



**Explanatory Statement for the Application
for Reaccreditation
of Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
(ACQUIN) in Bayreuth by the Accreditation Council
dated September 15, 2015**

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List of Abbreviations

ACQUIN	Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
AKAST	Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Study Programmes in Germany
AO	Tax Regulation
BMBF	Federal Ministry of Education and Research
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
DQR	German Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning
EDV	Electronic Data Processing
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EUA	European University Association
evalag	Evaluation Agency of Baden-Württemberg
EVD	Federal Department of Economic Affairs
HRK	German Rectors' Conference
HS-QSG	Higher Education Quality Assurance Act
INCHER	International Centre for Higher Education Research Kassel
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IQAA	Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency in Education
KMK	Conference of Culture Ministers
NCPA	National Centre for Public Accreditation, Russia
OAQ	Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Swiss Universities
QACHE	Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education
QM	Quality Management
RIQAA	Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity in the European Higher Education Area
TV-L	Collective Agreement for Civil Service Employees
VBL	Federal and State Government Employees Retirement Fund
VRUH	Association of Rectors of Ukrainian Universities

I Introduction / Description and Development of ACQUIN

The Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) carries out evaluations and accreditations in the field of higher education since its foundation in 2001, thus contributing to the shaping of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

According to the mission statement of the agency, the core task of ACQUIN is to promote the quality of higher education and to support the establishment of a culture of quality at higher education institutions. ACQUIN carries out accreditations of Bachelor and Master programmes of all disciplines on a supra-regional level and across all types of higher education institutions in order to ensure the high quality of study programmes, create market transparency, enhance the attractiveness of higher education to students and promote comparability of academic qualifications. In this sense, the accreditation of entire universities, their quality management systems in teaching and learning, as well as other performance areas contribute to the further promotion of the academic quality and to the support of the higher education development. ACQUIN sees itself as a partner of higher education institutions abroad willing to offer Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes at European level.

Based on the resolution of the Accreditation Council dated 8 June 2011, ACQUIN was reaccredited as an accreditation agency until 30 June 2016 and thus is authorised to accredit study programmes and internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions by awarding the seal of the Accreditation Council. The fulfilment of the required conditions was confirmed by the resolutions of the Accreditation Council on 23 February 2012 and 28 June 2012. As part of the fulfilment of conditions for the reaccreditation and also inspired by the recommendations of the expert group, the agency has further developed its procedures and processes since 2012. At the same time it was a response to the current guidelines of the Accreditation Council and the Conference of Culture Ministers (KMK).

ACQUIN has continuously carried out the evaluation and accreditation of study programmes since its last accreditation. The number of system accreditation procedures and international programme accreditation procedures has significantly increased. The new task includes institutional accreditation procedures of foreign higher education institutions and certification procedures for advanced training programmes.

The implementation of all quality assurance procedures in Germany and abroad is based on the international standards of good practice, particularly on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Based on the ESG, ACQUIN undergoes the evaluation by the Accreditation Council and simultaneously applies for the renewal of the full membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) and the continuation of the registration in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

The current application is structured according to the Standards of Part 3 of the ESG in the version dated May 2015 which contains the details on organisation, operation and quality assurance of accreditation agencies. The presentations and explanations of the implementation of the Standards and Guidelines from Part 3 of the ESG refer to Part 2 that contains external quality assurance guidelines. The Standards of Part 1 concerning the internal quality assurance are also taken into account. The criteria of the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of agencies are taken into consideration with the respective Standards of the ESG.

The self-evaluation report primarily addresses scopes of duties, areas of activity and institutional arrangements of ACQUIN, which are the immediate subject of the evaluation for the reaccreditation by the Accreditation Council and the re-registration by the EQAR. Additionally, the report contains a concise presentation of the field of activity of the consulting company ACQUINUS which has existed since 2006. As a subsidiary of ACQUIN, ACQUINUS is an independent and self-supporting limited liability company with a focus on provision of consulting services for higher education institutions and university-related institutions in the areas of education, research and services. The consultancy of ACQUINUS is strictly separated from the evaluations carried out by ACQUIN.

II European Standards and Guidelines

1 Quality Assurance Activities, Strategy and Procedures

Standard 3.1:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance procedures as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement and should translate them into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

The agency ACQUIN regularly carries out procedures of programme and system accreditation on a national level pursuant to the Statute (Annex 1). In addition, it carries out programme and institutional accreditation procedures on an international level. Certification procedures are also offered for advanced training programmes of higher education institutions and other educational organisations.

The areas of activity of ACQUIN are clearly differentiated from those of its subsidiary ACQUINUS. The ACQUINUS GmbH consults higher education institutions and university-related institutions in the areas of education, research and services. During the period under review, the focus of activity of ACQUINUS was on provision of consultancy services to private German universities concerning the preparation for the institutional accreditation by the Science Council and the preparation of universities for system accreditation which respectively was or is carried out by other agencies (Annex 2).

1.1 National Activities and Quality Assurance Procedures

1.1.1 Programme accreditation

Procedures for programme accreditation of study programmes constitute the core area of the operational activity of ACQUIN and are carried out on behalf of the Accreditation Council. Over the period from 2011 to 2015 1907 courses were accredited. The programme accreditation procedure is based on the Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes by the Accreditation Council; the evaluation of the programmes is carried out on the basis of the Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes by the Accreditation Council and the Common Structural Guidelines of the Conference of German Culture Ministers, the respective Structural Guidelines specific to each of the states and the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications (cf. Standards 2.1 and 2.5 of the ESG). The criteria of the Accreditation Council include guidelines formulated in the Standards 1.1. to

1.10 of the ESG. ACQUIN carries out accreditation in the entire range of academic subjects and in all types of higher education institutions.

The evaluation criteria and procedural principles of the accreditation procedures were determined in accordance with the Statute of the accreditation commission (Annex 1) which consists of representatives from universities, advanced technical colleges, art and music academies, as well as professional practice and students. In the current accreditation commission (term of office 2015-2017) a representative of a foreign university is selected in the group of higher education institutions (Annex 3). The programme accreditation procedure is defined in the Quality Management Manual of ACQUIN (Annex 4) and is shown in the "Guidelines for Programme Accreditation Procedures" (Annex 5) which is made available to the universities for the preparation for the accreditation (cf. Standard 2.2 of the ESG). There is a three-step process which includes the examination of the accreditation documents submitted by the university to the agency ACQUIN, the on-site visit by an expert group with a subsequent recommendation for a decision, and the decision by the accreditation commission (cf. Standard 2.3 of the ESG).

a) Compilation of self-documentation

The higher education institution submits an accreditation application or requests ACQUIN to issue an accreditation offer. ACQUIN informs the higher education institution of the procedure sequence and conducts a preliminary discussion at the request of the higher education institution. The aim of the preliminary discussion is to inform the higher education institution of the procedure and to explain the individual process steps, the procedure duration and fees, as well as criteria of evaluation and the possible outcomes of the procedure. This also clarifies queries of the higher education institution concerning the procedures and compilation of the self-documentation. Additional preparation and support of higher education institutions is carried out through the provision of supporting materials (Guidelines and Handouts, Annexes 5 and 6) and continuous feedback during the preparation of the evaluation procedures, for example, questions regarding the compilation of the self-documentation. The guideline provides the structure for the self-documentation that is submitted by the universities and which is to be divided into the chapters "Objectives", "Concept", "Implementation" and "Quality Management" of a study programme. The self-documentation of the university is reviewed upon receipt by the head office of ACQUIN in terms of its completeness and formal correctness. If appropriate, subsequent missing documents are requested.

b) Appointment of the expert group (cf. Standard 2.4 of the ESG)

The quality of any accreditation is crucially dependent on the quality of the experts. In order to ensure the appointment of professionally qualified experts, the task of the expert selection lies with the permanent expert committees. The following expert committees are established by the accreditation commission (Annex 3):

1. Expert Committee for Architecture and Planning
2. Expert Committee for Humanities, Linguistic and Cultural Studies
3. Expert Committee for Computer Science
4. Expert Committee for Engineering Sciences
5. Expert Committee for Art, Music and Design
6. Expert Committee for Mathematics and Natural Sciences
7. Expert Committee for Medicine and Health Sciences

8. Expert Committee for System Accreditation
9. Expert Committee for Economics, Law and Social Sciences

The expert committee appoints one of its members to be in charge for each procedure; the appointment of the experts is guided by the procedures defined in the "Procedures and Criteria for the Appointment of Experts" (Annex 7). The document adopted by the accreditation commission is provided to all members of the expert committees. The person in charge suggests experts for the appointment to the expert committee based on the self-documentation of the higher education institution.

