

Expert Opinion
Accreditation of the Alternative Procedure at
the
Harz University of Applied Sciences

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| University | Harz University of Applied Sciences |
| Additional information, if applicable | |
| Program-related administrative unit (if applicable) | |

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|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Program-specific procedure | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| System-related procedure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Initial accreditation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Reaccreditation No. (Number) | |
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Proposed Decision of the Expert Panel on the Equivalence of the Alternative Procedure to the Procedures Under Article 3, Sentence 1, Nos. 1 and 2 of the State Treaty

The alternative procedure is suitable for ensuring the quality of study and teaching in accordance with the criteria set forth in Parts 2 and 3 of the MRVO, analogous to procedures for program or system accreditation. It meets the requirements of Article 2 and Article 3, paragraph 2, sentence 1 of the State Treaty on Study Accreditation. It is designed and implemented in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

Met

not met

The panel of evaluators proposes the following conditions to the Accreditation Council:

Section 1: To establish and define the specific structure of the alternative procedure, in particular to determine the legal status and responsibilities of the Accreditation Committee (AkAsHSH), bylaws must be adopted that ensure the AkAsHSH can fulfill its duties and maintain its independence. (Section 54(1) HSG LSA in conjunction with Section 3(3) VoAAv; ESG Criteria 3.2 and 3.3)

Requirement 2: In the appeals process, a neutral body must be designated to make the final decision on appeals. (Section 3(3) VoAAv; ESG Criteria 2.7)

Requirement 3: The complete accreditation reports must be published. (Section 3(3) VoAAv; ESG criterion 2.6)

Requirement 4: A concept must be developed for conducting the "Evaluation (Re)Accreditation" event that ensures fulfillment of the university's stated requirement for innovation in this event. (Section 33(3) StAkkvVO LSA)

Requirement 5: The integration of the AkAsHSH Accreditation Committee into quality management with ongoing responsibilities must be further institutionalized. (Section 33(3) StAkkvVO LSA)

1 Results of the Evaluation

1.1 Brief profile of the university

The university was founded in 1991 as the Harz University of Applied Sciences in Wernigerode. Initially, it comprised only the Department of Economics, offering three degree programs. Since then, the university has grown steadily. In 1992, the Department of Automation and Computer Science was added. The expansion to include the Department of Public Administration at the additional Halberstadt campus was completed in 1998. The university thus currently comprises three departments at two locations. In January 1998, it was renamed "Harz University of Applied Sciences."

The university offers 24 bachelor's programs and 13 master's programs in the fields of business administration, public administration, and computer science, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary programs. According to its mission statement, the university sees itself as an institution "that plays a key role in shaping the scientific, economic, and cultural life of the region"; a selection of dual degree programs and "institutional study options" in the administrative sciences reinforce this claim. At the same time, however, the university also emphasizes its commitment to the international nature of its educational programs.

Research at the university is primarily application-oriented, with research priorities reflecting the university's educational profile, for example through research in the fields of tourism, administrative structural reform, and information and communication technologies. In this regard, the university maintains regional and supraregional networks. Thus, the

The "Center of Excellence for Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Business-Related Services" of the "Competence Network for Applied and Transfer-Oriented Research (KAT)"—comprising seven universities in the state of Saxony-Anhalt—is based at Harz University of Applied Sciences.

Currently, approximately 3,000 students are enrolled at Harz University of Applied Sciences, with the majority of students (1,700) pursuing degree programs in the Department of Economics.

1.2 Concept of the Alternative Procedure

The alternative procedure proposed by Harz University of Applied Sciences is program-based, not system-based. The university justifies this by stating that it views "the program-based approach as a central component of continuous content development and quality improvement" (Self-Evaluation Report, p. 4).

The alternative procedure aims to integrate external and internal quality assurance. It builds on Harz University of Applied Sciences' existing quality management system and

combines it with internal accreditation procedures featuring expanded external participation as a core element of the alternative procedure, which is intended to replace the previous external program accreditation procedures.

The following section first describes the procedure for the internal accreditation process and then outlines the committees and institutions involved that play a role in the alternative procedure.

1.2.1 Procedure for the internal accreditation process

Student surveys as the starting point

The internal accreditation process is designed in multiple stages. The starting point for this are the institutionalized, biennial student surveys, which gather student evaluations regarding both the degree programs they are enrolled in and general study conditions. All students in bachelor's degree programs starting from the third semester and all students in master's degree programs are surveyed.

The Quality Management Office compiles the results of the student surveys and sends them to the program coordinators in the academic departments, who analyze the results and, based on this analysis, conduct a program workshop with faculty and students; external stakeholders, such as representatives from the professional field and alumni, may also be invited to attend. During the workshop, a list of measures is developed and sent to the Dean's Office and the Rector's Office, which must also be notified of the implementation of the measures up to six months before the next student survey.

Steps in the internal accreditation process

When a degree program is due for initial or reaccreditation, this program workshop is incorporated in an expanded form into the "Evaluation (Re-)Accreditation" session, which constitutes one step in the internal accreditation process. However, several other procedural steps precede this. At the start of the internal accreditation process, the program coordinator responsible for the relevant degree program, in collaboration with the department, prepares the self-documentation for the process, with the Rector's Office contributing department-specific documents. The structure of this self-evaluation report is based on the criteria of the Saxony-Anhalt Study Accreditation Ordinance and fully covers them; however, it also includes the evaluation of the student survey.

Based on the self-documentation, the Quality Committee (QuAsHSH) then conducts a collegial feedback discussion with the department, which, in addition to verifying whether the criteria

of the state ordinance are being met, also serves to discuss issues regarding the quality of study programs with the involvement of all internal stakeholders even before external experts are brought in. With this format, Harz University also hopes, in the medium term, “to establish a discourse on central quality standards [...] and their implementation and further development.” (SEB, p. 14)

If necessary, the department subsequently revises the self-documentation in line with the recommendations made by the QuAsHSH or implements them; however, the recommendations are also included in the minutes of the feedback meeting prepared by the QuAsHSH. This is sent, together with the self-documentation, to the Accreditation Committee (AkAsHSH), to which the department applies for accreditation of the degree program.

The AkAsHSH first reviews the self-assessment documentation to determine whether the degree program meets the formal criteria set forth in Part 2 of the StAkkVO LSA; it prepares an evaluation report for this purpose.

The Accreditation Committee then appoints the external reviewers for the subsequent stages of the accreditation process; the self-documentation, the review report, and the evaluation of the student survey are sent to them in advance for preparation. The reviewers must declare their impartiality in advance using a document that complies with the HRK’s guidelines for program and system accreditation procedures.

As part of the on-site visit that follows, the evaluators first participate in the program workshop for faculty and students, to which representatives of the AkAsHSH are also invited. Harz University of Applied Sciences intends to enable all students to participate in these expanded program workshops; this goal was achieved for the program workshops of the programs assessed in the sample, in which the evaluators from the Accreditation Council were able to participate as guests, although this event was conducted online due to the pandemic.

Following the program workshop, the evaluators hold an additional discussion with the university’s bodies and officials who were (in some cases) not represented in the program workshop, including the dean’s office, the university administration, additional faculty members, and once again the program directors. In a final meeting, the evaluators then discuss their impressions with the representatives of the AkAsHSH.

Harz University has decided to have the “Evaluation (Re-)Accreditation” event accompanied by a representative from an accreditation agency. This includes training the evaluators prior to the site visit as well as moderating the program workshops and the subsequent discussion with university representatives.

Following the event, the reviewers prepare a report assessing compliance with the academic and content-related criteria set forth in Part 3 of the StAkrVO LSA, which also includes proposals for conditions and recommendations in the event of identified deficiencies. In preparing the report, they receive editorial support from the Alternative Procedure Coordination Office, which is part of the Quality Management department. The report is forwarded via the AkAsHSH to the academic department, which has the opportunity to comment on the report to the Accreditation Committee.

The Alternative Procedure Coordination Unit compiles an accreditation report from the audit report and the expert opinion, the structure of which is based on the Accreditation Council's framework for program accreditations. Based on this accreditation report, the AkAsHSH makes its accreditation decisions; any deviations from the experts' proposed decision must be justified and noted in the accreditation report. If a negative accreditation decision is made, the process is suspended. A fundamental revision of the program concept is then necessary for the matter to be reconsidered.

In the case of positive accreditation decisions, the AkAsHSH awards the Accreditation Council's seal to the degree program. For accreditations granted without conditions, an accreditation period of eight years is granted. For accreditations granted with conditions, the accreditation is initially limited to one year; during this period, the department must demonstrate compliance with the conditions. The AkAsHSH verifies compliance with the conditions. If the verification is negative, the matter is referred to the Senate, which requests a statement from the department regarding non-compliance with the conditions. After a set deadline, the Senate reports the status of compliance to the AkAsHSH, which makes the final accreditation decision.

The accreditation certificate and the audit report are then sent to the Accreditation Council for publication (see also Chapter 1.4).

