



schweizerische agentur
für akkreditierung
und qualitätssicherung

agence suisse
d'accréditation et
d'assurance qualité

agenzia svizzera di
accreditamento e
garanzia della qualità

swiss agency of
accreditation and
quality assurance

Institutional accreditation

Guide | 01.07.2015 (Status as of 01.08.2018)



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Part A: Institutional Accreditation Guide

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1 Objective, purpose and procedure of first institutional accreditation

1.1 Objective and purpose

With the Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education System (HEdA),¹ Switzerland has at its disposal an instrument designed to control access to its range of higher education (HE) institutions (see Part B). All public or private HE institutions wishing to maintain or obtain the right to use the reserved designations “universities”, “universities of applied sciences” or “universities of teacher education”, including composite or derived forms or versions in all languages, must undergo institutional accreditation. Institutional accreditation is also one of the conditions that HE institutions must meet to receive federal contributions.

Institutional accreditation focuses on the quality assurance systems of HE institutions that allow them to ensure the quality of their teaching, their research and the services they provide. The approach selected enables the autonomy of HE institutions (which retain full responsibility for their quality assurance and development) to be reconciled with their duty to demonstrate transparency and accountability and contributes to the reinforcement of a quality culture.

The quality assurance system is assessed against quality standards by external experts who offer an objective perspective on quality assurance and development approaches and mechanisms. The aim is to assess whether those approaches and mechanisms form a complete and coherent whole, allowing the HE institution to ensure the quality and continuous improvement of its activities, depending on its type and specific characteristics, and abiding by the principle of proportionality between resources deployed and results achieved.

The quality standards cover the following areas: quality assurance strategy; governance; teaching, research and services; resources; internal and external communication.

The accreditation procedure is led by an agency recognised by the Swiss Accreditation Council (hereinafter Accreditation Council).

The accreditation decision is taken by the Accreditation Council. The decision is based on the accreditation proposal from the agency, the report of the expert group and the position statement of the HE institution.

1.2 Procedure

The procedural rules and stages and the quality standards are set out in the Ordinance of the Higher Education Council on Accreditation within the Higher Education Sector (hereinafter HEdA Accreditation Ordinance, see Part C).²

In accordance with international practice, the accreditation procedure includes the following phases:

- Filing the application with the Accreditation Council;
- Admission to the institutional accreditation procedure by the Accreditation Council (decision on admission);

¹ Federal Act of 30 September 2011 on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education sector (Classified Compilation of Federal Law: RS 414.20).

² Ordinance of the Higher Education Council on Accreditation within the Higher Education sector (HEdA Accreditation Ordinance) of 28 May 2015 / Status as of revised 1 January 2018.

- Planning and initiating the procedure, including signing an agreement between the agency and the HE institution;
- Self-assessment by the HE institution;
- External assessment by independent experts, including a preliminary visit, an on-site visit and an expert report;
- Accreditation proposal from the agency and position statement given by the HE institution;
- Accreditation decision issued by the Accreditation Council;
- Publication;
- If appropriate, verification of the fulfilment of conditions.

An institutional accreditation procedure lasts at least 15 months, from the opening of the procedure to the decision of the Accreditation Council. For each procedure, a schedule is set jointly by the HE institution and the agency.

The HE institution may withdraw its application for accreditation at any time. The costs of, and occasioned by, the proceedings until the date of withdrawal shall be charged to the HE institution.

1.3 Costs

The expenses of an accreditation procedure are set in a Fees Ordinance approved by the Swiss Higher Education Council.³

The self-assessment costs are borne by the HE institution.

A lump sum of CHF 32,000 (excluding VAT) charged to the HE institution covers the direct costs (professional fees, travel, accommodation for the experts, etc.) for an institutional accreditation procedure involving five experts, a one-day preliminary visit and a two-and-a-half day visit (see 3.2.2 and 3.2.3). In cases where the competent local authority contributes indirectly to the funding of the agency, HE institutions pay only these costs.

Private HE institutions not in receipt of contributions from the competent local authority towards the funding of the agency pay a fixed charge of CHF 27,000 (excluding VAT) for indirect costs in addition to the direct costs, or a total amount of CHF 59,000 (excluding VAT).

The experts are paid a fixed amount per day for the preliminary visit and the on-site visit.

The terms and conditions of the procedure are set out in agreements. One agreement is signed between the agency and the HE institution; individual agreements are signed between the agency and the experts.

1.4 Duties of the accredited HE institution

The accredited HE institution has a duty to abide by the quality standards on which it has been accredited, and this shall apply throughout the accreditation validity period, across all its sites and for all its activities.

The Accreditation Council must be notified of any fundamental changes within the HE institution (legal form, organisational structure, etc.).

³ See <http://aaq.ch/en/the-aaq/regulations/>

2 Admission to the procedure

2.1 Admission requirements

To gain admittance to the accreditation procedure, the HE institution must demonstrate in a brief report that it meets the requirements set out in Art. 4 para. 1 of the HEdA Accreditation Ordinance.

HE institutions that:

- are already institutionally accredited under the HEdA,
- were created under federal law before the HEdA came into force,
- were recognised as authorised for contributions based on the law applicable before the HEdA came into force, or
- were already a public law university of teacher education under cantonal law before the HEdA came into force,

shall be admitted to the institutional accreditation procedure without verification of the admission requirements.

2.2 Filing of the application

The HE institution shall send its application for admission to the institutional accreditation procedure to the Accreditation Council by completing the application form by the end of 2020 at the latest (two years before the end of the transitional period established under Art. 75 HEdA) or two years before the end of the validity period of the institutional accreditation.⁴ The application of private HE institutions is to be accompanied by the aforementioned report.

The HE institution states on the form with which agency it would like to conduct the procedure.

The Accreditation Council delegates the examination of the application to the agency. The latter draws up a recommendation for admission or non-admission for the attention of the Accreditation Council.

2.3 Decision on admission

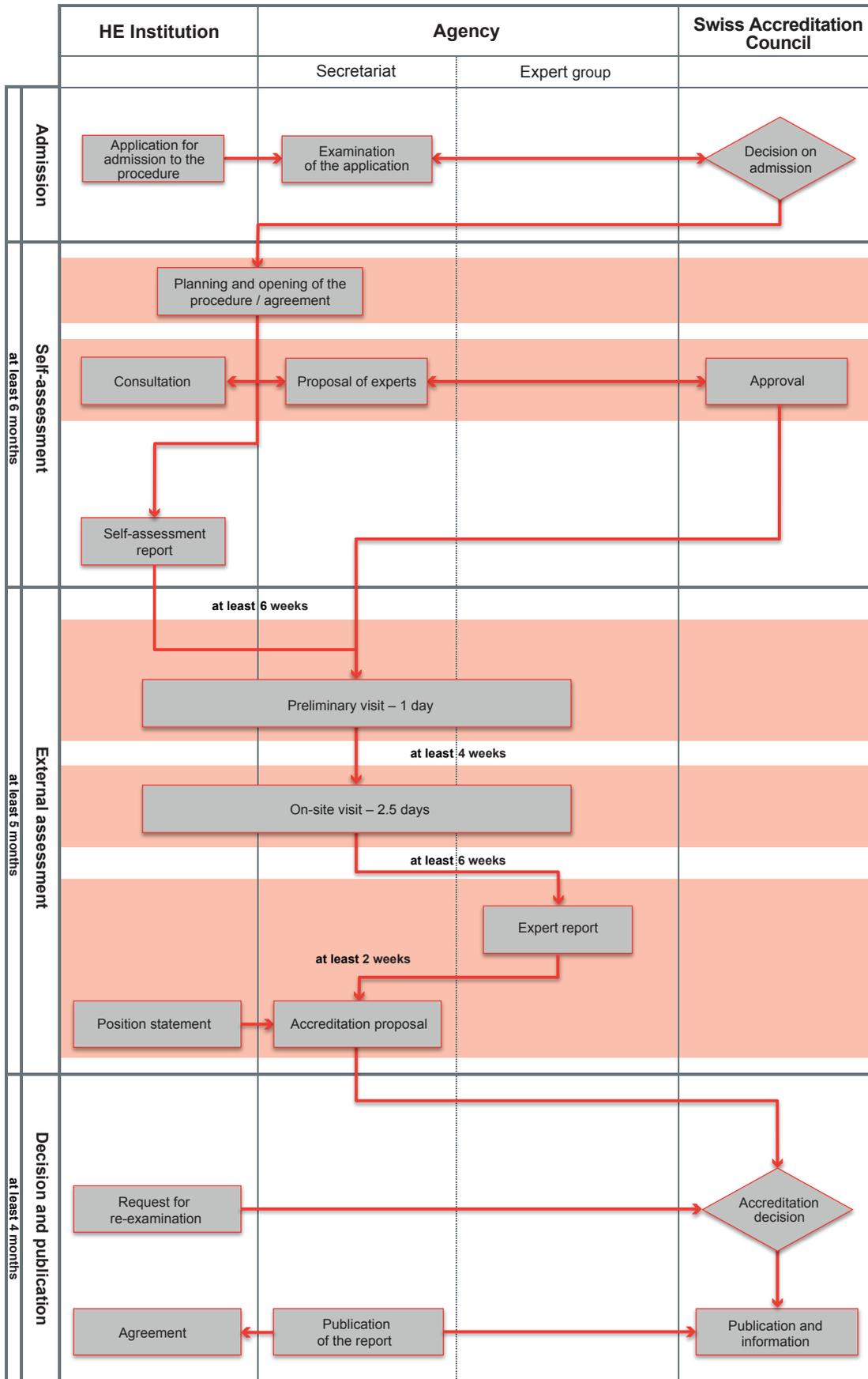
If the HE institution fulfils all the requirements for admission to the procedure, the Accreditation Council shall decide to admit the HE institution into the institutional accreditation procedure. It shall inform the HE institution and the agency of its decision. The agency shall then contact the HE institution to initiate the accreditation procedure.