ACQUIN ensures that the expert group consists of at least two (usually three) representatives of science and at least one representative of both professional practice and students in every procedure. The expert group must have relevant professional expertise in order to depict the profile of the study programmes; in case of a bundle procedure, the expert group is expanded accordingly so that each study programme can be evaluated by at least two relevant experts. In addition, the evaluation of study programmes with a special structural profile (distance learning, part-time or continuing education courses) is carried out by the expert group that includes professional representatives with experience in relevant field of programme models. Study programmes that are offered both at universities and at advanced technical colleges should also involve a representative of science of the respective other type of higher education institution. ACQUIN ensures the impartiality of the experts by appointing university representatives who do not come from the same federal land in which the university that is subject to evaluation has its registered office, and the so called "cross-evaluations" are avoided. The experts also have to sign a declaration of impartiality (Annex 8) which excludes individual biases.

The higher education institution has the right to appeal and may object to the appointment of experts in writing within ten working days after the receipt of the expert list. Objections are justified in cases of a potential bias or lack of professional competence. The appeal is decided by the expert committee.

c) On-site visit (cf. Standard 2.3 of the ESG)

The experts receive the self-documentation of the university at least four weeks prior to the date of the visit. At the same time they are sent the documents for preparation which explain the tasks and role of the experts as well as the context of the accreditation procedure (Annexes 5, 9-14). When the documents are sent out, the responsible consultant contacts the experts in order to clarify questions regarding the sent documents and offers them to discuss the preparation for the visit (Annex 11).

The on-site visits begin with an internal meeting of the expert group that lasts at least one and a half hours, in bundle accreditations the timeframe is accordingly adjusted (Annex 13). During the preliminary meeting, the experts are prepared for their role and function in the procedure. In addition, open questions are discussed with regard to the programmes that are evaluated, specifications and rules are explained. The structure of the expert report of ACQUIN (Annex 14) which lists the criteria of the Accreditation Council and transforms the guiding questions into the evaluation is used in the preliminary discussion as a guideline for the preparation of the discussion between experts and university representatives.

Then the visit to the university itself takes place and includes two meetings with teaching staff and directors of the study programme, one discussion with students from the relevant study programme and one discussion with the university administration, as well as a visit to premises used for the study programme. The preparation for each following round of discussions is carried out between the meetings; the conversations are also recorded by the consultants, these discussion notes are used for the preparation of further discussions and the final discussion, they are also used by the experts for when writing the expert report. During the final internal meeting the expert group comes to an agreement on the recommended decision in accordance with the Rules of the Accreditation Council and, where appropriate, formulates the requirements and recommendations, as well as points of criticisms in case of the programme accreditation refusal.

d) Expert report and decision (cf. Standard 2.3 of the ESG)

The expert report is subsequently created by the experts and edited by the agency. The report, evaluation of binding criteria and recommendation for a decision must be borne by the entire group of experts; where applicable, dissenting standpoints are to be represented. The final report is submitted to experts for coordination and correction. The coordinated expert report is subsequently sent to the experts electronically, with the invitation to participate in a survey for experts (cf. Standard 3.6 of the ESG).

The expert report coordinated by the experts is given to the university without a final recommended decision. Subsequently, within a specified period of time the university has the opportunity to express its opinion on objective corrections and to respond to the evaluations made by the expert group. The report of the expert group and the comments of the university are the basis for the statement of the competent expert committee (Annex 15) that is used by the accreditation commission. The decision based on the report of the expert group and the comments of the university and expert committee is finally made by the accreditation commission and is guided by the rules of the Accreditation Council, the Common Structural Guidelines of the German Conference of Culture Ministers, the Structural Guidelines specific to each of the states and the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications. Deviations in the decision of the accreditation recommendation of the experts and / or the responsible expert committee must be comprehensibly justified by the accreditation commission.

e) Report, follow-up measures and appeal procedure (cf. Standards 2.3, 2.6 and 2.7 of the ESG)

Following the meeting of the accreditation commission, the protocol, the appropriate documents and decision letters (Annex 16) are drafted and sent to the higher education institutions. If applicable, the decision letters include the time limits within which the fulfilment of conditions must be proven by the higher education institution. The higher education institution can also apply for a suspension of the procedure for a maximum of 18 months within the specified time limit. After the decision, the expert reports with the decisions of the accreditation commission and a schematic overview of the study programme are published on the homepage of ACQUIN and entered into the database of accredited study programmes of the Accreditation Council. The involved experts are informed by post of the decision in each accreditation procedure.

The documents submitted by the higher education institution in order to prove the fulfilment of conditions at first are referred to the competent expert committee which carries out the evaluation

and presents an opinion in form of a draft decision to the accreditation commission. The decision concerning the fulfilment of conditions is made by the accreditation commission. The higher education institutions are also obligated to report substantial modifications to a study programme during the period of accreditation by ACQUIN. If appropriate, the expert committee decides on the need of the renewed evaluation due to a reduction in quality following the change; necessary new accreditation decisions follow the depicted procedures for the programme accreditation.

The higher education institution can file an appeal against the accreditation decision - in accordance with the appeal procedure (Annex 17) - in writing within 20 working days from the date of the decision letter. The university appeal of the accreditation is presented to the accreditation commission at its next meeting. The accreditation commission then reviews all decision-relevant procedural, factual and legal issues, as well as the evaluation underlying the accreditation decision with special emphasis on the grounds of appeal. On this basis, it makes a decision and draws a conclusion about the accreditation once again. If the accreditation commission finds the appeal justified, it rectifies it. If the accrediting commission doesn't rectify the appeal, the appeal committee of ACQUIN (Annex 3) is presented with the appeal for examination and comment. The appeal committee consists of five members, with one member from an advanced technical college, university, art and music academy, professional practice and students. The members of the appeal committee shall not belong to the board, the accreditation commission or one of the expert committees.

The opinion of the appeal committee is considered in the course of the final decision making by the accreditation commission. If the appeal committee finds the appeal to be inadmissible, it is rejected. If the appeal committee determines that the appeal is fully or partially well-founded, it formulates a recommendation for the annulment of the decision of the accreditation commission and the justification for it. It refers the appeal with the comment back to the accreditation commission. If a new decision needs to be made, the reasons of the appeal committee are considered by the accreditation commission. However, if the appeal committee finds the appeal unfounded, it confirms the decision of the accreditation commission in a statement.

1.1.2 System accreditation

The accreditation of quality assurance systems in the area of teaching and learning (system accreditation) is one of the core procedures of the accreditation agency ACQUIN. The procedures are carried out according to the Standards in Part 2 of the ESG and the Procedural Rules and Criteria for System Accreditation Procedures by the Accreditation Council. The criteria of the Accreditation Council include guidelines formulated in the Standards 1.1. to 1.10 of the ESG. They also include the compulsory application of the Common Structural Guidelines and the Structural Guidelines specific to each of the states, as well as the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications.

The objectives and structure of the procedure are summarised in the Guidelines for System Accreditation Procedures (Annex 18) which were developed in accordance with the mission statement of the agency (Annex 19). The system accreditation procedure focuses on the effectiveness of internal quality assurance procedures of the universities in the area of teaching and learning (Standard 2.1 of the ESG). Study programmes are accredited if they have already been subject to internal quality assurance as specified by the accredited system. As part of the internal quality management of each higher education institution, the criteria of the Accreditation Council for programme accreditation procedures and therefore also Part 1 of the ESG must be fully taken into account.

The objectives and the implementation of procedures are clearly identified for all stakeholders. In addition to the Guidelines for System Accreditation Procedures, the higher education institutions usually receive a written offer, procedure sequence, costs and outcome of the procedure, as well as further information (Annex 20). Moreover, a preliminary talk with the higher education institution is provided in a binding manner. The underlying conditions are agreed upon in written form in an agreement between the higher education institution and ACQUIN (Annex 21). Future developments of the procedure and appropriate flexibilities can be made within the framework of the experimentation clause of the Accreditation Council. Since ACQUIN has only carried out first-time system accreditation procedures for the initial demonstration of the effectiveness of the university quality assurance systems, and the rules of the Accreditation Council do not systematically include them, there haven't been any relevant experiences yet (Standard 2.2 of the ESG).

a) Preparation of the procedure (admittance for the system accreditation)

The first-time system accreditation procedure firstly includes the admittance of the higher education institution to the procedure. The admittance request must specify that the higher education institution has a university quality assurance system in the area of teaching and learning and at least one study programme has already gone through this system. The assessment of the admittance requirements is carried out by the Expert Committee for System Accreditation. The Expert Committee for System Accreditation shall also include all stakeholder groups (representatives of science, representatives of professional practice and representatives of students), including at least one member from a foreign university (Annex 3). Similar to the procedure of a programme accreditation, a person in charge is assigned for each procedure; he prepares an opinion of the expert committee based on the application documents, which is then coordinated by the expert committee. The accreditation commission decides on admittance. Once admitted, the agreement is drafted.

b) Compilation of self-documentation (Standard 2.3 of the ESG)

