

## **Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation**

Resolution of the Accreditation Council of 08.12.2009, last amended on 20.02.2013<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> amended on 10.12.2010 (Printed Matter AR 85/2010), 07.12.2011 (Printed Matter. AR 92/2011), 23.02.2012 (Printed Matter AR 25/2012) and on 20.02.2013 (Printed Matter AR 20/2013). This resolution replaces the following resolutions of the Accreditation Council: "Accreditation of Study Programmes with Double Diploma Degrees and Joint Degrees" of 25 April 2005, "Communication of the Expert Recommendation to the Higher Education Institution" of 20 June 2005, "Minimum Requirements for Key Competences" of 20 June 2005, "Award of ECTS points in Intensive Study Programmes" of 22 June 2006, "Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes" in the version of 8 October 2007, "General Rules for the Implementation of Procedures for Accreditation and Re-accreditation of Study Programmes" in the version of 22 February 2008, Resolution: "Decisions of the Accreditation Agencies: Types and Effects" in the version of the 31 October 2008, "General Rules for the Implementation of Procedures of System Accreditation" in the version of 31 October 2008, "Criteria for System Accreditation" in the version of 31 October 2008 and "Rules for the Compilation of Criteria Random Sample" of 29 February 2008.

## Introduction

The decision, taken jointly by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* (KMK) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) in 1998, to introduce the procedure of the programme accreditation for the new graded study programmes, was an important step in the German implementation of the Bologna process. Since then, as a rule, the accreditation is a prerequisite for the state approval of Bachelor and Master's study programmes. Thereby, apart from the quality of the study programmes, the compliance with formal guidelines of the KMK and European standards is also assessed. The new procedure for system accreditation was introduced in 2008 after ten years' experience with programme accreditation. In system accreditation the quality of the study programmes and the compliance with formal guidelines are not verified by the assessment of the study programmes themselves any more. Rather the internal control and quality assurance systems of Higher Education Institutions, which are directed towards teaching and learning, are now assessed with regard to their suitability and effectiveness to ensure the quality of the study programmes and the compliance with the formal guidelines. A successful assessment leads to its accreditation and simultaneously to the accreditation of the study programmes.

A specific characteristic of the German accreditation system is its two-tier structure, with the Accreditation Council as an actor at the central level and the agencies at the decentralised level.

The Accreditation Council has the task of creating the prerequisites for the functionality of the German accreditation system, by regulating criteria and procedures of accreditation. The tasks assigned to it are laid down in detail in § 2 of the accreditation foundation law:

- Accreditation and re-accreditation of accreditation agencies (Agencies) by the time-limited granting of the entitlement to accredit study courses through the award of the Foundation's seal,
- Compilation of the common and the specific structural guidelines of the *Länder* into binding guidelines for the Agencies,
- Regulation of minimum requirements for accreditation procedures including the prerequisites and limits of bundled accreditations,
- Monitoring of accreditations undertaken by the agencies.

The agencies, licenced by the Accreditation Council, implement the accreditation procedures by applying the criteria, procedure and decision rules of the Accreditation Council.

The resolution on hand gives the agencies and the Higher Education Institutions orientation and legal certainty with regard to the application, implementation, decision-making and effects of decision of programme and system accreditations. It subsumes all binding rules for the accreditation of study programmes and system accreditation.

In order to ensure the uniform application of the criteria, procedure and decision rules, the Accreditation Council scrutinises the accreditations carried out by the agencies on a random basis and in specific cases.

The Accreditation Council took into consideration the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* while working out the criteria, procedure and decision rules. They are the basis for the international recognition of the Accreditation Council and the agencies by the full membership of the *European Association for Quality Assurance* (ENQA) and the *European Quality Assurance Register* (EAR).

## **I. Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes**

### **1 Rules of Procedure for the Accreditation of Study programmes**

#### **1.1 General Rules**

1.1.1 In the acquisition phase the Agency informs the Higher Education Institution making the application about essential contents, procedural steps and criteria of the accreditation proposal. In connection with this, the Agency ensures a complete specification and determines the fees.

1.1.2 The applicant has to submit a well-founded application, which covers a presentation of the study programme(s) and documents the compliance with the criteria for the accreditation of study programmes.

1.1.3 The Agency appoints an expert group, which ensures the assessment of all areas relevant for the review (e.g. professional aspects, study-related structural and formal aspects, social aspects). The relevant interest groups, particularly representatives of the sciences, students and practitioners from the profession, are part of the expert group.

The Agency ensures the impartiality of the experts and observes fairness towards the applying Higher Education Institution. To this end, the Agency gives the Higher Education Institution a right to object. The Higher Education Institution does not have a right of proposal or a power of veto.

1.1.4 The Agency briefs the experts on the assessment activity, their specific role, and the concrete accreditation procedure. The briefing also includes conversational proficiency and the preparation of reports.

1.1.5 The assessment is essentially based on

- the analysis of the application rationale and
- an on-site visit, which among other things includes separate discussions with the management of the Higher Education Institution, teaching staff and students.

The Agency can dispense with an on-site visit (unless in the case of a first accreditation), if it has evaluation results, which are not older than two years and which were obtained according to the appropriate rules of the Accreditation Council for programme accreditation.

1.1.6 The experts prepare a report including their recommendations for the decision, which documents the assessment of the singled Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes (section 2) in a well-founded manner.

1.1.7 Before the decision, the Higher Education Institution receives the experts' report without the experts' recommendation for the decision for its comment.

1.1.8 The Agency takes a decision on the basis of the experts' report and the recommendation under consideration of the comment of the Higher Education Institution. It declares or denies the accreditation (with or without conditions). The accreditation decision may be supplemented by recommendations and/or propositions. A one-time suspension of the procedure is possible for 18 months.

