

# ENQA Review Self-Assessment Report

Zentrale Evaluations- und  
Akkreditierungsagentur  
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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 General Introduction

Since its establishment in 1995, ZEvA has been on the forefront of quality assurance of teaching and learning in higher education. ZEvA was the first agency for quality assurance founded in Germany, the first to establish an accreditation procedure and the first agency to be accredited. From the beginning, ZEvA was active in national and international networks for quality assurance in higher education, such as the Joint Quality Initiative and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Since its transformation into a foundation under public law, ZEvA has continued to widen its range, establish new kinds of procedures and offering its services nationally and internationally.

Today, ZEvA's range of services includes programme and system accreditation in Germany, evaluation, especially at higher education institutions in Lower Saxony, international accreditations on a programme and institutional level, institutional audits at Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences, certification of further education at higher education institutions, validation of educational offerings outside of higher education, and consultations and seminars in the area of teaching and learning in higher education. From the beginning, ZEvA has ensured that all activities that pertain to quality assurance in higher education are carried out in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in their current version.

The following self-assessment-report (SAR) has been put together for ZEvA's upcoming ENQA review which shall serve as the basis for renewal of ZEvA's ENQA membership and inclusion in the European Quality Agency Register (EQAR). For this purpose, the SAR provides information about the German higher education and quality assurance system under which ZEvA operates, a description of ZEvA's structure, internal quality assurance and history and will furthermore describe ZEvA's external quality assurance activities in detail and demonstrate their adherence to the ESG. The SAR will thus concentrate on activities within the scope of the ESG, which are subject to the ENQA review. Activities not directly relevant to the review will be mentioned for completeness' sake but not described in detail. The annexes and links to online sources of information provide evidence for the descriptions in the SAR.

## 1.2 Self-Assessment Process

In the spring of 2020, ZEvA has put together a working group for the preparation of the self-assessment report consisting of ZEvA's managing director and division heads. This working group serves as the editorial team of the self-evaluation report, has compiled the relevant documentation and reviewed all current sources of information about ZEvA's work (website, brochures etc.) to ensure they represent the current state of affairs. As a result, ZEvA's manuals and handbooks have been updated.

The working group has conducted a SWOT analysis based on questionnaires distributed among ZEvA's employees and stakeholders. The results will be presented in chapter 2.4.3. Additionally, ZEvA conducts regular evaluations of their work among its stakeholders, the results of which serve to improve ZEvA's procedures and develop them further.



The review report has been subject to approval by ZEvA's Board of Trustees and has been presented to the ZEvA-Commission (ZEKo) and the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK).

## 2 General Information

### 2.1 German Higher Education and Quality Assurance System

Higher education in Germany is regulated for the most part by the federal states (“Länder”) and their higher education laws, with the Higher Education Framework Act (“Hochschulrahmengesetz”)<sup>1</sup> as a basis on the national level. The Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (“Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK)”)<sup>2</sup> provides frameworks for higher education that the federal states agree upon. The university system is divided into universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of arts and music. Additionally, universities of cooperative education or vocational academies (“Berufsakademien”), which are technically outside of the higher education system, can offer Bachelor’s programmes that are equated to higher education programmes and lead to the same qualifications.<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can be public or private, but, to be able to offer academic degrees, private institutions have to be recognized by the state, usually after an institutional accreditation by the German Scientific Council (“Wissenschaftsrat (WR)”). Most study programmes have been adapted to the Bachelor/Master system, but there are still programmes leading to a Diploma degree or a State Examination (e.g. teacher training, laws, medicine). Additionally, some universities have formalised doctoral programmes, some of them adapted to ECTS.

With the introduction of the Bachelor/Master system, the KMK also conceived an external quality assurance system and issued “Common Structural Guidelines of the Länder for the Accreditation of Bachelor’s and Master’s Study Courses”<sup>4</sup> and the German Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. The German Accreditation Council (GAC) was established in 2003 as a foundation under public law and tasked with the formulation of criteria and procedural rules based on the Structural Guidelines as well as the accreditation of private, non-profit agencies to carry out the accreditation procedures. The agencies could then decide on accreditation in their accreditation commissions and issue the quality seal of the GAC alongside their own.

In 2008, system accreditation was introduced, which had as its subject not individual programmes but the quality assurance system of an entire institution (or possibly a faculty). In turn, all programmes that had undergone this quality assurance system would be accredited and carry the GAC seal.

The accreditation agencies in Germany are private not-for-profit institutions competing for accreditation procedures on an open market. At the moment, 10 agencies are competing on the German market, including the national agencies of Austria and Switzerland. Four of these agencies have specialized in certain subjects. In general, HEIs are free to choose an agency based on quotation. The criteria for selection and their weighting vary from case to case (e.g., pricing, the proposed timeframe, prior experience with the agency, quality of a proposed

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/hrg/>

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.kmk.org/kmk/information-in-english.html>

<sup>3</sup> In the following, whenever Higher Education Institutions in Germany are referred to, the statements are generally valid for Universities of Cooperative Education offering Bachelor’s degrees as well.

<sup>4</sup> See [http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/KMK/en/KMK\\_Laendergemeinsame\\_Strukturvorgaben\\_en\\_aktuell.pdf](http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/KMK/en/KMK_Laendergemeinsame_Strukturvorgaben_en_aktuell.pdf)

concept etc.). Especially for larger projects (system accreditation or cluster accreditations), public HEIs are often legally bound to place an open call for tender that agencies can apply to.

Since the legal status of this accreditation system had been put into question, in March 2016, the German Federal Constitutional Court tasked the federal states with the establishment of a new accreditation system that would rectify this unclear status until the end of 2017. As a result, the KMK agreed on an “Interstate Treaty on the Organization of a Joint Accreditation System to Ensure the Quality of Teaching and Learning at German Higher Education Institutions (Interstate Study Accreditation Treaty)”<sup>5</sup> in 2016, which provided the legal framework for a new accreditation system. It was supplemented with the “Specimen Decree Pursuant to Article 4, Paragraphs 1 – 4 of the Interstate Study Accreditation Treaty”<sup>6</sup> in 2017. Both were enacted on January 1st, 2018, and the federal states agreed to implement the specimen decree into their own accreditation decrees that would not differ from the specimen decree in any substantial way. The last of these state decrees was ratified in March 2020. These decrees form the basis for all accreditation procedures contractually agreed upon from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 onward. Accreditation procedures with contracts concluded before that date can be carried out according to the previous accreditation system, and thus, a very few of these procedures have not yet concluded. Additionally, decisions about substantial changes to the study programmes or quality assurance systems accredited under the old system still fall to the agency that has accredited them.

The main differences of the new accreditation system are that, on the one hand, the GAC takes all decisions on accreditation while the agency carries out the review and provides an accreditation report, and on the other hand, agencies are no longer accredited by the GAC but are licensed on the basis of their inclusion in the EQAR. Furthermore, the criteria are now divided into formal and academic criteria and it falls to the agency itself to formulate an assessment on the formal criteria while the expert group is tasked with the assessment of the academic criteria. The GAC can decide on a conditional accreditation and decides on the fulfilment of the conditions.

## 2.2 History of ZEvA

ZEvA was founded in 1995 by the State University Conference of Lower Saxony (“Niedersächsische Landeshochschulkonferenz (LHK)”) and the Ministry of Science and Culture of Lower Saxony (“Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur (MWK)”) as the Central Evaluation Agency. As such, it is the oldest agency for quality assurance in higher education in Germany. Originally, ZEvA was installed as a part of the University of Hanover (now Gottfried-Wilhelm-Leibniz-University of Hanover), operating as a public institution of the state. As such, its mission was the evaluation of teaching and learning at higher education institutions in Lower Saxony. The evaluations centred around individual study subjects at public universities and universities of applied sciences. The evaluations were carried out in the form of peer reviews and resulted in reports that were published and served as recommendations for the

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<sup>5</sup> See [https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2016/2016\\_12\\_08-Studienakkreditierungsstaatsvertrag-englisch.pdf](https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2016/2016_12_08-Studienakkreditierungsstaatsvertrag-englisch.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See [https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2017/2017\\_12\\_07-Muster-rechtsverordnung-englisch.pdf](https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2017/2017_12_07-Muster-rechtsverordnung-englisch.pdf)



institutions and the state. After a few years, ZEvA conducted a follow-up evaluation of the same subjects.

As a reaction to the Bologna process, ZEvA was the first institution to introduce accreditation in 1998 and designed a procedure and criteria for the process. Subsequently, ZEvA's name was changed into Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency to incorporate the new procedure, and the Standing Accreditation Commission ("Ständige Akkreditierungskommission (SAK)") was formed to decide on accreditations. When the GAC was founded in 2000, ZEvA was the first agency to be accredited for the accreditation of study programmes in Germany. In 2008, the GAC accredited ZEvA to carry out system accreditations, and ZEvA formed a separate division for the new procedure as well as a sub-committee of the SAK, the Commission for System Accreditation ("Kommission Systemakkreditierung (KSA)"). ZEvA has been reaccredited three times by the GAC, and the results of the reaccreditation procedures also served as a basis for the renewal of ZEvA's ENQA membership and EQAR listing.

In 2009, ZEvA was transformed into a foundation under public law, founded by the state of Lower Saxony. Since then, it acts as a private, non-profit organisation but retains its mission for the state of Lower Saxony for which it receives institutional funding. ZEvA has devised new forms of evaluation which include institutional and thematic evaluations that have taken the place of subject-related evaluations. Starting in 2008, ZEvA has also been conducting accreditations internationally and has established a separate division for international procedures and a Commission for International Affairs ("Kommission für internationale Angelegenheiten (KIA)") in 2014. In 2012, ZEvA has been licensed to conduct Institutional Audits at universities of applied sciences in Austria under the Quality Assurance Act for Higher Education Institutions ("Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz (HS-QSG)").

Since 2012 ZEvA has conducted certification procedures for further education programmes at higher education institutions and validation procedures for vocational training programmes to formulate recommendations towards Higher Education Institutions regarding the recognition of parts of these programmes. Through a collaboration with the German Association for Educational and Academic Staff Development in Higher Education ("Deutsche Gesellschaft für Hochschuldidaktik (DGHD)"), ZEvA has also certified programmes of higher education didactics but this cooperation is currently dormant. In 2020, ZEvA has expanded their certification procedures to incorporate certification of further education institutions at HEIs ("institutional certification").

In 2018, when the new legal framework for the accreditation of study programmes and quality assurance systems was introduced, ZEvA was licensed to conduct accreditation procedures under these new laws, has devised new procedures and changed the structure of its deciding bodies. The SAK, KIA and KSA have been merged into one ZEvA Commission ("ZEvA Kommission (ZEKo)") which is now responsible for all decisions regarding accreditation, institutional audits, certification, and validation, in Germany and internationally. The final decision for accreditation procedures in Germany under the new legal framework falls to the GAC, however, and is thus not the responsibility of the ZEKo, which is merely tasked with the nomination of the respective expert groups and informed about the outcome of the procedures.

From the beginning, ZEvA has been engaged in networks both nationally and internationally. In its early years, it collaborated with other evaluation bodies like evalag and the Nordverbund. In 2002, ZEvA founded the European Institute for Quality Assurance (EIQA) as a network of up to 40 higher education institutions that also served as an advisory body. ZEvA is a founding



member both of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (now the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)) and the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA), a long-standing member of the German Evaluation Society (“Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluation (DeGEval)”) and a member of the Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). ZEvA has been part of the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI) and thus has participated in the formulation of the Dublin Descriptors that formed the basis for the framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

## 2.3 ZEvA's Structure and Profile

ZEvA is an incorporated foundation under civil law, founded by the state of Lower Saxony (see Annex 1). As such it is charitable and not profit-orientated. ZEvA's internal structures are bindingly established by the Foundation Charter (Annex 2) as well as the rules of procedure assigned to the bodies and commissions (Annexes 3-7). Competencies and responsibilities as well as the procedures for appointing the respective members are clearly defined therein. The Charter clearly states the Foundation's purpose, namely "to carry out tasks of quality assurance and thus to promote science and research" (§ 2). This is further elaborated as follows:

- a) Advising on issues of quality assurance and development, including the evaluation of teaching and study at universities.
- b) Planning and execution of evaluation procedures pursuant to section 5 (1) sentence 4 NHG.<sup>7</sup>
- c) Planning and execution of procedures for the accreditation of study programmes at universities and the system accreditation of universities for submission to the Accreditation Council.
- d) Methodological and content-related further development of quality assurance procedures.
- e) Establishment and maintenance of national and international cooperation, especially within the framework of the creation of a single European Higher Education Area.
- f) Assuming special tasks in quality assurance and quality development at higher education institutions on the basis of contractual arrangements.
- g) Planning and implementation of external quality assurance procedures at national and international level in addition to accreditation according to letter c).

The Charter also defines ZEvA's legal bodies, namely the Foundation Board of Trustees, the Executive Board, the ZEvA-Commission and the Standing Evaluation Commission. The Board of Trustees consists of seven members, six of them appointed by the State Universities Conference (LHK) in agreement with the Ministry of Science and Culture of Lower Saxony (MWK) and one appointed directly by the MWK. Three members should be selected from HEIs in Lower Saxony and three from outside of Lower Saxony. The Board elects a chairperson and a deputy chairperson. The members are appointed for a period of 5 years. Re-election is permissible. The Board's tasks are defined in § 8:

- a) Appointment and dismissal of the members of the Executive Board,
- b) Acceptance of the statement of accounts of the Foundation's Executive Board, resolution of the business plan and granting discharge to the Executive Board,
- c) Appointment of the members of the Standing Evaluation Commission on the basis of the proposals made pursuant to § 11 and their dismissal,
- d) Appointment of the members of the ZEvA-Commission on the basis of the proposals according to § 12 and their dismissal,

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<sup>7</sup> Lower Saxony Higher Education Act. See

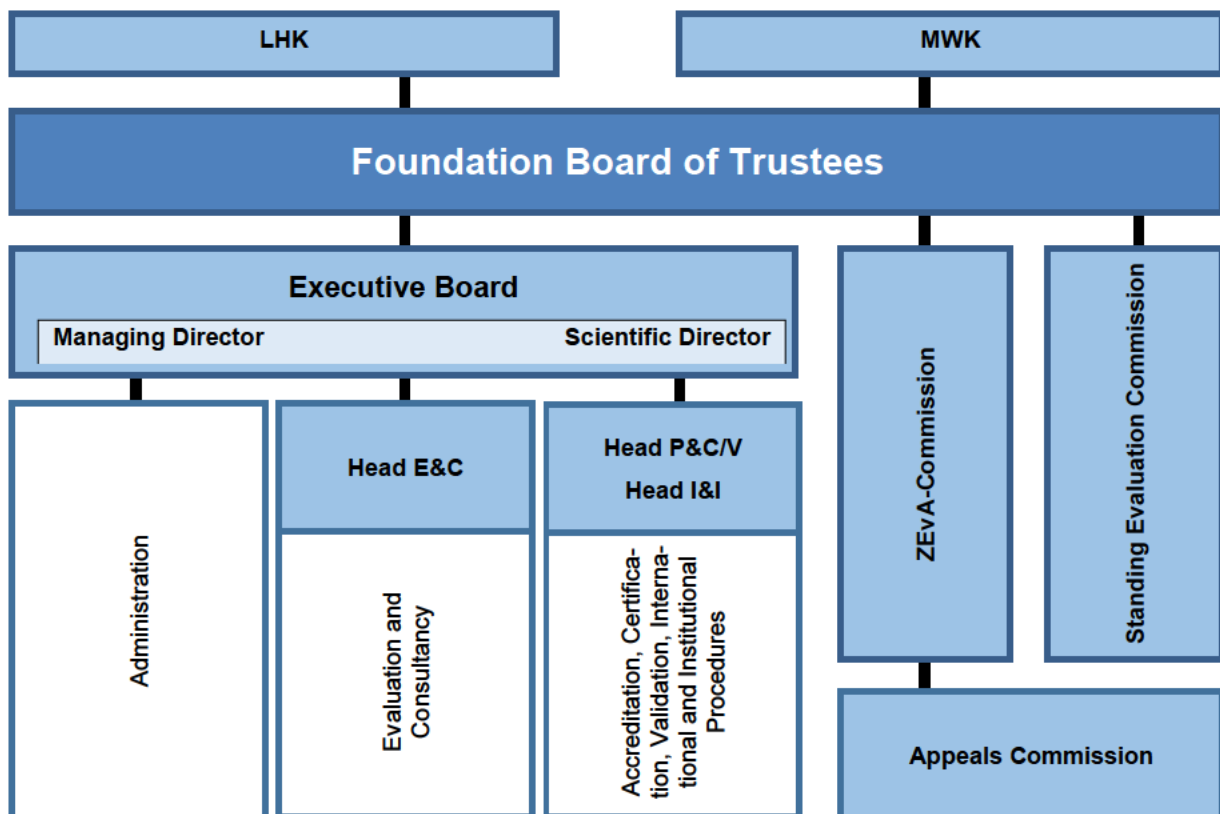
[http://www.nds-voris.de/jportal/portal/t/lmg/page/bsvorisprod.psml/action/portlets.jw.MainAction?p1=9&eventSubmit\\_doNavigate=searchInSubtreeTOC&showdoccase=1&doc.hl=0&doc.id=jlr-HSchulGND2007V17P5&doc.part=S&toc.poskey=#focuspoint](http://www.nds-voris.de/jportal/portal/t/lmg/page/bsvorisprod.psml/action/portlets.jw.MainAction?p1=9&eventSubmit_doNavigate=searchInSubtreeTOC&showdoccase=1&doc.hl=0&doc.id=jlr-HSchulGND2007V17P5&doc.part=S&toc.poskey=#focuspoint)  
 Unofficial English version:  
[https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/document/download/715fc9e9317654a6f83f3302d614c7bc.pdf/NHG\\_English.pdf](https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/document/download/715fc9e9317654a6f83f3302d614c7bc.pdf/NHG_English.pdf)

- e) Decisions on amendments to the statutes,
- f) Decisions to abolish the Foundation,
- g) Approval of the rules of procedure of the Board, the Standing Evaluation Commission and the ZEvA Commission.

The Executive Board consists of the Managing Director and the Scientific Director, who are appointed by the Board of Trustees for a period of five years (See Annex 4). Re-election is permissible as well. The Managing Director manages the day-to-day business of ZEvA, acts as superior of staff and represents ZEvA in judicial and extrajudicial matters. The Scientific Director acts as head of the ZEKo and the SEK.

