

Assessment report

on the Application of the Central Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation (ZEvA) Hanover of 19 May 2010 for Accreditation and Assessment of the Compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

- submitted on 31 January 2011 -

1. Basis of the Procedures

1.1 Legal Mandate

Pursuant to § 2 para. 1 no. 1 of the German Statute on the Establishment of a *Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany*, the Foundation is assigned with the task of accrediting accreditation agencies. It grants, for a limited period of time, the right to accredit study programmes or internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions by awarding the seal of the Foundation.

The decision of the Accreditation Council to award accreditation as well as the conduct of the procedure for accreditation of an accreditation agency are based on the resolution *Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Agencies* adopted on 8 December 2009.

In order to promote the international recognition of the decisions taken by the Accreditation Council and by the accreditation agency, the Accreditation Council adopted the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* in the approval of its accreditation criteria, as approved by the ministers responsible for higher education at the Bologna follow-up conference in Bergen in May 2005. By including the *ESG Standards*, the Accreditation Council emphasised the central role of accreditation in implementing the objectives set for the Bologna Process, making it clear that quality assurance in higher education - and particularly accreditation - can no longer be exclusively orientated toward national standards or particular characteristics. Other important sources for the formulation of the criteria set by the Accreditation Council are the *Code of Good Practice* laid down by the *European Consortium for Accreditation* on 3 December 2004 and the *Guidelines of Good Practice* elaborated by the *International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education* in April 2005.

1.2 The German Accreditation System

In 1998, an accreditation procedure based upon the "peer review principle" was introduced for study programmes in the tiered graduation system. The group of reviewing peers includes scientists but also students, representatives of professional practice and international experts. The German Law on the Establishment of a *Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany* adopted on 15 February 2005 provided a new legal foundation for accreditation. The objective of accreditation is to ensure content- and subject-related standards by assessing the conceptual outline of study programmes and the academic feasibility of the courses offered, including the assessment of quality in teaching as well as the scrutiny of the professional relevance and the promotion of gender mainstreaming. Generally, accreditation is a prerequisite for introducing and maintaining Bachelor's and Master's study programmes. In addition to programme accreditation, system accreditation was introduced in 2007. The object of system accreditation is the internal quality assurance system of a higher education institution. A positive system accreditation certifies that the quality assurance system of the higher education institution attains the qualification objectives in teaching and learning and ensures the high quality of the study programmes, and in so doing applies the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance*, the Guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder*, and the criteria set by the Accreditation Council.

In Germany, decentralised agencies conduct the accreditation of study programmes (programme accreditation) and of quality assurance systems for teaching and learning (system accreditation). In its role as central accreditation body, the Accreditation Council accredits the accreditation agencies periodically and defines the basic requirements for accreditation procedures, which are to be carried out according to reliable and transparent standards. At the same time, the Accreditation Council takes care that the interests of the entire system, which are the responsibility of each *Land*, are taken into consideration during accreditation. The actual accreditation procedures are conducted independently from the state.

The *Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany* also acts as a central documentation agency for the accreditation system and manages the database of study programmes accredited in Germany.

For private higher education institutions, a procedure of institutional accreditation was introduced by the Science Council, which monitors whether or not a higher education institution complies with the specifications for scientific teaching and research. Private higher education institutions must be accredited by the Science Council, preferably prior to starting operation, but at the latest prior to final state approval by the appropriate *Land*.

1.3 Compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

In order to be admitted as a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) or the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), an agency must demonstrate that it abides by the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG) in an external assessment. The full membership of an agency with the ENQA is valid as prima facie of compliance with the ESG and is thus also valid for the EQAR.

With regard to accreditation, the Accreditation Council also offers the option of assessing whether the agencies are compliant with Part 2 and 3 of the ESG and presenting this explicitly in its own section of the assessment in order to prevent duplicate external assessments. This assessment is, therefore, executed according to the “Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the EHEA”.

2. Course of the procedure

With letter dated 19 May 2010 ZEvA submitted its application for re-accreditation for the procedures of programme and system accreditation applying also for assessment of compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter referred to as ESG), which is required for renewal of both the ENQA full membership and registration with the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

On 14 October 2010 ZEvA submitted an explanatory statement for the application together with additional documents.

The following experts were nominated by the Accreditation Council in its resolution of 21 June 2010:

Prof. Dr. Reinhard Zintl (Chairman), University of Bamberg, Frankfurt School of Finance and Management and member of the Accreditation Council

Lewis Purser, Irish Universities Association

Thierry Malan, Ancien Inspecteur Général de l'administration de l'éducation nationale et de la recherche (France)

Moritz Maikämper, student at BTU Cottbus (Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus) and member of the Accreditation Council

Dr. Rita Weber, Mining, Chemical and Energy Industrial Union (representative of professional practice)

The expert group was supported by Ms Agnes Leinweber on the part of the office of the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany.

On 5 October 2010, the experts participated at a preparatory meeting during which the applicable criteria set by the Accreditation Council and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) were presented and explained. This occasion also served to develop the level of knowledge of the experts with regard to the procedural aspects and the understanding of their role.

Between 7 and 8 December 2010 an on-site visit took place at the head office of the Central Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation (ZEvA) Hanover, prior to which the expert group met for a preliminary meeting on 6 December 2010. The expert group held discussions with the management of the Agency, members of the Standing Accreditation Commission and of the Standing Evaluation Commission, with personnel of the head office, with experts and also with representatives of the higher education institutions that have already been involved in procedures carried out by the Agency, and finally with students from study programmes accredited by the Agency (the schedule is provided in the annex).

The expert group presented the following report with unanimous opinion on 31 January 2011.

3. The Central Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation (ZEvA)

3.1 Foundation of the Agency

ZEvA was established in 1995 as the Central Agency for Evaluation for the higher education institutions in Lower Saxony, with the task of supporting quality assurance and the enhancement of quality in teaching and learning in this *Land*. In terms of organisation, the Agency's head office was linked to the University of Hanover.

In 2000, a separate department for accreditation was added and the Agency's name was changed to "Central Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation Hanover" (ZEvA). Following the resolution adopted on 4 February 2000 by the Accreditation Council which certified ZEvA as the first German accreditation agency, the Agency started operating nationwide in this sector. The Accreditation Council re-accredited the Agency on 22 June 2006. By resolution adopted on 11 September 2008 by the government of Lower Saxony, ZEvA changed its organisational structure to become a foundation under civil law from 1 January 2009.

3.2 Organisation

According to § 6 para. 1 of the by-laws, the Foundation comprises the following organs: the Foundation Council, the Foundation's Board of Directors, the Standing Accreditation Commission and the Standing Evaluation Commission. Below the level of the Board of Directors, the head office of ZEvA is divided in the units Programme Accreditation, System Accreditation and Evaluation.

3.3 Facilities

According to the Agency, in 2010 the annual budget of ZEvA came to a total of about 2,373,357 Euros. For carrying out evaluations in Lower Saxony the *Land* allocates 525,000 Euros.

At present, 17 employees work for the Agency. In 2010, the Agency moved to new rented office spaces (about 640 m²) in Hanover.

3.4 Scope of Activity

The areas of activity of ZEvA comprise programme and system accreditation as well as evaluation spanning all disciplines and all types of higher education institutions. Furthermore, the Agency plans to offer consulting services to higher education institutions.

Evaluation procedures in Lower Saxony are regulated by the Higher Education Act of the

Land, which provides in § 5 that external evaluation of teaching and learning has to be carried out by a science-related organisation. Until 2006, the Agency focused on implementing systematic, periodic and comprehensive evaluation of the disciplines offered by the higher education institutions in Lower Saxony. Since 2005 higher education institutions have concentrated on the procedures for programme accreditation; therefore, the focus has shifted from discipline-related evaluation to the institutional evaluation of individual higher education institutions. On request and against reimbursement, the Agency also conducts quality assurance procedures outside Lower Saxony.

Since the Agency's certification by the Accreditation Council in 2000, ZEvA has so far accredited more than 2,200 study programmes and partial study programmes conferring them the quality seal of the Accreditation Council. By the Accreditation Council's resolution adopted on 31 October 2008, ZEvA was authorised, for the current period of accreditation, to carry out system accreditation procedures. ZEvA also offers the accreditation of doctoral programmes awarding its own quality seal to the higher education institutions. In addition, in 2009 the Agency started the "ZEvA Expert" initiative, offering consulting services to higher education institutions. The Agency also established a so-called "Council of Experts" with representatives from higher education institutions, research and academic administration bodies. The Agency is currently developing its range of consulting services, which will include the following fields:

- strategy development consulting / monitoring for higher education institutions
- consultancy in / monitoring of the implementation process for QM systems
- consultancy in the preparation of system accreditation / evaluation of QM systems
- consultancy in the development of solutions for specific problems concerning quality management.

ZEvA is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) in higher education institutions and of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). Since 2000, the Agency has been involved in the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI), which develops, inter alia, descriptors for Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral programmes (Dublin Descriptors) at European level.

4. Assessment

An analysis of the documents submitted and the discussions held during the on-site visit suggest a differentiated and positive overall impression of the Agency's activities. Compared with the very critical findings of the re-accreditation process in 2006, concerning for instance the lack of fully formulated templates for decisions to use in meetings of the SAK (Standing Accreditation Commission) or the preparatory briefings of experts, the Agency has since shown a significant increase in its level of professionalism.

The explanatory statement for the application presented by ZEvA on 14 October 2010 and the documents contained in the volume of annexes are comprehensive and well-arranged. They contain meaningful explanations with regard to all criteria set by the Accreditation Council and to the ESG providing almost complete proof of compliance with the aforementioned criteria and standards.

The staff, in particular in middle management positions, gave the expert group the impression of being highly competent and dedicated, clearly forming the backbone of the Agency.

The expert group also wishes to make a positive note with regard to the differentiated and comprehensive manual for the Agency's internal quality management, which is illustrated in a clear, comprehensible way in the recorded results, but also in an internal data base built up by the Agency with the aim of ensuring that its processes are carried out in an efficient manner. If any significant shortcomings concerning the internal quality management system may have been detected in 2006, nowadays the Agency's QM activities may be defined best practice in this field.

According to the expert group, corrective measures are needed with regard to the establishment of programme clusters (see criterion 2.2.1), the appointment procedure for experts in programme accreditation (see criterion 2.2.2) and the preparatory briefing of experts in system accreditation (criterion 2.2.3). The expert group is critical of the concentration of various decision-taking powers into a single position within the Agency's organisational structure, even though the Council's criteria do not cover this aspect (see criterion 2.2.1).

The expert group is impressed by the variety of the Agency's activities, which include accreditation, evaluation as well as the planned consulting services. As a result of their procedural approach and focus, the evaluation procedures in particular are more suitable than programme accreditation for providing support to the higher education institutions on their way to autonomy. Hence, evaluation activities should be further intensified in the future (see also the introductory remarks concerning paragraph 4.2 ESG).

The expert group is concerned that the Agency considers itself being much less a driving force in developing empirical methods for measuring the achievement of competences or the implementation of objectives set by the higher education institutions. This may be due to the tasks assigned to the agencies by the German accreditation system, but as a result, the effects of programme accreditation on the study courses offered in Germany are currently based solely on the experiences acquired by the stakeholders. The expert group agrees with the analysis made by the Agency's academic director that there should be more awareness for this problem in empirical higher education research.

The expert group recommends the Accreditation Council to accredit the *Central Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation Hanover (ZEvA)* for both programme and system accreditation subject to certain conditions.

Condition 1: ZEvA presents the criteria for establishing programme clusters for programme accreditation which ensure that the expert groups have the necessary academic and disciplinary affinity and are of an appropriate size according to the requirements set forth in section 1.3 of the resolution "Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation" (criterion 2.2.1).

Condition 2: ZEvA presents a binding procedure that ensures that representatives of all relevant interest groups participate in the appointment of experts for programme accreditation (criterion 2.2.2). This procedure bars any possibility of dependence on individual opinions.