The university has also established an appeals process in the event that the conduct of the accreditation process or the accreditation decision itself is met with criticism from the affected department. The QuAsHSH is responsible for handling appeals. The appeals process is divided into three escalation levels; the AkAsHSH is involved in the second level, and the Senate in the third. The complaint is processed until an agreement has been reached with the complainant. If no agreement is reached at the end of the process, a decision is made by a "competent body" not yet specified in detail in the process description (see also Chapter 1.4).

1.2.2 Committees and Institutions Involved in the Alternative Procedure

The following section describes the committees and institutions involved in the internal accreditation procedure in terms of their organization and their role in the alternative procedure.

AkAsHSH

The AkAsHSH Accreditation Committee is the central body in the internal accreditation process and is responsible for making decisions within that process. It is predominantly composed of external members: The external members include three professors, a student from another university, and a representative from the professional field; the internal members include two professors and a student from Harz University of Applied Sciences. A representative of an accreditation agency and the vice-rector responsible for studies and teaching serve as members in an advisory capacity. At least one of the external professors must have experience in university administration; this person then chairs the AkAsHSH. The impartiality of the external members is ensured in the same manner as that of the reviewers; furthermore, § 9 of the rules of procedure stipulates that in the event of conflicts of interest, members are excluded from deliberations and decision-making in a given proceeding, which takes into account potential biases among the internal members. The committee is appointed by the Senate for a term of eight years and operates independently of any directives.

The committee has adopted rules of procedure that define its assigned tasks in the preamble as follows:

- “Verification of compliance with the requirements for a quality management system pursuant to § 17 StAkkVO LSA.
- The program-specific implementation of internal (re-)accreditation procedures, in particular the review of formal criteria in accordance with Part 2 of the StAkkVO LSA.
- The appointment of a panel of experts to review the technical and content-related criteria in accordance with Part 3 of the StAkkVO.
- The issuance of the accreditation decision and the awarding of the seal.
- The formulation of recommendations for program-related or institution-wide quality management—regardless of the accreditation cycle.” (Rules of Procedure of the Accreditation Committee of Harz University of Applied Sciences, Preamble)

The AkAsHSH also sends one of its members to participate in the site visits during the internal accreditation process in an observer capacity.

The tasks of the AkAsHSH thus extend beyond mere decision-making in the internal accreditation process. Through its mandate to also verify compliance with the requirements for a quality management system pursuant to § 17 StAkkVO LSA, the AkAsHSH also functions

as a supervisory body vis-à-vis the QuAsHSH, which is responsible for documenting and ensuring compliance with the requirements. If the AkAsHSH determines that the requirements are not met, it may impose conditions on the QuAsHSH to require it to remedy these deficiencies.

Decisions of the AkAsHSH require a majority of its members and, in addition, the approval of a majority of the faculty members. The composition of the committee also means that, as a rule, the external members hold the deciding vote over the internal members. When selecting the internal members of the committee, care is taken to ensure that all three departments of the university are represented.

The AkAsHSH meets at least once per semester and additionally as needed, even if no regular accreditation procedures are pending. It receives the results of the student survey outside of the internal accreditation processes and may initiate an unscheduled accreditation procedure if necessary. The committee also decides whether changes made to an accredited degree program are to be classified as substantial changes. If this is the case, an unscheduled accreditation procedure is initiated. The departments are required to report to the AkAsHSH regarding any changes made.

QuAsHSH

The QuAsHSH Quality Committee is the university's internal body responsible for ensuring the proper functioning and further development of the quality management system. Its members are drawn from the Senate Commission on "Teaching and Studies" and are appointed by the Senate; the committee comprises the Vice Rector for Studies and Teaching, the associate deans of the departments, as well as one representative each from the academic staff, the non-academic staff, and the students.

Within the internal accreditation process, the QuAsHSH is involved in the university's internal preparation for the accreditation process through feedback meetings with the departments; in addition, it serves as a complaints and arbitration body for complaints arising during the internal accreditation process.

Group of Reviewers

The group of reviewers constitutes an interim body that remains in place for the duration of the main part of the internal accreditation process. It is composed entirely of external members and includes two university faculty members, one representative from the professional field, and one student. All members must have a subject-specific affinity with the degree program under review. Since bundled procedures at Harz University consist of a maximum of two related degree programs, larger groups of reviewers are not envisaged.

The process of selecting reviewers involves several steps and is outlined in a guide (“Guidelines for the Selection of External Reviewers”), which also details the requirements for reviewers. Among other things, care should be taken to ensure that reviewers from the previous accreditation process are included again. For teacher-training programs, the participation and approval requirements pursuant to § 24(1), sentences 3–5 of the StAkkVO LSA are taken into account. The department may make proposals for the selection of reviewers, which may be supplemented by the QuAsHSH. After the Office for Coordination of Alternative Procedures has verified that the proposed individuals meet the requirements for participation in the process, the AkAsHSH appoints the reviewers.

Senate and University Administration

The Senate appoints the members of the QuAsHSH and the AkAsHSH; the latter reports regularly to the Senate on its work and makes recommendations for the further development of the quality management system. In the internal accreditation process, the Senate is involved in the appeals process and makes decisions regarding the further handling of a degree program if it has not met the conditions imposed by the AkAsHSH (see 1.2.1).

The university administration is involved in the alternative procedure through the Vice President for Academic Affairs, who serves as chair of the QuAsHSH. It is also one of the bodies with which the evaluators hold discussions during the on-site visit as part of the internal accreditation process.

Accreditation Agency

External representatives from accreditation agencies are involved in the alternative procedure in two different capacities. Temporary involvement occurs on a project-specific basis in the respective internal accreditation procedures: Here, the agency is tasked with training the evaluators and moderating the sessions during the site visit. The role as an advisory member of the AkAsHSH, on the other hand, is permanent. The university draws on different accreditation agencies to fill these temporary and permanent roles.

Quality Management

The staff responsible for the Alternative Procedure within institutional quality management is located both centrally and decentrally. At the rectorate level, there is the Alternative Procedure Coordination Office, which is responsible for implementing the Alternative Procedure and supporting the AkAsHSH, and the Internal QM Office, which, among other things, conducts student surveys and supports the QuAsHSH; at the department level, one half-time position has been created per department for the internal accreditation procedures.

In addition to overseeing the Alternative Procedure, the tasks of quality management also include graduate surveys, course evaluations, analyses of academic progress, and analyses of examination statistics.

The quality management positions created for the alternative procedure are temporary for the duration of the accreditation process. They will become permanent should the Accreditation Council issue a positive accreditation decision. The remaining costs associated with implementing the alternative procedure, such as the flat-rate fee for reviewers, will be funded from the university's budget.

The university is introducing a document management system this year that already supports the alternative accreditation process. This includes process-based support for the internal accreditation process as well as ensuring that committees have constant access to documents relevant to the alternative process and to survey results.

1.3 Findings on Alternative Approaches to External Quality Assurance

The following section explains the innovative elements of the program-oriented alternative procedure at Harz University and discusses the key differences and the resulting expanded insights compared to conventional external program accreditation procedures.

1.3.1 Integration of external quality assurance and the existing internal quality management system

The alternative approach builds on the existing structures of Harz University of Applied Sciences' internal quality management system, further develops them, and permanently integrates external expertise into the existing system in order to leverage synergies to the university's advantage. With this expanded external involvement, Harz University aims to achieve a "closer integration of external and internal quality assurance on a continuous basis" (SEB, p. 4) compared to conventional program accreditations.

1.3.2 Continuous support of internal quality assurance through external expertise

The continuity of external support and the integration of internal and external quality assurance are ensured through the following measures in Harz University of Applied Sciences' alternative procedure:

Accreditation Committee (AkAsHSH)

This broadly based committee, composed of stakeholders with experience in accreditation, draws on both internal and external expertise. All relevant stakeholder groups (external and internal students, academic experts from within and outside the university, and representatives from the professional field) are appropriately represented on this committee and involved in the AkAsHSH's tasks. By maintaining a permanently staffed committee, the university aims to ensure continuity in the implementation of accreditation processes and decisions, in contrast to the ad hoc program accreditation procedures conducted by external accreditation agencies. In the long term, Harz University thus aims to enable the monitoring of degree programs over several years. This is expected to streamline the process of compiling documentation and familiarizing members with the university's basic structure, allowing for a greater focus on content-related criteria and program-specific development. The continuity of AkAsHSH members is also expected to have a positive impact on the review and follow-up of requirements, recommendations, or significant changes, thereby consistently closing the feedback loops.

A distinctive feature of the AkAsHSH compared to committees with similar functions at universities accredited by systemak is its composition of internal and external experts. The university's internal representatives serve a communicative role: they convey the committee's findings to the university community, thereby increasing acceptance of accreditation decisions among university members. The accreditation agency representative, who serves as an advisory member of the AkAsHSH, is responsible for integrating their knowledge of the accreditation system and its current changes into Harz University's quality assurance system. Thus, the AkAsHSH is a body connected both internally and externally, facilitating an effective flow of information.