For its different kinds of activities, ZEvA has appointed three Division Heads, one for Evaluation and Consultancy, one for Programme Accreditation and Certification/Validation and one for International and Institutional Procedures, who act as middle management for the project officers.

The following diagram shows ZEvA's internal structure:



The ZEvA Commission and Standing Evaluation Commission are described in detail in 2.4.1. For the Appeals Commission, which is appointed by the ZEvA Commission, see the information given for ESG Standard 2.7 under chapter 3. As the Appeals Commission does not take any final decisions, it is not counted among ZEvA's bodies but advises the ZEvA Commission in appeals and complaints.

## 2.4 ZEvA's External Quality Assurance Activities

### 2.4.1 General

#### 2.4.1.1 An overview of all activities

| Type of procedure                                     | Number of (study) programmes/procedures |      |      |      |      |
|---|---|------|------|------|------|
|   | 2016                                    | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
| <b>Programme Accreditation A<sup>8</sup></b>          | 180                                     | 226  | 322  | 145  | 66   |
| <b>Programme Accreditation B<sup>9</sup></b>          | 0                                       | 0    | 0    | 28   | 69   |
| <b>System Accreditation A</b>                         | 2                                       | 1    | 2    | 3    | 2    |
| <b>System Accreditation B</b>                         | 0                                       | 0    | 0    | 0    | 2    |
| <b>Accreditation according to "European Approach"</b> | 0                                       | 1    | 0    | 0    | 1    |
| <b>International Programme Accreditation</b>          | 25                                      | 4    | 20   | 7    | 11   |
| <b>International Institutional Accreditation</b>      | 0                                       | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    |
| <b>Institutional Audit</b>                            | 3                                       | 0    | 1    | 0    | 0    |
| <b>Evaluation</b>                                     | 2                                       | 0    | 2    | 1    | 2    |
| <b>(Programme) Certification</b>                      | 3                                       | 2    | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| <b>(Institutional) Certification</b>                  | 0                                       | 0    | 0    | 0    | 1    |

#### 2.4.1.2 ZEvA-Commission

Central deciding body for all procedures that do not fall under ZEvA's evaluation mandate in Lower Saxony is the ZEvA Commission (ZEKo). It was formed in 2018 in reaction to the changes in the German accreditation system. Previously, ZEvA had employed two deciding bodies, the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK), responsible for all procedures in Germany, and the Commission for International Affairs (KIA). Additionally, the Commission for System Accreditation (KSA), a sub-commission to the SAK, dealt specifically with procedures in system accreditation and prepared these for the final decision by the SAK. Since, in the new German accreditation system, accreditation decisions are no longer taken by the agency's internal commission, ZEvA decided to merge these three commissions into one, the newly formed ZEKo. As with the SAK, KIA and KSA, all relevant stakeholders are represented. The

<sup>8</sup> A: In accordance with the GAC criteria valid before 2018

<sup>9</sup> B: In accordance with the criteria of the new legislation effective from January 2018

ZEKo is comprised of long-standing experts from academia, the professional world, quality assurance and the student body. Its composition is as follows:

- a) the Scientific Director as a chairperson,
- b) seven representatives from universities or equivalent institutions of higher education, representing the major fields of study humanities and cultural sciences; mathematics and natural sciences; health care, medicine and psychology; engineering sciences; law, economics and social sciences,
- c) four representatives from universities of applied sciences from the major fields of study economics and law; social sciences and health care; engineering and architecture; natural and life sciences,
- d) two representatives of the study areas art, design and music,
- e) two representatives of quality management at universities,
- f) two representatives from the professional practice,
- g) one student representative each of a university or equivalent institution of higher education and a university of applied sciences.<sup>10</sup>

The ZEKo takes decisions on national and international accreditation procedures (apart from those within the current German accreditation system), institutional audits, certifications and validations, and appoints expert groups for all of these procedures, including those according to the current German accreditation system. The results of procedures concluding with a GAC decision are presented to the ZEKo for information and discussion. The ZEKo reflects on pertinent issues from these procedures and advises ZEvA in questions of strategy. Additionally, the ZEKo can appoint working groups for special topics, as for instance the digitalisation of study and teaching.

The ZEKo members are appointed by the foundation council. Student members are appointed for two years, all other members for three years. The ZEKo's procedures are regulated by the ZEKo's Rules of Procedure (see Annex 5).

#### *2.4.1.3 Standing Evaluation Commission*

ZEvA's Standing Evaluation Commission supervises ZEvA's evaluation activities as a whole and makes decisions about ZEvA's evaluation activities in Lower Saxony, usually covering the following two years. The commission receives reports on ongoing evaluation processes and decides on recommendations for measures concerning quality improvement. Furthermore, it decides on the refined procedural principles for ZEvA's evaluation procedures (based on the ESG) and monitors compliance with them.

The commission consists of 10 experts:

- a) the scientific director as chairperson,
- b) the chairperson or a deputy of the State University Conference of Lower Saxony (LHK),
- c) two current or former members of the presidential board or rectorate of a university and a university of applied sciences,
- d) a person with experience in national or international evaluation,
- e) one student representative each from a university and a university of applied sciences

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<sup>10</sup> For the current composition, see <https://www.zeva.org/ueber-die-zeva/zeva-kommission-zeko>



and

- f) a representative of the Ministry of Science and Culture in Lower Saxony.<sup>11</sup>

The members under c) are proposed equally by the LHK and ZEvA's Scientific Director, the members listed in d) and e) by the Scientific Director. These members are appointed by the Foundation Council. The member under letter f) is appointed by the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony. The details are laid out in the SEK's rules of procedure (see Annex 6).

## 2.4.2 Activities in Germany

### 2.4.2.1 Programme Accreditation in Germany

The subject of programme accreditation are bachelor's and master's programmes of state or state-recognized universities in Germany. Since January 2018, all programme and system accreditation procedures are conducted according to the accreditation decrees of the federal states ("Studienakkreditierungsverordnungen der Länder"). At ZEvA, only few procedures are still carried out according to the old regulations issued by the GAC ("Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation", Drs. AR 20/2013). It is expected that by March 2021, all outstanding cases of programme accreditation according to these rules will be concluded and are thus no longer among ZEvA's offered procedures.

The accreditation process is a multi-stage procedure based on the principle of peer review. ZEvA has issued a manual which describes this process in detail.<sup>12</sup> If a higher education institution commissions an agency, it appoints an expert group, the composition of which reflects both the subject matter and the specific profile of the study programme. The expert group includes representatives of all relevant interest groups, namely

- at least two professors/academics with expertise in the relevant field of study to be examined,
- a representative of professional practice with close professional ties to the field of study,
- a student from the field of study.

Part 2 and 3 of the current accreditation regulations provide the criteria for assessment of programmes. Compliance with the formal criteria defined in Part 2 shall be assessed by the Agency. The agency documents the results in a report, which is made available to the experts and the university.

The academic assessment of the study programme is based on the criteria laid down in Part 3. This part is conducted by the expert group and, in addition to the analysis of the self-assessment report, usually includes a site-visit at the HEI. In the initial accreditation of programmes that have not yet begun and in re-accreditations, the experts can decide to dispense with a site visit and will instead conduct a desktop validation. In the course of this inspection, the expert group holds discussions with representatives of the university. Subsequently, and combined with the report on the formal criteria, the experts prepare an accreditation report with a recommendation for a decision on the accreditation of the study programme(s).

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<sup>11</sup> For the current composition, see <https://www.zeva.org/evaluation/evaluierungskommission-sek-1>

<sup>12</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Programmakkreditierung.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Programmakkreditierung.pdf)

If there is a reasonable and justified connection between study programmes, accreditation can also be carried out as part of a cluster procedure; nevertheless, the accreditation decision always relates to the individual study programme.

The Accreditation Council decides on the accreditation of the study programme upon application by the university based on its SAR and the combined accreditation report of the agency and the expert group.

If a programme has successfully undergone an accreditation procedure, it receives a limited accreditation of eight years with or without conditions and bears the GAC's quality seal for the period of its accreditation.

#### *2.4.2.2 Accreditation of Study Programmes Outside of the Bachelor/Master-System*

In some singular cases, ZEvA also accredits study programmes that do not fall in the Bachelor or Master category. This has been the case for Diploma programmes and structured doctoral programmes. Purpose and context of these accreditations may vary. Only in Lower Saxony, special rules and criteria for doctoral programmes have been devised by the Ministry of Science and Culture that refer to the ECTS system and the Dublin Descriptors for the doctoral level ("Leitlinien und Kriterien für die Akkreditierung von Promotionsstudiengängen in Niedersachsen").<sup>13</sup> As the universities in Lower Saxony increasingly turn to system accreditation, this type of procedure, which has already been scarce, is expected to fade out completely. In all other cases, ZEvA uses criteria relevant to the case based on the ESG and the applicable German accreditation criteria. The procedure resembles that of the accreditation of Bachelor and Master programmes, with the final decision taken by the ZEvA Commission.

#### *2.4.2.3 System Accreditation in Germany*

System accreditation assesses the "internal quality assurance system of a higher education institution in the area of teaching and learning". The internal system must a.o. ensure the setup and operation of compliant study programmes according to the criteria of programme accreditation and thus also adhere to the standards mentioned in Part I of the ESG. Whether this is done at the higher education institution is examined by ZEvA in the system accreditation procedure. A significant difference to programme accreditation consists in the assessment of the internal quality assurance system of a higher education institution and thus also in the consideration of the quality assurance strategy (Standard 1.1, ESG 2015).

A higher education institution that obtains system accreditation has self-accrediting status, i.e. it is given the right to award the quality label of the German Accreditation Council to its own programmes for a period of eight years, without having to undergo external programme accreditation. As a central prerequisite for this, the HEI must prove that it has implemented an effective and appropriate internal accreditation procedure which involves a regular assessment of all programmes by external experts.

Since January 2018, all system accreditation procedures are conducted according to the accreditation decrees of the federal states ("Studienakkreditierungsverordnungen der Länder").

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<sup>13</sup> See [https://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/157318/Leitlinien\\_und\\_Kriterien\\_fuer\\_die\\_Akkreditierung\\_von\\_Promotionsstudiengaengen\\_in\\_Niedersachsen\\_Stand\\_17.07.2020\\_nicht\\_vollstaendig\\_barrierefrei\\_-\\_Download\\_.pdf](https://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/157318/Leitlinien_und_Kriterien_fuer_die_Akkreditierung_von_Promotionsstudiengaengen_in_Niedersachsen_Stand_17.07.2020_nicht_vollstaendig_barrierefrei_-_Download_.pdf)



While the procedure as such has not changed substantially compared to the former regulations, the assessment criteria for system accreditation (cf. §§ 17-18) have been re-formulated in order to reflect the purpose and focus of the assessment more clearly.

System accreditation is designed as a multiple-step procedure as stipulated in the ESG. The assessment of the quality assurance system is conducted based on a self-evaluation report of the higher education institution and two on-site visits of the expert panel. In preparation for the second site visit the higher education institution compiles a so-called sample, i.e. a collection of documents which illustrate the impact of internal quality assurance processes (including the internal accreditation procedure) on selected study programmes. The sample provides another important basis for the assessment of the system. The final accreditation decision is taken by the German Accreditation Council based on the assessment report of the expert panel.

Experts in system accreditation need to possess solid experience and competencies in higher education leadership and management, quality assurance, accreditation and/or the development of educational programmes. Ideally, they should also be used to working in international settings. As in programme accreditation, all expert groups also include a student member and a representative of professional practice from outside academia. At the request of the higher education institution, the panel may be complemented by a quality management professional.

In recent years, system accreditation has become increasingly popular among German higher education institutions. This general trend is partly politically induced, as many federal state governments strongly encourage their universities to switch from programme to system accreditation. Also, higher education institutions expect to gain in autonomy and to facilitate the development of a quality culture by implementing an internal quality assurance system which is tailored to their individual needs.

Considering this large-scale development, it comes as no surprise that ZEvA has significantly extended its activities in this area over the last five years or so. Between 2015 and 2020, the agency conducted 11 system accreditation procedures at both public and private higher education institutions of various profiles and sizes, including one re-accreditation procedure. Another 12 procedures are still ongoing or about to start in the near future; the majority of them based on the new accreditation legislation.

In view of the ongoing trend towards system accreditation and the resulting decline in programme accreditation procedures, the agency is planning to allocate additional staff resources to this field of activity in the near future.

#### *2.4.2.4 Certification and Validation*

HEIs increasingly provide opportunities for lifelong learning and further education to students, graduates and lecturers. ZEvA offers the external assessment and certification of such further education modules and programmes. Other services in this realm include the institutional certification of tertiary institutions or organisational units at HEIs offering further education programmes (as e.g. specialized institutes or departments, which may also be jointly run by several HEIs). In these procedures, the focus of the assessment lies on analysing the structure, the efficiency and the objectives of the HEI or the organizational unit, and – if applicable – the integration of the unit into the overall structure and strategy of the HEI.

The further education offers at HEIs are usually opportunities for lifelong learning, scientific further education or didactic further education. These offers are used by students, graduates and lecturers at universities.

Additionally, ZEvA conducts validations of educational programmes offered by non-university education providers. The target group of a validation by ZEvA are education providers with a reference to higher education, but whose educational offerings do not themselves belong to the tertiary education system. The subjects of validation procedures may be, for instance, curricular elements of a regulated vocational school education or independent educational modules and programmes that are offered by public or private educational institutions. As a central prerequisite for the awarding of the ZEvA quality label, all these educational units and programmes have to provide evidence that they impart qualifications at an academic level and could be used in study programmes (Bachelor) leading to level six of the German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and are thus equivalent in level and content to educational units in Bachelor's programmes at HEIs. Hence, the procedure does not only serve to support non-university education providers in increasing their quality in teaching and learning but also to increase the politically desired permeability of the secondary into the tertiary education sector.

As laid out in the ZEvA manual,<sup>14</sup> the requirements of the ESG are binding for certification procedures. In validation procedures, some deviation from the ESG is possible as regards the execution of the procedure and the assessment framework. Depending on the complexity and scope of the procedure, the process must be designed accordingly. However, the main purpose of the procedures would be to determine the equivalence of the defined learning objectives and competencies or the classification according to the German Qualifications Framework, check consistency with the structure and system of modules and credit points (according to ECTS) and to ensure suitable teaching and learning conditions.

So far, ZEvA has conducted certification and validation procedures in Germany and Switzerland. The latter included the validation of a professional training programme offered by the International Telecommunication Union (see also 2.4.3).

#### *2.4.2.5 Evaluation and Consultancy*

ZEvA offers consultancy and the organization and implementation of external evaluation procedures as a service to higher education institutions and vocational academies. It provides HEIs with support for quality development and improvement in all areas related to study, teaching and learning, including quality management. ZEvA considers itself as a catalyst for quality development in higher education and not as a supervisory authority. In order to achieve the greatest possible benefit for the HEIs, the specific objectives of an evaluation process are clarified in detail at the beginning of each project.

The evaluation procedures are based on the ESG. The processes run in several stages, i.e. they include phases of internal evaluation (self-report) and external evaluation (site visit by a group of experts), and ZEvA can also accompany and support the HEI during the implementation phase.

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<sup>14</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Zertifizierung\\_und\\_Validierung.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Zertifizierung_und_Validierung.pdf)

Assessments in evaluation procedures are carried out in the form of a peer review. An expert group of academic colleagues, supplemented by representatives of the student body and professional practice, conducts discussions with various interest groups of the institution to be assessed based on a self-report. The expert group writes a report about the results and makes recommendations for the further development of the institution.

ZEvA can rely on a pool of nationally and internationally recognized experts.

ZEvA's range of services in the field of evaluation and consulting currently includes the areas of thematic evaluation and consulting services for higher education institutions.

In Lower Saxony, ZEvA supports higher education institutions in fulfilling their obligation for external evaluation in teaching as stipulated in the state higher education act. ZEvA can also offer evaluations outside of Lower Saxony and even internationally (see also 2.4.3). These would not fall under ZEvA's mandate in Lower Saxony and are thus not covered by the institutional funding.

The results of an evaluation procedure are published by ZEvA. The respective report, including a statement from the evaluated institution and the composition of the group of experts are made available as an online publication on the ZEvA website.

### Thematic evaluations

Thematic evaluations are a valuable instrument where specific questions regarding teaching and study need to be examined on behalf of higher education institutions, politics, science and society. Examples of thematic evaluations are:

- Evaluation of the examination system
- Evaluation of dual study programmes
- Evaluation of measures to promote mathematical, technical, engineering and natural science study programmes

In contrast to institutional evaluation and subject evaluation, thematic evaluations are ad hoc procedures without a predetermined rhythm of first and follow-up evaluations.

### Consultation

In addition to thematic evaluations, ZEvA offers higher education institutions, vocational academies and other educational institutions consulting services. The main topics are:

- Organizational development
- Curriculum development
- Internal evaluation
- Project management
- Accreditation, certification and validation

The institutions of higher education have the opportunity to get extensive information in all areas of study and teaching as well as quality management and to get in touch with both the agency's employees and proven subject-specific experts.

Evaluation, accreditation or certification procedures can be prepared in a confidential atmosphere with communication based on partnership. Internal structures and processes can be optimized by looking from an external position and there is a chance to initiate and facilitate internal change processes.

Consulting services from ZEvA can be used via three process variants:

- Consultation without the involvement of external experts
- Consultation with the participation of external experts
- Consultation based on evaluation projects

As consultation is not an instrument of external quality assurance, it is not subject to the ESG and thus only mentioned here for completeness' sake. Consultation for HEIs in Lower Saxony falls under ZEvA's mandate from the state government.

### 2.4.3 International Activities

#### General developments

In the course of the last five years, ZEvA has significantly expanded its international activities. In view of the continuously growing volume of business outside of Germany, the management decided to enhance the team by an additional project officer who is primarily in charge of international affairs.

Furthermore, ZEvA implemented a strategy which stipulates the agency's strategic goals, activities and services in the field of internationalization for the time period 2017-2021. Apart from different forms of external quality assessment, these include consulting and advisory services as well as projects, training seminars, publications and active participation in international conferences. In 2019 the internationalization strategy underwent a thorough mid-term revision, in order to check in how far the agency's internationalization goals had been achieved and were still valid.

In recent years, two geographical focus areas have emerged which are also addressed in the strategy paper: Eastern Europe (particularly Russia and Ukraine) and the Arab world (Egypt, the autonomous region of Kurdistan/Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE). Demand for international accreditation is particularly high in these countries due to favourable political conditions and strong competition between higher education institutions. In Ukraine, ZEvA procedures are now also recognized by the national Ministry of Education.

