

AGENCY REVIEW REPORT:
**Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der
Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der
Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik e.V. (ASIIN)**

COORDINATED by ASHE



CONTENTS

CONTENTS	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION	5
BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS	5
BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW	5
MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2016 REVIEW	5
REVIEW PROCESS	5
HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY	7
HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM	7
QUALITY ASSURANCE	8
ASIIN	8
ASIIN'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE	9
ASIIN'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES	10
ASIIN'S FUNDING	12
FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ASIIN WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)	13
ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES	13
ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE	13
ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS	16
ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE	18
ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS	19
ESG 3.5 RESOURCES	21
ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT	22
ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES	25
ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE	26
ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE	26
ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE	28
ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES	30

ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS	32
ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES	35
ESG 2.6 REPORTING	36
ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS	38
ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS (optional section).....	41
ASIIN WEBSITE	41
ASIIN'S TYPE 1 AND TYPE 2 ACTIVITIES	41
ASIIN E.V. AND ASIIN GMBH	42
FOLLOW-UP PROCESS OF ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES IN GERMANY	42
CONCLUSION	43
SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS.....	43
OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	43
SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT	45
ANNEXES	47
ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT	47
ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW.....	52
ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY	58
ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW	59
ANNEX 5. EXAMPLE OF A MAPPING GRID	59

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This review report analyses the compliance of the Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics (ASIIN) with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The report is based on desk analysis (a study of the SAR and other material provided to the review panel) and site visit conducted in May 2021 using online tools. The review process was coordinated by the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE), based in Croatia.

ASIIN is a Germany-based agency established in 1999, deeply rooted in the quality assurance and enhancement of higher education in the STEM sector. It conducts programme accreditation, institutional or system accreditation, certification of courses, modules and programmes of further education, procedures for awarding the specialised European labels and evaluations (procedures without a formal outcome). Besides in Germany, ASIIN also conducts these procedures internationally.

Overall, the review panel concludes that ASIIN is well-functioning agency with reliable structures and procedures for ensuring the high quality of its operations, specifically in the field of external QA, and that it is compliant with the ESG.

The panel reached the following conclusions on the degree of compliance with the ESG:

ESG Part 3	Degree of compliance
Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance	Substantially compliant
Standard 3.2 Official status	Fully compliant
Standard 3.3 Independence	Substantially compliant
Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis	Substantially compliant
Standard 3.5 Resources	Fully compliant
Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct	Substantially compliant
Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies	Fully compliant
ESG Part 2	
Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance	Fully compliant
Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose	Fully compliant
Standard 2.3 Implementing processes	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts	Substantially compliant
Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes	Fully compliant
Standard 2.6 Reporting	Fully compliant
Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals	Partially compliant

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics (*Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik e.V.*, ASIIN) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted between March and June 2021.

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

The EQAR Procedure for Applications, as well as ENQA's membership regulations requires all registered/member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is ASIIN's third review, the review panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge progress from previous reviews. The panel also adopted a developmental approach, with a view to the enhancement of the agency's processes and operations.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2016 REVIEW

ASIIN underwent an external review coordinated by the German Accreditation Council (GAC) in 2016. The review panel concluded that ASIIN was fully compliant with two standards (3.2 Official status, 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies), substantially compliant with eight standards (2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance, 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose, 2.3 Implementing processes, 2.5 Criteria for outcomes, 2.6 Reporting, 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance, 3.3 Independence, 3.5 Resources) and partially compliant with four standards (2.4 Peer-review experts, 2.7 Complaints and appeals, 3.4 Thematic analysis, 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct).

The review panel made in total 24 recommendations and suggestions for further improvement. The 2016 review and its recommendations went beyond the scope of the ESG by also focusing on some of the more technical aspects of the GAC criteria. Consideration of how ASIIN responded to these recommendations was an important element of the current review, especially in relation to those recommendations that went beyond the technicalities of the GAC criteria. The 2016 recommendations were one of the inputs for the current review panel's interviews with different stakeholders, and specific remarks related to each of the recommendations can be found, where appropriate, under the relevant standard.

The 2016 review of ASIIN resulted in the agency's renewal of membership in ENQA (2016) and renewal of inclusion in EQAR (2017) for the period of five years.

REVIEW PROCESS

The primary purpose of the 2021 external review of ASIIN was to verify that ASIIN acts in compliance with the ESG. The review panel also took into account EQAR's Use and Interpretation of the ESG. The review itself was conducted in line with the process described in EQAR Procedure for Applications and in Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, and according to the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of ASIIN was appointed by ASHE and composed of the following members:

- Ms. Fiona Crozier (Chair), quality assurance expert, United Kingdom
- Mr. Aleksandar Šušnjar (Panel member - student, Secretary), University of Rijeka, Croatia
- Professor Volker Linneweber (Panel member), Saarland University, Germany
- Assistant Professor Maria João Machado Pires da Rosa (Panel member), University of Aveiro, Portugal

Ms. Mina Đorđević and Dr. Vesna Dodiković Jurković coordinated the review from the side of ASHE.

Self-assessment report

ASIIN's self-assessment report (SAR) was drafted by the head office and subsequently discussed and consulted with 14 technical committees of ASIIN. Following this consultation period, the SAR was approved by the Accreditation Commission and the Board of ASIIN.

The SAR contained information on:

- the higher education and legislative context of the agency
- history, profile and activities of the agency (including specifically international activities)
- quality assurance activities and their methodologies
- internal quality assurance system of the agency
- assessment of compliance with the ESG
- stakeholder input
- improvements resulting from the previous external review
- SWOT analysis and outlook towards the future

In addition to the fundamental SAR document, ASIIN also provided a number of annexes (12 in total), detailing specific aspects of its structures and functioning (detailed list of annexes can be seen in Annex 4).

Overall, the review panel considered the SAR (in combination with the annexes) to be very well composed and informative, with substantial evidence provided about ASIIN's structures, procedures and context, as well as compliance with all standards of the ESG. However, the panel also found that SAR could have had a stronger self-analytical and critical evaluative dimension, which was particularly evident in the underdeveloped SWOT analysis included.

After analysing the SAR, the review panel asked for supplemental information about its certain aspects; namely the mapping of ASIIN's standards to Part I of the ESG, extended SWOT analysis and general budget information. The panel received this information from ASIIN before the site visit and took it into account when preparing for the site visit interviews.

Site visit

A three-day site visit took place on 14, 18 and 19 of May 2021, following a preparatory meeting of the review panel on 12 May. Due to the pandemic measures currently in place, the site visit took place online, to which all the panel members explicitly agreed, on the proposal of the coordinating organisation – ASHE.

During the online site visit, the panel had the opportunity to talk with a diverse set of actors and stakeholders (full site visit programme can be found in Annex 1):

- ASIIN Director
- Board of Directors of ASIIN
- German Accreditation Council
- Representatives of ASIIN's technical committees

- Representatives of ASIIN's Accreditation Commission
- Representatives of ASIIN's Certification Commission
- Members of the Board of Appeals
- ASIIN staff
- Rectors and Deans of evaluated HEIs in Germany and overseas
- QA offices and teachers of a number of evaluated HEIs in Germany and overseas
- Student representatives in ASIIN bodies and in expert panels
- Representatives of German and overseas stakeholders (including Economic Advisory Council)
- Representatives of panel members in QA procedures in Germany and local members overseas
- Representatives of partner agencies from other countries with whom ASIIN carries out joint accreditation procedures

The panel was unable to meet with members of the Ethics Advisory Board as planned, due to illness of the representatives involved.

In general, the stakeholders interviewed demonstrated a high level of openness and provided the panel with valuable information and insight into the agency's structures and especially operations. The panel would also like to thank ASIIN for efficient and timely communication which made it possible not only to organise a site visit that was highly useful for the panel's work and to respond to requests from the panel.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Although ASIIN conducts international reviews and strives to strengthen its international activities, it is still predominantly active in the German system of HE.

Higher education studies in Germany are offered at two types of HEIs:

- Universities (*Universitäten*) mainly offer academic education and cover a range of academic disciplines. In the German tradition, universities particularly focus on basic research so the advanced stages of study mainly have theoretical orientation and research-oriented components
- Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen* or *Hochschulen für Angewandte Wissenschaften*) deliver education in an application-oriented manner, which includes integrated and supervised work assignments in industry, enterprises or other relevant institutions. Content-wise, universities of applied science mainly focus their study programmes on engineering and other technical disciplines, business related studies, social work, and design.

The legal basis of higher education in Germany is covered by the general Higher Education Act, by the legislation on higher education of the federal states (*Landeshochschulgesetze*), as well as the legislation regarding colleges of art and music and the legislation of certain types of universities of applied science (*Fachhochschulen*) of the federal states. German HEIs are either state or state-recognised institutions. In their operations, including organisation of studies and designation and award of degrees, they are subjected to higher education legislation.

Studies in both types of institutions have historically been offered in integrated 'long' (one-tier) programmes, of 4-6 years duration. After the introduction of the Bologna Process in Germany, one-

tier study programmes have been successively replaced by a two-tier study system. The German Qualifications Framework for Higher Education Qualifications describes the qualification levels as well as the resulting qualifications and competences of graduates. The three levels of this framework correspond to the levels 6 (bachelor), 7 (master) and 8 (doctorate/PhD) of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

Bachelor and master (and in some cases PhD) study programmes may be studied consecutively, at various higher education institutions, at different types of higher education institutions and with phases of professional work between the first and the second qualification. The organisation of the study programmes makes use of modular components and of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) with usually 30 credits corresponding to one semester.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

To ensure quality and comparability of qualifications, all programmes in Germany have to either be 1) accredited by external organisations or 2) accredited by the HEI themselves following an institutional accreditation by an external organisation.

Therefore, both programme and institutional accreditation are present in Germany; institutional accreditation is optional and enables an institution to self-accredit its study programmes, while programme accreditation is obligatory unless the institution has a valid system accreditation, which is verified by the seal of the GAC.

All programmes have to conform to the requirements defined in the “*Interstate Treaty on the organization of a joint accreditation system to ensure the quality of teaching and learning at German higher education institutions*” (Interstate study accreditation treaty / *Studienakkreditierungsstaatsvertrag*). The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Federal States in the Federal Republic of Germany adopted the treaty on 8 December 2016, and it was enacted on 1 January 2018.

This reform of the German national accreditation system in 2018 brought about significant changes. Until then, accreditation agencies, which were authorised by the GAC, conducted accreditation procedures based on the regulations and requirements of the GAC and the procedure would be finalised with the agency’s decision about accreditation of a programme or an institution. Since 2018 however, agencies still conduct the review, but now only provide assessment of compliance with the standards, while the final decision is then taken by the GAC itself.

As one of the interviewees framed it: “*In the past, GAC had no formal and legal relations with HEIs, only with agencies, now it is the opposite – there only formal legal relations with HEIs, but not with agencies. However, agencies are obviously still extremely important for GAC as they supply reliable materials for accreditation.*”

ASIIN

ASIIN e.V. was established in 1999 by a broad range of higher education institutions (HEIs) and industry and business representatives, including the coordination group of German Technical Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences, deans’ associations, multiple technical industrial associations (e.g. the Association of German Engineers (VDI), the Informatics’ Association (GI) or the German Physical Society (DPG)), and industrial networks and trade unions.

The main purpose of ASIIN was and is to measure, assure and enhance the quality of academic education in engineering, computer science, natural sciences, mathematics, medicine and all interdisciplinary fields that include one of the above-mentioned subject areas, as well as in teacher training.

In 2007 ASIIN Consult GmbH was founded as a 100% affiliate of ASIIN e.V. to complete the portfolio regarding certification of modules and courses in the field of further education, consulting in the field of quality assurance, and implementation and organisation of trainings, workshops and conferences.

ASIIN'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

ASIIN's organisation is split into two: ASIIN e.V. as a non-profit association and ASIIN Consult GmbH as an affiliate of ASIIN e.V., in which the profit-oriented activities are carried out.

ASIIN, being a membership organisation, is supported by four groups of institutional members, which also form the General Assembly of ASIIN:

- Group 1: Technical and scientific associations and professional organizations
- Group 2: Business organisations and leading organisations of the social partners
- Group 3: Deans' conferences of universities
- Group 4: Coordination Group of universities for applied sciences (Heads of universities) and Deans' conferences of universities of applied sciences

The General Assembly consists of representatives from all members. At the General Assembly, all member groups have the same number of votes. The General Assembly convenes once a year and is responsible for, among other things, formal approval of the members of the Board, resolutions on changes to the by-laws and resolutions on important matters relating to the association.

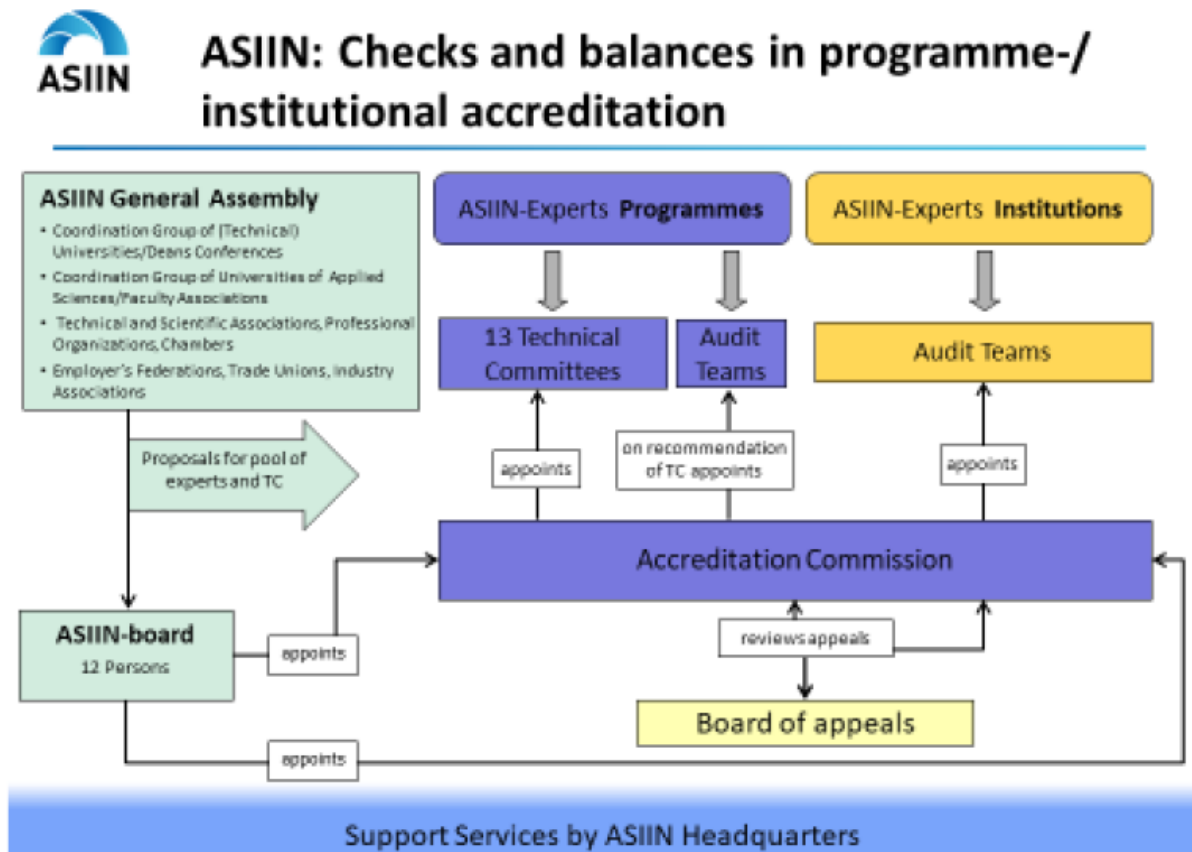
The Board of Directors has twelve members and is responsible for strategic guidelines, appointing the members of the Accreditation Commission and the Appeals Committee, signing bilateral and multilateral agreements with other accreditation agencies in Germany and abroad, recruiting of organisations as members of the Association which are relevant for participation in the accreditation, as well as passing resolutions on acceptance and exclusion of members. The Chairman of the Board is appointed in rotation by the first two and the last two member groups. The Deputy Chairman is always elected from one of the other groups.