To ensure ongoing communication between AkAsHSH and the Quality Management Office at Harz University of Applied Sciences, the Quality Management Office regularly informs AkAsHSH of findings and changes (e.g., regarding the latest results of the student survey at the program and university levels). In this regard, the AkAsHSH is not only responsible for evaluating the reports of the external review panels, but is also involved in the quality management of Harz University of Applied Sciences outside of the accreditation cycles—at shorter intervals—and is expected to develop its own recommendations based on the evaluation results of the student survey. Furthermore, if serious problems or significant changes are identified in individual degree programs, the AkAsHSH can initiate an extraordinary procedure within the intervals of the currently valid (re)accreditation. How this regular involvement of the AkAsHSH in the de-

The question of how this is to be structured and how it will affect the workload of AkAsHSH members with regard to quality management outside of the accreditation procedures remained unanswered (see Requirement 5). It is also unclear at this point how well the close ties to the university and the resulting workload are compatible with the availability of the external members of the AkAsHSH. It is therefore not yet possible to conclusively assess whether the concept of close and continuous integration of internal and external expertise will prove effective in terms of the expected workload. The reviewers anticipate future insights into the potential scope of integrating internal and external continuous expertise.

External reviewers in the “Evaluation and (Re)accreditation” sessions

The external reviewers responsible for assessing the academic and content-related criteria in the process are also expected to contribute to continuity. Harz University of Applied Sciences aims to reuse the same evaluators multiple times in order to benefit from their previous experience evaluating degree programs at the university. This is intended to “avoid redundant and sometimes even contradictory evaluations of the quality management system and the framework conditions for study and teaching by different evaluators” (SEB, p. 5). Evaluating the effect of establishing greater continuity even among external evaluators could also yield interesting insights. The university should therefore examine the impact of this practice on the organizational effort involved, as well as on the site visit itself and the results of the evaluation.

To facilitate knowledge transfer between the external evaluation and the AkAsHSH, a representative of the AkAsHSH participates in the site visits as an observer. However, care should be taken to ensure a consistent separation of roles between the two bodies.

1.3.3 Multi-stage nature of the procedure

The alternative procedure at Harz University of Applied Sciences involves a multi-stage quality assurance process in which the perspectives of the various stakeholders are incorporated at every stage. Compared to traditional program accreditation processes, the “program workshops” are particularly noteworthy here; they serve to facilitate in-depth discussion of the results of the program evaluation and thus act as a link between the student surveys and the “Evaluation (Re-)Accreditation” event. The alternative procedure at Harz University of Applied Sciences uses various instruments to gather student feedback and involve all stakeholder groups in the discussion and further development of the degree programs. The following tools are used for quality assurance and development:

- Regular, biennial anonymous **student surveys** using a standardized questionnaire on the overall study situation (program evaluation) and other evaluation formats such as course evaluations, surveys of graduates, and analyses of examination statistics.
- **Self-documentation of the degree programs**, incorporating the results of the student surveys.
- In the “program workshops,” faculty and students jointly review the evaluation results at the program level. In the spirit of “internal audit” or a peer-based self-assessment, the aim is to promote internal engagement with quality management, identify areas requiring action at an early stage, and create a platform for exchanging *best practices*. The system can respond flexibly to specific requirements, and if necessary, “program workshops.”
- The "**Evaluation and (Re)Accreditation**" event will be attended by students in the program, alumni, faculty members, and external evaluators. The event is designed as a discussion forum and will be moderated by an agency representative (not the same person who serves as the agency representative on the AkAsHSH). The event is intended to “discuss quality-related aspects, current topics, and further developments in the program’s content, as well as the implementation of measures and recommendations from previous evaluations” (SEB, p. 15). Compared to a traditional program accreditation process, this format is intended to go beyond typical peer-review interviews, as quality development is also explicitly to be discussed collectively. A key difference from traditional program accreditation procedures lies in the fact that, in this format at Harz University of Applied Sciences, mixed groups of university stakeholders participate simultaneously in the “Evaluation (Re-)Accreditation” event, and a completely separate survey of the status groups is omitted. This is intended to stimulate dialogue between the status groups, facilitate joint discussion of topic areas, and derive recommendations for action. In this way, university stakeholders are encouraged to participate in quality assurance and development, and collegial accountability is strengthened.

The regular program workshops are intended to facilitate ongoing discussions with participants about opportunities for further development. The design of the format is expected to lower the barrier to participation, increase participants’ motivation through shorter feedback loops, and ensure that the external evaluation conducted every eight years

will consequently be perceived as less disruptive. The panel of evaluators expects to gain fundamental insights into how the integration of various formats can be used for quality assurance and further development to establish a process that participants perceive as continuous and harmonious.

Since a culture of discussion and open dialogue form the core of the event “Evaluation (Re-)Accreditation,” care must be taken to ensure that the moderator actively fosters an atmosphere conducive to discussion. Thus, the concept for conducting the “Evaluation (Re)Accreditation” event must ensure the planned innovative nature of the event and ensure that the external evaluators do not fall into traditional program accreditation patterns and dominate the “Evaluation (Re)Accreditation” event through question-and-answer formats (see Requirement 4). In addition, it should be critically examined whether, in addition to the mixed-group discussions that leverage the synergies of the various stakeholder groups, individual stakeholder group discussions with the evaluators—particularly with the students—can also be offered to provide a *safe space* for critical comments.

Overall, the panel of evaluators expects to gain fundamental insights into whether the increased number of steps—compared to traditional program accreditations—brings additional benefits and, if so, what those benefits are. In addition, the panel expects an assessment of whether there are any redundancies and, if so, how these are viewed by those involved. The panel of experts also expects findings regarding the impact of the external review’s focus on subject-specific criteria and corresponding quality development.

1.3.4 Strengthening the role and involvement of students and faculty in the process

In implementing the alternative procedure, Harz University places particular emphasis on collegial cooperation and a culture of open discussion, which are intended to contribute to the effective substantive development of the degree programs. In the medium to long term, this is intended to increase the personal responsibility, co-determination, and active participation of students and faculty in ensuring and further developing the quality of their degree programs. This is reflected in the goal that, in the course of the “Evaluation (Re-)accreditation.” Opportunities for participation at the various levels of quality assurance and development at Harz University are characterized by broad participation of many representatives from the various stakeholder groups. Here, a clear added value of the alternative procedure is evident, which allows participants—who are not limited to a select circle

—reflected by representatives—enables them to go beyond a reporting role and actively help shape the improvement of the degree programs. The evaluators positively highlight that the alternative procedure at Harz University, in combination with the open culture of discussion among the participating university members that became evident during the on-site visits, is promising for increasing participation and shared responsibility in the spirit of a continuously evolving culture of quality. Insights that may be gained here regarding the increased and active participation of the various stakeholder groups can be used to derive development perspectives for the entire accreditation system.

1.3.5 Incorporation of external expertise through agency representatives and the Accreditation Council

Compared to traditional program and institutional accreditations, Harz University has decided to deliberately strengthen its ties with accreditation agencies and to continuously incorporate the expertise of established accreditation agencies and the Accreditation Council into its alternative procedure. The expertise of the accreditation agencies is reflected in two aspects of the alternative procedure: (1) An agency representative serving as an advisory member on the university's central accreditation committee (AkAsHSH) and (2) an agency representative acting as moderator for the "Evaluation and (Re)accreditation" event (including responsibility for preparing the evaluators through training). The agency representatives are intended to create a single-tiered and direct interface with the accreditation system. In this way, the knowledge derived from the accreditation agencies' many years of work, as well as current developments in the field of accreditation and quality assurance, is to be integrated into the relevant structures of Harz University of Applied Sciences. The evaluators welcome this professionalization and the support provided by external accreditation expertise, and recognize the added value for a targeted flow of information and an assessment of the degree programs aligned with accreditation standards. Through this approach, the university moves closer to the current accreditation system than, for example, system-accredited universities. The impact of this development on the university's quality management should be evaluated after a reasonable period of time.

As this alternative procedure progresses, Harz University and the AkAsHSH will also report to the Accreditation Council through thematic analyses. These thematic analyses are intended to evaluate the implementation of the alternative accreditation procedure and identify opportunities for further development.

The panel of experts has identified several areas where the alternative procedure can yield new insights. It expects the university to report to the Accreditation Council

Council on these and other potential findings within the framework of the thematic analyses. These will thus serve in the future to report on the acquisition of further fundamental insights into the accreditation system through the alternative procedure and will inform the Accreditation Council about the further development of the procedure.

1.3.6 The multi-perspective nature of the process and the establishment of a “learning organization”

The quality assurance and improvement tools at Harz University of Applied Sciences are designed not only to meet the accreditation criteria set forth in the StAkkrVO LSA, but above all to foster collegial exchange and “learning from one another,” in which all stakeholders are actively involved. Compared to traditional program accreditations, the focus here is on creating a culture of quality characterized by the participation and shared responsibility of all stakeholders. This culture of quality is intended to have a positive impact on both the further development of study programs and that of the entire quality management system.

The panel of evaluators expects to gain fundamental insights into the promotion of a culture of quality at the university. In particular, insights are expected regarding how appropriate structures and formats can encourage university members to actively engage in quality assurance and quality development processes. The panel of evaluators also expects insights into which types of quality development structures and formats are suitable for promoting the active involvement of all staff groups as well as discussion and exchange among these groups.

