

Report

on the decision of the Accreditation Council, dated 22 June 2006: Decision on the Application of the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (reg ass) Bayreuth (ACQUIN) for Re-Accreditation Dated 27 January 2006

issued on 26 January 2009

This report was compiled on request of ACQUIN. The purpose of the report is to demonstrate why the Accreditation Council concluded that ACQUIN complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). For this purpose the following documents are adapted according to the sequence of the ESG:

- Decision of the Accreditation Council, of 22.06.2006, on the application of the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (reg ass) Bayreuth (ACQUIN) for re-accreditation, of 27.01.2006

and for further information about the reasons for the decision:

- Review panel's Assessment Report (including a Recommendation for the Decision) on the Application for Re-accreditation submitted by the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (reg ass) Bayreuth (ACQUIN)
- Amendment to the "Decision of the Accreditation Council, of 22.06.2006, on the application of the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (reg ass) Bayreuth (ACQUIN) for re-accreditation, of 27.01.2006"

Please note:

This report invariably contains parts from the above mentioned original documents which were only put in new order. No changes like updating information etc. have been made. This is not to be considered as a new evaluation report.

With its decision from 22 June 2006 the German Accreditation Council granted ACQUIN reaccreditation under certain conditions. These conditions have been fulfilled meanwhile, which was certified by the Accreditation Council by decision of 8 October 2007

The report comprises three chapters:

Chapter “A) The accreditation decision” contains the relevant paragraphs of the accreditation decision of the German Accreditation Council on ACQUIN, dated from 22 June 2006.

Chapter “B) The review process” contains paragraphs from the Review panel’s Assessment Report and describes the course of the accreditation process.

Chapter “C) Findings” contains the relevant paragraphs from “The accreditation decision” and from “the assessment report” which relate to the respective standards of the ESG. This chapter starts with a short description of the agency.

A) The accreditation decision

Extract from the “Decision of the Accreditation Council, of 22.06.2006, on the application of the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (reg ass) Bayreuth (ACQUIN) for re-accreditation, of 27.01.2006” (Referred to hereafter as “extract from the decision”):

“I.

The Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany (“Foundation“) accredits, in accordance with section 2 para. 1 no. 1 of the “Act on the Creation of a Foundation ‘Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany’ “, the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (reg ass) Bayreuth (ACQUIN) pursuant to the following provisions, thus granting it the authority to accredit study programmes by awarding the seal of the foundation.

II.

The decision in accordance with the above Item I. takes effect on 1 July 2006, but subject to the resolving, yet non-reactive condition that an agreement with the foundation pursuant to section 3 of the act for creation of a foundation „Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany“ be signed by 30 September 2006. In addition, the decision is subject to a resolving condition in the event of the invalidity of the above-mentioned agreement as a whole or of specific provisions thereof, with the resolving effect taking place for the period commencing on the day of any such judgement becoming incontestable.

III.

The accreditation and the authority pursuant to the above Item I. are granted for a term of five years, with the right of revocation according to Item V. reserved. According to section 1 para. 1 clause 2 of the resolution „Decisions of the Accreditation Council: Types and Impacts“ of 15.12.2005, the accreditation expires on 30 September 2011. Should ENQA decide by 31.12.2009 that, according to general European standards, accreditation with a longer term than five years is admissible, the accreditation term will then automatically extend to the maximum term admissible according to general European standards, but no longer than by another three years. ...”

Extract from the “Amendment to the Decision of the Accreditation Council, of 22.06.2006, on the application of the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (reg ass) Bayreuth (ACQUIN) for re-accreditation, of 27 January 2006” (hereafter referred as amendment”:

“On 14/15 February 2007 the Accreditation Council concluded that ACQUIN fulfilled the conditions which the Accreditation Council had imposed on the agency as part of the re-accreditation decision of 27 January 2006. As a result the Accreditation Council confirms that ACQUIN complies with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.¹Reasons

To facilitate the international recognition of decisions made by the Accreditation Council and the accreditation agencies, the accreditation council primarily applied, for the adoption of their accreditation criteria dated 15 December 2005, the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, adopted by the competent ministers at the Bologna conference in Bergen in May of 2005. The following overview shows where ESG Standards 3.1 to 3.8 find their equivalent in the Criteria for the Accreditation of Accreditation Agencies:

ESG Standard	Criteria for the Accreditation of Accreditation Agencies (decision dated 12/15/2005, Criteria); “Law establishing a foundation ‘Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Courses in Germany’” (ASG)
3.1	Criteria Part I, Criteria Part II
3.2	ASG § 2Article; 1.1; Criteria 2.1, 2.2
3.3	ASG § 2 Article 1.1 und § 9; Criteria 1
3.4	Criteria 5
3.5	Criteria 1
3.6	Criteria 2.12, 2.13, 16.2
3.7	Criteria Part II; Criteria 3, 4, 15, 16, 2.9, 18.1
3.8	Criteria 4, 6, 17.2, 19.1, 1.1; ASG § 1 Article 1

¹ Added to amendment on 15.01.2007.

Based on these the accreditation council has arrived at the conclusion that ACQUIN does meet the membership criteria of the ENQA, especially since ACQUIN has fulfilled the conditions imposed on the agency by now. In particular, the executive summary of the experts' report on the ENQA membership criteria results in the following assessments:"

B) The review process

Extract from Evaluators' report on the application of the Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungsinstituts e. V. Bayreuth (ACQUIN) of 27 January 2006 (Referred to hereafter as: extract from assessment report)

"1. Basic procedural requirements

1.1 Legal task

The Foundation, in accordance with Section 2 Para. 1 No. 1 of the German Statute on the Establishment of a Foundation "Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany", is assigned the task to accredit and re-accredit Accreditation Agencies and hence grant them temporary authorisation to accredit study programmes with the seal of the Foundation.

At its meeting of 15 December 2005, the Accreditation Council passed "Criteria for the Accreditation of Accreditation Agencies" and thus laid the basis for accreditation decisions. By defining these criteria, the Accreditation Council went beyond the direct task of accrediting agencies and furthermore considered the requirement for international compatibility of the German accreditation system.

At the same meeting, the Accreditation Council with the decision "Processing the re-accreditation of Agencies ACQUIN, ASIIN and ZEvA" also determined the course of the procedure in three steps:

- Substantiation of the application in writing by ACQUIN.*
- Evaluation including on-site visit by a group of experts (a member of the Accreditation Council, a national expert, an international expert, a student member) and review of two sets of procedure documentation by the head office of the Foundation.*
- Decision of the Accreditation Council following the hearing.*

1.2 International recognition

To promote international recognition of decisions taken by the Accreditation Council and the Accreditation Agencies, the Accreditation Council particularly included the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as adopted by the ministers responsible for the higher education system at the successive Bologna Conference in Bergen in May 2005 when passing the accreditation criteria. By considering the ESG, the Accreditation Council on one hand emphasised the central role of accreditation for realising the targets of the Bologna process, on the other hand, it made clear that quality assurance in the field of higher education and especially accreditation can no longer be exclusively geared to national standards or particularities. Further essential sources for wording the criteria were the Code of Good Practice of the European Consortium for Accreditation of 3 December 2004 and the Guidelines of Good Practice of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education of April 2005.

2. Course of the procedure

With letter of 27 January 2006, the Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungsinstitut (ACQUIN) applied for re-accreditation as an Accreditation Agency by the Accreditation Council.

With letter of 28 February 2006, ACQUIN substantiated its application and presented additional documentation. In the course of the procedure, ACQUIN presented additional documents on 19 March 2006 in response to corresponding requests by the evaluators or specified already available documents. The Accreditation Council appointed the following evaluators with decision of 2-10 January 2006 (circular resolution):

- Prof. Dr. Johann Schneider, member of the Accreditation Council (chairman).*
- Prof. Dr. Konstantin Meskouris, RWTH Aachen (national expert).*
- Dr. Stephan Bieri, president of the "Eidgenössische Fachhochschulkommission" (international expert).*
- Stefanie Geyer, University of Marburg (student member).*

The evaluators were supported by Mr Franz Börsch M.A. on the part of the Foundation's head office. Mr Börsch attended the general ACQUIN meeting in Bonn on 20 March 2006, since the members of the group of evaluators were tied up due to other appointments.

Following a preparatory meeting of the group of evaluators on 22 March 2006, a meeting took place the next morning between the group of evaluators and the chairman of the board, the vice chairman of the accreditation commission, the managing director of ACQUIN and subsequently with ACQUIN's employees. On the afternoon of 23 and 24 March 2006, the members of the group of evaluators attended the meeting of the accreditation commission of the Agency. The evaluators had received the agenda papers in due time prior to the meeting. Subsequent to the meeting of the accreditation commission on 24 March 2006, the evaluators discussed the impressions and experiences gained during an internal meeting.

