

Application for Re-accreditation
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ZEVA

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1 Introduction

ZEvA was established in 1995 as the central evaluation and accreditation agency of higher education institutions in Lower Saxony. In the year 2000, ZEvA was the first agency to be authorized by the German Accreditation Council to carry out programme accreditation procedures.. In 2009, ZEvA was converted into a Foundation under civil law by resolution of the Lower Saxony State Government. It is active nationally and internationally; in Germany, it has been approved as an accreditation agency for programme and system accreditation by the Accreditation Council; in Austria, it is listed by ministerial decree as a quality assurance agency entitled to conduct institutional audits in accordance with the Quality Assurance Act for Higher Education Institutions (Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz (HS-QSG)); it is a founding and full member of ENQA, as well as ECA, and is also listed in the European register EQAR.

Its range of services includes programme and system accreditation, which describe ZEvA's range of services to a very significant extent and comprise approximately 65 per cent of its activities, evaluations at higher education institutions in Lower Saxony (approx. 35 per cent), and recently also the execution of audits and certifications, which still represent a very minor share of the activities of the foundation and therefore have not yet been fully integrated into the quality assurance manual. So far, the share of international procedures within this range of tasks probably reaches 10 per cent of overall activities.

To this extent the statements with regard to the ESG 2015 standards refer mostly to the accreditation procedures.



2 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.

[Annex 59](#) shows a table relating the criteria applied in the respective procedures to the corresponding ESG standard.

In the accreditation of study programmes (programme accreditation) and in system accreditation by ZEvA, ZEvA takes these aspects into account by applying the Common Structural Guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the States in the Federal Republic of Germany (Kultursministerkonferenz (KMK)) and by implementing the “Regeln des Akkreditierungsrats für die Akkreditierung von Studiengängen und für die Systemakkreditierung” (Regulations of the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of study programmes and for system accreditation) (Printed document AR 20/2013, [Annex 01](#)). ZEvA is obliged and committed to apply these guidelines.

However, the Accreditation Council intends to revise the rules and regulations for accreditation in 2016/17, so that some new aspects of the ESG 2015 should come into better focus. From the point of view of ZEvA this applies in particular to the subject "Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment" (Standard 1.3, ESG 2015). In the past ZEvA has already given greater attention to this aspect (see Section 3, Criterion 2.1).

System accreditation assesses the “internal quality assurance system of a higher education institution in the area of teaching and learning” (Sect. II, 4.1, Drs. AR 20/2013). The internal system must a.o. ensure the set-up 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 checked 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).

In some individual procedures in Lower Saxony, ZEvA also accredits doctoral programmes, but does not award the seal of the Accreditation Council in these cases. The procedures are carried out in very close accordance with the programme accreditation procedures for bachelor and master study programmes; the guidelines of the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science serve as criteria ([Annex 52](#)).

The evaluation of study programmes by ZEvA has a varying thematic focus and is

oriented towards the requirements of the higher education institutions and the statutory requirements, in Lower Saxony pursuant to Sect. 5 NHG. In the procedures not all aspects become relevant in every case, occasionally they focus on a particular topic or on certain individual aspects (and standards). Inasmuch as ESG standards are relevant, these will be used. In the ZEvA procedure of *Institutional Evaluation* and in *Subject / Programme Evaluation*, the ESG criteria are covered as a whole; however, the information is respectively categorised differently in the self-evaluation reports of the higher education institutions and in the evaluation reports ([See Annex 4](#)). In the procedure for *Thematic Evaluation* the ESG criteria are usually only covered in part, depending on the actual concrete question governing the evaluation procedure. One procedure, for example, deals with the evaluation of a third-party funded project (Quality Pact Teaching). In addition to the assessment of the project successes (achievement of objectives), project control and quality assurance are also evaluated. Another thematic evaluation of ZEvA focussed on the promotion of MINT degrees at higher education institutions in Lower Saxony. Here, the supporting measures of the higher education institutions were compiled, systematised and evaluated by a group of experts. Again, the ESG criteria were relevant in part only. ZEvA has almost completed the evaluation project for dual-study concepts at higher education institutions and vocational academies in Lower Saxony. In connection with this thematic evaluation, a feature catalogue for dual-study concepts was developed, which provided the basis for the self-evaluation reports of the evaluated study concepts and is basically designed in accordance with the ESG criteria.

