

Approval of the Application
by Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
(ACQUIN)
for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register

Register Committee

Ref. RC18/2016

Ver. 1.0

Date 3/12/2016

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Application of:	24/11/2015
Agency registered since:	08/04/2009
External review report of:	2 June 2016
Review coordinated by:	GAC
Review panel members:	Christian Frevel (chair), Franziska Raudonat, Udo Seeliger, Heli Mattisen, Gabriele Witter
Decision of:	3 December 2016
Registration until:	30 June 2021
Absented themselves from decision-making:	n/a
Attachments:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confirmation of eligibility, 15/12/2015 2. External Review Report, June 2016 3. Applicant statement: "Statement to the expert's report", 31/05/2016 4. Request to the Review Panel, 14/11/2016 5. Clarification by the Review Panel, 16/11/2016

1. The application of 24/11/2015 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 15/12/2015.
3. The Register Committee considered the external review report of 2 June 2016 on the compliance of ACQUIN with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).
4. The Register Committee further considered ACQUIN's Statement to the expert's report (of 31 May 2016).
5. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from the chair of the review panel.

Analysis:

6. In considering ACQUIN's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account its accreditation, certification, audit and evaluation activities. Certification of further education is only within the scope of the ESG, and, thus, pertinent to the application inclusion on the Register, as far as it concerns offers that are part of higher education.
7. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on ACQUIN's level of compliance with ESG.
8. The Register Committee concurred with the review panel's analysis and conclusions regarding the individual European Standards and Guidelines, unless otherwise noted in the following specific comments:

ESG 2.1: While clearly addressing how ACQUIN's criteria for programme accreditation and system accreditation address the elements described in ESG 1.1 – 1.10, the review report did not discuss in detail how the criteria used in ACQUIN's other activities within the scope of the ESG correspond to ESG Part 1.

Since there was no explicit mapping provided by ACQUIN or the review panel, the Register Committee sought clarification from the review panel chair. The Register Committee considered the panel's explanation (letter of 16/11/16) that the panel had reviewed in detail the criteria applied in ACQUIN's various activities, and established that ESG Part 1 was reflected in them.

Having considered the clarification, the Register Committee was able to concur with the panel's conclusion.

ESG 2.3: The review report demonstrates that ACQUIN's external quality assurance processes are clearly defined in public documents, except for institutional audits offered in Austria. The Register Committee concurred with the panel's view that the process should be clearly defined and published despite the low demand.

The Register Committee took note of ACQUIN's statement on the external review report, which states that audits in Austria follow the same procedure as system accreditation in Germany. The Register Committee, however, understands from the review report that this is not stipulated in ACQUIN's public documentation.

When ACQUIN's registration was last renewed, EQAR had flagged for attention whether ACQUIN's international accreditation and evaluation

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activities take place on a clearly defined and transparent basis, within and beyond the EHEA.

The Register Committee concluded that this flag has been resolved for ACQUIN's international accreditation activity in general, but not for audits in Austria.

The Register Committee was therefore unable to concur with the panel's conclusion (substantially fulfilled), and considered that ACQUIN complies only partially complies with standard 2.3.

ESG 2.4: The panel considered that ACQUIN generally follows common practice in terms of preparation of experts, but remarked critically that "ACQUIN only ensures a minimum for the preparation for the system accreditation". The panel specifically noted that the preparation of experts in system accreditation was less intensive compared to other agencies working under the auspices of the German Accreditation Council (GAC).

Consequently, the panel recommended that ACQUIN offer at least voluntary trainings or workshops to those experts.

The development of ACQUIN's activities for training and preparation of experts was flagged for attention when ACQUIN's registration was last renewed. Considering the assessment by the panel, the Register Committee concluded that practice did not change materially and the issue was therefore not resolved.

The Register Committee was therefore unable to concur with the panel's conclusion (substantially fulfilled), and considered that ACQUIN complies only partially complies with standard 2.4.