Condition 3: ZEvA presents a concept for the general preparation process of experts for system accreditation procedures (criterion 2.2.3).

Condition 4: ZEvA publishes its internal complaints procedure on the Agency's website (criterion 2.6).

Recommendation 1: Given the concentration of decision-taking powers into a single position within the organisational structure, the Agency should diversify the various tasks and competences to a greater extent (see the statements concerning criterion 2.2.1).

Recommendation 2: The Agency's by-laws should provide that alternate members with voting rights are appointed also for the student members of the SAK.

Recommendation 3: The Agency should keep an appropriate internal record of any decisions taken by its boards which concern frequently appearing questions about the accreditation of study programmes (see the statements concerning criterion 2.2.1).

Recommendation 4: The Agency should take concrete measures to achieve the objectives set in the by-laws concerning the percentage of women with voting rights in the SAK (see the statements concerning criterion 2.2.1).

Recommendation 5: In the future, the involvement of international experts should be increased and the Agency should appoint more international members to the SAK (see the statements concerning criterion 2.2.1).

Recommendation 6: The process for proving fulfilment of the conditions should be modified in order to ensure that the student members of expert groups can be more easily contacted for providing their feedback (see the statements concerning criterion 2.2.2).

Recommendation 7: When accrediting larger programme clusters, the expert groups should always include respectively two representatives from the students' groups and two from professional practice (see the statements concerning criterion 2.2.2).

Recommendation 8: Students and representatives of professional practice should be also represented in the Review Commission (see the statements concerning criterion 2.2.2).

Recommendation 9: In the medium-term, the Agency should not appoint any person without a structured preparation or without long-standing experience in programme accreditation procedures (see the statements concerning criterion 2.2.3).

Recommendation 10: The Agency should withdraw the paragraph from the contracts concluded with higher education institutions which provides that, in case of complaints submitted by the higher education institution to the Accreditation Council, the higher education institution will bear any costs incurred for the specific-purpose assessment if no procedural deficiencies are detected (see the statements concerning criterion 2.6).

Recommendation 11: For the sake of transparency, the Review Commission should be defined as an organ of the Foundation in its by-laws. The appointment of members of the Review Commission should be laid down in the rules of procedure of the competent organ as one of its tasks (see the statements concerning criterion 2.6).

4.1 Assessment based on the Criteria for the Accreditation of Accreditation Agencies

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

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

Documentation

At its 29th meeting held on 5 December 2006, the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK) adopted a fundamental decision regarding its understanding of quality. This resolution serves as a basis for the Agency's assessment approach in accreditation procedures and is published both in the guides for programme and system accreditation and on the ZEvA website.

ZEvA accordingly defines the quality of teaching and learning by the following three dimensions: quality of input, quality of process and quality of output, objectives or results. Output quality on the one hand consists in a conclusive justification of the qualification objectives. Input and process quality are expressed by the degree of suitability of the available resources and the design of the teaching-learning processes for achieving the qualification objectives.

The description of the qualification objectives should be in line with the qualification framework for higher education degrees and the Dublin Descriptors as well as with the requirements of the professional practice. Furthermore, they should include the objectives set with regard to personality development and consider the students' capability to participate actively in social life within a democratic polity.

Input quality is expressed by the degree of suitability of the material and personnel background of the qualification process which leads to the achievement of the qualification objectives. Process quality on the other hand is illustrated by the consistency, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of the concept, organisation and implementation of the study programme.

With regard to its assessment approach, the Agency determines from the understanding of quality illustrated above that the task assigned to the higher education institution consists in defining its understanding of quality in view of the requirements for accreditation. In this context, it is expected that the departments responsible for the implementation of the study programmes specify and justify the standards inherent to the respective discipline and disciplinary culture in order to make them accessible for evaluation. According to

ZEVA, it is not the Agency's task to set the standards for quality but to assess them by means of a comprehensible procedure carried out by experts.

Assessment

ZEVA defines a programme-related quality understanding which focuses on the higher education institutions' responsibility for the quality of the study programmes. It is generally suitable for implementing the criteria and rules of procedure set by the Accreditation Council.

The expert group considers the fact that the Agency allocates a certain number of ECTS credit points to each framework level to pose a problem; this kind of classification is, in fact, in conflict with the common understanding of ECTS in Europe as a method for measuring the student workload and is also incompatible with the structural guidelines of the KMK (see the Agency's progress report on p. 37). In the past, the Agency's understanding of ECTS was the cause of conflicts with the Accreditation Council. However, the experts have gained the impression that there is no evidence that the concept is applied as a rule and therefore no systematic errors have been detected in the accreditation procedures carried out so far. During the on-site visit the Board of Directors explained that in general, the Agency applies the exclusively time-based ECTS concept as understood by the KMK and the Accreditation Council. In cases of doubt, ZEVA will begin a respective discussion in good time with the Accreditation Council which is responsible for providing a binding interpretation of its criteria and rules of procedure.

Result

Criterion 2.1.1 is fulfilled.

Recommendation

2.1.2 The agency accredits across types of Higher Education Institutions and also across disciplines in the case of admittance for programme accreditations.

Documentation

Since the Agency was established, it has accredited more than 2,200 study programmes at universities of applied science, universities and university of cooperative education (see pp. 416-443 in the volume of annexes).

Assessment

It may be inferred from the Agency's history of foundation that whilst its activities are focussed traditionally on Lower Saxony, the Agency has since become well-established at national level. The statistical information about the procedures carried out demonstrate

that the Agency accredits all types of higher education institutions and disciplines.

Result

Criterion 2.1.2 is fulfilled.

2.2 Structures and Procedures

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

Documentation

Tasks and structure of the organs of ZEvA are laid down in the by-laws (pp. 4-11 in the volume of annexes). According to the by-laws, the Foundation comprises the following organs: the Foundation Council, the Foundation's Board of Directors, the Standing Accreditation Commission and the Standing Evaluation Commission. Pursuant to § 7 of the by-laws, the Foundation Council consists of seven members with experience in quality assurance at higher education institutions. This includes three members appointed by the Rectors' Conference of Lower Saxony, three on proposal by a Selection Committee of the registered association "European Institute for Quality Assurance in Higher Education" (EIQA e.V.)¹ and one by the competent ministry.

Pursuant to § 8 of the by-laws, the Foundation Council has the following specific functions:

- a) appointment and revocation of the appointment of members of the board,
- b) receiving the statement of accounts of the Foundation's Board of Directors, adopting the business plan and granting approval to the Board of Directors,
- c) appointment and revocation of the appointment (and dismissal) of members of the Standing Evaluation Commission based on proposals pursuant to § 11 of the Foundation's by-laws,

¹ At present, about 30 higher education institutions are members of this association that was established at the initiative of ZEvA with the aim of involving the member institutions in the appointment process of the SAK members by means of a co-operation agreement made in 2003. The Foundation's by-laws assigned the Foundation Council the task of appointing members of the SAK. Hence, the EIQA e.V. is now responsible for electing three of the seven members of the Foundation Council on proposal by a selection committee.

- d) appointment and revocation of the appointment (and dismissal) of members of the Standing Accreditation Commission based on proposals pursuant to § 12 of the Foundation's by-laws,
- e) adopting amendments of the by-laws,
- f) adopting the abolition of the Foundation,
- g) approval of the rules of procedure of the board of the Foundation, the Standing Evaluation Commission and the Standing Accreditation Commission.

Pursuant to § 9 of the by-laws, the Board of Directors of the Foundation comprises the managing director and the academic director who are appointed for 5 years. Re-appointment is admissible.

According to § 10 para. 1, the managing director is responsible for personnel management and for managing the on-going business as well as for representing the Foundation in judicial and extra-judicial matters, elaborating a draft business plan and preparing and executing the resolutions of the Foundation Council.

The SAK has a central role in the accreditation activities of the Agency. Pursuant to § 12 of the by-laws, the commission comprises 26 members representing the relevant subject groups, professional practice and the students. The following university subject groups are represented: Humanities and Cultural Studies, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Engineering, Law, Economics and Social Sciences, Life Sciences including Medicine (five members). The universities of applied science are represented with three members from the following subject areas: Economics and Social Studies, Engineering and Architecture, Natural Sciences/Life Sciences. The members representing the subject areas are each provided with alternates. In addition, there is a further representative from Arts and Music including two alternates. The alternate members are not entitled to vote. Student members have no alternates.

Pursuant to § 10 para. 7 of the by-laws, the SAK manages the accreditation process in accordance with the procedural principles adopted by the Accreditation Council. Furthermore, the commission adopts the directives of ZEvA. The SAK is assigned the following functions pursuant to § 1 para. 2 of its rules of procedure (pp. 16-18 in the volume of annexes): The SAK appoints the expert groups for programme accreditation jointly with the Foundation's Board of Directors involving in practice its own members who are related to specific subjects. Furthermore, the accreditation decisions for study programmes and internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions are taken by the commission in accordance with § 10 para. 8.

Pursuant to § 1 para. 4 of its rules of procedure, the SAK constitutes the System Accredi-

tation Commission (KSA) which provides support for system accreditation procedures. In the System Accreditation Manual the Agency has laid down the following (see p. 161 in the volume of annexes):

The members of the KSA are appointed by the SAK on the basis of suggestions made by the Foundation's Board of Directors. The KSA comprises eight members with voting rights: one student, one quality assurance expert, two representatives of a university or an equivalent higher education institution, two representatives of a university of applied sciences and two representatives of professional practice. In general, all members of the KSA have gained specific experience in higher education management and quality assurance. They are elected by the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK) on the basis of suggestions made by the Foundation's Board of Directors. The managing director and the academic director have an advisory role within the KSA. The term of office of all members of the commission is three years.

The KSA nominates all the expert groups involved in system accreditation and the respective chairpersons. The commission also determines the result of the preliminary assessment and initiates the procedure. After completion of the procedure, a recommendation for the resolution is submitted to the SAK based upon the assessment report. The decisions in procedures for system accreditation are taken by the SAK.

Any complaints lodged by higher education institutions concerning the conduct of the procedure and decisions taken by the SAK are discussed by a so-called Review Commission which hands over a recommendation for the resolution to the SAK.² It is clear from the Agency's rules of procedure which of the Agency's organs appoints the members of the Review Commission.

As provided for in § 11 of the by-laws, the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK) is responsible for evaluation procedures. This commission is not involved in tasks concerning programme or system accreditation. Simultaneous membership on both commissions, SAK and SEK, is excluded (§ 2 para. 3 of the rules of procedure of the respective commissions). Both commissions are chaired by the academic director (see § 11 para. 1 and § 12 para. 1 of the by-laws).

The outline of the procedure and the criteria to be complied with are described in the so-called "Application Manual" for programme accreditation (pp. 92-119 in the volume of annexes). The Agency provides additionally the following documents for programme accreditation: a template for the documentation relating to the application for accreditation by a higher education institution (pp. 106-119 in the volume of annexes), the experts' manual

² For further information see the statements concerning criterion 2.6 "Internal Complaints Procedure".

for drawing up the assessment reports (pp. 120-135 in the volume of annexes), a sample schedule for the on-site visits (pp. 136-138 in the volume of annexes) and a model for the accreditation report (pp. 139-152 in the volume of annexes).

The Procedures Manual for Programme Accreditation states on p. 4 that on request of the higher education institution an intensive preliminary assessment may be carried out which includes an assessment of the formal requirements set by ZEvA and of the compliance with the criteria set by the Accreditation Council and with the Common Structural Guidelines of the *Länder*.

The essential steps and criteria for system accreditation are laid down in the "Procedures Manual for System Accreditation at Higher Education Institutions" (pp. 153-195 in the volume of annexes).