1.1.9 Following the procedure the Agency publishes the decision, the experts' report and the names of the experts. In case of negative decisions instead of a publication according information is sent to the Accreditation Council. The Agency ensures confidentiality regardless of its obligations to report to the Accreditation Council.<sup>2</sup>

1.1.10 The Agency gives reasons for its accreditation decision. This includes also accreditation decisions limited by conditions or negative decisions, decisions on the suspension of a procedure and accreditation decisions differing from the experts' assessment.

1.1.11 The Agency documents the procedure in a suitable manner and publishes the result, in the case of a positive decision, by a corresponding entry in the database of accredited study programmes.

1.1.12 The Agency verifies the fulfilment of the conditions placed while granting the accreditation by the Higher Education Institution.

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<sup>2</sup> The publication of the expert reports is mandatory in procedures, which are initiated after 1 June 2010.

## 1.2 Special Rules for the Accreditation of Combined Study Programmes

1.2.1 The combined study programme and not its individual study programmes is the object of accreditation in so-called combined study programmes as per the *Common Structural Guidelines of the Länder* for the Accreditation of Bachelor and Master's Study Programmes of 10 October 2003 in the respective current version and the relevant resolutions of the Accreditation Council.

1.2.2 The Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes (section 2) have therefore to be applied to the study programme as such, together with its possibilities of combination, not only to the individual study programmes.

1.2.3 The Higher Education Institution has a concept for its combined study programme, which integrates the qualification objectives of the individual study programmes.

1.2.4 The demand for a coherent conceptual structure of the study programme as per cl. 2.3 has to be applied to the individual study programmes.

1.2.5 For all individual study programmes the Higher Education Institution proves that the courses and module examinations are matched with each other in such a manner that the academic feasibility is ensured

The Higher Education Institution ensures the academic feasibility for the entire combined study programme, also with regard to the absence of overlap, at least for the frequently selected combinations, and it attempts to achieve this for the combinations chosen less frequently. In these cases the Higher Education Institution has a special obligation to inform the students.

1.2.6 The accreditation of a combined study programme can be supplemented by the inclusion of further individual study programmes into the catalogue of selectable individual study programmes. The above-mentioned criteria have to be applied to the corresponding assessments. The accreditation term does not change.

1.2.7 If accreditation agencies co-operate in the accreditation of combined study programmes by assessing separate clusters, then a joint accreditation decision has to be taken at the end. If the Higher Education Institution changes the Agency for the assessment of the individual study programmes to be added, the newly selected Agency possibly certifies the accreditation ability of these individual study programmes without making an accreditation decision of its own. It informs the Agency, which has accredited the combined study programme, about this. This Agency includes the individual study programmes, which are to be added, in the accreditation certificate.

1.2.8 All individual study programmes of which the combination was object of the accreditation have to be listed on the accreditation certificate.

Should, after issue of the certificate, the accreditation be supplemented by the admittance of further individual study programmes into the list of the combinable individual study programmes, then these have to be taken into consideration in a certificate to be issued afresh.

### **1.3 Special Rules for Procedures of Cluster Accreditation**

1.3.1 The cluster accreditation of study programmes requires a high technical affinity of the individual study programmes. This is given only if it goes beyond the bare affiliation to a subject area (humanities and cultural studies, social sciences or natural sciences) and there is a disciplinary affinity of the (individual) study programmes.

Common structural features of the (individual) study programmes alone do not justify a technical affinity.

1.3.2 An adequate assessment of all (individual) study programmes has to be ensured in the formation of the expert group. The restriction to only one expert for every special discipline represented in the cluster needs to be substantiated. The agency must provide reasons in case of limitations to only one representative of students and practitioners from the profession, whereas the number of study programmes as well as occupational fields to be assessed are taken into account.

1.3.3 The scheduling of the on-site visit must ensure that every study programme in the cluster can be adequately reviewed for compliance with the criteria for the accreditation of study programmes. This has to be explained also in the experts' report.

1.3.4 The programme clusters for teacher training programmes may, in justified cases, be compiled depending on the type of school. An adequate assessment with regard to the subject and to the type of school has to be ensured when forming the expert group.

### **1.4 Special Rules for the Accreditation of Intensive Study Programmes**

1.4.1 In particularly justified cases, up to 75 ECTS points per academic year can be awarded for study programmes with special measures for the organisation of studies. The workload for one ECTS credit point corresponds to 30 hours (intensive study programmes).

1.4.2 Special measures for the organisation of studies concern, for instance, the learning environment and student support, the structure and planning of studies as well as measures for ensuring a living.

## 1.5 Special Rules for the Accreditation of Joint Programmes

1.5.1 The following rules are applicable to study programmes jointly carried out by at least one foreign and one German Higher Education Institution and leading to at least one degree recognised by German law<sup>3</sup> (joint programmes).

These rules are also applicable for the accreditation of national study programmes which offer an option that corresponds to a joint programme.

1.5.2 The Agency verifies whether the *entire* study programme complies with the “Common Structural Guidelines of the *Länder*” and the guidelines set by the Accreditation Council for programme accreditation.

1.5.3 In case the application of one of the guidelines mentioned under 1.5.2 would most likely prevent the accreditation of the study programme, since it is contrary to a specification of another accreditation institution involved or a national specification of one of the partner countries involved, the Accreditation Council can permit the responsible Agency not to use the specification in question in the accreditation procedure. The board of the foundation takes the decision on application of the Agency.

1.5.4 It must be ensured that facilities and the organisational structure of studies at all locations adhere to the requirements set in cl. 2.7. At least at one location of the programme an on-site visit has to take place. The on-site visit(s) must include interviews with the persons in charge of programme design and with students and teachers of all locations where the programme is carried out. Modern forms of communication may be implied for this purpose.