The head office of the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany subjected the documentation of two accreditation procedures filed on 1 March 2006 and supplemented by additional documents on 20 March 2006 to a critical review.

At its 47th meeting on 5 May 2006, the Accreditation Council heard the chairman of the board and the managing director of ACQUIN. The Accreditation Council had received ACQUIN's application rationale and a preliminary comment of the chairman of the group of evaluators prior to the meeting.

The evaluation report was based on ACQUIN's application for re-accreditation, the application rationale together with appendices and documents handed in later.”

C) Findings

Extract from assessment report:

„3. The Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungsinstitut (ACQUIN)

3.1 Development

The Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungsinstitut (ACQUIN) was established on 26 January 2001 and has been entered in the register of associations of the Bayreuth Local Court as a non-profit association since 5 March 2001. The establishment initiative, which had been taken by Bavarian universities at that time, was supported by representatives of the universities of applied sciences and universities from Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Saxony, Thuringia as well as Austria and Switzerland. The Accreditation Council accredited ACQUIN on 22 March 2001 for a period of five years.

3.2 Organisation

The Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungsinstitut (ACQUIN) is a registered non-profit association whose members – in addition to about 100 higher education institutions in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary and the USA – also include research-oriented vocational and professional associations. In principle, membership is open to domestic and foreign higher education institutions as well as commercial enterprises, professional associations, chambers and public institutions.

Bodies of the association are the general assembly, the board, the accreditation commission, the standing expert committees and the groups of evaluators. For the organisational implementation of all operations ACQUIN has a head office in Bayreuth.

The general assembly convenes for a regular meeting at least once per year. In particular, the general assembly is responsible for electing the members of the board, for electing the members of the accreditation commission, for formal approval of the actions of the board, for confirming the evaluation criteria and procedural basic requirements resolved by the accreditation commission as well as for taking decisions regarding amendment of the constitution and dissolution of the association.

The board of the Accreditation Agency comprises a first and second chairman, a treasurer and two more members. Two members each are members of the group of universities or universities of applied sciences respectively and one member is a member of the group of practitioners from the professions. Members of the board are elected for a term of three years by the general assembly. In particular, the board is responsible for preparing economic plans, acquiring associations and institutions relevant for accreditation as members of the association, taking decisions regarding the admittance of members and entering into agreements with other accreditation institutions.

The ACQUIN accreditation commission consists of the first chairman of the board, four representatives of universities and universities of applied sciences each and two representatives each from practitioners from the professions and students. The general assembly elects a substitute member for each member of the accreditation commission. All substitute members are invited to all meetings and receive all agenda papers. The accreditation commission ensures that the basic procedural principles for accreditation are in agreement with the law and rules. In addition, it has the following functions:

- a) Taking decisions regarding evaluation criteria and basic procedural principles taking into account suggestions made by the general assembly.*
- b) Establishing guidelines for higher education institutions' self-documentation.*
- c) Preparing an assignment overview of study programmes to standing expert committees.*
- d) Consulting and determining evaluation results.*
- e) Taking accreditation decisions on the basis of reports prepared by the group of evaluators and comments made by the standing expert committees.*
- f) Appointing standing expert committees.*

The accreditation commission has the duty to supervise the appointment of groups of evaluators by the standing expert committees.

The standing expert committees, which are made up of at least five representatives of higher education institutions and practitioners from the profession (as a

general rule, at least one member each from the universities, universities of applied sciences and practitioners from the professions), are appointed by the accreditation commission for individual specific fields. Currently six or eight standing expert committees respectively, when considering also those in the process of being established, are assigned to the following specific fields:

- 1. Economic, legal and social sciences.*
- 2. Engineering.*
- 3. Humanities, linguistics and cultural sciences.*
- 4. Information technology.*
- 5. Mathematics and Sciences.*
- 6. Architecture and planning.*
- 7. Art, music and design (in the process of being established).*
- 8. Medicine (in the process of being established).*

Primary task of the standing expert committees is to ensure uniform implementation of the procedure and uniform application of the evaluation criteria for their specific field. In addition, the standing expert committees have the following tasks:

- Appointing groups of evaluators and preparing documentations.*
- Commenting on reports and suggestions for decisions made by the groups of evaluators, and*
- developing specific criterion catalogues for particular study programmes and presenting them to the accreditation commission for decision taking.*

The groups of evaluators are each appointed by the standing expert committee in charge and, as a rule, comprise three representatives of higher education institutions and one representative of the practitioners from the profession and one student representative each. The group of experts reviews the self-documentation of the applying higher education institution, conducts the peer review and prepares an evaluation report for the standing expert committee and the accreditation commission. The members of the group of evaluators have a reporting duty towards the standing expert committee in charge.