In addition, ZEvA provides some instruments also in the system accreditation procedures which allow the higher education institutions to receive feedback on the subject of their application prior to initiating or when beginning the procedure. According to the statements on p. 18 of the explanatory statement for the application, on request of the higher education institution, prior to the system accreditation procedures, ZEvA carries out a so-called "Status Seminar" in order to verify systematically whether stage of development of the management and quality assurance system for teaching and learning as well as the documentability of its functioning are generally sufficient for applying for system accreditation. According to the Agency, this opportunity may be used at the same time to identify advantages and drawbacks of alternatives. In addition to the "Status Seminar", the higher education institution may arrange for a so-called "preliminary content assessment" of the documentation. As explained on p. 18 of the explanatory statement for the application, this assessment goes beyond the preliminary assessment of formal aspects verifying the consistency of the contents of the documentation and whether the documents contain any contradictory or ambiguous statements, without providing assessment on a content- and subject-related basis.

Assessment

The Foundation's by-laws and the respective rules of procedure provide a legally binding and comprehensive definition of the composition and tasks of the organs of ZEvA. What stands out with regard to the Agency's internal organisational structure is the very strong role of the academic director. According to the by-laws, the holder of this position chairs both the SAK and the SEK, is part of the Foundation's Board of Directors, participates in an advisory capacity at the meetings of the Foundation Council and of the KSA and is also directly involved in the nomination of experts. The academic director collaborates also in the three-member selection committee, which nominates three out of the seven members

of the Foundation Council to be elected by EIQA e.V. Pursuant to § 7 para. 1 of the by-laws of EIQA e.V., the academic director is also a member of the board of the association. Therefore, the academic director is involved in the appointing process for the Foundation Council which in turn elects the academic director.

This almost monocratic concentration of tasks and competences within a single position - as being an internal matter of the Agency - does not infringe upon an explicit criterion set by the Accreditation Council, but the lacking balance between the organs may, on the experts' point of view, entail some severe risks for the Agency's work. There is not only the risk that the spectrum of arguments in the decision-making process may be reduced, but it may also cause problems with regard to institutional learning and continuity: in case of a change of personnel, it is likely that the Agency will lose valuable competences and experience. Hence, the experts advise the Agency to make efforts to break up tasks and competencies to a greater extent in its own interest.

According to the experts' perception, the very active role of the Foundation's Board of Directors was reflected in the way the SAK meeting, which the experts partly attended in the course of the on-site visit, was conducted. According to the agendas of the SAK meetings held in 2010, the meetings of this commission are tightly scheduled which is certainly also due to the high number of accreditation decisions.

Since the establishment of the Foundation, the role of the member higher education institutions organised in the association EIQA e.V. has been confined to participation at the election of the members of the Foundation Council. The expert group recommends either to develop new tasks to enhance the cooperation or to end it altogether.

The rules for programme and system accreditation result from the structure and the allocation of tasks to the organs of the Foundation. These procedural rules are binding and are comprehensibly recorded by the corresponding guidelines, which make them available for external parties. The ZEvA guidelines directly reproduce the corresponding criteria set by the Accreditation Council as citations, explaining the Agency's expectations concerning the explanations given by the higher education institution. In this respect, the layout of these documents serves as a model since they provide the higher education institutions with the original wording of the criteria and the procedural rules of the Accreditation Council, with explanations for a better understanding. With regard to the procedural steps, the guidelines for programme and system accreditation also comply with the relevant rules of the Accreditation Council.

With regard to the current composition of the SAK, the expert group asserts that the objective laid down in § 12 para. 2 of the by-laws according to which the commission should comprise 8 women with voting rights, is not fulfilled at present. The expert group was not

able to recognise which concrete measures are being taken by ZEvA to come closer to its self-defined objectives. It should be possible to increase the proportion of women and international members in the SAK at least in the medium-term by cooperating with the higher education institutions organised at EIQA e.V.

The expert group welcomes the rule that provides for alternate members within the SAK. Even if it is not laid down in the by-laws how the right to vote of these members is regulated when the members with voting rights do not participate, the Agency has established an appropriate practice for these cases. It was not comprehensible to the expert group why the by-laws do not provide alternate members for the student members of the SAK. In this respect, the Agency should examine its regulations in order to establish an equal participation of all member groups.

The experts acknowledge that the members of the SAK graded the consistency of their own resolutions only with the school grade 3,1 in an internal survey carried out in November 2010. During a conversation with the experts, the head office explained that the documentation of the fundamental decisions of the SAK introduced in the past has been given up in order to avoid reducing the capacity necessary to consider higher education institutions case by case. Even if the expert group well understands the argument brought up by the Agency, it should be still in the latter's own interest to find ways to document the decisions adopted by its committees concerning recurring study programme constellations. In this regard, the comprehensive data base may be helpful.

The experts acknowledge that ZEvA is pursuing the goal to involve also experts from abroad in programme accreditation, even if the Accreditation Council does not explicitly stipulate this. However, the participation of international experts should still be clearly extended, possibly involving also German peers working abroad who may contribute their experience with international higher education systems. It is furthermore desirable to intensify the involvement of international experts within the SAK.

The records of preliminary assessments carried out in procedures for programme accreditation, which were submitted by the Agency, do not show any inadmissible consultation activities or anticipations of the assessment on a content- or subject-related basis. By verifying the completeness of the documentation for application, the head office offers meaningful support to the higher education institutions and the expert groups with regard to the accreditation process. However, ZEvA should be aware of the smooth transition from support to consultation and bear this in mind also in its daily work routine. The expert group considers the "Status Seminar" for system accreditation illustrated in the explanatory statement for the application to be a critical point, but it is not laid down in the corresponding guideline and according to the Board of Directors the Agency does not hold this

seminar in practice. For the sake of transparency, this event should not be mentioned any more in the Agency's documents. Furthermore, the planned activities of the "ZEvA Expert" division could be considered as consultation activities for higher education institutions included in the resolution "Standards for Structuring the Relationship between System Accreditation and Consultation Services" of 21 August 2008. The Board of Directors has assured verbally that in such cases ZEvA will not carry out procedures for system accreditation.

During the conversations held during the on-site visit, the expert group received contradictory information concerning the criteria for establishing programme clusters for programme accreditation. At the current SAK meeting, there are single clusters with more than 13 study programmes for one accreditation procedure. On the experts' request, the Agency presented an overview of the clusters of the previous year, which shows a fully heterogeneous picture. Hence, the expert group was not able to clearly identify on which criteria concerning academic and disciplinary affinity and the compilation of the expert groups the Agency actually bases its work.

The tendency for a rather slow initiation of procedures for system accreditation in Germany may be observed also at ZEvA. The Agency was able to procure its first procedure after having been accredited for system accreditation in 2007. This procedure will start in 2011.

Result

Criterion 2.2.1 is partially fulfilled.

Recommendation

1. The expert group recommends the Accreditation Council to specify **a condition** by which the Agency should present the criteria for establishing programme clusters for programme accreditation which are able to ensure that the expert groups will be formed with the necessary academic and disciplinary affinity and of an appropriate size according to the requirements set forth in section 2.1 of the resolution "Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation".
2. Given the concentration of decision-taking powers into a single position within the organisational structure, the Agency should diversify the various tasks and competences to a greater extent.
3. The Agency's by-laws should provide that alternate members with voting rights are appointed also for the student members of the SAK.

4. The Agency should keep an appropriate internal record of any decisions taken by its boards which concern frequently appearing questions about the accreditation of study programmes.
5. The Agency should take measures in order to achieve the objectives set in the by-laws concerning the percentage of women with voting rights in the SAK.
6. In the future, the involvement of international experts should be increased and the Agency should appoint more international members to the SAK.

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

Pursuant to § 12 para. 1 of the by-laws, the SAK as executive organ for programme and system accreditation procedures shall comprise members from science and research, student members and representatives of professional practice. The two representatives of professional practice represent both the employers' and employees' side; one of the two student members must be enrolled at a university and the other one at a university of applied science. The KSA shall also comprise representatives of professional practice and student members (see explanatory statement for the application pp. 11f). Only the Review Commission does not include these status groups (see the composition of the commission according to the explanatory statement for the application, p. 12).

According to the statements on p. 4 of the Guidelines for Programme Accreditation (p. 95 in the volume of annexes), the Agency appoints *"renowned academic teachers as well as representatives of professional practice and students"* to the expert groups in programme accreditation procedures.

In system accreditation procedures, the expert group "System" (see p. 166 in the volume of annexes) comprises three members experienced in higher education institution governance and self-administration as well as one student member and one representative of professional practice.

Assessment

The typological composition of the Agency's organs adequately reflects the requirements set by criterion 2.2.2. Solely the Review Commission does not involve students and representatives of professional practice since at present only academic teachers are represented. The expert group would welcome the involvement of students and representatives of professional practice also in this committee.

When dealing with larger clusters of study programmes in programme accreditation, the Agency involves only one student member and one representative of professional practice respectively in the expert group. Hence, the ratio between academic experts and these member groups results in a problematic imbalance. Furthermore, the individual students and representatives of professional practice have to face the necessity of making a differentiated assessment of all study programmes of the cluster, which causes a high personal burden in the performance of their roles. Larger expert groups should therefore include

two student representatives and two representatives of professional practice respectively in order to ensure a fair division of work in the procedures also in this case.

The expert group is critical of the appointment procedure for experts in procedures for programme accreditation. Even though these procedures form the basis for the core business of the Agency, the selection of experts lies in fact in the hands of the Board of Directors involving both subject-specific members of the SAK by way of circulation. The appointment is carried out on the basis of a list compiled by the head office suggesting only one candidate for each position to be filled. During an interview with the Board of Directors, the latter rejected the idea to suggest more than one nominee for the selection considering this practice to be too time-consuming. The expert group also criticises that - contrary to the requirement set in criterion 2.2.2 - no representatives of professional practice or student members are involved in the appointment procedure.

With regard to the meeting documents for the present SAK meeting, the experts have noticed that student feedback concerning the proof of fulfilment of the conditions is rarely to be found. During a discussion, the Agency attributes this to the short deadlines within which the student members of the expert groups can often not be contacted. Since the Agency's data base makes it easier to keep track of the deadlines concerning the fulfilment of conditions, the afore-mentioned aspects should be considered during the planning process.

Result

Criterion 2.2.2 is partially fulfilled.

Recommendation

1. The expert group recommends the Accreditation Council to specify the **a condition** by which the Agency should present a binding internal procedure that ensures that the representatives of all relevant interest groups participate in the selection of experts for programme accreditation.
2. The processes for proving the fulfilment of the conditions should be modified in order to ensure that the student members of expert groups may be more easily contacted for providing their feedback.
3. When accrediting larger programme clusters, the expert groups should always include respectively two student members and two representatives of professional practice.
4. Students and representatives of professional practice should be also represented on the Review Commission.

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

Documentation

The Agency bases the selection of experts for programme accreditation procedures on the following criteria (see p. 22 in the explanatory statement for the application):

- *"Scientific and/or subject-related expertise in the assessment of the quality of teaching and learning (implementation of the study programme concept),*
- *expertise in the assessment of the academic feasibility (teaching and examination requirements set for the students, quantitative aspects),*
- *acquaintance with the key goals of the Bologna Reform and a substantially positive attitude towards the reform,*
- *a constructive and critical attitude towards the study programmes for which accreditation has been requested,*
- *acquaintance with the goals and methods of quality assurance (primarily in higher education),*
- *willingness to work as part of a dedicated team performing a peer review,*
- *willingness to express an expert opinion on issues which go beyond the core of one's own discipline,*
- *impartiality,*
- *representation of the disciplines and gender parity within the group."*

Pursuant to § 1 of its rules of procedure, the SAK appoints the experts jointly with the Board of Directors of the Foundation. The SAK may commission this task to its members with affinity to the relevant discipline.