The panel of evaluators welcomes the evaluation grid used in Harz University of Applied Sciences’ internal accreditation processes, which is closely aligned with that of the Accreditation Council. This helps promote transparency, comparability, and trust, particularly at the outset of the introduction of alternative procedures. Looking ahead, however, the panel of experts expects to gain insights into whether the innovative elements of the alternative procedure—with a focus on establishing and strengthening a culture of quality—can also be reflected in a different evaluation format. This will allow the experience gained by Harz University of Applied Sciences to be shared and will also provide impetus for the development of the accreditation system in general.

1.4 Summary Quality Assessment

The panel of evaluators formed a very positive impression of the alternative procedure at Harz University of Applied Sciences. During the support provided for the first implementation of the alternative procedure, it became clear that all stakeholder groups involved (in particular the university administration, students, faculty, and quality management) were very well prepared; they gave the impression that everyone was actively and purposefully contributing to the implementation of the alternative procedure. The aspects of communication and the involvement of all participants were at the forefront of the process and constituted a key strength, as the topic was addressed intensively not only vertically but also horizontally across all organizational levels.

The reason cited for choosing the alternative procedure at Harz University of Applied Sciences was that the primary focus is on the continuous improvement of the quality of study programs, rather than solely on quality assurance. For a small university, it is essential to continually adapt to the need for flexibility and the market demands for students and to incorporate these into the quality management process. This idea also formed the basis for the comprehensive participatory process, with the goal of establishing, by the end of the process, a foundation for the sustained performance of Harz University and offering students attractive study programs.

Both the university administration and the faculty emphasized that, unlike in program accreditation, an interdisciplinary exchange took place and that all participants gained a better understanding of the activities of the other departments. This also led to greater motivation to participate in the alternative process and to continue supporting and expanding this participatory exchange of knowledge in the future. The alternative procedure enabled all participants to take greater ownership of the process and actively contribute their own quality considerations. Students also felt well integrated into the alternative procedure and were able to raise and discuss their concerns regarding studies and teaching. Likewise, this group felt that the proposed changes would be implemented by the instructors immediately or at the earliest possible point in the semester, meaning that subsequent students would also benefit from the quality improvements rather than having to wait until the next program accreditation.

The alternative process at Harz University of Applied Sciences has led to a better understanding of quality, both for the further development of individual degree programs and, in particular, for the university as a whole. The ongoing, broad-based participation laid the foundation for a culture of quality. The goal for the coming years is to

and to improve the entire process of the Alternative Procedure, as well as to resolve or optimize existing weaknesses.

However, the generally positive impression of the overall process still requires—in the assessment of the panel of experts—improvements in certain areas of quality standards, which must lead to further optimization of the Alternative Procedure at Harz University of Applied Sciences. These can be divided into the following two categories:

- process-oriented improvements,
- internal (organizational) improvements.

With regard to *process-oriented improvements*, the focus is on clearly defining roles, particularly that of the Accreditation Committee (AkAsHSH), but also the roles of the evaluators, the agency representatives, and the involvement of students. The panel of evaluators noted that the boundaries, distribution of tasks, and substantive responsibilities are not consistently clearly communicated or defined, and that these groups' self-understanding has not yet been established. It was also noted that the agency's role in moderating the "Evaluation (Re)Accreditation" event is not clearly defined. At this point, the panel of evaluators sees potential for improvement in the alternative procedure; it should be clarified whether the moderating agency participates in the procedure as an advisory member or exercises a general observational or moderating role. In particular, the role of the AkAsHSH should be more clearly defined, and a separation of roles in relation to the other stakeholders in the alternative procedure should also be established.

Furthermore, Harz University must define the processes that are still incomplete and that relate to the publication of the expert reports and the appeals procedure. For example, the flowchart for the "Awarding of the Seal" process (Appendix 1c) states that, following successful accreditation, the audit report and the accreditation certificate are sent to the Accreditation Council. However, the audit report prepared by AkAsHSH alone is not sufficient to fulfill the university's publication obligation. According to Standard 2.6 of the ESG, the complete expert reports must be published. In the case of the alternative procedure at Harz University of Applied Sciences, this includes the complete accreditation report, consisting of the audit report and the expert opinions (see Requirement 3). There are also still ambiguities in the flowchart for the "complaints procedure" (Appendix 1d), as the institution that makes the final decision on a complaint at the highest escalation level within the complaints procedure has not yet been designated. The "competent body" for the final decision on complaints must therefore still be defined (see Requirement 2).

With regard to one step in the alternative procedure, the evaluators see room for improvement to ensure that the procedure meets the standards and objectives set forth by the university: In its self-evaluation report, the university asserts that “the ‘Evaluation (Re)Accreditation’ event [...] represents an innovative and at the same time central component” (SEB, p. 15) of the Alternative Procedure. In this context, the program workshops held every two years are expanded to include events within the framework of internal accreditation.

However, according to the members of the panel of evaluators who observed the proceedings, the “Evaluation (Re)Accreditation” event held as part of the pilot accreditation process for the “Business Consulting” and “Tourism and Destination Management” master’s programs had lost its original workshop-style format. With the exception of the fact that no separate discussions were held with the students, the event showed little difference from site visits conducted as part of external program accreditation. Due to the prominent role of the external evaluators and the moderation by the agency representative, which was oriented toward a conventional program accreditation process, no exchange took place between faculty and students. The topics discussed during the event were dictated by the targeted or closed-ended questions. The innovative character of the event intended by the university thus did not materialize. The university must therefore examine how the benefits of the program workshops it outlined can be achieved in the implementation of this event while simultaneously meeting the requirements of internal accreditation. A concept for conducting the “Evaluation (Re)Accreditation” event must be developed that ensures the fulfillment of the university’s stated requirement for innovation in this event (see Requirement 4).

The university could, for example, explore whether this could be achieved by dividing the process into workshops involving the evaluators and additional on-site meetings. In doing so, it should also be examined whether, in addition to the workshop held as part of the internal accreditation process, separate meetings could be conducted between students and the evaluation team without the participation of other university staff groups.

The panel of evaluators also asks the university to consider whether the representatives of the AkAsHSH should participate only in the separate meeting with the external evaluators, but not in the workshop with students and faculty, as is currently planned. At the same time, the event should be communicated transparently to students in advance, including information regarding the event’s participants.

In addition, it is recommended that students in the “Evaluation and (Re)Accreditation” session be given more opportunity for discussion and to share their own comments. This could be achieved by

The aim is to ensure that students have more time to engage with the quality improvement process. Overall, however, it is worth noting positively that students are very interested in the further development of the curricula and are therefore motivated to participate in the alternative process. This also demonstrates a strong sense of loyalty and appreciation toward Harz University of Applied Sciences.

As part of *internal (organizational) improvements*, the panel of evaluators also sees a need for Harz University to codify the alternative procedure—in particular the legal status of the AkAsHSH—in a set of bylaws (just as evaluations are already governed by a set of bylaws, the Evaluation Regulations). To date, the Alternative Procedure is governed solely by the AkAsHSH's rules of procedure—which the AkAsHSH has adopted for itself—as well as the description of the Alternative Procedure in the self-evaluation report and (presumably) other internal documents on which this description is based. According to § 54(1) of the Higher Education Act of Saxony-Anhalt (HSG LSA), universities regulate their affairs through statutes. Without a statute, the specific structure of the alternative procedure is, in the view of the panel of experts, insufficiently legitimized and safeguarded. Through the statute, the provisions essential for the structure of the alternative procedure are bindingly established by the competent university body. They are also sufficiently transparent through the official publication of the statute, so that all stakeholders can rely on them. On the basis of these bylaws, the Academic Senate appoints the members of the AkAsHSH, and the AkAsHSH thereby obtains its independent status. To the extent that the AkAsHSH's rules of procedure currently contain provisions essential to the design of the alternative procedure (e.g., the AkAsHSH's mandate, its composition, the appointment and resignation of its members, the composition of the groups of reviewers), these belong in the statutes to be enacted rather than in the AkAsHSH's rules of procedure. Otherwise, the AkAsHSH could alter these provisions by amending its rules of procedure. However, the institution is responsible for ensuring that the alternative procedure is carried out in the accredited form and must guarantee this through relevant provisions. (See Requirement 1).