3.3 Resources

The head office has its seat in office rooms rented by the Notarkasse (notary account) in Bayreuth. Each of the nine work places is equipped with a computer as well as telephone and internet connections. ACQUIN's personnel currently comprises one managing director, one project manager, six programme managers, one assistant for servicing its bodies and one assistant doing secretarial work. The head office's personnel is predominantly un-limited and fulltime employed.

ACQUIN is financed by membership fees and revenues from accreditation procedures carried out. In 2005 the monthly operating income ranged from € -137.000 and € + 155.000 according to information provided by the Agency. 2005 saw costs in the amount of € 867.504,90 and revenues in the total amount of € 1.000.477,45. Accordingly, the operating income of € 132.972,55 together with € 407.845,04 adds up to an amount of over half a million Euro which corresponds to the personnel's costs of one year.

According to its own proclamation, ACQUIN does not receive any financial subsidies from the government or any other institutions.

3.4 Activities

The Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungsinstitut (ACQUIN) grants the seal of the Accreditation Council to bachelor and master study programmes accredited by ACQUIN at state and state certified higher education institutions. In addition to reviewing procedures completed with formal accreditation, ACQUIN has also carried out evaluation procedures in the past few years. ACQUIN's activities, in addition to cross-subject and cross-institution type accreditation of bachelor and master study programmes, also includes realising projects and events with German and foreign partner institutions as well as participating in various types of higher education policy events. The Agency sees its mission in enabling a variety of study programmes, securing the quality of education and guaranteeing transparency by means of independent, objective and quality-oriented evaluation procedures.

ACQUIN aspires to enter into agreements with other accreditation institutions and cooperates with higher education institutions, professional organisations, commercial enterprises as well as national and international institutions serving the same

purposes as ACQUIN. ACQUIN is a member of the following European and international networks and associations:

- *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).*
- *European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).*
- *International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).*
- *Central and Eastern European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CEEN).*
- *European University Association (EUA) [associate member].*

Since December 2004 ACQUIN participates in a two-year pilot project for optimising process quality in the fields of study programmes and teaching as well as conceiving and implementing a procedure for process accreditation. The project is conducted by the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). Furthermore, the Universities of Bayreuth and Bremen as well as the Universities of Applied Sciences of Erfurt and Münster participate in the project.

From the point of its establishment to late 2005, ACQUIN conducted a total of 261 procedures. The seal of the Accreditation Council was awarded to 241 study programmes, 162 of which subject to conditions. 14 study programmes were not accredited, in six instances the higher education institution withdraw its application for accreditation and in further 103 cases ACQUIN's accreditation commission decided to postpone the accreditation decision. In late 2005 ACQUIN recorded a total of 159 ongoing procedures.

4. Evaluation (evaluators' report)

I. Application and application documents:

The application documents were filed in due time. On request, the following documents were handed in later: documents on the Agency's economic development and situation, staff appointment scheme and a specimen agreement between Agency and higher education institution. A series of initial questions posed at first in writing after perusal of the documents in order to facilitate the discussion proc-

ess were also answered in writing mainly by making general references to the appendices to the application and prior to the on-site visit. For the evaluators' work it would have been more helpful to provide statements in the application with concrete references or incorporate them directly into the application.

In addition, the group of evaluators was provided with all agenda papers of the Accreditation Commission which were supplemented either directly prior to or during the meeting by handouts. The procedure of accrediting programmes became sufficiently clear from the consultancy documents (report/recommendations by the groups of evaluators as well as comments of higher education institutions and standing expert committees). All in all, the evaluators considered the documents as complete and sufficient for forming an opinion.