For international programme accreditation procedures, ZEvA has formulated its own quality standards, which are in close accordance with the ESG ([Annex 06](#)). Procedures at an institutional level are also envisaged here, but these have so far been limited to the institutional audits in Austria (see below). If other institutional procedures should be added, specific guidelines will be developed for them.

The programme accreditation procedure carried out in Switzerland was based on the guidelines of the "Swiss Federal Department for Economic Affairs, Education and Research" ([Annex 53](#)). However, the procedure described here is no longer in force. Currently, ZEvA is not certified to carry out procedures in Switzerland.

Recently, ZEvA has started to offer auditing and certification procedures. Auditing refers to audits at universities and other providers of higher education in Austria. The focus areas of the audit are specified by the Austrian Hochschulqualitätssicherungsgesetz (Higher Education Institution Quality Assurance Act) (§ 22 HS-QSG) and cover the ESG criteria for internal quality assurance ([Annex 5](#)).

The certification refers to a part of the standards for internal quality assurance and also takes these into account where relevant ([Annex 16](#)).

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.

The intentions and objectives of programme and system accreditation have been conclusively defined and published. Programmes of study must be accredited in accordance with the guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German States (KMK) and the Accreditation Council (AR). For both programme and system accreditation clear criteria for the design of the procedures have been formulated (Sect. I 1., 3. And II 5. And 7., Drs. AR 20/2013). Guides issued by ZEvA substantiate and interpret the guidelines where required. At an internal level the continuous improvement of ZEvA's external assessments lies in the hands of the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK). At federal level it is primarily the responsibility of the Accreditation Council (AR). As per the ZEvA statutes, the relevant interest groups (professors of various different higher education institution types and subject disciplines, representatives of professional practice, students) are represented in all bodies (see also Section 3.2).

In the field of evaluation, the guidelines, in which ESG-compliant processes and criteria are described, provide the basis for the organisation of review procedures. The same interest groups as those mentioned above are also represented in the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK), as stipulated by the by-laws of the foundation. As far as as higher education institutions of the State of Lower Saxony are concerned, the evaluation is designed in accordance with the Lower Saxony Higher Education Act (Niedersächsisches Hochschulgesetz (Sect. 5 NHG)).

Auditing and certification take into account the statutory guidelines (e.g. Sect. 22 HS-QSG for auditing) and involve the relevant interest groups in the arrangement of procedures, e.g. by formulating the requirements for the routines to be followed for on-site inspections.

In all international review procedures, ZEvA guidelines, procedural designs and contractual agreements explicitly refer to the ESG.

The guides are published (see [Annex 02](#), [Annex 03](#), [Annex 04](#), [Annex 05](#), [Annex 06](#), [Annex 15](#)).

The design of the various procedures depends on the respective situation and takes into account the quality management for the specific higher education institution. As the procedures focus essentially on the area of teaching and learning, questions referring to the quality of studying and the feasibility of the programmes grow increasingly significant.

The requirement of necessary information about quality assurance results and follow-up activities addressed in this standard is accounted for by applying criterion 2.9 Drs. AR 20/2013.

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.

Programme and system accreditation procedures have comparable routines, always including a documentation by the higher education institution in which a self-presentation along different topics and criteria is submitted. Along with the results of on-site talks, this documentation provides the basis for a written evaluation (assessment) which is published after completion of the procedure and, in addition, leads to entries into a national database (HRK Kompass). As from 2015, full reports are published.

The guidelines relating to this standard talk about "a self-assessment or [...] other material including supporting evidence". For the documentation, ZEvA encourages higher education institutions to rely as comprehensively as possible on existing documents and proofs in order to keep their workload at a reasonable level. For this purpose the requirements for the documentation have been revised ([Annex 08](#), [Annex 09](#)).

In Germany, these formal procedures may also result in conditions, which are to be understood as follow-up measures. These may have major consequences; as a rule, non-compliance with such conditions will lead to the withdrawal of the accreditation.

Evaluation procedures also encompass all procedural steps mentioned in the standard; the published guide also refers to them. Higher education institutions are asked to report on follow-up measures. However, at present this type of evaluation has almost come to a standstill in Lower Saxony. As a rule, evaluation procedures for study programmes are now only carried out in the case of study programmes that are not compliant with Bologna, recently e.g. in Pharmacy and Law. The reports are published (www.zeva.org), the final report on Law still had to be finalised at the time of the editorial deadline.