ESG 2.5: In the previous renewal of ACQUIN's registration, EQAR had flagged for attention "whether measures have been taken to enhance consistency in decision-making across different technical committees".

The panel reported that it had discussed the consistency of evaluations and decisions by ACQUIN in detail during the site visit.

The panel established that no structural change had been implemented to improve the situation since the last review. While the report refers to one formal meeting between the chairs of the standing committees in 2014, such meetings do not seem to be institutionalised and regular.

Given the assessment by the panel, the Register Committee concluded that the flag was not resolved. **Consequently, the Register Committee**

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was unable to concur with the panel's conclusion (substantially fulfilled), and considered that ACQUIN continues to only partially comply with standard 2.5.

ESG 3.5: The review report described that financial losses experienced by ACQUIN have eventually been recovered by reducing activity costs.

The Register Committee was able to follow the panel's concerns with regard to human resources planning and estimation of workload. Despite the fact that planning and documentation require improvement, the Register Committee did, however, not understand that the number of accreditation procedures conducted by ACQUIN significantly exceeds its capacity. Moreover, the Register Committee appreciated that an agency operating in a market-based system naturally experiences greater fluctuation than an agency in a monopoly situation.

The Register Committee was therefore unable to concur with the conclusion that ACQUIN only partially fulfils the standard, but considered that ACQUIN (substantially) complies with standard 3.5.

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Conclusion:

9. Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that ACQUIN demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

Standard	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	fulfilled	Compliance
2.2	fulfilled	Compliance
2.3	substantially fulfilled	Partial compliance
2.4	substantially fulfilled	Partial compliance
2.5	substantially fulfilled	Partial compliance
2.6	substantially fulfilled	Compliance
2.7	fulfilled	Compliance
3.1	substantially fulfilled	Compliance
3.2	fulfilled	Compliance
3.3	fulfilled	Compliance
3.4	partially fulfilled	Partial compliance
3.5	partially fulfilled	Compliance
3.6	substantially fulfilled	Compliance
3.7	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

10. The Register Committee considered that ACQUIN only achieved partial compliance with some standards. In its holistic judgement, the Register Committee concluded that these are specific and limited issues, but that ACQUIN continues to comply substantially with the ESG as a whole.
11. The Register Committee therefore renewed ACQUIN's inclusion on the Register. ACQUIN's renewed inclusion shall be valid until 30/06/2021¹.
12. The Register Committee further underlined that ACQUIN is expected to address the issues mentioned appropriately and to resolve them at the

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¹ Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see §4.1 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.



Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN)

Stefan Handke

Brandenburger Straße 2

95448 Bayreuth

Germany

Brussels, 15 December 2015

Confirmation of Eligibility: Application for Renewal of Registration

Application no. A32 of 24/11/2015

Dear Stefan,

We hereby confirm that the application by ACQUIN for renewal of registration is eligible.

Based on the information provided, the external review coordinated by the German Accreditation Council (GAC) fulfils the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

We confirm that the following activities of ACQUIN are within the scope of the ESG:

- Programme Accreditation in Germany
- System Accreditation in Germany
- Certification Procedures in Germany
- Programme Accreditation Abroad
- Institutional Accreditation Abroad

Please ensure that ACQUIN's self-evaluation report covers all the aforementioned activities.

We further remind you that the following issues were flagged when ACQUIN's registration was last renewed, and should be addressed in your self-evaluation report and the external review report:

ESG 2.5 – Consistency between technical committees

[ESG 2005: standard 2.3]

It should receive attention whether measures have been taken to enhance consistency in decision-making across different technical committees.

ESG 2.4 – Training and preparation of experts

It should receive attention whether ACQUIN has developed further its activities for training and preparation of experts.

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ESG 2.3 – International activities [ESG 2005: standard 3.7]

It should receive attention whether ACQUIN's international accreditation and evaluation activities take place on a clearly defined and transparent basis, within and beyond the EHEA.