ASIIN used to have two bodies dealing with accreditation of degree programmes and with quality management systems, which were merged into one Accreditation Commission. The members of the Accreditation Commission are professionally independent and are composed in the following way: one third of representatives come from technical universities or universities, one third from universities of applied sciences and one third are representatives from industry. Members must not represent a specific lobby and students from universities and universities of applied sciences are also included. The duties of the Accreditation Commission include defining the general criteria (standards) for programme and system accreditation, the confirmation of the subject specific criteria (standards) developed by the technical committees (only for programme accreditation), the accreditation of the study programmes or institutions based on the accreditation reports of the review panels (for the ASIIN seal) or based on the recommendations of technical committees (only for programme accreditation), and the appointment of the review panels for individual accreditation procedures.

The 14 technical committees of ASIIN are appointed by the Accreditation Commission and are involved only in programme accreditation procedures. Their duty is to develop and revise the subject-specific standards, nominate experts for the study programmes to be accredited, participate in the training of the reviewers, examine review reports of the review panels and assist in the creation of expert pools. Reviewers are recommended and proposed by scientific associations and societies, the associated faculty conferences and member groups of trade organizations and umbrella organizations of the trade unions.

ASIIN has also implemented an Ethics Advisory Board to support all bodies as a forum for the clarification of ethical questions which may arise in the course of ASIIN's accreditation and certification procedure, and an Appeals Committee responsible for processing and resolving potential appeals and complaints from the HEIs.

The organizational relation of different ASIIN bodies is depicted in the following chart:



In ASIIN Consult GmbH, as in ASIIN e.V., responsibilities for strategic and financial decision are separated from the decisions regarding the award of the certification seal. The owner (ASIIN e.V.), represented by the chair and the vice-chair of the board of ASIIN e.V. and the CEO of the company (ASIIN Consult GmbH) decide about the general strategy, financial belongings and human resources. All decisions regarding the certification procedures are taken by the certification commission, which has similar duties as the accreditation commissions within ASIIN e.V. The composition of the certification commission is also comparable, with representatives from universities, universities of applied sciences, industry and student members.

ASIIN'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

ASIIN's external QA activities included in Terms of Reference of this review are:

- Institutional accreditation/evaluation
 - System accreditation in Germany
 - ASIIN seal institutional accreditation
 - Institutional/System evaluation
- Programme accreditation/evaluation

- Programme accreditation in Germany
- ASIIN seal programme accreditation
- EQAS-Food Label joint programme review
- EQAS-Food Label review
- AMSE Label joint programme review
- AMSE Label review
- EUR-ACE joint programme review
- EUR-ACE review
- Eurobachelor joint programme review
- Eurobachelor review
- Euro-Inf joint programme review
- Euro-Inf review
- Euromaster joint programme review
- Euromaster review
- Joint programme accreditation
- Certification
- Evaluations for quality assurance and quality enhancement
 - Evaluations for quality assurance and quality enhancement ("type I")

ASIIN itself differentiates its external QA activities as follows:

- Programme accreditation (including third-party, cross-border accreditation)
- Institutional or System accreditation/certification
- Certification of modules/courses
- Evaluation procedures covered by the ESG (type I evaluations).

In the case of an ASIIN programme/system or institutional accreditation procedure, a university acquires the agency's own ASIIN seal for a study programme/quality management system if the result is positive, regardless of the national context in which the university is located. Additionally, ASIIN considers any existing national requirements of the respective country in which a HEI is located.

At the programme level, ASIIN specializes in accrediting bachelor, master and PhD programmes in single or cluster procedures in the subject fields of engineering sciences, computer science, natural sciences, mathematics, business, medicine and in all interdisciplinary areas that involve one of the above-mentioned subject areas; in international or European procedures (double degree or joint degree) involving one of the subject areas mentioned, and in teacher training.

The object of system or institutional accreditation is the internal quality management at a HEI - limited to the area of study and teaching. A positive system accreditation certifies that the quality management system is suitable to ensure certain quality standards for its organisation and study programmes.

The certification of modules/courses follows essentially the same procedures as the programme accreditation for the ASIIN Seal. With an ASIIN certification for courses, modules and training courses at EQF levels 5 to 8, independent confirmation is provided that the goals and learning outcomes aimed at by the provider can be achieved using the content, resources and structures provided and thus the desired competence profile can be achieved.

Evaluation procedures, which are subject to the ESG (type I evaluations), also follow the same processes as programme accreditations/certifications, but are concluded with the submission of an evaluation report thus omitting any formal decision by ASIIN.

In addition to the national accreditation and its own quality seals, ASIIN is also authorised to award several international quality labels based on subject specific competence frameworks on a European level. In all of these, the ESG are fully integrated. ASIIN uses a “piggybacking” approach for the simultaneous award of its own quality seal and the award of the European labels and/or national accreditation seals in one combined procedure. This means that HEIs could apply for the award of up to three seals / labels (ASIIN seal, European field specific labels, and national seal) in a combined accreditation/certification procedure and with a single set of documentation (self-assessment report and annexes).

Internationally, besides conducting reviews itself, ASIIN cooperates with AQU Catalunya, in jointly accrediting degree programmes at universities in Catalunya, with ASIIN providing the “EUR-ACE” label to engineering programmes if the requirements are fulfilled. In 2019, a similar agreement was signed with the French university network FIGURE. In the coming years, FIGURE and ASIIN will cooperate in accrediting engineering programmes at the around 30 member universities of FIGURE.

In addition to authorisation for awarding different European qualification labels as mentioned above, ASIIN is heavily involved in international networks for quality assurance in higher education and is an active member of numerous organisations. As a part of these memberships, ASIIN has also undergone multiple reviews by the responsible organisations, e.g. a review against the Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), regular authorisation processes every five years by the GAC for the admission to the German accreditation system, or authorisation processes by the owners of the European field specific labels to award their seals (ENAAE for the EUR-ACE label, EQANIE for the Euro-Inf label, ECTNA for the label in Chemistry or ISEKI-Food for the EQAS-Food label).

Additionally, ASIIN is a founding member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA).

ASIIN’S FUNDING

The most important sources of funding for ASIIN are revenues from programme accreditation procedures in Germany and internationally. These revenues are based on service fees charged from a soliciting institution – whether that is the institution undergoing evaluation itself, or another responsible institution (e.g. national ministry in charge of higher education). Other significant sources of funding for ASIIN are institutional/system accreditation procedures, consulting fees and membership fees.

The funding is predominantly (over 80%) used to cover the staff costs and costs of conducting accreditation procedures, i.e. remuneration and travel costs for review panel members.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ASIIN WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should 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.

2016 review recommendation

- ASIIN should clearly define type 2 “evaluations” as consultation services both internally and externally and no longer use the term “evaluation” for this area of activity.

Evidence

ASIIN is one of 10 accreditation agencies currently accredited by the GAC (8 in Germany, one in Switzerland, one in Austria). Founded in 1999, ASIIN reports on its homepage having conducted reviews in 5447 study programmes, 292 institutions and 43 countries (status: May 24, 2021). The SAR and the website homepage (<https://www.asiin.de/en/about-asiin.html>), clearly state that ASIIN provides “expert support to German and international universities in the implementation of accreditation procedures on the programme and institutional level” as its core activity.

ASIIN’s decision making bodies include the technical committees, Accreditation Commission, Certification Commission, Director and Board of the Directors - which is the highest governing body of ASIIN. A diverse set of stakeholders is included in the technical committees, Accreditation Commission and Certification Commission, but the Board of Directors consists exclusively of representatives of membership organisations/institutions of ASIIN.

ASIIN’s “culture of quality” outlines goals as well as ways to achieve them. A definition of quality, supported by ASIIN’s quality management (QM) manual is elaborated as well (<https://www.asiin.de/en/culture-of-quality.html>).

ASIIN’s activities, objectives and methods are clearly defined in its mission statement (published on the ASIIN’s website) which defines its field of activity as including accreditation/certification of study programmes and QM systems, certification of modules and courses, evaluations for quality assurance and improvement of studies and teaching (according to ESG). For recognized study programmes and QM systems, ASIIN and third-party seals are given. According to oral testimonies, ASIIN has a long history in awarding seals, although rather product-related than focusing on programmes or QM systems at HEIs. Lists of ASIIN activities as well as homepages of accredited German HEIs demonstrate the prestige of the ASIIN seal: the listing of decisions regarding accreditation of study programs (<https://www.asiin.de/en/programme-accreditation/results-reports.html>) indicates the ASIIN seal often being strived for (listing only in German), in Germany often in combination with GAC seal. GAC seals are also awarded exclusively.

ASIIN's competence in orientation to ESG is apparent through its description of procedures on its website and in the Handbooks defining various procedures, although in results and reports, explicit reference to ESG is only made occasionally. Information regarding the procedure, different seals/labels as well as accreditation standards are clearly visible for programme as well as for institutional accreditation.

According to ASIIN's SAR (2021), the agency intends to improve the quality of the HE system by conducting external QA activities nationally as well as internationally. The activities of ASIIN include "type 1 evaluations" (evaluations for external QA / enhancement in higher education" as well as "type 2 evaluations" (evaluations for quality and organizational development / research strategies). Type 1 evaluations fall under the ESG regime. Intraorganisationally, type 1 evaluations are conducted by ASIIN e.V., which is the originally established non-profit membership organization.

Resulting from emerging activities incompatible with a non-profit institution, ASIIN Consult GmbH was established 2007. This is not extraordinary; other agencies took the same developmental path. According to the budget, the volume of activities of ASIIN GmbH in relation to ASIIN e.V. is approximately 1:8 presently. Due to developments and shifts in ASIIN's fields of activity, ASIIN management expects the relation to change significantly.

ASIIN intends to continue playing a major role in accrediting and awarding seals for programmes and institutions in its area of origin which is the STEM sector. However, the plans for future development go further and include strengthening international activities and broadening the spectrum of disciplines in which ASIIN conducts external evaluations (see below).

Analysis

Testimonies of meetings with the Board of Directors, rectors and deans of evaluated HEIs in Germany and overseas as well as talks to QA officers and teachers in a number of evaluated HEIs in Germany and overseas supported the review panel's view that ASIIN is a major player in the field of QA in the STEM sector. The panel acknowledges that ASIIN is perceived and selected for conducting external reviews as an accreditation agency with attributed competency in the STEM sector, while internationally the prestige and positive image of German engineering is another factor contributing to ASIIN's attractiveness. This proximity to the application areas and the use of experts from outside the HE system is an essential feature of ASIIN, which also distinguishes it from other agencies. Such a connection also ensures awareness of changes in the field, such as the emergence of new challenges in research or new industrial sub-sectors and corresponding training profiles.

Members of the originally (1999) established agency were and still are relevant national actors in the STEM sector. At the same time, individuals associated with the membership entities of ASIIN are also involved in review processes as experts from different stakeholder groups, which will be discussed in more detail in relation to ESG 3.3. With respect to ESG 3.1, the close relationship of ASIIN to actors in HEIs, associations and organizations underlines the core competence with respect to disciplines involved. However, the fact that the highest governing body of ASIIN, the Board of Directors, does not include stakeholder representatives is a weakness in ASIIN's structure, as the body which should be responsible for setting the strategic direction of the organisation is therefore devoid of input from various stakeholders and disciplines outside the STEM sector.

ASIIN explicitly refers to the ESG in introductory parts of its documents prescribing standards for various external QA procedures, and the panel found sufficient evidence that the ESG are thoroughly integrated into ASIIN's own standards (for more details, see ESG 2.1). ASIIN considers its responsibility for formulating standards (and hence the own seal) as an advantage. It provides the agency with more flexibility in reacting to changes in the labour market as well as scientific disciplines. The review panel comprehends this argumentation and strategy. Particularly in hybrid

programs (with strong integration of theoretical and practical learning) an explicit closeness to actors in educational, as well as research and development, contexts is an advantage.

The structure and hierarchy of ASIIN are flat which is also manifested in the fact that currently, Dr. Irling Wasser is the only special representative (i.e. additional legal representative of the organisation besides its Board of Directors). The review panel questions how the agency would deal with a possible absence of its director, for example due to illness. This would be a problem both according to the association's statutes and its documented working procedures, and would, therefore, constitute a risk to the agency.

The fields of activity for accreditation agencies have changed considerably in recent years. In Germany, it is not the agencies that accredit, but the Accreditation Council at the request of a HEI. This implies a new role for the agencies; they accompany the HEIs in the preparation of their applications as partners. This weakens the formerly sharp differentiation between counselling and accreditation (in the sense of review). ASIIN takes this into account, but still maintains the differentiation between two types of evaluation.

ASIIN has reacted to the recommendation from the 2016 review recommendation regarding usage of the term "evaluation" by stating *"The complete absence of the word "evaluation" seems difficult for us, at worst infeasible, as many applicants use exactly this term internally and in their calls for tenders without making a claim for an ESG-compliant evaluation. This term is used in many ways, especially in German-speaking countries, not least in teaching evaluations, project evaluations, etc."* (Renewal Decision p. 12.) The review panel understands and agrees with this explanation. It also corresponds to the use of the term "evaluation" in research, such as "evaluation research": "evaluation" is an umbrella term under which different types of activities can be subsumed. The difference made by ASIIN in various documents between type 1 evaluation and type 2 evaluation, in combination with the sub-institutional allocation (e.V. vs. GmbH), sufficiently differentiates between accreditation and consultancy in the panel's view.

At present, the differentiation between e.V. and GmbH is well explained and externally presented. The budget also maintains this differentiation. However, the panel found that this does not correspond to internal organisational processes and practices since ASIIN is too small for such a differentiation and the workload is too dynamic. From the review panel's perspective, the dual structure works but seems laborious and artificial, particularly looking at the dynamics in the area of quality management of HEIs. Moreover, redundancies in dealing with the same subjects for different seals could be reduced. The major reason for maintaining the dual structure are legal restrictions that members of registered association (e.V.) are subject to, but the role of accreditation agencies in programme as well as system accreditation according to the present German requirements (after 2018) is compatible with an organisational structure other than non-profit (see Additional Observations section for more details).

Although not visible in the SAR, various meetings with ASIIN staff indicated that the agency has shifted its main emphasis from the business areas of ASIIN e.V. to ASIIN GmbH. This strategy is consequential and corresponds to future developments in the tasks of accreditation agencies. The personnel development plan of ASIIN takes this into account as there will be a shift of employees from e.V. to GmbH. The review panel considers this an adequate strategy for coping with developments nationwide and internationally.

ASIIN is visibly expanding its areas of competence to other disciplines (currently medicine and pharmacy), which should have a positive impact on international accreditation projects and activities in the area of system accreditation. However, the panel did not find evidence of any strategy on how to address the need for broader set of competences in ASIIN resulting from this expansion into other areas. It is also questionable whether the fine-grained structure established in the expert

committees and the technical committees can be maintained if ASIIN becomes increasingly active outside the STEM field, which, judging by the documented procedures, is already happening. There is a danger of defining the responsibility for new areas more coarsely than before, for example forming a technical committee for medicine that includes veterinary medicine, human medicine and dentistry. ASIIN should therefore continuously rethink its own structure in relation to its development both as a result of external factors and internal strategies and goals.