Under no circumstances does the decision on admission represent a prejudgement of the institutional accreditation decision.

If the requirements for admission to the procedure are not fulfilled, the Accreditation Council shall make a non-admission decision. It shall inform the HE institution and the agency of this outcome.

⁴ <http://akkreditierungsrat.ch/en/accreditation-switzerland/>

Diagram of the procedure for first accreditation



3 First institution accreditation: procedural steps

3.1 Self-assessment

After a positive admission decision is taken by the Accreditation Council, the agency shall formally initiate the accreditation procedure with the HE institution. The opening meeting allows the following issues to be addressed (and later fixed in minutes):

- The planning of the procedure (phases and schedule);
- The language specified for the procedure (German, French, Italian or English);
- The profile of the expert group.

The HE institution shall then undertake its self-assessment, the results of which are recorded in a written report (self-assessment report). The process, which is to include representatives of relevant groups from the HE institution, particularly students, non-professorial teaching staff and professors, and administrative and technical staff, also contributes to self-reflection on the development of the internal quality assurance system at the HE institution.

The self-assessment report is reflexive and self-critical, and it contains information, descriptions and analyses that allow the evaluation of the degree of compliance with quality standards. It includes the following items:

- Presentation of the HE institution (specific characteristics, organisation, key figures);
- Description of the self-assessment process;
- If relevant, follow-up of the outcomes of previous procedures;
- Presentation of the internal quality assurance system;
- Assessment of the quality standards;
- Presentation of strengths, challenges and opportunities for development for each quality standard or evaluation area;
- Action plan for the development of the quality assurance system.

The quality standards are explained in Part D of the documentation package to ensure uniform understanding by the agency, the HE institution and the expert group.

The self-assessment report shall serve as the basis for the experts' on-site visits and for their assessment of the extent to which the HE institution complies with quality standards.

The self-assessment report should comprise approximately 50–80 pages (excluding appendices). The AAQ provides the HE institution with a template. A document in English of approximately 3–4 pages (10,000 signs without spaces) which summarises the main elements of the quality assurance system, as well as its strengths and weaknesses, shall be appended to the self-evaluation report.

The self-assessment phase lasts approximately six months.

During this period, the agency is available to respond to any formal questions relating to the self-assessment report. A meeting with the HE institution will be scheduled if necessary. On invitation, the agency may also lend its support to internal information meetings at the HE institution.

The agency will also arrange a meeting with the HE institution to prepare for the external assessment.

3.2 External assessment

The external assessment phase comprises:

- Selection of the experts;
- Preliminary visit: preparatory meeting of the expert group and preparation of the visit with the HE institution;
- Visit by the expert group;
- External assessment report.

3.2.1 Selection of experts

The expert group appointed by the agency shall be composed of at least five people and possesses overall national and international experience and the knowledge necessary to accomplish its task, including:

- Experience in leading the internal quality assurance and development of HE institutions;
- Experience of teaching and research and, if necessary, an extramural perspective;
- Adequate knowledge of the Swiss Higher Education landscape;
- Active knowledge of the language of the procedure.

Ideally, the chair of the group shall be an active member of management at a HE institution. In addition, one member of the group must come from the student body.

The group is to include an international dimension if necessary, be balanced and take account of the gender, origin and age of the experts, as well as the specific characteristics of the institution and, if necessary, its specific teaching methods. The experts must be independent and be able to make impartial judgements.

During the opening meeting for the procedure, the profile of the expert group shall be discussed with the HE institution. A long list of potential names for the expert group shall then be submitted to the HE institution. Persons suspected of having a conflict of interests or a lack of independence in relation to the HE institution shall be removed from the list.

The agency shall submit the long list to the Accreditation Council for approval and shall then establish an expert group and appoint a chair.

The expert group shall have the following tasks:

- Preparation of visits (preliminary visit and actual visit);
- Conducting interviews during the visit;
- Responsibility for the expert report, with editorial support from the agency.

The agency accompanies and supports the expert group throughout the procedure. It may act as an intermediary between the expert group and the HE institution, as they do not communicate directly with one another during the procedure, except during the interviews conducted as part of the preliminary visit and the actual visit.

3.2.2 Preliminary visit

The preliminary visit takes place at least one month before the on-site visit. It comprises two parts: a preparatory session among experts and a meeting with the HE institution.

In the first part, the experts are informed about:

- The specific characteristics of the Swiss HE sector and the HE institution;
- Institutional accreditation with its focus on the quality assurance system and its quality standards;
- Their role and duties.

This meeting also allows for discussion of:

- Topics and questions to be addressed during the visit;
- Further documents that may be required;
- On-site visit programme.

An initial meeting is then held between the expert group and the HE institution management as well as those responsible for the accreditation. The objectives of this meeting shall be to clarify unresolved issues and to discuss any documentation to be submitted subsequently, as well as any final adaptations to the programme for the on-site visit.

3.2.3 On-site visit

The visit shall allow the expert group to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of the quality assurance system of the HE institution to assess its coherence and effectiveness in ensuring the quality of teaching, research and the provision of services. The analysis of the expert group serves as the basis for the decision by the Accreditation Council, but also contributes to the development of the quality assurance system at the HE institution.

The expert group meets the representatives of different key groups from the HE institution, notably the senior management team of the institution, the management team of key units, those responsible for quality assurance, the representatives of the student body, non-professorial teaching staff, professors, administrative and technical staff, and those responsible for services. The programme also includes working sessions among experts.

The programme for the visit – both its structure and the list of people met – shall be drawn up jointly by the agency and the HE institution and shall take account of the specific characteristics of the institution and the needs of the procedure.

The visit shall conclude with a debriefing, i.e. an oral report in which the expert group provides its first impressions and an outline of the challenges and strengths of the HE institution, but without issuing a definitive assessment of compliance with quality standards. No provision is made for discussion with the HE institution in the context of the oral report.

In general, the on-site visit lasts two and a half days, but its length may be adapted to suit the specific characteristics of the HE institution. The fixed charge for the HE institution shall then be adjusted subsequently.

3.2.4 Expert report

After its visit, the expert group shall deliver a report (expert report) under the responsibility of its chair and with editorial support from the agency. The expert report is to contain the following pieces of information, among others:

- If appropriate, an analysis of follow-up on the results of previous procedures;
- An assessment of the QM system as a whole;
- A description, analysis and conclusion in relation to compliance with the quality standards;
- A summary analysis of strengths and weaknesses;
- Recommendations and, if applicable, conditions for the future development of quality assurance;
- An accreditation recommendation intended for the agency.

Each quality standard is assessed according to a scale comprising four levels: entirely fulfilled, largely fulfilled, partially fulfilled and not fulfilled. In its assessment, the expert group takes account of the specific characteristics of the HE institution.

- A standard is entirely fulfilled when quality assurance mechanisms and approaches exist, when they are fully implemented in a coherent and consistent way and when this allows the HE institution to ensure the quality of its activities.
- A standard is largely fulfilled when only minor shortcomings are observed in the quality assurance mechanisms and approaches or in their implementation.
- A standard is partially fulfilled when quality assurance mechanisms and approaches exist, but major shortcomings or significant weaknesses in their implementation are discovered, or the mechanisms and approaches exist only in part.
- A standard is not fulfilled if mechanisms and approaches that are central to the quality assurance system are lacking and/or if they are implemented inadequately to the extent that they threaten the quality of the HE institution's activities.

