



Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences

General Information on Institutional Audit and Quality Assurance Procedures



Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Plan of external quality assurance procedures	3
3. Guidelines for external quality assurance procedures.....	4
Area A. Profile, objectives and strategy of the institution.....	4
Area B. Quality assurance and quality management system.....	5
Area C. Institutional management and administration.....	5
Area D. Educational activities, including study programs.....	5
Area E. Infrastructure and functional resources.....	6



1. Introduction

The Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences (AHPGS) is an interdisciplinary, multi-professional organization, whose mission is to contribute to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in higher education in the current European and international context. Its work focuses on the fields of health and social sciences, as well as on related fields, such as medical care or nursing. By implementing quality assurance procedures, it aims to share, disperse and promote values and good practices.

In an effort to guide and promote institutional autonomy, the AHPGS performs and implements external quality assurance procedures at higher education institutions (HEIs) in Germany and abroad. Peer review and agreement on a common set of guidelines are key to ensuring a qualitative standard in higher education. The goal of external quality assurance procedures is to provide a framework for the joint understanding of these guidelines, as well as to verify compliance with national and international standards. Such procedures may also increase the competitiveness of the HEI. Depending on circumstances, they may also provide resources for an improved management tool at the HEI and accordingly be used as a non-binding precursor to institutional or system accreditation.

In Germany, this is done in the form of **system accreditation**. The main objective is to ensure the internal quality of learning and teaching at the applicant HEI and within its study programs. During this process, the appropriateness and efficiency of the internal quality assurance (QA) mechanism is verified.

While the process of system accreditation is specific to Germany, the AHPGS provides similar services within international reviews, including the implementation of **institutional audits**, by means of which the quality standards of higher education institutions (HEI's) or parts of HEI's (e.g. faculties) can be verified. Institutional audits examine more closely further aspects of the institution, such as planned and current study programs, infrastructure, organisational and management structure.

The AHPGS is member of international associations and networks: the "European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (ENQA), the "European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education" (ECA), the "Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education" (CEENQA) and the "International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education" (INQAAHE). The AHPGS is also listed in the "European Quality Assurance Register" (EQAR).

As an organization, the AHPGS is an independent body.



2. Plan of external quality assurance procedures

A systematic and transparent outline of the aimed objectives of the HEI is decisive within the external quality assurance procedure itself. HEI members of staff should be aware of and identify with these objectives. They should be willing and able to work towards achieving them and reach a level of excellence. Accordingly, the AHPGS and its experts' peer review are not restricted to evaluating a definite set of standards, but is rather a "strength-weakness analysis" focusing on the distinguishing profile and particularities of the HEI. In the end, the peer review promotes and encourages the HEI's mission and objectives by proposing feasible recommendations.

The external quality assurance procedure generally runs along three consecutive steps. These steps are described as follows; however, depending on the profile and specificity of the higher education institution, they may alter or additional ones may be introduced.

- I. The HEI submits its application (self-evaluation report) to the AHPGS, requesting initiation of the external quality assurance process. The application should clearly and explicitly formulate the HEI's planned aims and goals. Additional documentation is also forwarded to the AHPGS to support the application.

The AHPGS reviews the documentation submitted and its compliance with the set aims and goals. If required, additional information can be requested from the HEI in the form of open questions. After the HEI has submitted its responses, a summary of the application is produced by the AHPGS.

At the same time, the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS nominates the expert group.

Following the nomination of the expert group, the AHPGS informs the HEI about the expert members. The documentation submitted by the HEI is then forwarded by the AHPGS to the expert group.

- II. The on-site visit of the expert group and the AHPGS takes place at the HEI. During this, the consistency of the documentation submitted is verified. Additional aspects are also reviewed, which the written documentation might not have covered. Following the visit, the expert report is produced, which sums up the key aspects and preliminary outcomes of the visit and the documents reviewed. If required, the HEI submits a response to the expert report.

- III. The expert report, the HEI's response, together with the application and all documentation submitted by the HEI is made available to the Accreditation Commission of the AHPGS. It is on the basis of these documents that the Accreditation Commission reaches its decision regarding the outcome of the quality assurance procedure.

According to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the final report will be published.



3. Guidelines for external quality assurance procedures

The AHPGS has developed a corresponding set of criteria for a better understanding of the external quality assurance processes and their aims. They include the standards formulated in the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), as well as the guidelines set by the German Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic and the "Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programs and for System Accreditation" set by the German Accreditation Council. The criteria also address key points which the AHPGS has identified through its experience in the field. At the same time, they indicate general areas for evaluation when implementing external quality assurance procedures at HEIs. The aims and objectives formulated by the HEI in the application have priority, as do its profile and particularities. The following criteria should serve as general guidelines for the HEI when completing its application.