In 2018 the ZEvA Commission for International Affairs (KIA) was dissolved as part of a large-scale restructuring process. Some of the former KIA members entered the central ZEvA Commission (ZEKo) instead. Based on their international experience and expertise, the ZEKo now takes the final decisions in all international accreditation and certification procedures, including institutional audits in Austria.

#### External Assessment

Programme accreditation procedures still constitute the biggest part of ZEvA's international business. For these procedures, ZEvA has formulated its own assessment framework, which is in close accordance with the ESG. The assessment criteria and the review procedure are described in detail in the ZEvA Manual for the External Assessment of Study Programmes.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA\\_Manual\\_External\\_Assessment\\_of\\_Study\\_Programmes.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA_Manual_External_Assessment_of_Study_Programmes.pdf)

The manual is published on the ZEvA website and serves as a central reference document for both higher education institutions and reviewers.

Since 2016, ZEvA has conducted 16 programme accreditation procedures abroad, most of them in the Russian Federation and in the Kurdistan region/Iraq. A wide variety of subject disciplines was covered, including engineering, natural sciences and social sciences. In Russia, demand for international accreditation is highest among renowned public universities, whereas in other countries it was mostly smaller and/or privately owned institutions applying for accreditation.

The programme accreditation procedures in Russia were partly conducted in co-operation with ZEvA's Russian partner agency Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Career Development (AKKORK). AKKORK holds contact with the universities and is responsible for the general coordination and organization of the assessment procedure, whereas ZEvA selects the experts, conducts the assessment based on the ZEvA assessment framework and awards the quality label.

In addition to programme accreditation, ZEvA developed an assessment framework and procedural guidelines for institutional accreditation procedures outside Germany in 2017.<sup>16</sup> In 2019, the concept was applied in practice for the first time at a university of applied sciences in the Kurdish region of Iraq, where it was combined with a programme accreditation procedure.

Furthermore, ZEvA is licensed to conduct quality audits at universities of applied sciences in Austria. The assessment framework is specified by the Austrian Higher Education Institution Quality Assurance Act ("Hochschulqualitätssicherungsgesetz") (§ 22 HS-QSG) which integrates the ESG criteria for internal quality assurance at higher education institutions. ZEvA has published an audit manual for the support of experts and higher education institutions which explains the assessment procedure and the audit requirements in detail.<sup>17</sup> The audits involve a self-report and a 2-3 day site visit at the university, leading up to the final certification of the institutional quality management system with the ZEvA quality label.

In the course of the last five years, ZEvA has conducted a total of four audits.

Finally, ZEvA offers evaluation, certification and validation services on an international scale. During the past five years, activities included the evaluation of a pilot Master's programme in Fisheries Science at Pukyong National University in Busan/South Korea (a project of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization) and the validation of one educational training programme offered by the International Telecommunication Union. These procedures were very specific as regards their goals and design and were therefore not strictly based on any of the ZEvA standard manuals. Furthermore, since the evaluation in Busan falls more in the realm of consultancy and the ITU is a non-academic institution, these procedures are not strictly ESG-related. However, the ESG standards (Part 1), the ECTS Users' Guide and the European

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<sup>16</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA\\_Manual\\_Institutional\\_Accreditation.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA_Manual_Institutional_Accreditation.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Qualitaetsaudit\\_OEsterreich.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Qualitaetsaudit_OEsterreich.pdf)



Qualifications Frameworks served as the main reference points, as laid out in the respective expert reports.<sup>18</sup>

### Further activities

In the years 2016-2018, ZEvA chaired the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

In September 2018, ZEvA hosted a seminar on European quality assurance standards in higher education in Cairo on invitation of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). This seminar was followed by a conference on internationalization and quality assurance in higher education that took place in Alexandria/Egypt in December 2018. The event was jointly organized by ZEvA and the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport in Alexandria, and was primarily directed at higher education institutions in the Arab world.

In addition to that, the ZEvA project officers occasionally delivered short talks or lectures in the context of international meetings and conferences. Several members of staff also attended international conferences on quality assurance in higher education, as, for example, the annual European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF).

In 2019, ZEvA started a long-term project in conjunction with the Kurdish Ministry of Science. The prime goal of this project is to support the ministry in implementing a quality assurance system for the Kurdish higher education sector. This is meant to include, for example, measures for capacity building at Kurdish higher education institutions and the establishment of a quality assurance agency.

Due to the increasingly volatile political development in the region and the global Corona crisis, the project is currently on hold, but will be resumed as soon as possible.

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<sup>18</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Berichte\\_Internationale\\_Verfahren/Experts\\_Evaluation\\_Report\\_WFU\\_Pilot\\_Programme\\_Busan\\_South\\_Korea\\_Final\\_for\\_Publication.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Berichte_Internationale_Verfahren/Experts_Evaluation_Report_WFU_Pilot_Programme_Busan_South_Korea_Final_for_Publication.pdf) and [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Berichte\\_Internationale\\_Verfahren/ZEvA\\_Experts\\_Report\\_Certification\\_ITU\\_SMTTP\\_Programme\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Berichte_Internationale_Verfahren/ZEvA_Experts_Report_Certification_ITU_SMTTP_Programme_FINAL.pdf)

## 2.5 ZEvA's Internal Quality Assurance

### 2.5.1 General

In its work in external quality assurance in higher education, ZEvA aspires to the following primary quality goals:

- To ensure the coherence and consistency of its evaluations and decisions
- Reliability towards the customer, especially combined with a high degree of adherence to delivery dates for all processes
- Transparency through complete documentation of procedures and processes
- Internal and external quality assessment of working processes and results
- Establishing and maintaining an efficient organization characterized by cost-effectiveness and a good cost-benefit ratio

The objectives are described in more detail in ZEvA's published Quality Handbook (See Annex 9), which serves the purpose of maintaining quality standards in the execution of reviews, and are thus documented transparently within the organization and vis-à-vis external interest groups:

| Objective   | Measure  |
|---|--|
| High quality of assessments                             | The assessment reports as well as the decisions following from them take into account all assessment and accreditation criteria. The assessments are justified in detail and are comprehensively documented and published in the final accreditation report. The factual basis for assessment is sufficient. |
| Customer satisfaction                                   | Effective quality management;<br>Internal evaluation through surveys concerning the procedures and feedback discussions with higher education institutions   |
| Expertise, appropriateness of decisions and reliability | Ensuring comparable decisions in comparable cases by entering the decisions in the database<br>Ensuring the quality of experts by feedback from ZEvA's Commissions and within the team<br>Further training of experts and employees  |
| Efficiency and effectiveness                            | Adherence to schedules<br>Internal controlling of the processes<br>Consulting and publications directed at higher education institutions<br>Assuring availability of the resources   |
| Transparency  | Completeness of documents<br>Documents being up-to-date<br>Quality of documents  |



|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
|                                       | Comprehensive documentation<br>Publications   |
| Compliance with procedural principles | Joint signing procedures<br>Project management separate from planning / regulation and control of the organisation<br>Feedback internally, with the other agencies, with AR<br>Responsibility and division of tasks<br>Reliability<br>Truthfulness<br>Benefit for students takes precedence |

In order to achieve these goals, ZEvA has implemented various elements of quality assurance and improvement and combined them in a comprehensive system. In all its quality improvement activities, ZEvA is oriented towards the PDCA cycle (plan-do-check-act) and always tries to establish closed quality cycles. The starting point is not so much in the “plan” phase as in the “do” phase, i.e. the work routines that have been established for a long time. However, these routines must be constantly questioned and evaluated (check), especially in such a fast-moving business as education and quality assurance at universities. Direct reactions to market requirements and the design of new and adapted procedures (act and plan) are vital for a quality agency. The transition to the new accreditation system in Germany is a fitting current example of necessary and comprehensive adaptation processes. The quality cycle is closed by considering all cycle phases as a whole. This system has already proved to be effective and sustainable in the past.

### 2.5.2 Project Database

An important basis for internal quality assurance is provided by a project database which supports the project officers and experts in carrying out the assessment procedures and, additionally, also the ZEKo members in preparing the commission meetings. Commission meetings are processed with full EDP support. The database contains master data of the actors involved and stores the associated documents along the process diagram of the procedure. At the same time the database tracks deadlines for e.g. accreditation periods or deadlines for fulfilling conditions. The database software is updated at regular intervals and adapted to the current regulations and guidelines for the accreditation procedures. ZEvA is in the process of replacing the current software (ZEvA Connect) with a more comprehensive tool that also encompasses financial controlling and provides a more thorough system for collecting and analysing data about ZEvA’s business and procedures. This new software is expected to be installed and functional by the end of 2021.

### 2.5.3 Measuring Success

A comprehensive system of quality assurance and improvement includes the measurement of success. Success or the achievement of a certain goal is on the one hand reflected in the measure of satisfaction, which is collected from reviewers and stakeholders in the universities



via the online survey (see 2.5.7). Beyond the relatively "soft" measure of the expression of opinion on satisfaction, however, a relatively "hard" indicator that demonstrates the quality of ZEvA's work concerns behaviour of stakeholders: Reviewers are often willing to commit themselves to a long-term cooperation with ZEvA and are willing to take part in ZEvA's procedures repeatedly, which can only be achieved through a high level of satisfaction and trust in the quality of ZEvA's work and its results. Similarly, HEIs that have worked with ZEvA will make use of its services repeatedly only if they are convinced of the quality and value of ZEvA's work, even when compared to competitors in the field of quality agencies. The great majority of ZEvA's customers express their satisfaction by returning for further procedures and establishing a long-term working relationship. As ZEvA is working in a market for quality assurance agencies, the ability to distinguish itself among its competitors is an important indicator of ZEvA's ongoing success.

The results of external reviews of ZEvA serve as a further measure of success. In the past, the GAC has accredited ZEvA every five years, an external review that is supplanted by an ENQA review. The results of these reviews so far have been very positive, with only smaller measures to be taken. In addition to these external reviews, the GAC has regularly reviewed random samples of accreditation procedures. ZEvA was able to reduce the number of issues raised in these sample reviews significantly. Due to the change in the accreditation system, this sample review is no longer required and has been replaced by a different measure. ZEvA's accreditation reports are subject to scrutiny by both the GAC's head office and the members of the GAC itself. ZEvA measures success in the current system by the level of acceptance of these reports and the assessments contained therein by the GAC. Disagreements with expert opinions on behalf of the GAC or deviations from the experts' recommendations provide us with important information for our work practice and the future design of procedures. The decisions of the GAC are supplemented by intensive communication with council members and the GAC office. Since the current accreditation system has only been in place for roughly three years, this process of aligning ZEvA's procedures with the GAC's practice and interpretation of criteria is still ongoing.

#### 2.5.4 Quality of Staff

The most important resource for ZEvA is competent and motivated personnel, especially on the level of the project officers. They form an important interface between the universities, the expert groups and the commissions. Therefore, ZEvA's staff is also the most important factor influencing the quality of ZEvA's services. Through our efforts in personnel recruitment, we have so far been successful in attracting suitable employees for the position of project officers and in making them fit for their task through a comprehensive induction program. A solid introduction to the daily work of reviewing is guaranteed by means of work shadowing, i.e. sitting in on procedures of senior staff, a buddy system and accompanied procedural support.

In addition to individually plannable further training opportunities, regular communication and joint planning are important in ZEvA's ongoing activities. For this purpose, ZEvA holds a general jour fixe every two weeks, alternating with a jour fixe of the management team. In addition to managing ZEvA's daily business, the general meetings particularly serve to establish a joint interpretation of standards, criteria and guidelines. Employees are informed about current developments and report on their own experiences and problems in their daily work. This format is often used to jointly find viable solutions to individual and overarching problems. The results



are documented in the meeting's minutes, and derived measures are tracked. Once a month, the general jour fixe is supplemented by a specific jour fixe for programme accreditation to consider the special coordination needs of ZEvA's (so far) prime field of activity.

The jour fixe of the management team is used to discuss strategic topics and current issues. Once a month, the management team also meets with an employee representative to discuss points of concern for ZEvA's staff. The results are presented to ZEvA's employees in the general jour fixe.

At least once a year, the entire staff participates in a two-day retreat. In addition to strategic discussions (including the results of the SWOT analysis), this usually involves the revision of processes and documents.

As a further personnel development measure, ZEvA is currently offering personal and individual coaching to its employees and management team by an external coach, which is supposed to be supplemented by a group coaching later in 2021.

### 2.5.5 Quality of Experts

Another important resource are ZEvA's experts, who are carefully selected and prepared for their task. The preparation of the experts for the accreditation or evaluation procedures is based on various instruments such as guides, handouts, briefings prior to the site visit, as well as the expert trainings offered by ZEvA. The expert seminars for programme accreditation are carried out annually. Recently, the in-person seminars have been supplemented by shorter webinars, which can reach a greater number of experts and can also be offered during the Covid-19 crisis. In addition to that, ZEvA expands the reach of their seminars by offering them in other locations, making it easier for experts from that region to attend. Trainings for experts in system accreditation, international procedures and evaluations are offered to the individual expert groups in preparation of the respective procedure they are involved in.

The seminars serve to introduce experts to the procedural rules and criteria they need to observe and to inform them about new developments and changes as regards the procedural framework. In the context of the seminars, ZEvA can also receive valuable feedback about the assessment procedures from the experts' perspective. The topics for the seminars are determined a.o. by interviewing experts and higher education institutions as well as through proposals made in the seminars themselves.

### 2.5.6 ZEvA's Internal Organization

ZEvA's internal bodies serve an important function in ZEvA's quality assurance. On the one hand, ZEvA's management reports twice a year to ZEvA's Foundation Council which oversees ZEvA's strategic goals and financial status. The management submits annual reports, annual financial statements and the business plan for the subsequent year to the Council for approval and reports on current developments. The Foundation Council also includes a representative of ZEvA's founder, the state of Lower Saxony, thus ensuring ZEvA's communication with the responsible authorities in its home state.

Further quality assurance takes place in ZEvA's commissions. The ZEvA Commission and the Standing Evaluation Commission serve to facilitate the exchange of information among

employees and with the members of the commissions. ZEvA submits its reports on the various QA activities to these commissions, either as a basis for formal decisions or for approval, but also to instigate discussions about broader and recurring topics which serve to further refine ZEvA's procedures. Since the committee members are external representatives from the tertiary education system, ZEvA employees get close access to external stakeholders with a long-standing experience with ZEvA's work (see also 2.5.7).

In order to get closer to the quality goal of an economically working and efficient organization, ZEvA has initiated a process of administrative reorganization in 2020. As a first step, ZEvA has installed a new management team, consisting of the managing director and the three heads of ZEvA's areas of activity. Wherever possible, decisions are made jointly and discussed in depth by the managing team, putting them on a broader basis and thereby increasing their acceptance among ZEvA's personnel. As a next step, administrative tasks are being redistributed while reducing workload and personnel capacity in the administrative area, thus keeping procedural costs for the universities relatively stable. One of the main goals is a reformed organization chart and clear, binding definitions of tasks and procedures. This restructuring process is being accompanied by an external consultant and is expected to be completed by the end of 2021.

As a further measure of quality ZEvA employs a "dual control principle" concerning assessment reports. The project officers submit their drafts to the head of their field of activity for double-checking. The fact that documents (especially expert opinions) are viewed by several people avoids errors and strengthens compliance with standards.

### 2.5.7 Involvement of External Stakeholders

The main stakeholders of ZEVA are higher education institutions – in Germany and abroad – and their members, i.e. university management, administration (including internal QA officers), teaching staff, students, and alumni. Other stakeholders include the labour market, state governments (especially the respective ministries of culture and science) and other institutions involved in higher education and the quality assurance thereof.

For a continuous exchange of information with stakeholders, the ZEvA-Commission (ZEKO) and the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK) are of particular importance, as all relevant stakeholder groups are represented in them (see 2.4.1.2 and 2.4.1.3) including (in the ZEKO) international experts, with no overlap of members between the two committees. The composition of the committees grants ZEvA access to relevant stakeholder groups, and ZEvA benefits strongly from their expertise and advice.

Additionally, ZEvA staff and management regularly attend networking events of different stakeholders, e.g. meetings of HEI QA officers, meetings and conferences organized by the German Rector's Conference or scientific associations, meetings of the labour union network of accreditation experts, and seminars by the German Student Accreditation Pool. Internationally, ZEvA meets stakeholders through events like the European Quality Assurance Forum and other international conferences, or through self-organized conferences and workshops, e.g. a conference in Egypt (see 2.4.3). In Lower Saxony, ZEvA is in close contact with the Ministry of Science and Culture and the State Universities Conference. Furthermore, ZEvA staff and management regularly attend meetings with their peers, e.g. other quality assurance agencies,



nationally and internationally (e.g. through ENQA, ECA, CEENQA, regular meetings among Germany's QA agencies) and the German Accreditation Council.

As part of its quality assurance, ZEvA regularly collects feedback from different stakeholders – formally and informally. Informally, HEI members and experts involved in ZEvA's procedures give direct feedback during and after a procedure. ZEvA's project officers hold close communication with all parties involved in their respective projects. In addition, ZEvA conducts feedback meetings with selected universities to obtain feedback on their satisfaction with the quality assurance procedures.

Formally, ZEvA carries out structured evaluation procedures. Several times a year, university representatives and reviewers are asked to fill out an evaluation form about the quality of the review process after completion of a review via the online survey portal SurveyMonkey. The results of the survey are forwarded to the participating employees and to the ZEvA management and are also presented to and discussed in the committees at regular intervals in summarized form. If necessary, measures to improve the quality of the process are derived from the evaluation results.

Recently, once a statistically relevant number of procedures had been completed, ZEvA has conducted an evaluation among ZEvA's customers and experts concerning all procedures under the new German accreditation system (see Annex 12). The number of responses is not very high yet, but nevertheless, the results show a high level of satisfaction with ZEvA's work, with the majority of answers falling into the categories "very good" and "good". Criticism from the side of ZEvA's customers included delay of a procedure due to long-term illness of the project officer who could not be substituted with another, and the quality of ZEvA's information on their website, which, according to the survey, seemed cluttered. The first criticism is in line with results of the SWOT analysis, which also spoke to a lack in personnel and thus in resilience in case of illness or departure of colleagues (see 2.5.8). This has already been addressed by hiring additional staff. ZEvA's website will receive an overhaul in the second half of 2021.

