

Appendix 1

Sequence of the Programme Accreditation Procedure

(Decision of the Accreditation Commission of 23 August 2016, version of 11 May 2020)

Accreditation Procedures of Study Programmes for Higher Education Institutions outside of Germany

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Preparation of the Accreditation Procedure:

1. AQAS offers an informal and free-of-charge initial consultation at our office in Cologne before the accreditation procedure starts. This consultation covers information on the accreditation procedure, on the requirements for the Self Evaluation Report (SER) and on the criteria.
2. The university mandates AQAS to perform the accreditation procedure. The university receives the contract from AQAS, duly signed by the chair of our board and the managing director. The contract is formally concluded with the university executive. The contract covers all steps of the accreditation procedure, the budget and the intended schedule.

Application for Accreditation:

3. The university drafts a Self Evaluation Report (SER) in accordance with the AQAS guidelines.
 - a) If the study programme has not yet started, the full SER will cover the following documents:
 - accreditation application
 - course/module descriptions
 - study and examination regulations
 - exemplary diploma supplement.
 - b) If the study programme is already running, the SER will include the following documents:
 - accreditation application (incl. student success data and performance indicators, plus examination and student statistics, including a list of the last 50 final papers/theses);
 - evaluation reports (internal/external) (if available),
 - if the study programme has already been accredited:
 - final report for the previous accreditation/accreditation letter,
 - proof that any conditions from the previous accreditation have been met (if any conditions were imposed during the accreditation),
 - course/module descriptions (latest version),
 - study and examination regulations (latest version),
 - exemplary diploma supplement.

The university management will confirm in writing that the resources specified in the SER are available as outlined. The SER and all annexes are sent to AQAS electronically.

4. The university will name a primary contact person for AQAS for the accreditation procedure.
5. The university will suggest a qualification profile for the members of the panel of experts to AQAS.
6. AQAS will assess the application for completeness and will advise the university on the further procedure. If necessary, AQAS will request a revision or completion of the SER.

Decision on the official initialisation of the Accreditation Procedure:

7. AQAS will produce an internal report on the "initial situation" of the study programme(s) outlining the key aspects of the accreditation application. Together with the SER, the report is presented to the Standing Commission of AQAS e. V. The Standing Commission will deliberate on the application and will decide upon the official initialisation of the accreditation procedure.

8. AQAS will inform the university about the decision of the commission and will pass on any questions / comments that the Standing Commission might have. In the event that the Standing Commission decided to deny an official initialisation of the procedure, the university will be informed about the reasons and receive advice on the further proceedings from AQAS. After an appropriate revision of the documents the university may resubmit the application.¹
9. The Standing Commission of AQAS will appoint the panel of experts. As a basic principle, the panel will consist of professors, one representative from the labour market and one student.

Site Visit at the University:

10. AQAS will inform the university in good time about the members of the expert panel and will allow the university a period of time for any justified objections it may have. Justified objections must be submitted in writing and will be forwarded to the Standing Commission. The university has neither nomination rights nor veto rights.
11. AQAS will inform the university about the date for the site visit and suggest a schedule for the visit.
12. The university will submit the SER to AQAS in sufficient number for all panel members and AQAS at least eight weeks prior to scheduled site visit. If the documents do not reach AQAS on time, this may result in the postponement of the site visit.
13. The experts will review the SER and are requested to submit a short preliminary statement (e.g. 2 pages) including open questions and potential needs for additional information. AQAS will forward these preliminary statements to the university and the other panel members to increase transparency in the process and the discussions during the site visit.
14. During the site visit, talks will generally be held with the university management, the head(s) of department, the study programme coordinator, lecturers, students and graduates, as well as labour market representatives.
15. If students have already graduated from the programme, the university is requested to randomly choose a number of representative final papers/theses covering the full spectrum of grades and topics and to provide these for review during the site visit.

Completion of the Procedure:

16. The expert panel will produce an assessment report with a recommendation to the Standing Commission how to decide on the accreditation application of the programme.
17. Before submitting the report to the Standing Commission, AQAS will forward the assessment report to the university, including a list of findings of the panel of experts. The university is given the opportunity to comment on the report within two weeks.
18. Based upon the report of the expert panel and the potential statement of the university the Standing Commission of AQAS will take a decision on the accreditation of the programme. The Standing Commission has four decision options: 1) Accreditation; 2) Conditional Accreditation; 3) Postponement of the Decision (suspension of the procedure); or 4) Denial of Accreditation. Based on the findings of the panel of experts the Standing Commission will decide on potential conditions, recommendations, or findings. The accreditation period for programmes that already produced graduates is six (6) years. For all other cases the accreditation period is four (4) years.

¹ This will not affect the costs of the procedure. However, delays to the various stages must be expected.

19. Following the decision of the Standing Commission AQAS will inform the university about the result and submit the final version of the report including the decision of the Accreditation commission.

The university has the right to appeal the decision or any imposed conditions. Appeals must be submitted in writing within four weeks after notification of the decision. In case of an appeal, the case is once again presented to the Standing Commission for decision. In the event that the university decides to appeal this (second) decision of the Accreditation Commission the appeal-/complaints commission of AQAS will decide. In the event of formal complaints that do not relate to decision of the Standing Commission, the appeal-/complaints commission of AQAS will decide. If no appeal is received, AQAS will publish the report and the result of the accreditation, as well as the names of the panel of experts on its website.

20. In case of a positive accreditation decision, the award of the AQAS accreditation certificate officially concludes the procedure. The accreditation confirms that the programme operates in accordance with the AQAS criteria for Programme Accreditation and is thus in line the European Standards and Guidelines.

21. In case the Accreditation Commission of AQAS decides to postpone the decision and suspend the accreditation procedure based on the findings documented in the expert report, the university is given the opportunity to revise the programme in a defined period and re-submit the SER to AQAS for a second review. In this case, additional costs may occur.

22. In case of a conditional accreditation, the university has to provide evidence that the conditions are met. The documentation providing evidence on the fulfilment of the condition(s) needs to be submitted to AQAS in written form within the time defined by the Standing Commission in its decision. If required, AQAS will forward the delivered evidence to members of the panel of experts and ask them to assess the fulfilment of the condition(s).

23. Based on the provided documentation and experts` assessment, the Standing Commission will decide on the fulfilment of the conditions(s). AQAS will inform the university on the decision of the Standing Commission in writing and deliver an updated accreditation certificate.

24. Failure to report on the fulfilment of the conditions or a negative decision of the Standing Commission on the fulfilment of the conditions will result in the withdrawal of the AQAS accreditation.

25. After half the time of the validity of the accreditation, the University can request a midterm evaluation. This voluntary follow-up procedure aims at supporting the university in the enhancement of its programmes and provide an external feedback also preparing the re-accreditation. AQAS will provide guidelines for the SER of the midterm evaluation. The costs for the midterm evaluation will be specified in a separate agreement.