Areas for the implementation of external quality assurance at higher education institutions:

- Area A. Profile, objectives and strategy of the institution
- Area B. Quality assurance and quality management system
- Area C. Institutional management and administration
- Area D. Educational activities, including study programs
- Area E. Infrastructure and functional resources

Area A. Profile, objectives and strategy of the institution

The HEI has a clear profile established and its mission and strategy respond to its profile. It developed a corresponding strategic plan and formulated short, medium, and long-term development plans. It sets future-oriented goals and develop feasible strategies for implementing these.

The objectives formulated by the HEI can be traced back to its overall strategy and development plans, which are internally and externally oriented.

All personnel – teaching and non-teaching – and groups of students are actively involved in the HEI's strategy. They are aware and work towards achieving the goals established by the HEI. External stakeholders also participate in the HEI's strategy.

Institutional autonomy is a key value within the HEI. Academic freedom, diversity, research and teaching, as well as corporate responsibility, are encouraged within the institution.



Area B. Quality assurance and quality management system

The HEI develops a quality management system and has clearly-defined objectives. It implements policies and procedures for quality assurance and promotes a quality assurance culture. This follows a quality control loop (PDCA Cycle). Tasks are responsibly divided among the bodies and personnel at the HEI. The quality assurance mechanisms are designed to accomplish the set objectives. Effectiveness is constantly monitored and enhancement is sought. Internal quality assurance includes evaluation mechanisms that are run regularly and cover all areas of activity within the HEI. The evaluation results are documented.

Internal steering processes are identifiable and aim at continuous improvement. The HEI continuously develops plans for improving the quality management system, which is integrated into the HEI's strategic plan. It works at different organizational levels and involves all the HEI's staff.

Area C. Institutional management and administration

The HEI's organizational structure demonstrates a clear and transparent division of responsibilities, duties and authorities. External stakeholders, students and other relevant parties are involved in the administrative and decision-making processes and the organizational structure responds to the strategy and objectives set by the HEI.

The HEI has regulations to cover the division of tasks and responsibilities, which are unambiguous and transparent. Members of the HEI are aware of their tasks and responsibilities.

Information systems are developed for monitoring and evaluating the effective management of the study programs and all other activities within the HEI.

The qualification and experience of the personnel are adequate to ensure the proper operation of the HEI and appropriate personnel is employed.

Area D. Educational activities, including study programs

The HEI defines clear goals for each of its study programs, which correspond and relate to the HEI's profile and mission. The educational offer is recognised as unitary; at the same time, the study programs are consistently differentiated and show individual particularities.

The study programs are comparable on the educational market and correspond to the educational and qualification level aimed at.

The HEI develops quality management procedures for the planning of teaching and learning process and the implementation of study programs. The results achieved are continuously monitored and documented.



The HEI also provides additional educational programs to cover the continuous training of its personnel and the enhancement of student training. This could take the form of workshops, conferences, internal training or further educational programs.

The HEI provides adequate premises for implementing its study programs. The HEI has a library providing adequate learning resources for its study programs. Should the profiles of the study programs require, the HEI holds additional premises available for practical activities (e.g. laboratories or computer rooms).

Admission requirements and student evaluation methods are clear, manageable and publicly made available.

The HEI has established mechanisms relating to student support and advice.

The HEI promotes exchange programs and international mobility among its students and teaching personnel.

The HEI promotes research and scientific activity. It has developed a strategy which sets corresponding goals. The study programs encompass research-related components, depending on the profile and final qualification. The HEI has sufficient material, spatial and financial resources to develop its current and planned research activities.

Area E. Infrastructure and functional resources

The HEI provides evidence that it has sufficient spatial, material and functional resources available to ensure the proper functioning of all teaching, learning, research and administrative activities. They are adequate in relation to the number of students enrolled and the number of teaching and administrative personnel. The HEI develops plans for constantly enhancing its resources.

The HEI has a mechanism for recruiting its personnel. There are corresponding regulations in force for recruiting teaching and administrative personnel, which are clear and transparent and promote equality and recognition based on qualification and experience. The duties and responsibilities of the personnel correspond to their qualifications and experience. The personnel is aware of their tasks and contribute to enhancing the HEI's strategy and activities. The number of personnel employed is adequate for developing all the HEI's current and planned activities.

The HEI secures sufficient revenue and its budget is clearly and transparently planned and covers all costs incurred.