The development of new business fields also implies increasing international activities. ASIIN is developing in this direction and sees such activities as more extensive in the future. This is to be welcomed - also against the backdrop of the internationalisation of the HE system - but requires organisational adaptation in the medium term, especially when there are increasing enquiries from countries outside the European higher education sector. The increasingly intensive encounter with other higher education cultures will have an internal impact on ASIIN. Currently, only requests deemed potentially critically problematic (e.g. from countries with recognisably little reference to European norms and values of the HE system) are submitted to the Ethics Advisory Board for review. It was unclear to the review panel where the sensitivity for the necessity for such a request lies.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the close connection of ASIIN to the STEM sector and both its academic and professional actors.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that ASIIN reconsiders the composition and role of the Board of Directors. Board of Directors should include a student member and representative of external stakeholders, while including a member from another discipline (outside of STEM) could also be considered. Stronger involvement of the Board of Directors in the strategic direction of the agency and the monitoring of its strategic goals should be ensured.
- The panel recommends that ASIIN considers the appointment of a Deputy Director with equal powers under the statutes.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests that ASIIN continuously assess the need for its dual structure and observe the future development in higher education legislation since membership in Ltds is an element of contemporary university autonomy.
- The panel suggests that requests for evaluations in countries outside the European HE system be made more transparent and that procedures and responsibilities be clearly defined and documented.
- The panel suggests that ASIIN continuously strategically rethink its own structure with respect to scientific fields not yet covered by the agency

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

Evidence

According to SAR, ASIIN e.V. is organised as a non-profit, registered association. It was established in 1999. ASIIN is entered in the German register of associations (Vereinsregister).

The last amendment registered is:

By resolution of the General Assembly of 10.05.2012, the Articles of Association are amended in §7 (Executive Board).

The members of the Board of Directors shall represent jointly. The special representatives according to § 30 BGB are each authorised to represent the following business areas individually:

- *conclusion, amendment or termination of contracts of all kinds with clients, applicants and employees within the scope of the service and product portfolio,*
- *participation in international projects and tenders,*
- *financial and banking transactions, in particular account management and disposal of accounts of any kind.*

Pursuant to § 30 of the German Civil Code (BGB), the Articles of Association may stipulate that, in addition to the Executive Board, special representatives are to be appointed for certain transactions. The power of representation of such a representative shall, in case of doubt, extend to all legal transactions that are usually entailed by the scope of business assigned to him.

Special representative after 10.5.2012 Dr. Iring Wasser and Birgit Hanny. Birgit Hanny resigned on 16 March 2017.

Currently, Dr Iring Wasser is the only special representative of ASIIN.

According to the SAR, “ASIIN is authorized to operate as agency in Germany by the German Accreditation Council, is part of the EQAR, full member of ENQA and other international bodies.” The homepage of the GAC indicates that ASIIN is one of 10 such agencies.

According to Art. 5 Para. 3 No. 5 of the State Study Accreditation Treaty, it is one of the tasks of the GAC to approve agencies to operate in Germany. This is done on the basis of the resolution of the GAC, and it adopted a procedure for this in February 2018. In the future, accreditation will be granted permanently on the basis of an agency's registration with the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), with the possibility of revocation. In addition, the GAC adopted a transitional regulation for the agencies already active in Germany, which clarifies their responsibilities under the previous as well as the new law.

Besides its own seal, ASIIN is authorized to award professional quality seals in: engineering sciences (EUR-ACE® ("European Accredited Engineer") Label), chemical sciences (Euro Label), computer science/business informatics (Euro-Inf® Label), food sciences (EQAS-Food Label), medical sciences (AMSE/ASIIN seal, based on the standards of the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME)).

In 2007, ASIIN Consult GmbH was founded as a profit-oriented company and is a 100% subsidiary of the non-profit association ASIIN e.V., The GmbH is registered in the German commercial register.

Analysis

ASIIN's structure and status is well suited for its mission of providing external QA of programmes and institutions. Competent authorities recognise ASIIN as a legitimate QA agency and value its contributions to the HE sector.

The legal form (e.V.) enables proximity to the subject areas of the agency, in particular through the established membership structure and recruitment of experts. This must be critically examined under the aspect of independence (3.3).

This form also corresponds to national practices; the establishment of a profit-oriented "subsidiary" is plausible in view of the developments in the field of activity of accreditation agencies.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

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.

2016 review recommendations

- ASIIN should ensure, for example with a code of conduct, that the deployed experts do not act as representatives of an organisation, but instead as independent experts.
- Declarations of impartiality should also be signed as standard in the area of certifying modules and courses and of (type I) evaluations.

Evidence

In the SAR, ASIIN states that independence is a core value in its statutes and in its operations.

With regard to impartiality, all ASIIN procedures require that reviewers confirm their impartiality for the review procedure in which they are involved. Any possible relationship with the institution under review must be stated when the expert is contacted in relation to a particular review process. In accreditation procedures, partiality is precisely defined in agreement with experts: involvement in the teaching at the department/faculty of the higher education institution under review during the last five years, employment as associate or visiting lecturer by the department/faculty of the higher education institution under review, current application for a position or awaiting a call to a chair at the higher education institution under review.

Admission to the expert review panel always takes place after discussion in the responsible committee of ASIIN. Accreditation Commission has the authority to deviate from the opinion of the review panels or technical committees, while technical committees have the same right in relation to the review panels. The independent decisions/recommendation of review panels, technical committees and Accreditation Commissions are still included in full in each accreditation report. ASIIN regulations state that members of evaluation committees are not involved in the voting of the technical committee or Accreditation Commission.

Analysis

ASIIN's internal independence was confirmed in the interviews and the review panel was clear that independence is not only carefully dealt with in documentation but is also recognisable and accepted in the daily operations of the agency. The panel was able to view randomly selected reports from ASIIN's website to confirm this opinion.

Nevertheless, the panel discussed the aspect of independence considering the possibility, confirmed in the interviews, for members of the technical committees to simultaneously hold the position of a reviewer in a procedure. The review panel concluded that ASIIN should avoid concurrent

committee and expert panel membership - regardless of the specified abstention from decisions of the committee - and instead permit committee members to reactivate their role as an expert reviewer only once their term on the committee had ended.

The review panel also discussed the issue of independence from the perspective of decision-making: it was clear to the panel that the new legal accreditation framework as of 2018 ensures independence between the agency and the Accreditation Council's decisions.

However, in connection with the awarding of ASIIN seals, the review panel noted that the potential that programmes offered by members of ASIIN are better placed to achieve such a seal than programmes offered by non-members is not addressed by ASIIN. The panel saw no evidence that this was the case but suggests that, in the spirit of a broader understanding of independence in the sense of the ESG, it would be desirable for ASIIN to also consider this aspect of independence in its documents and practice.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that Accreditation Commission and technical committees' members are not permitted to serve as review panel members for the duration of their term.

Suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests that ASIIN ensures that it considers independence in its broadest sense as understood by the ESG. In particular, ASIIN should implement mechanisms ensuring that its members are not treated preferentially in any way in accreditation/certification procedures.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

2016 review recommendations

- In future ASIIN should analytically evaluate the findings from its own work and publish the results. The newsletters and the meetings can be used for this purpose.
- The results of such thematic analyses should be entered into the agency's internal quality management.

Evidence

Multiple activities performed by ASIIN allow the agency to gain insight into programmes and institutions. This has been used to conduct some structured analyses across not only the German HE system but also across other countries' systems (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Mongolia) as a result of extensive international activities pursued by the agency. Of particular relevance for this standard are the Impact Studies that the agency has been developing since 2018 (e.g. Study on the Impact of ASIIN's Programme Accreditation in the Field of Engineering and Management (2009-2019); International Accreditation in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia; International Accreditation in Higher Education in Mongolia).

Impact studies are ASIIN's method of assessing whether what ASIIN is aiming for is aligned with user expectations (i.e. HEI); as such this is an extremely valuable tool. They are also seen (by the Board of Directors) as *“some kind of self-evaluation, of self-quality process”*. Regarding the topics addressed by the impact studies it became clear to the review panel during the site visit that various actors (e.g. Accreditation Commission, ASIIN's members, technical committees) are consulted to bring forward topics important to them, although in a rather informal manner. However, some other stakeholders are not addressed in this respect (e.g. Representatives of German and overseas stakeholders, including the Economic Advisory Council). It also became clear to the review panel from the SAR and the site visit that different stakeholders (e.g. ASIIN members, experts and committees) receive the impact studies reports for further discussion. As an example, it was mentioned that the technical committees receive the drafts of these thematic analyses and can contribute to their revision.

During the site visit, interviewees expressed the view that impact studies need to be strengthened and conducted more often.

In addition to impact studies, ASIIN also has several other tools useful for thematic analysis: the internal quality management system that ASIIN has established allows the agency to critically reflect on its practices and the results achieved, which provides material for the thematic analyses the agency has produced in the past years.

In the SAR, ASIIN also refers to the ASIIN newsletter and reports to members and committees as regularly published material describing and analysing the general findings of external QA activities, while ASIIN Global Conferences are mentioned as an example of an event useful for, among other things, presenting the findings to various stakeholders. These conferences are events where broad discussions on QA take place and as such are a platform for building trust between different actors and ASIIN.

In the meeting with students' representatives in ASIIN bodies and in expert panels it was expressed that many of the ASIIN's materials, including newsletters and analyses are not understandable for the many students who do not participate in the agency's activities but who might find such information useful and interesting.

Analysis

The newsletters and the reports to members and committees do contain some elements of thematic analysis but cannot be fully understood as such. On the contrary, the impact studies are an effective way for the agency to publish such analyses. These different documents and materials published by ASIIN, including newsletters and impact studies, should be made more understandable for regular students, since this would contribute to supporting capacity building on higher education QA.

It is not fully evident from the SAR and the meetings during the site visit that the different thematic analyses developed by ASIIN are sufficiently disseminated and discussed among the agency's different stakeholders. Also, it was not evident to the review panel how the findings from thematic analyses are used as inputs to the improvement of the QA processes of the agency. However, the review panel did hear during the interviews that the impact studies addressing activities performed outside Germany have been very important in assessing the ethical implications of the Agency's work in more authoritarian countries.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends ASIIN for its efforts in developing real thematic analysis through its impact studies which provide significant insights on the general findings of the agency's external QA activities, both within Germany and abroad. The fact that some of these impact

studies address specific subject fields (e.g. industrial management and mechanical engineering) adds to the relevance ASIIN has in promoting the quality of STEM HE in Germany.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that ASIIN further explore the impact studies, with regard to the possibility of using them as inputs for the agency's internal QM system and improvements to the agency's external QA activities.
- The panel recommends that ASIIN increase dissemination and discussion of the findings of the impact studies among its different stakeholders and specifically the GAC, given their relevance for the German higher education system.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests that different stakeholders are more formally consulted about the topics to be addressed in forthcoming impact studies, in order to make them more relevant for all interested parties and, as a consequence, for the agency's activities and their further improvement.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

2016 review recommendation

- ASIIN should show calculations for the overheads for cross-departmental tasks at the consultant level.

Evidence

The SAR shows the current staffing of ASIIN e.V. with 10 permanent employees, plus volunteers and honorary staff. ASIIN's management consists of the director, who is appointed by the Board of Directors and is responsible for the overall management of all working areas of the agency.

As a non-profit institution, ASIIN enjoys tax benefits (through the exception of VAT) but is not allowed to pursue profit interests. ASIIN finances salaries and other benefits (including cost reimbursements) through accreditation procedures, compulsory contributions from its members and solicitation of public funds.

ASIIN Consult GmbH has two employees.

The number of experts in the expert pool is estimated at 800, the number of review panel members at 200 for programme accreditations and 100 for system accreditations. Recently, ASIIN has also established a pool for international experts. Aspects related to age and gender diversity have been given importance since the last review and as a result, diversity of experts has increased.

The office space is rented and the infrastructure is maintained by a service provider.

Analysis

The association structure and the solid embeddedness of the agency into its core areas in science, organisations and companies allow for a lean structure, although the review panel noted the small number of permanent employees given the amount of work carried out - given the extensive activities of on average 250 reviews carried out annually for programmes and 13 for institutions, ASIIN's permanent staff is comparatively small. This is particularly important considering that ASIIN staff plays a very important (and very constructive) role in conducting the reviews.

The flat structure and hierarchy of the agency already mentioned under ESG 3.1 means that internal promotion opportunities are rare. This potentially explains the staffing problems in the past (high turnover mentioned in the SAR), as well as a possible understaffing in various positions.

The future perspective for ASIIN implies declining activities in (especially German) programme accreditations, while at the same time intensification of international activities. This includes strengthening consultancy and type 2 evaluations, with a resulting reduction in the e.V. and an increase in the GmbH activities. ASIIN can deal with this internally by transferring staff from the e.V. to the GmbH.

However, this development also carries the risk of blurring the boundary between the non-profit association and the limited liability company. For this reason, the panel suggested, under ESG 3.1, that the continuation of the two-pillar model be continuously reviewed. Should revised state university laws permit memberships in limited liability companies, the structures of ASIIN could be readjusted.

Contrary to current practice, the review panel finds the division of the strategic plan into two sections for e.V. and Consult problematic. The panel is aware of the fact that questioning the dual structure is a sensitive issue for the organisation, but interdependence as well as synergy between the two entities is unmistakable - both in the profile presentation and in terms of strategic planning.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

2016 review recommendations

- The agency should formalise its existing QM system in the near future. A new QM structure should contain the description of the core processes and a clear assignment of responsibilities. It should show the mechanisms for feedback used by the agency and arrange for the regular analysis and discussion inside the agency of the findings reached through feedback processes.
- Basic guidelines regarding quality assurance should also be developed for certifying modules and courses and for (type I) evaluations.
- The responsibility of the ethics committee should be extended to the area of (type I) evaluations.

Evidence

ASIIN has implemented processes for internal QA, which are well documented in its Quality Manual (German version). Detailed information on the ASIIN internal QA system is available in its internet

website under the designation “Culture of Quality”, which includes the ASIIN mission, values, approach and a link to the agency’s Quality Manual, where its internal QA system is specified with a significant level of detail.

The SAR drafting process was understood by the ASIIN staff as an opportunity to reflect again on what the agency does in terms of QA of their activities. It also allowed ASIIN to focus more attention on all the recommendations received in previous evaluations.

ASIIN continuously collects and processes feedback from different stakeholders: technical committee members, Accreditation/Certification Commission members, review panel members and evaluated HEIs. There are yearly reports on analysis of stakeholders’ feedback. Newsletters allow ASIIN to give feedback to its stakeholders on changes made due to their feedback.

Certain specific actions have been taken over the last years to improve the way ASIIN operates as a result of the feedback collected from different stakeholders, mostly the peer-review experts, but also the HEIs. Examples include drafting the short overviews of the HE systems of the countries where ASIIN operates, in order to assist the peer experts in becoming more acquainted with different national contexts or the establishment of specific peer training for the international activities.

In the meeting with the Board of Directors the review panel was told that the ASIIN Global Conferences work as a think tank for quality assurance as well as a means of building trust among the agency’s stakeholders. ASIIN considers this relevant for its internal operations. In the meeting with the GAC the review panel was told that ASIIN learns from its experiences and improves its work accordingly.

Impact studies are also considered as a relevant part of the QM system of ASIIN in the sense that they provide analysis of the impact of the agency’s activities across higher education systems. However, the panel could not find sufficient evidence that findings from thematic analyses are used as inputs for the improvement of the QA processes of the agency.

In the SAR, the Quality Manual, and during the different meetings held during the site visit, the review panel was not able to find any sound evidence of the existence and/or use of key performance indicators for monitoring ASIIN activities.

Analysis

The six levels on which the ASIIN internal QA system is based (i.e. Mission; Objectives and Strategy; QM Policy Manual; Processes; Job Instructions; QM Templates) are adequate to assure the agency has in place the necessary processes for defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of its activities. These levels form the basis for setting up a real and effective QM system, since they include ASIIN’s mission, objectives and strategy, policies, the processes, job descriptions and templates. This means that they provide the structure for managing quality within ASIIN from the political and strategic levels to the more tactical and operational ones.