1.5.5 Experts with international experience must be involved. As far as possible, for each country involved an expert with appropriate knowledge of the country should participate.

1.5.6 Procedures may be carried out in co-operation with a foreign agency. For this agency the following applies in addition to 1.5.1 - 1.5.5:

a) The agencies involved should prepare a joint catalogue of the assessment criteria to be used. Thereby it must be ensured that the “Common Structural Guidelines of the *Länder*”

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<sup>3</sup> Generally, "double degrees" or "joint degrees" are awarded.



as well as the guidelines set by the Accreditation Council for programme accreditation are verified for the entire study programme.

b) The agencies should co-operate in the nomination of the experts. Representatives of the relevant interest groups must be included in the expert group. This includes particularly the sciences, the students and the practitioners from the profession.

c) A joint self-report should be presented, which considers the *Länder*-specific characteristics respectively national guidelines in the partner countries.

d) An experts' report should be written jointly for all locations.

1.5.7. An Accreditation Agency licensed by the Accreditation Council may recognise decisions for programme accreditation adopted by an Agency, which is not licensed by the Accreditation Council - hereinafter "foreign Agency" -, subject to the following prerequisites:

a) The decisions for recognition concern joint programmes according cl. 1.5.1.

a) The foreign Agency/agencies are listed in the European Quality Assurance Register or is/are full member(s) of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

c) The Agency licensed by the Accreditation Council ensures that there are no substantial differences between its own criteria for accreditation and rules of procedure and those applied by the foreign Agency.

d) The Agency also ensures that the "Common Structural Guidelines of the *Länder*" are substantially complied with.

1.5.8 The legal consequence is that the study programmes in question are accredited with the seal of the Accreditation Council. Accreditation terms and any possible conditions are determined by the rules of the foreign Agency. If the Accreditation Council subsequently revokes the accreditation decision, the Agency licensed by the Accreditation Council is obliged to revoke the decision for recognition.

1.5.9 The Agency licensed by the Accreditation Council is obliged to promptly report the single decision for recognition to the Accreditation Council.

## **1.6 Special Rules for the Accreditation of Study Concepts**

In case of accreditation of a study programme, of which a concept is presented and which is not offered at the time of application, rules 1.1 to 1.5 apply with the following deviations:

1.6.1 An on-site visit according to cl. 1.1.5 does only take place on the respective decision of the expert group. The experts however must hold separate discussions with the management of the Higher Education Institution, teaching staff and students.

1.6.2 According to the nature of an accreditation procedure for study concepts and referring to cl. 2.4 and 2.9 empirical results on the academic feasibility and on the internal quality assurance's effectiveness do not have to be presented or assessed.

## 2 Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes

### 2.1 Qualification Objectives of the Study Programme Concept

The study programme concept orients itself towards qualification objectives. These comprise of technical and interdisciplinary aspects, particularly

- scientific or artistic qualification,
- competence to take up a qualified employment,
- competence for involvement in society,
- and personality development.

### 2.2 Conceptual Integration of the Study Programme in the System of Studies

The study programme complies with

(1) the requirements of the Framework of Qualification for German Degrees of 21 April 2005 in the respective valid version,

(2) the requirements of the *Common Structural Guidelines of the Länder* for the Accreditation for Bachelor and Master's Study Programmes of 10 October 2003 in the respective valid version,

(3) Länder-specific structural guidelines for the accreditation for Bachelor's and Master's study programmes,

(4) the binding interpretation and summary of (1) to (3) by the Accreditation Council.

### 2.3 Study Programme Concept

The study programme concept covers the imparting of specialised knowledge and interdisciplinary knowledge as well as of technical procedural and generic competences.

It is built up coherently in the combination of the individual modules with regard to the formulated qualification objectives and provides adequate forms of teaching and learning. Possibly planned practical components are so organised that credit points (ECTS) can be acquired.

It lays down the admission requirements and if necessary an adequate selection procedure and rules for both the recognition of credits achieved at other higher education institutions in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention as well as externally

achieved credits. Regulations are provided for compensating disadvantages of handicapped students. Possibly planned mobility windows are integrated in the curriculum.

The organisation of studies ensures the implementation of the study programme concept.

## **2.4 Academic Feasibility**

The academic feasibility of the study programme is ensured through:

- consideration of the expected entry qualifications,
- an appropriate curriculum design
- the information on the student workload, which is checked for plausibility (or, in the case of the first accreditation, estimated according to empirical values),
- frequency and organisation of examination, which is adequate and has a reasonable workload,
- corresponding offers of support as well as
- technical and interdisciplinary course guidance.

The interests of handicapped students will be taken into consideration.

## **2.5 Examination System**

The examinations serve the purpose of determining, whether the formulated qualification objectives have been accomplished. They are module-related as well as knowledge and competence oriented. Every module, as a rule, concludes with an examination covering the entire module. Compensating disadvantages of handicapped students with regard to time-related and formal guidelines in the studies as well as in the final performance tests and those during the studies is ensured. The examination regulations were subjected to legal verification.

## **2.6 Programme-related Co-operations**

The Higher Education Institution ensures the implementation and the quality of the study programme concept, if other organisations are involved or commissioned by the former to carry out parts of the study programme.

A written record is kept of the extent and nature of existing co-operations with other higher education institutions, companies and other organisations as well as for any agreements upon which the co-operation is based.

## **2.7 Facilities**

The adequate implementation of the study programme is ensured with regard to the qualitative and quantitative facilities with regard to personnel, material and space. In this interdependence with other study programmes is taken into account. Measures for a personnel development and qualification are available.

## **2.8 Transparency and Documentation**

The study programme, course of study, examination requirements and the prerequisites for admittance including the regulations for compensating disadvantages of handicapped students are documented and published.