The higher education institution compiles the self-report based on the admittance application. The relevant preparation and support for universities is carried out through the provision of supportive materials (Annexes 18 and 22) and continuous feedback during the preparation of the evaluation procedure, for example, to questions about the compilation of the self-documentation. The guideline determines the structure of the self-documentation to be submitted by the higher education institutions, and it must be divided into the chapters "Quality Policy", "Quality Assurance Processes", "Information and Communication" and "Review and Further Development". The self-documentation of the higher education institution is checked upon receipt by the agency ACQUIN for completeness and formal correctness. If appropriate, subsequent missing documents are requested.

c) Appointment and preparation of experts (Standard 2.2 and 2.4 of the ESG)

The "Procedures and Criteria for Expert Appointment" are applied in the procedures (Annex 7). The expert groups are usually appointed by the Expert Committee for System Accreditation, include at least five people and have representatives of all stakeholder groups. Again, at least one member of the expert group must be a representative of a foreign institution. In three of the hitherto 18 completed procedures more than one representative with international expertise has been involved. Size, focus and professional heterogeneity of the evaluated institution are taken into consideration when the experts are nominated. The appointed representatives of science have experience in the

design of decision-making and implementation processes in higher education institutions, particularly in the area of teaching and learning. They have management experience and are familiar with different organisational structures and different institutional cultures. In addition to representatives of science, the expert group includes a representative of professional practice and a representative of students with experience in university self-administration. When the experts are appointed one ensures that both experienced and new experts make up the group. In order to sensitise the committees of the accreditation agency ACQUIN for system accreditation procedures, members of the expert committee and the accreditation commission participate in system accreditation procedures as experts in order to increase the expertise of the agency in terms of the specific requirements of these procedures. The expert committee strives to attract the experts from higher education institutions that are already system accredited.

ACQUIN ensures the impartiality of the experts by making sure that appointed university representatives do not come from the same federal land in which the higher education institution that is subject to evaluation has its registered office, and so the called "cross-evaluations" are avoided. The experts also have to sign a declaration of impartiality (Annex 8), which excludes individual biases. The university has the right to appeal and may object to the appointment of experts in writing within ten working days after the receipt of the expert list. Objections are justified in cases of a potential bias or lack of professional competence. The appeal is decided by the expert committee.

The experts receive the self-documentation of the university at least four weeks prior to the date of the visit. At the same time they are sent the documents for preparation with the explanation of the context of the accreditation procedure (Annexes 18, 22-25). After the documents are delivered, the responsible consultant contacts the experts in order to clarify questions about the sent documents and offers them a discussion for the preparation for the first visit.

In order to prepare the experts for their role and responsibilities, ACQUIN provides the experts with a Handout (Annex 26). In addition to the written initial training, the experts will be prepared for the procedure during a four-hour preparatory workshop before the first on-site visit. This approach is based on the practice of the Scientific Council for the institutional accreditation of private higher education institutions. Prior to the evaluation and between the on-site visits, the exchange among experts is continuously carried out and is coordinated by the agency. If required and applicable, teleconferences are initiated and moderated by the consultants. During both visits, procedures are individually developed and coordinated with the higher education institution and they provide sufficient space for communication among the experts (Annex 27).

d) On-site visits (Standard 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 of the ESG)

The external evaluation includes two on-site visits and an evaluation of the selected samples. The first visit is primarily aimed to inform the experts about the higher education institution as well as its management and quality assurance system. In addition, samples are selected for in-depth evaluation. After the first visit, the experts prepare a report summarising the results. Herein is shown which documents the higher education institution has submitted before the second inspection and which samples were selected, the selection is justified by the experts. The report of the first visit is submitted to the expert committee and the accreditation commission for confirmation. In justified cases, the decision made on the selection of samples by the experts can be changed.

The second visit is the in-depth analysis of the management and quality assurance system for teaching and learning at the university. It is structured so that the experts receive a comprehensive insight into the quality assurance and management system and speak with various status groups of the higher education institution (higher education institution administration and equal opportunity representatives, quality assurance managers, teaching staff, students, administrative staff, and, if applicable, others). Sufficient space for the experts' internal exchange is scheduled between the interviews, at the beginning and upon the completion of the evaluation. At the debriefing session, the experts draw up a recommendation for a decision and prepare the expert report based on it. The recommendation for a decision is based on the Criteria for System Accreditation of the Accreditation Council. This also includes the Common Structural Guidelines and Structural Guidelines specific to each of the states, and takes into account the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications, as well as the Standards 1.1. to 1.10 of the ESG. Where appropriate, the expert group formulates the requirements and recommendations, as well as points of criticisms in case of a refusal for accreditation of the internal quality assurance system.

e) Expert report and decision (Standard 2.5 of the ESG)

Subsequently, an expert report is prepared based on the ACQUIN structure of the expert report (Annex 23), and it is supported by the entire group of experts and includes the evaluation of the criteria of the Accreditation Council. The final expert report is submitted to experts for coordination and correction. The coordinated expert report is subsequently sent to the experts electronically, together with the invitation to participate in a survey for experts (cf. Standard 3.6 of the ESG).

After the coordination by the experts, the expert report is sent to the higher education institution without a final recommendation for a decision. Subsequently, the higher education institution has the opportunity to express its opinion and to respond to the evaluations made by the expert group. The report of the expert group and the opinion of the university are the basis for the opinion on the system accreditation by the expert committee. After consulting the expert committee, the decision is made by accreditation commission of ACQUIN based on the expert report and the opinions of the university and expert committee. The decision of the accreditation commission is made based on the procedural and decision-making rules as well as the Criteria for the System Accreditation Procedures of the Accreditation Council, the Common Structural Guidelines, the respective Structural Guidelines specific to each of the states and the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Qualifications. Deviations in the decision of the accreditation recommendation of the experts and / or the responsible expert committee must be comprehensibly justified by the accreditation commission.

f) Follow-up measures and appeal procedures (Standard 2.3, 2.6 and 2.7 of the ESG)

Following the meeting of the accreditation commission, the protocol, appropriate decision letters and documents are prepared. In case of an accreditation with requirements, the requirements are precisely indicated and the deadline is provided (usually nine months) for the higher education institution to prove that the requirements are met. The verification of the fulfilment of the requirements is carried out by the expert committee; the determination of the fulfilment of the requirements is the responsibility of the accreditation commission.

In case of a non-accreditation, the points of criticism that have led to this decision and any further points of criticism are clearly identified. The higher education institution can then apply for suspen-

sion of the proceedings within an appropriate period. It is possible as a rule in the period of twelve months, in some cases up to 24 months. In this case the submitted application for reinstatement of the higher education institution contains the representation of the implementation of the points of criticism. The expert committee makes a decision based on the submitted documents, if necessary, on repeating steps (e.g. experts' engagement, on-site visit). The implementation of the points of criticism is verified and then a decision on the system accreditation is brought about by the accreditation commission.

In case of an unconditional accreditation or accreditation with conditions, as well as a decision of non-accreditation, recommendations and suggestions are forwarded to the higher education institutions and can help optimise the quality assurance system. The implementation of the recommendations and suggestions is reviewed during the interim evaluation (after the first half of the first system accreditation period) or during the system reaccreditation. ACQUIN has developed a concept for the interim evaluation (Annex 28) which supports the higher education institutions and the committees of ACQUIN in this process.

Higher education institutions are also obligated to notify ACQUIN about significant changes in their quality assurance system in the area of teaching and learning during the accreditation period. The expert committee determines if the result of the change, where appropriate, caused reduction in quality and if a renewed evaluation is needed; necessary new accreditation decisions follow the illustrated system accreditation procedures.

During the system accreditation the higher education institutions also have the option to launch the appeal procedure (Annex 17) in writing against the accreditation decision within 20 working days from the date of the decision letter. The appeal procedure corresponds to the programme accreditation.

g) Reports and publication obligations (Standard 2.6)

The expert reports are published on the website of ACQUIN. Due to the fact that till 7 December 2011 only the decision, summary of the opinions and names of the experts were to be published in Germany, only reports that meet these national requirements are stored (ten reports). In all procedures with the agreements dated 7 December 2011 or later, a publication of the complete report is mandatory. A summary of the report is entered into the database of accredited higher education institutions; there is also information about the respective study programmes of the higher education institution with accreditation deadlines. Before the publication of the expert report, the factual corrections marked in the opinion of the university are incorporated.

1.1.3 Certification procedure

In addition to the accreditation of study programmes and quality management systems in the areas of teaching and learning, ACQUIN ensures that the certification procedures achieve a similar programme quality in continuing education programmes. So far, two procedures have been carried out. The evaluation and certification of higher education and non-university continuing education programmes pursue the overall goal of verification of such courses in terms of their compatibility with university studies, comparability of skills and integration into the German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (DQR, levels 6 to 8). The certification of offered courses shall facilitate the assessment of the quality of these programmes for higher education institutions, students and em-

players within the Guiding Principle of Lifelong Learning and relevant Guidelines of Conference of Culture Ministers for Eligibility of Skills Acquired outside Higher Education.