In the evaluation among ZEvA's experts, one recurring criticism was the quality of the documentation provided by the HEI to be assessed, in combination with the feeling that the HEI was not interested in suggestions for improvement. Other criticism revolved around the quality of accommodation, a wish for more statistical data to support the HEI's documentation and the prolonged finalisation of the report, which was mostly due to the pandemic situation. ZEvA is in the process of improving its overall controlling, which would help keeping track of deadlines and thus supporting project officers in adhering to them. To ensure a high quality of documentation by the HEI to be assessed, ZEvA has devised new contracts that would help sanctioning low-quality documentation. Furthermore, ZEvA now provides a new table to accompany the self-report, providing more profound statistical data.

In evaluation and consultations, the feedback system is slightly different. The experts are also interviewed using the "SurveyMonkey" system, but feedback by the respective HEI is obtained by means of a structured telephone interview. A standardised questionnaire is less effective or practical in these cases as the evaluation procedures are in part embedded in longer-term project management processes and therefore differ significantly from one another.

ZEvA seminars are another important way of obtaining feedback from external stakeholders. On the one hand, ZEvA regularly carries out training seminars for their experts (see 2.5.5) and on the other hand, offers seminars on a variety of topics. Although these seminars primarily

serve to provide information to the attendees (mainly experts, QA officers and teaching staff from HEIs), they have proven to be very valuable for obtaining direct feedback on specific topics, e.g. on the examination system or evaluation procedures at universities. ZEvA offers a regular seminar programme but can also design workshops for individual HEIs on topics of their choosing. Where necessary and desired, experts on the respective topics are invited to contribute to these seminars and workshops. Recently, especially in the corona crisis, webinars have proven to be a valuable additional tool to stay in touch with stakeholders because of their easy accessibility and repeatability. As a preparation for their respective QA procedures, ZEvA also offers opening workshops for HEIs at the agency's office, online or as a half-day or full-day inhouse-workshop.

ZEvA's publications and website serve to provide information for ZEvA's stakeholders and about the current standards and procedures as well as general developments in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

### 2.5.8 SWOT Analysis

ZEvA has recently conducted a SWOT analysis for the first time to gain deeper insight into ZEvA's current situation and position in order to derive appropriate strategic measures. As a tool for developing strategic measures, the SWOT analysis will be repeated every five years, coinciding with the preparation of the SAR for the ENQA Review. The results will be discussed internally at ZEvA's annual retreat (Klausurtagung). The SWOT analysis as described in the following combines the internal perspective of ZEvA staff with the external perspective of members of the two standing committees of ZEvA: the ZEvA-Commission (ZEKo) and the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK).

As a first step, ZEvA's staff was asked to fill out a questionnaire on the four categories Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Out of the results, clusters of recurring answers and generic terms were defined and weighted. In a second step, the results were presented to members of the ZEKO and SEK to obtain an external perspective. As a result, the weighting of the identified factors was adapted.

The main findings of the SWOT analysis are (see details at the end of this chapter):

- A strength of ZEvA is the highly committed and competent staff.
- A weakness is the scarce staffing level which makes the agency less resilient in cases of long-term illness or staff departures.
- The internationalisation in quality assurance may present an opportunity for ZEvA.
- The increased national and international competition is perceived as a threat.

As a last step, an internal analysis and discussion of results focussed especially on the differences in prioritising the factors by ZEvA and by stakeholders as well as identifying medium-term measures with higher and lower priority. The joint analysis of ZEvA employees and management led to the formulation of the following measures to be implemented within the next 2 years with high priority:

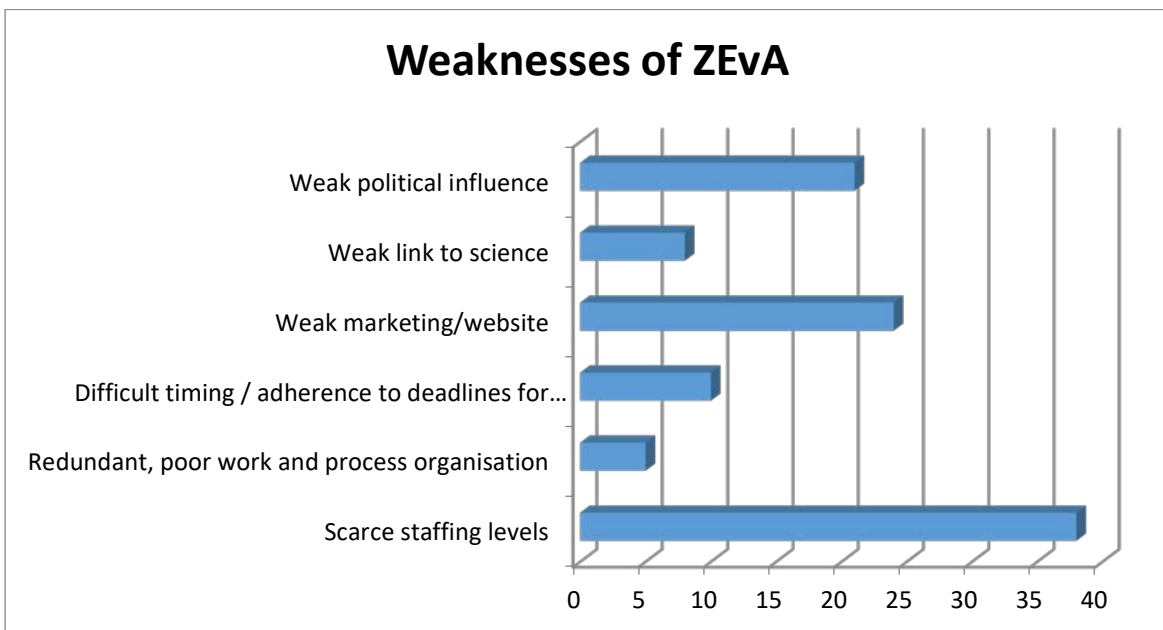
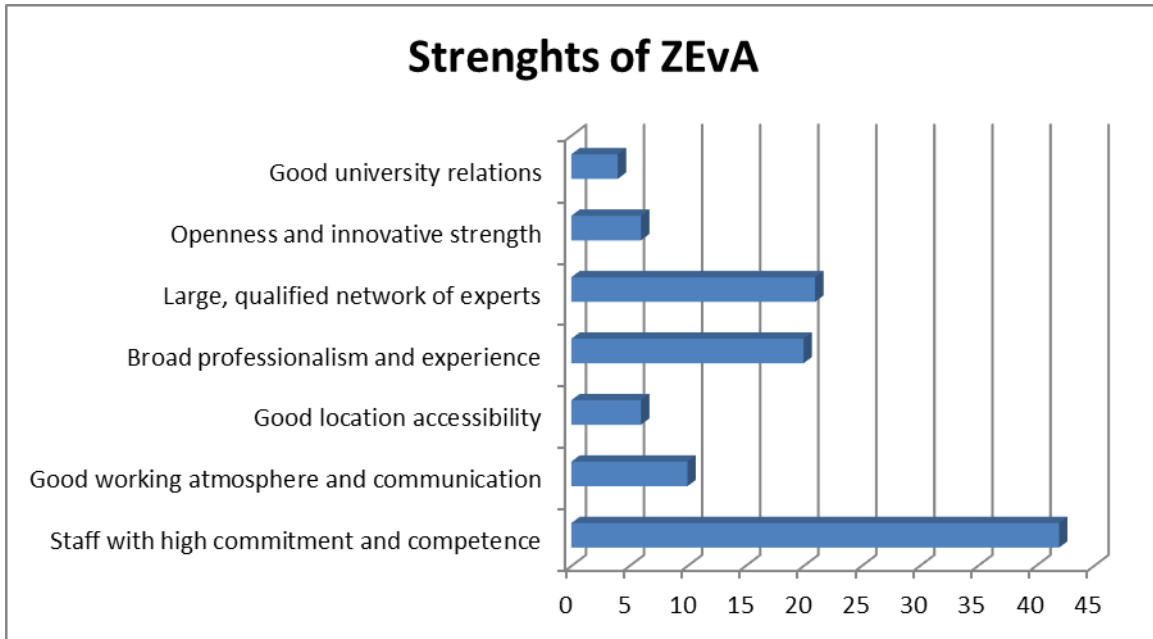
- Increase staffing level (project officers) by at least 1.0 FTE (an increase by 1.5 FTE is already accomplished beginning of January 2021!)
- Improve and increase marketing activities with a focus on the international market (including a relaunch of the website)



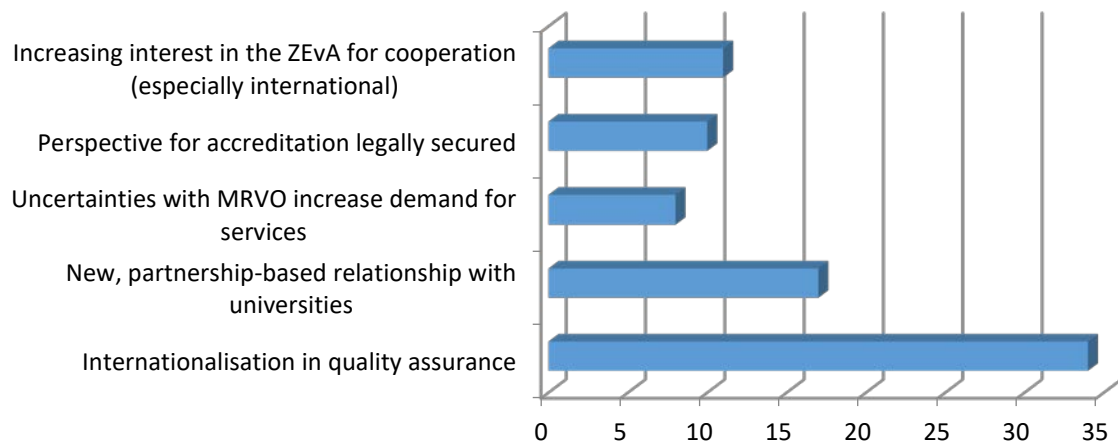
- Strengthen networking activities to increase the chances of being heard at the political level

These proposed measures will also be presented to the Board of Trustees and will be integrated into the internal management system.

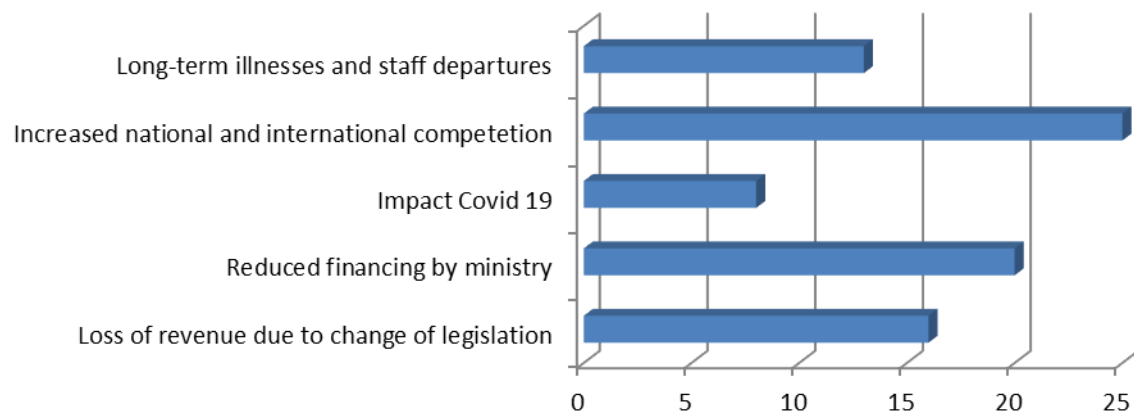
The detailed results are documented in the following charts:



## Opportunities for ZEvA



## Threats for ZEvA





## 2.6 Previous ENQA Review

### 2.6.1 GAC Review Process and Decision

ZEvA has undergone an external review by the German Accreditation Council (GAC) in 2016, combining the accreditation for the German accreditation system with an ENQA review. The experts had the task to assess the agency according to the GAC criteria for accreditation agencies and the European Standards and Guidelines. In the review report, the expert group stated that it “received an overwhelmingly positive impression of the agency’s work” but saw some of the standards and criteria only partly fulfilled.<sup>19</sup> With regard to the GAC criteria, the expert group suggested two conditions and issued five recommendations. With regard to the ESG, the experts saw 5 standards fulfilled, 5 standards substantially fulfilled, and four standards partly fulfilled. ZEvA used the opportunity of resolving some of the mentioned issues through their response to the review report.

On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, the GAC decided to accredit ZEvA for another five years. Two conditions were issued that ZEvA had to fulfil in the course of six months:

Condition 1: The agency shall demonstrate, using suitable documentation, that it conducts procedures on a full-cost basis and does not make use of cross-subsidisation (Criterion 2.3.2).

Condition 2: ZEvA shall produce an updated internal quality management system which guarantees continuous and sustainable quality development, also with regard to the system itself, and is publicly available (Criteria 2.5 and 2.2.1).<sup>20</sup>

With regard to the ENQA review, the GAC found that ZEvA partially fulfilled the ESG:

The following five standards are fulfilled: 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7

The following five standards are substantially fulfilled: 2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 2.5; 3.1

The following four standards are partially fulfilled: 2.4; 2.6; 2.7; 3.6

In judging the fulfilment of the ESG, the GAC did not take into account ZEvA’s response to the review report as it was issued after the site-visit.

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016, ZEvA handed in a report on the fulfilment of the conditions to the GAC. Condition 1 was based on an ambiguity in ZEvA’s business plan that seemed to suggest that ZEvA’s accreditation business was subsidised by its evaluation department which is funded by the state of Lower-Saxony. ZEvA clarified that this is not the case and has since changed the design of their business plans to avoid such ambiguities. For condition 2, ZEvA updated their quality handbook and published it on their website.

On February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the GAC reached the decision that the conditions were fulfilled.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> [http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/Agenturen/en/ZEvA\\_Gutachten\\_2016\\_EN.pdf](http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/Agenturen/en/ZEvA_Gutachten_2016_EN.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/Agenturen/AR\\_Beschluss\\_Reakkreditierung\\_ZEvA\\_vom\\_22.06.2016\\_EN.pdf](http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/Agenturen/AR_Beschluss_Reakkreditierung_ZEvA_vom_22.06.2016_EN.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/Agenturen/ZEvA\\_AR\\_Beschluss\\_Auflagenerfuellung\\_20170207.pdf](http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/Agenturen/ZEvA_AR_Beschluss_Auflagenerfuellung_20170207.pdf)



## 2.6.2 ENQA Decision and Follow-Up

On November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the ENQA Board reconfirmed ZEvA's membership for five years and concluded that ZEvA is in substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines. The ENQA Board requested a follow-up report on 10 recommendations to be handed in by November 2018.<sup>22</sup>

On November 30<sup>h</sup>, 2018, ZEvA issued a follow-up report with regard to the recommendations.<sup>23</sup> In the follow-up report, ZEvA clearly states that all recommendations have been implemented:

**“Recommendation 1:** All quality assurance procedures offered by the agency in the higher education sector should be clearly aligned with the ESG Standards from Part 1 and that this is made transparent (ESG Standard 2.1).

All our quality assurance procedures are aligned with the ESG Standards from part 1. National programme and system accreditation procedures are based on the criteria of the accreditation council which, in turn, are aligned to the ESG. The criteria for doctoral programmes in Lower Saxony are, in turn, based on the criteria of the Accreditation Council. For all other procedures, the criteria defined by ZEvA are directly derived from the ESG as stated in our manuals for evaluation, international procedures and certification. Annex 59 of our self-report provides an overview of the alignment with the ESG. In some procedures, the scope is limited to a few standards (e.g. an ongoing evaluation of examination systems), as others are not relevant for the project, but the relevant standards and guidelines are nevertheless adhered to. The manuals can be found on our website under the following links: [...]<sup>24</sup>

**Recommendation 2:** The agency should provide information on the procedure for the accreditation of doctoral programmes in a transparent and appropriate way and be able to demonstrate that the procedure can achieve its objectives (ESG Standard 2.2).

The procedure for the accreditation of doctoral programmes is the same as the procedure for the accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's programmes. This is made transparent in our manual for programme accreditation and on our website (see recommendation 3). It only differs in the defined criteria and in its outcome (no quality seal of the accreditation council). Thus, it is able to achieve its objectives in the same way as our procedure for programme accreditations. The outcome of each accreditation is made transparent by the published accreditation reports.

**Recommendation 3:** The procedure for the accreditation of doctoral programmes should (even if it is not an stand-alone procedure) be defined and presented externally, just as the other quality assurance procedures offered by ZEvA, in a way that renders the procedure components (self-evaluation, external assessment, reporting and follow-up) transparent (ESG Standard 2.3).

The procedure for the accreditation of doctoral programmes (which is the same as for the accreditation of Bachelor's or Master's programmes) is described on our website and in the manual for programme accreditation, which can also be found on our website: [...]<sup>25</sup>

**Recommendation 4:** ZEvA should specify and publish clearly designed procedures for the selection, nomination and appointment of its experts for all of the quality assurance procedures it

<sup>22</sup> [http://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Letter-ENQA-to-ZEvA\\_141216.pdf](http://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Letter-ENQA-to-ZEvA_141216.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ZEvA-Follow-Up-Report-ENQA-final.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> In the following, the links have been removed since most of them are outdated. See 6.2 for the links to the current versions of the manuals and handbooks.

<sup>25</sup> See footnote 25.

offers in accordance with the requirements from ESG Standard 2.4 and the corresponding guidelines (ESG Standard 2.4).

The procedure for the selection of experts is defined in our quality handbook for all types of procedures: [...]<sup>26</sup>

**Recommendation 5:** ZEvA should intensify its efforts to increase the proportion of experts who take part in the agency's preparatory seminars (ESG Standard 2.4).

To increase the proportion of experts who receive training by our agency, ZEvA is in the process of designing webinars that could accommodate and reach far more experts and potential experts than the traditional seminars. In 2018, we have piloted the webinar format and will implement webinars as regular experts-training from 2019 onwards. These are intended as an addition to the seminars to be held in Hanover, which will still be carried out. A new concept for these seminars will also be implemented in 2019. We hope that these measures will greatly improve the percentage of experts who have undergone training by ZEvA.

**Recommendation 6:** The criteria for the accreditation of doctoral programmes should be clearly defined and published (ESG Standard 2.5).

