the request of *KMK* and *HRK*, to exercise their mandate for a further six months until 31 December 2002. This mandate extension served to guarantee the continuation of the Akkreditierungsrat.

In the resolution of 1 March 2002 on the continuing development of quality assurance across all *Länder* and all universities in Germany, the *KMK* fundamentally advocated the continuance of the accreditation system in Germany.⁹ In reaching this course-setting decision, the ministers of education and cultural affairs had followed the conclusion reached of the international team of auditors responsible for evaluating the Akkreditierungsrat as well as the recommendations contained in an Akkreditierungsrat strategy paper on the future prospects for accreditation in Germany and Europe. According to the *KMK* resolution, the future accreditation system also needed to feature a network of decentralised agencies. The Akkreditierungsrat's role in this system is to supervise their quality in its capacity as the central accreditation body and on the basis of defined guidelines, and also to monitor and

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 9 f.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁹ *KMK* resolution: "Künftige Entwicklung der länder- und hochschulübergreifenden Qualitätssicherung in Deutschland", 1 March 2002, sub-para. 3.1.

supervise the transparency and consistency of the work of these agencies, and to guarantee fair competition between them.¹⁰

The statutes passed by the *KMK* on 24 May 2002 which came into force on 1 January 2003 govern the organisational structure and constitution of the Akkreditierungsrat. In correspondence with the *KMK* resolution of 1 March 2002, the statutes reads:

"An accreditation system was established to assure cross-*Länder* and cross-university quality in higher education. Accreditation involves a formalised and objective procedure to establish whether an academic programme corresponds with minimum requirements in terms of its academic content and professional career relevance."¹¹

According to the statutes, responsibility for accreditation, and so for cross-*Länder* and cross-university quality assurance in higher education, lies with the state, the universities and professional practice. In accordance with sub-paragraph 1, section 2 of the statutes, the representatives of these three groups will continue to work together in the accreditation process, both on the Akkreditierungsrat as well as within the agencies.

In accordance with the relevant *KMK* resolutions of 1 March and 24 May 2002, the Akkreditierungsrat continues to be responsible for supervising and monitoring the observance of the minimum requirements which it defined by accrediting respectively reaccrediting agencies. Moreover, the Akkreditierungsrat is responsible for representing and asserting German interests in international quality assurance networks by, inter alia, promoting communication and cooperation between agencies. While the mandate for the accreditation of study programmes was previously restricted solely to Bachelor's and Master's programmes, responsibility for developing - in the medium term - criteria for the accreditation of newly-established *Diplom* and *Magister* degree courses (§ 18 *HRG*) in subject areas in which no framework examinations regulations exist or where the current framework examinations regulations are outdated will be transferred to the Akkreditierungsrat.¹²

The period under report was characterised by the fact that the work of the Akkreditierungsrat lacked a statutory basis, despite the above-mentioned relevant *KMK* resolutions, because no appropriate legislation had been passed: "In terms of organisational structures, it

¹⁰ *ibid.*, sub-para. 3.2.

¹¹ *KMK* resolution: "Statut für ein länder- und hochschulübergreifendes Akkreditierungsverfahren", 24 May 2002 in the version of 19 September 2002, sub-para. I.1.

¹² *ibid.*, sub-para. 4 respectively *KMK* resolution: "Künftige Entwicklung der länder- und hochschulübergreifenden Qualitätssicherung in Deutschland", 1 March 2002, sub-para. 3.4.

is essential that the Akkreditierungsrat and the agencies in general must, in the medium term, be placed on a reliable statutory basis, since the creation of the Akkreditierungsrat through the *KMK* and *HRK* resolutions is difficult to assess from a legal perspective."¹³

1.3 Akkreditierungsrat resolutions

The currently valid *KMK* structural guidelines specify that Bachelor's and Master's programmes can be established at research universities and equivalent higher education institutions as well as at *Fachhochschule* universities of applied sciences without calling into question the differing educational goals pursued by these different kinds of higher education institutions.¹⁴ In contrast to the equality between research universities and *Fachhochschule* universities of applied sciences which this implies in relation to the establishment of two-cycle study programmes, the *Innenministerkonferenz (IMK)*¹⁵ and *KMK* have meanwhile agreed that the question as to whether or not *Fachhochschule* Master's degrees qualify holders for entry to the higher civil service must be established separately within the course of the accreditation process. Accordingly, the agreement on "Entry to higher civil service careers for holders of Master's degrees awarded by *Fachhochschule* universities of applied sciences" reached between the *KMK* and *IMK* requires that a representative of the superior authority responsible for the civil service career path must be involved in reviewing the individual programme as a "representative of professional practice" and, within this accreditation review, must be able to vote on the career path assignment on the basis of the criteria adopted by the *KMK* and *IMK*.¹⁶