If foreign higher education institutions cooperate with ZEvA in external quality assurance, these steps also apply; they are explicitly mentioned in the guide ([Annex 06](#)).

The design of the on-site visit corresponds fully to the guidelines formulated here; all relevant interest groups are involved ([Annex 10](#), [Annex 11](#), [Annex 12](#)).

If ZEvA conducts certification procedures (as pilot projects), these are always based on (provisional) guidelines specifically formulated for the purpose ([Annex 16](#)).

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 expert groups which ZEvA assembles in connection with ESG procedures, there is at least one student member. For accreditation procedures in Germany, ZEvA cooperates with the student accreditation pool, which, suggests suitable student reviewers to the agency on request. In all other cases, ZEvA recruits student members independently, using its own database for this purpose.

In all assessment procedures the expert group is appointed by the responsible ZEvA commission at the proposal of the ZEvA project officer in charge.. In all cases, the higher education institution has the right to raise objections against the appointment of panel members. On principle, all relevant interest groups (academia, the professional world and the student body) are represented in the review panels. In all cases, the main criterion for selection, in addition to being impartial, is the professional competence for the assessment of the respective subject matter. Panel members must possess expertise in the relevant field and must be independent and impartial. ZEvA closes contractual agreements with them which enclose a manual detailing the task and cooperation with the agency, e.g. in the case of programme accreditation procedures ([Annex 7](#)). Similar arrangements apply to the other procedures (See annexes [51](#), [53](#), [54](#), [55](#)). The following criteria for exclusion are applied throughout:

- Close personal ties, connections or conflicts
- Teaching activity (including assistant lecturer, visiting professor or lecturer) at the higher education institution being assessed within the last 3 years - or planned future activity there
- Teaching activity at another higher education institution in the same federal state
- Involvement in current appointment procedures as well as those concluded immediately prior-to.
- Involvement in mutual assessments ("cross-assessments")
- Personal or joint economic benefits drawn from the accreditation decision
- Direct competition with own research projects or plans
- Close cooperation, e.g. in the form of joint research or other intensive cooperation projects within the last 3 years
- Current or recent enrolment at the higher education institution to be assessed.

For preparation, information materials containing the guidelines 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. ZEvA offers so-called expert training seminars three to four times per year ([Annex 14](#)). In system accreditation procedures, experts are obliged to participate in such preparatory seminars ([Annex 13](#)).

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.

In Germany, the basis for accreditation criteria is provided by the Common Structural Guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in German States, which are publicly available. In evaluation, the applied standards are described in the ZEvA guide. For audits in Austria, ZEvA has published its own guide on the basis of the HS-QSG ([Annex 05](#)) which also describes the standards applied. In all other international procedures, the ESG and the relevant (national or European) qualification frameworks are applied directly ([Annex 06](#)) and, in case additional statutory regulations exist, these are also applied. Certifications, which so far refer to the recognition of knowledge and abilities acquired outside the higher education system, use the German programme accreditation criteria in analogy, and the certification of further education and training programmes in higher education didactic, carried out by ZEvA in cooperation with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Hochschuldidaktik (dghd), uses the criteria published by the latter. The consistent application of the criteria is ensured as part of internal quality assurance by the responsible ZEvA body, the fortnightly jour fixe of the agency staff and the dual verification principle ("two pairs of eyes").

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, additionally, summaries of the procedures (internet tables) are published on the homepage of ZEvA (www.zeva.org), with accreditation decisions according to the rules of the Accreditation Council additionally being published in the database of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) (www.hrk.de). In individual evaluation procedures it may be necessary to exclude some few passages due to data protection guidelines (e.g. financial data, personal details and data); however, the assessment as such is always shown.

The subject areas of the reports are defined by the criteria applied respectively (See Annexes [02](#), [03](#), [04](#), [05](#) and [06](#)). In addition, the context and the procedural principles are always shown. In all procedures, recommendations for improvement are also given or, if necessary, even conditions imposed that will be checked and reviewed again after some time.