## **2.9 Quality Assurance and Further Development**

Results of quality management internal to the Higher Education Institution are taken into consideration in the further developments of the study programme. Here the Higher Education Institution takes into consideration evaluation results, studies of the student's workload, academic accomplishment and the whereabouts of the graduates.

## **2.10 Study Programmes with a Special Profile Demand**

Study programmes with a special profile demand have special requirements. The aforementioned criteria and rules of procedure have to be applied under consideration of these requirements.

## **2.11 Gender Justice and Equal Opportunities**

The concepts of the Higher Education Institution for gender justice and for the promotion of equal opportunities of students in special situations such as students having health impairments, students having children, foreign students, students with migration background and/or from so-called educationally disadvantaged classes are implemented at the level of the study programme.

### **3 Decision Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes**

#### **3.1 Contents of Decisions and their Prerequisites**

3.1.1 The accreditation<sup>4</sup> of a study programme must be granted if the quality requirements are fulfilled.

3.1.2 The accreditation shall be granted with conditions if there are defects, which can most likely be remedied within nine months.

3.1.3 The accreditation shall be rejected if there are defects, which most likely cannot be remedied within nine months.

3.1.4 In the cases of paras. 3.1.2 and 3.1.3, after receiving the comment of the Higher Education Institution, the Agency can suspend the accreditation procedure once for a period of not more than 18 months, if it can be expected that the Higher Education Institution will remedy the defects within this period.

#### **3.2 Time Limitation**

3.2.1 The accreditation has to be limited to a duration of seven years. The period starts with the day of coming into effect of the accreditation decision (cl. 3.7). The period calculated after that is extended until the end of the last academic year within the period.

3.2.2 Should an accreditation be granted with conditions, then the accreditation period can be limited to a shorter period.

3.2.3 Alternatively, if an accreditation is granted subject to conditions, the accreditation can be issued temporarily until the decision concerning the fulfilment of said conditions has been adopted, provided with the indication that the accreditation period will be extended to the standard period if the conditions have been fulfilled.

3.2.4 In the case of the first accreditation incl. accreditation of study concepts, the accreditation period is five years. cl. 3.2.1, Sentence 2 and 3 apply in a similar manner to the determination of the period.

3.2.5 If, in a first accreditation incl. accreditation of study concepts, the study programme commences only after the coming into effect of the accreditation decision, then the period starts with the day of its commencement, however at the latest with the beginning of the academic year after the next one following the accreditation decision. The period thus cal-

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<sup>4</sup> The provisions of this resolution valid for the accreditation of a study programme apply also to the first accreditation of a study programme, unless different rules apply to the first accreditation.

culated can be extended to the end of the last academic year in question on an application of the Higher Education Institution.

### **3.3 Temporary Accreditation and Extension of the Accreditation Term**

3.3.1 If an application for the accreditation of a study programme is given to an Accreditation Agency before the expiry of the accreditation term and if the documents required for the implementation of the procedure are available, then the Agency can accredit the study programme temporarily for at the most another 12 months, unless there is obviously no prospect of a successful conclusion of the procedure. In case of the subsequent accreditation, the duration of this temporary accreditation of the study programme is to be included in the period applicable as per cl. 3.2. In case of rejection during the temporary accreditation, the latter continues until the end of the period fixed. In case of suspension, the period for a temporary accreditation may be extended to the date of the Agency's final decision.

3.3.2 If the Higher Education Institution does not apply for the accreditation of the study programme before the expiry of the accreditation term, because it has terminated the study programme and does not accept new enrolments in the study programme any more, the accreditation term can be extended in accordance with the regulations under state law of the protection of legitimate expectation for students still registered at the time of expiry of the accreditation term. Prerequisite is the proof of the Higher Education Institution that the study programme does not show any significant changes and the required personnel and material means continue to be provided. The Agency, which has accredited the expiring study programme, is responsible for the decision.

### **3.4 Suspension of the Procedure**

3.4.1 The suspension of the accreditation procedure requires the comment of the Higher Education Institution. The suspension should be given in writing giving the reasons and the time respite, within which the Higher Education Institution can apply for the resumption of the procedure.

3.4.2 It is incumbent upon the Higher Education Institution to apply for the resumption of the procedure to the Agency within the period fixed; in this case the suspended procedure is immediately resumed. On resumption of the procedure the Agency decides whether any procedural steps have to be repeated.

3.4.3 If the Higher Education Institution does not apply for resumption before the deadline, the Agency rejects the accreditation.

### **3.5 Conditions**

3.5.1 Conditions and respites for providing evidence of their fulfilment have to be specified clearly.

3.5.2 Accreditations subject to conditions must include the indication that the lack of evidence of fulfilment of such conditions leads in general to the revocation of the accreditation or - if cl. 3.2.3 applies - that the accreditation term will, in general, not be extended to the standard period.

3.5.3 The fulfilment of the conditions is declared by the Agency to the Higher Education Institution. In this case the accreditation decision is valid unconditionally for the duration specified or - if cl. 3.2.3 applies - will be extended to the standard period.

3.5.4 If the Higher Education Institution does not provide evidence for the fulfilment of the conditions in due time and if accreditation was granted with a proviso of revocation, the Agency shall immediately revoke the accreditation, after sending a reminder and expiry of an adequate additional respite, with effect from the end of the next semester. In well-founded cases the Agency can grant a one-time extension of up to further three months.

3.5.5 If the accreditation term was shortened in accordance with cl. 3.2.3, if evidence of the fulfilment of the conditions is not provided in due time, the accreditation period shall be extended only until the end of the semester in question and not for the standard period. In well-founded cases, the Agency can issue a one-time extension of the accreditation term by up to three months.