Therefore, within the framework of the certification procedure of ACQUIN, the evaluation is carried out in accordance with the Procedures for Programme Accreditation (Annex 29, 30). Continuing education programmes, wherever such application is reasonably possible, are evaluated according to "Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation" and assigned a level of the DQR (German Qualifications Framework). This ensures that the acquired skills can be more easily credited in subsequent university studies and their comparability is provided with regard to the workload and contribution to a defined employability.

The evaluation procedure of continuing education programmes structurally follows the programme accreditation procedure (Standards 2.1 to 2.7 of the ESG) and thus relies on a "peer review" by professorial expert representatives and representatives of students and professional practice. Both the preparation of the self-documentation and the appointment of the experts by an expert committee, as well as further steps of monitoring by the committees of ACQUIN reproduce the structure of a programme accreditation procedure. However, differences arise with regard to the actual evaluation. Due to the limited size of continuing education courses, which partly correspond only to the extent of a course module, the evaluation is defined as a rule in reports in conjunction with an online conference between programme carriers and experts. An on-site visit is carried out in exceptional cases, provided that the expert group deems it necessary or the type of training programme with equipment requires an inspection.

The process of the certification procedure in case of a successful evaluation is congruent with the process of the programme accreditation procedure (cf. in this regard "Programme Accreditation") with the difference that the decision on the certification of continuing education programmes does not imply the award of the seal of the Accreditation Council.

1.2 International Activities and Quality Assurance Procedures

According to the overall concept of the agency ACQUIN, the promotion and development of quality assurance in higher education is understood not as a nationally limited task but as a global project. In accordance with the idea of the Bologna Process, ACQUIN thus contributes to the implementation of quality assurance procedures in the European Higher Education Area and other parts of the world. One of the focal areas is the external quality assurance for study programmes and universities in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, North Africa and the Arab world (Annex 31). ACQUIN is actively involved in international and European networks in order to achieve approximation of quality standards, comparability of quality assurance procedures and a mutual understanding with respect to various quality cultures within the European Higher Education Area.

These include the membership in the "European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (ENQA), "Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education" (CEENQA), "International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education" (IN-QAAHE) and "European University Association" (EUA). The participation in the activities of the networks depends, on the one hand, on the reciprocal exchange of experience, on the other hand, on the systematic analysis and evaluation of the results and effects of quality assurance procedures (Standard 3.4 of the ESG).

In addition to the membership in the respective networks, the registration in the "European Quality Assurance Register" and "National Register of accreditation agencies in the Republic of Kazakhstan" (Annex 32, 33) is an important prerequisite for the international activities of ACQUIN. Moreover, there are bilateral agreements that foster cooperation and exchange between the agencies in some countries. Among the most important cooperation partners are the Russian agency "The National Centre for Public Accreditation" (NCPA) and the Kazakh Agency "Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency in Education" (IQAA), there is a close exchange in the assignment of experts and in the implementation of joint projects with them (Annex 34). Furthermore, ACQUIN is authorised to carry out audits at universities and advanced technical colleges in Austria in accordance with § 22 Part 2 of the HS-QSG (Annex 33 Excerpt Regulation).

1.2.1 Programme accreditations abroad

145 study programmes were evaluated abroad based on the ESG and national criteria in the period from 2011 to 2015. Furthermore, the procedural rules of the German programme accreditation were used (Standard 2.2 of ESG). The programme accreditation procedure at foreign universities procedurally follows the procedures that apply to the evaluations of programmes in universities in Germany (cf. Programme Accreditation). The provided three-step process includes ACQUIN evaluation of the accreditation documents submitted by the university, on-site visit by an expert group with subsequent recommendation for a decision, and decision made by the accreditation commission.

a) Documentation preparation (Standard 2.3 ESG)

There is a high demand for advice with regard to the creation of self-documentation at foreign universities due to different national underlying conditions and backgrounds. The preparation and support of these institutions is carried out by ACQUIN through providing guidance material (Annex 36), preliminary discussions for the explanation of the procedures and continuous feedback during the preparation of the evaluation procedure. The self-documentation of the higher education institution is checked upon receipt by the office of ACQUIN for completeness, formal correctness and compliance with the ESG. The higher education institution receives a first feedback after receipt of the documents and any missing documents are indicated.

b) Expert group, on-site visit and the expert report (Standards 2.2., 2.3, 2.4 of the ESG)

ACQUIN ensures that in every procedure the expert group consists of at least two representatives of science and at least one representative of professional practice and one representative of students (Standard 2.4 of the ESG). The competent expert committee of ACQUIN is responsible for the appointment of the experts. Each expert group is characterised by professional and subject matter expertise in regard to the specific profile of the programme that is accredited. If possible, groups are also composed of technical representatives with the knowledge of the higher education area, in which the assessment is conducted. In some countries, for example, in Kazakhstan mandatory national experts are also integrated as additional experts into the groups. In the bundling of several study programmes for accreditation, the expert group is put together so that every accredited study programme is sufficiently taken into consideration.

All the experts are sent the self-documentation components of the university and other documents for the preparation at least four weeks prior to the date of the on-site visit; this documents explain their role and responsibilities as well as the context of the accreditation procedure abroad (Annex

36-39). After the delivery of the documents, the responsible consultant of the agency contacts the experts to clarify questions about the sent documentation. The organisation and conduct of the on-site visit and the tasks of the experts are also discussed. In case of the first accreditation in a country or in cases of complex course bundle, if necessary, pre-meeting between the experts and the consultants of the office is carried out. This so called first on-site visit usually takes one day in Germany and serves as the first exchange within the expert group and the preparation for the university system that is subject to evaluation.

Special features of the on-site visits abroad should be highlighted: the intensive preparation of the experts on-site, the comprehensive and semi-standardised procedures are the reasons why the procedures carried out abroad are usually accompanied by two consultants of the agency. The on-site inspection first includes several hours of internal briefing in the evening before the visit. At this stage backgrounds of the procedure are described, role expectations of the experts are outlined and unresolved questions with regard to the evaluation of the study programmes are discussed. This discussion of the study programmes is structured according to the ESG. In addition, however, specific aspects of each higher education institution and higher education area that are beyond the standardisation are discussed in each procedure. The consideration of uniform standards and the recognition of individual peculiarities in a procedure are strengths of the quality-aligned accreditation procedure of ACQUIN. In preparation for the talks with representatives of the university, the experts are therefore invited to name the strengths and weaknesses of the study programmes or the entire university besides unresolved questions.

After the internal preparation of the expert group, discussions and visits take place at the university during the next two consecutive days. Based on a structured ACQUIN schedule (Annex 39) the discussions are conducted in coordination with the higher education institution with all stakeholder groups. These include the higher education institution management, programme managers, teaching staff, representatives of the examination office, quality management department and student administration. Moreover, discussions with representatives of students, graduates and employers are conducted. The interviews are supplemented by an inspection of the premises, laboratories, library and optional access to course materials, exams or evaluations of quality management.

The experts have the opportunity to reflect on the received information during the internal meetings between the discussion blocks. Based on the discussions and visits, the consultants of the agency create a protocol of the visit, which, on the one hand, forms the basis for the joint recommendation for a decision in the final meeting of the expert group, and, on the other hand, is used by experts for the report preparation. The expert group jointly develops preliminary points of criticism, requirements and recommendations that are recorded in the report in the final meeting. In the final meeting, the university administration is informed on the initial evaluation by the speaker of the expert group, stating the tendency of accreditation recommendation of the experts, however, without disclosing concrete evaluation results.

Subsequent to the on-site visit, a report with a recommendation for a decision is jointly drafted by the experts; in addition, it includes improvement suggestions that are considered helpful for the further development of the programme or higher education institution. These suggestions are based on a qualitative assessment and are not exhausted in the determination of compliance with fixed Standards (Standard 2.5 of the ESG), they are provided as support for the higher education institutions and higher education systems that sometimes partially need to define their own position in the

EHEA. The coordinated expert report is sent to experts electronically and is accompanied by the invitation to participate in a survey for experts (cf. Standard 3.6 of the ESG).

The higher education institution receives coordinated expert report without the recommended decision and has a chance to state factual corrections in an opinion and to respond to evaluations made by the expert group. The report of the expert group and the opinion of the university serve as a basis for an opinion of the competent expert committee used by the accreditation commission. It makes a decision on accreditation (with / without conditions). In case of an accreditation refusal, the higher education institution has the opportunity to apply for a suspension of the proceedings.

c) Accreditation commission, decision making and publication (Standard 2.5, 2.6 und 2.7 ESG)

In conclusion, the decision is made by the accreditation commission based on the report of the expert group and the opinions of university and expert committee. Its decision is based on the Standards of the first Part of the ESG (Standards 2.5 of the ESG). For decisions on programme accreditation procedures abroad, the commission is also provided with the information on the specific nature of the respective higher education system (e.g. on national legislation, understanding of quality, status of universities, social and political conditions) so that an appropriate assessment of all decision-relevant circumstances is possible.