There is also still a need for clarification regarding certain aspects of the AkAsHSH's role. For instance, in its self-evaluation report, the university describes the AkAsHSH's integration into the internal quality management process—even outside of accreditation cycles—as a means of “gaining fundamental insights that go beyond program and system accreditation.” However, the description of this integration remains sketchy and lacks concrete commitment. Even the AkAsHSH representatives interviewed during the review process were still uncertain about how their role in this regard would be defined. The integration of the AkAsHSH accreditation committee with ongoing

tasks into quality management must therefore be more strongly institutionalized (see Requirement 5). (Section 33(3) StAkkVO LSA)

In addition, the accreditation report contains inaccuracies resulting from the use of the Accreditation Council's grid for program accreditation procedures without adapting it to the specific characteristics of the alternative procedure at Harz University of Applied Sciences. The subchapter "Results at a Glance" adopts the terminology of the grid. In program accreditation procedures, this subchapter serves to inform the Accreditation Council, upon submission of the application, of the separate decision proposals from the agency and the panel of experts. In the Alternative Procedure, however, the accreditation decision of the AkAsHSH is presented here, including the information in Chapter 3.1 of the accreditation report, which documents the changes made to the reviewers' assessment. Therefore, neither the subheading "Proposed Decision of the AkAsHSH" (the AkAsHSH has already made its decision, and the results are not to be submitted to any other body for a decision) nor the subheading "Proposed Decision of the Panel of Experts" (the AkAsHSH has already made changes here; the panel of experts' original proposed decisions are documented in the actual report). The university should adjust the terminology here to make it clear that the AkAsHSH's accreditation decision is documented here. It is recommended that the present accreditation report also be adjusted accordingly. With regard to the presentation of the accreditation decision, it is further proposed that any conditions imposed be accompanied by references to the applicable legal basis (i.e., generally the relevant criteria of the StAkkVO LSA). This serves to inform the program directors and the departments responsible for implementing the measures necessary to address the deficiencies.

In summary, it can be stated that:

The alternative procedure at Harz University of Applied Sciences has the following strengths:

- A uniform, continuous approach within the framework of the new accreditation process, involving all stakeholder groups.
- High motivation among Harz University stakeholders, particularly faculty and students, to contribute to the university's quality improvement efforts.

- A role model as a small university that designs its own quality improvement processes and independently defines and develops the associated procedures. Defining the procedural steps led to improved management of the university's internal quality system and quality development.

The alternative procedure at Harz University still exhibits the following weaknesses:

- The roles of the individual stakeholder groups must be precisely redefined; this applies in particular to the AkAsHSH and the body that makes the final decision in the appeals process.
- The university's internal processes and regulations must be established or adapted to the alternative procedure and clarified. The defined quality standards are not yet fully clear to all stakeholder groups.
- Clarification of the innovative nature of the program workshops to justify an alternative procedure.

Additional recommendations from the panel of evaluators

1. It should be examined whether the following adjustments could be made to the "Evaluation (Re)Accreditation" event:
 - More time should be allocated for the workshop. At the same time, more space should be given to the discussion of open-ended topics.
 - Representatives of the AkAsHSH should only participate in the separate meeting with the evaluators, not in the workshop with students and faculty.
 - The event should be communicated transparently to students in advance, including information regarding the event's participants.
2. The role of the AkAsHSH should be more clearly defined, and a separation of roles in relation to the other actors in the alternative procedure should be established.
3. The measures for addressing significant changes should be further differentiated and, in addition to conducting unscheduled procedures, provide for additional options for addressing significant changes.
4. In the accreditation report, the terminology in the chapter "Results at a Glance" should be adapted to the alternative procedure.

2 Documentation and Evidence

2.1 Compliance with the ESG / Parts 2 and 3 of the MRVO¹

Strategies for Quality Assurance (ESG 1.1) / § 14 MRVO Status

Harz University has published its quality assurance objectives and the elements of its quality management system on its website. The existing quality management system, which is also described in the self-evaluation report, is to be closely linked to external quality assurance through the alternative procedure. The internal committee QuAsHSH and the committee AkAsHSH, composed of both internal and external members, are also tasked with the further development of quality assurance.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

The quality assurance strategy is publicly accessible. The Alternative Procedure of Harz University is a meaningful expression and a logical extension of this strategy.

Proposed Decision

Fulfilled.

Design and Approval of Degree Programs (ESG 1.2) / Sections 11, 12, 13 MRVO

Status

The approval of degree programs takes place through a formal procedure at the university that also takes into account the requirements of the Ministry of Economics, Science, and Digitalization of the State of Saxony-Anhalt. The learning outcomes of the degree programs are described in the study regulations, the Diploma Supplements, and cumulatively in the module descriptions in accordance with the EQF and DQR, and are thus publicly accessible. The degree programs are designed for modularization in accordance with the requirements of the StAkkVO LSA and structured through the awarding of ECTS credits. The attainability of learning outcomes is verified through continuous program monitoring and workload surveys.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

Procedures for the approval and design of degree programs are institutionalized in accordance with the ESG. The alternative procedure supplements these procedures by adding additional levels of approval and further development of degree programs with the participation of faculty and students. The review of the validity of the qualification objectives is part of the internal accreditation process.

¹ Explanation: Parts 2 and 3 of the Model Statutes can be referenced to ESG Part 1, i.e., provisions of the MRVO can be derived from the guidelines. A review of compliance with the guideline therefore also includes a review of the corresponding provision in the MRVO.

Proposed Decision

Compliant.

Student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment (ESG 1.3) / §§ 12, 15 MRVO

Status

At Harz University of Applied Sciences, the use of varied and competency-based examination formats is facilitated. The mission statement commits the university, on the one hand, to promoting new forms of student education, and on the other hand, it calls on students to demonstrate a “high level of commitment to performance and cooperation as well as initiative.” The teaching and examination formats applied in the two samples reflect this commitment and encourage students to engage in self-directed learning.

The examination regulations provide for accommodations for students in special circumstances.

Evaluation: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

In principle, student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment are facilitated at Harz University of Applied Sciences. The regular program workshops provide a forum for students and faculty to ensure that this opportunity is utilized. In the internal accreditation process, the achievement of this objective is subject to external review.

Proposed Decision

Met.

Admission, Course of Study, Recognition, and Degree Completion (ESG 1.4) / Sections 5, 6, 12, 14 MRVO

Status

The university has submitted all relevant regulations that apply university-wide, department-wide, and, in the case of the two programs in the sample, program-specific. They are also freely accessible on the university’s website. They govern all phases of the “student life cycle,” from admission to graduation. The examination regulations establish rules for recognition in accordance with the Lisbon Convention and for the transfer of credits for competencies acquired outside the university. The degree documents for a program also include a Diploma Supplement that explains the qualification earned.

The university regularly evaluates examination statistics and has conducted an analysis of student attrition. In the coming semesters, AI-supported monitoring of academic progress is to be introduced.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

The “student life cycle” is fully mapped out in regulations, and the course of study is continuously evaluated. In the internal accreditation procedures within the framework of the alternative procedure, the aspects of Standard 1.4 of the ESG that are relevant to the criteria under StAkkVO LSA are also reviewed (see also Chapter 2.2 on random sampling).

Proposed decision

Fulfilled.

Faculty (ESG 1.5) / § 12 MRVO

Status

The university has outlined its standardized process for appointment procedures in the appendices to the self-evaluation report. With the involvement of an appointment committee appointed by the departmental council, the multi-stage appointment procedures are conducted in accordance with the Higher Education Act of the State of Saxony-Anhalt.

All full-time faculty members are required to participate in continuing education in higher education pedagogy at least once a year. To this end, the university offers its own continuing education programs, but it also allows faculty to attend programs at other universities. The university has also established the TeachingLab organizational unit to promote digital teaching.

In its mission statement, the university commits to promoting application-oriented research and to integrating research and teaching.

Evaluation: Strengths and Areas for Development

Faculty members are hired according to standardized procedures, and the development of their teaching competencies is supported. In the alternative process, faculty members are also systematically involved in quality development.

Proposed Decision

Met.

Learning Environment (ESG 1.6) / § 12

MRVO Status

The university outlines its financial resources in its self-evaluation report. In addition to the state funding allocated through performance agreements, the university receives additional funding through the Higher Education Pact 2020. Further funding will be provided through the “Strengthening Study and Teaching” Future Agreement.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

The university's funding is secured. Facilities and the learning environment are assessed and evaluated on a program-specific basis as part of the alternative procedure.

Proposed Decision

Met.

Information Management (ESG 1.7) / § 14 MRVO

Status

The university regularly collects statistical data. This is supplemented by additional analyses, such as an analysis of student dropout rates. In addition to course evaluations and student surveys, it also conducts graduate surveys at longer intervals. The university is currently implementing AI-supported academic progress monitoring.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

The university collects a range of study-related data that complements the survey instruments.

The results of the student surveys serve as the starting point for the program workshops and, consequently, for the "(Re)Accreditation" event; they are also made available to the evaluators as part of the internal accreditation process for review, supplemented by statistics and key figures at the university, department, and program levels (such as the student-faculty ratio or the gender distribution of faculty members).

Proposed Decision

Fulfilled.

Public Information (ESG 1.8) / - Status

The university publishes information about its degree programs and activities on its website. The 2019 dropout analysis is also available online via research-gate.net.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

The university fully complies with its information obligations.

Proposed decision

Compliant.

Ongoing monitoring and regular review of degree programs (ESG 1.9) / § 14 MRVO

Status

The evaluations conducted by the universities and the program monitoring have already been described above. The program workshops, based on student surveys, also serve to further develop and update the programs. The university has adopted a continuous improvement process (CIP) overall, which is overseen by the quality management department.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

The university regularly reviews its degree programs using various tools with the aim of further developing them. The alternative procedure integrates these measures with external quality assurance, thereby incorporating additional perspectives into the further development of the degree programs.

