

Institutional Accreditation

A Manual for Reviewers
and Higher Education
Institutions

Central Evaluation and
Accreditation Agency (ZEvA)

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
1 Preamble.....	3
2 Assessing and Developing Quality: Profile and Mission of ZEvA	4
2.1 History.....	4
2.2 Internal Quality Management	4
3 Institutional Accreditation: Introduction	6
3.1 What Is It All About? – General Approach	6
3.2 Why Institutional Accreditation? – Aims and Benefits	6
3.3 Eligibility: Who Can Apply for Institutional Accreditation?	7
3.4 Purpose of the Assessment: What Do We Have to Do to Get Accredited?.....	8
3.5 Flexible Options: Are There Alternative Approaches?	8
4 Institutional Accreditation: the Procedure at a Glance	9
4.1 General Aspects.....	9
4.2 Composition of Expert Panels: Guiding Principles.....	9
4.3 Milestones and Timeline.....	9
4.3.1 Application and Contracting (Date X)	10
4.3.2 Compilation of the Institutional Self-Report (X + 2-3 months)	10
4.3.3 On-site talks (X + 5-6 months).....	10
4.3.4 Generation of the Evaluation Report (X + 8-9 months).....	11
4.3.5 Final Decision (X + 10-12 months)	11
4.3.6 Follow-Up.....	12
5 Assessment Framework	13
6 Appeals and Complaints.....	15
7 Design and Content of the Self-Evaluation Report.....	15
7.1 Basic Structure.....	16
7.2 Content	16
7.3 Key Information on the Institution	16
7.4 Key information on the Study Programmes	17
7.5 Key information on Quality Assurance in Teaching and Learning:.....	17
7.6 Appendices	17
7.7 Illustrative Examples	17
8 Additional Information for External Experts.....	19

8.1	Tasks and Responsibilities	19
8.2	Roles and Requirements	19
9	Annex	21
	Annex 1: Sample Agenda of the Site Visit.....	21
	Annex 2: Useful Links	23

1 Preamble

This manual describes the procedure of **International Institutional Accreditation** as defined and applied by the Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hanover (ZEvA). First and foremost, it is meant to serve as a prime source of information and as a reference document for higher education institutions outside Germany wishing to apply for institutional accreditation. It may also function as a decision aid for institutions considering such a step. In addition, external experts may use the manual for preparation and as a general guideline throughout the assessment procedure.

Since the start of the Bologna Process in the mid-1990s, evaluation and quality assurance of teaching and learning have gained increasing importance for higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe. Since 1995, ZEvA has been a major actor in this field both nationally and internationally. ZEvA is a founding member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). The agency is also listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The methods and criteria of assessment applied by ZEvA are fundamentally rooted in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), which have also gained wide recognition and acceptance outside the borders of Europe.

ZEvA carries out different types of external quality reviews in Germany, in Europe and beyond. The focus of the assessment may be placed on study programmes or on the entire higher education institution and its internal quality management system.

On principle, institutional accreditation is of interest for higher education institutions both inside and outside the European Higher Education Area.

2 Assessing and Developing Quality: Profile and Mission of ZEvA

2.1 History

The Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hanover (ZEvA) was set up in 1995 by the Lower Saxony Conference of Higher Education Institutions (LHK) with the task of supporting quality improvement of teaching and studies at higher education institutions.

ZEvA began with state-wide evaluations of study and teaching at all higher education institutions in Lower Saxony and still offers universities, universities of Applied sciences and universities of cooperative education the organisation and implementation of external evaluation procedures as a service – naturally also outside of Lower Saxony. ZEvA thus provides assistance to higher education institutions in quality development and improvement in all areas related to study and teaching.

ZEvA was accredited in 2000 as the first agency in Germany for programme accreditation and in 2008 also for system accreditation. Furthermore, ZEvA offers international accreditations (institutional and programme), institutional audits (mainly in Austria), consulting, certification and validation.