Following the meeting of the accreditation commission and the preparation of the protocol, the written reports and documents for the respective procedure are drafted and sent to the universities in German and English (depending on the region, e.g. also in Russian). After completing the procedure, the expert reports with the decisions of the accreditation commission and a brief overview of the programme are published on the homepage of ACQUIN. The involved experts are informed by mail on the decision in each accreditation procedure.

The relevant data of the study programmes are submitted annually to EQAR. In cases where conditions were imposed, the university must prove their fulfilment within twelve months. It differs from the period of nine months in accreditation procedures of ACQUIN in Germany due to the necessary translations, longer mail routes and to some extent complex decision-making and committees at foreign universities. The accreditation agency ACQUIN stays in contact with the universities during the process of fulfilment of conditions in order to clarify procedural questions. The fulfilment of the conditions is determined based on the submitted documents and the opinion of the expert committee with the decision of the accreditation commission.

In order to sensitise the committees of the agency ACQUIN for quality assurance abroad, members of the expert committees recurrently participate in accreditation procedures abroad as experts or observers in order to increase the expertise of the Agency with regard to the special requirements of evaluations abroad. Currently one of the members of the accreditation commission is also a representative of a foreign university.

1.2.2 Institutional accreditation procedures abroad

In addition to programme accreditation procedures, institutional accreditation procedures are another type of evaluation procedures carried out abroad. The evaluation of study programmes is aimed at determination of quality assurance standards on the level of study programmes; the institutional accreditation procedure focuses on the organisation and functioning of the entire university.

The areas of teaching and learning, research and internal university self-management are included into the evaluation procedure. Analysis and assessment are carried out in terms of decision-making, institutional structures, resources, effectiveness of strategic management, internal quality assurance tools, application of teaching and learning methods, as well as research direction of the university.

The Standards and Guidelines of Part 1 of the ESG are the basis for evaluation for the institutional accreditation; moreover, the evaluation takes into consideration the criteria of "Institutional Accreditation of Non-state Higher Education Institutions" (section B. IV) of the German Science Council (Annex 40, 41). National legal requirements in each country of destination of the evaluation are not excluded and are given the priority.

Structurally, the procedure of institutional accreditation is based on the procedure of system accreditation (cf. section System accreditation), with the exemption from a compliance inspection, and only one on-site visit to the university is usually needed. In the period from 2011 to 2015 institutional accreditation procedures have been conducted in two universities in two countries.

2 Official Status

Standard 3.2:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

a) Legal personality

ACQUIN is registered in the register of the local court Bayreuth since 5 March 2001 as an association under No. 1323 (Annex 42). The first and second chairman and the treasurer are Executive Board within the meaning of § 26 of the Civil Code. Each member of the Board has sole power of representation in accordance with § 26 of the Civil Code (§ 7 Part 2 of the Statute of ACQUIN).

b) Non-profit status

According to § 2 of the Statute of ACQUIN, the purpose of the association ACQUIN has been recognised by the respective tax office Bayreuth as non-profit; this excludes any profit making. The tax office Bayreuth audits the non-profit status annually (Annex 43) after presentation of the financial statements and ad hoc basis for each amendment adopted by the General Assembly. The financial statements include the appropriation of funds that proves the prompt allocation of resources for privileged purposes (Annex 44).

c) Accreditation agency for the entire range of academic subjects and across various types of higher education institutions

The §4 of the Statute (Annex 1) allows primarily state, state-approved and private higher education institutions in Germany and abroad to be members of the association. Further university associations, commercial enterprises, professional associations, chambers of commerce and public institutions are allowed to be members of ACQUIN. The Statute defines four member groups that are

selected into the accreditation commission: the member group of universities, member group of advanced technical colleges, member group of art and music academies, and the member group of professional practice.

Meanwhile, the members of ACQUIN include over 160 higher education institutions; they consist of mainly domestic higher education institutions as well as five non-university institutions (Annex 45). Of these, approximately one third is from a university member group and two-thirds belong to the member group of advanced technical colleges. As to the regional distribution of member institutions of ACQUIN, one should note that universities, advanced technical colleges, private universities, as well as art and music academies are represented from all federal states of Germany.

d) Recognition of ACQUIN

ACQUIN was first accredited by the Accreditation Council in 2001 for a period of five years. The first reaccreditation was granted on 1 July 2006 and was valid till 30 September 2011; the second reaccreditation was granted on 8 June 2011 is valid till 30 June 2016. As part of the application for the reaccreditation, the Accreditation Council temporary extended the accreditation till 30 September 2016. ACQUIN has been approved by the Accreditation Council for the implementation of system accreditation procedures since 2008.

Based on the decision of the reaccreditation of ACQUIN by the Accreditation Council, full membership of the agency in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was reconfirmed in 2012 and extended for five years. In 2008, ACQUIN has been included into the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). After extension of the full membership of ENQA, the listing in the register has been extended until 31 January 2016.

The Federal Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) of Switzerland authorised ACQUIN to carry out applications for accreditation from the Swiss advanced technical colleges on its behalf on 17 January 2008. ACQUIN is also entitled to carry out audits at universities and colleges in Austria in accordance with § 22 part 2 of the HS-QSG (Annex 35). ACQUIN is entitled to accredit courses and universities in Kazakhstan based on the listing in the National Register of accreditation agencies of Kazakhstan (Annex 33).

3 Independence

Standard 3.3:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

3.1 Organisational Independence

According to the Statute, ACQUIN is free from state interference and is independent in the spirit of academic traditions. In accordance with § 6 part 1 of the Statute of ACQUIN (Annex 1), the bodies of the association with its head office in Bayreuth are the Executive Board, the General Assembly and the accreditation commission; the committees are the expert committees, the expert groups and the appeal committee (§ 6 part 2).

The Board of ACQUIN is elected by the General Assembly every three years and it is independent from members and any outside influence in its decisions. ACQUIN is a member-supported organisation; however, there is no relationship between the member universities and the association. The work of all members of the bodies and committees is provided on a voluntary basis. In their work they are bound by the Statute of ACQUIN, Code of Ethics (Annex 46) and generally applicable legal regulations. The managing director who heads the office of the association is appointed by the Board to which he reports. The independence of ACQUIN is ensured by the legal form of the association, internal organisation and decision-making structure (Annex 47), as well as by the non-profit character. The recognition as a non-profit organisation excludes a profit motive and is carried out by the tax authority Bayreuth (Annex 42).

The Accreditation Council exercises legal supervision over ACQUIN according to the law concerning the establishment of a foundation "Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany". There is no other supervision over ACQUIN.

3.2 Operational Independence

Procedural rules and evaluation criteria for accreditation procedures in Germany are defined by the Accreditation Council in the "Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation" dated 8 December 2009 in the current version. The experts employed in ACQUIN and the expert committees, the accreditation commission and the appeals committee of ACQUIN are bound by the rules of the Accreditation Council in their evaluations. The relevant experts and committees of ACQUIN are independent and are not subject to instruction from the outside in their decisions. This is ensured by the internal structure and the procedural rules of ACQUIN. The procedural rules can also be applied when the procedures are carried out abroad.

The accreditation commission is elected by the General Assembly every two years. The appointment of the expert committees is carried out by the accreditation commission every four years. The appointment of experts is done by the expert committees of ACQUIN and the independence of the external experts and any possible conflicts of interest are taken into consideration when the experts are appointed (Annex 7, 48). The experts are obliged to sign a statement of independence (Annex 8).

The independence of decisions is ensured by the multistage nature of the accreditation / certification procedure at ACQUIN. The expert committees appoint the respective expert groups which carry out the evaluation at the university and submit an evaluation report with an accreditation recommendation to the accreditation commission. Subsequently, the expert committee revises the proper implementation of the procedure and based on the opinion of the university prepares an opinion on the procedure which also contains an accreditation recommendation. Sole decision-making body of ACQUIN is the accreditation commission and it makes the accreditation decision based on the presented documents (expert report with an accreditation recommendation, opinion of the university on the report, opinion of the expert committee with an accreditation recommendation).

Accreditation and counseling as parts of the system accreditation procedure are separated within the structure of ACQUIN. Both the higher education institution and ACQUIN explicitly state in the agreements that no counseling was provided by the subsidiary ACQUINUS (Annex 21). The declaration of impartiality in accreditation / certification procedures on the expert level ensures that experts are not involved in counseling and accreditation at the same time.

3.3 Independence of the Official Results

The involvement of students, representatives of science and professional practice is ensured both in the committees of ACQUIN and the expert groups (Annex 1, 7). The independent decision on accreditation / certification is ensured by multistage accreditation procedure of ACQUIN. Both external experts groups and the expert committees provide only a recommendation for accreditation / certification, accreditation / certification decision is made solely by the Accreditation commission of ACQUIN. The members of the accreditation commission and the expert committees do not participate in deliberations and decisions that affect their own institution. This is noted in the protocols.

4 Thematic Analyses

Standard 3.4:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

ACQUIN is dedicated to thematic analysis in many forms. The number of activities connected with this Standard has increased during the reporting period and thus a recommendation of the previous accreditation is implemented. In particular, the exchange of the member higher education institutions within the framework of the annual meeting has proven to be a good practice in the agency. Developments and trends are presented and can be analysed in this context. The member higher education institutions are given the opportunity to exchange ideas on good practices of higher education institutions or to address ongoing problems in order to look for solutions together.