With regard to the selection of experts for system accreditation procedures the following criteria (see p. 166 in the volume of annexes) are laid down in the corresponding Guideline:

"Three experts must have a proven track record in higher education institution governance and self-administration of higher education institution and also have experience in management. The rectors or presidents of higher education institutions are for instance eligible for this position, as well as their deputies or persons holding corresponding positions on faculty or departmental level. As a general rule, they are experienced in higher education

assessment, preferably though their involvement in evaluation and accreditation procedures.

Student members must have gained experience in the self-administration bodies of a higher education institution. Members of professional practice represent the perspective of stakeholders of the employment system, putting the emphasis on the aspects of professional qualifications. In every case, the aim is to appoint a member from abroad out of the afore-mentioned group of experts. If necessary, the group will be complemented by an expert who will make any necessary additional assessments concerning legal regulations for specific professions. The expert must provide proof that they have participated at preparatory events for system accreditation or, alternatively, they have to express their willingness to participate in such a briefing."

The experts involved in the system accreditation procedures are nominated by the System Accreditation Commission (KSA) and appointed by the academic director (see p. 166 in the volume of annexes).

For the general preparation of experts in programme accreditation, the Agency offers annually special seminars (see p. 22 in the explanatory statement for the application and the SAK report about the qualification of experts dated 28 September 2010 in the volume of annexes, pp. 316-325). On this occasion, primarily modifications and current interpretations of the guidelines are discussed and the experts are assisted in developing an adequate understanding of their role. These seminars are also an opportunity to provide direct feedback about the experience gained in the accreditation procedures taking up questions brought up by the expert groups. The seminars are aimed equally at all status groups such as teachers, representatives of professional practice and students. ZEvA supports the activities of the student accreditation pool with an annual subvention of max. 2,500 Euro.

In 2010, 10 one-day seminars on 5 topics with about 140 participants in total took place. For 2011, four blocks of seminars with duration of 1.5 days are scheduled (in March 2011). Each seminar should reach about 25 participants. Hence, about 100 persons will become acquainted with current accreditation-related topics and the guidelines for the accreditation process. ZEvA's objective is that the majority of the experts within the pool will have participated at the seminars by mid-2011 or that they will have acquired similar qualifications through multiple participation at accreditation procedures. The Agency evaluates the seminars by conducting surveys amongst the participants, aiming at achieving at least the assessment of "good".

At the beginning of the procedure, each member of an expert group receives a manual containing the currently applicable criteria and rules of procedure. The Agency explains

that the experts' preparation for the concrete procedure consists in consigning the documents at an early stage, providing them with the possibility to submit a preliminary statement and take part in a detailed preliminary discussion.

Biographical information on the members of the organs and on the members of the head office staff is provided. The recruitment of the head office staff members is based upon the qualification profile defined in the job description. Newly employed consultants of ZEvA are mentored intensively during the first months of their employment. In order to exchange experiences concerning the application of the criteria, the Agency has established *jours fixes*, internal closed conferences and seminars for experts carried out on a regular basis. The consultants participate regularly at national and international conferences and meetings.

Assessment

The biographical information on the members of the organs and on the head office staff members provide a record of broad competences in the relevant fields such as academic performance, design of study programmes or higher education institution management and governance.

With regard to programme accreditation, the concept for the general preparation of experts as well as for the preparation regarding concrete procedures is judged as being well suitable by the experts. The Board of Directors is aware that the individuals involved in the procedures in the public perception stand for the overall quality of ZEvA. The expert group evaluates positively the seminars offered by the Agency, which are - due to the feedback provided by the expert groups - tailored to suit their needs. The expert group welcomes the Agency's objective to increase the number of trained individuals involved in the procedures. According to the experts, it is also worth the effort, in the medium-term, to ensure that only prepared persons are appointed to the expert groups.

With regard to the preparation for a concrete procedure, the expert group considers the preliminary statement to be a helpful instrument which ensures that the experts become acquainted in good time with the documentation before the on-site visit takes place.

It was not clearly recognisable how ZEvA instructs the experts with regard to the system accreditation procedures. During the on-site visit, the Board of Directors explained that his suggestions for the expert groups comprise solely individuals personally known to him. Albeit personal factors may be of importance in this context, from the experts' point of view, the afore-mentioned practice cannot replace a structured, general preparation.

Result

Criterion 2.2.3 is partially fulfilled.

Recommendation

1. The expert group recommends the Accreditation Council to specify the **a condition** by which the Agency should present a concept for the general preparation of experts in system accreditation procedures.
2. Over the medium-term, the Agency should not appoint any person without a structured preparation or without long-standing experience in programme accreditation procedures.

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

Documentation

As an example of a co-operation ZEvA cites a procedure for the accreditation of study programmes of the University of the Music in Karlsruhe, which was carried out in concert with the European Association of Conservatories (AEC). Furthermore, the Agency carried out the accreditation of one study programme of the University of Kiel (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel) in co-operation with the accreditation agency AQA.

Assessment

The rights and obligations of the parties involved in the co-operations cited in the explanatory statement for the application were regulated in a comprehensible, comprehensive manner in the submitted contracts. The Board of Directors explained during the discussions visit that the co-operation with the Validation Organization for Study Programmes Architecture and Planning (ASAP - Akkreditierungsverbund für Studiengänge der Architektur und Planung) and the Accreditation Network for Study Programmes of Civil Engineering (ASBau e.V. - Akkreditierungsverbund für Studiengänge des Bauwesens), that was considered to be problematic when the Agency was re-accredited the last time in 2006, is, in practice, no longer in existence.

Result

Criterion 2.2.4 is fulfilled.

Recommendation

2.3 Independence

2.3.1 The agency has a separate legal entity.

Documentation

On 11 September 2008, the German Federal State of Lower Saxony established ZEvA as a foundation under public law with legal capacity and with registered office in Hanover. ZEvA is subject to supervision by the Ministry of the Interior of the Federal State of Lower Saxony. The deed of foundation has been submitted (p. 11 in the volume of annexes).

Assessment

The experts assert that through its transformation to a foundation under civil law the Agency has achieved a separate legal entity.

Result

Criterion 2.3.1 is fulfilled.

Recommendation

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

Documentation

Pursuant to § 3 of the by-laws (see volume of annexes p. 5) ZEvA pursues exclusively and directly non-profit purposes. § 4 para. 1 of the by-laws determines the amount of the foundation assets at 25,000 Euro.

According to the KMPG audit report, in 2009 the income of ZEvA came to a total of 1,531,623 Euro, of which 525,000 Euros were accounted for by public grants of the Federal State of Lower Saxony for evaluation procedures. For 2010, the Agency's business plan calculates an income from accreditation of about 1,177,000 Euro. For evaluation procedures in Lower Saxony, the Agency registers fundings obtained by the *Land* of 525,000 Euro. The Agency reckons with an income from other evaluation procedures of about 25,200 Euro.

The expenditures are also listed in detail in the business plan for 2010 (pp. 62-67 in the volume of annexes). The business plan for 2010 estimates the costs for evaluation proce-

dures as 525,000 Euro, of which 385,716 Euro are allotted for personnel costs alone. Costs for material setup and expenses such as rent and office furniture are allotted pro-rata to the evaluation and the accreditation units. According to the business plan for 2010, the Agency has built up reserves of about 2 million Euros on a call deposit account (see p. 66 in the volume of annexes).

Assessment

The non-profit status of ZEvA's activities emerges from the purpose of the Foundation laid down in the by-laws. The *Land* as the founding body ascertains the Agency's non-profit status as part of the legal requirements. The Board of Directors explains that the high reserves built up by the Agency result from profits that have been accumulated during the last 15 years of business and that they were discovered when the bank accounts were transferred from the University of Hanover to the Foundation. These profits have been generated mainly through evaluation procedures and will now be used, in agreement with the founding body, for projects carried out in accordance with the objectives set by the Federal State of Lower Saxony. He cites as an example the current evaluation of the results of the Bologna Process in Lower Saxony, which will be presented by the Agency in spring 2011. The expert group welcomes the Agency's intention to use these profits mainly for measuring the impacts of the structural reform of higher education and of accreditation by a valid method.

The expert group clearly recognised that the necessary separation of the cash flows generated by the evaluation procedures conducted in Lower Saxony on the one hand and of the accreditation procedures on the other hand, is carried out in an appropriate manner. The Board of Directors explained in a comprehensible way that - if necessary due to factual reasons - cross-divisional employment of staff members is directly counterbalanced by a corresponding exchange in order to maintain the financial separation of the units.

Cost reductions for accreditation procedures for higher education institutions in Lower Saxony or for member institutions of EIQA. e.V. could not be detected. The Agency's itemisation concerning the way it determines the costs for higher education institutions in programme or system accreditation procedures was explained to the expert group in a comprehensible manner.

Result

Criterion 2.3.1 is fulfilled.

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

The tasks of the Agency's organs are described by § 8, 10, 11 and 12 of the by-laws according to which the single organs do not have the authority to issue instructions to one another. In terms of external partnerships, the Agency solely co-operates with the association EIQA e.V. with regard to the appointment of the organs (see criterion 2.2.1).

The contract concluded with the experts also contains indications with regard to partiality (see volume of annexes, p. 90). By signing the contract the experts declare that they are not biased.

Assessment

Besides the interlaced personnel structure of the organs (see criterion 2.1), there are no interdependencies between organs and the latter do not have the authority to issue instructions to one another. Furthermore, the expert group did not detect any third party interventions with regard to the Agency's activities.

The measures taken by the Agency in order to ensure the impartiality of the experts are considered to be appropriate and sufficient. The Agency adopts a good practice with regard to the members of the organs providing that they leave the room when issues concerning their own higher education institution are discussed.

The experts concluded that the fact the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony represents the founding body in the Foundation Council does not pose a problem, since the Foundation Council assumes a merely supervisory role.

Result

Criterion 2.3.3 is fulfilled.

2.4 Facilities

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

Documentation

At present, the ZEvA head office staff comprises 17 persons. In addition to the managing director the staff currently comprises eight persons in the programme accreditation unit and two persons respectively in the system accreditation unit employs two persons and the evaluation unit. For back office support there are two persons in the secretariat and two in the administration unit. In July 2010, ZEvA moved to its new spacious office in Hanover with about 640 m². All working stations are equipped with personal computers which are connected to an internal network providing also access to the internet.

Assessment

The expert group welcomes the Agency's practice, illustrated during the on-site visit, of giving its staff members a long-term perspective by offering them permanent posts. The Agency's facilities with regard to personnel and material resources are appropriate and sustainable.

Result

Criterion 2.4 is fulfilled.

2.5 Internal Quality Management

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

Documentation

ZEvA submitted an internal quality management manual (see volume of annexes, pp. 255-315), which was developed in 2006. Since March 2007, this manual has been a binding guideline for the internal quality management of the Agency.

The purpose of the internal quality assurance measures is to assure the procedural quality as well as to provide an analysis of the internal processes of the Agency and an internal evaluation (experts, higher education institutions). Furthermore, these QA measures en-

sure the ability for systematic self-correction by means of practical feedback processes and the preparation of all parties involved in the procedure. The Agency sets itself the following objectives: high quality assessments, customer satisfaction, expertise, adequacy of decisions as well as reliability, efficiency and effectiveness, transparency and adherence to procedural principles.

Since 2009, the Agency has used a project data base containing reference data of the parties involved, which also stores the documents allocated to the accreditation procedure throughout each process and manages deadline reminders, e.g. for the fulfilment of conditions.

Additional instruments for internal quality assurance are the different surveys among all parties involved in the procedures such as higher education institutions, experts and members of the Agency's organs, carried out through web-based questionnaires. The results of surveys among experts are already available (see volume of annexes, pp. 326-370) as well as those of a satisfaction survey carried out among the higher education institutions (2007-2010) (see volume of annexes, pp. 332-375) and among the members of the SAK (the results were submitted at a later stage).