ZEvA is a member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) and ECA (European Consortium for Accreditation). Furthermore, ZEvA has been listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since March 2008. The periodical renewal of this registration guarantees an external quality assurance in regular cycles.

2.2 Internal Quality Management

ZEvA uses various instruments of internal quality assurance. These include Jour Fixes (entire team, divisional, management team), procedural evaluations of the satisfaction of reviewers and higher education institutions, annual closed meetings and, of course, the ZEvA Commission (ZEKo) which meets three times a year. The commission consists of 20 persons and, in addition to the Scientific Director of the ZEvA, is made up of representatives of the various study areas of universities and universities of applied sciences, representatives of quality management at universities, representatives from professional practice and student representatives of a university and a university of applied sciences.

The tasks of the ZEKo include

- final decisions on accreditations, quality audits, certifications and validations
- formal appointment of the expert groups (delegated to two members from the relevant study areas and one member each from professional practice and the student body)
- Decisions on complaints and appeals by ZEvA's clients regarding the course of proceedings on the basis of a vote by the Appeals Commission
- Election of the members of the Appeals Commission
- Discussion and introduction of quality assurance topics at higher education institutions, further development of procedures and thus ensuring science-led procedures

The entire quality management serves to realise the following objectives:

- High quality of the assessments
- Customer satisfaction
- Expertise, appropriateness of decisions and reliability
- Efficiency and effectiveness
- Transparency
- Compliance with procedural principles

By defining appropriate measures, the achievement of these objectives is operationalised in the ZEvA quality management manual.

3 Institutional Accreditation: Introduction

3.1 What Is It All About? – General Approach

Institutional Accreditation procedures as conducted by ZEvA are based on the following core principles:

- ✓ The main focus of Institutional Accreditation is on assessing the **quality of student learning**. Other central areas of activity usually pursued by HEIs (research, internationalization, administration, management) are only assessed in so far as they affect the quality of teaching and learning, unless the HEI wishes to have them included in the assessment procedure.
- ✓ ZEvA takes a “**Fitness for Purpose**” approach to Institutional Accreditation. This means that the review is aimed at assessing whether
 - an institution has defined quality goals for teaching and learning in accordance with its overall mission and strategy,
 - an institution has procedures in place appropriate for its stated purposes,
 - it pursues activities and applies sufficient resources to achieve those purposes,
 - there is verifiable evidence to show that the purposes are being achieved,
 - adequate processes for quality monitoring and enhancement have been implemented.
- ✓ Even though the accreditation procedure does not serve to rank or benchmark HEIs, the experts may also comment on the institution’s **compliance with international academic standards** where appropriate.
- ✓ Beyond checking compliance with standards, ZEvA takes an **enhancement-driven approach** to accreditation. Our external experts act as advisors and “critical friends” who support higher education institutions in continuously improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- ✓ Even beyond the scope of the assessment procedure, ZEvA acts as a **partner to higher education institutions**. For example, we provide assistance in putting the experts’ recommendations into practice.

3.2 Why Institutional Accreditation? – Aims and Benefits

Higher education institutions may benefit from the assessment procedure in various ways.

For instance, institutional accreditation

- ✓ **increases trust**. Through Institutional Accreditation HEIs can demonstrate that they live up to European standards for teaching and learning and provide all necessary conditions for successful learning. This may have a positive effect on the mobility of

students and staff (both incoming and outgoing) and may facilitate the forging of cooperative relationships with foreign universities.

- ✓ **Is a driver of self-reflection and change.** Systematic and critical internal assessment is an important prerequisite for successful external assessment. Institutional accreditation provides an occasion for thorough self-analysis and can make it easier to implement measures for improvement.
- ✓ **facilitates quality enhancement in teaching and learning.** HEIs applying for institutional accreditation have the chance of receiving expert advice that helps them to improve their programmes and procedures.
- ✓ **is an opportunity for demonstrating excellence.** Wherever appropriate, ZEvA accreditation reports include commendations of good practice.