ESG 3.6 – Internal quality assurance [ESG 2005: standard 3.8]

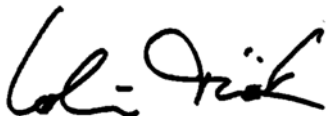
It should receive attention whether systematic internal quality assurance processes have been put in place by ACQUIN.

We confirm that “Consulting Services by ACQUINUS” are not within the scope of the ESG, provided that they do not include evaluations or audits of higher education institutions or programmes related to teaching and learning. The external review should, however, address the measures in place to separate clearly between quality assurance by ACQUIN and consultancy by ACQUINUS.

We kindly ask you to forward this letter to GAC as the coordinator of the external review and request that GAC inform the review panel, so as to ensure that all these activities are analysed by the panel.

This confirmation is made according to the relevant provisions of the EQAR Procedures for Applications. ACQUIN has the right to appeal this decision in accordance with the Appeals Procedure; any appeal must reach EQAR within 90 days from receipt of this decision

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Tück'.

Colin Tück
(Director)

Cc: GAC (review coordinator)

Statement to the expert's report

31 Mai 2016

Factual Correction

2.3 Implementing processes

"In terms of the procedure of the institutional audit, there are no binding stipulations on the course or the responsibilities for the individual procedural steps, in the guidelines for example. It is also unclear whether a decision under conditions is possible here and how the process of fulfilling conditions would proceed."

The institutional audits correspond in terms of responsibilities, procedural steps and decision-making possibilities to the procedure of the system accreditation.

"The position of ACQUIN about formal outline of procedures for the audit in Austria being unnecessary because of the low demand, cannot be shared by the panel. ACQUIN should create more transparency here, for example by adding the guidelines and relevant schedules to the QM manual."

The procedures of the audits in Austria will also correspond to those of the system accreditation (please note the offer of the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria as an example).

2.4 Peer-review experts

"Despite demanded, the criteria and procedures for appointing experts for audits in Austria were not available."

The procedure corresponds to that of system accreditations.

"During the meeting, representatives of the agency mentioned difficulties in finding experts for programme accreditation in certain subjects. This problem cannot be solved by just one agency. It could be helpful for ACQUIN if in addition to the existent occasional communication, the exchange between standing expert committees and the accreditation commission was intensified. This could also make the accreditation commission's perception of the supervisory function more transparent for example with regular reports of the committees on the practice of appointing the experts in the accreditation commission (see also ESG 3.6)."

ACQUIN will further systematise the dialogue between the standing expert committees and the accreditation commission after consultation with these bodies.

“The submitted information demonstrates that in 2015 at least one person from abroad was involved in the majority of the expert groups for system accreditation.”

In all expert groups for system accreditation at least one person from abroad was involved.

“However, the declaration of impartiality for experts (Annex 8) does not include a clear enough statement about a consultation of the higher education institution as an exclusion criterion for expert activities.”

In ACQUIN's point of view the declaration of impartiality for experts does include a clear statement about a consultation of the higher education institution: „Participation in committees or advisory boards, which are directly related to the higher education institutions which are to be evaluated.”

“With regards to the preparatory briefing of experts, no significant change from the reaccreditation in 2011 can be observed. Even in system accreditations the preparation is limited to a longer meeting before the beginning of the actual site visit. The online training courses mentioned in the self-evaluation report do not play any role in practice yet. Meanwhile, introductory information for experts has been uploaded into the social network Youtube¹.”

Since the introduction of system accreditations ACQUIN complies with the practise of the institutional audits by the German Council of Science and Humanities.

2.5 Criteria for outcomes

“No structural change from the last reaccreditation in 2011 could be ascertained in terms of the committees' communication with each other.”

The chairmen of the standing expert committees came together in Bayreuth on 29 September 2014 and participated also at the meeting of the accreditation commission.