In 2009, the Agency introduced a fortnightly *jour fixe*; an example for the recorded results has been submitted (see pp. 404f in the volume of annexes). These meetings serve on the one hand for internal organisation purposes, whilst on the other, they provide in particular occasions for an exchange of experience concerning the assessment procedures (evaluation and accreditation) and for developing a common interpretation of the standards, criteria and guidelines.

Additional elements of the internal quality assurance are the ZEvA internal closed conferences which are always carried out twice a year.

Assessment

The experts consider the Agency's internal quality management as being very detailed and exemplary. The quality manual clearly describes the quality objectives, processes and instruments and lays down the responsibilities.

The results of the satisfaction surveys carried out among the experts, higher education institutions and members of the Agency's organs provide a record of how well the feedback processes work. Furthermore, these survey results serve as a methodically valid basis for decisions taken by the organs concerning the enhancement of the Agency's work. The efficiency of the internal quality management is illustrated by the concept of the preparation of experts: The survey results serve as a basis for the choice of the topics that will be treated in the preparatory seminars.

Result

Criterion 2.5 is fulfilled.

2.6 Internal Complaints Procedure

The agency has a publicly accessible, formalised internal procedure for reviewing accreditation decisions on application of a Higher Education Institution.

Documentation

The Agency's internal complaints procedure was formalised with the constitution of the Review Commission on 5 October 2007. The rules are described in the General Terms and Conditions of ZEvA (see point 7.3, volume of annexes p. 85) and they are thus part of the contracts with the higher education institutions. The following is laid down by the afore-mentioned document:

"Objections against the conduct of the procedure and/or procedural decisions may be submitted in writing to the ZEvA Board of Directors at any time, but no later than the adoption of the corresponding decision by the SAK. The Board of Directors will subsequently decide upon the complaint. Objections against accreditation decisions of the SAK may be submitted within six weeks after receipt of the notification of accreditation. They must be submitted in writing to the ZEvA Board of Directors. The decisions about the complaints are adopted by the SAK based upon a recommendation of the ZEvA Review Commission. This does not affect the possibility of court proceedings (action).

If the other party to the contract lodges an appeal concerning a procedure with the Accreditation Council and it leads to an assessment by the Council which is subject to charges, and if the Council's review does not produce any objections, the other party of the contract is obliged to bear the costs laid down by the fees regulation of the Accreditation Council as well as any costs incurred by ZEvA and for which the Agency has to provide proof."

The Review Commission comprises three members and up to two alternate members who should have experience in assessment procedures. The members are appointed by the SAK for a three-year term of office. The volume of annexes contains the rules of procedure of the Review Commission (see p. 19).

Assessment

The deadlines and actions required for the internal complaints procedure are mostly adequate. The regulations of the internal complaints procedure are known to the higher education institutions as part of the contracts for the accreditation procedure, but not yet publicly accessible as required by criterion 2.6.

The contracts with the higher education institutions provide that in case of complaints presented by the higher education institution to the Accreditation Council with regard to a specific-purpose assessment, the higher education institution will bear any costs incurred if no procedural deficiencies are detected. The currently applicable fee statute excludes such a case. Hence, the above-mentioned paragraph might have an unlawful dissuasive effect on higher education institutions when it comes to lodging an appeal with the Accreditation Council. Therefore, this paragraph should be withdrawn. The expert group has ascertained that the composition of the Review Commission and the corresponding appointment procedures are laid down solely in the rules of procedure of the actual commission. Even if the experts considered this to be a small formal flaw, it does not infringe the criteria set by the Accreditation Council.

Result

Criterion 2.7 is substantially fulfilled.

Recommendation

1. The expert group recommends the Accreditation Council to specify the **a condition** by which the ZEvA should publish its internal complaints procedure on the Agency's website.
2. The Agency should withdraw the paragraph from the contracts concluded with higher education institutions which provides that, in case of complaints presented by the higher education institution to the Accreditation Council with regard to a specific-purpose assessment, the higher education institution will bear any costs incurred if no procedural deficiencies are detected.
3. For the sake of transparency, the Review Commission should be defined as an organ of the Foundation in its by-laws. The appointment of members of the Review Commission should be laid down in the rules of procedure of the competent organ as one of its tasks.

2.7 Reporting

The agency describes its procedures and appraisal criteria adequately in detail and publishes them. It publishes the names of the experts, the expert reports³ and the decisions of the accreditation procedures carried out by it.

Documentation

The guidelines for programme and system accreditation as well as all the relevant resolutions adopted by the Accreditation Council can be downloaded from the Agency's website. The website also provides information about the current composition of the committees as well as access to a data base of the accredited study programmes and further information about the Agency. According to Clause 1.1.9 of the resolution "Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation" adopted on 8 December 2010 by of the Accreditation Council, the publication of the assessment report is only provided for procedures initiated since June 2010.

Assessment

By publishing them on the website of the Agency and in the data base for study programmes accredited by the Accreditation Council, the Agency's criteria, procedures and decisions are made sufficiently transparent to the interested public.

The Agency admitted during the on-site visit that the registration of the accredited study programmes with the Higher Education Compass, in compliance with § 11 of the agreement made with the Accreditation Council, has been carried out tardily in the past. According to the Agency, the records should be entered in the data base within four weeks after the accreditation decision. The expert group appreciates this decision.

A superficial inspection of the records shows that the profile outlines published in the Higher Education Compass are, in part, not very significant. The Agency explained that, in future, these texts will be a part of the assessment reports and thus discussed by the experts which should enhance the quality.

The examination of the documents of the current SAK meeting shows that the assessment reports are clearly in line with the criteria set by the Accreditation Council and that they structured in a stringent manner. However, due to the criteria-oriented structure and the use of text modules the impression of standardisation may easily arise. Therefore, in some cases the individual character of the assessment of individual study programmes may not be given full consideration. The expert group recommends paying the necessary attention to the quality of the texts in spite of the high number of programme accreditation

procedures. In this regard, the experts appreciate the established four-eye principle which includes the proof-reading by the head of the unit in charge.

Result

Criterion 2.7 is fulfilled.

³ The publication of the expert reports is mandatory in procedures, which will be initiated after 01.06.2010.

4.2 Assessment based on European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

The Accreditation Council's resolution concerning the rules of procedure and the criteria for the accreditation of agencies, study programmes and internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions are based upon the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*.

In addition to the programme and system accreditation procedures, the Agency carries out evaluations and other activities, which do not fall within the area of responsibility of the Accreditation Council. With regard to the renewal of the ENQA full membership and registration with the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) these activities are also considered when assessing compliance with the ESG.

Documentation

Evaluation procedures in Lower Saxony are regulated by the Higher Education Act of the *Land*, which provides in § 5 that external evaluation of teaching and learning is to be carried out by a science-related establishment. Until 2006, the Agency focused on implementing systematic, periodic and comprehensive evaluation of the disciplines offered by the higher education institutions in Lower Saxony. With reference to the workload, since 2005 higher education institutions have concentrated on the procedures for programme accreditation; therefore, the focus has shifted from discipline-related evaluation to the institutional evaluation of individual higher education institutions. On request and against reimbursement, the Agency also conducts evaluations outside Lower Saxony.

The evaluation procedures are managed by the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK). Pursuant to § 11 para. 7 of the by-laws, the commission adopts a two-year work plan, receives the reports concerning on-going evaluation procedures and decides upon the evaluation reports including the recommendations concerning quality assurance contained therein.

The criteria and rules for the implementation of evaluation procedures are laid down in the "Procedures Manual for External Evaluation") (pp. 196-254 in the volume of annexes). This manual defines the procedures of the institutional evaluation of quality management in teaching and learning, the evaluation of study programmes or subjects and of thematic evaluations.

Pursuant to § 11 para. 1 of the by-laws, the SEK comprises the following 10 members:

- *"the academic director chairing the commission,*
- *the chairperson (or alternate) of the Conference of the Higher Education Institutions in Lower Saxony (LHK - Landeshochschulkonferenz),*

- *two rectorate members-in-office or former members of an university or an equivalent higher education institution and two of an university of applied science,*
- *a personality experienced in evaluation at national or international level,*
- *one student representative of an university or an equivalent higher education institutions and one of an university of applied science and*
- *one representative of the Ministry responsible for the higher education institutions in Lower Saxony."*

Between 2006 and 2010 the following procedures were carried out:

- evaluation of the study programme Communication Design, Merz Akademie Stuttgart
- evaluation of teaching and learning at the University of Applied Science for Art Therapy Nürtingen
- evaluation of the study programme Music Pedagogy, Darmstadt Academy for Musical Arts
- evaluation of the study programme for nursery school teachers, Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus Berlin
- subject evaluation of teaching and learning in Law Studies at universities in Lower Saxony
- subject evaluation of teaching and learning in Cultural Studies at universities in Lower Saxony
- subject evaluation of teaching and learning in Dentistry at universities in Lower Saxony
- subject evaluation of teaching and learning in Slavonic Studies, University of Göttingen
- institutional evaluation of the Centre for Higher Education and Quality Development (Zentrum für Hochschul- und Qualitätsentwicklung - ZfH), University of Duisburg-Essen
- institutional evaluation of the Konservatorium Wien University
- institutional evaluation of the Braunschweig University of Technology
- institutional evaluation of the University of Applied Science Braun-

schweig/Wolfenbüttel

- institutional evaluation of the Hanover Medical School
- institutional evaluation of the University Medical Centre of the University of Göttingen
- evaluation of the implementation of the structural reform of higher education in the framework of the Bologna Process in Lower Saxony (on-going procedure)
- thematic evaluation at the University of Applied Science Emden/Leer (on-going procedure)

Assessment

The expert group assesses the documents and procedures, on which the evaluation is based to be positive throughout, considering them very suitable for strengthening the self-controlling ability of higher education institutions by providing targeted feedback on their work. The expert group expresses its regret concerning the fact that the subject-related evaluation has been given up. Due to its focus on the implementation and achievement of the objectives set by the higher education institutions for specific subjects, this instrument could be a valuable complement to system accreditation that focuses necessarily on the quality assurance within higher education institutions. Furthermore, subject-related evaluation may be used to collect information on the quality of study programmes in a systematic and methodically valid way, providing a method for measuring the effects of programme accreditation. According to the expert group, this would contribute to the empirical validation of the activities in accreditation in general. In addition, the procedures for the accreditation of single study programmes cannot compensate the insight that could be gained by comparing the activities of the different institutions offering a particular discipline. From this line of thoughts, the expert group recommends expanding the offer of evaluation services in the future in order to provide stronger support to the higher education institutions on their way to autonomy.

With regard to the international activities of the Agency, the expert group asserts that ZEvA has been authorised in the meantime by Federal Department of Economic Affairs (EVD) of Switzerland to carry out accreditation procedures for study programmes and universities of applied science in Switzerland and that the Agency also carries out procedures in other countries such as Saudi Arabia and Russia. The expert group much appreciates these international activities.

ZEvA's commitment to exploit its expertise for the development of targeted consultation services for higher education institutions offered by "ZEvA Expert" is considered as

substantially positive by the experts. At present, it is not possible to assess compliance with the ESG as these activities are still in the planning stage.

3.1: Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

STANDARD:

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

GUIDELINES:

The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990s. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions. The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

Since standard 3.1 includes the fulfilment of Part II of the ESG, the following sections will firstly deal with standards 2.1 to 2.8 before making a statement concerning standard 3.1.

2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

STANDARD:

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

GUIDELINES:

The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met. If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

Documentation

The Agency's guidelines for programme and system accreditation (see pp. 92-104 and pp. 153-195 in the volume of annexes) contain the currently applicable criteria of the Accreditation Council according to the resolution "Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation" adopted on 8 December 2009. The guidelines refer in particular in point 2.8 for programme accreditation procedures to the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions; point 5.4 also lists

the criteria for system accreditation, which formulate the requirements set for the internal quality management system of the higher education institution.

With regard to evaluation procedures, the requirements and procedures are laid down and published by the Agency in a manual (see pp. 196-254 in the volume of annexes).