II. Course and evaluation of the on-site visit and of the commission's meeting

During the course of the on-site visit there was sufficient time for conversations with the chairman and managing director as well as the Agency's employees. The conversations were characterised by great openness, and all questions could be handled sufficiently. The group of evaluators could speak with the members of the commission as well.

The commission's meeting faced the pressure to having to deal with a large number of applications and handouts. This, however, seems to be quite the rule and in compliance with the ambition to complete procedures within the contractually agreed term of generally six months and nevertheless keep the number of meetings of the commission low. Nevertheless, the required attention was largely given to the applications and, if required, reference was made to self-reports prepared by the higher education institutions during consultations to clarify questions at issue. The discussions were marked by a high degree of expert knowledge and commitment. However, it is inevitable that the degree of attention for individual applications varies and the seizure of problematic issues is not only due to technical criteria. The group of evaluators, however, mostly had the overall impression that preparation, structure and especially conduct of the meeting guarantees that all applications receive the required care of consultation and the required taking of decisions (review category 16).

Also fundamental questions were discussed again and again, which indicates that the matter did not always follow the same procedure, but that the commission's self-perception is further developed based on the consultations.

At the end of the visit the group of evaluators informed ACQUIN's chairman of its preliminary evaluation and it was agreed to refrain from another hearing conducted by the chairman of the group of evaluators.”

ESG Standard 3.1 (Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education):

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

Guidelines:

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

Extract from the amendment:

“The standards for external quality assurance procedures were implemented in the criteria of the accreditation council for the accreditation of accreditation agencies. As a rule, they are once again addressed in Standards 3.2 through 3.8, with the exception of Standard 2.7 (periodic reviews). The accreditation council, pursuant to its decision of 22 June 2006, requires the agencies to grant accreditations for a limited period of time, so that this decision is not subject to agency discretion. ESG Standard 3.1 has consequently been met.”

Extract from assessment report:

ACQUIN has a profiled self-conception (review category 1). On one hand, this is based on the fact that the Agency primarily understands itself as an organisation of member higher education institutions for quality assurance and therefore does not deem higher education institutions to be customers, but clients at best, but first and

*foremost to be members and partners. It remains open whether this self-perception is reflected in concrete relationships in the accreditation process at all times and also seen by applicants this way. Practical examples, however, show that ACQUIN maintains its opinion also towards members and attempts to get its way. On the other hand, a specific understanding of quality belongs to the profile which, based on the autonomy of higher education institutions, refrains from phrasing normative specifications and verifying their realisation. Quality is primarily understood as fitness **for** purpose. Although fitness **of** purpose is also phrased as a quality feature, it rather plays a minor role. Consistently, the guideline for programme accreditation is also not conceived as a mandatory list of criteria, but as non-binding assistance for higher education institutions. Save some exceptions (see below), the list itself meets the specifications of the Accreditation Council and international criteria (review categories 10-14), and the groups of evaluators largely prepare their reports in compliance with the same sample (higher education institution and integration of study programmes, objectives, concepts, implementation, quality management and summary, partially with special comments by student representatives and representatives of practitioners from the profession) (review categories 7 and 8)."*

ESG Standard 3.2 (Official status):

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

Extract from the amendment:

“Pursuant to § 2 Article 1 No. 1 of the “Law establishing a foundation ‘Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Courses in Germany’” it is the responsibility of the Foundation to accredit and re-accredit accreditation agencies. It grants the temporary authorisation to accredit study programmes through the awarding of the Foundation’s seal. Consequently, the foundation is the public entity responsible for the recognition of the agency pursuant to Sentence 1 of Standard 3.2. By accrediting the agency, it meets Standard 3.2 Sentence 1.

Pursuant to Criterion 2.1 the agency must be legally identifiable, i.e. it must be a legal entity. The *Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute* (ACQUIN) was founded in 2001 and has since been in existence as a legal entity in the form of a regis-

tered association for the common good. Its existence as a legal entity has thus been verified. ESG Standard 3.2 has consequently been met.”

Extract from assessment report

“The Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungsinstitut (ACQUIN) is a registered non-profit association whose members – in addition to about 100 higher education institutions in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary and the USA – also include research-oriented vocational and professional associations. In principle, membership is open to domestic and foreign higher education institutions as well as commercial enterprises, professional associations, chambers and public institutions.

[...]

The Agency's structures essentially correspond to those at the time of initial accreditation and have largely proven themselves. The same applies to processes that are well-tuned to each other. They comply with international standards and requirements set by the Accreditation Council (review categories 2 and 3).