The criteria are defined by the Ministry of Higher Education and Culture of the state of Lower Saxony and have been published on their website: [...]<sup>27</sup>

**Recommendation 7:** ZEvA should ensure that the complete expert reports are published in all of the quality assurance procedures it offers. In the handbook concerning external evaluations of higher education institutions, the agency should avoid giving the impression that reports may, where applicable, not be published in full upon the request of the higher education institution (ESG Standard 2.6).

In all procedures within the scope of the ESG, the reports are published in full. The handbook for external evaluation (see Recommendation 1 for a link to the manual) has been amended so as to eliminate the passages which seemingly suggested that at the request of the HEI parts of the reports could be withheld.

**Recommendation 8:** ZEvA should define a complaints and appeals procedure for all of the quality assurance procedures offered by the agency and should publish these in a prominent position on the agency's website. The procedure should allow for objections to formal decisions as well as complaints about the way procedures are conducted (ESG Standard 2.7).

We provide information on our website about our appeals and complaints process, demonstrating that they have been implemented for all of our quality assurance procedures: [...]<sup>28</sup>

**Recommendation 10:** The agency could highlight with even greater clarity how and to what extent the findings from its analyses could be used in its daily work and for the benefit of the higher education institutions (ESG Standard 3.4).

Our analyses benefit our procedures immensely and help us to improve them constantly. Our analysis of the German accreditation system and the state of the Bologna process in Germany (2012) led to revisions of our assessment procedures. Likewise, a market analysis (2012) was instrumental in aligning our procedures more closely to the needs of the institutions we work with. Our evaluation of dual study programmes (2016), as an example of our more recent thematic

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<sup>26</sup> See footnote 25.

<sup>27</sup> Current version to be found under: [https://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/157318/Leitlinien\\_und\\_Kriterien\\_fuer\\_die\\_Akkreditierung\\_von\\_Promotionsstudiengaengen\\_in\\_Niedersachsen\\_Stand\\_17.07.2020\\_nicht\\_vollstaendig\\_barrierefrei\\_-\\_Download\\_.pdf](https://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/157318/Leitlinien_und_Kriterien_fuer_die_Akkreditierung_von_Promotionsstudiengaengen_in_Niedersachsen_Stand_17.07.2020_nicht_vollstaendig_barrierefrei_-_Download_.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> See <https://www.zeva.org/ueber-die-zeva/revisionskommission>

analyses, serves as a reference point in the accreditation of these programmes. At the moment, we are conducting an analysis of exam systems at Lower Saxony HEIs, and the results will lead to a better understanding of exams in higher education and thus will also help us in the assessment of study programmes. See the following links: [...] <sup>29</sup>

#### **Recommendation 12:**

ZEvA's internal quality assurance system should be updated and expanded to incorporate all of the procedure types offered by the agency (ESG Standard 3.6).

Our quality assurance system applies to all procedure types, as stated in our published quality handbook, which can be found under the following link: [...] <sup>30</sup>

On February 28<sup>h</sup>, 2019, the ENQA Board responded to the follow-up report and stated: "The Board approves the report and acknowledges the progress that has been made." <sup>31</sup>

### 2.6.3 EQAR Decision and Substantial Change Report

On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, EQAR's Register Committee confirmed the eligibility of ZEvA's application.

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the Register Committee concluded that ZEvA is in substantial compliance with the ESG as a whole, while only partially complying with the standards 2.4, 2.7 and 3.6. Thus, ZEvA's inclusion on the Register was renewed until June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021. <sup>32</sup>

On February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019, ZEvA handed in a substantive change report, covering the transition to the new accreditation system in Germany and the discontinuation of activities in Switzerland. On April 29<sup>h</sup>, 2019, the Register Committee requested further clarification on the change report to which ZEvA responded on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019. On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019, the Register Committee responded to the substantial change report. <sup>33</sup>

### 2.6.4 Further Actions Taken Regarding the Recommendations

For Recommendations 2, 3 and 6, see chapter 2.4.2.2 for the current state of affairs concerning doctoral programmes.

As for recommendation 5, ZEvA's efforts to include more experts in our training seminars have progressed further. Seminars have been supplemented by webinars and ZEvA has started to hold the training seminars not only in Hannover but also in other German cities so experts from that area have a better chance of participating. In 2020, these efforts have stalled somewhat due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so only webinars were possible, which will continue in 2021 as

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<sup>29</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Evaluationsberichte/Gesamtbericht\\_Duale\\_Studienkonzepte\\_2016.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Evaluationsberichte/Gesamtbericht_Duale_Studienkonzepte_2016.pdf)

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Evaluationsberichte/Gesamtbericht\\_Pruefungswesen.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Evaluationsberichte/Gesamtbericht_Pruefungswesen.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> See footnote 25.

<sup>31</sup> [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Letter-ENQA-to-ZEvA\\_FU.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Letter-ENQA-to-ZEvA_FU.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> [https://backend.degar.eu/reports/EQAR/2016-12\\_A27\\_RenewalDecision\\_ZEvA.pdf](https://backend.degar.eu/reports/EQAR/2016-12_A27_RenewalDecision_ZEvA.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> [https://backend.degar.eu/reports/EQAR/2019-06\\_C32\\_SubstantiveChangeReport\\_ZEvA.pdf](https://backend.degar.eu/reports/EQAR/2019-06_C32_SubstantiveChangeReport_ZEvA.pdf)



long as the pandemic situation is not resolved. Physical seminars will resume once there is no longer any need for contact restrictions.

For all other recommendations, ZEvA's follow-up report aptly describes the current state of affairs, so no further actions were required.

### 3 European Standards and Guidelines

#### Standard 2.1: Consideration of internal quality assurance

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

Part 1 of the ESG defines the subjects and standards of internal quality assurance in ten sections: 1. Policy for quality assurance, 2. Design and approval of study programmes, 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification, 5. Teaching staff, 6. Learning resources and student support, 7. Information management, 8. Public information, 9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of study programmes and 10. Cyclical external quality assurance.

All of ZEvA's procedures, insofar as their purpose is an assessment of study and teaching at HEIs, follow criteria that are in line with and for the most part directly derived from the standards and guidelines in Part 1 of the ESG. Annex 10 shows a table linking the criteria applied in the respective procedures to the corresponding ESG standard.

#### Programme and System Accreditation in Germany

In the accreditation of study programmes and in system accreditation in Germany, the criteria of the current system are defined in the "Specimen Decree Pursuant to Article 4, Paragraphs 1-4 of the Interstate Study Accreditation Treaty,"<sup>34</sup> which has been implemented in individual decrees in each federal state. The German Accreditation Council has issued a comparison between these criteria and the ESG, presented in Annex 11. ZEvA is bound to these criteria in their assessment of study programmes and quality management systems in preparation of their accreditation by the GAC.

With regard to the few still ongoing accreditation procedures according to the accreditation rules by the GAC,<sup>35</sup> ZEvA is bound to the criteria issued by the GAC.<sup>36</sup> For a comparison to the ESG, again see Annex 10.

#### Accreditation of Programmes other than Bachelor/Master in Germany

In the accreditation of programmes other than Bachelor's and Master's Programmes, the criteria differ from procedure to procedure according to the purpose of the accreditation. These cases are very rare and do not constitute a substantial field of activity, so ZEvA does not publish criteria but defines them from case to case. For doctoral programmes in Lower Saxony, criteria are defined in the guidelines of the Ministry of Science and Culture.<sup>37</sup> These criteria are

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<sup>34</sup> See

[https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2017/2017\\_12\\_07-Musterrechtsverordnung-englisch.pdf](https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2017/2017_12_07-Musterrechtsverordnung-englisch.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> By the time of the site visit, this will be limited to a few system accreditation procedures. All programme accreditation procedures according to the GAC rules will by then be completed.

<sup>36</sup> See [http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/AR/Beschluesse/en/AR\\_Regeln\\_Studiengaenge\\_en\\_aktuell.pdf](http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/AR/Beschluesse/en/AR_Regeln_Studiengaenge_en_aktuell.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> See [https://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/157318/Leitlinien\\_und\\_Kriterien\\_fuer\\_die\\_Akkreditierung\\_von\\_Promotionsstudiengaengen\\_in\\_Niedersachsen\\_Stand\\_17.07.2020\\_nicht\\_vollstaendig\\_barrierefrei\\_-\\_Download\\_.pdf](https://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/157318/Leitlinien_und_Kriterien_fuer_die_Akkreditierung_von_Promotionsstudiengaengen_in_Niedersachsen_Stand_17.07.2020_nicht_vollstaendig_barrierefrei_-_Download_.pdf)

in line with Part 1 of the ESG. For the accreditation of Diploma programmes, ZEvA usually employs the relevant criteria of the current accreditation system in analogy.

### International Programme and Institutional Accreditation

For international programme and institutional accreditation procedures, ZEvA has formulated its own quality standards in its manuals,<sup>38</sup> which are based on the ESG. These form the basis for the review reports and the decisions of the ZEvA commission.

### Quality Audits in Austria

The focus areas of the audit are specified by the Austrian Higher Education Institution Quality Assurance Act („Hochschulqualitätssicherungsgesetz“) (§ 22 HS-QSG) and cover the ESG criteria for internal quality assurance. ZEvA has translated these into an assessment framework to be found in the respective manual.<sup>39</sup>

### Certification of Further Education

For the certification of further education at HEIs, ZEvA has formulated criteria based on the ESG standards 1.1 to 1.10 in its respective manual.<sup>40</sup> The already mentioned Specimen Decree may function as an additional reference.

In addition, ZEvA procedures use the ECTS Users' Guide in its current version, and the German Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (DQR) is employed as an instrument for classifying qualifications in the German education system.

### Evaluation

Evaluations of study and teaching carried out by ZEvA have a varying thematic focus and are oriented towards the requirements of the higher education institutions and the statutory requirements in Lower Saxony pursuant to Sect. 5 of the Lower Saxony Higher Education Act (NHG).<sup>41</sup> In these procedures, not all aspects become relevant in every case; occasionally they focus on a particular topic or on certain individual aspects (and standards). In the ZEvA procedure of *Institutional Evaluation* and in *Subject / Programme Evaluation*, the ESG are covered as a whole. In the procedure for *Thematic Evaluation* the ESG are usually only covered in part, depending on the actual concrete question governing the evaluation procedure. Thematic evaluations of ZEvA have focussed on certain aspects of higher education, such as the promotion of Mathematics, Computer Science, Natural Sciences and Technology degrees at higher education, an evaluation of dual-study programmes and an evaluation of examination systems at HEIs. These evaluations naturally do not cover all of the ESG standards but only those relevant to the purpose of the evaluation. In some cases, like the evaluation of dual study

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<sup>38</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA\\_Manual\\_External\\_Assessment\\_of\\_Study\\_Programmes.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA_Manual_External_Assessment_of_Study_Programmes.pdf) and [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA\\_Manual\\_Institutional\\_Accreditation.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA_Manual_Institutional_Accreditation.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Qualitaetsaudit\\_OEsterreich.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Qualitaetsaudit_OEsterreich.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Zertifizierung\\_und\\_Validierung.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Zertifizierung_und_Validierung.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> See [http://www.nds-voris.de/jportal/portal/t/lmg/page/bsvorisprod.psml/action/portlets.jw.MainAction?p1=9&eventSubmit\\_doNavigate=searchInSubtreeTOC&showdoccase=1&doc.hl=0&doc.id=jlr-HSchulGND2007V17P5&doc.part=S&toc.poskey=#focuspoint](http://www.nds-voris.de/jportal/portal/t/lmg/page/bsvorisprod.psml/action/portlets.jw.MainAction?p1=9&eventSubmit_doNavigate=searchInSubtreeTOC&showdoccase=1&doc.hl=0&doc.id=jlr-HSchulGND2007V17P5&doc.part=S&toc.poskey=#focuspoint)

Unofficial English version:

[https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/document/download/715fc9e9317654a6f83f3302d614c7bc.pdf/NHG\\_English.pdf](https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/document/download/715fc9e9317654a6f83f3302d614c7bc.pdf/NHG_English.pdf)

programmes, feature catalogues are developed that provide the basis for self-evaluation reports of the evaluated study concepts and are designed in accordance with the ESG.<sup>42</sup>

Other evaluation procedures are in their nature not assessments of teaching and learning but rather of projects, and thus, the ESG are not applicable. ZEvA offers to coordinate the review of applications for projects in teaching and learning in higher education by HEIs applying for special state funding programmes. The criteria are usually defined by the state ministry of science and culture (MWK) which also takes the final decision. ZEvA may also evaluate project process and/or success, measured against the project criteria.

## Standard 2.2: Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

ZEvA has a long-standing experience with designing and carrying out procedures of external quality assurance and thus can build on these experiences to ensure all procedures are fit for purpose. All procedures of external quality assurance are clearly defined in ZEvA's manuals and, where applicable, in procedural rules issued by the GAC, the German federal states or the Austrian Government. All procedures of external quality assurance of study and teaching follow the same pattern, starting with a self-assessment report of the HEI, which will usually undergo a preliminary desktop validation and then be sent to an expert group including experts from academia, professional practice, and the student body. As a rule, the findings of the experts will be verified and supplemented during a site visit, after which an assessment report will be prepared by the experts. The HEIs can issue a response to the report and, where applicable, a formal decision will be reached by the responsible body (e.g. the ZEvA Commission or the GAC). A follow-up usually deals with the question whether conditions issued in conjunction with the formal decision have been met or whether recommendations have been implemented.

These procedures are all specifically designed with their purpose in mind, involving stakeholders in its design and continuous improvement on several levels.

ZEvA regularly issues questionnaires to HEIs and experts involved in quality assurance procedures to assess its procedures' fitness for purpose. Furthermore, ZEvA regularly reviews its procedures through feedback sessions with the HEIs assessed. Additionally, ZEvA's training seminars for experts and quality assurance managers at HEIs are also used to receive feedback on ZEvA's procedures (see also 2.5). In general, this feedback shows a high level of satisfaction with ZEvA's work.

All of ZEvA's procedures and manuals are subject to scrutiny by its two relevant bodies, the ZEvA Commission (ZEKo) and the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK). As per the ZEvA statutes, the relevant interest groups (professors of various different higher education institution types and subject disciplines, representatives of professional practice, experts in quality assurance, students, and, in the case of the SEK, the government of Lower Saxony) are represented.

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<sup>42</sup> ZEvA's evaluation manuals can be found here: <https://www.zeva.org/evaluation/dokumente-und-vorlagen>



ZEvA ensures that its procedures remain cost-effective by constantly reviewing the amount of workload necessary and adjusting the costs for the different procedures regularly. Since ZEvA is a non-profit organization, procedures are planned on a cost price basis. The costs are calculated beforehand and defined in ZEvA's contracts with HEIs. Except for evaluation procedures in Lower Saxony, ZEvA also has to compete with other agencies and thus has to adjust prices according to the current market.

All external quality assurance procedures carried out by ZEvA serve the purpose of improving the quality of teaching and learning at Higher Education Institutions. Procedures which HEIs are obligated to carry out (i.e. mandatory accreditation) and which result in formal decisions may be designed as a form of external quality control to ensure the HEIs compliance with pre-defined rules, but the procedures always provide opportunity to aid the HEIs efforts in improving their programmes and internal quality assurance procedures. ZEvA project officers and experts act as critical friends who go beyond the task of an external assessor and can also offer recommendations for improvement, both during on-site talks and in the review reports.

The outcomes of all external quality assurance procedures are published and thus made transparent to all relevant stakeholders.

#### Programme and System accreditation

The intentions and objectives of programme and system accreditation have been conclusively defined and published. Since January 2018, all programme and system accreditation procedures are conducted according to the state regulations based on the Specimen Decree. Procedures contractually agreed upon before 2018 are carried out according to the Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation (Drs. AR 20/2013) issued by the German Accreditation Council. For both sets of rules, clear criteria for the design of the procedures have been formulated (Specimen Decree, Part 4; Drs. AR 20/2013, Sect. I 1., 3.; Sect. II 5., 7.). These rules have been designed by representatives of the federal states in close collaborations with stakeholders. The GAC is composed of representatives of HEIs, the federal states, professional practice, and the student body. For the design of the Specimen Decree, the federal states have consulted with various stakeholders. The accreditation system is to be evaluated regularly, with an initial evaluation set to take place after five years (2023).

Manuals issued by ZEvA substantiate and interpret the procedural rules issued by the GAC or the federal states where required. Furthermore, ZEvA's accreditation reports and procedures are and have been subject to quality control by the GAC, either through direct feedback on reports handed in by HEIs for accreditation by the GAC or (until 2017) through periodic sample inspections. ZEvA uses this feedback to improve on procedures.

As is to be expected in a substantial reform of a national accreditation system, the transition has not always run smoothly, and in some cases, problems have arisen. These problems mainly concern the new distribution of tasks between the GAC, the agencies and the HEIs. The GAC, the agencies and the HEIs are still in the process of developing a common understanding of the procedural rules. The system will be evaluated after 5 years, which may result in a revision of the procedural rules to remedy some of the problems.

One major issue is the high workload of the GAC and its head office, making a timely conclusion of the decision-making process increasingly difficult. HEIs and agencies enter into contracts, in which a timetable is agreed upon which is supposed to ensure a conclusion of the



procedure, including a decision of the GAC, before the start of a programme (or planned implementation of a quality assurance system) or before the end of its prior accreditation period. For the most part, however, the GAC cannot guarantee that the procedures will be concluded on a specific GAC meeting. As a reaction, ZEvA urges HEIs to start the procedures much earlier to better their chances at a timely conclusion. As contracts are often agreed upon months before the actual start of the procedure, the effects of this will only come in effect with a certain delay.

Another criticism that has arisen in the current system concerns the templates for the accreditation reports, which have often been seen as convoluted in their structure and difficult to work with. ZEvA's managing director is a member of a GAC working group concerned with the (further) development of the templates and acts as a representative of the agencies concerned and can communicate these difficulties. A revised version has already been circulated, which does address some, but not all of the concerns raised.

Closely connected to the issue of accreditation reports, HEIs that have completed a system accreditation in the old system and are now applying for reaccreditation have to adjust to the new rules, as the GAC has issued guidelines concerning the composition of quality reports used for the HEI's internal accreditation, as the accredited quality assurance systems differ considerably and do not always make provisions for an extensive report by an external expert group. Discussions about this issue are ongoing and ZEvA follows them closely to advise their HEIs on the current state of affairs and adjustments to their system that may be necessary.

#### Accreditation of Programmes other than Bachelor/Master in Germany

Since accreditation procedures for non-Bachelor/Master-programmes are not standardized due to their varying contexts and purpose, no specific procedures have been defined for the different types of programmes. However, ZEvA's manual for programme accreditation makes it clear that these accreditation procedures follow those for Bachelor/Master programmes closely, apart from the fact that the final decision falls to the ZEvA Commission and not the GAC.