3.3 Eligibility: Who Can Apply for Institutional Accreditation?

On principle, ZEvA works together with higher education institutions both inside and outside the European Higher Education Area. To be eligible for accreditation (at programme level or at institutional level), a higher education institution should meet the following requirements:

- ✓ It should be state-recognized (though it may be privately funded) and hence legally entitled to award academic degrees.
- ✓ Its degree programmes should incorporate international academic standards and qualifications frameworks, as well as the principles of the ESG.
- ✓ The institution should not serve any political or religious causes or doctrines which compromise its neutrality in teaching and research or cause it to disregard general principles and standards of the scientific community.
- ✓ Making financial profit should not be its prime mission.
- ✓ It should take a student-centred and outcome-oriented approach to teaching and learning. Degrees should be awarded based on the achievement of intended learning outcomes (acquisition of knowledge and competencies).
- ✓ It should have defined quality standards for all central areas of activity and should have developed instruments to monitor adherence to these standards.
- ✓ It should be able to demonstrate that it is well established in the national and international scientific community, as, for instance, by membership in university networks.

It should be noted that a quality assessment in the form of an accreditation or certification may not be combined with consultancy on the same subject matter. If, for example, ZEvA provides content-related counselling with regard to the conception or the further development of a curriculum or of an institution's internal QA system, it cannot assess the same educational programme or QA system in the context of a subsequent accreditation or certification procedure.

3.4 Purpose of the Assessment: What Do We Have to Do to Get Accredited?

In order to pass the institutional accreditation procedure successfully, higher education institutions must demonstrate that their **quality management system in teaching and learning fulfils the requirements laid out in Part 1 of the ESG**.

In short, the ZEvA quality label certifies that a higher education institution's internal structures, human and material resources, procedures and activities are apt to achieve the institutional goals and provide a sound basis for high-quality teaching and learning.

Based on the reference framework of the ESG, ZEvA has defined a number of focus areas for institutional accreditation. These are explained in more detail in Chapter 5 below.

3.5 Flexible Options: Are There Alternative Approaches?

Higher education institutions may feel that they are not yet ready for an international accreditation procedure, but nonetheless need advice from external experts. Others may prefer to narrow down or extend the focus of the review. ZEvA takes all efforts to adapt to each university's individual needs and priorities. For example, the following alternatives are possible:

- ✓ **Faculty Focus:** The focus of the assessment may be placed on individual faculties, departments or similar organizational units. In this case, the panel includes a number of experts from the relevant subject discipline(s). Also, the study programmes are assessed in more detail. Depending on their needs, faculties may choose to apply for the accreditation of their study programmes instead. In case of doubt, ZEvA is glad to provide advice and support in choosing the most suitable approach.
- ✓ **Optional Focus Areas:** at the request of the HEI, the assessment framework may be extended to include additional focus areas that take an impact on the quality of teaching and learning, as e.g. internationalization, diversity/equal opportunities policy, research etc.
- ✓ **Quality Audit:** Faculties or higher education institutions may prefer an external assessment procedure that does not result in a formal accreditation decision, but in recommendations for the further development of internal quality management. If recommendations are followed, this may open the way for future accreditation.

By request, ZEvA can officially confirm that the institution or faculty has been audited, yet without awarding a quality seal.

On principle, it is also possible to combine institutional accreditation with the accreditation of (selected) study programmes. This may be possible within one and the same assessment procedure. The ZEvA management can provide detailed advice on this by request.

4 Institutional Accreditation: the Procedure at a Glance

4.1 General Aspects

The following basic principles are applied in all ZEvA quality reviews:

- ✓ **Peer Review:** ZEvA quality reviews are always designed as peer reviews. The agency assembles a panel of experts comprising both academics and professionals. On principle, each panel includes a student, too.
- ✓ **Multiple Steps:** The experts' assessment is based on an institutional self-report, as well as talks with faculty, staff and students on site. The final accreditation decision is not taken by the expert panel, but by an independent commission.
- ✓ **Language Policy:** If the review takes place in a non-German speaking country, the institutional self-report must be written in English. Important supplementary documents should also be translated into English if necessary.