Assessment

The Agency's procedures for programme and system accreditation as well as for evaluation are comprehensibly written down in the corresponding guidelines, which make them available to external parties. The ZEvA guidelines directly reproduce the corresponding criteria set by the Accreditation Council as citations, explaining the Agency's expectations concerning the explanations given by the higher education institution. With regard to both programme and system accreditation, the criteria set by the Accreditation Council refer in particular to the importance of the correct functioning of internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions.

Result

The Agency complies with standard 2.1

2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes

STANDARD:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

GUIDELINES:

In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used. As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

Documentation

The Agency's requirements and procedures for programme and system accreditation and for external evaluation are regulated by the relevant guidelines (see pp. 92-104, pp. 153-195 and pp. 196-254 in the volume of annexes). These documents represent an assessment approach that results from the Agency's understanding of quality and which assumes and respects the higher education institutions' final responsibility for quality in

teaching and learning. The Agency involves representatives from higher education institutions as well as representatives of professional practice in the development of the guidelines which are elaborated by the organs SEK and SAK.

The guidelines are published on the Agency's website and hence accessible for the higher education institution.

Assessment

The Agency's guidelines for the procedure of accreditation provide information - in an exemplary way with regard to presentation and comprehensibility - about the objectives and requirements for higher education institutions and provide a description of the Agency's quality assurance procedure. Relevant interest groups, representatives of higher education institutions and of professional practice as well as students and international experts were involved in the development of the above at the level of the Accreditation Council for programme and system accreditation procedures and in the organs of the Agency.

Result

The Agency complies with standard 2.2

2.3 Criteria for decisions

STANDARD:

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

GUIDELINES:

Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

Documentation

The Agency's requirements and procedures for programme and system accreditation and for external evaluation are laid down in the relevant guidelines (see pp. 92-104, pp. 153-195 and pp. 196-254 in the volume of annexes). Pursuant to the resolution "Procedure of the Accreditation Council for the assessment of accreditations carried out by agencies" adopted on 8 December 2009 by the Accreditation Council, the decisions taken in accreditation procedures are subject to random sampling and, if necessary, specific-purpose assessments by the Accreditation Council to verify compliance with the criteria and rules of procedure. In evaluation procedures, no formalised decisions are adopted (see p. 53 of

the explanatory statement for the application), but the SEK simply receives the evaluation reports including the recommendations.

Assessment

By publishing the guidelines for the procedures for accreditation and evaluation, the relevant criteria for the decisions of the Agency's organs are made transparent to the higher education institutions. Their consistent application in accreditation decisions is verified by the Accreditation Council on a regular basis. According to the impression of the expert group, there have also been some conflicts in the past resulting from a different understanding of the criteria. For instance, the Agency allocates a certain number of ECTS credit points to each framework level which is in conflict with the common understanding of ECTS in Europe as a method for measuring the student workload and is also incompatible with the structural guidelines of the KMK (see the Agency's progress report on p. 37). However, the experts have gained the impression that there is no evidence that this incorrect understanding of ECTS is applied as a rule and, therefore, that any systematic errors have been detected in the accreditation procedures carried out so far. During the on-site discussions the Board of Directors explained that in practice, the Agency basically applies the exclusively time-based ECTS concept as understood by the KMK and the Accreditation Council. In cases of doubt, ZEvA will begin a respective discussion in good time with the Accreditation Council which has the final responsibility for providing a binding interpretation of its criteria and rules of procedure.

Result

The Agency fully complies with standard 2.3.

2.4 Processes fit for purpose

STANDARD:

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes.

Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance. Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
- the exercise of care in the selection of experts;
- the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;
- the use of international experts;
- participation of students;
- ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached;
- the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review;
- recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality

Documentation

The elements and steps of the procedures for programme and system accreditation and for evaluation procedures are illustrated in the relevant guidelines (see pp. 92-104, pp. 153-195 and pp. 196-254 in the volume of annexes).

According to the statements on p. 22 of the explanatory statement for the application, the Agency bases its selection of experts for programme accreditation procedures on the following criteria:

- *"Scientific and/or subject-related expertise in the assessment of the quality of teaching and learning (implementation of the study programme concept),*
- *expertise in the assessment of the academic feasibility (teaching and examination requirements set for the students, quantitative aspects),*
- *acquaintance with the key goals of the Bologna Reform and a substantially positive attitude towards the reform,*

- *a constructive and critical attitude towards the study programmes for which accreditation has been requested,*
- *acquaintance with the goals and methods of quality assurance (primarily in higher education),*
- *willingness to work as part of a dedicated team performing a peer review,*
- *willingness to express an expert opinion on issues which go beyond the core of one's own discipline,*
- *impartiality,*
- *representation of the disciplines and gender parity within the group."*

Students and representatives of professional practice participate in expert groups for programme accreditation.

With regard to the selection of experts for system accreditation procedures the following criteria (see p. 166 in the volume of annexes) are laid down in the corresponding Guidelines:

"Three experts must have a proven track record in higher education institution governance and self-administration of higher education institution and also have experience in management. The rectors or presidents of higher education institutions are for instance eligible for this position, as well as their deputies or persons holding corresponding positions on faculty or departmental level. As a general rule, they are experienced in higher education assessment, preferably though their involvement in evaluation and accreditation procedures.

Student members must have gained experience in the self-administration bodies of a higher education institution. Members of professional practice represents the perspective of stakeholders of the employment system, putting the emphasis on the aspects of professional qualifications. In every case, the aim is to appoint a member from abroad out of the afore-mentioned group of experts. If necessary, the group will be complemented by an expert who will make any necessary additional assessments concerning legal regulations for specific professions. The expert must provide proof that they have participated at preparatory events for system accreditation or, alternatively, they have to express their willingness to participate in such a briefing."

The following criteria for the selection of experts in evaluation procedures are listed in the manual (see volume of annexes, pp. 203f).

"The requirements on the experts are manifold: on the one hand they are peers acting on

the same level of qualifications, on the other hand they should be external experts for a specific field that is to be assessed or they should represent a specific interest group inside or outside of the higher education institution.

These prerequisites eventually determine the composition of an expert group involving HEI representatives from teaching and learning (professors), from management level (rectorate, deanery), from professional practice and students. The groups are compiled with different appointment profiles in accordance with the issue of the evaluation."

For the general preparation of experts in programme accreditation, the Agency offers annually special seminars (see p. 22 in the explanatory statement for the application and the SAK report about the qualification of experts dated 28 September 2010 in the volume of annexes, pp. 316-325). On this occasion, primarily modifications and current interpretations of the guidelines are discussed and the experts are assisted in developing an adequate understanding of their role. These seminars are also an opportunity to provide direct feedback about the experience gained in the accreditation procedures taking up topics brought up by the expert groups. They are aimed at all status groups such as teachers, representatives of professional practice and students. ZEvA supports the activities of the student accreditation pool with an annual subvention of max. 2,500 Euro.

According to the Agency, in 2010, 10 one-day seminars on five topics with about 140 participants in total took place. For 2011, four blocks of seminars with a duration of 1.5 days are scheduled (in March 2011). Each seminar should reach about 25 participants. Hence, about 100 persons will become acquainted with current accreditation-related topics and the guidelines for the accreditation process. ZEvA's objective is that the majority of the experts will have participated at the seminars by mid-2011 or that they will have acquired similar qualifications through multiple participation at accreditation procedures. The Agency evaluates the seminars by conducting surveys amongst the participants, aiming at achieving at least the assessment of "good" (school grade 2).

At the beginning of the procedure, each member of an expert group receives a manual containing the currently applicable criteria and rules of procedure. The experts' preparation for the concrete procedure should consist in consigning the documents at an early stage, being given the possibility to provide a preliminary statement and to take part in a detailed preliminary discussion.

Assessment

The Agency's procedures for programme and system accreditation and for evaluation are based on a three-level peer review procedure which includes self-documentation, an on-site visit and the experts' evaluation report. The procedural steps mentioned in standard

2.4 are adequately implemented. The procedures are aimed at the principle of providing feedback to the higher education institution as the responsible party, concerning the quality of their study programmes or internal quality assurance systems. The Agency also integrates advisory elements in the evaluation procedures in order to strengthen the self-controlling ability of higher education institutions.

The Agency has laid down the criteria for the selection of experts in a comprehensible manner and in compliance with the objectives and the characteristics of each procedure.

The expert group is critical of the way in which experts are appointed in procedures for programme accreditation. Even though these procedures form the basis for the core business of the Agency, the decision lies in fact in the hands of the Board of Directors of the foundation involving both subject-specific members of the SAK by way of circulation. The appointment is carried out on the basis of a list compiled by the head office suggesting only one candidate for each position to be filled. During an interview with the Board of Directors, the latter rejected the idea to suggest more than one nominee for the selection considering this practice to be too time-consuming. The experts acknowledge that ZEvA is pursuing the goal to involve also experts from abroad in programme accreditation, even if the Accreditation Council does not explicitly stipulate this. However, the participation of international experts should still be clearly extended, possibly involving also German peers working abroad who may contribute their experience with international higher education systems. The Agency should increase the number of experts in its pool by a selective recruitment. It is furthermore desirable to intensify the involvement of international experts within the SAK.

Also when dealing with larger clusters of study programmes in programme accreditation, the Agency involves only one student member and one representative of professional practice. Hence, the ratio between academic experts and these member groups results in a problematic imbalance. Furthermore, the individual students and representatives of professional practice have to face the necessity of making a differentiated assessment of all study programmes of the cluster, which causes a high personal burden in the performance of their roles. Larger expert groups should therefore include two student representatives and two representatives of professional practice respectively in order to ensure a fair division of work in the procedures also in this case.

The biographical information on the members of the organs provide a record of broad competences in the relevant fields such as academic performance, design of study programmes or higher education institution management and governance.

With regard to programme accreditation, the general preparation of experts as well as for the preparation regarding specific procedures is judged as good by the experts. The

Board of Directors is aware that the individuals involved in the procedures in the public perception stand for the overall quality of ZEvA. The expert group evaluates positively the seminars offered by the Agency, which are - due to the feedback provided by the expert groups - tailored to suit their needs. The expert group welcomes the Agency's objective to increase the number of trained individuals involved in the procedures. According to the experts, it is also worth the effort, in the medium-term, to ensure that only prepared persons are appointed to the expert groups.

It was not clearly recognisable how ZEvA will instruct the experts with regard to the system accreditation procedures. During the on-site visit, the Board of Directors explained that his suggestions for the expert groups comprise solely individuals personally known to him. Albeit personal factors may be of importance in this context, from the experts' point of view, the afore-mentioned practice cannot replace a structured, general preparation.

Result

The Agency complies partially with standard 2.4

Recommendation

1. In the future, the involvement of international experts should be increased and the Agency should appoint more international members to the SAK.
2. When accrediting larger programme clusters, the expert groups should always include respectively two student members and two representatives of professional practice.
3. Over the medium-term, the Agency should not appoint any person without a structured preparation or without long-standing experience in accreditation procedures.

2.5 Reporting

STANDARD:

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

GUIDELINES:

In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone. In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers. Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

Documentation

According to Clause 1.1.9 of the resolution “Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation” adopted on 8 December 2010 by of the Accreditation Council, the publication of the assessment report is only provided for procedures initiated since June 2010.

The structure of the assessment reports for programme accreditation is laid down in the guidelines for application (see volume of annexes, pp. 92-104). The evaluation reports on the procedures for external evaluation are published on the website of the Agency.

Assessment

By publishing the summarised reports on the website of the Agency and in the data base for study programmes accredited by the Accreditation Council, the Agency's decisions are made sufficiently transparent to the interested public. An examination of the documents of the current SAK meeting shows that the assessment reports for programme accreditation are clearly in line with the criteria set by the Accreditation Council and that they are structured in a stringent manner. However, due to the criteria-oriented structure and the use of text modules the impression of standardisation may easily arise. Therefore, in some cases the individual character of the assessment of individual study programmes may not be given full consideration. The expert group recommends paying the necessary attention to the quality of the texts in spite of the high number procedures. In this regard, the experts appreciate the established four-eye principle which includes the proof-reading by the head of the unit in charge.