At its meeting of 7 October 2002, the Akkreditierungsrat adopted a resolution in which the process defined in the *IMK-KMK* agreement was made mandatory for the agencies and an arrangement was met for those *Fachhochschule* universities of applied sciences wishing to submit a supplementary application for Master's programmes that had already been accredited. The procedure provides for participation by an *IMK* representative in the accredita-

¹³ Bieri, Stephan; Brinkmann, Harry; Mayer, Evelies; Osterwalder, Konrad; Schulze, Winfried: Bericht der Gutachtergruppe "Evaluation des Akkreditierungsrates", Freiburg im Breisgau 2001, p. 10.

¹⁴ *KMK* resolution: "Strukturvorgaben für die Einführung von Bachelor-/ Bakkalaureus- und Master-/Magisterstudiengängen", 5 March 1999 in the version of 14 December 2001, sub-para. 1.1.

¹⁵ Standing Conference of Ministers of the Interior.

¹⁶ *IMK* resolution of 6 June 2002 and *KMK* resolution of 24 May 2002: "Zugang zu den Laufbahnen des höheren Dienstes durch Masterabschluss an Fachhochschulen", sub-para. B II 2.

tion or - in already completed accreditations - review by an *IMK* representative on the basis of the documentary files and records.¹⁷

2. The Work of the Akkreditierungsrat – Roles and Results

2.1 Accreditation and reaccreditation of agencies

Since the introduction of the accreditation system in Germany, seven agencies have been accredited by the Akkreditierungsrat.¹⁸ The agencies ASII (accredited on 5 June 2000) and A-CBC (accredited on 11 December 2000) merged on 4 June 2002 to form ASIIN, whose activities cover programmes in engineering, computer science, chemistry, biochemistry and other natural sciences and in mathematics. This step met a condition stipulated by the Akkreditierungsrat calling for an extension of the subject range covered by the A-CBC. In the period under report, the Akkreditierungsrat accredited respectively reaccredited the agencies listed below and so entitled them to award the *Siegel des Akkreditierungsrates*¹⁹ for a time-limited period:

- *Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge im Bereich Heilpädagogik, Pflege, Gesundheit und Soziale Arbeit e.V. - AHPGS* - (Agency for Study Courses in Medical Pedagogy, Care, Health and Social Work), accredited on 17 December 2001 and until 17 December 2004.
- *Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch Akkreditierung von Studiengängen - AQAS* - (Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes), accredited on 14 March 2002 and until 14 March 2007.
- Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (**FIBAA**), reaccredited on 14 March 2002 and until 14 March 2007.
- *Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik - ASIIN* - (Agency for Study Programmes in Engineering/Informatics and Chemistry, Biochemistry, Chemical Engineering), accredited on 5 March 2003, backdated to 12 December 2002, and to run until 11 December 2005.

¹⁷ Akkreditierungsrat resolution on "Feststellung der laufbahnrechtlichen Zuordnung der Masterabschlüsse an Fachhochschulen im Akkreditierungsverfahren", 7 October 2002 in the version of 13 May 2003; and: <http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de>.

¹⁸ Detailed information on the individual accreditation agencies can be found on the Akkreditierungsrat website: <http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de>.

¹⁹ Seal of the German Accreditation Council.

The reaccreditation process for FIBAA was prepared and accompanied by the Akkreditierungsrat rapporteurs²⁰ responsible for the agency. The rapporteurs attended a selected review team session held during an accreditation carried out by FIBAA and also sat in on one of the agency's accreditation commission sessions. The report which the rapporteurs produced along with the documents submitted by FIBAA served as a discussion and decision-making basis for the Akkreditierungsrat. The insight into the work and approach of FIBAA which the rapporteurs gained enabled the Akkreditierungsrat to carry out the reaccreditation under consideration of agency-typical practical experience.

2.2 Accreditation of study programmes

In the first three years, the Akkreditierungsrat was given the opportunity, in accordance with the *KMK* resolution of 3 December 1998²¹, to carry out the accreditation of study programmes itself in justified cases and upon application by one of the *Länder*. The Akkreditierungsrat used the chance which this offered to shape and structure the processes associated with the introduction of the accreditation system on the basis of the direct and immediate experience it had gained by itself accrediting programmes; in total, the Akkreditierungsrat accredited two Bachelor's and twelve Master's programmes. In line with its recommendations to the agencies, the Akkreditierungsrat applied a two-tier procedure in line with that normally around the world to process the accreditation applications submitted by programmes. Working on the basis of the self-description submitted the applicant programme and an on-site inspection, the respective review group produced an assessment report which was presented to the Akkreditierungsrat for decision. In the period under report, the Akkreditierungsrat accredited the following two Bachelor's and nine Master's programmes:

- Bachelor's programmes in *Agrarwissenschaften* (agricultural sciences) und *Gartenbauwissenschaften* (horticultural sciences) offered at the Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture at the Humboldt University Berlin;
- Master's programmes in *Agrarökonomik* (agricultural economics), *Fishery Science and Aquaculture*, *Gartenbauwissenschaften* (horticultural sciences), *Internationale Agrarwissenschaften* (international agricultural sciences), *Nachhaltige Landnutzung* (sustainable land use), *Nutztierwissenschaften* (animal sciences) und *Pflanzenbauwissenschaften*

²⁰ For information on the rapporteurs, see Chapter 2.3.

²¹ KMK resolution: "Einführung eines Akkreditierungsverfahrens für Bachelor-/ Bakkalaureus- und Master-/Magisterstudiengänge", 3 December 1998.

(crop sciences) offered at the Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture at the Humboldt University Berlin;

- Master's programme in *Kulturjournalismus* (cultural journalism) offered at the University of the Arts Berlin, plus
- Master's programme *Kunst im Kontext* (art in context) offered at the University of the Arts Berlin.

The Akkreditierungsrat used a cluster procedure for the first time to accredit the programmes offered by the Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture at the Humboldt University Berlin. The pilot project aimed to reduce the accreditation workload and the related costs by packaging programmes into a single process. As a consequence, the nine related programmes at the faculty were peer reviewed within the scope of a whole-day review session; the constitution of the review group corresponded with the range of subject areas in question. The approach of packaging related programmes in a review process to reduce costs and so to contribute to lowering the financial burden on universities was reflected in the *KMK* resolution on the future development of cross-*Länder* and cross-university quality assurance²², which specifically refers to this cost minimisation option.

By December 2002, the agencies certified by the Akkreditierungsrat had accredited around 180 Bachelor's and Master's programmes, while another 300 applications had been submitted to the individual agencies by universities.

2.3 Coordination and supervision

Besides supervising the fulfilment of responsibilities by the agencies, the promotion of communication and cooperation between the agencies represents one of the key roles for the Akkreditierungsrat. The Akkreditierungsrat performs this responsibility by accrediting respectively reaccrediting the agencies. In addition, the Akkreditierungsrat has established roundtable discussions with the agencies as well as thematic workgroups within the Akkreditierungsrat. The workgroups particularly address the specification and assessment of the standards which academic degrees (Bachelor and Master) are required to meet, the future prospects for the work of the Akkreditierungsrat as well as questions of international cooperation. In addition, the Akkreditierungsrat has appointed a number of rapporteurs from among its own members to work within the individual agencies to create a system close

²² KMK resolution: "Künftige Entwicklung der länder- und hochschulübergreifenden Qualitätssicherung in Deutschland", 1 March 2002, sub-para. 3.6.

feedback between the council and the agencies. For this purpose and in agreement with the agency in question, the rapporteurs are given guest status to attend the sessions of the agency's decision-making body or review group meetings held as part of the accreditation process. The Akkreditierungsrat primarily performs its function of guaranteeing comparability and transparency of the accreditation process by accrediting agencies and subsequently monitoring and supervising them. By contrast, the meanwhile institutionalised roundtable discussions above all serve as a platform for information exchange, not least with the goal of improving cooperation and competition between the agencies.

In the period under report, the Akkreditierungsrat convened eleven times and held three roundtable discussions.

2.4 Cooperation and fine-tuning

Besides its coordinating and supervising function, the Akkreditierungsrat maintains contacts with its founding organisations by holding joint discussions, participating in respectively inviting to sessions and by engaging in an ongoing process of information exchange on the results of deliberations and accreditations. In addition, the Akkreditierungsrat maintains continuous contacts with the universities, the *DAAD*²³, the *Wissenschaftsrat*²⁴ and other education, science and research policy organisations.

Towards the end of its trial phase, the Akkreditierungsrat organised a conference at the *Wissenschaftszentrum* in Bonn on 19 December 2002: *Der Akkreditierungsrat - Bilanz und Perspektiven*.²⁵ The conference served as a discussion forum at which a "progress report" on key questions and the results of the Akkreditierungsrat's work was discussed with domestic and foreign experts, while emerging developments abroad were reflected. In the critical progress report, the international experts identified a decisive role for the German accreditation system to play in the international context. The international conference was attended by around 150 experts from home and abroad.²⁶

²³ DAAD = Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (German Academic Exchange Service).

²⁴ German Science Council.

²⁵ Akkreditierungsrat - Progress and Prospects.