The expert group may formulate recommendations for quality development. But it must formulate one or more conditions if a quality standard is partially fulfilled or not fulfilled. A condition is a correction that the HE institution must make or a requirement that it must fulfil in relation to a major shortcoming, so that its accreditation continues. It must always relate to a quality standard and must concern the HE institution, which must be able to fulfil it within a defined period.

If the expert group judges that any defects in the quality assurance system of the HE institution are insurmountable within a reasonable period or that there are too many major shortcomings, it may recommend the refusal of accreditation.

The accreditation proposal of the expert group relies on an overall assessment of compliance with quality standards.

The agency provides the expert group with a template as well as editorial support.

Data protection in the accreditation procedure is subject to the Federal Act on Data Protection.⁵

The external assessment phase lasts approximately five months.

⁵ Federal Act of 19 June 1992 on Data Protection (RS 235.1).

3.3 Agency accreditation proposal and position statement of HE institution

After a formal examination of the expert group's report, the agency shall prepare its accreditation proposal, which includes the following items:

- A brief account of the procedure (composition of expert group, schedule, evaluation of the self-assessment report, the visit and its preparation);
- An accreditation proposal intended for the Accreditation Council.

The agency accreditation proposal is to be based on the self-assessment report of the HE institution and the expert report.

The agency then submits its accreditation proposal and the expert report to the HE institution for a statement (right to a hearing). The HE institution makes due reference to any conditions.

The agency shall examine the position statement from the HE institution and, if appropriate, may amend its accreditation proposal as a result.

The position statement forms an integral part of the documentation for the procedure and will be sent to the Accreditation Council with the self-assessment report, the expert report and the agency accreditation proposal.

3.4 Decision-making

The Accreditation Council shall base its decision on the agency proposal, the self-assessment report, the expert report and the position statement from the HE institution. There are no provisions for a hearing of the HE institution.

The Accreditation Council may:

- grant accreditation without conditions;
- grant accreditation with condition(s);
- refuse accreditation.

The decision of the Accreditation Council cannot be legally challenged (Art. 65, para. 2 HEdA). Nevertheless, the HE institution may submit a request for re-examination to the Accreditation Council.⁶

The accreditation is valid for seven years.

The Accreditation Council is to specify the deadline for the fulfilment of conditions and the terms and conditions for overseeing the fulfilment of those conditions.

The Accreditation Council notifies the HE institution and the agency of its decision.

⁶ See <http://akkreditierungsrat.ch/en/accreditation-council/>

3.5 Publication

The Accreditation Council publishes a list of accredited HE institutions that have obtained the right to use their designation under the HEdA.

The agency publishes the documents related to the external evaluation procedure; these include the expert report, the agency accreditation proposal, the position statement of the HE institution, the decision of the Accreditation Council and, where applicable, the results of the procedure verifying the fulfilment of the conditions. The publication is settled in the contract signed between the agency and the HE institution.

3.6 Verification of the fulfilment of conditions

The HE institution submits a dossier to the Accreditation Council within the specified period setting out how it has fulfilled the conditions.

The Accreditation Council instructs the agency to verify the fulfilment of conditions. The agency carries out this verification – usually with the involvement of experts – in accordance with established procedure (“sur dossier” [in writing] or by means of a shortened visit). It compiles a report for the attention of the Accreditation Council.

The Accreditation Council then decides on the fulfilment of conditions. If the conditions are met, accreditation shall remain valid for the remainder of the seven-year validity period. If the conditions are not met or are not met within the period allowed, the Accreditation Council shall take the administrative measures necessary under Article 64 HEdA.

The HE institution will be charged for the verification procedure.

Part B: Swiss Higher Education landscape: terminology and definitions

Higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector

According to the Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector (HEdA) the higher education landscape comprises “higher education institutions and other institutions within the higher education sector” (Art. 2 para.1).

The term “higher education institution” encompasses all institutions operating at tertiary A level in Switzerland (universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education), regardless of their subject profile or size (Art. 2 para. 2; Art. 30 para.1 lit. b). Similarly, the terms “higher education institution” and “other institution within the higher education sector” relate both to units under public law and to private units (Art. 2 para.1 and 4).

With regard to accreditation, the terms “higher education institution” and “other institution within the higher education sector” relate to a higher education institution as a whole unit. This is therefore a legal entity and possesses an infrastructure in Switzerland. Sub-units of higher education institutions cannot be accredited under the HEdA – even if they are named higher education institutions or institutes.

University, university of applied sciences and university of teacher education

The HEdA distinguishes between higher education institutions of two types: universities on the one hand; universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education on the other (Art. 2). Both types have in common a bound unity of teaching and research, and to be active in several fields or disciplines (art. 30, par. I, let. b).

The criteria for admission to the first study cycle, and the educational and research mandate, allow a distinction to be made between the two types of higher education institutions, and between a university of applied sciences and a university of teacher education, within the second type.

Universities (Art. 2 para. 2 lit. a) have a more general training and research mission (acquisition of knowledge). Admission to the first study cycle requires the compulsory possession of a baccalaureate or an equivalent qualification (Art. 23). Universities award Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees and doctorates.

Universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education (Art. 2 para. 2 lit. b) carry out education and research that focuses on the practise and exercise of professional activities (vocational and applied orientation) (Art. 24, 25 and 26).

Admission to the first study cycle of universities of applied sciences requires the possession of a federal vocational education training diploma combined with initial professional training, or a baccalaureate combined with at least one year’s working experience related to the desired field of studies (Art. 25). The studies and applied research of universities of applied sciences prepare students for vocational activities (Art. 26). Universities of applied sciences award Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees.

Admission to the first degree course of universities of teacher education requires the possession of a baccalaureate or an equivalent qualification (Art. 24). For admission to the first degree course for the training of pre-school and primary level teachers, a specialist baccalaureate in pedagogy or a vocational baccalaureate may also be required. The conditions for admission are set by the Swiss Higher Education Council. Universities of teacher education award teaching diplomas as well as Bachelor's and Master's degrees; those are recognised throughout Switzerland. Holders of a degree recognised by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) are allowed to carry the title "graduated teacher for the XY degree (EDK)".

Higher education institutions that belong to one of the two types and that satisfy the corresponding rules for admission to the first study cycle may acquire the right to use the reserved designation "university", "university of applied sciences" or "university of teacher education" (Art. 29).

The Higher Education Council may define other characteristics of different types of higher education institutions (Art. 12 para. 3 lit. b).

Profile

Within the two types defined under Art. 2 HEdA, higher education institutions are distinguished by their profile. The combination of the type of institution, subject profile, size and history allows a distinctive profile to be obtained that is specific to each higher education institution.

According to the HEdA, higher education institutions that offer teaching, research and service provision in several fields or disciplines to apply for accreditation as "university institute" or "university of applied sciences institute".

Part C: HEdA Accreditation Ordinance

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English is not an official language of the Swiss Confederation. This translation is provided for information purposes only and has no legal force.

Ordinance of the Higher Education Council on Accreditation within the Higher Education Sector (HEdA Accreditation Ordinance)¹

of 28 May 2015 (status on 1 January 2018)

The Higher Education Council,

on the basis of Article 30 paragraph 2 of the Higher Education Act of 30 September 2011² (HEdA) and Article 2 paragraph 2 letter b number 1 of the Federal-Cantonal Agreement of 26 February 2015³ on Cooperation in Higher Education *ordains*;⁴

Section 1 General Provisions

Art. 1 Object

This Ordinance⁵ specifies the conditions for institutional accreditation under Article 30 HEdA and programme accreditation under Article 31 HEdA. It establishes:

- a. the admission requirements for accreditation procedures;
- b. the conditions for institutional accreditation and programme accreditation;
- c.⁶ the procedure for first-time accreditation;
- d. the quality standards to be applied in the procedures.

Art. 2 Study programmes

The following are considered study programmes under this Ordinance:

- c. Bachelor's study programmes ranging up to 180 ECTS⁷ points;

AS 2015 1877

¹ Amended by No. I of the Ordinance of 23 Nov. 2017 of the Higher Education Council, in force since 1 Jan. 2018 (AS 2017 7375).

² SR 414.20

³ SR 414.205

⁴ Amended by No. I of the Ordinance of 23 Nov. 2017 of the Higher Education Council, in force since 1 Jan. 2018 (AS 2017 7375).

⁵ Term in accordance with No. I of the Ordinance of 23 Nov. 2017 of the Higher Education Council, in force since 1 Jan. 2018 (AS 2017 7375). The new term is used throughout the Ordinance.