The review panel considers that the Quality Manual adequately translates ASIIN implemented processes for internal QA and, as such, is a very relevant document to help stakeholders understand all ASIIN activities and how these are quality assured. However, the panel did not find evidence of a significant use of this document by ASIIN stakeholders and was informed by some interviewees that the current format is not user-friendly.

It was evident from the SAR and the interviews that ASIIN’s internal QA covers all the agency’s type I activities. Quality expectations have been established for each activity field in the QM Manual, although it is not sufficiently clear to the review panel how their accomplishment is monitored.

Furthermore, it was not clear to the panel how far the established expectations are indeed quality indicators for the agency's activities. Therefore, the panel was unsure to what degree ASIIN relies on a set of quality indicators to monitor and improve the quality of its mode of operations, including the type I activities it performs. It must also be noted that the level of detail of the German version of the Manual has not been fully translated into its English version, which would be beneficial considering that ASIIN performs a significant amount of international activities.

Process data sheets, work instructions and templates ensure standardisation of operations and are examples of relevant mechanisms to ensure quality and consistency in the work of the agency. This consistency was confirmed by the various stakeholder groups who spoke to the review panel.

Different mechanisms exist to collect information from various stakeholders; the information is then used as input for improving the work of the agency: for example, the *Jour Fixe* staff meetings; client and peer satisfaction surveys; routine communications between committees and commissions; impact studies. The review panel understood from those it spoke to that changes are made in ASIIN's mode of operation as a result of such feedback (e.g. training for international reviews; documents on foreign countries higher education systems).

From the meetings with different stakeholders the review panel concluded that both the drafting of the SAR and its final analysis/approval had not been widely disseminated and discussed by all ASIIN stakeholders, namely its members (General Assembly), board of directors, technical committees and the accreditation and certification commissions. Due to this document's relevance for the QA of the agency's activities, the panel is of the opinion that such dissemination and discussion is of paramount importance.

The review panel considers the annual planning meeting of the ASIIN office to be good practice as it allows for internal analysis of the work of the agency, using the multiple inputs and feedback gathered throughout the year from ASIIN stakeholders (staff, HEIs/clients, peers, technical committees, commissions), and ensuring outputs related to the improvement of ASIIN operations and services. The annual meeting between chairs of technical committees and the members of accreditation commission is also considered to be an important practice to regularly monitor and improve the quality of ASIIN operations and services.

Panel considers that ASIIN has addressed most of the recommendations and suggestions for further improvement from the 2016 external review. Although there is still space for improvement in some of these areas (see details in analysis of each specific standard), overall ASIIN successfully implemented significant changes in order to improve its functioning in accordance with review panel recommendations.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that in the future procedures, since SAR is also a relevant element of ASIIN internal QA system due to its character of self-evaluating the work of the agency according to the ESG, both its drafting and final approval be more widely disseminated and discussed within the agency members, technical committees and Accreditation and Certification commission.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- In relation to the Quality Manual, the panel suggests that ASIIN:
 - Improves its dissemination as a very relevant document to help stakeholders understand all ASIIN activities and how these are quality assured.
 - Improves its format to make it easier to access and use; perhaps by having an interactive format rather than just a PDF file

- Provides a full English translation so that it is fully accessible to all foreign institutions that ASIIN is or will be involved with.
- The panel suggests that ASIIN disseminates more fully the changes implemented in ASIIN services and procedures as a result of the stakeholder feedback.
- The panel suggests that ASIIN ensures that its processes for monitoring its expectations are clear and that it also ensures that any quality indicators that it uses to monitor and improve the quality of its work are clearly defined.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

Evidence

Since its creation, ASIIN has undertaken multiple external reviews on a cyclical basis. These have been national, through the GAC which, until recently, periodically re-accredited ASIIN in a process that checked its procedures, practices and by-laws. The GAC also carried out interim observations of accreditation procedures and inspections of accreditation results. ASIIN's last accreditation visit by the GAC was in 2015 and resulted in ASIIN's reaccreditation by the Council until 2022. Up until 1st January 2018, GAC accreditation was also the first step to ensure the listing of ASIIN in EQAR and full membership of ENQA. As the review criteria of the GAC included parts 2 and 3 of the European Standards and Guidelines, EQAR and ENQA used the report to make their own, independent decisions and, as a result, ASIIN has been a full member of ENQA for more than a decade and was one of the first agencies to be listed on the EQAR.

ASIIN has also been reviewed against the International Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE) "Guidelines of Good Practice".

In order to award the different European field-specific labels, ASIIN must additionally undertake regular reviews by the organisations that authorise the labels. Currently, ASIIN is being reviewed by the European Network for the Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAE) and has been reviewed by the European Quality Assurance Network for Informatics Education (EQANIE) which authorises the award of the EUR-ACE label.

Analysis

It was clear to the review panel, from the multiple results of reviews undertaken by ASIIN that it viewed, that the agency is reviewed on a very regular basis. Indeed, its disciplinary base requires it to undergo review more frequently than is often the case and this provides a continuous cycle of accreditation. ASIIN has been regularly reviewed against the ESG and has supplemented the benefits of such reviews by testing itself against other international standards such as the INQAAHE GGP.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part I of the ESG.

2016 review recommendation

- It should be publicly clarified (for example via the agency's homepage), that the only standards catalogues that can be used in evaluation procedures (type I) are those that comply with the ESG.

Evidence

The SAR states that, “the standards embedded in Part I of the ESG are reviewed as a standard procedure in every programme and system accreditation as well as certification procedures of ASIIN”. The SAR also explains that, for ASIIN, this translates into an opportunity for the HEI to take responsibility for its own quality assurance and to build a system that allows the results of the internal QA system to feed into strategic planning.

The following handbooks cover the ASIIN review processes within the scope of this review:

- Degree Programmes - ASIIN Quality Seal: Engineering, Informatics, Architecture, Natural Sciences, Mathematics (individually and in combination with other Subject Areas) (Includes programme accreditation in Germany, labels such as EUR-ACE and Eurobachelor/master as well as joint programmes)
- Institutional Accreditation/Certification/Evaluation Criteria for the ASIIN System Seal (includes German system accreditation)
- Standards for the Certification of (Further) Education and Training

Each handbook contains a table that maps the ESG part I against ASIIN standards and the GAC requirements, as can be seen in the following example from the Handbook on Criteria for the Accreditation of Degree Programmes (full table can be found in the annex to this report):

The ASIIN seal		Accreditation Council (AC) seal
ASIIN Requirements		Corresponding Requirements of the German Accreditation Council ⁵
5.3	Relevant rules The rights and duties of both the higher education institution and students are clearly defined and binding (guidelines, statutes etc.). All relevant course-related information is available in the language of the degree programme and accessible for anyone involved. [Documentation/supporting records: guidelines etc.]	ESG 1.4 ESG 1.7 2.8 Transparency and Documentation
6	QUALITY MANAGEMENT: QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT	

<p>The programme is subject to regular internal quality assessment procedures aiming at continuous improvement. All responsibilities and mechanisms defined for the purposes of continued development are binding.</p> <p>Students and other stakeholders take part in the quality assurance process. The outcomes and all measures derived are made known to anyone involved. All methods employed and data analysed are suitable for the purpose and used to continue improving the degree programme, especially with a view to identifying and resolving weaknesses. To this end, the information they provide includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - whether the intended learning outcomes required to obtain the degree have been achieved; - the academic feasibility of the degree programme; - student mobility (abroad, where applicable); - how the qualifications profile is accepted on the labour market; - the effect of measures in use to avoid unequal treatment at the higher education institution (if any). <p>[Documentation/supporting records: results obtained in internal and external evaluations, statistical data regarding new students, graduates, etc., statistics about alumni]</p>	<p>ESG 1.1 ESG 1.2 ESG 1.9 ESG 1.10</p>	<p>2.4 Academic Feasibility 2.9 Quality Assurance and Further Development</p>
---	---	--

NB: Type one evaluations, carried out against the ESG, can be at either institutional or programme level, according to the institution's wishes. There is, therefore, no specific handbook and those mentioned above are applied as appropriate.

Analysis

The review panel viewed the very clear examples of mapping of the ESG part I against ASIIN's standards for its own seals and also the requirements of the GAC. These mapping tables go one step further by either ensuring that the ASIIN standards are specific enough to provide a useful framework against which a HEI can measure its own internal processes and systems and/or setting out the kinds of questions that a review panel might ask on a particular topic.

The standards are reinforced for each review method by the provision of a template for the programme/institutional SAR that is structured to follow the ESG part I.

ASIIN's website clearly provides a link to the ESG for type I evaluations, accompanied by text that explains that these evaluations are carried out against those externally determined standards (i.e. the ESG).

The review panel was convinced of the efficacy of ASIIN's approach to part one of the ESG and this was confirmed by representatives of both German and foreign HEIs that spoke to the panel about their experiences of having undertaken an ASIIN accreditation process. Foreign HEIs spoke of the beneficial experience of being reviewed against German and international standards (with specific reference to the ESG part I) within a process that encouraged improvement but that, according to one interviewee, did not hesitate to take the correct accreditation decision. Students who spoke to the panel also spoke of their confidence in the correct decision being taken against the standards. A representative from a German university also recognised the improvement-oriented approach and felt that ASIIN could go even further in this regard with a view to ensuring that staff at programme level could appreciate the benefits of the accreditation process.

The review panel also discussed the mapping of part one of the ESG to ASIIN standards with the agency's staff. Members of staff were clear that the standards set out in the ESG part I are fundamental to ASIIN's review processes but they emphasised that it is equally important to ensure that the standards are more than boxes to be ticked and that it is their application and use in the process that brings them alive.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the clear link between the mapping of the ESG part I, GAC and ASIIN standards with input element of the review/accreditation methods. HEIs are encouraged to consider the standards in part one of the ESG in depth through the structured format of the SAR.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

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.

2016 review recommendations

- It should be made clear that in certifying modules and courses in accordance with ESG standard 1.2 compliance with the desired level of the European qualification framework will be reviewed.
- Work should be done towards greater diversity in committees and expert groups in respect of background experience, professional conviction, age, background and gender.
- Membership of a student in the certification committee must be arranged as a rule and the member must be appointed promptly.

Evidence

As stated in previous sections, ASIIN conducts a number of different external QA procedures at programme and institutional level, including processes that are in line with GAC criteria, certification which is applied in lifelong learning programmes and is usually exercised on units smaller than a complete study programme, and different kinds of evaluations for quality assurance and quality enhancement which do not end in any official accreditation decision.

Standards and methodologies for these different types of procedures are codified in three important ASIIN documents: Criteria for the Accreditation of Degree Programmes - ASIIN Quality Seal, Institutional Accreditation/Certification/Evaluation Criteria for the ASIIN System Seal, and Standards for the Certification of (Further) Education and Training. When discussing programme and institutional accreditation, it is important to note that the two documents prescribing the criteria for awarding the ASIIN Seal also include reference (or compliance) to the GAC criteria since in the German HE system, if a client HEI is interested, ASIIN simultaneously conducts the procedure for the purpose of GAC accreditation, ASIIN seal award and specialised European label award.

This integration or using the same procedure for different formal outcomes is referred to as “piggybacking approach” in the SAR and is aimed at lowering the administrative complexity and workload for the HEIs while also increasing the attractiveness of ASIIN services. The way that this integration works is that, for example, in programme accreditation three different sets of standards form the basis for the overall set of standards which will be used; first is the GAC criteria, second are specialised European labels criteria and third is ASIIN’s own criteria (see ESG 2.1 for an example of the criteria). These three are then merged together after a careful procedure to avoid overlaps and redundancies and the HEI under review can therefore be assured of their compliance to each of the three sources by receiving three different seals. When it comes to assuring that ASIIN’s standards are compliant with the GAC criteria and criteria of specialised European labels, this is achieved through external reviews of ASIIN and authorisation of the organisations responsible; GAC

for German HE and various field-specific organisations for specialised European labels. Regarding the GAC, so far there have not been any issues with ASIIN's compliance, quite the contrary, there is a high level of confidence in ASIIN's reviews and reports (see ESG 2.6)

This system of integration of different standards has implications for the ways in which ASIIN approaches development and revision of its standards. Since standards from the two sources mentioned above are determined externally, ASIIN only has autonomy in developing and revising its own standards and in integrating all these different standards in a meaningful whole. Procedurally, ASIIN's Accreditation Commission, Certification Commission and technical committees are crucial for the process of developing and revising ASIIN's standards, each in a different area. For example, dealing with programme accreditation, technical committees have discussions based on the feedback of review panels and propose changes to the standards and methodology for their respective field.

The fact that these expert bodies of ASIIN are the main actors in designing methodologies and standards for different external QA procedures is also important for stakeholder involvement. Since stakeholder involvement is very strong in all these bodies (they all include representatives of HEIs, students and industry) and the stakeholders in practice contribute a lot to the work of these bodies - students mentioned during the interviews that their voice is always heard and even asked for explicitly - this is also a platform through which stakeholders are involved in developing and revising external QA standards and methodologies.

During the interviews, various stakeholders expressed their strong confidence in ASIIN's standards being fit for purpose of assuring and enhancing the quality of HE institutions and programmes. HEIs stated that the standards are mostly useful and applicable, while students further emphasised that ASIIN's STEM field focus enables it to provide an in-depth, reliable assessment and recommendations. HEIs were also confident that ASIIN's standards are sufficiently flexible and adaptive for accreditation of innovative (in content, structure or format) study programmes. The review panel heard evidence from a foreign institution that the agency is successful in ensuring that its standards are sufficiently applicable internationally in very diverse environments as well, as the feedback from HEIs from abroad was very positive, with one representative stating that ASIIN *"applies fundamental QA methodology which robust enough to be applied in different national and cultural contexts"*. ASIIN also has reliable mechanisms of assuring the quality of decision-making about outcomes of external QA processes (e.g. system of checks and balances and strong involvement of ASIIN staff), more on which can be found under ESG 2.5.

ASIIN accreditation or certification also brings several other tangible benefits for the HE institutions and programmes, besides the fundamental purpose of leading to improved quality. Receiving specialised European labels is very important for HE institutions in the STEM sector, especially for attracting international students, and ASIIN seal is internationally recognised as well – it provides HEIs with a benchmark against international standards of quality. HEIs also stated that ASIIN's reviews triggered and stimulated self-reflection and self-analysis at their institutions, which was helpful in the longer term.

When it comes to balancing accountability and enhancement in the reviews, ASIIN pays a lot of attention to striking an optimal balance, although they are aware this is a challenge for any QA agency. In any review, both aspects are present simultaneously and assessment of whether standards are met is followed by suggestions of how they could be met. These suggestions are given in two forms, mandatory and optional, the latter is more of an enhancement dimension. In providing these recommendations and suggestions, review panels are however careful never to tell a HEI exactly what to do but encourage them to reflect on what they are doing and why in order to devise their own way of accomplishing set goals. In general, HEIs were positive about degree to which ASIIN

manages to balance the two aspects, but they did mention that in the future they expected the system to progressively become more enhancement-based.

Analysis

The way in which ASIIN constantly revises its standards and methodologies is in the review panel's view efficient and effective in ensuring that these are reliable and useful for the HE sector and its stakeholders. Involvement of technical committees that bring together different stakeholders and experts in in-depth discussions is deemed as a very positive influence on the whole process, and the strong involvement of stakeholders described above ensures that the standards are up to date with current developments in the sector. As already mentioned under ESG 3.5, ASIIN has managed to increase the diversity of its expert panels in reaction to recommendation of the 2016 review, however further work remains to be done in ensuring a stronger diversity in Accreditation Commission, Certification Commission and technical committees' membership.

Judging from the input provided by stakeholders (HEIs, students, industry representatives) the standards and methodologies are fit for purpose of assuring and enhancing quality of HE. It is very important for the trust that the HEIs have in the system of external QA that they believe that ASIIN's standards reliably assess quality, and this is the case with this agency. Furthermore, the fact that HEIs and other stakeholders perceive tangible benefits from recommendations and suggestions resulting from reviews show that ASIIN does not only perform the control function but also pays a lot of attention to helping institutions improve.