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 a Review Commission where complaints and appeals against formal decisions can be submitted. Every formal decision contains an explicit reference to this procedural step, which is possible on an out-of-court basis. Also, all ZEvA procedures give higher education institutions the opportunity to comment on draft reports and point out factual errors. The Review Commission addresses its proposal for dealing with the complaints and appeals to the cognisant ZEvA body. Tasks and procedures are defined in the rules of procedure (Geschäftsordnung (GO)) ([Annex 17](#)). The Review Commission reviews the complaint, requests that the documents and a summary assessment by the office be submitted, and, following consultation, issues a recommendation to the competent body on how to deal with the complaint.

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 regularly carries out the procedures described above, primarily programme and system accreditations. The agency's understanding of quality, which provides the basis of its work, is predicated on the ZEvA mission statement published a.o. on the homepage. This mission statement is reviewed at regular intervals and confirmed by the Foundation Council as part of strategic planning discussions, most recently at the 13th meeting on 11/12/2014 in correlation with the release of the ZEvA strategy 2015 – 2020. 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 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 18](#)).

A further characteristic of ZEvA is the high level of personal responsibility shown by the agency's project officers when fulfilling their project-related and procedure-related tasks. Their professionalism was already highlighted by the expert report issued by the Accreditation Council as part of the agency's last re-accreditation. ("During the assessment the employees, in particular those at middle management level, gave displayed a high level of competence and commitment and recognizably form the backbone of the agency", (Drs AR 09/2011, S.7).

During the reporting period ZEvA has carried out numerous accreditation and

evaluation procedures. These concerned all existing types of higher education institutions in Germany and the entire spectrum of subject disciplines offered at universities as well as universities of applied science ([Annex 19](#), [Annex 20](#)). Since its foundation, ZEvA has accredited approximately 3,700 study programmes. The ZEvA commission in charge is the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK), in which all relevant interest groups are involved ([Annex 24](#)). For system accreditation procedures, the SAK has instituted its own specialist commission whose composition is also ESG compliant ([Annex 25](#)).

The activities of the Evaluation Department in the reporting period can be subdivided into different areas, the "classical" evaluation of study programmes that are not subject to the Bologna reform (Pharmacy, Law), as well as higher education institutions (e.g. in Austria) which were completely organised in accordance with ESG rules and regulations – In particular with regard to the participation of relevant interest groups. Moreover, specialised subject evaluations were conducted concerning reform projects in teaching which were/are also, in part, evaluated externally. As also, ZEvA conducted structural evaluations (study concepts, research concepts) and acted as consulting agency to the Lower Saxony state government with regard to the selection of various different funding programmes in the realm of teaching and learning. The competent decision-making body is the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK) in which representatives from Lower Saxony form the majority ([Annex 26](#)).

Outside of Germany, ZEvA has carried out numerous external quality assurance procedures as well ([Annex 21](#)). In order to carry out these procedures, ZEvA also concludes contracts, in which the ESG criteria – and, in the case of programme accreditations, the ECTS conventions – are defined as binding ([Annex 22](#)). The commission in charge of international assessment procedures is the Commission for International Affairs (KIA), in which all relevant interest groups are involved ([Annex 23](#)).

The intentions and objectives of all these procedures are described in the above-mentioned guides ([Annexes 02](#), [03](#), [04](#), [05](#), [06](#)).

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.
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On 11 September 2008 ZEvA was converted into a legally independent foundation under civil law ([Annex 27](#)). Its mission and governance structure are defined in the statutes ([Annex 28](#)). ZEvA thus has a Foundation Council ([Annex 29](#)), a Board of Directors ([Annex 30](#)) and other bodies, namely Commissions for Accreditation, Evaluation and International Affairs.

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. The supervisory Foundation Council consists of six representatives of academia and one member 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, as could be the case with associations or societies) which may also accept legal entities as members. 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 Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German States, the ESG, ECTS conventions or on the basis of relevant laws (e.g. national laws on higher education institutions or the Lisbon Convention). There are no restrictions that are agency-specific or grant a binding influence to individual interest groups.

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 also carries out conferences on this subject, the results of which are published. Furthermore, ZEvA is probably the only German quality assurance agency that provides its academic staff with the opportunity to carry out independent research, as e.g. through an empirical analysis of the Bologna reform in Germany in 2012 and a doctoral dissertation ([Annex 31](#)) on the impact of accreditation on the quality of study programmes in 2013.