The expert reports in evaluation procedures have a clear structure which facilitates the

comprehension of both the factual information and the evaluations expressed by the experts to the interested public.

Result

The Agency fully complies with standard 2.5.

2.6 Follow-up procedures

STANDARD:

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

Documentation

In procedures for programme accreditation, the Agency's guidelines allows the issue of accreditation subject to certain conditions (see p. 95 in the volume of annexes). In system accreditation, a random sample is carried out half-way through the accreditation procedure, assessing intensively of at least one study programme for each 2,500 students enrolled during the past winter semester, including at least one Bachelor's and one Master's study programme.

In evaluation procedures, the Agency provides implementation reports as follow-up measures. The higher education institution submits these reports to ZEvA about 2 or 3 years after completion of the evaluation describing whether and in what way the measures, derived from the recommendations of the expert group, have been implemented. ZEvA carries out an analysis of the reports submitted by the higher education institutions and elaborates a summarised report. In case of subject-related evaluations with more than one participating higher education institution, the Agency makes the summarised reports available to the institutions involved after they have been adopted by the SEK.

Assessment

The Agency's regulations concerning the verification of the implementation of conditions on the part of the competent committees for programme accreditation as well as the half-time random sample provided for system accreditation are in line with the currently appli-

cable Guidelines of the Accreditation Council and form the basis for plausible follow-up measures in compliance with the ESG. The follow-up reports for evaluation procedures are a good instrument for providing feedback with regard to the implementation of the recommendations made by the expert group.

Result

The Agency fully complies with standard 2.6.

2.7 Periodic reviews

STANDARD:

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not “once in a lifetime”. It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

Documentation

Pursuant to the rules of procedure of the Accreditation Council, the decisions concerning programme and system accreditation are issued with a limited accreditation term. As a consequence, accreditation generally has to be renewed in order to continue to be able to offer the study programme. ZEvA has adopted more than 2,000 decisions for the accreditation of study programmes and partial study programmes since its foundation.

Between 1996 and 2006, during the comprehensive evaluation of disciplines in Lower Saxony, ZEvA conducted two consecutive cycles of evaluation. Due to the fact that the current offer of evaluation procedures leaves the choice between the different variants to the higher education institution (institutional evaluation, evaluation of study programmes or subjects, thematic evaluations), the continuous external quality assurance is coordinated with the higher education institutions. Since 2006, six procedures for institutional evaluation have taken place (see overview in the explanatory statement for the application, p. 42).

Assessment

The accreditation period in the procedure of programme and system accreditation which is limited by the Accreditation Council's rules of procedure, involves a periodic revision in

accordance with standard 2.7. Even though, to a certain extent, the focus in Lower Saxony has shifted away from subject-related evaluation since 2006, procedures concerning external quality assurance with a different focus are regularly carried out also in this field of activities, hence complying with standard 2.7.

Result

The Agency fully complies with standard 2.7.

2.8 System-wide analyses

STANDARD:

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

GUIDELINES:

All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

Documentation

The Agency states that it systematically publishes the information and experience acquired during its work in the annual reports and scientific publications of its staff members (see pp. 411-415 in the volume of annexes).

At present, the Agency is carrying out a procedure to evaluate the implementation of the structural reform of higher education in the framework of the Bologna Process. The evaluation involves higher education institutions in Lower Saxony and further, selected institutions and will be completed in 2011.

Assessment

The expert group awaits with great interest the results and findings of the evaluation of the implementation of the structural reform of higher education in the framework of the Bologna Process in Lower Saxony. This evaluation is expected to contribute to the measurement of the effects of programme accreditation.

Nevertheless, during its 15 years of activity, the Agency could have made available more often its findings to the higher education institution and to the interested public by providing a structured analysis. According to the expert group, this objective is neglected to a

certain extent in the everyday business of the programme accreditation. Therefore the analysis of the results should be institutionalised.

Result

The Agency fully complies with standard 2.8.

Recommendation

1. The Agency should institutionalise a structured analysis of the insights gained through the different procedures for quality assurance.

Summarised result for Standard 3.1:

Summarising the assessments for standard 2.1 to standard 2.8, it can be asserted that standard 3.1 is fulfilled.

3.2 Official status

STANDARD:

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

Documentation

As per § 2 para. 1 no. 1 of the German Statute on the Establishment of a *Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany*, the Foundation has the task of accrediting and re-accrediting accreditation agencies. It grants, for a limited period of time, the right to accredit study programmes or internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions by awarding the seal of the Foundation. Since 04 February 2000, ZEvA has been entitled without any interruption to award the quality seal of the Accreditation Council.

Evaluation procedures carried out by ZEvA are regulated in Lower Saxony by the Higher Education Act of the *Land*, which provides in § 5 that external evaluation of teaching and learning is to be carried out by a science-related organisation.

Assessment

With the first accreditation by the Accreditation Council issued on 4 February 2000 and all subsequent re-accreditations, ZEvA is recognised by the competent public authority in Germany. Adherence to current criteria and rules of procedure is confirmed by the Ac-

creditation Council's decision in the on-going procedure of accreditation, and the Agency is permitted to conduct procedures of programme and system accreditation during the upcoming period of accreditation.

The expert group ascertains that the Agency receives financial benefits from the *Land* for evaluations according § 5 of the Higher Education Act of Lower Saxony and that the procedures are thus recognised by the respective authority.

Result

The Agency fully complies with standard 3.2.

3.3 Activities

STANDARD:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

GUIDELINES:

These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

Documentation

The Agency has adopted 2,200 decisions for accreditation of study programmes and partial study programmes since its foundation. Since 2008, it has been entitled to carry out procedures for system accreditation; the first procedure is expected to be initiated in the next year.

In addition to these accreditation procedures, the Agency carries out evaluations on a regular basis. Furthermore, it plans to offer consulting services to higher education institutions with "ZEVA Expert".

Assessment

With programme accreditation being quantitatively its main activity, the Agency carries out regular external quality assurance procedures for study programmes in compliance with standard 3.3. The expert group recommends reinforcing the activities concerning evaluation services as it considers them to be very suitable for providing stronger support to the higher education institutions on their way to autonomy. Due to its focus on the implementation and achievement of the objectives set by the higher education institution for specific subjects, the subject-related evaluation could be in particular a valuable complement to system accreditation that focuses necessarily on the implementation of quality assurance in higher education institutions.

Result

The Agency fully complies with standard 3.3.

Recommendation

1. The Agency should further intensify its activities in the field of evaluation.

3.4 Resources

STANDARD:

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

Documentation

According to the KMPG audit report, in 2009 the income of ZEvA came to a total of 1,531,623 Euro, of which 525,000 Euros were accounted for by public grants of the Federal State of Lower Saxony for evaluation procedures. For 2010, the Agency's business plan calculates an income from accreditation of about 1,177,000 Euro. For evaluation procedures in Lower Saxony, the Agency registers fundings obtained by the *Land* of 525,000 Euro. The Agency reckons with an income from other evaluation procedures of about 25,200 Euro.

The expenditures are also listed in detail in the business plan for 2010 (pp. 62-67 in the volume of annexes). The business plan for 2010 estimates the costs for evaluation procedures as 525,000 Euro, of which 385,716 Euro are allotted for personnel costs alone. Costs for material setup and expenses such as rent and office furniture are allotted pro-rata to the evaluation and the accreditation units. According to the business plan for 2010, the Agency has built up reserves of about 2 million Euros on a call deposit account (see p. 66 in the volume of annexes).

At present, the ZEvA head office staff comprises 17 persons. In addition to the managing director the staff comprises currently eight persons in the programme accreditation unit, the system accreditation unit employs two persons as well as the evaluation unit. For back office support there are two persons in the secretariat and two in the administration unit. In July 2010, ZEvA moved to its new spacious office in Hanover with about 640 m². All working stations are equipped with personal computers which are connected to an internal network providing also access to the internet.

Assessment

The Agency's facilities with regard to personnel and material resources are appropriate and sustainable. The expert group welcomes the Agency's practice, illustrated during the on-site visit, of giving its staff members a long-term perspective by offering them permanent posts.

The Board of Directors explains that the high reserves built up by the Agency result from profits that have been accumulated during the last 15 years of business and that they were discovered when the bank accounts were transferred from the University of Hanover to the Foundation. These profits have been generated mainly through evaluation procedures and will now be used in agreement with the founding body for projects carried out in accordance with the objectives set by the Federal State of Lower Saxony. He cited as an example the current evaluation of the results of the Bologna Process in Lower Saxony, which will be presented by the Agency in spring 2011. The expert group welcomes the Agency's intention to use these profits mainly for measuring the impacts of the structural reform of higher education and of accreditation by a valid method.

According to the experts, the personnel and material resources for the evaluation unit are sufficient for the present stage of the procedures. However, disposing of just two staff members limits the possibilities for acquiring procedures nationwide. In order to make it possible to intensify the activities in this field, the Agency should invest in this unit.

Result

The Agency complies substantially with standard 3.4.

Recommendation

1. In order to make it possible to intensify its activities in evaluation, the Agency should provide additional resources for acquiring new procedures.

3.5 Mission statement

STANDARD:

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

GUIDELINES:

These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

Documentation

At its 29th meeting held on 5 December 2006, the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK) adopted a fundamental decision regarding its understanding of quality. This resolution serves as a basis for the Agency's assessment approach in accreditation procedures and is published both in the guides for programme and system accreditation and on the ZEvA website.

ZEvA accordingly defines the quality of teaching and learning by the following three dimensions: quality of input, quality of process and quality of output, objectives or results. Output quality on the one hand consists in a conclusive justification of the qualification objectives. Input and process quality are expressed by the degree of suitability of the available resources and the design of the teaching-learning processes for achieving the qualification objectives.

The description of the qualification objectives should be in line with the qualification framework for higher education degrees and the Dublin Descriptors as well as with the requirements of the professional practice. Furthermore, they should include the objectives set with regard to personality development and consider the students' capability to participate actively in social life within a democratic polity.

Input quality is expressed by the degree of suitability of the material and personnel background of the qualification process which leads to the achievement of the qualification objectives. Process quality on the other hand is illustrated by the consistency, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of the concept, organisation and implementation of the study programme.

With regard to its assessment approach, the Agency determines from the understanding of quality illustrated above that the task assigned to the higher education institution consists in defining its understanding of quality in view of the requirements for accreditation.

In this context, it is expected that the departments responsible for the implementation of the study programmes specify and justify the standards inherent to the respective discipline and disciplinary culture in order to make them accessible for evaluation. According to ZEvA, it is not the Agency's task to set the standards for quality but to assess them by means of a comprehensible procedure carried out by experts.

Assessment

ZEvA defines a programme-related quality understanding which focuses on the higher education institutions' responsibility for the quality of the study programmes. It is from this understanding of quality that the Agency derives the basis for its work. Nevertheless, the self-controlling ability of the higher education institutions could be encouraged to an even greater extent than currently happens implicitly through the current predominance of programme accreditation. From the experts' point of view, the upcoming update of the mission statement should be used to elaborate a document that is shorter and more concise.

Result

The Agency fully complies with standard 3.5.

3.6 Independence

STANDARD:

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

GUIDELINES:

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as

- its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

Documentation

On 11 September 2008, the German Federal State of Lower Saxony established ZEvA as a foundation under public law with legal capacity and with registered office in Hanover. ZEvA is subject to supervision by the Ministry of the Interior of the Federal State of Lower Saxony. The deed of foundation has been submitted (p. 11 in the volume of annexes).