#### International Programme and Institutional Accreditation

ZEvA's manuals for International Programme Accreditation and International Institutional Accreditation describe in detail the procedures employed. The procedures and the initial manuals have been designed in close collaboration with ZEvA's former Commission of International Affairs (KIA), which involved national and international representatives of HEIs, professional practice and the student body.

#### Quality Audits in Austria

Auditing and certification in the context of Quality Audits in Austria take into account the statutory guidelines laid out in the Austrian Higher Education Institution Quality Assurance Act ("Hochschulqualitätssicherungsgesetz") (§ 22 HS-QSG) and involve the relevant interest groups in the arrangement of procedures.

#### Certification and Validation

The procedures for certification and validation are described in detail in ZEvA's manual. The objective of the respective procedure may vary and is agreed upon between ZEvA and the HEI by contract.

## Evaluation

In the field of evaluation, ZEvA's manuals, in which ESG-compliant processes and criteria are described, provide the basis for the organisation of review procedures. As far as higher education institutions of the State of Lower Saxony are concerned, evaluation is designed in accordance with the Lower Saxony Higher Education Act ("Niedersächsisches Hochschulgesetz" (Sect. 5 NHG)).

### **Standard 2.3: Implementing Processes**

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

All external quality assurance procedures carried out by ZEvA are carried out according to pre-defined and published processes. For each kind of standardized procedure, ZEvA has issued manuals that can be downloaded from ZEvA's website. In the case of programme and system accreditation in Germany, these manuals refer (or referred) to the procedural rules as issued by the GAC (until 2017) and the federal states (current system), whereas in Austria, the procedures follow the Austrian Higher Education Institution Quality Assurance Act. All procedures include a self-assessment report, an external assessment by a peer group which results in a review report, and in almost all cases an on-site visit to the HEI concerned. The follow-up varies from procedure to procedure and is not always the agency's task, as is the case in the current German accreditation system. Where formal decisions are taken, the follow-up is mostly concerned with formulated conditions and their fulfilment by the respective HEI. Since all formal decisions are only valid for a limited time, a follow-up in the form of a re-accreditation or re-certification is required after this time period to re-assess the programme or institution and to examine whether recommendations from the previous procedure have been implemented.

#### Programme and System accreditation in Germany

Programme and system accreditation procedures have comparable routines, described in the specimen decree under Part 4. In the former accreditation system, these were defined under sections 1 (Programme Accreditation) and 5 (System Accreditation) of the GAC rules. The HEI is required to hand in a self-evaluation report that addresses all relevant criteria in its written part and provides the necessary evidence through annexes. In system accreditation, ZEvA makes it a rule to kick off the procedure with a status seminar which serves to take stock of the HEI's progress in designing and implementing their quality assurance system and to help the HEI in the preparation of their self-evaluation report. For programme accreditation ZEvA offers shorter kick-off meetings in ZEvA's office, online, or, if requested, in-house at the HEI concerned.

All self-evaluation reports are subject to a desktop pre-check by the responsible project officer, assessing whether the report is complete and if problems in the fulfilment of criteria are to be envisioned. In the current accreditation system, this pre-check is combined with the first part

of the accreditation report, the formal report. It is the task of the responsible project officer to assess the fulfilment of formal criteria according to part 2 of the Specimen Decree. After the pre-check and formal report, the HEI is given the opportunity to revise their self-evaluation report to remedy the issues raised.

Parallel to this process, the agency composes an expert group, which is formally installed by the ZEvA-Commission. The HEI can object to the composition of the expert group but has no vetoing rights. The expert group receives the (possibly revised) self-evaluation report and (in the current system) the formal report and is asked to hand in a list of preliminary findings before the site-visit, which the project officer summarizes and sends to the HEI for the preparation of the site-visit.

As a rule, this is followed by a site-visit to the HEI, where the experts will interview the university management, teaching staff and students, with the possible addition of alumni or external partners involved in the programme (e.g. staff from companies involved in a dual study programme). In cases of a concept accreditation of a programme not yet begun and in case of a re-accreditation of a study programme, the expert group can decide to dispense with the site-visit and will then assess the programme in a desk-top validation, which can be supplemented by sending a list of questions to the HEI to be answered or by video conferences. In system accreditation, two site visits are being conducted. After the first site visit, ZEvA prepares a short report on the preliminary findings and the experts agree on samples from study programmes to be assessed in order to see the effect of the quality assurance system on the programmes.

In result of the site-visit or the desktop validation, the experts write an accreditation report, or, in the current system, the second part of the accreditation report, the review report, assessing the academic criteria (Part 3 of the Specimen Decree). The HEI receives the report and can respond to it, correcting factual errors or (in the former system) describing measures planned or taken to address deficiencies described in the report.

In the current accreditation system, the GAC and the federal states expect the HEIs to address deficiencies detected by the experts by starting a follow-up process with the agency ("Quality Improvement Process") after the completion of an accreditation report, although this has not been made mandatory. In this follow-up, the HEI shall be given the opportunity to improve their study programmes or quality assurance system to meet all the criteria and hand in a revised review report which will again be assessed by the experts. As a result, a new or revised accreditation report is prepared. The agency decides in conjunction with the experts which steps are necessary to assess the revised self-report, which may also include another site visit. This voluntary procedural step is meant to reduce the number of conditions issued by the GAC, as the substantiation of the specimen decree states that conditions are to be an exception to the rule. It is also meant to decrease the GAC's workload and to increase the likeliness of a positive outcome.

Although the number of conditions issued has already been reduced, this proposed pre-decision follow-up is not always feasible or desirable for the HEI concerned. On the one hand, the agencies cannot offer this follow-up, which can be quite extensive and may also involve another site visit, free of charge, so the HEI faces an increase in costs. On the other hand, HEI's are often under a considerable time pressure and cannot afford a delay of the GAC decision, so it is often preferable to deal with conditions after the formal decision instead of delaying the decision in the hope of avoiding conditions altogether. ZEvA has carried out several of these Quality Improvement Processes, mostly in severe cases where a positive outcome could be in

question or where the information provided has not been sufficient for an assessment of all criteria. Since the GAC has in the past rejected accreditation reports that were based on insufficient information or an immature concept of their study programme, ZEvA strongly advises HEIs to enter into a Quality Improvement Process where either a refusal of accreditation or a rejection of the report is to be feared, but since this would require a new contract and further costs, HEIs retain the right to refuse.

The Quality Improvement Process, when it is employed, is a further step in the assessment process and follows the same principles. It may occur immediately after the site-visit or after the completion of the first draft of the accreditation report. Once it is completed, the HEI will receive a finalised accreditation report based on the revised self-evaluation report.

After the accreditation report has been finalised, a formal decision will be taken. In the former system, this was the responsibility of the ZEvA-Commission (or the SAK before that), which decided on the basis of the self-evaluation report, the accreditation report and the university's response. In the current system, it is the HEI's task to hand in their self-evaluation report and the accreditation report to the GAC and apply for accreditation. The agency's task is concluded at this point. The decision can be on accreditation, conditional accreditation (with conditions to be fulfilled in a defined time-frame, usually 12 months) or refusal of accreditation. In the former system, decisions could also be postponed once for the course of 18 months to give the HEI the opportunity to remedy more critical deficiencies.

Accreditation in the current system is generally for eight years, in the former system it was five years for initial programme accreditation, six years for initial system accreditation, seven years for programme re-accreditation and eight years for system reaccreditation. If the GAC decision deviates significantly from the experts' recommendation, the HEI is given the opportunity to give a statement in response to these deviations. In these cases, the GAC's decision will only come in effect after the HEI's response and possibly another discussion in the GAC, should the HEI disagree with the deviations.

Follow-up to these decisions in the form of assessing the fulfilment of the conditions issued is the task of the GAC in the current system and does not involve the agency or the expert group. The GAC can delegate this decision to the foundation's Executive Board. Any further follow-up is then relegated to the following re-accreditation, which will also take into account how the HEI has reacted to recommendations by the experts or the GAC. In the former system, assessing the fulfilment of conditions was the task of the agency. The decision was to be taken by the ZEvA-Commission on the basis of an assessment by the experts. In both cases, failure of fulfilment of these conditions may result in the revocation of the accreditation.

Since 2015, all full reports and decisions are published, including negative decisions. ZEvA publishes them on their own homepage, and the GAC also publishes all reports and decisions from the German accreditation system in their ELIAS database and the DEQAR database.

#### International Accreditation, Quality Audits in Austria, Certification and Accreditation of Programmes other than Bachelor/Master

In all other external quality assurance measures resulting in a formal decision, ZEvA applies the same procedure as in programme or system accreditation according to the GAC rules until 2017. This applies to institutional or programme accreditation in the international context,

quality audits in Austria, the certification of further education and the accreditation of study programmes that do not fall in the Bachelor/Master category. All of these procedures include a self-report, a pre-check of the self-report, an expert group, a site visit (as a rule), a review report that the HEI can respond to and a formal decision by the ZEvA Commission, with a possible follow-up to assess the fulfilment of conditions. The main difference to the current accreditation system in Germany is that no entity like the GAC is involved, the entire procedure is the sole responsibility of the agency, including the publication of the reports and decisions on ZEvA's website and in the DEQAR. International institutional accreditations and quality audits in Austria are more closely linked to system accreditation and may also include two site visits, a sample assessment of programmes and a status seminar as a kick-off event. All accreditation or certification decisions can be issued with conditions to be fulfilled in a certain time frame, and the ZEvA Commission decides on their fulfilment based on an assessment of the experts involved.

### Evaluation

In evaluation procedures, the process can vary depending on the purpose of the procedure. In the case of the evaluation of study programmes or subjects, institutional evaluation and thematic evaluation, it will in every case involve a self-report, an expert group, a site visit and a review report. These procedures are described in their respective manuals. No formal decisions ensue; these procedures rather serve to formulate recommendations for further improvement. ZEvA and the expert groups are acting for the most part in a support capacity. However, these reports may also be used by the Ministry of Culture and Science of Lower Saxony, e.g. for the formulation of target agreements. Follow-up also varies from procedure to procedure and may take the form of a regular follow-up report to the agency or a re-evaluation after a certain time.

All evaluation reports are published on ZEvA's websites.

## Standard 2.4: Peer-Review Experts

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

In all external quality assurance procedures, ZEvA applies the peer review principle. For every procedure, an expert group is installed that includes experts from academia, professional practice, and the student body. For programme and system accreditation in the current German system, ZEvA is bound by guidelines issued by the German Rectors' Conference.<sup>43</sup>

Experts are carefully selected. ZEvA works closely with the HEIs to define which areas of expertise have to be covered in the expert group. Based on this definition, ZEvA project officers contact possible candidates and make a suggestion for the composition of the panel, drawing on ZEvA's existing pool of experts where possible. In case of need it obtains further indications of suitable persons by making inquiries at State Rectors' Conferences, scientific societies, Faculty and Department Conferences, university networks in the field of study and teaching or the Standing Commission for Teaching and Studies of the German Rectors' Conference. For

<sup>43</sup> See <https://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/de/media/65>

the selection of student experts in German accreditation, ZEvA regularly cooperates with the Student Accreditation Pool, which suggests suitable student reviewers to the agency on request. Other possible sources of student experts are the European Students Union or the student self-administration of HEIs. Several labour unions also employ a joint network of accreditation experts from the professional world which ZEvA can draw from.

The main criterion for selection is always the professional competence for the assessment of the respective subject matter. Panel members must possess expertise in the relevant field, should have experience with quality assurance procedures and must be independent and impartial. ZEvA closes contractual agreements with experts which include a code of conduct and a manual detailing their task and cooperation with the agency. Through these contracts, ZEvA ensures their impartiality. The following criteria for conflict of interest are applied throughout:

- Family ties or personal relations or conflicts.
- Teaching positions (also as external lecturer or guest professor) at the university to be assessed within the last 3 years or in the foreseeable future.
- Participation in on-going or recently completed appointment procedures at the university to be assessed.
- Participation of members of the university to be assessed in recent assessments of the experts' university.
- Personal or shared economic interest in the accreditation.
- Direct competition of the university to be assessed with the expert's projects or programmes.
- Close cooperation (e.g., conjoint research projects or other close collaboration) within the last 3 years.
- Current or recent enrolment as a student at the university to be assessed.

In all assessment procedures that lead to a formal decision (either by the GAC or ZEvA), the expert group is appointed by the ZEvA Commission at the proposal of the ZEvA project officer in charge. For evaluation procedures, the project officers compose an expert group in close communication with the HEIs involved and, where relevant, the Ministry of Science and Culture in Lower Saxony. In all procedures, the HEI can object to the composition of the expert group but has no explicit vetoing right. Objections can be based either on conflicts of interest or insufficient expertise for the subject matter to be assessed.

ZEvA offers training seminars and webinars for experts and relies for the most part on experienced experts. In system accreditation procedures, experts are obliged to participate in preparatory seminars. Evaluation procedures are preceded by extensive preparatory meetings of the expert group. Student experts suggested by the student accreditation pool are undergoing training seminars by the pool, in which agencies regularly participate. Other expert pools, like e.g. the pool of German labour unions, also offer such training and networking events and invite agency personnel to participate. Due to the Covid-19-situation, currently expert seminars can only be offered in the form of webinars. Once the pandemic is resolved, ZEvA will continue to use webinars as an addition to in-person workshops.

For preparation, information materials containing the criteria and procedural rules applied, a ZEvA Guide and a manual for experts are handed out to the experts in all procedures. In addition, there is always an internal meeting for preparation prior to the site visit where experts are extensively briefed on the task at hand.



## Standard 2.5: Criteria for Outcomes

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

All assessments in external quality assurance procedures are based on clearly defined and published criteria. Where ZEvA is not bound by criteria issued by other bodies (e.g. the GAC or the federal states), the criteria are defined in ZEvA's respective manuals and are based on Part 1 of the ESG. In some cases (e.g. thematic evaluation, accreditation of non-BA/MA-programmes) the criteria may not be clearly defined beforehand but are agreed upon in preparation of the respective procedure, attuned to the procedure's purpose.

ZEvA establishes consistency in the use and interpretation of these criteria in various ways. Most importantly, all reports are subject to proof-reading. As a rule, the heads of the relevant area of activities read reports written by the project managers before these are sent to the expert group and can thus ensure a consistent interpretation of the criteria. Additionally, the interpretation of criteria is discussed in Jour Fixes and corporate retreats to develop a common understanding. Wherever ZEvA takes a formal decision in its procedures, the ZEvA Commission is supported by ZEvA's staff in keeping track of current interpretation of criteria, and the members of the commission have access to an online archive of prior meetings and decisions. For the German accreditation system, see below.

As an additional measure for quality and consistency, new colleagues passively attend procedures of experienced project managers before they manage their "own" procedure. After that, the first peer review managed and moderated by a new colleague will be conducted in a buddy system.

### Programme and System Accreditation

In Germany, the accreditation criteria for Bachelor's and Master's programmes are defined in the accreditation decrees of the federal states which are based on the Specimen Decree. In the former system, the GAC Rules included criteria based on the Common Structural Guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in German States. These criteria (old and new system) are available on the GAC's website and are mandatory for all procedures.<sup>44</sup>

The consistent application of criteria for the formal decision in the current accreditation system is the responsibility of the GAC. The GAC is supported by its head office and has access to the outcomes of all former GAC meetings through an online database. The Specimen Decree itself contains a detailed substantiation of the rules and criteria which serves as a basis for the GAC's decisions. In addition to that GAC agrees on further interpretations of criteria and communicates these to the HEIs and agencies in several ways. On the one hand, the accreditation reports are subject to a pre-check by the GAC's office, and the agencies receive feedback on the quality of the report, which may also include comments on the correct and consistent application of criteria. If the reports are to be found too inconsistent, the GAC retains the right to hand them back for revision before processing the HEI's application for accreditation. On the

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<sup>44</sup> Current system: <https://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/en/node/33>  
Old system: <http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/index.php?id=beschluesse&L=1>



other hand, the GAC publishes official interpretations of criteria on their website in the form of FAQs or resolutions. Also, the GAC head office organizes occasional feedback rounds with the individual agencies to jointly reflect on the experiences gathered with the new system and to discuss, among other things, the application and interpretation of accreditation standards and criteria.

ZEVA uses the GAC's feedback to fine-tune its interpretation of criteria and monitors the GAC's website for current changes to their FAQ or new resolutions. Critical comments on ZEVA's accreditation reports by the GAC are being collected in an Excel-list available to all project officers.

In general, the new accreditation system has increased consistency in the interpretation of criteria considerably, as only one body takes the decision instead of ten. In the former accreditation system, the interpretation of criteria often varied from agency to agency, and since agencies had to compete for accreditation procedures, they were also under pressure not to interpret the criteria too strictly. In this respect, the reform has been an improvement for agencies, as they can now refer to official interpretations by the GAC to justify assessments in their accreditation reports.

HEI's, on the other hand, have to adjust to stricter interpretations of some criteria that may force them to revise their study programmes or quality assurance systems which had been accredited under the old system. As the current system is still in its early stages, this adjustment process is still ongoing. This is especially true for system accreditation. With so far very few completed procedures, the GAC is still in the process of finding common interpretations of criteria, and thus, there is as yet little systematic information for HEIs and agencies on the GAC's interpretations. ZEVA communicates with the GAC head office regularly to discuss these issues, but a more proactive and systematic communication would be desirable. This could be achieved, for instance, by setting up a regular exchange forum for all parties involved in the accreditation process or by publishing supplementary guidelines which could also address practical and methodical issues.

#### Accreditation of Programmes other than Bachelor/Master

For the accreditation of programmes that do not fall in the Bachelor/Master-category, the criteria may vary from procedure to procedure, as these are very singular occurrences the purpose of which may vary. So far, only the state of Lower Saxony has made it mandatory for some of these programmes to undergo an accreditation and provided criteria in their guidelines for the accreditation of doctoral programmes ("Leitlinien und Kriterien für die Akkreditierung von Promotionsstudiengängen in Niedersachsen").<sup>45</sup> For the accreditation of Diploma programmes, ZEVA has in the past adapted the relevant criteria for programme accreditation in the current system.