[...]

The Agency has developed well in terms of quantity and quality, and represents an important contribution to the accreditation system in Germany due to its profile in terms of regulatory policy. Given the aforementioned restrictions, ACQUIN essentially meets the criteria assigned to the review categories. These restrictions mainly refer to performance and less to structures and processes, even if some changes at that level (see recommendations) would support improvements in this regard.”

ESG Standard 3.3 (Activities):

Standard:

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

Guidelines:

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

Extract from the amendment:

“Pursuant to § 2 Article 1 No. 1 of the “Law establishing a foundation ‘Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Courses in Germany’” and subsequently Criteria 1.1 through 1.4 only such applicants will be accredited who perform study programme accreditation processes. ACQUIN has accredited approx. 550 study programmes across various subjects and types of universities. ESG Standard 3.3 has consequently been met.”

Extract from assessment report

“The Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungsinstitut (ACQUIN) grants the seal of the Accreditation Council to bachelor and master study programmes accredited by ACQUIN at state and state certified higher education institutions. In addition to reviewing procedures completed with formal accreditation, ACQUIN has also carried out evaluation procedures in the past few years. ACQUIN’s activities, in addition to cross-subject and cross-institution type accreditation of bachelor and master study programmes, also includes realising projects and events with German and foreign partner institutions as well as participating in various types of higher education policy events. The Agency sees its mission in enabling a variety of study programmes, securing the quality of education and guaranteeing transparency by means of independent, objective and quality-oriented evaluation procedures. [...]

ESG Standard 3.4 (Resources):

Standard:

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

Extract from the amendment:

“Pursuant to Criteria 5.1 through 5.4 the agency must verify that it has adequate material and staff resources that are sustainable.

The agency’s business office currently engages 12 full-time employees. The agency’s workforce consists of a managing director, nine instructors, one organisational assistant and one secretary (Status quo 08/2007).

The business office has at its disposal office space totalling approx. 250 square meters in Bayreuth. The agency's statements regarding the adequate and realistic sustainable resources are plausible and were verified by the on location inspection performed by the accreditation council's group of experts. In addition the expert group was positively impressed by the qualification and engagement of the instructors. ESG Standard 3.4 has consequently been met."

Extract from assessment report

"The head office has its seat in office rooms rented by the Notarkasse (notary account) in Bayreuth. Each of the nine work places is equipped with a computer as well as telephone and internet connections. ACQUIN's personnel currently comprises one managing director, one project manager, six programme managers, one assistant for servicing its bodies and one assistant doing secretarial work. The head office's personnel is predominantly un-limited and fulltime employed.

ACQUIN is financed by membership fees and revenues from accreditation procedures carried out. In 2005 the monthly operating income ranged from € -137.000 and € + 155.000 according to information provided by the Agency. 2005 saw costs in the amount of € 867.504,90 and revenues in the total amount of € 1.000.477,45. Accordingly, the operating income of € 132.972,55 together with € 407.845,04 adds up to an amount of over half a million Euro which corresponds to the personnel's costs of one year.

According to its own proclamation, ACQUIN does not receive any financial subsidies from the government or any other institutions.

[...]

The Agency's financial situation is good (review category 5), there are no third-party subsidies after expiry of start-up financing, and first, even if modest reserves could be generated which are also required as a responsibility towards the personnel, but are also limited within the scope of a charitable nature.

[...]

Manager and employees are very good qualified for their tasks (review category 5a) and can participate in many events regarding accreditation and the develop-

ment of quality (partly also abroad) so that they are integrated well in the general higher education policy discussion. They all also take part in meetings of the commission and hence can assume an integrating function between the groups of evaluators, the standing expert committees and the accreditation commission. There is no specific further training or development of human resources conducted beyond that extent.

As the group of evaluators could assess on site, the Agency's spatial and material resources are good as well and appropriate for the tasks. In addition, the possible connection to the University of Bayreuth has a positive effect (review category 5b)".

ESG Standard 3.5 (Mission Statement):

Standard:

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

Guidelines:

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

Extract from the amendment:

"Pursuant to Criteria 1.1 through 1.4 the agency is required to evidence its understanding of the accreditation responsibility.