⁶ Amended by No. I of the Ordinance of 23 Nov. 2017 of the Higher Education Council, in force since 1 Jan. 2018 (AS 2017 7375).

⁷ ECTS = European Credit Transfer System

414.205.3

University

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- d. Master's study programmes ranging from 90 to 120 ECTS points;
 - e. continuing education study programmes ranging up to at least 60 ECTS points;
 - f. study programmes whose accreditation under HEdA is provided for in a special act.

Art. 3 Accreditation agencies

¹ An accreditation agency under this Ordinance is considered to be the Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance as well as other Swiss or foreign agencies recognised by the Swiss Accreditation Council.

² Accreditation agencies implement accreditation procedures under Article 32 HEdA.

³ The requirements and procedure for recognising other Swiss and foreign accreditation agencies is defined by the Accreditation Council in its own guidelines.

Section 2 Admission Requirements for the Accreditation Procedure**Art. 4** Institutional accreditation

¹ Higher education institutions or other institutions within the higher education sector shall be admitted for institutional accreditation if they meet the following requirements:

- a. they respect the principles of freedom and the unity of teaching and research;
- b. they correspond to one of the following types of higher education institution:
 1. tier-one university;
 2. university of applied sciences or university of teacher education;
- c. they meet, if applicable, the admission requirements for the first level of studies under Articles 23-25 and 73 HEdA. Universities of applied sciences shall also fulfil the regulations on the structure of studies under Article 26 HEdA;
- d. they have a quality assurance system in place (Art. 30 para. 1 let. a HEdA);
- e. they are compatible with the European Higher Education Area;
- f. they have infrastructure and staff in Switzerland for teaching, research and services appropriate to their type and profile;
- g. a cohort of its students has completed a study programme;
- h. they have the resources to continue their operations over the long-term (Art. 30 para. 1 let. c HEdA) and have taken measures to ensure that their students can complete a study programme; and
- i. they are legal entities in Switzerland.

² Higher education institutions or other institutions within the higher education sector shall be admitted for the institutional accreditation procedure without an examination under paragraph 1 if they meet one of following requirements:

- a. they are already institutionally accredited under HEdA; or
- b. they were created under federal law before HEdA came into force; or
- c. they were recognised as authorised for contributions based on the University Funding Act of 8 October 1999⁸ (UFundA) and the Universities of Applied Sciences Act of 6 October 1995⁹ (UASA) before HEdA came into force (Art. 75 para. 2 HEdA); or
- d. they were already a public university of teacher education under cantonal law before HEdA came into force.

Art. 5 Programme accreditation

¹ A study programme shall be admitted for programme accreditation if it meets following requirements:

- a. the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector running the study programme is institutionally accredited under HEdA; and
- b. a cohort of its students have completed the study programme.

² The same rules and standards apply to cooperation study programmes as for other study programmes. They are admitted for programme accreditation if the applying higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector:

- a. confers the title; and
- b. assumes responsibility for the quality of the study programme.

Section 3 **Requirements for Institutional Accreditation and Programme Accreditation**

Art. 6 Institutional accreditation

A higher education institution or another institution within the higher education sector is accredited if it fulfils the quality standards under Article 22.

Art. 7 Programme accreditation

The study programme of an accredited higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector under HEdA is accredited if it fulfils:

⁸ AS 2000 948, 2003 187 Annex No II 3, 2004 2013, 2007 5779 No II 5, 2008 307 3437 No II 18, 2012 3655 No I 10, 2011 5871. AS 2014 4103 Annex No I 1]

⁹ [AS 1996 2588, 2002 953, 2005 4635, 2006 2197 Annex No 37, 2012 3655 No I 11. AS 2014 4103 Annex No I 2]

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University

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- a. the quality standards under Article 23; and
 - b. any other standards that may be set by special acts.

Section 4 Effects of Institutional Accreditation

Art. 8

¹ The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall be accredited in accordance with its application as a university, an institute within a university, a university of applied sciences, an institute within a university of applied sciences or a university of teacher education.

² The accredited higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall comply with the right to use reserved designations in accordance with Article 29 HEdA.

³ If a university of teacher education is part of a university of applied sciences, the university of applied sciences is entitled to use the reserved designation for the university of teacher education in the context of institutional accreditation of the university of applied sciences.

Section 5 Procedure for First-time Accreditation¹⁰

Art. 8a¹¹

The provisions of this Section set out the procedure for first-time accreditation.

Art. 9 General provisions

¹ The object of the accreditation procedure is the quality assurance system of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.

² Taking into account their organisational characteristics, higher education institutions or other institutions within the higher education sector shall include in the accreditation procedure all representative groups of the institution, particularly students, mid-level faculty staff, professors and administrative and technical staff.

³ Results of external quality assessments may be taken into account if they are no more than three years old.

⁴ A Bachelor's study programme may be accredited with the corresponding consecutive Master's study programme in the same procedure.

¹⁰ Amended by No. I of the Ordinance of 23 Nov. 2017 of the Higher Education Council, in force since 1 Jan. 2018 (AS **2017** 7375).

¹¹ Inserted by No. I of the Ordinance of 23 Nov. 2017 of the Higher Education Council, in force since 1 Jan. 2018 (AS **2017** 7375).

⁵ Accreditation procedures under HEdA may be carried out with the procedures of other accreditation agencies or organisations if all the quality standards of this Ordinance are thereby taken into consideration.

⁶ The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector selects an agency from agencies recognised by the Accreditation Council to implement institutional or programme accreditation.

Art. 10 Filing of the application and decision on admission

¹ For institutional accreditation, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall file a well-founded application to the Accreditation Council. If the requirements are fulfilled in accordance with Article 4, the Accreditation Council decides on admission and transmits the application to the accreditation agency for the assessment. If the requirements are not fulfilled, the Accreditation Council makes a non-admission decision.

² For programme accreditation, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall file a well-founded application to the accreditation agency. If the requirements are fulfilled in accordance with Article 5, the accreditation agency decides on admission. If the conditions are not fulfilled, the accreditation agency makes a non-admission decision. In both cases it shall notify the Accreditation Council.

³ For accreditation and renewal of accreditation the application shall be filed in good time so that the decision can be made before the accreditation or transitional period can expire (Art. 75 HEdA).

Art. 11 Self-assessment

¹ The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall carry out a self-assessment and summarise the results in a written report (self-assessment report).

² It shall send the self-assessment report to the accreditation agency.

Art. 12 External assessment

¹ By means of the self-assessment and an on-site visit, the group of experts shall verify whether the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector or the study programme meets the quality standards.

² On the occasion of the on-site visit, the group of experts shall hold discussions with all representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector affected by the procedure.

³ The group of experts shall draw up a report. This shall contain:

- a. an assessment of the quality assurance system of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector, on the basis of the quality standards;

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- b. if required, suggestions for recommendations and conditions for further development of the quality assurance system;
- c. an accreditation proposal made to the accreditation agency.

Art. 13 Composition of the group of experts

¹ The accreditation agency shall set up a group of experts to carry out the external assessment.

² It shall set up the group of experts in such a way that the group has the required national and international experience and expertise to assess the accreditation application. The type, profile, size and other specific features of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector are thereby taken into account.

³ Gender, age and origins shall be taken into account in the composition of the group of experts. Experts must be independent and impartial.

⁴ The following apply to the composition of the group of experts:

- a. In the case of institutional accreditation, the group of experts shall consist of at least five experts. The group shall have current and international experience in managing or running a higher education institution or another institution within the higher education sector, internal quality assurance, teaching and research as well as, depending on the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector, professional experience or non-academic perspective.
- b. If the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector under accreditation runs an integrated university of teacher education, the corresponding expertise must be represented in the group of experts.
- c. With programme accreditation, the group of experts shall consist of at least three experts, adequately representing teaching and professional experience. With regulated professions, the additional requirements in the specific related legislation must be taken into consideration.
- d. For institutional accreditation and programme accreditation of Bachelor and Master courses, one member of the group of experts must come from the student body.

⁵ Before it sets up the group of experts, the accreditation agency shall listen to the views of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector regarding the composition and profile of the group of experts.

⁶ The rules in Article 10 of the Administrative Procedure Act of 20 December 1968¹² on recusal apply to members of the group of experts.

¹² SR 172.021

Art. 14 The accreditation proposal of the accreditation agency and statement of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector

¹ The accreditation agency shall submit an accreditation proposal to the Accreditation Council on the basis of procedural documents, in particular the self-assessment report and report of the group of experts.