As a general rule, English should be the language used by all parties involved throughout the entire review procedure. Sometimes it may be necessary to involve professional interpreters for assistance.

- ✓ **Continuous Support:** Each institutional assessment procedure is managed by an experienced project officer who provides advice and support throughout the assessment procedure.

4.2 Composition of Expert Panels: Guiding Principles

Selecting qualified, experienced and independent experts is of central importance if a review procedure is to do justice to a higher education institution, its particular profile, its strategic goals in teaching and research and to the disciplines involved.

Review panels typically consist of 4-6 persons, depending on the scale and nature of the review procedure. The selection of experts lies with the agency. On principle, each panel consists of university professors (preferably with leadership experience), professionals from outside academia and at least one student.

As a general rule, the peers should not only have an unquestionable academic reputation, but solid experience in higher education management and quality assurance, too. At least one member of the panel should be familiar with the language and higher education system of the country the HEI is located in.

The HEI has a right to object to experts selected by the agency for well-grounded reasons (as, for example, potential conflicts of interest). As a general rule, all experts have to confirm their independence as part of their contract with ZEvA.

4.3 Milestones and Timeline

On average, an institutional accreditation procedure takes **about 12-18 months** to complete.

Typical milestones of the assessment procedure are as follows:

4.3.1 *Application and Contracting (Date X)*

ZEvA is happy to provide all information regarding its services to interested higher education institutions and to give a first estimate of the costs involved. A personal meeting with a representative of the agency may be helpful in order to clarify the needs of the HEI and its prospects of obtaining accreditation. In order to do so, the institution might have to provide some general information regarding its profile, programme portfolio etc.

In case the HEI decides to engage ZEvA for a quality review, the exact nature of the service to be provided, the costs incurred, and the time schedule will be laid out in a contract. The agency assures strict confidentiality.

4.3.2 *Compilation of the Institutional Self-Report (X + 2-3 months)*

The HEI (or the department/faculty in charge) generates a self-report that includes a detailed description of the institution's profile and its internal quality assurance system in teaching and learning. The following should be kept in mind during this process:

- ✓ All aspects of the assessment framework (cf. Chapter 5) should be covered by the report, in as much detail as necessary.
- ✓ The HEI should also submit a separate reader containing central reference documents, as e.g. strategy documents/policy papers, mission statements, regulations concerning quality in teaching and learning, templates of survey questionnaires etc. **Please note:** it may be necessary to have some of the documents translated into English to create transparency for the reviewers.
- ✓ The complete and final report should be submitted to the agency **at least 6 weeks** prior to the on-site visit. We strongly recommend handing in a **draft version for pre-check** about 10-12 weeks prior to the on-site visit. The final self-report is immediately forwarded to the peers for desktop validation.

4.3.3 *On-site talks (X + 5-6 months)*

The visit of the expert panel and the ZEvA project officer at the higher education institution usually takes 2-3 days.

In the course of the site visit the members of the expert panel will talk to various representatives of the higher education institution and gain a hands-on impression of the HEI's infrastructure and resources.

Typically, the experts conduct interviews with the following stakeholders:

- ✓ members of the university leadership board (president/rector, vice-rector(s), deans etc.),
- ✓ senior staff/heads of academic departments responsible for developing and implementing policies and strategies for teaching and learning, including members of key committees,
- ✓ staff responsible for quality management/quality assurance in teaching and learning,

- ✓ teaching staff at various levels and with various degrees of experience,
- ✓ undergraduate and graduate students from different faculties/departments, including members of the student union or equivalent committees,
- ✓ graduates/alumni,
- ✓ external stakeholders, such as employers and representatives of professional bodies.

Interviews are usually scheduled in separate, 1-1.5-hour sessions.