4.1 Annual Reporting

Once a year, the work of ACQUIN is outlined and reflected upon in the annual report. Information about the carried out procedures, projects and initiatives is presented in the annual report as well as in presentations and publications. The annual reports are publicly available (Annex 49). The discussion with the member higher education institutions on the annual report takes place at the annual general assembly.

4.2 Series of Workshops

The general assemblies are regularly flanked by workshops in which academic representatives can introduce issues in question and discuss them with each other. The agendas and the protocols of workshops are attached (Annex 50). ACQUIN continually picks up the demands of the university and provides advice on this in a wider context. The results of the workshops are provided to member universities and the committee members of ACQUIN (expert committees and the accreditation commission) by sending the protocol of the meeting.

The workshop organised in Heidelberg in 2011 had three major topics: study programmes with a special profile demand, system accreditation and internationalisation. The workshop conducted in

Dresden in 2012 dealt with the proposal of German Rectors Conference to introduce a Quality Audit, the participants intensively discussed the advantages and disadvantages in comparison to the system accreditation. The workshop in Frankfurt am Main in 2013 used the first opportunity of exchange among system accredited higher education institutions and higher education institutions undergoing this accreditation procedure in a small circle under the auspices of ACQUIN. Here the opportunity was taken to discuss the Procedural Rules of the Accreditation Council revised in February. The workshop in 2014 in Essen focused on the "System Accreditation 2.0". The possibilities of expanding the system accreditation were discussed sensibly. For instance, universities see possibilities of extending the system accreditation procedure in the areas of evaluation of the management and their internationalisation efforts. The workshop programme in Wiesbaden in 2015 saw the development of the programme accreditation as a priority. The focus was on the rule change announced for the 2016 by the Accreditation Council. In addition, the exchange took place on the topics of "interim evaluation" and "experimentation clause".

4.3 Quality Reporting

Qualitative and quantitative data are obtained and analysed descriptively from the expert reports and accreditation decisions (Annex 49, 51). The surveys of stakeholder groups (experts and higher education institutions) are used to optimise the processes as a whole and to identify areas for improvement. Findings from these surveys are summarised in a quality report and discussed in the bodies of AC-QUIN (executive board, accreditation commission and expert committees). Optimisation measures are derived by the QM team and are discussed in the office and then implemented (Annex 52).

The methods and tools (particularly the Guidelines), which are used in the procedures are reviewed on a regular basis on their practicality and adjusted if necessary. For this purpose, a modification of the procedures and tools is done based on the specific needs and requirements of the university, but without violating the legal framework. For example, the institutional accreditation procedures in this respect can clearly emphasise aspects of internationalisation in the guidelines in order to respond to particularities of higher education institutions.

4.4 Exchange Forums with Other Agencies / Organisations

ACQUIN uses the possibility of exchange with other agencies and organisations. In the period since its last accreditation several joint projects with German and foreign agencies have been implemented. In 2012, a workshop was organised in collaboration with the Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg (evalag) and it served as the exchange for the experts with experience in system accreditation or the evalag audit (Annex 53). The mutual awareness of business structures and practices was provided through the exchange with the Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ) in 2012; so employees could each sit in on accreditation procedures and exchange on current developments within the framework of visits at the respective locations (Annex 54)

A joint programme accreditation procedure with the Russian Agency NCPA was carried out at the Polytechnic University of St. Petersburg in 2015; it was taken as an opportunity for a fundamental exchange of views on the cooperation of a German and a Russian agency. Evaluation of previous activities was undertaken in Moscow at the conference "Quality Enhancing and Relevance of Stu-

dents' Learning Experience"; challenges of harmonisation of quality approaches in European Higher Education Area are paramount for future cooperation (Annex 55).

"Seminar on Cross-Border External Quality Assurance" with a similar focus was organised by EQAR and hosted by ACQUIN in Bayreuth in April 2014 (Annex 54 PROGRAMME EQAR SEMI-NAR IN BAYREUTH). The seminar was held in the course of the project "Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity in the European Higher Education Area" (RIQAA) that was carried out from October 2013 to September 2014 by the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) with support of the EU education programme Lifelong learning. The opportunity for debate on good practice examples and challenges of transboundary evaluations was used in various plenary sessions and parallel workshops.

4.5 Project "External and Internal Quality Assurance of Learning and Teaching through Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures"

ACQUIN supports the project of the International Centre for Higher Education Research Kassel (INCHER) "External and Internal Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning through Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures". The project is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and is set to last 42 months. The project aims, on the one hand, to support the gain of scientific knowledge (in particular in the field of social science academic research, but also for the surrounding areas such as organisational and governance research, innovation and science research), on the other hand, key insights are obtained into the often controversial development and implementation of procedures of external and internal quality assurance that can be used for further development in universities and by higher education policy players.

ACQUIN has granted the INCHER access to all documents and project staff accompanies multiple programme and system accreditation procedures. ACQUIN is a cooperating accreditation agency, so the experts of ACQUIN were interviewed about the previous programme and system accreditation procedures using a standardised questionnaire in 2015. A total of approximately 6,500 individuals were contacted, of which roughly 4,500 were professors and university representatives, 1,300 were representatives of professional practice and about 700 represented students. A workshop is planned for spring 2016 and it will include information on suggestions for quality assurance procedures and work of accreditation and evaluation agencies based on the issues of evaluation of the results and statistical tests. In addition, the plan is to make a comparison of the agencies and survey tools used by the agencies. In this context, specific results for the work of ACQUIN are also expected (Annex 57).

4.6 International Projects and Initiatives

By participating in international projects, initiatives and events, ACQUIN undergoes a constant process of reflection on its work. ACQUIN is actively involved into international projects since its foundation (Annex 31). For instance, ACQUIN is a member of the working group "Impact of Quality Assurance" established by ENQA in 2012. The aim of the working group is to exchange the experiences of agencies in measuring the effects of quality assurance, and then to present them to the public. A publication of the results of the working group is scheduled for late 2015.

ACQUIN was also the subject to the project "Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education" (QACHE), accompanied by ENQA and funded by the Erasmus Mundus programme of the European

Union. In the period from October 2013 to December 2015, studies were conducted in order to see how quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions carry out the procedures for accreditation of study programmes outside their regions. The project aims to improve the international practices of quality assurance.

In addition, ACQUIN was a partner in the project "Making Quality Visible" supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) in Malta in the period from 2013 to 2015. The aim of the project was to build up a comprehensive quality assurance system in the field of education in accordance with European standards and guidelines, which, in addition to higher education institutions, also included training providers and vocational education and training. ACQUIN served as a consultant to the National Commission for Further Education and Higher Education, which is responsible for quality assurance in the education sector in Malta. Within the framework of the project, standards were developed for a holistic quality assurance system with all stakeholders involved.

In the period from 2011 to 2014, ACQUIN was also a project partner in the Tempus project "Accreditation – Pathway to Quality Assurance". The aim of the project was to improve the quality of university education in Syria, to adapt it to international standards and to prepare it for external quality assurance procedures. Within the framework of the project, several workshops were held in Syria. In 2014, a final workshop was held at the ACQUIN branch, where participants exchanged procedures and criteria for accreditation procedures.

In March 2015 ACQUIN participated in the Ukrainian-German Forum "Education, Science, Innovation at Universities: Current Challenges" organized by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) in Kiev and presented the German accreditation system. Following this forum, the Association of Rectors of Ukrainian universities (Vruh) approached the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) with the request to further intensify the exchange in the field of quality assurance with ACQUIN. Then the HRK together with ACQUIN and the University of Konstanz coordinated a follow-up project funded by German Federal Ministry for Education and Research. The contribution of ACQUIN is the training of multipliers for external quality assurance in the area of accreditation of study programmes. The contributions by ACQUIN are intended to serve for the establishment and coordination of a long-term exchange of experience. During a three-week internship, a Ukrainian expert came to Bayreuth and got the opportunity to learn about the German Accreditation System in particular and the Principles of Programme Accreditation in the European Higher Education Area in general; moreover, a two-day workshop on principles of a science-led programme accreditation was prepared and carried out in Kiev in October 2015 (Annex 58).

5 Resources

Standard 3.5:

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources -both personnel and financial resources - in order to carry out their work.

5.1 Finances

In order to sustain its capacity, ACQUIN has formed a reserve fund in the amount of € 395,000 for recurring payments such as salaries and rent for a period of approximately four months according to § 58 No. 6 Tax Code (AO). Thus, the continuous business operation is ensured if payments are late,

etc. The provisions are set up at the end of the year. They amounted to a total of € 303,250 in 2014 (including € 220,350 for ongoing accreditation procedures, € 58,400 for outstanding holidays, as well as € 24,500 for the storage of business documents). If one takes into account the annual results of 2011 – 2014, total earnings amounted to approximately € 13,000 with the average turnover of approximately € 2.4 million for these four years.