Integration of GAC standards, specialised European labels standards and ASIIN's own standards into one set of standards is a complex and demanding task, which presents a significant workload for ASIIN's internal structures. However, the panel is of the opinion that ASIIN has managed to navigate through this issue successfully and create consistent sets of standards which enable HEIs to receive multiple outcomes through just one procedure, which is highly appreciated.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends the strong role of technical committees in developing and revising external QA standards and methodologies (especially in the area of programme accreditation). These bodies, that generally contribute a lot to the agency's operations, are very fitting platforms for ensuring meaningful stakeholder and expert involvement in producing and constantly updating ASIIN's standards and methodologies.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

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

2016 review recommendation

- In the area of (type I) evaluations the agency should initiate the implementation of recommendations and/or offer to assist in their implementation. For (type I) evaluations, on-site visits should generally take place and principles should be established which state in which cases on-site visits are not necessary.
- The agency should proceed in accordance with the rules established by it in their own policy paper on the separation of accreditation and consultation and for accreditation abroad based on evaluations should predominantly designate experts who were not already deployed as experts in the previous evaluation. If it no longer finds the stipulation to be appropriate, it should discard this.

Evidence

ASIIN has very precisely defined processes and procedures for external QA. These are codified in three fundamental ASIIN documents for external QA (Criteria for the Accreditation of Degree Programmes - ASIIN Quality Seal, Institutional Accreditation/Certification/Evaluation Criteria for the ASIIN System Seal, and Standards for the Certification of (Further) Education and Training).

Generally (in all types of external reviews conducted by ASIIN), the procedure starts with an expression of interest from a HEI. After an agreement is made between ASIIN and the interested HEI, a review panel is formed and the HEI delivers a self-assessment report. ASIIN then prepares and executes a site visit (mandatory aspect of all reviews), after which the review report is drafted. The reviewed HEI has an opportunity to comment before an appropriate body of ASIIN (Accreditation Commission or Certification Commission, depending on the procedure) makes the final decision (final at least in ASIIN's purview, accreditation decision in the German HE is made by the GAC as already elaborated in sections above). Division of tasks between ASIIN and GAC also impact the issue of follow-up; in case of accreditation in German HE, follow up is not conducted by ASIIN because the final accreditation decision is not made by ASIIN but rather by GAC which then conducts the follow-up (see also the Additional Observations section of this report). In ASIIN's other procedures, follow-up is implemented in case of conditional accreditation/certification (which forms a large majority of the outcomes of ASIIN seal award process), after which the reviewed institution has to rectify certain aspects in the set timeframe. In case of unconditional accreditation/certification there is no follow-up, but instead a mandatory significant change report is prescribed which serves ASIIN to assess whether those changes influence the running accreditation.

When it comes to avoiding bias and ensuring objectivity, ASIIN clearly differentiates between its accreditation and consultancy activities; ASIIN Board has decided that ASIIN will not conduct accreditation of those institutions/programmes at which consultancy activities were carried out. The panel could find no evidence of this policy not being adhered to consistently.

Procedures are also explained in great detail on the ASIIN's website. Interviewed HEIs considered the website very useful, since it contains all the necessary information in an easily searchable and accessible way. For some HEIs from abroad it was also useful to have the website in multiple languages. In addition to this, ASIIN notifies the reviewed institution via email about all aspects of a review, including templates and similar useful documents. After this, the project manager is in constant communication with the institution under review in order to provide any clarification, guidance or assistance in general when needed. HEI expressed their satisfaction with the manner and efficiency of this communication.

Analysis

Judging from the interviews with different stakeholders, procedures set in ASIIN's documents, and communicated to HEIs through the documents themselves, websites and targeted communication,

are implemented consistently and the panel did not find any evidence of deviations from the prescribed procedures.

The panel determined that HEIs, as the primary users of ASIIN's services, are very well aware of all the procedures and guidelines for carrying them out and are very satisfied with the support offered by ASIIN staff. This clearly demonstrates that ASIIN's procedures are sufficiently well communicated and accessible to the users.

The documentation could, however, provide better guidance about the site visit schedule and especially the guidelines about groups of stakeholders to be interviewed. In the template for site visits in programme accreditation, external stakeholders are not included as standard interviewees, which is a deficiency considering that external stakeholders can provide a very valuable perspective on the programme level, for example about educational outcomes or alignment with societal needs. The panel received information that this group is, in fact, as a standard practice included in the site visit programmes even though it is not prescribed in the site visit template, but it would provide a complete picture of the process if this good practice was codified.

The fact that ASIIN only implements follow-up procedures when the outcome of accreditation/certification procedure is conditional is another area in which improvements could be made. Although the current system complies with ESG 2.3 and EQAR's interpretation of it, one way to make ASIIN's external reviews even more reliable and to provide an enhancement focus would be to require a follow-up that will take place before the next reaccreditation regardless of the (rare) result of an unconditional accreditation outcome.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that ASIIN redesigns the template for site visits to make sure that they are accurate in mentioning the involvement of external stakeholders.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests that ASIIN implements a documented follow-up process regardless of the outcome of a review, which would take place before the next accreditation/certification procedure.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

2016 review recommendations

- In the future it must be ensured that representatives of students and of professional practice are involved in all expert groups in all procedures.
- For bundle procedures abroad a sufficiently large expert group for the number of study programmes to be assessed is required.
- The agency should expand the pool of experts to include more foreign experts and/or experts with international experience. This also applies to procedures for system accreditation, but not only these.

- Principles and procedures for selection and preparation of the expert groups in the (type I) evaluations should be published.

Evidence

All review panels are constituted to involve different types of expertise, including those with expertise in academia, those from the professional world and students. Representatives of industry that are part of the review panels have a special say regarding employability issues. Since ASIIN is a subject specific agency specialised in the STEM field, review panel members are well acquainted with the scientific area of programmes under review, which is considered by stakeholders to be a very positive asset/characteristic of ASIIN. Furthermore, there is evidence that in the case of bundle processes (interdisciplinary or cluster procedures), special attention is given to the composition of the review panel in order to guarantee that it has the necessary competences and skills to cover different subject areas. ASIIN experts are well respected by the representatives of the QA offices and teachers due to the fact that they always give good advice and recommendations on how to improve the study programmes under review. According to the representatives of the ASIIN Accreditation Commission, ASIIN experts are seen by HEIs and programmes as “critical friends” that can help institutions/departments to improve the quality of their educational offer. One mechanism of ensuring reliability of the review panels is that they always include at least one experienced reviewer, which allows new reviewers to work with substantial support in their first external review. Participating in a first external review is as such considered to be “in-job” training.

Experts are selected to each review panel from existent and constantly updated pools of experts (one for programmes; another for institutions; and another one for certifications). There is an established process for selecting the experts (responsibility for it lies in the accreditation or certification commissions, depending on the type of review), which assures that each review panel has the necessary competences and skills to adequately perform their tasks. There are also written, published principles for the nomination of reviewers.

ASIIN relies on the German students’ expert pool to select student experts to be included in the review panels. In international accreditation, ASIIN includes students from the countries where the reviews take place as experts in the review panels. Student representatives were very clear in stating that in ASIIN students are not only engaged and equal members of the review panels but also of the technical committees (for programme accreditation) and of the Accreditation Commission.

A project manager is assigned to each review team. Although he/she does not act as a reviewer, their role is very important for the well-functioning of the team. The project manager is in charge of collecting all the questions and notes; mediating the relation between panels and HEI; helping the panel prepare for the review; and asking for additional documentation from the institution/programme and structures the timeline of the review.

Training on ASIIN procedures and standards is regularly available for all experts; e.g. once per year there is an online training which covers recent changes in the accreditation/evaluation systems (e.g. change from programme accreditation towards institutional accreditation), although it is not mandatory that experts take the training provided by ASIIN before participating in an evaluation. However, all panel members are briefed by ASIIN staff on the standards and all other materials needed for a review before each procedure. In fact, ASIIN staff (project managers) are key factors in supporting experts’ self-training. This is a constant process; the materials change and experts are continuously involved in reviews so they need to be continuously updated about any changes in order to adapt to them. A specific training course has been organised for ASIIN international activities. The experts involved in such training were then asked to apply to conduct reviews abroad.

Independence of experts is ensured; experts cannot be employees at the reviewed institutions or in institutions located in the same region; experts sign a confidentiality and impartiality declaration. The experts conduct the reviews and send their reports, with recommendations, to the technical committees. After that it is up to the technical committees and/or to the Accreditation/Certification Commission to decide on the accreditation/certification of the study programmes (ASIIN seal). Experts with whom the panel met during the site visit had a very positive view of ASIIN, its processes and its staff.

Analysis

The fact that all ASIIN review panels are composed of representatives from HEIs, industry and student bodies allows the panels to have a broad overview of the programmes/institutions/modules under evaluation. There is sufficient evidence that ASIIN experts have the adequate expertise to review the specific subject fields that ASIIN covers and that they have an important role in improving the quality of German higher education offer in the STEM fields. Furthermore, and judging from the evidence collected, the panel was assured that representatives of students and of professional practice are involved in all expert groups and in all procedures, including those taking place abroad.

Regarding the accreditation procedures conducted in Germany (programme and system), the panel did not find sound evidence that ASIIN had sufficiently addressed the recommendation to include more foreign experts and/or experts with international experience in its pool of experts. However, the panel noted that ASIIN has organised a specific training course for international activities. Such an initiative may contribute to increasing the number of ASIIN experts involved in international activities and, as such, add to the development of experts' international experience. The drafting of short overviews of the higher education systems of the countries where ASIIN operates (see ESG 3.6) contributes to ensuring that in reviews abroad experts have sufficient knowledge of the higher education system in which the review takes place.

Regarding reviews abroad, the panel considers it good practice to include students from the country in which the review takes place as experts in the review panels. Following this practice, inclusion of academics from the country in which an international review takes place would also be beneficial, provided that the academics receive adequate training on ASIIN procedures and standards.

Because the training is not mandatory, it is possible to have in a review panel a peer review expert that has never undertaken any formal training, although he/she will have had some briefing on the specific review. Although the panel found no evidence that this lack of training is a common occurrence, there is a possibility that it could happen and that it could impact on the reliability and adequate level of competences for conducting a review.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends ASIIN for the careful selection of their experts, as well as members of the technical committees, since it was clear from the different interviews that they were generally considered as highly skilled and competent to review different subject fields in which ASIIN operates, contributing to the improvement of higher education offer in STEM.
- The panel commends the inclusion of students from the country in which the review takes place as experts in the review panels for conducting reviews abroad.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that ASIIN make the initial training of experts for all activities performed by ASIIN mandatory.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests including international experts in the review panels responsible for accreditation/certification/evaluation activities within Germany on a more systematic basis.
- The panel also suggests including academics from the countries where an international review takes place, following training on ASIIN procedures and standards.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:

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.

Evidence

In ensuring consistency of outcomes of different ASIIN's external QA procedures, the main work is done by ASIIN staff, i.e. the project manager, and by the responsible ASIIN body: Accreditation Commission, Certification Commission or technical committees.

For example, in programme accreditation, the technical committees ensure consistency and compare the work and reports of different review panels by providing a joint framework for levelling different reports/recommendations. This procedure can sometimes be very demanding for the technical committees (for example, if more than one such committee is involved), but this is perceived as one of their fundamental tasks.

The Accreditation Commission has a similar role at a higher level; it ensures that the approach of different technical committees (or directly review panels in case of institutional accreditation) is consistent.

The technical committees also play an important role in guiding the review panels in arriving at their overall decision/recommendation from a set of judgements about specific individual standards. There is no clear procedure outlined, but the technical committees and review panels are instructed to base their overall decision on the severity of the problem and especially the time needed to remedy the issues – the less time is deemed to be needed, the less of a negative impact a deficiency will have on an overall assessment of a programme or an institution, and vice versa.

Although higher level bodies have the formal authority to override the recommendations of lower level bodies (e.g. technical committees can override a recommendation from a review panel and Accreditation Commission can override a recommendation from a specific technical committee), this almost never happens in practice because ASIIN staff already ensure the quality and consistency of the report before it reaches the first decision-making body (e.g. a technical committee). A typical procedure if, for example, a technical committee is unsatisfied with the conclusions or work in

general of a review panel would be to return the report to the review panel for improvement. Even in rare cases when a technical committee would unilaterally change the recommendation of a review panel in order to ensure consistency between the work of different review panels, the original recommendation is still included in the documentation, together with the argument for changing it.

In view of HEIs and other stakeholders, ASIIN's criteria for outcomes of an external QA process are clear, understandable and transparent – they know what to expect of a procedure conducted by ASIIN. HEIs also expressed strong confidence during the interviews with the review panel in the professionalism and independence of various ASIIN bodies, meaning that the experts involved in these bodies serve in individual capacity and are independent and autonomous from their organisations or institutions.

Analysis

When it comes to ensuring consistency of outcomes of external QA processes, ASIIN has reliable mechanisms grounded in the structure of ASIIN bodies. Having a three-level structure (review panels, technical committees, Accreditation/Certification Commission) and a strong involvement from ASIIN staff helps ensure consistency because these different instances act as checks on each other. In this system of checks, a good balance is achieved between a more hierarchical approach (a higher-level body has formal authority to unilaterally change the recommendation of a lower level body) and a more bottom-up approach (informally, the authority of higher-level bodies is rarely exercised and there is instead a more cooperative relationship between bodies of different levels).

The panel found no evidence of systematic inconsistency in external reviews conducted by ASIIN, and the very positive opinion of stakeholders (especially HEIs as the primary users) about the clarity and transparency of the standards, as well as fairness of the final decision, demonstrates that the system is operating appropriately.

However, relatively little attention is given to the issue of how a review panel should arrive at an overall judgement from a set of judgements about individual standards, which is an important aspect of consistency. The standard that ASIIN applies (severity of the problem and the time needed to remedy it) is appropriate, but it could be further developed and emphasised.

One important aspect to note regarding ensuring consistency is that in accreditations conducted in German HE, ASIIN cannot guarantee the consistency of the final decision on accreditation because that is made by the GAC. This is, however, another facet of the complexities of the relationship and division of tasks between the agencies and the GAC in the German system of accreditation.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests that ASIIN integrate guidance of how an overall judgement is derived from a set of judgements about individual standards in the guidelines recorded in ASIIN's official documents and especially in training of experts (to be) involved in review panels.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

Standard:

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.

Evidence

In different meetings (e.g. GAC, representatives of rectors/deans; representatives of QM offices and teaching staff; representatives of technical committees' members) ASIIN reports were considered as very clear, informative and useful, both for external decisions on programme and institutional accreditation (by the GAC) and for institutions' internal quality improvements. For example, the review panel heard that *"there are lots of changes occurring in programmes due to the information contained in the reports"* (rectors'/deans' representatives; QM offices and teachers' representatives) and that *"reports can be used by programmes as a lever for change, to support change"* (representatives of technical committees' members). In international activities, reference was made to the fact that the reports take into account the institutional and/or programme context as well as the country's context. The panel also heard some concrete examples of the reports' usefulness for the institutions which were provided during the interviews: for example, changes in the study programme design and curricula; changes in the name of the programmes; in learning and teaching methodologies; and in internal QA methods.

In the meeting with representatives of the GAC this position was further reinforced. ASIIN reports were seen as highly reliable and practically useful for all GAC purposes. They were considered to be well structured and based on insightful information, making it easy to see the overall recommendation regarding accreditation (decision).

