

Printed Matter AR 32/2013

Decision on the Application of the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) for Accreditation

Decision of the Accreditation Council of 06 June 2013

I.

Pursuant to § 2 para. 1 no. 1 of the law on the establishment of a foundation “Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany”, the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany (Foundation) accredits the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) in accordance with the following provisions and insofar thereby grants it the authority to accredit study programmes and internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions by awarding the seal of the Foundation.

II.

The decision pursuant to above Article I will become effective on 03.06.2013. It will, how-ever, become void if the agency has not signed an agreement by 01.07.2013 pursuant to § 3 of the law on the establishment of a foundation “Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany” in the version resolved on 20.02.2013 by the Accreditation Council.

III.

The accreditation and authorisation pursuant to above Article I will be granted for a term of five years; subject to revocation pursuant to subsequent Article V. Pursuant to Clause 3.2.1 of the resolution “Rules for the Accreditation of Agencies” of 08.12.2009 in the version of 10.12.2010, the accreditation expires on 30.06.2018.

IV.

The Accreditation Council establishes that AQ Austria has not fulfilled certain quality requirements; pursuant to Clause 3.1.3 of the resolution "Rules for the Accreditation of Agencies" of 08.12.2009 in the version of 10.12.2010, these defects are to be corrected within six months. The accreditation is therefore granted under the following conditions:

Condition 1: The Accreditation Council obligates the Agency to involve more proven experts for the relevant discipline as members of the expert group of programme accreditation procedures (Criterion 2.2.1).

Condition 2: The Accreditation Council obligates the Agency to implement the accreditation procedures which have obtained the seal of the Accreditation Council at least in the concept stage and to make these publicly accessible (Criterion 2.5).

The Accreditation Council refers expressly to the recommendations contained in the report.

V.

Should AQ Austria not present fulfilment of the conditions within the respective term, or should the conditions not be fulfilled on expiry of the respective term, then the Foundation may, pursuant to Clause 3.5.3 of the resolution "Rules for the Accreditation of Agencies" of 08.12.2009 in the version of 10.12.2010, revoke the accreditation.

VI. Reasons

General:

On the basis of the expert report and in consideration of the Agency's comment, the Accreditation Council has come to the conclusion that the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) substantially meets the criteria set out in chapter 2 of the resolution "Rules for the Accreditation of Agencies" of 8 December 2009 in the version adopted on 10 December 2010.

The Accreditation Council has gained a positive impression of AQ Austria and the conceptual preparatory work it carried out for taking up the accreditation activity.

In consideration of the information submitted with the Agency's statement and in deviation of the recommendations given by the expert group in their report, the Accreditation Council does not impose any conditions concerning the following items:

With respect to Condition 2 recommended by the expert group, the Accreditation Council observes that the list of cost centres and the itemisation of the costs submitted by AQ Austria allow a clear allocation of the costs incurred to the single quality assurance procedures and that they are particularly suitable to ensure that accreditation procedures in Germany are carried out on a full-cost basis pursuant to criterion 2.3.2. With reference to the information subsequently submitted by the Agency, the Accreditation Council deems that Condition 2 recommended by the expert group is no longer necessary.

The Accreditation Council waives condition 4 recommended by the expert group, on account of the fact that the Agency submitted a new version of the rules of procedure along with its statement, which was adopted on 21 February 2013; under § 1 para. 1, this makes it possible to bring forward as causes of complaint the procedural conduct and the decisions of the Board concerning programme and system accreditation procedures. By including these modifications, the Agency has adequately taken into account the objections brought forward on p. 27f of the expert report. The requirements set by Criterion 2.6 concerning internal complaints procedures are fulfilled, since the Agency has already published the modified rules of procedure on its website. Hence condition 4 is no longer relevant.

Concerning Condition 1:

The experts observe on p. 15f of their report that, on the one hand, the composition of the Board offers a good basis to enable sound decisions concerning system accreditation, but, on the other hand, it does not reflect the range of discipline-related competences needed for decisions for programme accreditation. Therefore, the expert group recommend ensuring the involvement of least three acknowledged experts with relevant academic qualifications in programme accreditation procedures by issuing a condition in order to compensate for shortcomings due to a commission with a range of discipline-related competences which is too narrow. This proposal follows the recommendations issued by the decision for accreditation of OAQ in 2008.

After having discussed in detail the arguments brought forward by the Agency in its statement, the Accreditation Council shares the assessment of the expert group. In fact, the Board does not have to carry out a specific assessment of study programmes in the case of programme accreditation. A commission should, however, be able to evaluate discipline-related aspects independently and to express opinions diverging from those expressed by the expert groups in order to ensure, among other things, the consistency when issuing conditions or suspending procedures. Furthermore, there has to be the possibility to develop solutions in controversial cases, for example where obvious contradictions arise between the assessment and the opinion expressed by the experts.

In this context, the Accreditation Council refers to the certification for accreditation of the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria), which was issued in 2010 on condition that sufficient discipline-related expertise from different disciplinary cultures was ensured for the Certification and Programme Accreditation Commission.

The Accreditation Council is aware of the fact that the composition of the Board of the AQ Austria is subject to legal provisions in Austria. The Accreditation Council assumes that the activities of AQ Austria in Germany will focus on procedures for system accreditation. Following the revision of the Council's rules in February 2013, certification for programme accreditation has only been required for random samples of state regulated study programmes. Therefore, the Council has opted for enlarging the expert group only in case of programme accreditation procedures carried out in Germany. By including more experts, a wider range of opinions is ensured already during the assessment stage, with the result that potential dependencies or misjudgements of single experts are countered.

Concerning Condition 2:

On p. 27 of their report, the experts observe that, after the merge of the preceding agencies, the Agency's internal quality management is still in the process of being established and will be finalised during the second half of the year. The expert group observes in addition that the existing processes for internal quality management should be formalised by appointing the relevant responsibilities. In this context, accreditation with the seal of the Accreditation Council should be expressly included. In addition, criterion 2.5 of the Accreditation Council imposes that internal quality assurance systems shall be publicly accessible; this requirement is not yet fulfilled.