### **3.6 Revocation of the Accreditation Decision**

3.6.1 The Accreditation Council may oblige the Agency to revoke a decision for accreditation or, in the case of defects which may be remedied within nine months, to issue a condition for such decision, if it has been reached without taking into consideration or applying an accreditation criterion appropriately or in violation of an essential procedural rule. The revocation or subsequent issuing of conditions must take place immediately with effect from the end of the next semester. This obligation does not apply, if the same accreditation decision would have been taken even if the mistake had not been made; the Agency has the burden of explanation and proof in this respect.



3.6.2 If, in the case of cl. 3.6.1, a positive or negative accreditation decision or one with conditions should have been taken, then the Agency immediately takes the relevant decision.

3.6.3 In case of significant changes in the concept or profile of a study programme, the Agency decides whether the change decreases the quality and therefore a renewed accreditation is required. In this case, the Agency immediately revokes the accreditation with effect from the end of the next semester, provided that a renewed accreditation has not been applied for. The Agency decides whether the procedure can be shortened in the individual case.

### **3.7 Coming into Effect of Decisions**

Decisions from accreditation agencies in the named cases will become effective upon the receipt of a written decision.

## **II. Rules for System Accreditation**

### **4 Subject Matter of Accreditation and Prerequisites for Admittance**

#### **4.1 Definition of the Subject Matter of Accreditation**

Subject matter of the system accreditation is the internal quality assurance system of a Higher Education Institution in the field of teaching and learning. The structures and processes relevant for teaching and learning are assessed with regard to their appropriateness for achieving the qualification objectives and for ensuring high quality of the study programmes, with the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ESG), the guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) and the criteria of the Accreditation Council being applied.

A positive system accreditation attests the Higher Education Institution that its quality assurance system in the field of teaching and learning is appropriate to achieve the qualification objectives and to ensure the quality standards of its study programmes. Accordingly, study programmes set up as specified by the accredited system or that already have been the subject matter of internal quality assurance as specified by the accredited system are accredited. This does not apply to Catholic theological study programmes in full theological courses.

In particular exceptional cases a Higher Education Institution may apply for system accreditation for the internal quality assurance system of one or several of the study-related organisational units of the Institution, if it has management competency and operative responsibility for teaching and learning, i.e. for planning and implementing the offered study programmes, and for the quality assurance in the field of teaching and learning. In this case, all rules for system accreditation are to be applied to the study-related organisational unit.

#### **4.2 Prerequisites for Admitting Higher Education Institutions to System Accreditation**

4.2.1 The Higher Education Institution can demonstrate plausibly that it is using a quality assurance system covering the whole Higher Education Institution, and can prove that at least one study programme has already been the subject matter of the system.

4.2.2 No negative decision has been filed against the Higher Education Institution in a system accreditation procedure during the last two years.

### **4.3 Prerequisites for the Admittance of Sub-divisions of Higher Education Institutions to System Accreditation in Particular Exceptional Cases**

4.3.1 The presidency of the Higher Education Institution applies for system accreditation for one or several study-related organisational units and provides comprehensible reasons why accreditation of the quality assurance system for the entire Higher Education Institution is not yet reasonable or practicable. In addition, it declares that it assumes the responsibility for the internal organisation of the procedure.

4.3.2 For the study-related organisational unit the Higher Education Institution can demonstrate plausibly that it is using a quality assurance system, and can prove that at least one study programme has already been the subject matter of the system. The quality assurance system of the organisational unit is integrated into the Higher Education Institution.

4.3.2 No negative decision has been filed against the study-related organisational unit in a system accreditation procedure during the last two years.

## **5 Rules of Procedure for System Accreditation**

5.1 The Agency conducts a preparatory conversation with the applying Higher Education Institution and informs it about essential contents, steps and criteria of the procedure. The Agency provides the Higher Education Institution with a complete description of services and determines the fees.

5.2 The Higher Education Institution submits an application, including brief descriptions of the institution and its internal management and quality assurance system in the field of teaching and learning. In the application the functionality of the quality assurance system is demonstrated based on at least one study programme that has already been the subject matter of the system. In case of a respective special state regulation, the application has to be submitted via the responsible ministry.

5.3 The Agency conducts a preliminary assessment whether the prerequisites for the admittance to system accreditation are met. The Agency informs the Higher Education Institution and the Accreditation Council about the result of the preliminary assessment.

5.4 The Higher Education Institution submits a documentation to the Agency which particularly specifies internal management and decision making structures, the Higher Education Institution's overall mission and profile, its offer of study programmes, defined quality objectives and the system of internal quality assurance in the field of teaching and

learning. The documentation explains the way procedures for quality assurance and quality enhancement work. The documentation should not amount to more than 40 pages (without annexes). A statement by the students' council of the Higher Education Institution shall be attached to the documentation.

5.5 The Agency appoints an expert group for the assessment procedure, consisting of at least the following persons:

- three members having experience in the fields of managing Higher Education Institutions,
- and of internal quality assurance of Higher Education Institutions,
- a student member having experience in the fields of self-administration of Higher Education Institutions and of accreditation.
- one practitioner from the profession.

One member of the expert group each shall have comprehensive experience in the management of Higher Education Institutions, in curriculum design of study programmes and in quality assurance in the field of teaching and learning.

One member of the expert group shall be from abroad.

The formation of the expert group has to allow an adequate assessment of all relevant areas. Size, organization and technical heterogeneity have to be taken into account. In particular, the Agency occasionally calls in further experts, if this is necessary for conducting the samples.

If decisions on supplementary determinations in terms of professional law must be taken during the procedure and as far as it is required due to state regulations an adequate expert must be involved as well. In case the Higher Education Institution offers teacher training or combined study programmes which contain elements in Theological Studies, an expert from either the Evangelical or Catholic Church must be involved in taking the samples.

The Agency appoints a chairman or chairwoman.