The tasks of the Agency's organs are described by § 8, 10, 11 and 12 of the by-laws according to which the single organs do not have the authority to issue instructions to one another. In terms of external partnerships, the Agency co-operates with the association EIQA e.V. with regard to the appointment of the organs (see criterion 2.2.1). According to the statements on p. 12 of the explanatory statement, EIQA e.V. was established as a registered association at the initiative of ZEvA. At present, 30 German higher education institutions are registered as members. Pursuant to § 7 of the by-laws, the members of the Foundation Council are elected by EIQA e.V. on a proposal from a selection committee. The selection committee comprises the chairpersons of the Rectors's Conference of Lower Saxony and of EIQA e.V. as well as the academic director.

The contract concluded with the experts also contains indications with regard to partiality (see volume of annexes, p. 90). By signing the contract the experts declare that they are not biased.

Assessment

With the transformation of the Agency to become a foundation under civil law on 11 November 2008, it achieved a separate legal entity which ensures independence from third parties. The expert group did not detect any third party interventions with regard to the Agency's activities.

The measures taken by the Agency in order to ensure the impartiality of the experts are considered to be appropriate and sufficient. The Agency adopts a good practice with regard to the members of the organs providing that they leave the room when issues concerning their own higher education institution are discussed.

The experts concluded that the fact the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony represents the founding body in the Foundation Council does not pose a problem, since the Foundation Council assumes a merely supervisory role. The expert group considers the participation of a representative of the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony in the SEK as uncritical, since the Federal State has a legitimate interest in the further development of the higher education institutions in Lower Saxony. Furthermore, the representative of the Federal State of Lower Saxony provides constructive and pertinent contributions to the Agency's work. Furthermore, no formalised decisions are adopted in evaluation procedures, but the SEK receives the evaluation reports and discusses the recommendations concerning the enhancement of quality.

Result

The Agency complies with standard 3.6

3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies**STANDARD:**

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

GUIDELINES:

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people.

Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

Documentation

The elements and steps of the procedures for programme and system accreditation and for evaluation procedures are illustrated in the relevant guidelines (see pp. 92-104, pp. 153-195 and pp. 196-254 in the volume of annexes). In order to examine specific issues brought up by higher education institutions, the Agency also offers individually tailored procedures for thematic evaluations (see volume of annexes, p. 254).

Students are involved in the expert groups for all types of procedures: programme accreditation (see p. 95 in the volume of annexes), system accreditation (see p. 166 in the volume of annexes) and external evaluation (see p. 209 in the volume of annexes).

According to Clause 1.1.9 of the resolution “Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation” adopted on 8 December 2010 by of the Accreditation Council, the publication of the assessment report is only provided for procedures initiated since June 2010.

The Agency's internal complaints procedure was formalised with the constitution of the Review Commission on 5 October 2007. The rules are described in the General Terms and Conditions of ZEvA (see point 7.3, volume of annexes p. 85). This information thus forms part of the contracts with the higher education institutions. The following is laid

down by the afore-mentioned document:

"Objections against the conduct of the procedure and/or procedural decisions may be submitted in writing to the ZEvA Board of Directors at any time, but not later than the adoption of the corresponding decision by the SAK. The Board of Directors Board of Directors will subsequently decide upon the complaint. Objections against accreditation decisions of the SAK may be submitted within six weeks after receipt of the notification of accreditation. They must be submitted in writing to the ZEvA Board of Directors. The decisions about the complaints are adopted by the SAK based upon a recommendation of the ZEvA Review Commission. This does not affect the possibility of court proceedings (action).

If the other party to the contract lodges an appeal concerning a procedure with the Accreditation Council and it leads to an assessment by the Council which is subject to charges, and if the Council's review does not produce any objections, the other party of the contract is obliged to bear the costs laid down by the fees regulation of the Accreditation Council as well as any costs incurred by ZEvA and for which the Agency has to provide proof."

The Review Commission comprises three members and up to two alternate members who should have experience in assessment procedures. The members are appointed by the SAK for a three-year term of office. The volume of annexes contains the rules of procedure of the Review Commission (see p. 19).

Assessment

The Agency's procedures for programme and system accreditation as well as for evaluation are adequately described in the guidelines published on the website and are thus publicly accessible. They are based upon on three-level peer review with which includes a self-documentation, on-site visit and the experts' evaluation report. Students are involved on a regular basis in expert groups for accreditation and evaluation. However, the Agency involves only one student member when dealing with larger clusters of study programmes in programme accreditation. In this regard, the single students have to face the necessity of making a differentiated assessment of a possible high number of study programmes contained in the cluster, which causes a high personal burden in the performance of their roles. Larger expert groups should therefore comprise two student members in order to ensure the division of labour in the procedures.

The Agency disposes of an internal complaints procedure, of which the deadlines and actions required are adequately regulated and made accessible to the higher education institution since being a part of the contracts. In order to fulfil standard 3.7 completely, the in-

ternal complaints procedure should, in the future, also be published on the Agency's website.

Result

The Agency complies partially with standard 3.7.

Recommendation

1. When accrediting larger programme clusters, the expert groups should always include respectively two student members and two representatives of professional practice.

3.8 Accountability procedures

STANDARD:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

GUIDELINES:

These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;
2. Documentation which demonstrates that:
 - the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
 - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
 - the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are sub-contracted to other parties;
 - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.
3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.

Documentation

ZEvA submitted an internal quality management manual (see volume of annexes, pp. 255-315), which was developed in 2006. Since March 2007, this manual has been a binding guideline for the internal quality management of the Agency.

The purpose of the internal quality assurance measures is to assure the procedural quality as well as to provide an analysis of the internal processes of the Agency and an internal evaluation (experts, higher education institutions). Furthermore, these QA measures en-

sure the ability for systematic self-correction by means of practical feedback processes and the preparation of all parties involved in the procedure. The Agency sets itself the following objectives: high quality assessments, customer satisfaction, expertise, adequacy of decisions as well as reliability, efficiency and effectiveness, transparency and adherence to procedural principles.

Since 2009, the Agency has used a project data base containing reference data of the parties involved (representatives of the higher education institutions, experts), which also stores the documents allocated to the accreditation procedure throughout each process and manages deadline reminder, e.g. for the fulfilment of conditions.

Additional instruments for internal quality assurance are the different surveys among all parties involved in the procedures such as higher education institutions, experts and members of the Agency's organs, carried out through web-based questionnaires. The results of surveys among experts are already available (see volume of annexes, pp. 326-370) as well as those of a satisfaction survey carried out among the higher education institutions (2007-2010) (see volume of annexes, pp. 332-375) and among the members of the SAK (the results were submitted at a later stage).

In 2009, the Agency introduced a fortnightly *jour fixe*; an example for the recorded results has been submitted (see pp. 404f in the volume of annexes). These meetings serve on the one hand for internal organisation purposes, whilst on the other, they provide in particular occasions for an exchange of experience concerning the assessment procedures (evaluation and accreditation) and for developing a common interpretation of the standards, criteria and guidelines. Additional elements of the internal quality assurance are the ZEvA internal closed conferences which are always carried out twice a year.

The contract concluded with the experts also contains criteria concerning partiality (see volume of annexes, p. 90). By signing the contract the experts declare that they are not biased.

Pursuant to the resolution "Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Agencies" adopted by the Accreditation Council on 8 December 2009, the accreditation of the Agency is to be issued with a time limitation of five years.

Assessment

The experts consider the Agency's internal quality management as being very detailed and exemplary. The quality manual clearly describes the quality objectives, processes and instruments and lays down the responsibilities.

The results of the satisfaction surveys carried out among the experts, higher education institutions and members of the Agency's organs provide a record of how well the feedback

processes work. Furthermore, these survey results serve as a methodically valid basis for decisions taken by the organs concerning the enhancement of the Agency's work. The efficiency of the internal quality management is illustrated by the concept of the preparation of the experts: The survey results serve as a basis for the choice of the topics that will be treated in the preparatory seminars.

According to the experts, the measures taken by the Agency in order to ensure the impartiality of the experts and of the members of the organs are appropriate and sufficient.

The limitation of five years for the period of accreditation issued by the Accreditation Council entails a periodic external assessment of the Agency, if ZEvA wishes to continue to be entitled to award the quality seal of the Accreditation Council.

Result

The Agency fully complies with standard 3.8.

Bonn, 31 January 2011

Accreditation of the Central Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation (ZEvA) in 2010

Schedule for the on-site visit

Effective: 08.11.2010

Accommodation:

Maritim Grand Hotel Hanover
Friedrichswall 11
30159 Hanover

6 December 2010		
6:00 p.m.	Internal preliminary meeting at the hotel	
8:00 p.m.	Internal working dinner at the hotel	

Meeting place 7 December 2010:

Function rooms "Rotation", verdi-Haus, Goseriende 10, 30159 Hanover

7 December 2010		
8:30 - 10:15 a.m.	Discussion with the Foundation's Board of Directors	Discussion partners: Prof. Dr. Rainer Künzel, Hermann Reuke, Florian Fischer
10:30 - 11:30 a.m.	Break	
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Participation at the meeting of the Standing Accreditation Commission and discussion with the commission members	Discussion partners: SAK members according to the directory of members, Hermann Reuke
12:15 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Discussion with students from accredited study programmes/higher education institutions	Discussion partners: Jennifer Dusdal, University of Hanover, Kai Horge Oppermann, University of Göttingen, Steven Zurek & Gesa Olf, University of Vechta
1:00 – 2:30 p.m.	Lunch, internal meeting	

2:45 - 3:45 p.m.	Discussion with experts involved in procedures carried out by the Agency	Discussion partners: Prof. Dr. Hans-Bernd Brosius, Dean of the Faculty for Social Sciences of the LMU Munich, Prof. Dr. Stefan Hornbostel, Institute for Research Information and Quality Assurance, Bonn, Prof. Dr. Thorsten Litifin, Dean of Studies Department Management and Technology, University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück, Dr. Helmuth Schöning, HSG Bewerbermanagement GmbH, Hamburg (professional practice), Björn Stecher, student, Economic Law, FHTW Berlin
3:45 - 4:00 p.m.	Break	
4:15 - 5:15 p.m.	Discussion with representatives from study programmes accredited by the Agency	Discussion partners: Prof. Dr. Günther Dey, Business Economics, University of Applied Science Bremen, Prof. Dr. Hubert Heinelt, Institute of Political Science, TU Darmstadt, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Lücke, Agricultural Science, Vice-president of the University of Göttingen, Prof. Dr. Jürgen Stember, Dean of the Department Public Management, University of Applied Science Harz.
5:15 - 7:00 p.m.	Internal final meeting of the first day	
ca. 7:30 p.m.	Internal working dinner at the hotel	

Meeting place 8 December 2010: ZEvA head office, Lilienthalstrasse 1, 30179 Hanover

8 December 2010		
8:30 - 9:30 a.m.	Discussion with the staff members (evaluation unit, programme accreditation unit, system accreditation unit and administration/secretariat)	Discussion partners: Dr. Torsten Futterer, Henning Schäfer, Dr. Frank Wullkopf, Dr. Stephan Curriefen, Dr.-Ing. Dagmar Ridder, Monika Topper, Michael Weimann,

		Dr. Steffen Rogalski, Sandra Junghans
9:30 - 09:45 a.m.	Break	
09:45 – 10:45 a.m.	Discussion with some members of the Standing Evaluation Commission	Discussion partners: Dr. Gerhard Greif, President of the University of Veterinary Medicine Hanover, Christof Schiene, Ministry of Science and Culture of Lower Saxony, Prof. Dr. Martin Thren, President of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts - HAWK Hochschule Hildesheim/Holzminden/Göttingen
10:50 - 11:30 a.m.	Possibly Discussion with the Foundation's Board of Directors	Discussion partners: Prof. Dr. Rainer Künzel, Hermann Reuke, Florian Fischer
11:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Internal final meeting of the expert group with preparations for the report, light lunch	
2:30 p.m.	short feedback to the Foundation's Board of Directors (optional)	
then	Departure	