Proposed Decision

Fulfilled.

Regular external quality assurance (ESG 1.10) / § 26 MRVO Status

On the one hand, external quality assurance is integrated into the Alternative Procedure, which is described in detail in Chapter 1. On the other hand, the Alternative Procedure itself must be accredited at regular intervals through external accreditation procedures.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

The university undergoes external quality assurance both within its own alternative procedure and through the accreditation of the alternative procedure itself. With the exception of the mandated Monita (see p. 3), the respective quality assurance procedures are designed in accordance with the ESG.

Proposed Decision

Compliant.

Consideration of Internal Quality Assurance (ESG 2.1) Status

In the internal accreditation process within the framework of the Alternative Procedure, the standards relevant to the criteria of Part 1 of the ESG, as defined by the StAkkVO LSA, are reviewed and evaluated. The accreditation report is based on the evaluation grid published by the Accreditation Council for program accreditation procedures. In addition, the two central bodies of the Alternative Procedure are involved in reviewing the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures: The QuAsHSH is responsible for compliance with the requirements for a quality assurance system pursuant to § 17 StAkkVO LSA; it is supervised in this regard by the AkAsHSH.

... Among the tasks of the AkAsHSH is also the formulation of recommendations for improving program- and institution-related quality management. The advisory member of the AkAsHSH, who is seconded by an agency, ensures that current developments in the field of accreditation are taken into account.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

In the university's alternative procedure, internal and external quality assurance are clearly intertwined. The effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures under Part 1 of the ESG is thus subject to continuous review.

Proposed Decision

Fulfilled.

Design of Appropriate Procedures (ESG 2.2)

Status

The Alternative Procedure is designed in accordance with § 33 StAkkVO LSA and based on Parts 1 through 3 of the ESG. Internal accreditation within the framework of the alternative procedure verifies whether the degree programs at Harz University of Applied Sciences are designed and implemented in accordance with the criteria of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation and the StAkkVO LSA. It also ensures that the requirements for a quality management system pursuant to § 17 StAkkVO LSA are met. All stakeholder groups are involved at various stages of the multi-level procedure.

Evaluation: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

The alternative procedure is fundamentally suitable for achieving the quality development goals defined by the university. Compliance with the requirements for degree programs under the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation and the StAkkVO LSA is ensured. The alternative procedure is suitable for fully replacing external program accreditation.

Proposed Decision

Fulfilled.

Implementation of the procedures

(ESG 2.3) Status

The alternative procedure comprises a self-assessment in the form of a multi-stage process resulting in self-documentation, an external review as part of the "Evaluation (Re)Accreditation" event, an accreditation report consisting of an audit report and expert opinion, as well as follow-up measures to address findings.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

The alternative procedure encompasses all procedural steps required under ESG 2.3. Further details regarding areas for improvement in individual procedural steps are provided in the section on compliance with ESG 2.6 and ESG 2.7.

Proposed Decision

Met.

Peer review experts (ESG 2.4)

Status

External quality assurance is carried out, on the one hand, by the panels of reviewers, which are composed entirely of external experts, including a student representative, and, on the other hand, by the AkAsHSH, where external members outnumber internal members. The independence of the external experts is ensured; their selection is based on established criteria for their qualifications. The reviewers also receive additional training for their role.

Evaluation: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

External quality assurance by peer review experts meets the standards of external program accreditation and, in some respects, exceeds them.

Proposed Decision

Met.

Criteria for the results (ESG 2.5) Status

The evaluations from the external quality assurance process are based on the criteria of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation and the StAkkVO LSA and are therefore published. The self-reports to be prepared for internal accreditation are structured in accordance with the StAkkVO LSA, while the accreditation reports are based on the framework for program accreditation procedures provided by the Accreditation Council. The AkAsHSH is responsible for the consistent application of the criteria; it is supported in this by the staff member(s) delegated by an agency, who serves as an advisory member. In its accreditation decision, the AkAsHSH issues requirements that must be implemented and recommendations that address desirable but not mandatory changes.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

All criteria have been published, and the conditions for their consistent application are in place.

Proposed Decision

Met.

Reports (ESG 2.6)

Status

The accreditation report includes the audit report prepared by AkAsHSH and the expert opinion prepared by the panel of experts. Once the accreditation decision has been made, it is published; however, according to the “Seal Award” flowchart (Appendix 1c), only the audit report and the accreditation certificate are sent to the Accreditation Council.

Evaluation: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

The audit report prepared by the AkAsHSH alone is not sufficient to fulfill the university’s publication obligation. According to Standard 2.6 of the ESG, the complete expert reports must be published. In the case of the alternative procedure at Harz University of Applied Sciences, this includes the complete accreditation report, consisting of the audit report and the expert opinion.

Proposed Decision

Not met.

The expert panel proposes the following condition:

The complete accreditation reports must be published.

Complaints and Appeals (ESG 2.7) Status

The procedure provides for a multi-stage appeals process that allows for both complaints regarding the conduct of the procedure and objections to the accreditation decision. QuAsHSH is responsible for handling complaints and objections. The appeals process is divided into three stages of escalation; the AkAsHSH is involved in the second stage, and the Senate in the third. The complaint will be processed until an agreement is reached with the complainant.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

The complaint procedure is fundamentally suitable for addressing complaints and appeals and reaching an agreement on them. However, the process of the complaint procedure has not yet been fully developed. In the “Complaint Procedure” flowchart (Appendix 1d), the institution that makes the final decision on a complaint at the highest escalation level within the complaint procedure has not yet been named.

Proposed Decision

Not met.

The review panel proposes the following requirement:

The complaints procedure must define a neutral body responsible for making the final decision on complaints.

Activities, Strategy, and Procedures for Quality Assurance (ESG 3.1)

Status

The role of the agency as defined in Standard 3.1 of the ESG is assumed by the AkAsHSH in the alternative procedure; however, it is supported in this process both on an ongoing basis by the “Alternative Procedure Coordination” office and, as needed, by a representative of an accreditation agency—for example, during expert training. As the central body for regularly conducted internal accreditations, the AkAsHSH makes the accreditation decision and thus also oversees the implementation of internal accreditations. It has adopted rules of procedure that, among other things, define the body’s tasks and objectives. In addition to external members, it also includes internal members delegated by the university, including students.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

All functions of a quality assurance agency as specified in Standard 3.1 of the ESG are performed by the AkAsHSH or by the stakeholders supporting the AkAsHSH.

Proposed decision

Met.

Official Status (ESG 3.2)

Status

The alternative procedure was designed in accordance with § 33 StAkrVO LSA and has met the approval requirements set forth in § 3, paragraphs 1 through 3, of the VoAAv. The AkAsHSH has adopted rules of procedure; however, there are no bylaws governing the alternative procedure at Harz University issued by the competent university body.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

The AkAsHSH lacks a secure legal basis. The AkAsHSH cannot establish this for itself through rules of procedure; rather, the university must provide it.

Proposed Decision

Not met.

Taking into account § 54(1) HSG LSA, the review panel proposes the following condition:

For the establishment and specific design of the alternative procedure, in particular for defining the legal status and tasks of the AkAsHSH

AkAsHSH, statutes must be enacted that ensure the fulfillment of the AkAsHSH's tasks and its independence.

Independence (ESG 3.3)

Status

The alternative procedure submitted for accreditation provides for an independent role for the AkAsHSH. The external members of the committee hold the majority of votes. When decisions concern their own department, the internal representatives of the university must abstain. In the event that university representatives disagree with accreditation decisions, an appeals procedure is provided for that preserves the independence of the AkAsHSH. However, as outlined in the description of ESG Standard 3.2, the legal status of the AkAsHSH within the university has not yet been secured.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

The independence of the AkAsHSH is fundamentally ensured. In the event of a positive accreditation decision regarding the alternative procedure, fundamental changes to the status of the AkAsHSH—in the sense of a significant change—would require justification to the Accreditation Council; this provides a certain degree of protection for the committee's independence. Nevertheless, the legal status of the committee must still be secured.

Proposed Decision

Not met.

Taking into account § 54(1) HSG LSA, the expert panel proposes the following condition:

To establish and define the specific structure of the alternative procedure, particularly to determine the legal status and responsibilities of the AkAsHSH Accreditation Committee, a set of bylaws must be adopted that ensures the AkAsHSH can fulfill its responsibilities and maintain its independence.

Thematic Analyses (ESG 3.4)

Status

The AkAsHSH plans to test in practice the propositions formulated in Chapter 4 of the self-evaluation report regarding the acquisition of additional insights into quality assurance—which are to be gained through the Alternative Procedure—and to report on this to the Accreditation Council in consultation with the university.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

The announced reports give reason to hope that the Alternative Procedure at Harz University will yield insights into the design of external quality assurance that are significant for the further development of the Alternative Procedure policy line and the accreditation system as a whole.

Proposed Decision

Fulfilled.