ACQUIN does not receive any financial assistance or benefits from Third Parties, 98% of the agency costs are covered by the flat rates of accreditation procedures, the cost calculation of the procedures only breaks even and is non-profit (Annex 59). The generated funds shall be used only for the purposes of the association. The proper use of funds is presented annually by the auditing company checks (Annex 60). The Member Assembly determines the budget for the coming year at its annual meeting. Likewise, the report on discharge by the auditing company is submitted to the Board at the General Assembly. Accreditation / certification procedures are carried out both at member universities as well as non-member universities.

5.2 Personnel

The personnel of the office currently consist of 18 employees (including 17 for an unlimited period and 16 with a university degree) and eight student assistants. Three employees are engaged part-time (1.6 full-time equivalent). ACQUIN uses the collective agreement for the Public Service for Federal States (TV-L) and is a member of the Federal and State Government Employees Retirement Fund (VBL). The personnel management is done in administrative assistance provided by the University of Bayreuth.

As a rule, vacancies are published in the weekly newspaper "Die Zeit". Applicants with qualified university degree must have professional experience in scientific management, especially in teaching and learning and possibly in the area of quality assurance. Profound knowledge and experience in project management, as well as in the thematic areas of quality management and process optimisation are helpful. A training concept (Annex 61) has been prepared for the first six months of employment at ACQUIN.

The feedback and development meetings take place at the end of the probationary period for fixed-term employees - about six months before the end of the agreement - and for permanent employees at the latest after five years of work for ACQUIN. Permanent employees receive the possibility to participate in specific further training and qualification upgrading programmes. ACQUIN supports employees in many ways, either by exemption or special leave (there is no such thing as "educational leave" for public servants in Bavaria) and / or financial support. In addition, event-driven discussions (vacancy, parental leave, etc.) are held when required.

In addition, all employees regularly get the opportunity to participate in national and international events to make pursuing of the latest developments in higher education possible. The events are reported in regularly scheduled team meetings and conference materials are provided for all employees. A detailed statement of the employee participation in national and international events can be found in the annual reports (Annex 49).

5.3 Tangible Assets

On 1 January 2009 ACQUIN rented a listed building in the Brandenburger Straße 2 in Bayreuth not far from the station for an initial ten years. The premises on the ground floor and the first floor have been completely renovated and equipped according to the needs of the agency. Three meeting rooms can be used for board meetings and team meetings.

As of 1 March 2009, the office moved into the new premises. Since then, a total of 630 m² of office space and 150 m² of secondary area are available. In order to make additional space accessible for archiving documents, three basement rooms were renovated in winter semester 2010/11. If additional space requirements arise, ACQUIN can independently expand to the currently unused second floor (200 m²).

Each workstation is equipped with contemporary furniture, computers, and the Internet and telephone connection. Tangible assets of ACQUIN amounted to € 37,035 on 31 December 2014 (Annex 60). It is composed of € 13,153 of office furniture and € 6,251 of office equipment (computers, telephone system etc.). Since April 2012, ACQUIN has a company car, which is available to all ACQUIN employees for official journeys (€ 17,631). The inventory evidence of fixed assets is carried out by an asset ledger (DATEV). The depreciation and the respective residual values are shown next to the year of acquisition and the cost of acquisition. The depreciation is calculated with the official tax depreciation tables using the linear method.

6 Internal Quality Assurance and Professional Conduct

Standard 3.6:

Agencies should have processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

In order to continuously improve its own work and to ensure a professional implementation of the procedures, ACQUIN has developed an internal quality management system that covers all service areas of the agency. The business processes and the procedures of internal quality assurance are defined in the Quality Management Manual of ACQUIN (Annex 4). The results of the internal quality assurance procedures are summarised in an annual quality report (Annex 52) and provided to the member universities, the Executive Board, the Accreditation commission and the expert committees.

Internal and external evaluations provide valuable information for further development of the agency. All accreditation, certification, evaluation procedures are assessed upon completion, both the experts and the universities participate in an anonymous online assessment. The questionnaires are standardised and include free text comments. (Annex 62). The evaluation of the questionnaires is carried out centrally in the agency; the results are made available to all employees and are discussed. The results are analysed to see if there is negative feedback because of systematic weaknesses and if any corrective actions must be developed. For instance, responding to the request for a Skype conference in order to prepare the experts, now all experts are regularly offered a call to prepare for the procedure. Optionally, also a telephone conference of the whole group is carried out.

As part of the regularly scheduled team meetings, employees provide feedback on the conducted procedures and possible measures for improvement. In addition to the survey data and the procedure evaluations, they form the basis for the development of business processes and internal quality assurance by the QM team. The QM team is made up of employees from various areas as well as the quality officers. The task of the team is to continuously develop the quality management system of ACQUIN. It also deals with conceptual considerations on the quality objectives as well as methods of data collection. As part of the further development of the QM system, the team purposefully integrates the employees of the head office (Annex 4).

Problems are directly communicated and solutions are jointly sought within the agency. A higher-level supervision is the responsibility of the heads of the individual departments and the executive board.

The committees are also involved in the internal quality assurance. The expert committees are questioned on the procedures, processes and cooperation with the agency every two years (Annex 63). In the context of meetings of the accreditation commission, members give immediate feedback on organisational matters, implementation of the procedures and procedural documents including references to necessary improvements. Subsequently, they are discussed within the agency and, if necessary, corrective actions are initiated. Such feedback led to the revision and creation of document templates for all procedure steps that are available on the server of the agency. For example, the opinions of the expert committees or the letters to the experts after the procedure can also be mentioned.

The quality of work of ACQUIN is largely determined by the expertise of all those involved in quality assurance procedures. Careful selection is therefore indispensable. ACQUIN ensures the professional work of all committee members, experts and employees through targeted selection and qualification measures.

The members of the accreditation commission are elected by the general assembly of ACQUIN (Annex 64). The members are invited to propose appropriate representatives of science and representatives of student as election candidates. The student members are asked for nominations in addition to the student accreditation pool. The board drafts an electoral list from the submitted proposals, which takes up the suggestions of the members and adjusts them only when there are multiple nominations from one university. The qualification profiles and motivation letters of election candidates are provided to member universities for the election of members of the accreditation commission. The accreditation commission consists of the first chairman of the board, four representatives of a university and advanced technical college, a representative of the art and music academies, as well as two representatives of professional practice and students.

After the election of new members of the accreditation commission they receive an extensive information package to prepare them for their new role (Annex 65). A preparation of the new members of the accreditation commission is carried out by members of the office before the first meeting of accreditation commission. The chairman of ACQUIN, the managing director and an experienced member of the accreditation commission are available for questions by new appointees.

The members of the expert committees of ACQUIN are appointed by the accreditation commission; when a new appropriate expert is appointed not only professional competence is taken into account

but also experience in quality assurance, development of degree programmes and management positions. Proposals for new members are added to the accreditation commission by the expert committees. New members of the expert committee are also provided with extensive information materials. A Handout for New Expert Committee Members (Annex 48) explains the individual steps of an accreditation / certification procedure and the role and responsibilities of the expert committee members. In addition, new members of the expert committee are accompanied by the respective speakers of the committees in the introductory phase; they are also informed and consulted with regard to the working methods and procedures. Once the members of the expert committee (first-time) take the lead for the implementation of accreditation procedures, they work in close coordination with the agency that provides comprehensive organisational support.

The general meeting of the expert committees provides them with a forum to exchange views on their own disciplinary boundaries on procedures and evaluation criteria, quality of procedures and developments in the quality assurance area. There is a round of discussions among the speakers of the expert committees and the members of the accreditation commission on procedural principles and carried out quality assurance procedures between the inter-committee meetings. The accreditation commission and the expert committees are promptly informed about innovations in the accreditation system on the respective following meetings. The accreditation commission receives all the protocols of expert committee meetings and in return the expert committees receive the decisions of the accreditation commission that involve them: thus, the same level of knowledge of all participants is guaranteed.

The selection of the experts by the expert committees is carried out in accordance with clear criteria (Annex 7). The expert groups are represented by all relevant stakeholders: expert groups always consist of representatives of science, professional practice and students. ACQUIN aims to include at least one expert from the previous accreditation into the reaccreditation in order to ensure the procedure consistency.

The preparation of the experts on their role and the requirements of a programme or system accreditation procedure is carried out by agency ACQUIN. As a rule, the experts receive all procedural documents four weeks before the visit date so that there is sufficient time for preparation. The experts also receive the so-called "Information Package for Experts" (Annex 66) which includes the binding evaluation criteria. They are provided support via the so-called "Structure for the Report" where the evaluation criteria of the Accreditation Council are firmly listed and linked to key questions for the evaluation. Before the evaluation the open questions can be clarified in the context of a telephone appointment with the supervising consultant. A preliminary meeting of experts before the on-site inspection is the immediate preparation for the respective accreditation procedure.