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<sup>45</sup> See [https://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/157318/Leitlinien\\_und\\_Kriterien\\_fuer\\_die\\_Akkreditierung\\_von\\_Promotionsstudiengaengen\\_in\\_Niedersachsen\\_Stand\\_17.07.2020\\_nicht\\_vollstaendig\\_barrierefrei\\_-\\_Download\\_.pdf](https://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/157318/Leitlinien_und_Kriterien_fuer_die_Akkreditierung_von_Promotionsstudiengaengen_in_Niedersachsen_Stand_17.07.2020_nicht_vollstaendig_barrierefrei_-_Download_.pdf)

### Quality Audits in Austria

For audits in Austria, HS-QSG provides 6 areas of assessment (“Prüfbereiche”), which ZEvA has translated into a list of Topics for the Audit, which serve as an assessment framework. These are described in ZEvA’s Manual for Quality Audits, to be found on our website.<sup>46</sup>

### International Accreditation

In all other international procedures that lead to a formal decision, ZEvA has formulated criteria based on the ESG, the ECTS User’s Guide and the European Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, to be found in the manuals for international programme and institutional accreditation.<sup>47</sup>

### Certification

For the certification of further education, ZEvA has formulated criteria based on the ESG, to be found in the manual for certification and validation.<sup>48</sup>

### Evaluation

For evaluation procedures, the criteria depend on the purpose of the evaluation. For the evaluation of study programmes and subjects and for institutional evaluation, ZEvA has formulated criteria that directly apply the ESG, to be found in the respective manuals.<sup>49</sup> In thematic evaluations, these criteria vary significantly, and an important part of the evaluation procedure may even be to arrive at assessment criteria, as with the accreditation of dual programmes. These procedures often start with an assessment of the status quo, leading to an understanding of common characteristics of the subject matter (e.g. dual programmes) and a sample of best practice examples which can then be transferred to a catalogue of standards and guidelines which ZEvA publishes to be used for future evaluations.

## Standard 2.6: Reporting

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

In all assessment procedures the full expert reports and decisions are published on ZEvA’s website.<sup>50</sup> Reports and decisions in programme and system accreditation according to the German system (old and new) are also published in the GAC’s ELIAS-database. The GAC also transfers these reports and decisions to the DEQAR database. For other procedures leading to a formal decision, ZEvA transfers them to the DEQAR itself.

<sup>46</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Qualitaetsaudit\\_OEsterreich.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Qualitaetsaudit_OEsterreich.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA\\_Manual\\_External\\_Assessment\\_of\\_Study\\_Programmes.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA_Manual_External_Assessment_of_Study_Programmes.pdf), [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA\\_Manual\\_Institutional\\_Accreditation.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA_Manual_Institutional_Accreditation.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Zertifizierung\\_und\\_Validierung.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Zertifizierung_und_Validierung.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> See <https://www.zeva.org/evaluation/dokumente-und-vorlagen>

<sup>50</sup> Programme accreditation: <https://www.zeva.org/programmakkreditierung/akkreditierte-studiengaenge>, System accreditation: <https://www.zeva.org/systemakkreditierung/akkreditierte-hochschulen>, Certification: <https://www.zeva.org/zertifizierung>, International procedures: <https://www.zeva.org/international/information-in-english/projects-and-references>, Evaluation: <https://www.zeva.org/evaluation/evaluationsberichte>

For accreditation reports in the German system, the GAC has provided mandatory templates. For international accreditation, quality audits and certification, ZEVA has designed standardized templates that ensure a common structure of the reports. All of ZEVA's reports include

- context description
- description of the individual procedure, including experts involved
- evidence, analysis and findings
- conclusions
- features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution
- recommendations (or conditions) for follow-up action.

In all procedures, the HEIs involved are given the opportunity to respond to the review report to correct factual errors or object against the findings of the expert group. In this way, ZEVA ensures that the reports are clear and gets the opportunity of revising them where they are not. Additionally, all reports are subject to proof-reading to ensure their clarity and consistency. ZEVA takes care that reports are concise and written in a common language and that they provide a clear distinction between description of the status quo and its assessment. In procedures where ZEVA takes a formal decision, the ZEVA Commission provides additional feedback on the reports in the context of regular meetings.

As far as programme and system accreditation in Germany are concerned, the GAC head office provides another external input on the quality of the agencies' accreditation reports. It may also return a report for revision if it is found to be incomplete or incomprehensible in any way. This contributes significantly to the establishment of common, system-wide standards as regards the clarity and consistency of accreditation reports.

## Standard 2.7: Complaints and Appeals

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

ZEVA has installed a formal process for complaints about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out and appeals against formal decisions. Every formal decision contains an explicit reference to this procedural step, which is possible on an out-of-court basis. Information about the complaints and appeals procedure and the Appeals Commission are included in ZEVA's manuals on the individual types of procedures and on ZEVA's website.<sup>51</sup> Appeals against formal decisions have to be brought forth within one month after being notified of the decision.

ZEVA's Appeals Commission, appointed by the ZEVA Commission, addresses all complaints and appeals. The commission's tasks and procedures are defined in the commission's Rules of Procedure (Annex 7). The commission includes four members from the academic world, one from professional practice and one student. The complaint or appeal, the documents necessary to assess it, and a summary assessment by ZEVA's office are submitted to the Appeals Commission, which, after reviewing these documents, issues a recommendation to the ZEVA

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<sup>51</sup> For the appeals procedure and the current composition of the Appeals Commission, see <https://www.zeva.org/ueber-die-zeva/revisionskommision>

Commission on how to deal with the complaint or appeal. The ZEvA Commission then decides on the complaint and whether any changes have to be made in the decision or process. No second appeal or complaint may be issued on the same subject matter.

In the past, appeals and complaints were only filed in the context of programme accreditation in the German system. With only one exception these were all appeals against formal decisions. If sustained, these appeals led to a change in the decision, e.g. retracting or modifying conditions. If a complaint were sustained, ZEvA would e.g. repeat the procedural step the HEI complained about, exchange an expert or the project officer or add an additional expert. Through this appeals process, ZEvA could in almost all cases avoid legal steps taken by the HEI concerned against a decision. ZEvA has had to appear in one court case which was, however, resolved out of court.

### Standard 3.1: Activities, Policy and Processes for Quality Assurance

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

ZEvA carries out external quality assurance procedures on a regular basis (see chapter 2.4). They comprise the central task and purpose of the agency and occupy a large majority of its time and resources. The largest portion is still programme accreditation in Germany but especially system accreditation and international procedures have increased significantly over the last five years.

In the state of Lower Saxony, ZEvA's task as an evaluation agency is not only to carry out evaluations but also to counsel and support the public HEIs in Lower Saxony. These tasks are not easily distinguishable as the evaluations themselves also serve as external support of the HEIs and their main purpose is in generating recommendations for further improvement. Both in evaluations and consultancy, the HEIs in Lower Saxony receive these services free of charge, since they encompass ZEvA's mission for which it receives state funding, so no conflict of interest arises.

For consultancy outside of Lower Saxony, which only happens on rare occasions and is not an ongoing task which ZEvA promotes actively, ZEvA keeps these activities separate from its accreditation, certification and audits. These procedures are not combined with consultancy activities, and experts involved in consultancy will not be employed in external quality assurance activities at the same institution, if such cases would arise, which so far they have not.

The agency's understanding of quality, which provides the basis of its work, is predicated on the ZEvA mission statement published on ZEvA's webpage.<sup>52</sup> The mission statement makes evident that it is the central task of ZEvA "to promote the development of quality in teaching and learning", and that in this sense, ZEvA actively participates in the further development of the higher education system, while emphasizing that the higher education institutions themselves are ultimately responsible for quality. Therefore, ZEvA neither specifies quality

<sup>52</sup> See [https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitbild\\_der\\_ZEvA.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitbild_der_ZEvA.pdf)

objectives nor offers ready-made solutions for their implementation but understands the responsibility "for the performance objectives and quality control to be with the higher education institutions" (Annex 8).

## Standard 3.2: Official Status

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

On 11 September 2008 ZEvA was converted into a legally independent foundation under civil law (Annex 1). As a foundation, ZEvA is a non-profit organisation. Its mission and governance structure are defined in the Charter (Annex 2) and by federal and state foundation laws. ZEvA thus has a Foundation Council (Annex 3), an Executive Board (Annex 4) and other bodies, namely the ZEvA Commission (Annex 5) and the Standing Evaluation Commission (Annex 6). Furthermore, ZEvA is listed in the foundation register of Lower Saxony.<sup>53</sup>

### Programme and System Accreditation

ZEvA's recognition as a quality assurance agency is dependent on ZEvA's listing in the EQAR. In Germany, ZEvA had to be accredited by the GAC in the old accreditation system. ZEvA was the first agency to be accredited and has retained this status until the accreditation system was changed. Under the current system, the GAC recognizes ZEvA on the basis of ZEvA's EQAR listing. In Austria, ZEvA has been recognized by the Ministry of Science and Research in 2013.

### Evaluation

ZEvA's mandate for evaluation procedures in Lower Saxony is defined through ZEvA's foundation certificate issued by the state of Lower Saxony and ZEvA's statutes. Recognition is ensured through representatives of the Ministry of Science and Culture and the State University Conference on the Foundation Council and the Standing Evaluation Commission.

### International Procedures and Certification

In international procedures and certification, ZEvA has no legal mandate, as the procedures are not part of a regulatory process. Thus, there is no need for recognition by a higher authority apart from ZEvA's listing in the EQAR. Recognition of ZEvA's quality seal in these cases is rather dependent on ZEvA's reputation which increases with every completed procedure. Already, ZEvA has made a name for itself in Eastern Europe and the Arabian and North African countries as well as in HEIs associated with the United Nations specializing in maritime subjects and fishery. Institutions seek out ZEvA's quality seal for marketing purposes and because they have confidence that ZEvA's procedures will help them improve the quality of teaching and learning.

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<sup>53</sup> See [https://www.arl-we.niedersachsen.de/startseite/grundbesitz\\_und\\_stiftungen/stiftungen/](https://www.arl-we.niedersachsen.de/startseite/grundbesitz_und_stiftungen/stiftungen/)

## Standard 3.3: Independence

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.

Legal independence provides the basis for independence and autonomy. As a foundation, ZEvA is a separate legal entity that governs itself. Thus, ZEvA is autonomous and only bound by its statutes and the legal framework it is operating in, namely the foundation laws in Lower Saxony and on a federal level, the German accreditation decrees in each federal state and the Higher Education Institution Quality Assurance Act in Austria. Furthermore, there are budgetary restrictions under which ZEvA operates in connection with the institutional funding received by the state of Lower Saxony, as defined by the General Auxiliary Conditions for Grants for Institutional Support (“Allgemeine Nebenbestimmungen für Zuwendungen zur institutionellen Förderung (ANBest-I)”).<sup>54</sup> Within these legal boundaries, ZEvA’s bodies are independent in their decisions.

The supervisory Foundation Council consists of six representatives of academia and one representative of the Founder, namely the State of Lower Saxony. The members of the Foundation Council, in the legal sense, are natural persons and not representatives of institutions, e.g. higher education institutions or associations.

Operational independence is warranted through independent bodies, which hold discussions and take decisions on the basis of general guidelines, e.g. by the German Accreditation Council, the German Federal States, the ESG, ECTS conventions or on the basis of relevant laws (e.g. national laws on higher education or the Lisbon Convention). There are no restrictions that are agency-specific or grant a binding influence to individual interest groups. All ZEvA’s formal decisions are taken by the ZEvA Commission, which is acting independently and without third-party influence, as stipulated in its rules of procedure (see Annex 5). Formal decisions in programme and system accreditation in the current system are taken by the GAC.

ZEvA’s experts also act independently as individuals, not as representatives of an institution or organisation. They are not subject to third-party influence and only bound by the terms of ZEvA’s expert contracts, which also ensure that no conflict of interest exists, and that the experts’ assessment shall be based on the criteria of the respective quality assurance system (e.g., the accreditation decrees of the German federal states). Through the contract, experts are also excluded from advisory positions at the institution assessed over the course of the procedure.

In accreditation procedures in the Russian Federation, ZEvA sometimes co-operates with the Russian agency AKKORK. AKKORK, however, is mainly responsible for logistics; any formal decisions are taken by ZEvA with no influence from AKKORK.

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<sup>54</sup> See [https://www.bva.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Aufgaben/ZMV/Zuwendungen\\_national/nebenbestimmungen\\_anbest\\_i\\_2019.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=5](https://www.bva.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Aufgaben/ZMV/Zuwendungen_national/nebenbestimmungen_anbest_i_2019.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5)



## Standard 3.4: Thematic Analysis

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

ZEvA attaches great importance to the analysis and reflection of the external quality assurance procedures and has also carried out conferences on this subject, the results of which have been published. In the past, ZEvA has published an extensive evaluation of the effects of the Bologna process in Lower Saxony and beyond. Furthermore, ZEvA staff had the opportunity to place articles in national and international publications, e.g. on international accreditation and dual study programmes.

ZEvA's thematic evaluation procedures cover specific parts of the higher education system and quality assurance. The evaluation reports convey transparency in the evaluation and offer recommendation for future development and quality assurance of the aspects assessed.

Examples of published thematic evaluation reports:<sup>55</sup>

- Evaluation dualer Studienkonzepte (2016)  
(an evaluation of dual study concepts)
- Evaluation der Förderlinie "Wege ins Studium öffnen" (2017)  
(„Opening ways to studies“, a review of programmes meant to support first-generation students in MINT subjects)
- Evaluation des Prüfungswesens an niedersächsischen Hochschulen (2019)  
(An evaluation of examination systems of HEIs in Lower Saxony)

Another thematic evaluation of projects to attract female students to MINT subjects (“Niedersachsen-Technikum”) is ongoing.

Examples of published articles:

- Petersen, J. (2017). “European Consortium for Accreditation: Challenges/Perspective/Initiatives.” In: *Conference Report. Single Accreditation of Joint Programmes – Turning the Bologna Guideline into Reality*. Frontex.
- Grube, A., Petersen, J. (2016). “Internationale Akkreditierung von Studiengängen. Verfahren, Befunde, Wirkungen.” In: *Handbuch Qualität in Studium, Lehre und Forschung*. F 10.2. Hrsg. Fuhrmann et al.  
(An article about procedures, outcome and impact of international accreditation of study programmes)
- Futterer, Torsten, Harnisch, Jürgen, Arens-Fischer, Wolfgang (2020). “Entwicklung eines Leitfadens zur Evaluation dualer Studiengänge.” *Duales Studium*. Ausg. 1, 2020.  
(An article about the development of a manual for the evaluation of dual study programmes.)

In 2020, thematic reviews have been hampered by the Covid-19 situation but will be picked up again in 2021 and beyond. In 2020, ZEvA had planned to hold a conference on 25 years of quality assurance, celebrating ZEvA's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and publish the proceedings, but had to cancel due to restrictions connected with the corona virus. As a response to the pandemic,

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<sup>55</sup> See <https://www.zeva.org/evaluation/evaluationsberichte>



ZEvA has started a working group on the digitalisation of teaching and study with the purpose of publishing a thematic review on the switch to digital during Covid-19 and digital teaching and learning in general. This is to be supplemented with a desktop study on experiences of universities in Lower Saxony concerning teaching in times of Corona. It is expected to document best practices in dealing with the rapid shift from teaching in physical presence to digital formats. Initial results are expected by the end of the summer semester 2021.

ZEvA is in the process of acquiring a new management software that would serve as a tool for the management of all projects but also ZEvA's controlling and administration. Through this tool, ZEvA will be able to compile and analyse a wider range of statistical data that can be used for thematic reviews. The results of these analyses will then be published in annual business reports.

Currently in preparation are thematic reviews of the changes in the accreditation system in Germany and the accreditation of dual study programmes. For the future, ZEvA has planned further thematic reviews on the impact of international accreditations. Additionally, a newly hired project officer is envisaged to start a doctoral project in the field of quality assurance in higher education, which will be supported by ZEvA.

### Standard 3.5: Resources

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work

ZEvA has sufficient resources to carry out all of their external quality assurance procedures.

ZEvA's activities are managed by the Foundation's Board of Directors, which consists of an Academic Director (a current or former rector/president or vice-rector/-president of an HEI in Lower Saxony) and a Managing Director of ZEvA. The Managing Director oversees ZEvA's day-to-day activities and acts as head of staff. Both positions are appointed by the Board of Trustees for 5 years.

ZEvA employs 14 academic staff (11.45 full-time equivalents) and five administrative staff (3.625 full-time equivalents). One administrative staff position (head of administration) is currently vacant, and another (secretary) is on maternity leave. ZEvA is in the process of decreasing administrative staff in order to reduce costs and increase efficiency. This process is expected to be concluded in the second half of 2021. Of the academic staff, two project officers are exclusively working on evaluation procedures. Most of the other academic staff are working in at least two areas of activity. Three project officers serve as heads of their respective field, one for evaluation and counselling, one for programme accreditation and certification, one for system accreditation and international procedures. As a result of the SWOT analysis, ZEvA has hired an additional project officer to better distribute workload and handle cases of illness among staff. In the recent past, ZEvA's personnel has been under strain to cope with loss and long-term illnesses of staff members along with the pandemic situation. ZEvA has taken measures by increasing personnel and offering a coaching programme for staff members.

Information about ZEvA's personnel and their qualifications can be found on ZEvA's website.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See <https://www.zeva.org/kontakt>

Financially, ZEvA is in a good position, [REDACTED]. ZEvA has sufficient means for performing its statutory tasks and is able to initiate projects going beyond the routine tasks connected to external quality assurance procedures, as e.g. independent research and publications and a reform of ZEvA's administrative processes.

In recent years, ZEvA's annual revenue has been approximately [REDACTED].<sup>57</sup> In addition, ZEvA receives institutional funding from the state of Lower Saxony to cover the costs for evaluation and consultation projects at HEIs in Lower Saxony.

Due to the Covid-19-pandemic, the annual revenue for 2020 is projected to be [REDACTED]. In 2021, business is expected to pick up, since several accreditation procedures have been postponed to 2021 and HEIs have by now adapted to the Covid-19 situation and are better prepared for carrying out virtual site-visits. The projected annual revenue for 2021 thus is expected to [REDACTED]. Through investments in a new business software and an increase in personnel, ZEvA plans with [REDACTED].

The agency is located on the 2nd floor of Lilienthalstraße 1, 30179 Hannover, [REDACTED]. The infrastructure is provided by a corresponding computer network with ethernet and Wi-Fi as well as an external web and mail server. ZEvA's projects are managed through an internet-based project management software, ZEvA Connect. ZEvA is in the process of acquiring a new software that will replace ZEvA Connect and is also supposed to manage financial controlling.

