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PROMOTING QUALITY.

EVALUATION, CERTIFICATION AND
AUDIT SERVICES FOR THE EUROPEAN
HIGHER EDUCATION AREA AND BEYOND



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QUALITY ASSURANCE ACROSS BORDERS

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has become a highly attractive concept for the higher education institutions of the Bologna signatory states and beyond. Like universities, quality assurance agencies increasingly extend their activities across national borders, contributing to the building of the EHEA by ensuring and promoting quality in higher education.

From its very beginnings, ZEvA has been at the forefront of this development. Since 1995, the agency has been actively involved in international networks and is a founding member of

- › The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
- › The European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA)
- › The Joint Quality Initiative (JQI)

offer the following services to higher education institutions abroad:

- › External Evaluation, Accreditation and Certification of Study Programs
- › Institutional Audits
- › Thematic Evaluation
- › Consulting Services

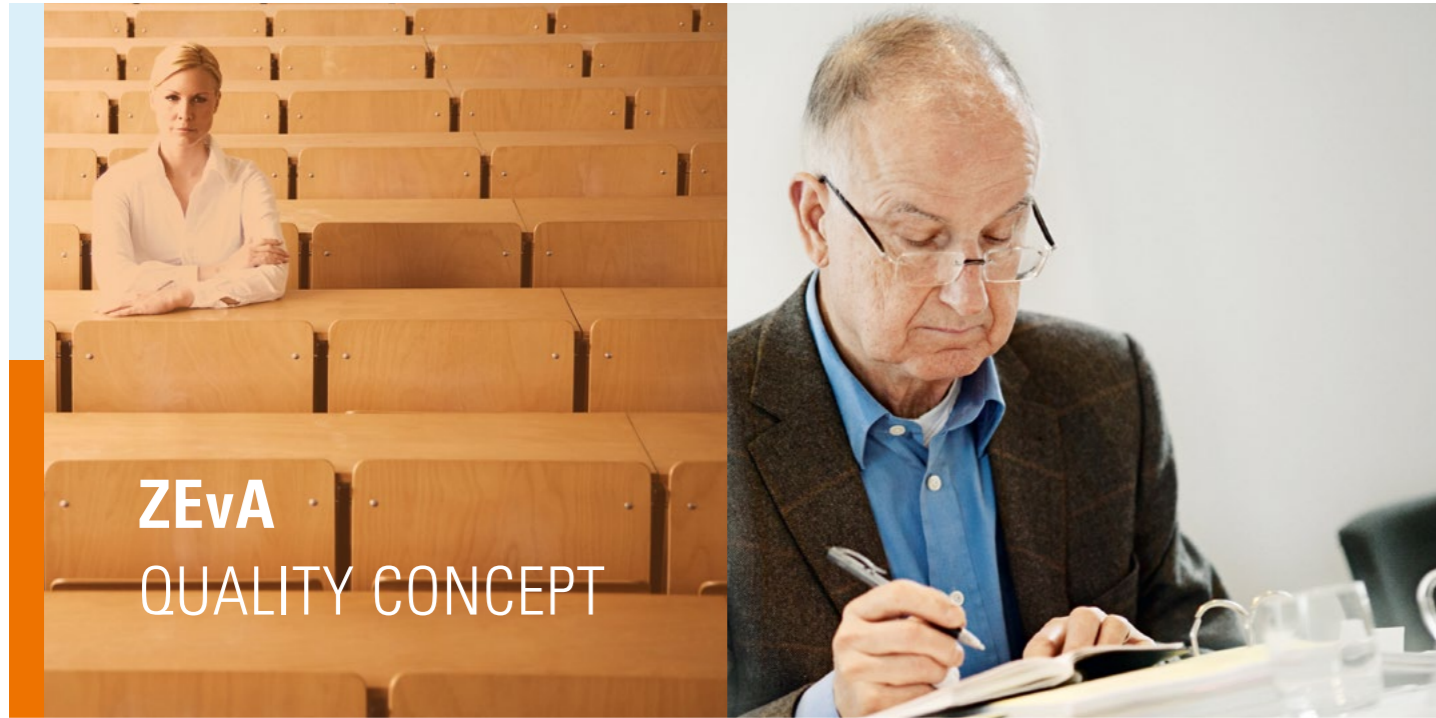
The agency is also listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

As part of the JQI, ZEvA took part in the development of the so-called Dublin Descriptors in the year 2000. The Dublin Descriptors provide a common European reference framework for evaluation and certification in higher education by defining the levels of knowledge and competencies for Bachelor, Master and doctoral graduates.