Standard 3.5: Resources

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

In addition to its administrative staff, ZEvA employs 11 academic staff; including five post-doctoral employees, whose prime responsibility consists in managing the external quality assurance procedures ([Annex 32](#), [35](#)). Their tasks are defined in a schedule of responsibilities. Therefore, the agency disposes of a sufficient number of adequately qualified personnel.

The Foundation's Board of Directors consists of Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Lücke, President of the University of Osnabrück, and Hermann Reuke, Managing Director of ZEvA (see also www.zeva.org).

Financially, ZEvA is in a good position; it 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.

For some years, the annual turnover has been approximately EUR [REDACTED] from the accreditation procedures and a subsidy of approximately EUR [REDACTED] for Lower Saxony quality assurance projects. The most recent annual financial statement from 2014 shows sales revenues in the amount of EUR [REDACTED] and other operational revenues of EUR [REDACTED] ([Annex 33](#)). By and large, the business plan for 2016 approved by the Foundation Council represents a continuation of the present situation ([Annex 34](#)).

To demonstrate the equipment and facilities, the annexes comprise a floor plan of the offices ([Annex 57](#)), the lease contract for the premises ([Annex 58](#)) and a listing of the IT equipment ([Annex 56](#)). The agency is located on the 2nd floor of Lilienthalstraße 1, 30179 Hanover, with a total office space of 580 m² and a storage space of 64 m². The IT equipment includes – in addition to some printers etc. – 17 workstation computers and 11 notebooks. The infrastructure is provided by a corresponding computer network with LAN and WLAN as well as an external web and mail server.

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 own activities, ZEvA has developed a formalised and binding system for internal quality management. Initially, this was discussed at an internal closed meeting in October 2006 in connection with the process analysis of programme accreditation and made binding for employees as service instructions in the form of a Guide for Internal Quality Assurance in March 2007. The 48th SAK (Standing Accreditation Commission) meeting in September 2010 approved of the document, which had meanwhile been revised several times ([Annex 36](#)) in connection with the concept for the expert seminars. 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 the higher education institutions in connection with accreditation, evaluation and consulting, ZEvA ensures that these are conducted 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.

The quality objectives are:

Objective	Measure
High quality of assessments	The assessment reports as well as the decisions following on from them take into account all assessment and accreditation criteria. The assessments are justified in detail and comprehensibly and documented and published in the final accreditation report. The factual basis for assessment is sufficient.
Customer satisfaction	Effective quality management; 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 Ensuring the quality of experts by feedback from the SAK (Standing Accreditation Commission) and within the team Further training of experts and employees
Efficiency and effectiveness	Adherence to schedules Internal controlling of the processes Consulting and publications directed at higher education institutions Assuring availability of the resources
Transparency	Completeness of documents Documents being up-to-date Quality of documents Comprehensive documentation Publications
Compliance with procedural principles	Joint signing procedures Project management separate from planning / regulation and control of the organisation Feedback internally, with the other agencies, with AR Responsibility and division of tasks Reliability Truthfulness Usefulness for students takes precedence

In order to ensure that objectives are achieved, ZEVA has described and graphically illustrated the core process of accreditation and made it the object of project and finance controlling. The presentation provides the following information:

Action levels and actors, procedural steps, responsibilities, transfer at internal and external interfaces, time schedule, milestones, reaction and feedback, control loops, documents and records associated with the action stages.

During the accreditation period 2010 to 2015 ZEVA has made considerable efforts to develop its quality management even further. The starting points were the re-accreditation procedures of 2006 and 2010 and the April 2006 decision by the SAK (Standing Accreditation Commission) on ZEVA's understanding of quality. In addition, there was the observation and analysis of procedural defects and complaints by certain higher education institutions against SAK (Standing Accreditation Commission) decisions and against the long duration of some procedures. The head office uses the monitoring by the Accreditation Council for its quality assurance. The focus was and is on the standardisation of the internal processes and the use of evaluation methods for quality monitoring.

In an internal document which is continuously further developed, ZEVA has formulated all rules and procedures for its internal quality assurance, which include internal and external feedback mechanisms contributing to the continuous improvement of the agency. The essential elements of ZEVA's internal quality assurance are published on the ZEVA homepage.