Resources (ESG 3.5)

Status

The “Alternative Procedure Coordination” position, which supports the AkAsHSH in its work, will become permanent following a positive accreditation decision regarding the Alternative Procedure. In addition, one half-time QM position will be filled per department to carry out internal accreditations. The financing of the agency’s services, as well as the financing of the expense allowances and travel costs for the external members of the AkAsHSH, will be covered by the university budget. Among other things, the funds that would have been spent on external program accreditations had the Alternative Procedure not been implemented will be allocated here.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

The university has convincingly demonstrated that the Alternative Procedure and the work of the AkAsHSH are sufficiently funded.

Proposed Decision

Fulfilled.

Internal Quality Assurance and Professionalism (ESG 3.6)

Status

The work of the AkAsHSH is governed by rules of procedure. One of its tasks is to formulate recommendations for the further development of higher education-related quality management, which also encompasses the alternative procedure and the committee’s own work. It is also stipulated that the AkAsHSH report to the Senate on its work every two years.

Criteria have been established for selecting AkAsHSH members to ensure their competence. Furthermore, the inclusion of an agency representative as an advisory member enables continuous quality assurance of the AkAsHSH’s work.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Development

The prerequisites for the AkAsHSH to operate competently, including the continuous improvement of its own work, are in place.

Proposed Decision

Fulfilled.

Regular external review of the agencies (ESG 3.7) Status

The Alternative Procedure and, consequently, the work of the AkAsHSH will be monitored by the Accreditation Council throughout the entire accreditation period. The university is required to report to the Accreditation Council in this regard.

In addition, the Alternative Procedure is subject to an evaluation six years after the accreditation decision in accordance with § 9 VoAAv. The accreditation of the Alternative Procedure is also limited to eight years; if the Alternative Procedure is to be continued after this period, a new external accreditation of the Alternative Procedure is necessary.

Assessment: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

The Alternative Procedure and the work of the AkAsHSH are subject to continuous review by the Accreditation Council and must additionally undergo an evaluation process and, if necessary, a reaccreditation process according to specified deadlines.

Proposed Decision

Met.

2.2 Samples

The following presentation outlines the master's programs "Business Consulting" (MBC) and "Tourism and Destination Management" (TDM) in accordance with the requirements of the StAkrVO LSA. Following a brief overview of the facts, the report specifically addresses the formal comments developed by the AkAsHSH and the substantive comments developed by the reviewers from Harz University of Applied Sciences, to the extent that such comments were noted. Their further consideration during the internal reaccreditation process under the alternative procedure by the AkAsHSH of Harz University of Applied Sciences at its meeting on May 28, 2021, is examined and acknowledged by the panel of experts of the Accreditation Council. In this way, the effectiveness of the alternative procedure at the program level can be examined and subsequently evaluated.

However, this should not be understood as a second evaluation of the degree programs by the Accreditation Council's panel of experts. Therefore, the undisputed descriptions of the current status and the evaluations from the internal accreditation report for the two degree programs have been partially abridged or paraphrased in the following. Evaluations by the Accreditation Council's panel of experts are identified as such. Since the alternative procedure was conducted jointly for both degree programs, a differentiated presentation is provided wherever the factual findings and evaluations for the two master's degree programs differ.

Formal criteria for degree programs

§ 3 StAkrVO LSA: Program Structure and Duration –

Current Status

Both master's programs have a standard duration of three semesters, which is extended to four semesters if an additional practical/study abroad phase ("extended") is included. Students earn 30 ECTS credits per semester, resulting in a total of 90 or 120 credits ("extended"). Upon completion of the Master's program, students have earned 300 ECTS credits.

Assessment

The AkAsHSH considers the requirements under § 3 StAkrVO LSA to be met for both master's programs.

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with this assessment.

Section 4 StAkrVO LSA Program Profiles Status

Both master's programs are consecutive, full-time master's programs classified as practice-oriented. It should also be noted that the Business Consulting program is designed to qualify students for doctoral studies.

Evaluation

The AkAsHSH considers the requirements under § 4 StAkkVO LSA to be met for both programs. The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with this assessment.

Section 5 StAkkVO LSA Admission Requirements and Transitions Between Programs Status

For both master's programs, a first professional university degree with 180 ECTS credits (for the four-semester variant) or 210 ECTS credits (for the three-semester variant) is required for admission. For the MBC master's program, a university degree in an economics program with a focus on business consulting or a comparable focus must be demonstrated; for the TDM master's program, a first university degree in a tourism-specific or economics program must be demonstrated, with a minimum grade of "good" in both programs.

Evaluation

The AkAsHSH considers the requirements under § 5 StAkkVO LSA to have been met for both degree programs. The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with this assessment.

Section 6 StAkkVO LSA Degrees and Degree Titles Status

For both master's programs, the Master of Arts degree is awarded based on the academic focus of the program.

Assessment

The AkAsHSH considers the requirements under § 6 StAkkVO LSA to be met for both degree programs. The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs.

§ 7 StAkkVO LSA Modularization

Status

Both master's programs are fully modularized; modules are worth at least five ECTS credits and are completed within a single semester. For the master's thesis, 25 ECTS credits are awarded in the MBC program and 20 ECTS credits in the TDM program; five ECTS credits are awarded for each colloquium. The module descriptions contain all information required by the Study Accreditation Ordinance.

In both programs, the learning outcomes are generally presented only at the unit level (submodules) and not at the module level. Additionally, submodule exams are scheduled for some modules.

Assessment

The AkAsHSH considers that the requirements of § 7 StAkrVO LSA regarding module descriptions have **not** been met and imposes **the** following **condition**: *“In view of the module’s overall qualification objective, the learning outcomes must also be included in the module descriptions at the module level.”* This issue was already addressed during the AkAsHSH meeting on March 26, 2021.

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs: § 7 StAkrVO LSA is currently **not** met. Regarding the aspect of sub-module examinations, reference is made to the comments on § 12(4) StAkrVO LSA. The condition imposed by the AkAsHSH is appropriate.

§ 8 StAkrVO LSA Credit Point System

Status

In both master’s programs, ECTS credits are awarded for all modules. Thirty ECTS credits are awarded per semester. One ECTS credit corresponds to a workload of 30 hours. The master’s thesis is credited with 25 ECTS credits in the MBC master’s program and with 20 ECTS credits in the TDM master’s program; the colloquium is credited with five ECTS credits in each case. For both programs, the Diploma Supplement is issued in its current version.

The General Regulations for the Recognition and Transfer of Learning Outcomes at Harz University of Applied Sciences establish appropriate provisions for the transfer of non-university academic achievements. Recognition of coursework and examination results earned at other higher education institutions in the signatory states of the Lisbon Convention may only be denied if there are significant differences from the competencies they are intended to replace.

Assessment

The AkAsHSH considers the requirements under § 8 StAkrVO LSA to be met; however, regarding recognition of foreign credits, see the comments on § 12 StAkrVO LSA.

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with this assessment.

§ 9 StAkrVO LSA Special criteria for cooperation with non-higher-education institutions

§ 10 StAkrVO LSA Special provisions for joint degree programs **Not applicable, as neither paragraph applies.**

Academic and content-related criteria for degree programs and quality management systems

§ 11 StAkrVO LSA Qualification objectives and degree level

Current status regarding both degree programs

Both programs are interdisciplinary programs that provide business management expertise and consulting- or tourism-specific training at the master's level. The soft skills acquired in addition help graduates take on positions of responsibility in companies and/or society. Students' social skills are fostered in particular through teamwork and practical projects designed to help them develop the ability to compromise, assert themselves, communicate effectively, and facilitate discussions.

Status of MBC

The master's program focuses on consulting-oriented business administration and business psychology competencies at the master's level and combines them with the communication and digital skills essential for their application. Methodological skills round out the application-oriented academic qualification. The overarching educational goal of the program is to train specialists and managers in the field of business consulting services, incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives. The professional field is defined as general management consulting; specialization in specific consulting areas is not pursued (e.g., IT consulting, strategic consulting). The scope of practice is also broadly defined, as particular emphasis is placed on in-house consulting in addition to external consulting. The core professional and practice fields are thus sufficiently defined. Typically, graduates take on in-house consulting positions in the areas of organization, human resources, controlling, and strategy, or offer services as independent external management consultants. They design and manage consulting processes in all phases of business operations, from problem analysis through solution proposals and decision-making to implementation and monitoring.

MBC Evaluation

The evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences consider the requirements under § 11 StAkrVO LSA to have been met. The learning outcomes are clearly defined and cover the areas of business management skills, business psychology skills, methodological skills, and communication skills. The evaluators from Harz University welcome the fact that future graduates can be employed in various professional fields and consulting positions. In their view, this sufficiently ensures the ability to engage in qualified professional work. They have concluded that the intended level of the degree corresponds to the level required for master's programs in accordance with the

This corresponds to the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees. Given this context, the evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences consider the program's broad disciplinary scope to be understandable, but believe that the program profile should be refined somewhat to provide students with a clearer picture of the program and its overarching qualification objectives. In addition, the qualification objectives should be communicated in an appropriate place (e.g., the program's website), as they are currently only available in the Diploma Supplement. In the field of consulting, engagement with and awareness of current developments are crucial. In the opinion of the review panel, this includes in particular the topic of "sustainability" in the context of individual economic activity. According to the program coordinators, this is already addressed in the curriculum. However, this is not yet evident in the curriculum or the module descriptions.