²⁶ Some of the conference papers have been published on the Akkreditierungsrat website: <http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de>.

2.5 International cooperation

The process initiated by the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration and continued by the 1999 Bologna Declaration and the Prague Communiqué of May 2001 has resulted in the view asserting itself at European level that the development and assurance of international quality standards, with essential co-responsibility taken on by science and research, needs to be further expanded. The report by the audit group "*Evaluation des Akkreditierungsrates*" reads as follows:

"Even more than potential students and employers at home, foreigners interested in what studies in Germany actually mean and offer depend on being able to obtain reliable information based on the scientific review and assessment on the programmes and degrees offered in Germany. A reliable accreditation system is a key factor, both regarding the appeal of German universities for foreign students as well as Germany's active involvement in European and international networks of university cooperation."²⁷

Since quality assurance respectively accreditation will only serve to promote and encourage student mobility once acceptance of the various quality assurance methods has been guaranteed at European respectively international level, the Akkreditierungsrat is itself playing a part in creating and expanding international respectively transnational networks, such as the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI), and the regional accreditation network *Deutschland-Österreich-Schweiz (D-A-CH)*. The Akkreditierungsrat began to formalise *D-A-CH* towards the end of 2002. A commitment to and active involvement in the above-mentioned networks promotes information exchange with the various accreditation and quality assurance bodies abroad and contributes to raising the awareness for and understanding of the *Siegel des Akkreditierungsrates* at international level.

In addition to its active involvement in international networks, the Akkreditierungsrat maintains contacts with foreign accreditation bodies which perform comparable functions and responsibilities to its own. In particular, these are the Austrian Accreditation Council, the Hungarian Accreditation Council (HAC), the Swiss Accreditation and Quality Assurance Body (OAQ) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in the United States. The Akkreditierungsrat also has good contacts with the European University Association (EUA).

²⁷ Bieri, Stephan; Brinkmann, Harry; Mayer, Evelies; Osterwalder, Konrad; Schulze, Winfried: Bericht der Gutachtergruppe "*Evaluation des Akkreditierungsrates*", Freiburg im Breisgau 2001, p. 9.

2.6 Website, database and PR work

The *Geschäftsstelle des Akkreditierungsrates*²⁸ maintains a *Zentrale Datenbank*²⁹ of all programmes which have been accredited and awarded the *Siegel des Akkreditierungsrates* on the Akkreditierungsrat's website. The database includes information on the programme profiles, on the assessment by the review groups, on the accreditation's term of validity and on the relevant contact partners at the universities, and is constantly updated. The service helps potential students and employers to assess the accredited programmes. The integration of the accreditation information into the data stock of the *HRK Hochschulkompass*³⁰ has already been prepared.

Besides the *Zentrale Datenbank*, the Akkreditierungsrat Office also collects and analyses statistics on accredited programmes. These statistics provide information on the number of accredited Bachelor's and Master's programmes, thereby considering various categories, such as final degree, subject group, conditional accreditation, *Land*, accreditation agency and number of semesters (time to degree).

The individual *Länder* regularly produce a summary of the decision-making principles for the approval of study programmes leading to Bachelor's and Master's degrees. This and other information is constantly updated and made accessible on the Akkreditierungsrat website.³¹

3. Finances

In the three year start-up phase, the Akkreditierungsrat was financed by the *Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft*.³² The Akkreditierungsrat had an annual budget of € 178,952.16 (DM 350,000) amounting to a total of € 536,856.48 (DM 1,050,000) over the three years. To fund the 6-month mandate extension,³³ the *KMK* approved additional funding for the Akkreditierungsrat of up to € 80,000 (DM 156,466.40) to cover a share of the budgetary deficit required for material expenses. Budgetary resources for the staff of the Akkreditierungsrat Office continued to be financed from the remaining resources of the *Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft*.

²⁸ Akkreditierungsrat Office.

²⁹ Central Data base.

³⁰ see <http://www.hochschulkompass.de> or <http://www.higher-education-compass.de>

³¹ see <http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de>.

³² Donors' Association for the Promotion of Science and Humanities in Germany.

³³ see Chapter 1.2.

Members of the Akkreditierungsrat work in an honorary capacity. They receive neither expenses nor attendance fees; only travel expenses are reimbursed.

Revenue earned by the Akkreditierungsrat from the accreditation of programmes (Humboldt University Berlin and University of the Arts Berlin) were invoiced via the accounts department of the *HRK*; in the period under report, this income amounted to a total of € 46,808.67 (DM 91,549.81). Costs for the accreditation of programmes depended on the procedural workload and were calculated on the basis of staff and material expenses, including travel and accommodation costs for reviewers.

Agency accreditation and reaccreditation was carried out free of charge.