² The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall comment on the report of the group of experts and of the accreditation agency's accreditation proposal.

³ The accreditation agency shall submit its accreditation proposal with the self-assessment report, report of the group of experts and statement of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector to the Accreditation Council for a decision.

⁴ The Accreditation Council shall check whether the proposal is suitable as the basis for a decision. If necessary the proposal shall be returned to the accreditation agency.

Art. 15 Accreditation decision

¹ The Accreditation Council shall base its decision on institutional accreditation or programme accreditation on the accreditation agency's proposal, the self-assessment report, the report of the group of experts and the statement of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.

² The Accreditation Council may:

- a. grant accreditation unconditionally;
- b. grant accreditation subject to conditions;
- c. refuse accreditation.

³ It shall, in the context of the accreditation decision, determine the deadline and means of verifying whether the conditions have been met.

⁴ It shall notify the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and accreditation agency about it.

⁵ The accreditation decisions are not appealable under Article 65 paragraph 2 HEdA. The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector may file a re-examination application with the Accreditation Council.

Art. 16 Withdrawal of the application

¹ The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector may withdraw the accreditation application at any time.

² If the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector withdraws its application, it may not file another application until at least 24 months have elapsed.

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Art. 17 Disclosure requirement of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector

The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall immediately notify the Accreditation Council of any changes that mean the requirements under Article 6 or 7 are no longer being met.

Art. 18 Administrative measures

If the accreditation requirements are no longer met or the requirements stated in the decision are not met within the deadline, the Accreditation Council shall take measures in accordance with Article 64 HEdA.

Art. 19 Period of validity of the accreditation

The accreditation applies for seven years from the accreditation decision.

Art. 20 Publication

The Accreditation Council shall publish a list of accredited higher education institutions or other institutions within the higher education sector which have complied with the right to use reserved designations, as well as accredited study programmes. The list of accredited higher education institutions or other institutions within the higher education sector shall also include integrated universities of teacher education.

Section 6 Quality Standards

Art. 21 Principles

¹ The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector is responsible for introducing and maintaining a quality assurance system.

² The quality assurance system shall support the task and objectives of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector, taking into consideration its special features. In doing this, the resources committed for the quality assurance system must be in proportion to the objectives sought.

³ The quality assurance system provides for verification of its effect and implementation of corrective measures.

Art. 22 Quality standards for institutional accreditation

¹ The quality standards for institutional accreditation include standards grouped into five areas, in accordance with Annex 1. The standards specify the requirements of Article 30 HEdA.

² When checking the quality standards, the guidelines of the Higher Education Council regarding the characteristics of different types of higher education institution must be taken into account.

Art. 23 Quality standards for programme accreditation

The quality standards for accreditation of study programmes include standards grouped into four areas in accordance with Annex 2.

Section 7 Final Provisions**Art. 24** Transitional provision

Higher education institutions or other institutions within the higher education sector that were recognised under the UFunda¹³ or UASA¹⁴ as being entitled to contributions before HEdA came into force, may have the study programmes whose accreditation under HEdA is provided for in the Medical Professions Act¹⁵ or courses of universities of applied sciences in health accredited at the latest by 31 December 2022, even if they do not fulfil the requirements of Article 5 paragraph 1 letter a.

Art. 25 Commencement

This Ordinance comes into force on 1 July 2015.

¹³ [AS 2000 948, 2003 187 Annex No II 3, 2004 2013, 2007 5779 No II 5, 2008 307 3437 No II 18, 2012 3655 No I 10, 2011 5871. AS 2014 4103 Annex No I 1]

¹⁴ [AS 1996 2588, 2002 953, 2005 4635, 2006 2197 Annex No 37, 2012 3655 No I 11. AS 2014 4103 Annex No I 2]

¹⁵ SR 811.11

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Annex 1
(Art. 22 para. 1)

Quality standards for institutional accreditation

Area 1 Quality assurance strategy

- 1.1 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall define its quality assurance strategy. This strategy shall contain the essential elements of an internal quality assurance system aimed at ensuring the quality of the activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and their long-term quality development as well as promoting the development of a quality culture.
- 1.2 The quality assurance system shall be incorporated into the strategy of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and efficiently support its development. It includes processes verifying whether the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector fulfils its mandate while taking account of its type and specific characteristics.
- 1.3 At all levels, all representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall be involved in developing the quality assurance system and in its implementation, in particular students, mid-level faculty staff, professors and administrative and technical staff. Quality assurance responsibilities must be transparently and clearly assigned.
- 1.4 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall periodically analyse the relevance of its quality assurance system and make the necessary adjustments.

Area 2 Governance

- 2.1 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the organisational structure and decision-making processes enable the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector to fulfil its mission and to achieve its strategic objectives.
- 2.2 The quality assurance system shall systematically contribute to providing relevant and current quantitative and qualitative information on which the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector relies to make current and strategic decisions.
- 2.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector have an appropriate participatory right and that basic conditions are in place allowing them to independently operate.
- 2.4 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall give consideration to an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development in the completion of its tasks. The

quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector sets objectives in this area and also implements them.

- 2.5 To carry out its tasks, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall promote equal opportunities and actual gender equality for its staff and students. The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector sets objectives in this area and also implements them.

Area 3 Teaching, research and services

- 3.1 The activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall correspond to its type, specific features and strategic objectives. They shall mainly relate to teaching, research and services and be carried out in accordance with the principle of freedom and independence within the limits of the mandate of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.
- 3.2 The quality assurance system shall provide for a periodic evaluation of teaching and research activities, of services and of results achieved in these areas.
- 3.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that principles and objectives linked to the European Higher Education Area are taken into consideration.
- 3.4 The quality assurance system shall ensure compliance with the criteria for admission, for the assessment of the student performance and for issuing final diplomas according to the mission of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. These criteria shall be defined, communicated and applied systematically, transparently and consistently.

Area 4 Resources

- 4.1 With its competent authorities, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall assure that its personnel resources, infrastructure and financial means allow for operating on a going concern basis and for achieving its strategic objectives. The origin and allocation of financial resources and financing conditions shall be transparent.
- 4.2 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the entire staff is qualified according to the type and specific characteristics of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. To this end, it shall also provide for its periodic assessment.
- 4.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector supports the career development of its entire staff, particularly the new generation of scientists.

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Area 5 Internal and external communication

- 5.1 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall make public its quality assurance strategy and ensure that the provisions corresponding to quality assurance processes and their results are known to employees, students and if necessary external stakeholders.
- 5.2 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall regularly publish objective information about its activities, its study programmes and the qualifications awarded.

Quality standards for programme accreditation

Area 1 Educational objectives

- 1.1 The study programme shall show clear objectives, clarifying its special features and complying with national and international requirements.
- 1.2 The study programme shall pursue educational objectives corresponding to the mission and strategic planning of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.

Area 2 Conception

- 2.1 The content of the study programme and the methods applied shall allow students to attain their learning objectives.
- 2.2 The content of the study programme shall include academic knowledge and development of the professional field.
- 2.3 The methods of assessing the performance of students shall be adapted to the learning objectives. The admission requirements and requirements for being awarded a qualification shall be regulated and published.

Area 3 Implementation

- 3.1 The study programme shall be regularly carried out.
- 3.2 The available resources (supervision and material resources) shall enable students to attain their learning objectives.
- 3.3 The teaching staff shall have the competence appropriate to the special features of the study programme and its objectives.

Area 4 Quality assurance

- 4.1 Managing the study programme shall take into consideration the interests of the relevant interest groups and allow for the necessary developments to be achieved.
- 4.2 The study programme shall be an integral component of the quality assurance system of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.

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Part D: Explanations of quality standards

Introduction

Quality standards

The structure of the quality standards reflects a vision of the HE institution considered as a system oriented towards the achievement of the institution's mission, namely teaching, research and the provision of services. Governance, including the strategy of the HE institution, seeks to create the overall coherence.

The quality standards therefore cover the fields of internal quality assurance strategy, governance, mission and activities (teaching, research and the provision of services), resources and communication (internal and external), the latter being an important element both in the development of a quality culture and in ensuring transparency for internal and external stakeholders.

The quality standards shall specify the requirements set out in Art. 30 para. 1 HEdA based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)⁷. In accordance with the HEdA, they revolve around the internal quality assurance system rather than the institution itself. They constitute a binding framework and their evaluation must allow for an assessment of whether the quality assurance system allows the HE institution to ensure the quality of its teaching, its research and the provision of its services while permitting a continuous improvement in the quality of its activities.