4.3.4 Generation of the Evaluation Report (X + 8-9 months)

Following the on-site talks, the ZEvA project coordinator generates a draft evaluation report in cooperation with the panel members. The report summarizes the panel's findings, supported by detailed analysis and commentary.

The report is structured along the assessment framework outlined in Chapter 4 of this manual.

Wherever appropriate, the findings are expressed as:

- ✓ **commendations** of good practice,
- ✓ **affirmations**, which recognise improvements the institution is already making as a result of its self-review,
- ✓ **recommendations** for improvement.

The draft expert report is forwarded to the higher education institution. The HEI may lodge a written statement in response in order to correct factual errors and to comment on the contents of the report.

4.3.5 Final Decision (X + 10-12 months)

All relevant documents (including the institutional self-report) are forwarded to the ZEvA Commission. Based on the written material and the supplementary information provided by the project coordinator, the commission takes the final accreditation decision.

In case of a positive outcome, ZEvA awards its quality label to the institution for a period of six years. The agency issues an official accreditation certificate.

If the institution opts for an institutional audit, no final decision is taken. However, the commission is notified of the assessment procedure and its results.

The accreditation may be awarded under conditions, which must be fulfilled within a limited period of time (usually 9-12 months).

The commission may also formulate "pre-conditions" which must be fulfilled prior to the awarding of accreditation.

Higher education institutions may lodge appeals to accreditation decisions or complaints regarding procedural errors or irregularities (Cf. Chapter 6).

4.3.6 Follow-Up

It is of special importance to ZEvA to provide a thorough follow-up to the accreditation procedure. This does not only include assistance in fulfilling conditions, but continuous advice and support.

Two years into the accreditation period, the higher education institution should submit a short intermediate report to the agency which outlines the general development that the institution and its internal quality management system have taken since. An additional meeting/workshop with the ZEvA project manager and/or members of the expert panel can also be arranged upon request.

5 Assessment Framework

ZEvA has defined five focus areas of assessment for institutional accreditation which are rooted in Part 1 of the ESG (“Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance”).

For each focus area, the quality standards applied are outlined in a few sentences. It should be kept in mind, however, that the standards (consciously) leave room for interpretation and describe an “ideal state”, i.e. institutional accreditation may be awarded even if not all of the listed requirements are (yet) fully met.

The experts may give recommendations for optimization wherever they see the need. In case substantial shortcomings are identified, conditional accreditation is possible, or the accreditation procedure may be suspended for some time.

1. Internal Quality Assurance [ESG 1.1]

- ✓ The institution has implemented and published a policy or strategy for quality assurance.
- ✓ Responsibilities for quality assurance are clearly defined. The processes and procedures are transparent to all involved and are applied consistently.
- ✓ Adequate human and financial resources have been allocated for the execution of QA activities.
- ✓ Internal and external stakeholders participate actively in quality assurance and quality development. An institutional quality culture is actively promoted.
- ✓ The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education are accounted for.

2. Institutional Objectives in Student Learning [ESG 1.1]

- ✓ The institution has clearly defined and articulated its definition of quality in teaching and learning.
- ✓ The institution has formulated objectives for teaching and learning which fit in with its general profile, mission and strategy. The objectives are revised on a regular basis.

3. Study Programmes [ESG 1.2-1.4, 1.7-1.9]

- ✓ Intended learning outcomes (ILOs) have been formulated for each study programme. The ILOs are transparent and in line with the general institutional strategy. They clearly reflect the intended qualification level and the desired profile of the graduates.
- ✓ The HEI ensures that

- a student-centred approach is taken to teaching and learning, as reflected, for example, in the applied teaching methods, the enabling of flexible learning paths, and in the methods of student assessment,
 - there is a constructive alignment of course contents, teaching methods and student assessment,
 - curricula are designed in such a way that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved,
 - sufficient public information is provided regarding the study programmes,
 - the “student life cycle” is well-managed throughout. This includes the existence of clear regulations and standard procedures for student selection and admission and for the recognition of qualifications. Upon leaving the institution, students and graduates receive adequate documentation of the qualification gained.
- ✓ All programmes are continuously monitored and revised. Quality cycles are established and closed. A variety of instruments is regularly applied, including course evaluation, monitoring of students’ workload, progression and overall satisfaction, as well as graduate surveys. The HEI gathers and analyses all information relevant for the management and quality assurance of the programmes.