New employees of the agency are prepared for work in the office based on the training concept (Annex 61). In the introduction phase new employees are accompanied by a mentor. With regard to the training of employees, it is specifically requested that they attend meetings, conferences and trainings. Likewise ACQUIN carries out in-house training when needed for the entire office. For example, presentation training and a time management seminar were offered. In addition, ACQUIN is involved in the Staff Development Group of ENQA in the drafting of recommendations for staff development in quality assurance agencies.

The actions of the committee members, experts and employees are guided by the Code of Ethics of ACQUIN, which is available on the home page. The work of ACQUIN and the implementation of quality assurance procedures shall comply with these guidelines. This ensures that any kind of discrimination and intolerance is counteracted (Annex 46).

ACQUIN ensures compliance with internal quality standards even in the cases in which parts of an evaluation procedure are not carried out by the agency itself. This is ensured by the relevant cooperation agreements. So far, in this context, only the cooperation with the "Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Study Programmes in Germany e.V." (AKAST) is listed (Annex 67). The accreditation of AKAST by the Accreditation Council ensures compliance with the ESG. A regular experience and knowledge exchange also take place between the two agencies. The management of AKAST attends the meeting of the accreditation commission of ACQUIN and the meetings of the Expert Committee for Humanities, Languages and Cultural Studies, an employee of ACQUIN in exchange participates in the Accreditation Commission meetings of AKAST and the workshop discussions.

7 Regular External Audit of Agencies

Standard 3.7:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

7.1 Regular External Audit

ACQUIN is obligated to undergo an external review in a cycle of five years according to the rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of agencies.

ACQUIN was last accredited by the Accreditation Council in 2011, and subsequently got the renewal of the full membership of ENQA and the renewal of registration in the European Register EQAR.

7.2 The way recommendations made by Accreditation Council, ENQA and EQAR are dealt with

ACQUIN has continuously developed its quality management and procedures since the last accreditation and, where possible, took into consideration the recommendations of the respective evaluations and the evaluation of the results of the sampling of the Accreditation Council. Subsequently, the recommendations from the three assessment procedures are picked and the appropriate measures are presented. The figures in brackets refer to the respective recommendation of the previous accreditation.

a) Documents and procedures (AR 1, 2, 5, ENQA 2.1, 2.6, 2.7, 3.5, 3.8, EQAR 8, 9)

. ACQUIN has responded to the recommendations concerning the revision of the handouts and guidelines for programme and system accreditation procedures and other related documents, which are briefly described below.

- ACQUIN now has a mission statement, which is called "Leitbild" in German.

- As recommended by the experts of the previous accreditation, the Guidelines for Programme Accreditation and structure of the expert report show explicitly that accreditation is primarily a quality assessment procedure. In addition, the criteria of the Accreditation Council were better depicted in the standards for assessment. The Guideline for system accreditation was amended so that a member of the expert group comes from abroad. (Annex 18, 23)
- The procedural documents for international accreditations now explicitly define Part 1 of the ESG as the evaluation principles. The structure for the expert report for international accreditation procedures refers to the standards in four chapters and includes the final chapter on assessing overall evaluation in terms of compliance with Part 1 of the ESG (Annex 38). In programme accreditation procedures in German universities the rules of the Accreditation Council are referenced that are based on the ESG.

ACQUIN considers the recommendations from the evaluations of the agency and the advice from the random checks by the Accreditation Council as a valuable impulse for the further development of its own work. In view of the above, internal procedures were revised and specified:

- Expert reports (including the expert group recommendation for a decision) now are fully published within six weeks after the accreditation decision. The previous publication practice (decision of the accreditation commission and in case of deviations from the recommendation of the expert group, specification of the original accreditation recommendation of the experts with regard to the justification for the modified accreditation decision) included the implicit accreditation recommendation of the experts. Since 1 January 2016 negative decisions are also published.
- ACQUIN complies with a further recommendation from the initial accreditation by carrying out regular surveys of both experts and universities. In every procedure both the experts and universities are asked to provide their assessment of the procedure. The surveys are evaluated centrally.
- The implementation of the review results of the Accreditation Council has been included as a separate process in the internal quality management system of ACQUIN to ensure a systematic and timely implementation.
- As a measure resulted from the outcome of the sampling checks, a checklist for evaluation reports was created in order to ensure complete documentation of the criteria of the Accreditation Council for programme accreditation in the reports (Annex 68).

b) Selection and preparation of the experts (AR 4, ENQA 2.4, 3.8, EQAR 7)

The expert groups are appointed by the expert committees. In each expert committee a person in charge is appointed for the procedure with a high technical affinity for the programme that is the subject of evaluation. He suggests experts for the accreditation procedure that are subsequently voted and officially appointed by the expert committee. Thus, it ensures that every person in the expert committee is responsible for the appointment of the expert groups. In the handout "Methods and Criteria for the Appointment of Experts" the process of the appointment of experts and the technical criteria for the selection of experts are set binding.

With regard to the composition of expert groups, which always consist of at least two representatives of science, a student representative and a representative of the professional practice, it seemed to provide an ambiguous wording in the document "Procedures and Criteria of the Expert Appointment". ACQUIN was advised in the report and revised the document accordingly. The recommendation with regard to a stronger involvement of foreign experts is considered to be extremely helpful for the evaluation procedures. The expert group regularly consists of German and foreign university representatives for the system accreditation procedures. ACQUIN also increasingly involves experts from different German universities into process of programme accreditation. This applies primarily to international accreditation procedures where not only German university representatives but also professorial representatives and professional practice representatives from third countries participate in almost every procedure. For programme accreditation procedure in Germany, which is carried out in German, an increasing number of technical representatives from Austria has been recorded since 2012.

The requirement to ensure adequate preparation and qualification of experts for the accreditation process based on the transparent criteria is fully supported by ACQUIN. In view of the above, ACQUIN provides a four-step procedure of the preparation of the experts.

1. relevant information in the handouts for experts
2. expert training via online training video (planned)
3. communication with experts via preparatory phone calls and e-mail correspondence
4. preparatory meeting of the expert group in the course of the on-site visit

c) Committees (AR 3, 6, ENQA 2.3, EQAR 5)

By setting up an appeal committee in 2013, ACQUIN has implemented a recommendation from the previous accreditation. The appeal procedure, the structure of the appeal committee and the Rules of Procedure are available on the homepage of ACQUIN.

The general meeting of the expert committees provides a forum for views exchange on their own disciplinary boundaries on procedures and evaluation criteria, quality of procedures and developments in the quality assurance area. There is a round of discussions among the speakers of the expert committees and the members of the accreditation commission on procedural principles and carried out quality assurance procedures between the inter-committee meetings. Members of the accreditation commission participate in meetings of expert committees when required.

d) International activities (ENQA 3.7, EQAR 10, 11, 12)

The increasing number of international activities of ACQUIN forms the strategy of the agency to comprehend and co-design the European Higher Education Area in its overall context. For this reason, ACQUIN is represented not only in European and international networks, but performs procedures of external quality assurance at universities in many countries (cf. Annex 31). Accreditation procedures at foreign universities are listed on the homepage of ACQUIN in a special field.

With an increasing number of accreditation procedures outside the Federal Republic of Germany, ACQUIN undertook a distinct professionalisation of the tasks areas. In addition to programme accreditation, this also relates to institutional accreditation procedures. Accreditation procedures have been conducted primarily in Central Asia, Central and Eastern Europe as well as sporadically in Africa and in the Arab world. This professionalisation includes the availability of all relevant procedural

documents in English and to a large extent in Russian. In addition, in all international evaluation procedures a reference is explicitly made on the ESG as an authoritative basis for evaluation (cf. Recommendation of ENQA ESG 2.1).

The implementation of the accreditation procedures outside of Germany is based on the ESG. At the same time, nationally applicable laws have been fully respected in every procedure. This consideration of national regulations ensures, among other things, expert training and preparation of expert reports. Moreover, due to the Code of Ethics of ACQUIN, the agency has a fundamental commitment to comply with the legal framework that applies to the field of activity (Annex 46).

III Outlook

Subsequent to the approval of the revised ESG in May 2015, the Accreditation Council adopted the following resolution on 30 September 2015: "In the procedures of programme and system accreditation which take place after 01.01.2016, the agency shall publish the accreditation decision and full expert report, regardless of whether the procedure has a positive or a negative outcome within six weeks after the decision". This resolution shall apply to all agencies accredited by the Accreditation Council and is accordingly implemented by ACQUIN. In addition, the Accreditation Council has organised a working group "Revision of Regulations", which had its first meeting on 4 November 2015 and agreed on a time and work schedule. The revised regulations for programme and system accreditation shall therefore be submitted to the Accreditation Council for approval on 23 September 2016. ACQUIN will directly update its rules in accordance with this approval by the end of 2016, and in this case - if there is no impediment on part of the Accreditation Council - define the ESG as a starting point. Other national guidelines shall then find a "national context" entry into the procedure.