Explanations of quality standards: objectives

Quality standards must be usable by the various HE institutions constituting the Swiss higher education landscape, regardless of their type, their specific characteristics and their strategic objectives. The composition of the expert group reflects the profile of the HE institution and takes account of the type and specific characteristics of the institution when assessing its quality assurance system. Those specific characteristics may apply to its teaching methods (e.g. distance learning) or to fields of teaching, research and service provision.

The explanations of quality standards for institutional accreditation serve to assist in the interpretation of standards by the experts and by the HE institutions, without being exhaustive or exclusive. They should ensure a common understanding of the quality standards. Their goal is not to impose additional requirements.

The document includes information of two types:

- Explanations that describe standards by listing the different factors that can be taken into account during the assessment;
- Examples of supporting data for the assessment (self-assessment and external assessment) offered to provide a more specific idea of usable relevant evidence. Such lists are not exhaustive and do not involve a full analysis of all the elements referred to.

⁷ Version approved by the Ministerial Conference in May 2015

Quality standards for institutional accreditation

Area 1. Quality assurance strategy

1.1 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall define its quality assurance strategy. This strategy shall contain the essential elements of an internal quality assurance system aimed at ensuring the quality of the activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and their long-term quality development as well as promoting the development of a quality culture.

Explanations

→ In order to guarantee the long-term quality assurance and development required by the law (Art. 27 HEdA), the HE institution defines an internal quality assurance strategy (ESG 1.1). This strategy defines a global vision for quality assurance at an institutional level and allows connections to be made between different processes and development objectives to be set.

→ The concept of a quality system refers to all the procedures and practices for documenting and improving the quality of the HE institution's activities. It requires a complete, coherent and dynamic set of rules, mechanisms and processes designed to:

- the achievement of objectives by implementing selected strategies;
- the implementation of actions arising from the objectives and strategies, and their evaluation;
- the introduction of corrective mechanisms, if necessary;
- the continuous improvement of the HE institution's activities and its adaptation to changes in its environment.

The resources deployed for the quality assurance system are proportional to the goals sought.

→ In accordance with the HEdA, the internal quality assurance system incorporates at least the following fields: governance (e.g. direction, decision, organisational mechanisms), resources, teaching, research and services. It addresses the organisation as a whole.

→ An assessment of the quality assurance system provides an assurance that the HE institution possesses the tools to ensure and develop the quality of its activities in accordance with its type, mission and its specific characteristics.

→ The development of a quality culture allows the entire HE institution community to take ownership of quality-based initiatives and to assume its responsibility for quality assurance. In particular, this requires the involvement of representative groups from the HE institution that will help to enrich and to spread the culture of quality.

Supporting evidence useful for the self-assessment and the external assessment

The assessment of that standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- the institution's quality strategy (documents and other elements);
- a description of its quality processes.

1.2 The quality assurance system shall be incorporated into the strategy of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and efficiently support its development. It includes processes verifying whether the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector fulfils its mandate while taking account of its type and specific characteristics.

Explanations

→ In order to contribute effectively to the development of the HE institution and to support it in achieving its objectives, the quality assurance system must be integrated into the overall strategy of the HE institution.

→ Each HE institution has a clear mandate set for it by a supervisory authority, be it public or private. This mandate defines the mission of the institution according to its type and its specific characteristics. By means of the appropriate monitoring methods, the quality assurance system must allow the achievement of the objectives set by the HE institution to be verified together with the completion of its mandate; it must also ensure that its duty to account to its supervisory authority is fulfilled (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 7 HEdA).

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- strategy documents belonging to the HE institution;
- legal text for the foundation of the HE institution;
- other national and/or international legal requirements;
- reports intended for supervisory authorities (management, business or financial audit reports etc.).

1.3 At all levels, all representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall be involved in developing the quality assurance system and in its implementation, in particular students, mid-level faculty staff, professors and administrative and technical staff. Quality assurance responsibilities must be transparently and clearly assigned.

Explanations

→ In order to ensure that the expectations of different interest groups are taken into account, the development and implementation of the quality assurance system shall involve, among others, the students, the mid-level teaching staff and the professors of the HE institution together with its administrative and technical staff, but it may also include external partners such as supervisory authorities, alumni and representatives from the working environment, professional associations, the political sphere, civil society or any other interest group, depending on the specific characteristics and working methods of the HE institution (ESG 1.1).

→ The involvement of different groups may be required, for example, at the level of strategic discussions about quality assurance, and in the development of tools for quality assurance, their monitoring and use of their results for further development.

→ A clear and transparent assignment of quality assurance responsibilities shall ensure that all duties and tasks are known to everyone at every level of the system.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- terms and conditions for the involvement of different interest groups;
- organisation chart.

1.4 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall periodically analyse the relevance of its quality assurance system and make the necessary adjustments.

Explanations

→ A relevant quality assurance system implies that the objectives set meet the needs of the HE institution. Its periodic analysis allows the HE institution to ensure that it conducts adequate monitoring of its teaching, research and service provision, thereby applying itself to long-term quality development (Art. 27 HEdA and ESG 1.10).

→ Periodic analysis of the quality assurance system implies internal and external assessment. Those assessments may take different forms and apply at different organisational levels (institution, faculty/department, unit/service, study programme etc.).

→ The concept of external assessment implies an external perspective of the unit concerned or a perspective external to the institution itself while ensuring that conflicts of interest are avoided.

→ The results of assessments offer the HE institution new perspectives, particularly if external, and they allow the activities of the institution to be adapted or improved. They are taken into account in subsequent assessments in order to ensure coordinated and continuous improvement.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- descriptions of the quality assurance system's assessment processes;
- examples of self-assessment and external assessment reports;
- examples of changes in the quality assurance system subsequent to assessments.

Area 2. Governance

2.1 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the organisational structure and decision-making processes enable the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector to fulfil its mission and to achieve its strategic objectives.

Explanations

→ The managerial and organisational mechanisms put in place by the institution are effective when they allow it to achieve its strategic objectives and to thereby complete its mandate (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 3 HEdA). They are relevant when they take account of the needs of the different stakeholders. In particular, they involve the preparation of a strategic plan together with its implementation, its monitoring and its adaptation to address internal changes and those deriving from the political, economic and social environment.

→ The mandate, mission and objectives of the HE institution are defined by agreement with the (public or private) supervisory authorities and are established in the founding legislation of the institution.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- description of the competencies of the HE institution in relation to its supervisory authority;
- organisational structure and assignment of responsibilities within the HE institution;
- processes for appointments to senior management roles;
- examples of detailed job descriptions;
- documents explaining decision-making processes in detail;
- mission and strategic plan of the HE institution;
- examples of changes in organisation and decision-making processes subsequent to the monitoring of strategic objectives.

2.2 The quality assurance system shall systematically contribute to providing relevant and current quantitative and qualitative information, on which the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector relies to make current and strategic decisions.

Explanations

→ The quality assurance system shall incorporate an information system that allows the collection, analysis and use of recent, relevant information for the management of all the activities of the HE institution at every level (ESG 1.7).

→ The data collected shall meet the needs of stakeholders and allow for the monitoring of the activities of the HE institution; in particular, it shall concern the issues of resources (infrastructure and financial, human and documentary resources), activities (teaching, research and service provision), the results of activities (research performance, student performance development, student population profile, monitoring of graduates, satisfaction etc.).

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- descriptions of data collection and analysis systems (responsibilities, indicators, technical resources etc.);
- statistical reports;
- examples of the systematic use of the quantitative and qualitative data produced by the system.

2.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector have an appropriate participatory right and that basic conditions are in place allowing them to independently operate.

Explanations

→ Effective and appropriate governance implies the participation in decision-making processes of all representative groups of people from the institution, including the student body, the mid-level teaching staff and the professors, as well as administrative and technical staff (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 4 HEdA and ESG 1.1).

→ The right to participate, which relies if necessary on the cantonal legislation applicable, corresponds to the specific characteristics of the HE institution and it also encompasses the following elements: processes for the appointment of representatives, type of involvement in specific process type and at specific level, effective influence of those representatives, transparency of information, assignment of responsibilities, framework conditions and type of operation that they guarantee, and resources available.

Supporting evidences useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- legislation and regulations that establish participative bodies and their operating terms and conditions;
- description of the resources placed at the disposal of participatory bodies and representatives (premises, resources, internal and external channels of communication, administrative support, discharge etc.).

2.4 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall give consideration to an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development in the completion of its tasks. The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector sets objectives in this area and also implements them.

Explanations

→ In order to guarantee its long-term development, and therefore its durability, in completing its tasks the HE institution is to take account of issues concerning social, economic and ecological sustainability, according to its specific characteristics and within the limit of its powers (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 6 HEdA).