A 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 SAK members in preparing the commission meetings. Work on this database could be completed in 2009, so that since then the commission meetings and the review as to whether conditions have been complied with 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 accreditation procedure. At the same time the database contains the diary for compliance with the conditions, which ensures that ZEVA is able to monitor and confirm the fulfilment of the conditions in due time in spite of the large number of procedures. The database software is updated at regular intervals and adapted to the current regulations and guidelines for the accreditation procedures ([Annex 37](#)). It is expected to be replaced in 2017 by a completely new online platform which will contain even better quality assurance routines and provide a new basis for the activities for all parties involved (particularly higher education institutions, experts, members of commissions).

A further element of internal quality assurance is provided by the annual report and the annual accounts of ZEVA. These two reports are submitted to the ZEVA Foundation Council. In this way ZEVA's communication with the responsible authority is assured.

The fortnightly *jour fixe* was permanently established in 2009, its results are always recorded. In addition to managing daily business, the meetings particularly serve to enable an exchange of experience with regard to assessment procedures (evaluation and accreditation) and the achievement of a joint interpretation of standards, criteria and guidelines. A further quality assurance aspect concerns the introduction of the "dual check principle" concerning preliminary assessments of self-reports and assessment reports. The project officers submit their drafts to the head of programme accreditation for double-checking. The double-checking of the preliminary assessments is done by the Managing Director.

As a means of internal quality assurance, all experts and higher education institutions are surveyed with regard to the process and the results of the accreditation procedure. The survey is conducted using Internet-supported questionnaires and is implemented by means of the system "SurveyMonkey". The Standing Accreditation Commission, the Standing Evaluation Commission and the Foundation Council of ZEvA are informed about the results of the surveys. The current analysis of the surveys shows that the high quality of the procedures could be maintained ([Annexes 38, 39](#)). Where necessary, appropriate corrections and adaptations of procedures were made.

In addition, SAK (Standing Accreditation Commission) members are involved in the feedback from head office ([Annex 41](#)). Here, as well as in the interviews with the expert groups, the assessments of the higher education institution documents provide reasons to seek improvements.

The experts in evaluation procedures are also interviewed via the Internet, using the "SurveyMonkey" system. However, in the case of the evaluated higher education institutions – in contrast to the accreditation procedures – feedback on the procedure is obtained by means of a structured telephone interview. A standardised questionnaire was considered to be inexpedient as the evaluation procedures are in part embedded in longer-term project management processes and therefore differ significantly from one another ([Annex 40](#)).

A further quality-assuring element is provided by the internal ZEvA meetings that usually take place annually.

Due to the expansion of various instruments for internal quality assurance since 2006, both the assessment reports by ZEvA and the SAK (Standing Accreditation Commission) decisions have become more consistent and ensure the assessment of all accreditation criteria.

In the case of privately funded higher education institutions, ZEvA ensures that the institution is state-recognised by the competent supervisory authority. Accreditation decisions by the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK) of ZEvA may be taken under the condition of state recognition.

The preparation of the experts for the accreditation or evaluation procedures is based on various instruments such as guides, handouts, the preliminary discussion prior to the site visit and, for accreditation procedures, in particular the expert trainings offered by ZEvA (expert seminars).

The expert seminars are carried out by ZEvA annually in the spring. During the period 2010-2015 366 experts took part in 25 seminars. The seminars focus on the communication and discussion of new developments in the accreditation system as well as on a discussion and feedback regarding the interpretation of the criteria of the Accreditation Council.

The topics for the seminars are determined a.o. by interviewing experts and higher education institutions as well as by proposals made in the seminars themselves.

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 externally assessed by the Accreditation Council in the year 2000 and since then has been re-accredited in the years 2003, 2006 and 2011 (www.akkreditierungsrat.de). The current 5-year cycle is now an established part of the accreditation procedure for agencies in Germany.

3 Criteria of the Accreditation Council

Criterion 2.1: Self-Image and Understanding of the Accreditation Task

2.1.1 The agency has a publicly documented understanding of quality, from which it derives the basis of its accreditation activity. Its activity is geared to the objective of enhancing quality and is based on the Higher Education Institutions' key responsibility for the profile and quality of teaching and learning.

2.1.2 The agency accredits across types of higher education institutions and also across disciplines in the case of certification for programme accreditations.