The Agency ensures the impartiality of the experts and observes fairness towards the applying Higher Education Institution. To this end, the Agency gives the Higher Education Institution a right to object. The Higher Education Institution does not have a right of proposal or a power of veto.

The Agency briefs the experts on the assessment activity, their specific role, and the concrete accreditation procedure. The briefing also includes conversational proficiency and the preparation of reports.

The Agency takes care that the experts assess the internal quality assurance system of the Higher Education Institution in connection with the institution's own understanding of quality, and that they do not use concrete system models as a parameter for the assessment.

5.6 The assessment procedure includes two on-site visits and an assessment of relevant features of the design of study programmes, the conduct of study programmes and quality assurance on a sample basis (samples).

If the Higher Education Institution offers state regulated study programmes one of these must be reviewed additionally by sampling under consideration of the "Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes". If the Higher Education Institution offers teacher training programmes one programme each per type of teaching post is to be included in addition.

5.7 The first on-site visit primarily serves for collecting information on the Higher Education Institution and its management and quality assurance system. The experts examine the documents submitted with regard to their completeness and decide which documents the Higher Education Institution must additionally present for the second on-site visit. Furthermore, the experts agree upon the compilation of the samples pursuant to cl. 5.8.

The second on-site visit serves for the critical analysis of the documents submitted and for conducting the samples. It should be scheduled so that the Higher Education Institution has sufficient time to compile the documentations required.

The experts conduct generally separate conversations especially with the presidency of the Higher Education Institution and the equal opportunity commissioners, the administrative staff, the persons in charge of quality assurance as well as professor and student representatives in the course of the procedure. The decision on the particular arrangement of the second on-site visit and, where appropriate, on further conversation sessions are made by the Agency at the suggestion of the experts.

5.8 In the samples it is by means of relevant features of the design of study programmes, the conduct of study programmes and quality assurance examined, whether the effects strived for by the quality assurance system are actually given at the level of the study programmes, which hence comply with the criteria for the accreditation of study programmes, and with the guidelines specified by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Educa-

tion and Cultural Affairs (KMK) as well as state-specific guidelines. The following rules apply:

- a) The Agency decides on the features as well as on the selection and scope of the study programmes to be examined at the reasoned suggestion of the experts.
- b) The samples contain multiple features. Thereby an in-depth examination of study programmes shall take place; deviations need to be substantiated. When selecting the study programmes subjected to the samples the experts consider the whole range of subjects taught by the Higher Education Institution.
- c) The features result from the requirements of both, the *Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes* in the respective valid version as well as of the *common and the specific structural guidelines* that have been compiled by the Accreditation Council into binding guidelines.
- d) Subject matter of the samples may *for example* be:
  - regarding the qualification objectives: the development of specific and plausible qualification objectives of study programmes; the consideration of technical and interdisciplinary aspects; the comprisal of scientific or artistic qualification, competence to take up a qualified employment, competence for involvement in civil society, and personality development
  - regarding the conceptual integration in the system of studies: agreement of the qualification objectives with the *German Qualifications Framework for Higher Education* and compliance with legal requirements, particularly common and state-specific structural guidelines and, where appropriate, existing special regulations for study programmes preparing students for state regulated professions
  - regarding the study programme concept: the implementation of the qualification objectives and intended learning outcomes into study programme concepts; the imparting of specialised knowledge and interdisciplinary knowledge as well as of technical procedural and generic competences; the definition of admission requirements and selection procedure as well as rules for the recognition of credits achieved at other higher education institutions or externally achieved credits; the acquirement of credit points (ECTS) for practical components; the modularization concept of the higher education institution; the organisational implementation of the study programme concepts

Likewise, any requirement for the academic feasibility, the examination system, facilities, transparency and documentation, the consideration of special profile demands, gender

justice and equal opportunities as well as quality assurance and further development may be subject matters of the samples. Subject matter may also be the consideration of all criteria within an entire study programme or several ones.

If the Higher Education Institution offers regulated study programmes (e.g. teacher training programmes), then the corresponding specifics (e.g. regulations for the accreditation of teacher training programmes, common to the Länder and if necessary Länder-specific) are added as further features.

5.9 The review of state regulated Bachelor's and Master's study programmes by sampling serves for verifying compliance of these study programmes with the guidelines specified by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) as well as state-specific guidelines and the criteria set up by the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of study programmes. According to the accreditation of study programmes the following rules apply:

a) If the Agency is also licensed for the accreditation of study programmes, it conducts the review of state regulated Bachelor's and Master's study programmes by sampling as part of system accreditation. The Agency may commission another Agency licensed for programme accreditation by the Accreditation Council.

If the Agency is not licensed for programme accreditation, the review by sampling must be taken by an Agency licensed for programme accreditation.

b) For taking the samples the conducting Accreditation Agency appoints expert groups that ensure a proper evaluation of the study programmes in all areas relevant for the evaluation procedures. Student experts and practitioners from the profession as well as at least one member of the expert group for system accreditation shall be involved. In the case of Evangelical theological study programmes in full theological courses, an expert from the Evangelical Church must be involved. In the case of teacher training or combined study programmes which contain elements in Theological Studies, an expert from either the Evangelical or Catholic Church must be involved.

c) The review conducted in those procedures follows the "General Rules of Procedure for the Accreditation of Study programmes" pursuant to section 1, without leading to independent accreditation decisions. The common and state-specific structural guidelines and the "Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes" pursuant to section 2 apply correspondingly.

d) The Agency makes the reports from the review by sampling available to the experts for system accreditation.

5.10 The experts for system accreditation prepare a report including their recommendations for the decision, which documents the assessment of the single Criteria for System Accreditation (section 6) in a well-founded manner. In particular, the experts assess the causal connection between the findings and observations from the samples and the quality assurance- and management system.