Procedurally, the draft of the review panel report is done by the ASIIN project manager with input from the experts and cross-checked by one of the other members of the ASIIN staff. ASIIN staff (project managers) therefore play a very important professional role in drafting and reviewing the reports produced by review panels before they go to technical committees or Accreditation/Certification Commission. This is intended to ensure the overall quality of the reports, as well as their intra and inter consistency. HEIs always have the opportunity to give feedback on the draft version of the report.

In the meeting with the ASIIN director it was clearly explained that a report is made of "two reports": one with factual information about the fulfilment of the accreditation/certification standards and another where peers use their individual expertise to assess the programme according to the typical learning outcomes of the discipline that the reviewed programme belongs to; these are referenced to national and European practice in the specific subject field.

The review panel confirmed that all accreditation, certification and evaluation reports are published on the ASIIN website, together with the formal decisions taken by the agency or with a link to the website of the body taking the final decision (GAC in the case of accreditation procedures). Reports are accessible to a broad range of constituencies, namely the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. There is in most cases a need to master the German language since the vast majority of the reports are written in German. All the decisions are also published in the DEQAR database and in all the European umbrella organisations that authorise ASIIN to award specific labels.

Analysis

ASIIN publishes all its reports according to the rules for accreditation, certification and type I evaluation procedures. However, the vast majority of the reports are written in German, which prevents the international community from fully understanding their content. Since ASIIN is involved in a significant number of international activities, having the reports available in English would contribute to improved transparency and mutual understanding.

It is highly encouraging that ASIIN's reports are held in such high esteem both by the GAC and HEIs, since this is strong evidence of their high quality. From HEIs perspective, the usefulness of the reports in supporting improvements aimed at increasing the reviewed programme/institution's quality shows that the reports are fit for the general purposes of external QA.

The system of multiple checks and balances implemented by ASIIN regarding the production of reports (with the first draft being written and checked by the agency's staff – project manager and another colleague) adequately ensures their quality and consistency. Furthermore, in the case of programme accreditation, the work done by the technical committees is highly efficient in ensuring consistency, through the comparison of the work and reports of different review panels and the provision of a joint framework for levelling different reports/recommendations.

Panel commendations

- The panel commends ASIIN for the quality of their reports, considered by the different stakeholders as very informative and useful for taking subsequent action, including the quality improvement of institutions, programmes, modules and courses.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

- The panel suggests that ASIIN consider making the reports available in English, even in the case of the German accreditations/certifications/evaluations.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

2016 review recommendations

- The appeals procedure should be regulated for the area of certification so as to be binding. This includes the definition of the object, procedures and terms in a document accessible to the public. 5
- Furthermore an appeals procedure that corresponds to the ESG standard 2.7 must be established for procedures that do not lead to formal decisions, in particular evaluations.
- The option of submitting complaints should be made transparent to the public.

Evidence

The SAR states that ASIIN established, "...an Appeals Committee in 2007 for complaints from universities concerning decisions of the competent accreditation and certification commission of the ASIIN or any points in evaluation procedures". The Appeals Committee is established as an organ of ASIIN's association and the procedure for complaints is set out in the statutes of the by-laws. The SAR also states that, "... the Appeals Committee has adopted rules of procedure that regulate the appeal procedure in detail. According to these rules of procedure, the members of the Complaints Committee are 'technically independent and not bound by instructions". Membership of the Committee includes a student and a member from another German or overseas accreditation agency.

The process for appealing a decision of the Accreditation or Certification Commissions is published on the ASIIN website and is also set out in the Handbooks for each accreditation process. Appeals

are not escalated to the Committee unless all other options are exhausted, i.e. ASIIN staff check the matter and requests additional information from the HEI. It then submits the dossier to the relevant Accreditation/Certification Commissions. If the Commission cannot reach a decision, it transfers the appeal to the Appeals Committee. If the Appeals Committee accepts the argumentation of the HEI, it returns the appeal to the Accreditation Commission with a detailed justification and asks for a new decision. Consequently, the Accreditation Commission either follows the Appeals Committee by adjusting its decision or overrides the Committee's suggestions by confirming and possibly better explaining its former decision. If the Appeals Committee does not accept the HEI's argument, it confirms the decision of the Accreditation Commission and the appeal is thus rejected.

The SAR states that *"In case of any appeals in evaluation procedures the complaint is given directly to the Appeals Committee for a decision"*.

The current Appeals Committee has only dealt with one case.

Analysis

The review panel confirmed that a process for making an appeal/complaint is in place and is published on the ASIIN website as well as being included under a specific heading in the various accreditation/certification handbooks, which also apply to type I evaluations. An Appeals Committee is in place.

However, in reading the relevant section of the website, the SAR, the statutes and the various Handbooks, the review panel noted a lack of consistency in terminology. This is exemplified in the extracts from the SAR quoted above, where the terms 'Appeals Committee' and 'Complaints Committee' are used interchangeably, as are the terms 'appeal' and 'complaint.' Scrutiny of the accreditation handbooks also reveal a lack of consistency in terminology: The Institutional Accreditation Handbook talks of a complaints procedure (although what is described is the means to appeal a decision), whereas the handbooks for the programme accreditation and certification processes talk about an appeals procedure.

The review panel is of the view that there are two separate but linked issues: the first is a lack of consistency in all published material concerning the terminology of the process – the panel read four different permutations of the name of the Appeals/Complaints Committee. The panel believes that this is a second issue, consistent with a lack of understanding of the difference in the terms 'complaint' (which has to do with matters relating to the operation of the accreditation process) and 'appeal' (which pertains to the outcome or decision). These differences are clearly explained in the guidelines of ESG 2.7. The panel explored this matter with representatives of the Appeals Committee who agreed that the use of a single word in German to mean both 'complaint' and 'appeal' added to confusion around terminology.

The review panel asked representatives from the GAC where responsibility lay for appeals in the case of an institution appealing against a GAC decision that was based on the report of an ASIIN accreditation procedure. The GAC representatives confirmed that, in such cases, responsibility for the appeal would lie with the GAC. However, a complaint about the operation of the process would be the responsibility of ASIIN thus highlighting the importance of ensuring that there is clarity in how the agency uses the terms 'complaint' and 'appeal.'

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends that ASIIN uses the guidelines of ESG 2.7 to ensure that its processes differentiate between a complaint and an appeal and revises its procedure accordingly.

- The panel recommends that the agency ensures that the body that is responsible for considering complaints and appeals is referred to consistently by one title across all internal and external documentation, including the website and handbooks.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS (optional section)

ASIIN WEBSITE

The review panel used ASIIN's website as a source of extensive and useful information; however, it encountered some deficiencies in the website, which are especially important in view of ASIIN's plan to become increasingly internationally active. It was found that translations are missing in several places and occasionally, after trying to switch from a German language page to the English language page, another page opened. The panel also came across a page that was only partially available in English, on which the translation simply broke off. To support ASIIN in its international endeavours, the panel encourages ASIIN to carry its international strategy through to scrutiny of its website to ensure that it fully supports the agency's international endeavours.

ASIIN'S TYPE 1 AND TYPE 2 ACTIVITIES

ASIIN differentiates its external QA activities in so-called type 1 and type 2 activities. Type 1 activities are ESG-based (and are therefore within the scope of this review), while type 2 activities are free-standing and are not based on the ESG (and are therefore not included in the scope of this review).

In the SAR, ASIIN describes these differences in more detail:

	Type 1 evaluations for external quality assurance / enhancement in higher education	Type 2 evaluations for quality and organisational development / research activities
Focus & Purpose	external quality assurance and improvement of academic courses and/or educational institutions	consulting, development and optimisation, design and/or impact analysis
Subject	study programmes, modules and courses, QM systems, institutions (in the area of learning and teaching)	study programmes, modules and courses, QM systems, institutions (in the area of learning and teaching)
Approach	accountability and comparison with other similar items, usually a sequence of predefined process components that cannot be changed by the client	goal and approach determined by the client, tailor-made evaluation projects, any combination of evaluation instruments (e.g. workshops, audits, surveys)
Criteria and Evaluation Mandate	comparison with predefined, external quality specifications or criteria for assessing against other tested objects; usually criteria cannot be changed by the client	research questions and criteria are specified and defined by the client or developed jointly with him

Methods and Tools	Self-assessment by the client on the basis of (externally) predefined sets of criteria, mixture of expert and stakeholder audit, external audit as quality check, reporting on predefined sets of criteria	tailored evaluation project in coordination with the client, any combination of evaluation instruments and consulting elements (e.g. workshops, audits, surveys)
Reports	evaluation reports intended for publication and accountability	expert reports for internal discussion and further development to be used at the sole discretion of the client

Both in its internal and external communication, ASIIN strongly differentiates between the two types of activities and invests effort in communicating clearly and efficiently about the distinction.

ASIIN e.V. AND ASIIN GmbH

ASIIN e.V. was established in 1999 with the mission of quality assuring the study programmes and institutional quality management systems in the STEM sector higher education. As an accreditation agency, ASIIN e.V. is a non-profit organisation. In 2007 ASIIN Consult GmbH was founded as a 100% affiliate of ASIIN e.V. to enable ASIIN to engage in activities (e.g. consulting HEIs, organising trainings workshops and conferences, providing type 2 evaluations etc.) which result in a profit. Therefore, overall ASIIN organisation is currently split in two; ASIIN e.V. as a non-profit association and ASIIN Consult GmbH as an affiliate of ASIIN e.V., in which the profit-oriented activities are carried out.

The dynamic between the two organisational units is constantly evolving, with ASIIN e.V. activities still being dominant and fundamental, but ASIIN expects that in the future activities of ASIIN GmbH will become increasingly important.

The major reason for establishment of a separate GmbH entity is the fact that some of ASIIN member institutions who are affiliated to ASIIN e.V. are legally not allowed to be members of GmbH organisations. Should that legal restriction change in the future, there would be no obstacle to unifying ASIIN's organisational structure under a GmbH entity.

FOLLOW-UP PROCESS OF ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES IN GERMANY

The review panel noted that some of the features of German accreditation system result in complex relations between the QA agencies and GAC. The panel also found that this leads to issues particularly with regards to follow-up processes of accreditation procedures. Division of tasks between ASIIN and GAC in which GAC is exclusively responsible for follow-up of accreditation procedures creates a disconnect between a review and its follow-up, which is problematic from the perspective of coherence of the entire process. Since this is not a shortcoming of ASIIN (and is essentially outside of its control), but a feature of the German accreditation system, the panel did not react to this issue under ESG 2.3, but would still like to note that ASIIN (and indeed the other German QA agencies) and the GAC should discuss the matter of ensuring a coherent follow-up to accreditation procedures in Germany in order to resolve this issue.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.1: The panel commends the close connection of ASIIN to the STEM sector and both its academic and professional actors

ESG 3.4: The panel commends ASIIN for its efforts in developing real thematic analysis through its impact studies which provide significant insights on the general findings of the agency's external QA activities, both within Germany and abroad. The fact that some of these impact studies address specific subject fields (e.g. industrial management and mechanical engineering) also adds to the relevance ASIIN has in promoting the quality of STEM higher education in Germany.

ESG 2.1: The panel commends the clear link between the mapping of the ESG part I, GAC and ASIIN standards with input element of the review/accreditation methods. HEIs are encouraged to consider the standards in part one of the ESG in depth through the structured format of the SAR.

ESG 2.2: The panel commends the strong role of technical committees in developing and revising external QA standards and methodologies (especially in the area of programme accreditation). These bodies, that generally contribute a lot to the agency's operations, are very fitting platforms for ensuring meaningful stakeholder and expert involvement in producing and constantly updating ASIIN's standards and methodologies.

ESG 2.4: The panel commends ASIIN for the careful selection of their experts, as well as members of the technical committees, since it was clear from the different interviews that they were generally considered as highly skilled and competent to review different subject fields in which ASIIN operates, contributing to the improvement of higher education offer in STEM.

The panel commends the inclusion of students from the country in which the review takes place as experts in the review panels for conducting reviews abroad.

ESG 2.6: The panel commends ASIIN for the quality of their reports, considered by the different stakeholders as very informative and useful for taking subsequent action, including the quality improvement of institutions, programmes, modules and courses.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.1: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

The panel recommends that ASIIN reconsiders the composition and role of the Board of Directors. Board of Directors should include a student member and representative of external stakeholders, while including a member from another discipline (outside of STEM) could also be considered. Stronger involvement of the Board of Directors in the strategic direction of the agency and the monitoring of its strategic goals should be ensured.

The panel recommends that ASIIN considers the appointment of a Deputy Director with equal powers under the statutes.

ESG 3.2: Fully compliant

ESG 3.3: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendation:

The panel recommends that Accreditation Commission and technical committees' members are not permitted to serve as review panel members for the duration of their term.

ESG 3.4: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendations:

The panel recommends that ASIIN further explore the impact studies, with regard to the possibility of using them as inputs for the agency's internal QM system and improvements to the agency's external QA activities.

The panel recommends that ASIIN increase dissemination and discussion of the findings of the impact studies among its different stakeholders and specifically the GAC, given their relevance for the German higher education system.

ESG 3.5: Fully compliant

ESG 3.6 Substantially compliant

Panel recommendation:

The panel recommends that in the future procedures, since SAR is also a relevant element of ASIIN internal QA system due to its character of self-evaluating the work of the agency according to the ESG, both its drafting and final approval be more widely disseminated and discussed within the agency members, technical committees and Accreditation and Certification commission.

ESG 3.7: Fully compliant

ESG 2.1 Fully compliant

ESG 2.2: Fully compliant

ESG 2.3: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendation:

The panel recommends that ASIIN redesign the template for site visits to make sure that they are accurate in mentioning the involvement of external stakeholders.

ESG 2.4: Substantially compliant

Panel recommendation:

The panel recommends that ASIIN make the initial training of experts for all activities performed by ASIIN mandatory.

ESG 2.5: Fully compliant

ESG 2.6: Fully compliant

ESG 2.7 Partially compliant

Panel recommendations:

The panel recommends that ASIIN uses the guidelines of ESG 2.7 to ensure that its processes differentiate between a complaint and an appeal and revises its procedure accordingly.

The panel recommends that the agency ensures that the body that is responsible for considering complaints and appeals is referred to consistently by one title across all internal and external documentation, including the website and handbooks.

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, ASIIN is in compliance with the ESG.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

ESG 3.1: The panel suggests that ASIIN continuously assess the need for its dual structure and observe the future development in higher education legislation since membership in Ltds is an element of contemporary university autonomy.

The panel suggests that requests for evaluations in countries outside the European HE system be made more transparent and that procedures and responsibilities be clearly defined and documented.

The panel suggests that ASIIN continuously rethink its own structure with respect to scientific fields not yet covered by the agency

ESG 3.3: The panel suggests that ASIIN ensures that it considers independence in its broadest sense as understood by the ESG in relation to its documents and practices. In particular, ASIIN should implement mechanisms ensuring that its members are not treated preferentially in any way in accreditation/certification procedures.

ESG 3.4: The panel suggests that different stakeholders are more formally consulted about the topics to be addressed in forthcoming impact studies, in order to make them more relevant for all interested parties and, as a consequence, for the agency's activities and their further improvement.

ESG 3.6: In relation to the Quality Manual, the panel suggests that ASIIN:

- Improves its dissemination as a very relevant document to help stakeholders understand all ASIIN activities and how these are quality assured.
- Improves its format to make it easier to access and use; perhaps by having an interactive format rather than just a PDF file
- Provides a full English translation so that it is fully accessible to all foreign institutions that ASIIN is or will be involved with.

The panel suggests that ASIIN disseminates more fully the changes implemented in ASIIN services and procedures as a result of the stakeholder feedback.

The panel suggests that ASIIN ensures that its processes for monitoring its expectations are clear and that it also ensures that any quality indicators that it uses to monitor and improve the quality of its work are clearly defined.

ESG 2.3: The panel suggests that ASIIN implements a documented follow-up process regardless of the outcome of a review, which would take place before the next accreditation/certification procedure.