ZEvA's publicly documented understanding of quality is described in detail in Section 3.1 of this self-report. It is based on the ZEvA mission statement ([Annex 18](#)). From the start the agency has accredited across all types of higher education institutions and also across disciplines in programme accreditation ([Annex 19](#)).

Criterion 2.2: Structures and Procedures

2.2.1 For admittance to programme accreditation and/or for system accreditation, the agency proves binding internal structures and procedures, which ensure the correct and consistent application of the "Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation" in the current version. Responsibilities of the organs and their personnel are functional and legally regulated.

2.2.2 The agency involves representatives of interest groups (sciences, students and professional practitioners) relevant for the execution of the task. .

2.2.3 The competence of those involved in the procedures, with regard to all areas relevant for the assessment procedures of programme accreditation or system accreditation, is ensured by appropriate selection procedures and briefing.

2.2.4 If the agency engages other organisations for the implementation of parts of the procedures, the correct implementation must be ensured by reliable rules and procedures.

Re 2.2.1: The internal structures are bindingly established by the statutes ([Annex 28](#)) as well as the rules of procedure assigned to the bodies and commissions ([Annexes 24, 25](#)). Competencies and responsibilities as well as the procedures for appointing the respective members are clearly defined therein. Some members of the commissions, in particular many of the SAK (Standing Accreditation Commission) members have been working with us for many years; they are also invited to the expert workshops. They are characterised by very extensive experience in accreditation.

Re 2.2.2: In all commissions and the respective expert groups, the relevant interest groups are involved. For the appointment and preparation of the respective experts, and for ensuring their competence, see the description for ESG standard 2.4.

Re 2.2.3: The contracts with the applicants (and the guides) state clearly that the AR rules are to be applied ([Annexes 44, 45](#)). The accreditation reports include assessments of all criteria of the AR as can be seen from the template enclosed

([Annex 46](#)). In all other respects the general terms and conditions ([Annex 47](#)) govern all necessary procedural stages in accordance with the guidelines.

Re 2.2.4: ZEvA conducts all accreditation procedures fully independently.

Criterion 2.3: Independence

2.3.1 The agency has a separate legal entity.

2.3.2 It does not work on a profit-oriented basis and carries out the accreditation procedures on full cost basis.

2.3.3 The agency ensures the freedom from instructions of the organs in individual cases and the independence and impartiality of the persons working for it.

ZEvA is an incorporated foundation under civil law ([Annex 27](#)). It is thus charitable and not profit-orientated; in addition to the statute ([Annex 28](#)), this is also shown e.g. by the annual accounts 2014 ([Annex 33](#)) and the business plan 2016 ([Annex 34](#)). The procedures are carried out on a full cost basis, as is demonstrated by the examples of Pforzheim and Frankfurt ([Annexes 42, 43](#)). The tasks of ZEvA's bodies are described above and demonstrate clearly that they discuss and take their decisions solely on the basis of the guidelines by the Accreditation Council (and thus also by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German States).

Criterion 2.4: Facilities

The agency is sustainably and adequately equipped for its function in all required functional areas in respect of personnel and material resources.

Statutes, rules of procedure by the various bodies, general terms and conditions of business, guides and business plans provide the basis for sustainable and functionally adequate equipment.

The composition of the bodies is regulated in the statutes. Their members dispose of excellent qualifications for carrying out their tasks. This also applies to the members of the SAK (Standing Accreditation Commission) ([Annex 48](#)), which plays a central role in accreditation.

As a supplement to the descriptions in Section 3.5 the annexes enclosed also comprise the curriculum vitae of the head office staff ([Annex 49](#)).

The financial and material equipment was also described above under ESG standard 3.5.

Criterion 2.5: Internal Quality Management

The agency continuously uses a formalised internal quality management system, which is suitable for assessing the effectiveness of the internal control processes and ensures the safeguarding and continuous improvement of the quality of the activity. It is publicly accessible and covers systematic internal and external feedback processes..

Based on its mission statement, ZEvA has a quality manual ([Annex 36](#)) and a special manual for its project database ([Annex 37](#)). It carries out feedback loops with the relevant target groups (higher education institutions, experts, SAK members) as described in detail in Section 3.6.