The agency's goals and objectives are publicly available on the website of ACQUIN. The agency describes its task as such: ACQUIN's aim is to support the maintenance and enhancement of quality standards for teaching and learning in higher education and to contribute to the internationalisation of German higher education by performing accreditation for all types of higher education institutions and taking into account all types of programmes and disciplines. A main objective is to provide guidance and information for students, employers and higher education institutions and to contribute to more transparency in the market of study programmes. (...) ACQUIN serves quality assurance in an open

education market by evaluating study programmes on the basis of the degree programme profile and performance defined and proposed by the applicant higher education institution itself and by developing quality standards and evaluation criteria.

The expert group stated that the policy of ACQUIN reflects the agency's understanding of quality and quality assurance in accordance with the main objects of accreditation. ESG Standard 3.5 has consequently been met.”

Extract from assessment report

*“ACQUIN has a profiled self-conception (review category 1). On one hand, this is based on the fact that the Agency primarily understands itself as an organisation of member higher education institutions for quality assurance and therefore does not deem higher education institutions to be customers, but clients at best, but first and foremost to be members and partners. It remains open whether this self-perception is reflected in concrete relationships in the accreditation process at all times and also seen by applicants this way. Practical examples, however, show that ACQUIN maintains its opinion also towards members and attempts to get its way. On the other hand, a specific understanding of quality belongs to the profile which, based on the autonomy of higher education institutions, refrains from phrasing normative specifications and verifying their realisation. Quality is primarily understood as fitness **for** purpose. Although fitness **of** purpose is also phrased as a quality feature, it rather plays a minor role. Consistently, the guideline for programme accreditation is also not conceived as a mandatory list of criteria, but as non-binding assistance for higher education institutions. Save some exceptions (see below), the list itself meets the specifications of the Accreditation Council and international criteria (review categories 10-14), and the groups of evaluators largely prepare their reports in compliance with the same sample (higher education institution and integration of study programmes, objectives, concepts, implementation, quality management and summary, partially with special comments by student representatives and representatives of practitioners from the profession) (review categories 7 and 8).”*

ESG Standard 3.6 (Independence):

Standard:

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

Guidelines:

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

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

Extract from the amendment:

“Pursuant to Criterion 2.12 in combination with 2.13 and 16.2 the agency must prove the independence of its organs and their decision-making processes, in particular that of its experts.

The instruction autonomy of the organs can be derived from the provisions on the status of the precise task assignments. The members of the Accreditation Commission must not participate in the decision-making process concerning the accreditation of study programmes at their own university. ACQUIN is not subject to any kind of state control, the accreditation commission as well as the other organs concerned with the accreditation procedure are not bound by instruction. Criteria 2.12 and 2.13 have been met.

An appeal option for the applicant universities to use against experts is stipulated in the appeals procedure published on the agency's website; bias is pointed out as a reason here. Criterion 16.2 of the accreditation council is met. Consequently, ESG Standard 3.6 has been met.”

Extract from assessment report

“The Agency’s structures essentially correspond to those at the time of initial accreditation and have largely proven themselves. The same applies to processes that are well-tuned to each other. They comply with international standards and requirements set by the Accreditation Council (review categories 2 and 3).”

ESG Standard 3.7 (External quality assurance criteria and processes):

Standard:

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

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

Guidelines:

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes.

Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

Extract from the amendment:

“The study programme accreditation criteria to be applied by the agency are defined in Criteria 7 through 14. Pursuant to Criteria 15.1 in combination with 15.2 and 16.1 the agency is required to provide universities with comprehensive information on its process regulations and criteria. Pursuant to Criterion 16.4 the agency is required to involve all relevant stakeholders in the proceedings, whose results have to be published pursuant to Criterion 4.1. Pursuant to Criterion 18.1 the agency must verify the fulfilment of assignments.

The agency does conduct a comprehensive informative meeting with the interested universities, during which the universities are provided with all pertinent information on the execution of an accreditation proceeding. Universities receive all required documents (application form for accreditation, sample contract, "guidelines for the self-documentation" and a set of documents). All documents (disregarding the sample contract) are published on the website of the agency. The sample contract contains a precise and complete description of the service and a fee overview. Criteria 15.1 through 15.3 and 16.1 of the accreditation council have been met.

In compliance with condition 3 of the Accreditation Council ACQUIN has an appeals procedure by now published on its website that defines the admissible reasons of complaint and the corresponding procedures.

