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- via electronic mail -

Bonn, 03.09.2015

Progress Report

Dear Mr President,

As mentioned in your letter of November 28th 2013, the progress report of the German Accreditation Council (GAC) is due by now. It is a pleasure for us to inform you about the steps we have taken in considering the recommendations of ENQA's review panel.

Let me start with the two issues you highlighted in your letter and proceed with the other recommendations given by the review panel in chapter V of its report of July 31th 2013 (p. 38).

Firstly, you mentioned that GAC's resources should be increased. We could not agree more and we are happy to inform you that the Conference of the German Ministers of Finance had increased our annual grant from 330.000 Euro to 397.000 Euro in 2015 and 415.000 Euro in 2016. They also increased our establishment plan so that we are now allowed to employ 5.0 full time equivalents (4.0 FTE before).

Furthermore, we have modified our Statutes of Fees. We expect that our annual earnings from fees will rise from about 80.000 Euro in 2013 to about 180.000 Euro from 2016 onwards; in 2014 we already could generate about 120.000 Euro.

Secondly, the ENQA board encouraged us to update our Mission Statement. The current one of 2007 is clearly outdated and we agree upon that. Nevertheless, we have postponed the renewal for a while: This year, we have started a process of a general revision of our rules and regulations. The timing is due to the new ESG as we want to take them fully into account. Therefore, GAC had set up a working group for this general revision in its first meeting after the adoption of the new ESG in Yerevan earlier this year. Part of the terms of

reference for this working group is to update the Mission Statement. The whole process is determined to be finished at the end of 2016. As the next evaluation of GAC by ENQA is expected to take place in 2017/18, we will be able to present the new Mission Statement by then.

Now let me move to the other panel's recommendations on page 38 of the report.

- Strategic plan: On December 13th 2013, GAC adopted a strategic plan for its period of office from 2013 to 2017. This document is available in English¹ and comprises, among others, the mentioned areas of system development and internationalization.
- Evaluation of the development of system accreditation: In the mentioned strategic plan, GAC stated that it would “recommend the agencies and the system accredited higher education institutions to involve an external evaluation and to jointly develop an assessment order”. When further considering how to proceed, questions about the appropriate time arose.

In fact, the first two Higher Education Institutions (HEI) got their system accreditation only in 2011. At the moment, there are 30+ (of about 400) HEIs “system-accredited”. Our main task today is to define how the first “re-accreditations” from 2017 onwards will be carried out. To this purpose, we are steadily monitoring the system accreditations and have already noted several needs for adjustments, as GAC’s objectives have been reached mostly though not fully by now. For the time being, we will have a series of smaller observations concerning system accreditation but not the big all-embracing general evaluation: In our opinion, more experiences at more HEIs are needed to appreciate the impact of system accreditation. GAC’s next period of office 2017-2021 seems to us the more suitable time to conduct a large-scale evaluation.

- We have discussed the desirability of including doctoral studies in GAC’s portfolio and came unanimously to the conclusion that this would not be advisable for two reasons. Firstly, doctoral studies in Germany are very closely linked to research, and doctoral candidates seen primarily as first-stage researchers rather than as advanced students, while GAC is competent in matters of studying and teaching but not so much in research. This leads, secondly, to the fact that Germany is a country of shared responsibilities in Higher Education and therefore there are several honourable institutions here dealing with the research aspects of HE. Especially the Council of Science and Humanities and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft address quality issues with doctoral studies.

¹ http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/AR/Beschluesse/en/AR_Strategische_Planung_2013-17_en.pdf

- We have increased our attention to our role, performance and impact beyond German borders. The international activities of German accreditation agencies accredited by GAC will (and already have) become much more important in our reviews of them. Concerning the value of our quality seal in the world, we have to keep in perspective that the foreign demand for receiving our seal is very low. Only some German-backed universities ponder from time to time whether to aim at our seal and GAC deals with these requests individually. After careful consideration, we have decided not to promote our seal outside Germany.
Finally, our paramount activity in this regard is currently our participation in the ENQA-led QACHE project, which has proven to be of utmost interest.
- Balance between generic and subject-specific standards: A working group of GAC has dealt with this issue recently and produced a report (German only²) suggesting that we should strive for a linkage between these types of standards. We will take decisions about this within our above-mentioned revising of our rules and regulations.
- QA procedures for private HEIs: GAC is in regular contact with the Council of Science and Humanities in whose purview the so-called “institutional accreditation” of private HEIs is. We work together to keep our separate processes as simple as possible but it is a fact that most the Higher Education Acts of the German states (“Länder”) require both different accreditations for private HEIs.
- Mission statement: see above.
- Adjustment of GAC’s full name following the introduction of system accreditation: One has to take into account that also system accreditation leads to accredited programmes so that GAC’s name is still quite accurate. Nevertheless, before the Federal Constitutional Court will have come to its judgment about the legal set-up of accreditation in Germany (this pending case being mentioned in our panel’s report on pp. 14, 27, 37), changes in our Foundation Law are unlikely in general.
- Further development of the Foundation’s website and communications strategies: We noticed that the panel was not enthusiastic about our English website and we have put considerable effort into improving it. We are convinced that it is of acceptable quality by now but as the overwhelming majority of our statutory tasks lies within German borders, our resources to provide international communication are limited.
For national communication, we would like to highlight that in early 2015, we have organized a first “Forum on System Accreditation”. In the follow-up, we have established regular ways of communication with system-accredited HEIs as we all

2

http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/AR/Veroeffentlichungen/Berichte/AR_Abschlussbericht_AGFachlichkeit.pdf

agree that systematic exchange of information is crucial for a QA (and HE) system as complex as ours.

I hope our progress report will meet ENQA's expectations. Please do not hesitate to contact us for any further information. In addition, Olaf Bartz, our managing director, will take part at ENQA's general assembly in October in Dublin so there will be the opportunity to discuss any issues face-to-face also.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Reinhold R. Grimm'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'R'.

Professor Dr. Reinhold R. Grimm