ESG 2.4: The panel suggests including international experts in the review panels responsible for accreditation/certification/evaluation activities within Germany on a more systematic basis.

The panel also suggests including academics from the countries where an international review takes place, following training on ASIIN procedures and standards.

ESG 2.5: The panel suggests that ASIIN integrate guidance of how an overall judgement is derived from a set of judgements about individual standards in the guidelines recorded in ASIIN's official documents and especially in training of experts (to be) involved in review panels.

ESG 2.6: The panel suggests that ASIIN consider making the reports available in English, even in the case of the German accreditations/certifications/evaluations.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

PROPOSAL SITE VISIT SCHEDULE FOR				
14th, 18th, 19th May 2021				
Date: 12/05/2021				
Time	Meeting with	Location	Purpose of the meeting	Name and institution of the participant
10:00 - 13:00	Review panel only	Zoom platform	Preparatory meeting of the review panel	
Date: 14/05/2021				
Time	Meeting with	Location	Purpose of the meeting	Name and institution of the participant
08:45 - 09:00	ASIIN Director	Zoom platform	Introduction meeting.	Dr. Iring Wasser
09:00 - 09:45	ASIIN Director ASIIN Management	Zoom platform	Briefing on ASIIN, drafting of the SER.	Dr. Iring Wasser
09:50 - 10:35	Board of Directors of ASIIN	Zoom platform	Introduction and discussion with the board of directors of ASIIN consisting of 12 individuals and composed of three representatives from each of the four member groups of ASIIN.	Prof. Dr.-Ing. Heyno Garbe, University of Hannover; Prof. Dr.-Ing. Norbert Ritter, University of Hamburg; Prof. Dr.-Ing. Klaus Kreulich, University of Applied Sciences Munich; Prof. Dr. Marc Krüger, University of Applied Sciences Muenster; Dr. rer. nat. Dipl.-Chem. Saša Jacob, VDI (Association of German Engineers); Prof. Dr.-Ing. Tim Hosenfeldt, Schaeffler AG.

10.35 - 10.55	Review panel only	Zoom platform	Break with internal review panel discussion	
11.00 – 12.00	German Accreditation Council and representative of ministries	Zoom platform	Introduction and discussion on the German accreditation system; its scope, impact and regulations. Presentation of the policies and developments that are related to the accreditation process with special focus on HE regulation.	Katrin Mayer-Lantermann, German Accreditation Council Felix Fleckenstein, German Accreditation Council
12:05 - 13:20	Representatives of ASIIN's technical committees	Zoom platform	Representatives of ASIIN's 14 technical committees - responsible for the preparation and supervision of accreditation procedures.	Prof. Dr.-Ing. Reinhard Möller, University of Wuppertal; Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Clemens Bonnen, University of Applied Science Bremen; Prof. Dr. Klaus Lang, University of Applied Science Bingen; Prof. Dr.-Ing. habil. Daisy Nestler, Technical University Chemnitz; Prof. Dr. Matthias Werner, University of Applied Science Konstanz; Prof. Dr. Susanne Strahringer, Technical University Dresden; Dr. habil. Nikolaus Nestle, BASF SE; PD Dr. Alois Palmethofer, University Wuerzburg; Prof. Dr. Volker Bach, Technical University Braunschweig; Prof. Dr. Mathias Getzlaff, University Duesseldorf; Prof. Dr. med Thomas Reinheckel, University Freiburg,
13.20 – 14.05	Review panel only	Zoom platform	Lunch break	
14.05- 15.20	Representatives of ASIIN's Accreditation Commission	Zoom platform	Introduction and discussion with the members of the ASIIN's Accreditation Commission, including student representative - responsible for all procedures and quality seals in the accreditation of study programmes, and internal QA systems.	Prof. Dr.-Ing. Wolfgang Huep, University of Applied Sciences Stuttgart; Prof. Dr.-Ing. Kathrin Lehmann, Technical University Cottbus-Senftenberg; Prof. Dr. Robert Hänsch, Technical University Braunschweig; Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Gert-Ludwig Ingold*, University Augsburg; Raphael Tietmeyer, Technical University Berlin
15.25 – 15.55	Representatives of the Certification Commission	Zoom platform	Introduction and discussion with the members of the ASIIN's Certification Commission - responsible for all procedures and quality seals in the certification of study programmes, courses, further education courses or individual modules	Prof. Dr. Jörg Desel, Supervisory Board of Weiterbildungs-GmbH of the University of Hagen; Debora Garus-Greis, Head of Development, Accreditation and Quality of the RWTH International Academy GmbH

16:00 - 16:30	Members of the Board of Appeals and Ethics Advisory Board	Zoom platform	Introduction and discussion with the ASIIN Board of Appeals - responsible for evaluating complaints and appeals submitted by higher education institutions related to accreditation, certification or evaluation procedures and determining the consequences resulting from this, and with the Ethics Advisory Board – responsible for clarification of ethical questions which may arise in the course of ASIIN's accreditation, certification or evaluation procedures.	Prof. Dr. Jürgen Prestin, University Lübeck; Dr.-Ing. Kira Stein, Consultant Prof. Dr. Margret Bülow-Schramm, University Hamburg; Prof. Dr. Rene Matzdorf, University Kassel
16:30 - 17:15	Review panel only	Zoom platform	Review panel meeting to summarize outcomes of day one	
Date: 18/05/2021				
Time	Meeting with	Location	Purpose of the meeting	Name and institution of the participant
08:50 - 09:00		Zoom platform	Panel members connecting to the Zoom platform	
9:00 - 10:00	ASIIN staff	Zoom platform	Discussion on operational practices for external QA, work conditions and internal QA system.	Dipl. Phys. Rainer Arnold; Christin Habermann, M.A.; Yanna Sumkötter, M.A.; Dr. Siegfried Hermes; Tanja Kreetz, M.A.; Karin Berg; Dipl.-Ing. Daniel Wörhoff Arne Thielenhaus, MSc Dr. Michael Meyer
10:05 - 11:05	Rectors and Deans of evaluated HEIs in Germany and overseas	Zoom platform	Discussion on how the accreditation/certification process is functioning at a local level i.e. how the HEIs prepare for the accreditation process, how the applications are conducted, the challenges involved and how cooperation with ASIIN is perceived.	Dr. Mahdi Mejri, Director EPI Sousse (Tunisia) Prof. Dr. Tsoodol Burmaa, Mongolian National University of Education; Prof. Dr.rer.nat. Poerbandono, Institute of Technology Bandung (Indonesia)

11:05 - 11:25	Review panel only	Zoom platform	Break with internal review panel discussion	
11:25 - 12:25	QA offices and teachers of a number of evaluated HEIs in Germany and overseas	Zoom platform	Discussion on how the accreditation/certification process is functioning at a local level i.e. how the HEIs prepare the accreditation process, how the applications are conducted what are the challenges and how the cooperation with ASIIN is perceived. Discussions with academic staff of the HEIs on the impact of external QA procedures on the learning and teaching process in practice.	Ms Bin Bao, Shanghai Ocean University; Dr. Helmy Yusuf, University Airlangga (Indonesia) Bakhytkul Abdizhapparova, University Shymkent, Kazakhstan; Antje Zelmer M.A., University of Applied Sciences Reutlingen (Germany); Dr. Gerulf Hirt, Technical University Claustha (Germany); Stefanie Hammacher, Technical University Dortmund (Germany)
12:30 - 13:15	Student representatives in ASIIN bodies and in expert panels	Zoom platform	Discussion on student involvement in the accreditation/certification process, student input and feedback and perceived impact of external QA procedures on the learning and teaching process in practice.	Dominik Kubon, Student RWTH Aachen University; Peter Kersten, Student University Weimar; Florian Löhden, Student Technical University Darmstadt; Niklas Kercher, Student RWTH Aachen University; SiZhong Hu, Student Technical University Berlin; Markus Gehring, Student RWTH Aachen University; Sebastian Neufeld, Student University Freiburg; Maximilian Jalea, Student University Heidelberg; Christoph Blattgerste, Student University Heidelberg; Julian Beier, Student University Heidelberg
13:15 - 14:00	Review panel only	Zoom platform	Internal review panel discussion with lunch	
14:00 - 15:00	Representatives of German and overseas stakeholders (including Economic Advisory Council)	Zoom platform	Discussion on stakeholder involvement in the accreditation/certification process, stakeholder input and feedback and wider societal impact of external QA procedures.	Dr. Franziska Seimys, VDMA Dipl.-Ing. Axel Haas, VWI Dipl.-Ing. Heinz Leymann, ZBI Dr. Hans-Georg Weinig, German Chemical Society
15:05 - 16:05	Representatives of panel members in QA procedures in Germany and local members overseas	Zoom platform	Introduction and discussion with representatives of expert panels (experts on institutional and programme accreditation, on certification and evaluations for quality assurance and quality enhancement) for external evaluation procedures – responsible for conducting external QA procedures, site visits and producing reports.	Prof. Dr. Dirk Dahlhaus, University Kassel; Prof. Dr. Martin Buhmann, University Gießen Prof. Dr. Hans-Christian Brauweiler, University of Applied Science Zwickau; Prof. Dr. Mike Gralla, Technical University Dortmund

16:10 - 16:55	Representatives of partner agencies from other countries with whom ASIIN carries out joint accreditation procedures	Zoom platform	Discussion on joint procedures and strategic cooperation and its purpose.	Esther Adot Giménez, AQU (Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya)
16:55 - 17:40	Review panel only	Zoom platform	Review panel meeting to summarize outcomes of day two	
Date: 19/05/2019				
Time	Meeting with	Location	Purpose of the meeting	Name and institution of the participant
08:50 - 09:00		Zoom platform	Panel members connecting to the Zoom platform	
09:00 - 14:15	Review panel only Additional meeting, if necessary	Zoom platform	Break with internal review panel discussion Potential additional meeting with the Director and/or other persons	
14:15 - 15:00	Exit meeting	Zoom platform	Exit meeting with the ASIIN	Dr. Iring Wasser
	Review panel only	Zoom platform	Wrap-up	
Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At any meeting there should be 5-6 persons, maximum 8 if necessary for ensuring sufficient representation of different groups • In all the interviews where interviewees both from Germany and from abroad will be present, sufficient representation of both groups should be ensured • ASIIN should ensure that in the meeting with student representatives in ASIIN bodies and expert panels there is also a sufficient number of students that have experience with external reviews as students of reviewed programme/institution 				

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

This section includes a description of the main stages and timescale of the review. This box to be deleted before publishing.

External review of ASIIN e.V. against the ESG

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The present Terms of Reference were agreed between The Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics (ASIIN e.V.) (applicant), and The Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) (coordinator) and EQAR.

1. Background

ASIIN e.V. (hereafter the “agency”) commissions the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) (hereafter “the coordinator”) with the organization, coordination and performance of an external institutional review for the purpose of registration within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Applicant’s Independence from the coordinator

Applicant organization and coordinator confirm, that the coordinator has not provided remunerated or unremunerated services to the agency during the past 5 years, or vice-versa. Furthermore, the coordinator guarantees to take appropriate measures in preventing conflicts of interests within his own staff as well as expert reviewers. Both the applicant and coordinator officially commit themselves not to be reviewed (in the next 5 years) by the agency for which it coordinates the review.

2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This review will evaluate the extent to which the agency fulfils the requirements of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to EQAR to support the agency’s application.

2.1 Activities of the agency within the scope of the ESG

The application for registration extends to both ASIIN e.V. and ASIIN Consult’s, thus the self-evaluation report and the external review report should consider all external quality assurance covered by both units.

This review will analyse the activities of the agency that are within the scope of the ESG.

This review comprises the agency’s following activities (as self-defined by the agency) conducted both, nationally and internationally:

- Institutional accreditation/evaluation
 - System accreditation in Germany
 - ASIIN seal institutional accreditation
 - Institutional/System evaluation
- Programme accreditation/evaluation
 - Programme accreditation in Germany
 - ASIIN seal programme accreditation
 - EQAS-Food Label joint programme review

- EQAS-Food Label review
- AMSE Label joint programme review
- AMSE Label review
- EUR-ACE joint programme review
- EUR-ACE review
- Eurobachelor joint programme review
- Eurobachelor review
- Euro-Inf joint programme review
- Euro-Inf review
- Euromaster joint programme review
- Euromaster review
- Joint programme accreditation
- Certification
- Evaluations for quality assurance and quality enhancement
 - Evaluations for quality assurance and quality enhancement ("type I")

2.2 Other matters relevant to ASIIN's application for Registration on EQAR

Concerning the other activities of ASIIN, the review should address the way in which the agency ensures a clear separation between its quality assurance activities within the scope of the ESG and ASIIN's consulting activities (consultation services, evaluations of quality and organizational development etc.) taking into account Annex 2 of the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG¹.

Considering the renewal of ASIIN's application to EQAR, the self-evaluation report and the external review report is expected to also cover specifically those issues where the Register Committee concluded in its last decision that the agency complied only partially with the ESG, namely 2.3, 3.1 and 3.4.

Additionally, the review should also address the changes brought about by the Interstate Treaty between the German federal states, which entered into force in 2018, and the related Specimen Decree as noted in EQAR's decision on ASIIN's Substantive Change Report.

ASIIN's last Decision for Renewal of Registration on EQAR and ASIIN's Substantive Change Reports can be consulted on ASIIN's Register entry at: <https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/agency/?id=19>

ASHE ensures that experts are selected from a wide variety of different backgrounds and at least one expert from a different country. The coordinator does not select experts who have been previously involved in providing services to the applicant quality assurance agency or otherwise have a real or apparent conflict of interest as defined in §4 of EQAR's Code of Conduct.

3. The review process

The review will be conducted in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by the coordinator

¹ <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg>

- Formulation of the draft Terms of Reference for the review between the coordinator and the agency,
- Agreement on the Terms of Reference by EQAR;
- Self-assessment by the agency including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- Organization of a site visit by the review panel to the agency; the site visit may take place in a virtual environment if the COVID-19 pandemic makes an on-site visit impossible.
- Preparation and completion of the final review report by the review panel;
- Analysis of the final review report and decision-making by the EQAR Register Committee.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of 4 members:

- Academia:
 - one representative of Higher Education Institutions with experience in institutional accreditation
 - one representative of Higher Education Institutions
- QA Agency:
 - one representative of an accreditation agency not related to ASIIN e.V.
- Student:
 - One student.

ASHE as coordinator of the review process ensures the selection of the Review Panel. The coordinator takes responsibility for selecting qualified experts in a fair and transparent procedure.

Short description of the peer selection and training process:

For the purpose of creating a team of panel reviewers, ASHE shall approach its stakeholder organisations such as E4 group of organizations as well as use its own networking and communication channels in order to solicit a more diverse pool of candidates for this assignment.

As a next step in this recruitment procedure, the ASHE shall commence the sourcing procedure among nominated and recommended candidates while paying special attention to the relevancy of their both experience in working with ESGs in reviews of quality assurance agencies and/or training in agency review as well as academic background.

In addition to expertise for conducting the review process at high standards, all invited and selected reviewers shall have to demonstrate their impartiality and objectivity in this procedure and independence from the applicant agency. For that purpose and before commencement of the procedure, all selected reviewers shall sign a non-conflict of interest declaration in terms of Article 9 Conflict of Interest Policy of EQAR's Procedure for Applications.

In addition to demonstrated previous QA experience and training of the reviewers, the ASHE shall organize a briefing session with a panel of selected reviewers. The aim of this short training is to provide reviewers with guidance regarding EQAR's expectations of the review process and to facilitate a common understanding of relevant ESG standards in line with EQAR's use and interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies.

Thus, we ensure that all experts are experienced in working with the ESG and criteria sets based on the ESG, performing site-visits and leading stakeholder discussions.

Consequently, ASHE will ensure that all panel members have either completed a formal training for agency reviews against the ESG 2015, or have participated in at least two reviews of quality assurance agency against the ESG that were accepted to support an application to EQAR.