The agency publishes its decisions on its website and provides the information along with the names of the experts to the accreditation council and the university compass. By publishing its annual report, the agency also meets its reporting obligations to the accreditation council. Consequently, Criterion 4.1 of the accreditation council has been fulfilled. As result, ESG Standard 3.7 has been complied with."

Extract from assessment report

"The Agency's structures essentially correspond to those at the time of initial accreditation and have largely proven themselves. The same applies to processes that are well-tuned to each other. They comply with international standards and requirements set by the Accreditation Council (review categories 2 and 3). The same applies for reporting to higher education institutions and the Accreditation Council (review category 4). [...]"

"The accreditation procedure fees are lump sums to prevent disadvantages for possibly travel expense intensive locations of individual higher education institutions and generally prevent cost deliberations to the detriment of quality. On average, the fees cover the expenses. Therefore, we also can speak of a fair competitive behaviour as far as finances are concerned (review category 15)."

ESG Standard 3.8 (Accountability procedures):

Standard:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

Guidelines:

These procedures are expected to include the following:

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

Extract from the amendment:

“Pursuant to Criterion 4 the agency is required to make its processes transparent for the universities. Pursuant to Criterion 6 it is also required to verify that an internal quality assurance system is in place and that same is being documented. Criterion 19.1 commits the agency to set up a formal appeals process. The regular external assessment is binding upon the agency pursuant to § 2 Article 1 No. 1 of the “Law establishing a foundation ‘Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Courses in Germany’” and must be performed every 5 years.

Upon completion of the accreditation process, the applicant university receives a detailed, decision-justifying report along with the decision. By publishing their annual report as well as short reports on accreditations including the names of experts involved, the agency

also meets its reporting obligations to the accreditation council. The short reports are published in the HRK database. Criterion 4.1 of the accreditation council has been met.

All relevant documents concerning the accreditation policy ("guidelines for the self-documentation"), the understanding of quality and the goals of quality assurance, the procedures underlying the accreditation decision and the appeals procedure are publicly available on the agency's website.

In fulfilling condition 3 of the Accreditation Council ACQUIN by now has a formalised internal quality system in place which includes internal feedback mechanisms. As result, ESG Standard 3.8 has been complied with."

Extract from assessment report

"The Agency's structures essentially correspond to those at the time of initial accreditation and have largely proven themselves. The same applies to processes that are well-tuned to each other. They comply with international standards and requirements set by the Accreditation Council (review categories 2 and 3). The same applies for reporting to higher education institutions and the Accreditation Council (review category 4). [...]"

"ACQUIN attaches great importance to its own quality assurance and enhancement, however, does without an internal quality assurance system (review category 6). The Agency has confidence in the quality-oriented motivation and communication of all parties involved as well as in the prompt and consistent consideration of feedbacks and suggestions at and from the various levels. The group of evaluators have gained the impression that this currently is sufficiently guaranteed, especially given the personnel available. This concept indeed fits into ACQUIN's quality culture which places more emphasis on communication than on formalities; whether the concept is sustainable for the future in view of continued growth of the Agency and alternating persons must remain open. [...]"

ACQUIN has a profiled self-conception (review category 1). On one hand, this is based on the fact that the Agency primarily understands itself as an organisation of member higher education institutions for quality assurance and therefore does not deem higher education institutions to be customers, but clients at best, but first and foremost to be members and partners. It remains open whether this self-perception is reflected in concrete relationships in the accreditation process at all times and also seen by applicants this way. Practical examples, however, show that ACQUIN

*maintains its opinion also towards members and attempts to get its way. On the other hand, a specific understanding of quality belongs to the profile which, based on the autonomy of higher education institutions, refrains from phrasing normative specifications and verifying their realisation. Quality is primarily understood as fitness **for** purpose. Although fitness **of** purpose is also phrased as a quality feature, it rather plays a minor role. Consistently, the guideline for programme accreditation is also not conceived as a mandatory list of criteria, but as non-binding assistance for higher education institutions. Save some exceptions (see below), the list itself meets the specifications of the Accreditation Council and international criteria (review categories 10-14), and the groups of evaluators largely prepare their reports in compliance with the same sample (higher education institution and integration of study programmes, objectives, concepts, implementation, quality management and summary, partially with special comments by student representatives and representatives of practitioners from the profession) (review categories 7 and 8)."*