Criterion 2.6: Internal Complaints Procedure

The agency has a publicly accessible, formalised internal procedure for reviewing accreditation decisions on application of a higher education institution.

Each accreditation decision comprises a.o. information about the ZEvA-internal complaints procedure, which the Review Commission is responsible for. Also, on the homepage of ZEvA (www.zeva.org), relevant information is found next to the outline of the procedure (in the section on programme accreditation). The general terms and conditions of business (AGB) (Sect. 7.3) also point out this option ([Annex 47](#)).

Criterion 2.7: Reporting

The agency describes its procedures and appraisal criteria in sufficient detail and publishes them. It publishes the names of the experts, the expert reports and the decisions for all accreditation procedures it carries out.

The ZEvA procedures are described in detail in the guides ([Annex 02](#), [03](#)). Names and decisions are published on the ZEvA homepage and in the HRK database.

4 ZEvA Experience Report

The ZEvA experience report is enclosed as [Annex 50](#).

5 List of Annexes

- [01 AR Regulations for Courses and Higher Education Institutions](#)
- [02 Guide to Programme Accreditation 2015](#)
- [03 Guide to System Accreditation ZEvA 2015](#)
- [04 Manual and Guide Evaluation 2010](#)
- [05 Guide Quality Audits Austria \(Date: Nov. 2015\)](#)
- [06 ZEvA Manual External Assessment of Study Programmes 2015](#)
- [07 Expert contract for programme accreditation, date: 2014-03-07](#)
- [08 Accreditation requirements 07/03/2014](#)
- [09 Accreditation application 2014-10-14](#)
- [10 Schedule for on-site visit programme accreditation](#)
- [11 Schedule for on-site visit system accreditation, first inspection](#)
- [12 Schedule for on-site visit system accreditation, second inspection](#)
- [13 Expert contract, system accreditation](#)
- [14 Schedule, expert workshops 2015](#)
- [15 Application guide for programme accreditation - Date Feb 11](#)
- [16 Certification Guide](#)
- [17 GO Review Commission](#)
- [18 ZEvA Mission Statement](#)
- [19 Table of all accreditations](#)
- [20 Activities of the Evaluation Department 2011-2015](#)
- [21 International Procedures 2012-2015](#)
- [22 Sample contract - international](#)
- [23 GO \(Rules of Procedure\) KIA FINAL](#)
- [24 GO \(Rules of Procedure\) SAK \(Standing Accreditation Commission\)](#)
- [25 GO \(Rules of Procedure\) KSA](#)
- [26 GO \(Rules of Procedure\) SEK](#)
- [27 Foundation Deed](#)
- [28 Statutes](#)
- [29 GO \(Rules of Procedure\) Foundation Council](#)
- [30 GO \(Rules of Procedure\) Foundation's Board of Directors](#)
- [31 Publications according to ESG 3.4](#)
- [32 Schedule of Responsibilities ZEvA 2015](#)
- [33 Annual Accounts 2014](#)
- [34 Business Plan 2016](#)
- [35 Organigram](#)

- [36 Guidelines for internal Quality Assurance](#)
- [37 Manual ZEvA Database](#)
- [38 Report on Interviews - Accreditation 2015](#)
- [39 Report on Interviews - Evaluation 2015](#)
- [40 Interview for Higher Education Institutions Evaluation QPL](#)
- [41 Report on Interviews - SAK 2015](#)
- [42 Calculation HS Pforzheim](#)
- [43 Calculation University of Frankfurt](#)
- [44 Sample contract - programme accreditation](#)
- [45 Sample contract - system accreditation](#)
- [46 Accreditation Report 07/04/2015](#)
- [47 General Terms and Conditions of Business Date 12/11/2013](#)
- [48 CVs SAK members](#)
- [49 CVs consultants](#)
- [50 Experience Report Re-accreditation ZEvA 2016](#)
- [51 Agreement with Experts Programme Accreditation](#)
- [52 Accreditation Guidelines for doctoral study programmes in Lower Saxony](#)
- [53 WBF Guidelines](#)
- [54 Expert Contract - Evaluation](#)
- [55 Expert Contract - Certification](#)
- [56 IT Equipment](#)
- [57 Floor Plan](#)
- [58 Lease Contract](#)
- [59 Tabular Overview of Criteria / ESG](#)

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