5.11 The Agency forwards the experts' report to the Higher Education Institution without their decision recommendation for comment.

5.12 The Agency's decision is based on the experts' report and the decision recommendation, taking into account the Higher Education Institution's comment. The Agency either grants accreditation with or without conditions or denies accreditation. The accreditation decision may be supplemented by recommendations and/or propositions. A one-time suspension of the procedure by the Agency for normally 12 months, but no longer than 24 months is possible.

5.13 The Agency gives reasons for its accreditation decision. This includes also accreditation decisions limited by conditions or negative decisions, decisions on the suspension of a procedure and accreditation decisions differing from the experts' assessment.

5.14 The Agency publishes the decision, the experts' report and the names of the experts involved. In addition, without prejudice to its reporting obligations to the Accreditation Council, the Agency ensures confidentiality in all of the procedures.

5.15 The Agency documents the procedure in a suitable manner and publishes the result, in the case of a positive decision, by a corresponding entry in the database of accredited study programmes.

5.16 The Agency verifies the fulfilment of the conditions placed while granting the accreditation by the Higher Education Institution.

5.17 After expiry of half of the first-time accreditation term the Higher Education Institution submits a self-evaluation report to the Agency (midterm evaluation). This self-evaluation report basically covers an overview of the quality assurance procedures conducted during the accreditation period so far. The Agency prepares a report on the results of the midterm evaluation, which, where appropriate, contains recommendations regarding the remedy of deficiencies, makes it available to the Higher Education Institution and publishes it.



## 6 Criteria for System Accreditation

### 6.1 Qualification Objectives

The Higher Education Institution has defined and published an education profile for itself as an institution and for its study programmes. It is continuously using methods to check and further develop the qualification objectives of its study programmes.

### 6.2 Internal Management in Teaching and Learning

The Higher Education Institution is continuously using a management system in the field of teaching and learning. This ensures determination of concrete and plausible qualification objectives of study programmes, taking into account the *Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes* as amended in its latest version. The qualification objectives include disciplinary and interdisciplinary aspects, especially scientific or artistic competency, employability (competency to take up a qualified employment), competency for involvement in society and personality development. The system warrants

- implementation of the qualification objectives and intended learning outcomes in study programme concepts that are academically feasible (practicable) and ensure achievement of the aspired level and profile of qualification. This includes a realistic evaluation and verification of students' work load, application of the ECTS, proper modularisation, adequate organisation of examinations, offers of consultancy and assistance, consideration of gender justice and the specific requirements of students having health impairments, students having children, foreign students, students with a migration background and/or from so-called educationally disadvantaged classes as well as the rules applied for recognising credits achieved at other higher education institutions in accordance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention or externally achieved credits;
- adequate implementation of study programmes on the basis of qualitatively and quantitatively sufficient resources as well as measures for personnel development and qualification;
- agreement of the qualification objectives with the *German Qualifications Framework for Higher Education* and compliance with legal requirements, particularly common and state-specific structural guidelines and, where appropriate, existing special regulations for study programmes preparing students for state regulated professions;

- consideration of the results of internal quality assurance and participation of professors and students, graduates and external experts as well as practitioners from the profession in the design and further development of study programmes. In the case of study programmes preparing for state regulated professions, adequate experts shall be involved.

### 6.3 Internal Quality Assurance

The Higher Education Institution is continuously using an internal quality assurance system in the field of teaching and learning that meets the requirements of the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*.

The internal quality assurance system has staff and equipment resources that ensure sustainability. It is appropriate to assess the effectiveness of the internal management in the field of teaching and learning and to warrant the ensuring and continuous improvement of the quality of teaching and learning.

In detail, the internal quality assurance system includes the following

- regular internal and external evaluation of study programmes, taking into account the organisation of studies and examinations,
- regular evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning by students,
- verification of the competency of professors in the fields of teaching and examination when they are hired and their regular training advancement,
- regular verification of the compliance with guidelines for the accreditation of study programmes specified by KMK and the Accreditation Council,
- binding procedures for implementing recommendations and a system of incentives.

It ensures participation of professors and students, of administrative personnel, of graduates and practitioners from the profession and makes sure that authorities (persons) that are independent in their decision perform the evaluation of quality within the scope of internal and external evaluations.

### 6.4 Reporting System and Data Collection

The Higher Education Institution is continuously using an internal reporting system that documents the structures and procedures in the development and implementation of

study programmes as well as the structures, procedures and measures of quality assurance, its results and effects.

## 6.5 Responsibilities

The decision procedures, competencies and responsibilities within the management system for teaching and learning and within the internal quality assurance system are clearly defined and published throughout the Higher Education Institution.

## 6.6 Documentation

The Higher Education Institution informs the bodies in charge of teaching and learning at least once per year and in addition the general public and the responsible ministry in an appropriate manner about the procedures and results of the quality assurance measures in the field of teaching and learning.

## 6.7 Cooperation

The Higher Education Institution ensures the quality of the study programmes and its continuous improvement, if other organisations are involved or commissioned by the former in the field of teaching and learning. A written record is kept of the extent and nature of existing co-operations with other higher education institutions, companies and/or other organisations as well as for any agreements upon which the co-operation is based.

These rules are also applicable to study programmes jointly carried out by at least one foreign and one German Higher Education Institution and leading to at least one degree recognised by German law<sup>5</sup> (joint programmes). They are also applicable for the accreditation of national study programmes which offer an option that corresponds to a joint programme. 3 In case of contradictions between national specifications of the partner countries involved, cl. 1.5.3 applies whereby the board of the foundation takes the decision on application of the Higher Education Institution.

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<sup>5</sup> Generally, "double degrees" or "joint degrees" are awarded.