ASHE will provide ASIIN e.V. with the list of suggested experts and their respective curricula vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the ASIIN e.V. review, covering at least the cases of interest defined in the EQAR Code of Conduct.

Once appointed, ASHE will inform EQAR about the appointed panel members.

Among the panel members a Chair and a Secretary is chosen. At least one member of the Review Panel has an international background not related to the country/countries of residence of the agency under review. The selected panel members are completely independent from the agency under review.

3.2 Self-assessment by ASIIN e.V., including the preparation of a self-assessment report

ASIIN e.V. is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-evaluation report shall reflect on the applicant's compliance with each of the ESG in parts 2 and 3. The report is a critical reflection on the activities, strengths and weaknesses of the applicant and the added value they provide for quality improvement of higher education institutions.
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the review and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part 2 and 3) addressed individually, and considerations of how the agency has addressed the recommendations as noted in the previous EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal (if applicable).
- All of the above listed external QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which ASIIN e.V. fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements for EQAR registration.
- The report is submitted to the review panel at the latest 6 weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A site visit by the review panel

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which shall be submitted to the agency at least 6 weeks before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule is to include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is at least 2 days. The approved schedule shall be given to ASIIN e.V. at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews. Due to the circumstances of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the meetings will be held online. ASHE is

responsible for the complete organization of logistics of the virtual site visit. The visit comprises virtual internal meetings, virtual inspections of premises, and discussions with all relevant stakeholders (including management and leadership of the agency, staff members, reviewed institutions and/or programmes, academics, students, employers, etc.).

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the ESG compliance of the agency.

The ASHE shall conduct external review procedure in an unbiased, objective and independent manner. ASIIN is responsible for the accuracy, reliability and credibility of the data presented in the self-assessment report as well as for the quality of the self-assessment report itself.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final review report

The review report will be drafted in consultation with all review panel members and correspond to the purpose and scope of the review as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. In particular, it will provide a clear rationale for its findings concerning each ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG* to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR².

The external report will reflect reality at the time of review.

A draft will first be submitted to ASIIN e.V. usually within 6 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If ASIIN e.V. chooses to provide a position statement in reference to the draft report, it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within 2 weeks after the receipt of the draft report.

Thereafter, the review panel will take into account the statement by ASIIN e.V. and finalise and submit the document to ASHE and EQAR. ASHE will sign and provide to ASIIN e.V. the [Declaration of Honour](#) together with the final report.

The report is to be finalised within 12 weeks of the site visit and will normally not exceed 50 pages in length.

4. Publication of the report

The agency and the coordinator will receive the expert panel's report and publish it on its website. The report will also be published on the EQAR website together with the decision on registration, regardless of the outcome.

5. Decision-making on EQAR registration

The agency will submit the review report via email to EQAR. The agency will also include its self-assessment report (in a PDF format), the Declaration of Honour and the full curriculum vitae (CVs) of all review panel members. In addition, ASIIN e.V. may provide any other relevant documents to the application (i.e. annexes, statement to the review report).

EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency's application at its Register Committee meeting in (November, 2021).

6. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on Terms of Reference	February 2021
---------------------------------	---------------

2 See here: <https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/UseAndInterpretationOfTheESGv2.0-2015.pdf>

Appointment of review panel members	March 2021
Self-assessment completed	March 2021
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	April 2021
Briefing of review panel members	April 2021
Review panel site visit	May 2021
Draft review report	July 2021
Statement of ASIIN e.V. to review panel (if applicable)	July 2021
Submission of final report to the agency and EQAR	August 2021
EQAR Register Committee meeting and decision on the application by ASIIN e.V.	November 2021

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

AMSE	Association of Medical Schools in Europe
AQU	Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency
ASHE	Agency for Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Croatia
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
DEQAR	Database of External Quality Assurance Results (EQAR)
ECTNA	European Chemistry Thematic Network Association
ENAE	European Network for the Accreditation of Engineering Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EQANIE	European Quality Assurance Network for Informatics Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
EQAS	European Quality Assurance Scheme
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
EUR-ACE	EUROpean-ACcredited Engineer
FIGURE	Network of French Universities for Engineering
GAC	German Accreditation Council
GGP	Guidelines of Good Practice (INQAAHE)
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ISEKI	European Association for Integrating Food Science and Engineering Knowledge into the Food Chain
QA	quality assurance
QM	quality management
SAR	self-assessment report
SWOT	strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
STEM	science, technology, engineering, mathematics
VAT	value-added tax
WFME	World Federation of Medical Education

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

Documents provided by ASIIN

- SAR Annex 1: Quality Management Handbook (including translation into English)
- SAR Annex 2: Criteria for the Accreditation of Degree Programmes - ASIIN Quality Seal 2015-12-10
- SAR Annex 3: Institutional Accreditation / Certification / Evaluation Criteria for the ASIIN System Seal 2016-06-20
- SAR Annex 4: Standards for the Certification of (Further) Education and Training 2020-26
- SAR Annex 5: ASIIN e.V. Statutes 2012-05-10
- SAR Annex 6: Agreement for peers 2017-03-21
- SAR Annex 7: ASIIN e.V. Register of Associations 2020-07-06
- SAR Annex 8: ASIIN Consult GmbH German Commercial Register 2019-10-22
- SAR Annex 9: General Terms and Conditions 2019-09-12
- SAR Annex 10: Results peer survey 2019
- SAR Annex 11: Results client survey 2019
- SAR Annex 12: Impact Study ASIIN Accreditation Procedures 2018-09
- ASIIN e.V. budget 2020-2021
- ASIIN GmbH budget 2020-2021
- Statistics of ASIIN activities 2019-2020
- Draft Strategic Plan of ASIIN
- Mapping of ASIIN standards against ESG part I

ANNEX 5. EXAMPLE OF A MAPPING GRID

Mapping of ASIIN standards to ESG and GAC standards (Handbook on Criteria for the Accreditation of Degree Programmes):

The ASIIN seal		Accreditation Council (AC) seal
ASIIN Requirements		Corresponding Requirements of the German Accreditation Council ⁵
I	THE DEGREE PROGRAMME: CONCEPT, CONTENT & IMPLEMENTATION	
I.1	<p>Objectives and learning outcomes of a degree programme (intended qualifications profile)</p> <p>The objectives and learning outcomes of the degree programme (i.e. the intended qualifications profile) are described in a brief and concise way. They are well-anchored, binding and easily accessible to the public, i.e. to students, teaching staff and anyone else interested.</p> <p>The aims and learning outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → reflect the level of academic qualification aimed at⁶ and are equivalent to the learning outcome examples described in the respective ASIIN Subject-Specific Criteria (SSC); → are viable and valid; → are analysed on a regular basis and developed further if necessary. <p>The intended qualifications profile allows the students to take up an occupation which corresponds to their qualification (professional classification).</p> <p>The relevant stakeholders were included in the process of formulating and further developing the objectives and learning outcomes. [Documentation/supporting records: guidelines, website, Diploma Supplement, student handbooks, alumni surveys etc.]</p>	<p>ESG 1.2⁷</p> <p>ESG 1.3</p> <p>ESG 1.7</p> <p>ESG 1.8</p> <p>ESG 1.9</p> <p>2.1 Qualification Objectives of the Study Programme Concept</p> <p>2.2 Conceptual Integration of the Study Programme in the System of Studies</p>
I.2	<p>Title of the degree programme</p> <p>The degree programme title reflects the intended aims and learning outcomes as well as, fundamentally, the main course language.</p> <p>[Documentation/supporting records: guidelines, website, Diploma Supplement etc.]</p>	

1.3	Curriculum The curriculum allows the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes in order to obtain the degree. The overall objectives and intended learning outcomes for the degree programme are systematically substantiated and updated in its individual modules ⁸ . It is clear which knowledge, skills and competences students will acquire in each module. [Documentation/supporting records: guidelines, curricular overview, module/objectives matrix, website, student handbooks etc.]	ESG 1.2 ESG 1.3	2.3 Study Programme Concept
1.4	Admission requirements In terms of admission, the requirements and procedures are binding, transparent and the same for all applicants. The admission requirements are structured in a way that supports the students in achieving the learning outcomes. There are clear rules as to how individual admission requirements that have not been fulfilled can be compensated. A lack of previous knowledge must, however, never be compensated at the expense of degree quality. [Documentation/supporting records: guidelines, website, student handbooks etc.]	ESG 1.4	2.2 Conceptual Integration of the Study Programme in the System of Studies 2.3 Study Programme Concept 2.4 Academic Feasibility
2	THE DEGREE PROGRAMME: STRUCTURES, METHODS AND IMPLEMENTATION		
2.1	Structure and modules All degree programmes must be divided into modules. Each module is a sum of teaching and learning whose contents are concerted. With its choice of modules, the structure ensures that the learning outcomes can be reached and allows students to define an individual focus and course of study (student mobility, work experience etc.). The curriculum is structured in a way to allow students to complete the degree without exceeding the regular course duration. The modules have been adapted to the requirements of the degree programme. They ensure that each module objectives helps to reach both the qualification level and the overall intended learning outcomes. All working practice intervals or internships are well-integrated into the curriculum, and the higher education institution vouches for their quality in terms of relevance, content and structure. There are rules for recognising achievements and competences acquired outside the higher education institution. They render the transition between higher education institutions easier and ensure that the learning outcomes are reached at the level aimed at ⁹ . [Documentation/supporting records: guidelines, module descriptions, student handbooks, student progression statistics etc.]	ESG 1.2 ESG 1.3	2.2 Conceptual Integration of the Study Programme in the System of Studies 2.3 Study Programme Concept 2.4 Academic Feasibility
2.2	Work load and credits The estimated time budgets are realistic enough to enable students to complete the degree without exceeding the regular course duration. Structure-related peaks in the work load have been avoided. A credit point system oriented on the amount of work required from students has been devised ¹⁰ . The work load comprises both attendance-based learning and self-study. This includes all compulsory elements of the degree. [Documentation/supporting records: module descriptions, work load surveys and analyses etc.]	ESG 1.4	2.2 Conceptual Integration of the Study Programme in the System of Studies 2.4 Academic Feasibility
2.3	Teaching methodology The teaching methods and instruments used support the students in achieving the learning outcomes. The degree programme is designed to be well-balanced between attendance-based learning and self-study. Familiarising the students with independent academic research and writing plays a vital role in the programme. [Documentation/supporting records: module descriptions etc.]		
2.4	Support and assistance There are resources available to provide individual assistance, advice and support for all students. The allocated advice and guidance (both technical and general) on offer assist the students in achieving the learning outcomes and in completing the course within the scheduled time. [Documentation/supporting records: consultation concepts, student handbooks etc.]	ESG 1.6	2.4 Academic Feasibility
3	EXAMS: SYSTEM, CONCEPT AND ORGANISATION		

	<p>Exams¹¹ are devised to individually measure to which extent students have reached the learning outcomes defined. Exams are structured to cover all of the intended learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences). Exams are module-related and offer students continuous feedback on their progress in developing competences.</p> <p>The degree programme comprises a thesis/dissertation or final project which ensures that students work on a set task independently and at the level aimed for.</p> <p>For each module, a form of assessment (including suitable alternatives, if any) has been defined. There are mechanisms in place which ensure that all students learn the details of what is required in order to pass the module (pre-examination elements, assignments etc.) no later than at the start of the module. Rules have been defined for re-sits, disability compensation measures, illness and other mitigating circumstances etc.</p> <p>The number and distribution of the exams ensure that both the exam load and preparation times are adequate. All exams are organised in a way which avoids delays to student progression caused by deadlines, exam correction times, re-sits etc.</p> <p>All exams are marked using transparent criteria. There are mechanisms in place which ensure that exams marked by different examiners are comparable. The higher education institution vouches for the quality in terms of relevance, content and structure of all student assignments completed outside the institution.</p> <p>[Documentation/supporting records: guidelines, inspection of exams, work placement and project reports, examination minutes, theses/dissertations etc.]</p>	ESG 1.2 ESG 1.3 ESG 1.4	2.2 Conceptual Integration of the Study Programme in the System of Studies 2.3 Study Programme Concept 2.4 Academic Feasibility 2.5 Examination System
4	RESSOURCES		
4.1	<p>Staff</p> <p>The composition, scientific orientation and qualification of the teaching staff team are suitable for sustaining the degree.</p> <p>There are sufficient staff resources available for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → providing assistance and advice to students → administrative tasks <p>The research and development activities carried out by the teaching staff are in line with and support the level of academic qualification aimed at.</p> <p>[Documentation/supporting records: staff descriptions, overview of research and development activities]</p>	ESG 1.5	2.7 Facilities
4.2	<p>Staff development</p> <p>There are offers and support mechanisms available for teaching staff who wish to further develop their professional and teaching skills.</p> <p>[Documentation: staff overview etc.]</p>	ESG 1.5	2.7 Facilities
4.3	<p>Funds and equipment</p> <p>The available funds and equipment form a sound and solid basis for the degree programme including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → guaranteed funds → sufficient and high quality infrastructure → solid, binding rules for all internal and external cooperations <p>[Documentation: cooperation agreements, overview of funds and equipment etc.]</p>	ESG 1.6	2.6 Programme-related Co-operations 2.7 Facilities
5	TRANSPARENCY AND DOCUMENTATION		
5.1	<p>Module descriptions</p> <p>The module descriptions are accessible to all students and teaching staff and contain the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → module identification code → person(s) responsible for each module → teaching method(s) and work load → credit points → intended learning outcomes → module content → planned use/applicability → admission and examination requirements → form(s) of assessment and details explaining how the module mark is calculated → recommended literature → date of last amendment made <p>[Documents: module descriptions]</p>	ESG 1.7 ESG 1.8	2.2 Conceptual Integration of the Study Programme in the System of Studies

5.2	<p>Diploma and Diploma Supplement</p> <p>Shortly after graduation, a diploma or degree certificate is issued together with a Diploma Supplement printed in English.</p> <p>These documents provide information on the student's qualifications profile and individual performance as well as the classification of the degree programme with regard to its applicable education system.</p> <p>The individual modules and the grading procedure on which the final mark is based are explained in a way which is clear for third parties. In addition to the final mark, statistical data as set forth in the ECTS User's Guide is included to allow readers to categorise the individual result/degree.</p> <p>[Documentation/supporting records: sample diploma, specific (course-related) English Diploma Supplement, transcript of records etc.]</p>	ESG 1.4	2.2 Conceptual Integration of the Study Programme in the System of Studies
5.3	<p>Relevant rules</p> <p>The rights and duties of both the higher education institution and students are clearly defined and binding (guidelines, statutes etc.). All relevant course-related information is available in the language of the degree programme and accessible for anyone involved.</p> <p>[Documentation/supporting records: guidelines etc.]</p>	ESG 1.4 ESG 1.7	2.8 Transparency and Documentation
6	QUALITY MANAGEMENT: QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT		
	<p>The programme is subject to regular internal quality assessment procedures aiming at continuous improvement. All responsibilities and mechanisms defined for the purposes of continued development are binding.</p> <p>Students and other stakeholders take part in the quality assurance process. The outcomes and all measures derived are made known to anyone involved. All methods employed and data analysed are suitable for the purpose and used to continue improving the degree programme, especially with a view to identifying and resolving weaknesses. To this end, the information they provide includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - whether the intended learning outcomes required to obtain the degree have been achieved; - the academic feasibility of the degree programme; - student mobility (abroad, where applicable); - how the qualifications profile is accepted on the labour market; - the effect of measures in use to avoid unequal treatment at the higher education institution (if any). <p>[Documentation/supporting records: results obtained in internal and external evaluations, statistical data regarding new students, graduates, etc., statistics about alumni]</p>	ESG 1.1 ESG 1.2 ESG 1.9 ESG 1.10	2.4 Academic Feasibility 2.9 Quality Assurance and Further Development