→ Social sustainability may encompass the following elements:

- the role of social partnerships in working conditions and workplace relations;
- consideration of medium and long-term needs at every hierarchical level (e.g. junior scientists and academics) within staff development policy;
- transparency and fairness in income and social security policy, including for outsourced work;
- health and safety for all.

→ Economic sustainability may encompass the following elements:

- the management of financial resources from a long-term perspective according to the mandate, objectives and tasks entrusted to the HE institution, including investment and debt policy;
- transparency in the use of public funds and in the terms and conditions for the acquisition of private funds;
- consideration of the source of products and equipment, and of the conditions of production within purchasing policy.

→ Environmental sustainability may encompass the following elements:

- effectiveness in the management of energy resources (consumption, recycling, renewable energies);
- consideration of the standards applicable in terms of environmental protection and energy consumption for the renovation or construction of buildings;
- soft mobility for personnel and students, including any relevant items of infrastructure, if applicable.

→ Sustainability also concerns teaching, research and service provision, and may encompass the following elements:

- consideration of sustainability issues in the courses, research and services on offer;
- promotion of sustainability activities and results;
- information and support that allow HE institution students and personnel to conduct their activities in a sustainable manner.

→ The sustainability policy or strategy concerns all the activities of the HE institution. In particular, it includes the objectives that the HE institution sets in this field for its areas of activities, and the methods of implementation and evaluation.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- policy or strategy and projects concerning social, economic and environmental sustainability;
- annual sustainability reports;
- statistics.

2.5 To carry out its tasks, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall promote equal opportunities and actual gender equality for its staff and students. The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector sets objectives in this area and also implements them.

Explanations

→ In order to achieve excellence and with a view to fairness, responsibility and development in completing its tasks and depending on its particular characteristics the HE institution shall take account of the issues of equal opportunities and gender equality (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 5 HEdA).

→ Equal opportunities encompass the issues of gender equality, disability, social integration, minorities and concern cases of direct or indirect discrimination (Art. 8 para. 2, 3, 4 of the Swiss Constitution; Gender Equality Act; Disabled Equality Act)⁸. It applies horizontally to all the HE institution's spheres of activity and to the governance of the institution with appropriate resources (personnel, representation policies within various committees, finances etc.).

→ The evaluation of equal opportunities may encompass the issues of access to and involvement in studies, research and academic or administrative supervisory and management positions, the balance of different personal needs or occupations (study, research, work, family, health), integration and participation in the life of the institution, advice and financial support, and awareness-raising.

→ The evaluation of equal opportunities for disabled people includes, in particular, the issues of the suitability of the duration and organisation of the studies and exams available (compensatory principle for disadvantages), and of access to infrastructure and equipment.

→ Equal opportunities policy or strategy covers students and all personnel. In particular, it includes the objectives that the HE institution sets in this field for its areas of activities, as well as the methods of implementation and evaluation.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- legislation and regulations guaranteeing non-discrimination;
- policy or strategy, measures adopted and equal opportunities projects;
- reports from the services responsible;
- objective indicators and statistics;
- description of mechanisms promoting the institutional embedding of equality policies.

⁸ Constitution of the Swiss Confederation of 18 April 1999 RS 101 ; Federal Act of 24 March 1995 on Gender Equality RS 151.1 ; Disabled Equality Act of 13 December 2002 RS 151.3.

Area 3. Teaching, research and services

3.1 The activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall correspond to its type, specific features and strategic objectives. They shall mainly relate to teaching, research and services and be carried out in accordance with the principle of freedom and independence within the limits of the mandate of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.

Explanations

→ Each HE institution is different and provides teaching, research and services according to its type and its specific characteristics, in various disciplines or areas of study (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. b HEdA and ESG 1.2).

→ Teaching encompasses Bachelor and Master degree education and continuing education.

→ The coherence and consistency of the offer in terms of teaching and its suitability to the specific characteristics of the HE institution are expressed, in particular, in terms of the design and approval of study programmes, learning objectives, level of qualifications to be achieved (alignment with the national qualification framework nqf.ch-HS), workload and feasibility for students, scope of subject area, position in relation to the environment, internationalisation, involvement of students and other interest groups, and connection to specific characteristics of the institution (e.g. distance learning).

→ The suitability of the research to the particular characteristics of the HE institution is expressed, in particular, through the research strategy of the institution and through the inclusion of the latter in its overall strategy, its positioning in relation to other institutions, the relationship between internal and external funding, the valuation modes, the international dimension and innovation.

→ The services provided encompass all service-based activities provided to the community and to civil society, such as short-term continuing training, on-line courses (e.g. MOOCs)⁹, scientific mediation work, institutional or individual projects and assignments for public and private-sector organisations.

→ The freedom and independence of research and teaching constitute a basic principle of HE institutions guaranteed by Swiss constitutional law (Art. 20 of the Swiss Constitution). In particular, the following elements are covered by this principle:

- transparency related to the source of funding and assignment of funds in all spheres of activity;
- the influence of external financial partners on the contents of teaching or the purpose of research;
- the sovereignty of the HE institution in the procedure for the selection and management of its staff at every level;
- the potential for personnel to report threats to or infringements of the principle of academic freedom, and the risks incurred by whistleblowers.

⁹ Massive Open Online Course

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- founding legislation of the HE institution;
- strategic documents;
- reports intended for those responsible (management and business reports, financial audits etc.);
- description of mechanisms that guarantee that the activities of the HE institution comply with its mission, its specific characteristics and its strategic objectives (e.g. preparation and approval of study plans, focus of research and priorities with regard to service provision);
- description of mechanisms that guarantee that account is taken of competitors when preparing new projects;
- description of mechanisms that allow research to be conducted in accordance with the best international practices;
- distribution of funds according to activities;
- description of mechanisms that allow the freedom and independence of research to be guaranteed (e.g. regulations connected to third-party funds, to secondary services of academic staff, research contracts, sponsorship contracts, procedures and guidelines for the selection and appointment of staff, description of terms and conditions laid down for reporting abuse).

3.2 The quality assurance system shall provide for a periodic evaluation of teaching and research activities, of services and of results achieved in these areas.

Explanations

→ The teaching, research and service provision activities of the HE institution and the results achieved in those fields are to be assessed periodically – and therefore continuously adapted – in order to ensure the achievement of the objectives set and to allow the HE institution to measure the completion of its mission (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 1 HEdA and ESG 1.9).

→ The assessment of teaching, research and service provision activities should take account of the specific characteristics of the HE institution and include internal and external assessment procedures based on quantitative and qualitative indicators. The quality assurance system is designed to ensure that the analysis of the results obtained is used to develop and improve those activities.

→ The assessment procedures provide for the involvement of people external to the unit for assessment. These people possess the expertise and skills necessary in order to provide an external view of the quality of the activities, avoiding any conflict of interest. This external perspective is complemented by the view of groups benefiting from the services of the HE institution, which may include, for example, students for the assessment of teaching activities, assistants/PhD students for the evaluation of research activities or the beneficiaries of services.

→ The assessment of teaching, research and service provision activities requires the assessment of the respective supporting entities or services.

→ The assessment of teaching activities, which is distinguished from the assessment of teaching staff, includes the assessment of lessons and study programmes and elements specific to the particular forms of teaching (e.g. distance learning).

→ It reflects the active participation of students in the creation of learning processes (“student-centred learning, teaching and assessment”) (ESG 1.3).

→ The assessment of service provision ensures that the offer complies with the strategy of the HE institution and meets its mandate expectations.

→ The services provided are assessed periodically according to terms and conditions adapted to suit their specific characteristics.

→ The assessment relates not only to the activities carried out but also to their effects, their impact and to the results achieved in the context of those activities (e.g. the assessment of a lesson by the students, and analysis of the performance of students in that lesson, or the assessment of the resources invested in a research activity and of the performance of that research activity).

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- descriptions of assessment processes for teaching, research and service provision;
- examples of self-assessment and external assessment reports;
- description of framework conditions and measures adopted in order to improve the quality of teaching, research and service provision, and their effects;
- examples of improvements made following assessments;
- student statistics;
- activity reports at different levels of the institution;
- description of processes that guarantee the connection of teaching with research and with changes in society and professional fields.

3.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that principles and objectives linked to the European Higher Education Area are taken into consideration.

Explanations

→ Switzerland is participating in the construction of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and is a signatory country of the Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999. It is committed to the implementation of its objectives. Using their own means and according to their particular characteristics, Swiss HE institutions implement the principles and objectives that underpin the EHEA (ESG 1.2)¹⁰.