## **7 Decision Rules for System Accreditation**

### **7.1 Contents of Decisions and their Prerequisites**

7.1.1 System accreditation must be granted, if the quality requirements are met. Accordingly, study programmes set up as specified by the accredited system or that already have been the subject matter of an internal quality assurance as specified by the accredited system are accredited. If system accreditation was applied for an organisational unit of the Higher Education Institution, any and all decisions of the Agency only refer to study programmes of that organisational unit.

7.1.2 The accreditation shall be granted with conditions if there are defects, which can most likely be remedied within nine months.

7.1.3 The accreditation shall be rejected if there are defects, which most likely cannot be remedied within nine months. Already existing accreditations shall not be affected thereby. If renewed system accreditation (re-accreditation) is denied, the study programmes shall be accredited for another one and a half years.

7.1.4 In the cases of cl. 7.1.2 and 7.1.3, after receiving the comment of the Higher Education Institution, the Agency can suspend the accreditation procedure once for a period of generally 12 month, but maximum 24 month, if it can be expected that the Higher Education Institution will remedy the defects within this period.

### **7.2 Time Limitation**

7.2.1 System accreditation shall be limited to a period of eight years. The period starts with the day of coming into effect of the accreditation decision (cl. 7.7). The period calculated after that is extended until the end of the last academic year within the period.

7.2.2 Alternatively, if an accreditation is granted subject to conditions, the accreditation can be issued temporarily until the decision concerning the fulfilment of said conditions has been adopted, provided with the indication that the accreditation period will be extended to the standard period if the conditions have been fulfilled.

7.2.3 In the case of first accreditation the accreditation time period is six years. Cl. 7.2.1, Sentences 2 and 3 apply in a similar manner to the determination of the period.

### 7.3 Provisional Accreditation

7.3.1 If an application for renewed system accreditation is submitted to an Accreditation Agency at the latest one year before the expiry date of the accreditation period, the system accreditation shall be provisionally granted by the Agency for a maximum of two years along with the admittance to system accreditation. In case of the subsequent accreditation, the duration of this temporary accreditation is to be included in the period applicable as per cl. 7.2. Provisional system accreditation lapses with immediate effect in case of a negative decision in the procedure. Cl. 7.1.3, Sentence 3 applies to the study programmes of the Higher Education Institution.

7.3.2 Along with the admittance to a first system accreditation the Agency accredits the study programmes, the accreditation terms of which expire during the procedure, temporarily for a maximum of two years.

7.3.3 In case of suspension the agency can extend the temporary accreditation as per cl. 7.3.1 and 7.3.2 until the decision on the system accreditation is taken.

### 7.4 Conditions

7.4.1 Conditions and respites for providing evidence of their fulfilment have to be specified clearly.

7.4.2 Accreditations granted subject to conditions must include the indication that the lack of evidence of fulfilment of such conditions leads in general to the revocation of the accreditation or - if cl. 7.2.2 applies - that the accreditation term will, in general, not be extended to the standard period.

7.4.3 The fulfilment of the conditions is declared by the Agency to the Higher Education Institution. In this case the accreditation decision is valid unconditionally for the duration specified or - if cl. 7.2.2 applies - will be extended to the standard period.

7.4.4 If the Higher Education Institution does not provide evidence for the fulfilment of the conditions before the given respite and if accreditation was granted with a proviso of revocation, the Agency shall immediately revoke the accreditation, after sending a reminder and expiry of an adequate additional respite, with effect from the end of the next semester. In well-founded cases the Agency can grant a one-time extension of up to further three months.

7.4.5 If the accreditation term was shortened in accordance with cl. 7.2.7, if evidence of the fulfilment of the conditions is not provided in due time, the accreditation period will be extended only until the end of the semester in question and not for the standard period. In

well-founded cases, the Agency can issue a one-time extension of the accreditation term by up to three months.

## **7.5 Suspension of the Procedure**

7.5.1 Accreditation procedures are suspended in writing by indicating the reasons and the period of time within which the Higher Education Institution may apply for the resumption of the procedure.

7.5.2 It is incumbent upon the Higher Education Institution to apply for the resumption of the procedure to the Agency within the period fixed; in this case the suspended procedure is immediately resumed. On resumption of the procedure the Agency decides whether any procedural steps have to be repeated.

7.5.3 In case the Higher Education Institution does not submit an application for resumption of the procedure within the period stipulated, the Agency shall refuse system accreditation.

## **7.6 Revocation of the Accreditation Decision**

7.6.1 The Accreditation Council may oblige the Agency to revoke a decision for accreditation or, in the case of defects which may be remedied within nine months, to issue a condition for such decision, if it has been reached without taking into consideration or applying an accreditation criterion appropriately or in violation of an essential procedural rule. The revocation or subsequent issuing of conditions must take place immediately with effect from the end of the next semester. This obligation does not apply, if the same accreditation decision would have been taken even if the mistake had not been made; the Agency has the burden of explanation and proof in this respect.

7.6.2 If in case of cl. 7.6.1, a favourable accreditation decision should have been granted, the Agency shall file the corresponding decision without delay.

7.6.3 In case of significant modifications to the internal quality assurance system, the Agency decides whether they might lead to a decrease in the quality of the study programmes. In this case, the Agency immediately revokes the accreditation, provided that a renewed system accreditation has not been applied for. In case of revocation, cl. 67.1.3, Sentence 4 applies for the study programmes of the Higher Education Institution. The Agency decides whether the procedure can be shortened in the individual case.

## **7.7 Coming into Effect of Decisions**

Decisions from accreditation agencies in the named cases will become effective upon the receipt of a written decision.

## **III. Transitional Provisions**

The legal relationships between Higher Education Institutions and Agencies are determined by the regulations set by the Accreditation Council in effect at the time of the conclusion of the contract. Nevertheless, the parties may agree upon immediate application of all or of single rearrangements to their contractual relationship.