Due to this strong international focus, ZEvA is increasingly commissioned to carry out quality assurance projects in other European and non-European countries. In detail, we

The methods and criteria of evaluation applied by ZEvA are rooted in the common European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG), which have also gained wide acceptance by higher education institutions outside Europe. It is our central task to monitor adherence to these international standards while accounting for the individual needs of each higher education institution.

The project officers of our international department are bi- or multilingual and familiar with working in international settings. They provide all-round support to their clients throughout the assessment procedure.



ZEvA QUALITY CONCEPT

ZEvA offers a wide range of quality assurance services to higher education institutions. Assessment procedures may apply to an institution's entire quality management system for teaching and learning or may be focused on particular organizational units, study programs or thematic areas. The agency also provides coaching and consulting services in close cooperation with its associated company ZEvA Expert.

All quality reviews conducted by ZEvA contain the following elements as set forth in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG):

- › a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process
- › an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency
- › publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes
- › a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report

Supporting higher education institutions in reaching their quality goals is our prime concern. We provide an all-round service to keep expenditure of time and effort down to a minimum. As partners to our clients we offer innovative solutions and best practices for the continuous improvement of their internal support structures and processes.

„ZEvA has earned our confidence by managing the peer review process in a fair, reliable and professional manner.“

Alexandra Khudaykulova, Vice Rector for Educational Program Development, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University)

Quality assurance in teaching and learning, higher education management and governance are the core competencies of ZEvA. Since 1995 we have successfully conducted evaluation, certification and accreditation procedures at higher education institutions in Germany, Europe and beyond. First and foremost, we regard ourselves as partners to higher education institutions in reaching their quality goals.

Our concept of quality in teaching and learning is based on the principles of autonomy and responsibility: in order to fulfill their mission, higher education institutions have to establish and maintain internal policies and procedures for quality management which account for the needs and requirements of numerous stakeholders (students, employers, the scientific community and society as a whole). ZEvA supports higher education institutions in developing, implementing and continuously improving their internal quality management systems.

Faculty, students and graduates excelling in competitive professional and academic environments across national borders are the best indicators of quality in higher education. Based on this insight, ZEvA contributes to turning the idea of a European Higher Education Area into reality.

ZEvA guarantees transparency, legal security as well as comprehensive consulting and support throughout the

peer review process. The sound judgment of internationally experienced and independent experts lies at the heart of all our quality assessment procedures.

Higher education institutions (and European ones in particular) have undergone rapid changes since the Bologna Process was launched. Their social, political, economic and cultural roles and functions have diversified, and new ideas of teaching, learning and institutional governance have emerged. However, in spite of the immense diversity of the European higher education landscape, some central ideas and principles are still shared by all: academic freedom and autonomy, student-centered learning and the close link between teaching and research. As a partner to higher education institutions, it is part of our mission to safeguard these fundamental values and principles.



ZEvA – SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES



EVALUATION AND CERTIFICATION OF STUDY PROGRAMS

International competition between higher education institutions is constantly increasing. In order to attract the best students, a higher education institution must provide high-quality education. A quality seal awarded by an experienced and renowned agency therefore creates a tangible competitive advantage on the higher education market.

The external assessment of study programs is an occasion for higher education institutions to systematically analyze their teaching and learning processes, to identify strengths and shortcomings and to decide upon adequate measures for improvement.

ZEvA takes a multidimensional approach to program evaluation which accounts for various indicators, such as the qualification profile of graduates, the acquisition of knowledge and competencies, the design and implementation of study programs, adherence to general academic standards or the efficient use of resources.

The following questions are among those most likely to be raised in the course of a program evaluation procedure:

1. Are the graduates of the program fit to meet the requirements and expectations of the scientific community, the employment market and society at large?
2. Are the applied forms of student assessment apt to determine whether students have reached the desired level of qualification?

3. Do the structure and design of the curriculum enable students to study successfully and pass the exams?
4. Are there sufficient resources for the implementation of the study program?
5. Have the intended learning outcomes of the program been clearly defined? Is the curriculum geared to these learning outcomes?

In most cases, an assessment procedure refers to a single study program or to a cluster of programs belonging to a particular academic discipline.

On principle, the assessment of study programs involves the same steps as institutional reviews (self-report, on-site talks, expert report and written statement by the higher education institution).

All study programs that have successfully passed the assessment procedure are awarded the ZEvA quality seal. By request, ZEvA assists higher education institutions in putting the recommendations of the expert panel into practice.