2.6 Reporting

“In terms of the international activities, information about 225 internationally accredited study programmes can be found on ACQUIN's website in its own area. A number of entries only include the names of the experts and short reports, such as for the entries on study programmes from Switzer-

¹ ACQUIN refers in the position paper dated 31 May 2016 to the following internet address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GO1yYNwWRfE>

land. For other procedures the complete report is also made available. In terms of the procedures of institutional accreditation abroad, the entries can only be found if the name of the higher education institution is entered into the search field.”

The publication of the expert’s reports of study programmes at Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences was not stipulated by law at that time and as a consequence not agreed in the contracts between ACQUIN and the Swiss HEIs.

“Action is required in regards to the publication of reports. Even though ACQUIN intends to publish the decisions and reports in all procedure formats, gaps remain on the homepage as before.”

For ACQUIN these gaps are not plausible (any more) as ACQUIN has published all missing reports and optimised its publication process in 2015. This has been approved by the Accreditation Council itself.

“The term of six weeks stated in the German Accreditation Council’s resolution dated 30 September 2015 for the publication in the programme and system accreditation procedures was described by the agency in the meetings as being ambitious. Nevertheless, it appears to be possible to observe the time guideline, after ACQUIN has internally reorganised the processes for publication and the internal responsibilities. A formal written stipulation is however still pending. A stipulation of this sort would also be appropriate for the remaining fields of activities.”

The formal confirmation in writing has already been carried out in the QM manual (see attachment 4 of the self-evaluation report). This applies to programme accreditations as well as to system accreditations.

2.8 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

“This text is not published on the agency’s German website, but other formulations can be found in the “Objectives” area. The mission statement can be found on the English language site. Upon request the managing director explains that the agency’s internet presence is currently being revised, adding that the mission statement in the annexes of the self-evaluation report is valid.”

The incorrect formulation on the website has been corrected in the meantime (<https://www.acquin.org/de/die-akkreditierungsagentur/ueber-acquin/zielsetzung/>).

“The relevance of the mission statement should be clear, fundamentally easy to implement and transparent at all levels of the agency. The panel sees a need for ACQUIN to make improvements.”

All standing expert committees, the accreditation commission as well as the managing board have discussed the mission statement as part of the code of ethics. Finally the general assembly has agreed on the mission statement on its meeting on 30 May 2016.

3.5 Resources

“The number of programme managers continually fell from 20 people in 2012 to 12 in 2014 according to the annual reports.”

ACQUIN asks for deletion of this paragraph, because it is used incoherently within the context of the financial resources. In the following paragraph the human resources are documented sufficiently. In addition this statement is neither in accordance to the date the self-evaluation report was submitted (31 December 2015) nor to today.

“In the 2013 quality report (Annex 52) the results of an anonymous survey of the employees of ACQUIN from June 2013 is referenced. They show that a considerable portion of the employees is unsatisfied by the working conditions.”

ACQUIN asks for deletion as this statement („considerable portion“) cannot be concluded like this from the quality report (annex 52 of the self-evaluation report, page 7 final paragraph).

“The decline in the number of academic consultants in the last few years to just 12 people in 2014 is recorded in the annual reports.”

ACQUIN asks for deletion of this sentence, because this statement is neither in accordance to the date the self-evaluation report was submitted (31 December 2015) nor to today.

“The panel also judged the lack of a detailed schedule of responsibilities, which depicts the responsibilities, tasks and representation regulations, to be making capacitive human resources planning more difficult.”

A detailed schedule of responsibilities exists, that however needs to be updated on the basis of the structural and staff changes (in accordance with the in March 2016 newly elected works council).

3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

“Otherwise, this example also indicates that the structures and allocations stipulated in the QM manual form a guideline for practice only partly.”

After having updated the schedule of responsibilities, ACQUIN will of course update the QM manual correspondingly.