4. Resources and Learning Environment [ESG 1.6]

- ✓ The institution provides adequate student support and advisory services in both academic and non-academic matters.
- ✓ The institution ensures that the infrastructure and facilities on campus enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.
- ✓ The institution aims at a continuous monitoring and enhancement of learning resources and student support services.

5. Teaching Staff [ESG 1.5]

- ✓ The institution ensures that all faculties and programmes have an adequate number of qualified teaching staff at their disposal.
- ✓ The institution offers opportunities for the professional development of teaching staff.
- ✓ The HEI has developed transparent processes for staff recruitment, including adequate selection criteria.

6 Appeals and Complaints

Higher Education Institutions and other ZEvA clients can lodge appeals or complaints in connection with all ZEvA procedures. For this purpose, ZEvA has set up an Appeals Commission consisting of experienced university teachers and representatives of professional practice and the student body. The current composition of the Appeals Commission can be found here:

<https://www.zeva.org/ueber-die-zeva/revisionskommision>

ZEvA distinguishes between **appeals** against the formal outcome of a procedure and **complaints** against procedural steps or professional conduct of the persons involved:

1. Appeals against Formal Decisions and Outcomes

An appeal against the formal outcome of a procedure can be lodged if the institution comes to the conclusion that this outcome is not based on sound evidence, that the relevant criteria have been applied incorrectly or that the outcome has been tainted by inconsistently applied processes.

ZEvA's institutional accreditation procedures conclude with a formal decision on the accreditation of the respective institution. An appeal against these decisions can be lodged within 4 weeks after receipt of the decision.

If an appeal against a formal outcome is sustained, the result may be a change of the decision, e.g., the deletion/modification of a condition or recommendation or the conversion of a refusal into an accreditation.

2. Complaints Regarding Procedural Steps and Professional Conduct

ZEvA's clients may lodge complaints against any procedural step if they consider it not to have been properly carried out in accordance with the contract and the procedural rules. This may concern, for example, the conduction of the site visit or the preparation of the assessment report. They may also file complaints against the professional conduct of ZEvA's staff or the experts involved in the respective procedure. These complaints can be lodged at any time during the procedure until it concludes with the final formal outcome.

If a complaint against a procedural step or against the professional conduct of staff or experts is sustained, it may result in a repetition, modification, or supplementation of a procedural step, e.g., a renewed site-visit, a revision of an assessment report or a supplementary opinion by an additional expert. The agency may also decide to assign a different staff member or exchange individual experts.

Appeals and Complaints Procedure

Complaints and appeals must always be substantiated in writing and have to be addressed to ZEvA's management. If necessary, a detailed substantiation can be submitted after a formal complaint to observe the 4-week deadline. The complaint or appeal, including the justification, is forwarded together with an assessment by ZEvA's management to ZEvA's Appeals Commission, which then makes a recommendation as to the extent to which the complaint should be upheld. This recommendation, together with the complaint, is sent to the ZEvA Commission (ZEKo), which takes the final decision. Once the ZEKO has taken its decision, no further appeal or complaint can be lodged against the same issue.

7 Design and Content of the Self-Evaluation Report

With a view to the diversity of higher education institutions in different countries, ZEvA does not provide a template or prescribe a structure for the self-report. Each institution should have the opportunity to describe its profile, structures, and procedures freely and in the way it considers most appropriate. The assessment framework (cf. Chapter 5) can be used as a basic guideline as regards the structure and content of the report.