THEMATIC EVALUATION

Often higher education institutions feel the need for an external analysis of very specific problems they encounter in their daily activities. For example, they may aim for a more student-friendly exam administration or more effective management information systems. Others may wish to determine their degree of internationalization or identify the causes of high student attrition rates. Thematic evaluations can provide quick answers to such questions.

Unlike institutional and program evaluation, thematic evaluations are ad hoc procedures. Nevertheless, with their combination of internal and external assessment, they are rooted in the same common standards for evaluation procedures laid out in the ESG. For each thematic evaluation, ZEvA develops a tailor-made manual with a careful view to the subject and purpose of the evaluation.

The peers conduct the evaluation (including a SWOT analysis) with a view to the standards that the higher education institution has defined for itself. Standards set by external authorities (as, for instance, legislative demands regarding modularization) may also play a role, depending

on the thematic focus of the procedure. Both the applied framework and the outcomes of the peer review are subsequently published as part of an evaluation report.

„ZEvA is a trustful organization due to its experience in transnational and international quality assurance. Very helpful for the mobility of staff and students!“

Karl Dittrich LL.M., Chairman of the Association of Dutch Universities (VSNU)

INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT

Institutional audits exceed all other types of quality assessment in scope and complexity. They support higher education institutions in implementing an all-embracing quality culture through the external assessment of their core functional areas, as e.g. teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer or strategic management.

ZEvA Institutional Audits take all major tasks and activities of a higher education institution into view. The audit procedure is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) launched by the European Ministers for Education in Bergen in May 2005, which are now a widely accepted framework for internal and external evaluation across and beyond the European Higher Education Area.

As an alternative to institution-wide reviews, ZEvA also carries out assessments of organizational units (faculties or departments, key administrative units) and their central fields of activity (student support services, library and media services, the examination system, external and internal communication, equal opportunities policies etc.).

The standard procedure for institutional audits is as follows: first of all, the higher education institution generates a written self-assessment report. Based on this document and the outcomes of on-site talks with representatives of all stakeholder groups, the review panel creates an expert report including commendations and recommendations for improvement. The central objective of the audit is to determine the particular strengths of an institution's internal (quality) management system and to identify areas for potential improvement. In short, the audit aims at enhancing a higher education institution's

self-governing capacity instead of measuring it against predefined standards.

On average, an institutional audit takes about 9–12 months to complete.

At the request of the higher education institution the agency issues a certificate that records the core results of the audit and the measures to be taken in response.

„I appreciated above all the thoroughness of the review I was privileged to be part of: the pre-preparation, the actual review process and the post-event breadth of the documentation, the integrity with which the entire process was conducted and the high expectations and, finally, working with experts with a wide range of experiences.“

Roland E. Schulze, Professor Emeritus of Hydrology and Senior Research Associate, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa



ZEvA MILESTONES

1995

In view of prolonged study times, high student attrition rates and slow knowledge transfer, a critical debate on third level teaching and learning arose in Germany during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In response to the general call for more effective quality assurance in higher education, the higher education institutions and the state government of Lower Saxony cooperated in founding the Central Evaluation Agency (ZEvA). In 1995, the agency began its work as the first of its kind in the country. In the following six years, ZEvA evaluated nearly all study programs offered by higher education institutions in the state of Lower Saxony. In organizational and legal terms, the agency was then part of the University of Hannover.

1998

In 1998, ZEvA became active in the field of program accreditation. As a consequence, the agency's name was changed to "Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency", while the well-established trademark "ZEvA" was maintained.

2000

In the year 2000 ZEvA was the first agency to be licensed to award the quality seal of the German Accreditation Council. From an early stage ZEvA joined international quality assurance networks like ENQA, ECA or the Joint Quality Initiative. The agency was also among the first included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

2002

In the year 2002 ZEvA first awarded its own quality seal to doctoral programs at German universities. Since then, there has also been increasing interest in the ZEvA seal from higher education institutions abroad.

2008

In 2008, ZEvA was licensed by the Accreditation Council to carry out System Accreditation, a newly introduced form of institutional accreditation. In the same year, by resolution of the state government of Lower Saxony, ZEvA was turned into an independent foundation under civil law.

2012

For many years ZEvA has been a strong partner to higher education institutions in Germany, Europe and beyond. In 2012, the subsidiary company ZEvA Expert was founded to satisfy the steady demand for advisory and consulting services in the higher education sector.