→ The framework is defined by the Bologna Guidelines.

→ In particular, the EHEA promotes mobility (of students, researchers, teaching staff, and administrative and technical staff), the recognition of degrees Europe-wide, the promotion of a European dimension within the development of curricula, the promotion of cooperation between institutions, and cooperation in the field of quality assurance.

→ The degree of internationalisation of the higher education institution depends on its type, profile and strategic goals.

→ The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), produced by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), approved in 2005 and revised in 2015 by the European Education Ministers, constitutes a European benchmark in quality assurance. The ESG also provides a frame for the agencies’ activities; the agencies must comply with the ESG in order to be recognised at the European level.

¹⁰ see <http://www.ehea.info>

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- strategy for the internationalisation of the institution;
- rules on mobility and measures to promote it (e.g. support services, funding);
- rules on the validation of the learning outcomes and the awarding of degrees in relation to the nqf.ch;
- examples of degrees awarded;
- description of mechanisms that allow students to play an active part in the creation of learning processes;
- documents showing how the ESG Part I are implemented;
- measures and instruments for the recognition of titles and certifications.

3.4 4 The quality assurance system shall ensure compliance with the criteria for admission, for the assessment of the student performance and for issuing final diplomas according to the mission of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. These criteria shall be defined, communicated and applied systematically, transparently and consistently.

Explanations

→ Student admissions, the assessment of student performance and the awarding of their degrees are essential components of the “student life cycle”.

→ The awarding of degrees and allocation of credits rely on the assessment of the performance levels of students, including examination and other methods of assessing the achievement of learning outcomes.

→ Rigour and transparency underpin the criteria for admissions, student performance assessments throughout their studies and the awarding of degrees and certificates for all education modes (including distance learning). Admission conditions are also to comply with the requirements imposed in the HEdA (Art. 23-25, Art. 73) on admissions to universities, universities of teacher education and universities of applied sciences (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 2 and ESG 1.4).

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- admissions regulations and other institutional founding documents, including their compliance with the HEdA;
- examination regulations;
- description of mechanisms introduced in order to provide information about admission and assessment methods;
- regulations on the awarding of degrees;
- description of appeal mechanisms (e.g. ombudsman).

Area 4. Resources

4.1 With its competent authorities, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall assure that its personnel resources, infrastructure and financial means allow for operating on a going concern basis and for achieving its strategic objectives. The origin and allocation of financial resources and financing conditions shall be transparent.

Explanations

→ In order to fulfil its mission, the institution is to have continuous sufficient resources at its disposal in terms of personnel, infrastructure and funding, and which are allocated with a long-term perspective (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. c HEdA). Resources are to support teaching and learning (ESG 1.6).

→ The resources and infrastructure are to suit the particular characteristics of the HE institution, including in terms of teaching methods (e.g. distance learning) and to meet the needs of the institution's activities, including in terms of organisation, planning and method of allocation.

→ In particular, the resources are to include staff, infrastructure, equipment, and documentary and financial resources.

→ In particular, the evaluation of financial resources is to include the type and degree of engagement of the competent local authority, funding methods and external financial audits, methods for the use of external funds, methods for the approval of budgets and accounts, and financial planning.

→ The evaluation of resources is also to include support measures and structures for students (services, advice etc.).

→ Transparency of the provenance and allocation of funds and conditions for funding imply data publication.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- documents relating to the financial commitment of the competent local authority;
- financial audit reports;
- rules for the preparation of budgets and the use of funds;
- documents guaranteeing the long-term use of infrastructure;
- statistics concerning personnel and student supervision rates;
- examples of contracts;
- documents relating to the acquisition and conservation of documentary resources;
- description of mechanisms allowing the suitability of organisations and student support measures to be guaranteed.

4.2 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the entire staff is qualified according to the type and specific characteristics of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. To this end, it shall also provided for its periodic assessment.

Explanations

→ In order to adequately complete its mission, the institution is to ensure that all its personnel is appropriately qualified (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 1 HEdA and ESG 1.5).

→ In particular, the assessment of staff qualifications includes recruitment, selection and promotion processes and, for academic staff, assessment of teaching and scientific skills. The assessment is to also consider the transparency of the processes.

→ The periodic assessment of personnel should take into account the nature of the appointment (academic or administrative) and of the specific characteristics of the HE institution.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- description of staff categories;
- personnel statistics;
- legislation and regulations relating to the recruitment, assessment and promotion of personnel;
- descriptions of staff assessment processes;
- examples of specifications.

4.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector supports the career development of its entire staff, particularly the new generation of scientists.

Explanations

→ The assessment of staff career development encompasses the issues of equal opportunities, continuing education and training and other professional development support measures (counselling, scientific leaves, training placements, “protected time” for project research and development etc.), career prospects and measures for internal placement and promotion of junior staff.

→ It should also involve career policies for its personnel and encourage internal promotion up to the top of the hierarchy.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- personnel promotion policy, particularly for junior scientists and academics;
- regulations for promotion and continuing education and training;
- description of organisations and measures that offer counselling and support;
- examples of detailed job descriptions;
- regulations with regard to scientific conferences;
- description of personnel categories;
- special projects to support junior staff.

Area 5. Internal and external communication

5.1 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall make public its quality assurance strategy and ensure that the provisions corresponding to quality assurance processes and their results are known to employees, students and if necessary external stakeholders.

Explanations

→ Internal and external communication is an important part of quality assurance both in order to develop a quality culture and to ensure transparency for internal and external stakeholders. HE institutions shall therefore ensure that regular and transparent information about objectives, quality processes and their results is provided to personnel and students and to external stakeholders, wherever applicable.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- internal and external communication strategy and means;
- description of the measures introduced in order to ensure a good understanding of quality assurance processes and results.

5.2 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall regularly publish objective information about its activities, its study programmes and the qualifications awarded.

Explanations

→ In order to ensure transparency for students and other stakeholders regarding its activities, HE institutions shall regularly publish current, impartial and objective information, both qualitative and quantitative, concerning the activities, study programmes and degrees that it awards (ESG 1.8).

→ Information and communication means vary according to the target group.

→ In particular, this information is to include the issues of admission conditions, deadlines, costs, duration, assessment conditions and ECTS credits awarded.¹¹ In addition, it is to include information about infrastructure, students and teaching staff, and teaching, research and service activities. Information about funding shall be published as well, including, for example, an annual report distributed both internally and externally.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- description of methods for providing information about the HE institution's activities according to the target group;
- description of measures in place for the updating of data;
- sample descriptions of programmes and of supporting means for the presentation of activities;
- annual report;
- external evaluation reports;
- website.

¹¹ European Credits Transfer System

Part E: Code of conduct

The accreditation procedures are to be carried out as part of a comprehensive partnership and they are based on principles of trust, autonomy, responsibility, subsidiarity and participation. The agency and HE institutions together are to take responsibility for instilling trust during the preparation, completion and monitoring of accreditations. Jointly, they are to ensure that the experts can work independently. All interest groups from an HE institution, particularly students, are to be involved in the procedure.

The members of the expert group, the HE institution representatives and the agency therefore undertake to abide by the following code of conduct.

Members of the expert group

The members of the expert group shall abide by the contractual principles of independence and confidentiality. In their assessment, they shall confine themselves to an objective, impartial and factual report.

The experts:

- shall take account of the type and specific characteristics of HE institutions;
- shall be constructive, benevolent and critical when necessary;
- shall be respectful, encouraging a diversity of opinions through open discussion and shall ensure that everyone can express themselves during meetings;
- shall be prepared and shall play an active part in interview and work sessions, while keeping to the schedule;
- shall seek a consensus when taking decisions.

Apart from interviews, members of the expert group shall never communicate directly with the HE institution.

Representatives of the HE institution

Through their attitude, the representatives of the HE institution shall contribute to the success and the constructive atmosphere of on-site visits.

Participants in interviews:

- shall be frank, courteous, cooperative and scrupulously transparent;
- shall respond clearly and constructively;
- shall allow other interview participants to express themselves.

Apart from interviews, HE institution representatives shall never communicate directly with members of the expert group.

Representatives of the agency

Agency representatives shall contribute to the success of the accreditation by supporting the HE institution during preparations for the procedure and by lending their support to members of the expert group during the on-site visit.

Agency representatives:

- shall ensure the integrity of the procedure by protecting it against any external influences;
- shall participate in the entire on-site visit;
- shall lend support to the experts and, in particular, to the chair of the expert group;
- shall ensure that all important information is collected and that all compulsory requirements of the accreditation are taken into consideration;
- shall not influence opinions of the expert group;
- shall provide communication between the expert group and the HE institution.

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