In order to ensure a **maximum level of clarity and readability**, it may be helpful to observe the following general guidelines:

7.1 Basic Structure

- ✓ The written self-report (excluding appendices) should not exceed a length of 50 pages.
- ✓ The document should include a table of contents and a list of appendices. It should be submitted both electronically and on paper.
- ✓ The appendices/additional documents should be provided in separate files (ideally in pdf format). Where appropriate, the self-report should contain cross-references to the documents. Appendices should therefore be numbered and/or directly linked to the self-report to make it as easy as possible for the experts to navigate their way through the documentation.
- ✓ The self-report must be written in English. It may be helpful to include a glossary of the most important terms to avoid misunderstandings: for instance, terms like “department”, “course” or “educational unit” may signify different things in different countries and higher education systems.
- ✓ Sometimes an illustrative chart or table says more than words: you are welcome to insert such graphic elements wherever it seems appropriate and helpful.

7.2 Content

Even though the HEI is free to provide any information it considers important, the self-report should at least cover the following aspects:

7.3 Key Information on the Institution

- ✓ **Mission, size and profile** of the HEI (funding bodies, number of students and staff, focus areas in teaching and research, history, position of the institution within its national higher education system ...)
- ✓ Outline of the **internal organizational structure** (departments or faculties; administrative units, leadership board etc.)
- ✓ Information on **resources, infrastructure, and equipment**
- ✓ Description of general **student support services**
- ✓ Outline of the HEI’s **strategic goals**, especially in teaching and learning

- ✓ Information on the **composition of the teaching faculty**
- ✓ Outline of **international activities, networks and partners**

7.4 Key information on the Study Programmes

- ✓ **List of the study programmes** offered (programme titles, degrees awarded, number of students currently enrolled in each programme)
- ✓ Outline of the **structure of the study programmes** (duration, qualification levels, credit point system, mobility windows etc.)
- ✓ Outline of **external impact** (of ministerial authorities/national qualifications frameworks/national legislation) on the design and content of study programmes
- ✓ Information on **programmes with special profiles** (joint programmes, programmes taught in foreign languages, programmes run in co-operation with industry etc.)

7.5 Key information on Quality Assurance in Teaching and Learning:

- ✓ Outline of **procedures for the quality assurance, monitoring and design of study programmes** (regular external or internal assessment and monitoring of study programmes, procedures for designing new programmes, course evaluation and other surveys, key performance indicators etc.)
- ✓ **Responsibilities** for the design, management, and quality assurance of study programmes (personnel, boards, and committees)

7.6 Appendices

The volume of appendices should include at least the following:

- ✓ Mission statement,
- ✓ Quality assurance policy,
- ✓ General regulations for student assessment and admission,
- ✓ General regulations for the recognition of qualifications,
- ✓ Equal opportunities policy (if existent),
- ✓ Regulations for quality assurance (guidelines for course evaluation, process descriptions, survey questionnaires, quality handbook ...),
- ✓ Cooperation agreements (if applicable).

7.7 Illustrative Examples

If possible, the higher education institution should illustrate its internal procedures for the monitoring and quality assurance of study programmes by means of sample documents. These

documents should exemplify how the institution achieves a continuous quality improvement based on closed PDCA cycles.

ZEvA can advise the HEI on the composition and scope of the sample documentation.

8 Additional Information for External Experts

8.1 Tasks and Responsibilities

Acting as an expert reviewer in institutional accreditation involves the following main tasks:

- ✓ Desktop validation of the institutional self-report,
- ✓ Participation in the on-site talks at the HEI (duration: 2-3 days, excluding traveling time),
- ✓ Contribution to the final evaluation report of the expert panel,
- ✓ Additional short analyses and comments prior to the final decision (if necessary).

As a general rule, all members of an expert panel gather for an introductory briefing session together with the responsible ZEvA project officer immediately prior to the on-site talks. The experts get to know each other, clarify their individual roles and tasks within the team and discuss the self-report in detail. The ZEvA project officer provides additional background information about the higher education institution, the schedule, the assessment procedure and its larger context. He/she is also responsible for taking the minutes of the talks and for drafting the evaluation report.