2.3.2 It is a non-profit organisation and carries out the accreditation procedures on a full-costs basis.

“According to the opinion of the panel, GAC should insist on a comprehensible calculation for setting prices, validating the assumptions regarding the amount of work needed and overheads.”

The current calculation of prices for programme accreditation results from the decision of the general assembly in 2006 based on collected data since ACQUINs very foundation. Since 2006 it is verified annually in form of a product costing analysis on the basis of the profit and loss statement.

Christian Frevel

Chair of the expert review of ACQUIN

– via email –

Brussels, 14 November 2016

**Application by the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance
Institute (ACQUIN) for renewal of registration on EQAR**

Dear Mr Frevel,

ACQUIN has made an application for renewal of inclusion on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

We are contacting you in your capacity as chair of the panel that prepared the external review report of 2 June 2016 on which ACQUIN's application is based.

The EQAR Register Committee's rapporteurs have been considering the application and the external review report. We would be obliged if you could clarify, in consultation with the panel members, one matter in order to contribute to the consideration of ACQUIN's application:

In relation to ESG 2.1, the panel noted that – other than for programme and system accreditation procedures – no detailed comparisons between ACQUIN's criteria and ESG Part 1 were available. The panel concluded that in the interviews of ACQUIN's committees and experts it "*became plausible [...] that ESG Part 1 is taken into account in all fields of activity*" (external review report, page 12).

Could you please elaborate whether the panel has reviewed in detail the criteria used by ACQUIN in certification of further education offers, international programme accreditation, institutional accreditation, and audits in Austria with a view to how the issues described in ESG 1.1 – 1.10 are addressed?

We be would grateful if it was possible for you to **respond by 24 November 2016**, and we would appreciate if you get in contact with us should that not be feasible.

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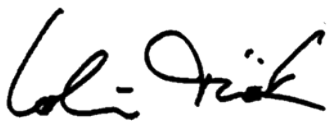
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Please note that EQAR will publish this request and your response together with the final decision on ACQUIN's application. We, however, kindly ask you to keep information related to the application confidential until the final decision has been published.

We acknowledge that it might not be possible to clarify all of the above. However, we appreciate your assistance and I shall be at your disposal if you have any questions in relation to this request.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Tück'.

Colin Tück
(Director)

Cc: German Accreditation Council (coordinator and secretary)
ACQUIN

KATHOLISCH-THEOLOGISCHE FAKULTÄT

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16.11.2016

Dear Mr. Tück,

Thank you for your letter. You asked me to “elaborate whether the panel has reviewed in detail the criteria used by ACQUIN in certification of further education offers, international programme accreditation, institutional accreditation, and audits in Austria with a view to how the issues described in ESG I.1 – I.10 are addressed”.

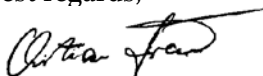
The answer is yes but indeed we have – for the sake of brevity – not written so much about it in the report. I am happy to develop that point.

For all four mentioned procedures, ACQUIN has provided handbooks we have looked into. They all take the ESG Part I into account, while doing so in different ways. In detail:

- 1) The handbook for the certification of further education offers is derived from ACQUIN's procedures concerning programme accreditation in Germany. As the latter is mapped to Part I of the ESG, the same applies to the further.
- 2) The international programme accreditation is also derived from programme accreditation in Germany and refers in general to ESG-compliance. Conclusion see 1).
- 3) For its institutional accreditation, ACQUIN has created an own set of criteria which refer explicitly to every single standard of ESG Part I, see <https://www.acquin.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ACQUIN-Guidelines-Institutional-AccreditationDec2015.pdf>
- 4) The audits in Austria are derived from system accreditation in Germany, supplemented by Austria-specific provisions. Conclusion see 1).

Based on this, the panel came to the conclusion that ESG Part I is sufficiently addressed. Nevertheless, we recommended within standard 2.1 that ACQUIN should do this in a more explicit way.

Best regards,



Prof. Dr. Christian Frevel