### Standard 3.6: Internal Quality Assurance and Professional Conduct

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

In order to meet the quality requirements and to operationalise its own quality understanding for its activities, ZEvA has developed a formalised and binding system for internal quality management, defined in the Quality Handbook (Annex 9). It is used to ensure procedural quality and procedural ethics, the analysis of one's own processes, internal evaluation by experts and higher education institutions, systemic self-correction capability by functional feedback processes and training of employees and experts. In particular by means of the feedback processes and the training of employees and third parties acting for or on behalf of the agency, ZEvA ensures that these persons perform the tasks entrusted to them by ZEvA professionally and competently and in full accordance with the ESG. In the discussions of the expert groups with the various different representatives of higher education institutions in connection with external quality assurance procedures and consulting, ZEvA ensures that these are conducted

<sup>57</sup> Annual financial statements („Jahresabschluss“) can be made available on request.

based on tolerance and fairness. With regard to the composition of the expert groups, agreement is sought with the higher education institutions. In the expert manuals and the expert training as well as in the preliminary discussions for the on-site visits, the members of the expert groups are reminded by ZEvA staff that the procedures should be critical as regards the subject matter and the assessment, but that they must also be carried out with fairness and tolerance towards the higher education institution and its representatives.

For a detailed description of ZEvA's quality assurance measures, see chapter 2.5.

### **Standard 3.7: Cyclical External Review of Agencies**

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

ZEvA was first assessed externally by the Accreditation Council in the year 2000 and since then has been re-accredited in the years 2003, 2006, 2011 and 2016.<sup>58</sup> Starting in 2021, this will be replaced by a regular ENQA review every five years.

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<sup>58</sup> See <http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/index.php?id=29&L=1>

## 4 Outlook

### 4.1 Current Challenges

In the course of the last two or three years, ZEvA has undergone some fundamental changes which were both internally and externally induced. These changes imply a number of short-term and medium-term challenges which need to be tackled and managed now and in the years to come.

Besides the global Corona crisis, the change in the national accreditation legislation in January 2018 had an impact on the daily operations of the agency. Core work processes had to be changed in order to adapt them to the new system, and reporting had to follow unfamiliar templates. Practice proved that the GAC and the agencies did not always share a common understanding and interpretation of this framework, or of the quality standards to be applied to accreditation reports. ZEvA is confident that with the establishment of new routines, these initial problems will disappear.

As ZEvA is not entitled to take accreditation decisions within the new system, the role and function of the ZEvA Commission needed to be re-defined. This involves a gradual shift in focus from national accreditation towards international and strategic issues. For instance, the members of the commission may form ad hoc working groups that reflect on selected topics or current issues in higher education (as e.g. digitalization) and formulate recommendations for further development directed at the GAC, higher education institutions or government authorities. This transformation process has already begun and will continue for some time.

An increasing number of higher education institutions in Germany is now applying for system accreditation in order to obtain self-accrediting status. This general trend is most likely to continue, resulting in a gradually declining demand for programme accreditation procedures. To compensate for this, ZEvA – like all German QA agencies – is under increasing pressure to enhance its portfolio of services. In order to meet this challenge, the project officers will need a wider range of knowledge, skills and experience. Hence, instead of specializing exclusively on the accreditation of study programmes, all ZEvA project officers are now encouraged to gather expertise in at least one additional field (System Accreditation, Evaluation, International Accreditation, Certification/Validation, Quality Audits). Also, all members of staff are to receive more time for activities and projects beyond their core tasks, as e.g. publications, participation in conferences and professional networks, or training seminars/webinars.

Beyond these external developments, changes in the personnel structure and in the internal organization and management of the agency have also been identified as necessary to adapt to future needs. This resulted in the decision to install an executive team consisting of the heads of the three divisions (Programme Accreditation & Certification, Evaluation & Counselling, System Accreditation & International Affairs) in order to support the Managing Director and share leadership responsibilities. The position of the Head of Administration is currently vacant and may be abolished altogether, and the administrative tasks were re-distributed internally. Some of these tasks now fall to the division heads who are better suited to tackle the needs and technical or specialist questions of ZEvA's customers.

The new structures have been in place and are functional for a few months now; but some minor aspects as exact rights and duties of the leading staff at mid-management level are still

in the process of being defined or formally described to the desirable extent. This remains a task to be done. The same applies to the new roles and responsibilities of the administrative staff. These tasks will be further discussed and defined in the context of the introduction of the new project management software to be installed in 2021.

Furthermore, ZEvA is in the process of assessing how it can more effectively ensure that the agency works efficiently and covers its costs. To this end, ZEvA is now receiving professional external support in order to further standardize administrative core processes as e.g. contracting and invoicing and to provide a more reliable and realistic basis for project cost calculations, especially as regards the core business of external assessment procedures. A new software to replace ZEvA's project database will be acquired to help with these processes and further the digital transformation of the agency.

## 4.2 Areas for Further Development

As mentioned above, ZEvA will have to expand its range of activities in the coming years due to the continuous decline in its traditional core business area. This includes the further development of validation and certification as new fields of activity. As external demand for these services has been limited until now, a systematic market analysis and stronger, more targeted promotion efforts will be necessary. As a first step in 2021, a working group will develop a strategy for certification and validation that will define overarching goals and objectives for the next seven years. In addition, workshops and webinars will be offered on topics related to recognition and increasing permeability between secondary and tertiary education.

In the international sphere, ZEvA's strategy has, by and large, proved to be successful. The agency has consolidated and further expanded its position in its regional focus areas, especially by means of international accreditation projects. Future potential lies in the area of political consulting, especially in developing countries that require special expertise in building up a functional national quality assurance and accreditation system in higher education. One first large-scale project in the Kurdish region of Iraq has already been agreed upon but is currently on hold due to the Corona pandemic. First attempts to acquire external funding for projects, e.g. through Erasmus+, have so far been unsuccessful, but can present a further source of finance for ZEvA's international activities.

Another possible area of development is ZEvA's seminar programme, which in 2020 has been suspended due to the pandemic situation. So far, ZEvA has mostly offered seminars on certain topics to HEIs in Lower Saxony free of charge, with a few open spots offered to participants from outside of Lower Saxony who then had to cover the costs themselves. In the future, ZEvA could expand this to become another source of income that will also serve to further ZEvA's reputation and attract more HEIs to ZEvA's external quality assurance procedures. In the past, these seminars were very effective as a marketing tool.

As far as internal issues and developments are concerned, the ZEvA management is also planning to pay more attention to staff health and staff development. First steps have already been taken by introducing annual personnel talks, and by offering professional coaching to all interested staff members. Also, the ZEvA management supports all members of staff in proactively seeking further professional training.

## 5 Glossary of Terms

| Term  | German original (where applicable)            | Explanation   |
|---|---|---|
| Accreditation Decrees of the Federal States                                       | Studienakkreditierungsverordnungen der Länder | Decrees of the German federal states, based on the Specimen Decree, regulating the accreditation system in the respective state. Some of these decrees include a substantiation of the rules and criteria and some refer to the substantiation of the Specimen decree.  |
| Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Career Development (AK-KORK) |   | Russian agency for quality assurance and a partner of ZEvA  |
| Appeals Commission  | Revisionskommission                           | ZEvA's commission handling appeals against decisions and complaints about procedural steps  |
| Commission for International Affairs (KIA)  | Kommission für internationale Angelegenheiten | ZEvA's former deciding body for international quality assurance procedures  |
| Commission for System Accreditation (KSA)   | Kommission Systemakkreditierung               | A former subcommittee of ZEvA's SAK responsible for German system accreditation procedures  |
| European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)             |   | European membership association of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education area   |
| European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)                   |   | An association of European quality assurance agencies.  |
| European Institute for Quality Assurance (EIQA)                                   |   | Former association of HEIs and other bodies serving as an external advisory council to ZEvA   |
| European Quality Agency Register (EQAR)   |   | A register for European quality assurance agencies. Registration in the EQAR is in many countries required for agencies to work.  |
| European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF)   |   | A regular meeting of European quality assurance experts   |
| Foundation Board of Trustees  | Stiftungsrat                                  | ZEvA's supervisory body   |
| Foundation under Civil/Public Law   | Stiftung nach privatem/öffentlichen Recht     | Foundations in Germany are either founded under civil or public law. A foundation under public law would operate with public assets under public supervision and fulfil responsibilities of a public administration. ZEvA is a foundation under civil law and thus operates mostly with its own assets while serving public purposes. |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| General Auxiliary Conditions for Grants for Institutional Support  | Allgemeine Nebenbestimmungen für Zuwendungen zur institutionellen Förderung (ANBest-I)  | Auxiliary conditions for the German Federal Budgetary Regulations, regulating governmental institutional support of private institutions  |
| German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)  | Deutscher akademischer Austauschdienst  | Association of German HEIs and student bodies to support international relations in higher education.   |
| German Accreditation Council (GAC)   | Akkreditierungsrat (AR)   | Central regulating and decision-making body in the German accreditation system, incorporated as part of a foundation under public law of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia.   |
| German Evaluation Society  | Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluation (DeGEval)  | German association for evaluation in higher education   |
| German Federal Constitutional Court  | Bundesverfassungsgericht  | Highest constitutional court in Germany   |
| German Scientific Council (WR)   | Wissenschaftsrat  | Central body of the German federal government and the federal states, responsible for further development of the German academic system and for the institutional accreditation of private HEIs   |
| Higher Education Framework Act (HRG)   | Hochschulrahmengesetz   | Legal framework for higher education on the federal level   |
| Interstate Treaty on the Organization of a Joint Accreditation System to Ensure the Quality of Teaching and Learning at German Higher Education Institutions (Interstate Study Accreditation Treaty) | Staatsvertrag über die Organisation eines gemeinsamen Akkreditierungssystems zur Qualitätssicherung in Studium und Lehre an deutschen Hochschulen ("Studienakkreditierungsstaatsvertrag") | A treaty of the German federal states with the purpose of developing a new common accreditation system in Germany. Legal basis for the Specimen Decree and the accreditation decrees of the federal states.   |
| Joint Quality Initiative   |   | An initiative by European countries with the purpose of developing a joint system of quality assurance for higher education in Europe. Formulated the Dublin Descriptors which served as a basis for the European Qualifications Framework for Higher Education |
| Lower Saxony Higher Education Act (NHG)  | Niedersächsisches Hochschulgesetz   | State law of Lower Saxony regulating higher education in the state.   |
| Ministry of Science and Culture of Lower Saxony (MWK)  | Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur   | Ministry of the state of Lower Saxony governing higher education in the state   |
| Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA)  |   | An association of East and Central European quality assurance agencies  |



|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| Quality Assurance Act for Higher Education Institutions (HS-QSG)  | Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz  | Austrian legal framework for quality assurance at HEIs  |
| Specimen Decree Pursuant to Article 4, Paragraphs 1 – 4 of the Interstate Study Accreditation Treaty (MRVO) | Musterrechtsverordnung gemäß Artikel 4 Absätze 1 4 Studienakkreditierungsstaatsvertrag | Legal document agreed upon by the German federal states to serve as a template for the legally binding state accreditation decrees. Includes procedural rules and criteria for accreditation procedures and an extensive substantiation of these rules and criteria |
| Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK)   | Ständige Akkreditierungskommission   | Former decision-making body of ZEvA for German accreditation procedures   |
| Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK)                                    | Kultusministerkonferenz  | A conference of ministers for culture, education, and higher education of the German federal states. Issues common guidelines and frameworks for education and higher education.  |
| Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK)  | Ständige Evaluierungskommission  | ZEvA's commission for all state-funded evaluation and consultancy projects in Lower Saxony  |
| State University Conference of Lower Saxony (LHK)   | Niedersächsische Landeshochschulkonferenz  | A conference of all public HEIs in Lower Saxony   |
| System Accreditation  | Systemakkreditierung   | An accreditation of an HEI's quality assurance system, in effect enabling them to self-accredit their programmes  |
| University of Cooperative Education (also: vocational academy)  | Berufsakademie   | A vocational academy that may offer Bachelor's degrees that are equated to higher education programmes and lead to the same qualifications  |
| ZEvA-Commission (ZEKo)  | ZEvA-Kommission  | ZEvA's central decision-making body for all external quality assurance procedures that lead to a formal decision since 2018   |

## 6 Links

### 6.1 General

ZEvA Website:

<https://www.zeva.org/>

Website German Accreditation Council (GAC):

<https://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/>

Archive GAC Website for the previous accreditation system:

<http://archiv.akkreditierungsrat.de/>

Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK)

<https://www.kmk.org/kmk/information-in-english.html>

Interstate Treaty on the Organization of a Joint Accreditation System to Ensure the Quality of Teaching and Learning at German Higher Education Institutions (Interstate Study Accreditation Treaty)

[https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2016/2016\\_12\\_08-Studienakkreditierungsstaatsvertrag-englisch.pdf](https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2016/2016_12_08-Studienakkreditierungsstaatsvertrag-englisch.pdf)

Specimen Decree Pursuant to Article 4, Paragraphs 1 – 4 of the Interstate Study Accreditation Treaty (MRVO)

[https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2017/2017\\_12\\_07-Musterrechtsverordnung-englisch.pdf](https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2017/2017_12_07-Musterrechtsverordnung-englisch.pdf)

Lower Saxony Higher Education Act.

[http://www.nds-voris.de/jportal/portal/t/lmq/page/bsvorisprod.psm/action/portlets.iw.MainAction?p1=9&eventSubmit\\_doNavigate=searchInSubtreeTOC&showdoc-case=1&doc.hl=0&doc.id=jlr-HSchulGND2007V17P5&doc.part=S&toc.poskey=#focuspoint](http://www.nds-voris.de/jportal/portal/t/lmq/page/bsvorisprod.psm/action/portlets.iw.MainAction?p1=9&eventSubmit_doNavigate=searchInSubtreeTOC&showdoc-case=1&doc.hl=0&doc.id=jlr-HSchulGND2007V17P5&doc.part=S&toc.poskey=#focuspoint)

Unofficial English version: \_\_\_\_\_

[https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/document/download/715fc9e9317654a6f83f3302d614c7bc.pdf/NHG\\_English.pdf](https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/document/download/715fc9e9317654a6f83f3302d614c7bc.pdf/NHG_English.pdf)

Guidelines and Criteria for the Accreditation of Doctoral Programmes in Lower Saxony:

[https://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/157318/Leitlinien\\_und\\_Kriterien\\_fuer\\_die\\_Akkreditierung\\_von\\_Promotionsstudiengaengen\\_in\\_Niedersachsen\\_Stand\\_17.07.2020\\_nicht\\_vollstaendig\\_barrierefrei\\_-\\_Download\\_.pdf](https://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/157318/Leitlinien_und_Kriterien_fuer_die_Akkreditierung_von_Promotionsstudiengaengen_in_Niedersachsen_Stand_17.07.2020_nicht_vollstaendig_barrierefrei_-_Download_.pdf)

German Higher Education Framework Act (HRG)

<https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/hrg/>

Austrian Higher Education Quality Assurance Act:

<https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20007384>

Lower Saxony Foundation Register:

[https://www.arl-we.niedersachsen.de/startseite/grundbesitz\\_und\\_stiftungen/stiftungen/](https://www.arl-we.niedersachsen.de/startseite/grundbesitz_und_stiftungen/stiftungen/)

General Auxiliary Conditions for Grants for Institutional Support:

[https://www.bva.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Aufgaben/ZMV/Zuwendungen\\_national/nebenbestimmungen\\_anbest\\_i\\_2019.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=5](https://www.bva.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Aufgaben/ZMV/Zuwendungen_national/nebenbestimmungen_anbest_i_2019.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=5)



## 6.2 ZEvA Manuals

Quality Handbook:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Qualitaetshandbuch\\_ZEvA\\_2020.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Qualitaetshandbuch_ZEvA_2020.pdf)

Programme Accreditation (Germany):

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Programmakkreditierung.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Programmakkreditierung.pdf)

System Accreditation (Germany):

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Systemakkreditierung.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Systemakkreditierung.pdf)

Certification/Validation:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Zertifizierung\\_und\\_Validierung.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Zertifizierung_und_Validierung.pdf)

International Programme Accreditation:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA\\_Manual\\_External\\_Assessment\\_of\\_Study\\_Programmes.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA_Manual_External_Assessment_of_Study_Programmes.pdf)

International Institutional Accreditation:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA\\_Manual\\_Institutional\\_Accreditation.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/ZEvA_Manual_Institutional_Accreditation.pdf)

Quality Audits Austria:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Qualitaetsaudit\\_OEsterreich.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Qualitaetsaudit_OEsterreich.pdf)

Evaluation of Study Programmes:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Evaluation\\_von\\_Studiengaengen.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Evaluation_von_Studiengaengen.pdf)

Quality Audit/Institutional Evaluation:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_zum\\_institutionellen\\_Qualitaetsaudit.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_zum_institutionellen_Qualitaetsaudit.pdf)

Evaluation Exam Systems:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_zur\\_Evaluation\\_des\\_Pruefungswesens.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_zur_Evaluation_des_Pruefungswesens.pdf)

Evaluation Dual Study-Programmes:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_zur\\_Evaluation\\_dualer\\_Studienkonzepte.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_zur_Evaluation_dualer_Studienkonzepte.pdf)

Evaluation MINT-Programmes:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Evaluation\\_der\\_Massnahmen\\_zur\\_Foerderung\\_der\\_MINT-Studienabschluesse.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Evaluation_der_Massnahmen_zur_Foerderung_der_MINT-Studienabschluesse.pdf)

Consultancy:

[https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden\\_Beratung.pdf](https://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Leitfaden/Leitfaden_Beratung.pdf)

## 7 List of Annexes

- Annex 1: Foundation Certificate (Translation)
  - Annex 2: Foundation Charter (Translation)
  - Annex 3: Rules of Procedure Foundation Council (Translation)
  - Annex 4: Rules of Procedure Executive Board (Translation)
  - Annex 5: Rules of Procedure ZEvA-Commission (Translation)
  - Annex 6: Rules of Procedure Standing Evaluation Commission (Translation)
  - Annex 7: Rules of Procedure Appeals Commission (Translation)
  - Annex 8: Mission Statement of ZEvA (Translation)
  - Annex 9: ZEvA's Quality Handbook (Translation)
  - Annex 10: Comparison ZEvA Criteria to ESG
  - Annex 11: GAC Comparison Criteria to ESG
  - Annex 12: SurveyMonkey Evaluation Results (in German)
- (Translations aided by DeePL)







## ZEvA

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