8.2 Roles and Requirements

Since the institutional accreditation procedure as described in this manual was specifically designed as a cross-border activity, the experts need to possess solid oral and written skills in English. Ideally, they should be natives of the host country or have at least basic knowledge of the local language, culture and education system.

All experts should regard themselves as “critical friends” to higher education institutions, and be aware that an atmosphere of mutual openness and trust is essential for the success of the review procedure.

In particular, experts should possess the following personal qualities:

- ✓ a demonstrable commitment to the principles of quality assurance and quality audit in higher education,
- ✓ a critical but constructive disposition,
- ✓ powers of analysis and sound judgment,
- ✓ personal authority and presence, coupled with the ability to act as an effective team player,
- ✓ the ability to make appropriate judgments in the context of unfamiliar environments,
- ✓ experience of organisation and management, preferably in relation to teaching and learning and to course development and operation,

- ✓ a high standard of oral and written communication, preferably with some experience of writing formal reports to deadlines,
- ✓ good time-management skills.

9 Annex

Annex 1: Sample Agenda of the Site Visit

Please notice: the sample agenda is subject to modification. Each site visit is planned individually according to the needs and requirements of experts and higher education institutions.

Day 1

Arrival of panel members and ZEvA project manager; transfer to the hotel

(Optional: dinner, get-together)

Day 2

08.30 Breakfast + transfer to university

09.00 **Internal Meeting of the Expert Panel**

Proposed Topics: Mission of the expert group, distribution of roles and tasks, information/briefing reg. the national higher education system, accreditation framework & criteria etc., analysis of the university's self-report; open questions

11.30 Talks with Members of the **University Leadership Board**

Proposed Topics: Strategic goals of the university, institutional profile in teaching and research; future perspectives, internationalization strategy, quality assurance policy, equal opportunities policy etc.

13.00 **Lunch**

14.00 **Guided Tour of the Campus**

17.00 **Internal Meeting of the Expert Panel**

18.30 Transfer to the hotel; dinner

Day 3

08.30 Breakfast + transfer to university

09.00 **Internal Meeting of the Expert Panel**

10.00 Talks with Staff of the **Quality Assurance Department**

Proposed Topics: Quality goals of the institution, applied methods and procedures for quality assurance in teaching and learning, reporting and information management etc.

12.30 Lunch

14.00 Talks with **Programme Managers and Teaching Faculty**

Proposed Topics: Intended learning outcomes, design of curricula, teaching methods; advisory and support services for students, design and organization of exams, employment market for graduates, staff development, mobility of students and faculty, internationalization

17.00 **Internal Discussion of the Panel Members**

18.30 Transfer to the hotel; dinner

Day 4

08.30 Breakfast + transfer to university

09.00 Talks with **Students of the HEI**

Proposed Topics: Intended learning outcomes, contents and structure of study programme(s), student workload, examination system, student support and advisory services, general learning environment, student mobility, quality assurance and student participation

11.00 Talks with **Graduates of the HEI**

Proposed topics: Achievement of intended learning outcomes, career prospects, contents and structure of study programmes, career centre and consulting, general quality of infrastructure, contribution of graduates to quality assurance

12.30 **Lunch Break**

14.00 **Final Internal Discussion of the Expert Panel**

Topics: Summary of findings and results, decision on central contents of the evaluation report and the final vote of the panel

16.00 **Final Feedback Session** (all welcome)

Topics: Round-up of the experts' findings and general feedback, clarification of open questions, further procedure etc.

Annex 2: Useful Links

ZEvA Website:

<https://www.zeva.org/international/information-in-english>

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA):

<http://www.engq.eu/>

ECTS Users' Guide:

https://ec.europa.eu/education/ects/users-guide/docs/ects-users-guide_en.pdf

European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area:

<http://www.engq.eu/index.php/home/esg/>

Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Framework_for_Qualifications_of_the_European_Higher_Education_Area



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