Based on this, the evaluators from Harz University derive the following recommendations:

- *"The profile of the program should be sharpened. The focus on sustainability in the context of economic activity should be reflected in appropriate places (e.g., in the module descriptions, the program description, or the mission statement) and supplemented accordingly."*

At its meeting on May 28, 2021, the AkAsHSH refined the recommendation by removing the reference to the mission statement, as the degree programs at Harz University do not have their own mission statement.

- *"The overarching qualification objectives should be communicated in an appropriate place (e.g., on the program's homepage) to facilitate easier access for prospective students and current students."*

The AkAsHSH had initially supplemented this recommendation with the note that a suitable location could be, for example, the program's external communications. After the department explained that the recommendation was already being implemented, the AkAsHSH deleted it.

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with the assessment and the resulting recommendations of the evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences, as well as with the clarification and deletion of the second recommendation by the AkAsHSH, with regard to § 11 StAk-krVO LSA.

Status of TDM

Graduates of the TDM program apply the approach of the St. Gallen Model for Destination Management (SGDM) in a structured manner. The primary qualification objective of the program is therefore to train specialists and managers who help shape the management of destinations and other tourism stakeholders and do so on a

They apply a scientifically sound and practice-oriented foundation. They take on challenging tasks in product development, advocacy, marketing, planning, and consulting within destination management organizations, marketing companies, service providers, associations, and other tourism-related entities. According to the program coordinators, the program also has an international focus to facilitate mobility within a globally oriented tourism industry. According to the faculty, current developments and trends—such as the issue of sustainability in tourism—are addressed across all modules.

In terms of its academic focus, the program benefits from the “Institute for Tourism Research” (ITF), which was founded in April 2012 as the first in-house institute at Harz University of Applied Sciences.

TDM Evaluation

The evaluators at Harz University of Applied Sciences consider the requirements under § 11 StAkkVO LSA to be met: The program is appropriately structured and aligns with the qualification objectives in terms of its structure. The program fully qualifies students for professional employment, particularly in leadership positions within tourism-oriented companies (including on an international scale), which is adequately supported by the curriculum (management skills, international subject matter, English-language modules, and the option of a semester abroad). The program broadens and deepens knowledge based on the relevant bachelor’s degree. In the absence of relevant experience, a bridge course must be completed. It is worth noting positively that current developments, such as sustainability aspects, are incorporated into the individual courses. However, this has not yet been documented.

Based on this, the evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences have made the following two recommendations:

- *“The focus on sustainability in tourism should be reflected in the appropriate sections (e.g., in the module descriptions, the program description, or the mission statement) and supplemented accordingly.”*

At its meeting on May 28, 2021, the AkAsHSH clarified the recommendation by removing the reference to the mission statement, as the degree programs at Harz University of Applied Sciences do not have their own mission statement.

- *“The overarching qualification objectives of the program should also be published in an appropriate place beyond the Diploma Supplement [sic] to provide guidance to applicants and students.”*

The AkAsHSH had initially supplemented this recommendation with the note that a suitable place could be, for example, the program’s external communications. After the

department explained that the recommendation is already being implemented, the AkAsHSH deleted it.

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with the assessment and the resulting recommendations of the evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences, as well as with the clarification and deletion of the second recommendation by the AkAsHSH, regarding § 11 StAkkVO LSA.

§ 12 StAkkVO LSA Coherent program concept and adequate implementation

a) Curriculum (Section 12(1) STAKKRVO

LSA) Status regarding both degree programs

Enrollment is possible in both the summer and winter semesters. According to faculty and students, the resulting flexibility of the curriculum is welcomed, and coordination is successful. Modules are designed so that they do not necessarily have to follow one another and can therefore be taken in a different order.

Status of the MBC Program

The three-semester version of the MBC program comprises 90 ECTS credits, requiring the completion of nine modules, including the master's final examination (master's thesis and colloquium). In the four-semester version worth 120 ECTS credits, an additional semester is completed at the start of the program to enable students to acquire missing competencies through modules individually defined in "learning agreements" with the program coordination at the beginning of their studies. This is credited with 30 ECTS credits.

The curriculum is based on the ideal-typical consulting process (problem analysis, solution proposal and decision, implementation, and control). Problem analysis, as well as control, is addressed from a business administration perspective, e.g., in the courses

"Cost-Benefit Analysis" and "Control Systems for Goal Achievement," and from the business psychology perspective in the courses "Decision Models" and

"Complex Problem Solving." The overall process flow is covered in the courses "Evidence-Based Change Management" and, newly added since the last accreditation, "Digital Transformation."

Specific communication skills are taught in the course "Consulting and Facilitation Training." In addition, the required-elective courses offer specialization in the application areas of consulting within the fields of human resources, strategy, IT, and startups.

Many courses focus on project-based and group work as teaching methods. The "traditional" course formats—lectures and seminars—are thus being phased out in many

. In general, a range of assessment formats is available for the majority of modules.

The MBC program does not explicitly include mobility windows in its curriculum. However, students have the option of studying abroad. The university draws on a network of established partnerships with foreign universities and enters into a Learning Agreement with students prior to their stay abroad. However, the general regulations for the recognition and transfer of learning outcomes at Harz University do not provide for appropriate recognition procedures for countries that are not signatories to the Lisbon Convention.

MBC Assessment

The evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences consider the achievement of the qualification objectives to be assured through the teaching of the content included in the curriculum. In their view, the degree level and degree title are consistent with the selected content, the module concept is adequate, and it is appropriately aligned with the achievement of the qualification objectives. They view it as positive that the curriculum is based on the typical consulting process, places a strong emphasis on collaborative teamwork, and incorporates current topics such as digitalization. The reviewers from Harz University generally view the variety of examination formats as positive; however, in their opinion, the options should be limited at the module level (see also the recommendation to limit the selection of examination formats under “Examination System,” §12(4) StAkrVO LSA).

During discussions with students and faculty, the evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences concluded that the university provides excellent support for students wishing to study abroad and has established appropriate conditions to promote student mobility.

The AkAsHSH has decided on the following requirement:

“The university-wide regulations on recognition and credit transfer should be amended to comply with the provisions of §13(2) HGLSA and the KMK’s interpretive guidelines on the Lisbon Convention regarding the recognition of credits earned at other universities.”

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with the aforementioned assessment and the imposed condition with regard to compliance with § 12 (1) StAkrVO LSA. The proposed condition is appropriate.

Status of TDM

The degree program has been given the new title as indicated, since, according to the university, this title better reflects the management focus of the program than the old title “Tourism and Destination

"Development." The three-semester version of the TDM program comprises 90 ECTS credits, during which students must complete thirteen modules, including the master's final examination (master's thesis and colloquium). In the four-semester version worth 120 ECTS credits, an additional semester is completed as a third semester to allow students to undertake a practical, study abroad, or research semester. This is credited with 30 ECTS credits. A Learning Agreement outlines the courses or other activities to be completed, depending on the intended learning outcomes. Students who do not have sufficient background experience in tourism management from their bachelor's program must complete a bridge course worth five ECTS credits. This course does not necessarily have to be taken at the beginning of the program.

The foundational training in tourism economics, based on the St. Gallen model for destination management, is reflected in the program structure (including modules such as Product Development, Destination Marketing I and II, Tourism Policy and Planning, and International Tourism Policy and Planning). Complemented by management and methodological competencies, the program achieves its stated goals at the master's level. Additionally, modules are offered in English, some of which are taught by native speakers, emphasizing the international focus. The four-semester option also includes a curricular mobility window. Harz University of Applied Sciences has numerous partnerships with universities in Europe and beyond, which TDM students can also utilize for their semester abroad. However, the general regulations for the recognition and transfer of learning outcomes at Harz University do not provide for adequate recognition procedures for countries that are not signatories to the Lisbon Convention.

TDM Evaluation

The reviewers from Harz University of Applied Sciences note that the program builds upon the relevant Bachelor's program in Tourism Management (B.A.) and serves as a logical continuation of it. In this respect, the entry requirements are considered appropriate and adequate. The idea of a bridge course is deemed fundamentally suitable for adequately supplementing any missing prior knowledge. However, this should be explicitly mentioned in the admission regulations, specifying the scope. Furthermore, these courses appear to be effective only if they are taken prior to the curriculum or at least at the beginning of the program.

The aim of the program is to train future leaders in the field of tourism and destination management. The reviewers from Harz University of Applied Sciences are convinced that the curriculum is well-suited for this purpose. They also positively highlight that students in the four-semester track are explicitly granted the opportunity to spend a semester abroad without extending the standard duration of study.

The AkASHSH imposes the following condition:

- *“The university-wide regulations on recognition and credit transfer should be amended to comply with the provisions of Section 13(2) of the Higher Education Act (HGLSA) and the KMK’s interpretive guidelines on the Lisbon Convention regarding the recognition of academic achievements completed at other institutions of higher education.”*

The AkAsHSH had already raised this issue for review at its meeting on March 26, 2021, and confirmed this requirement on May 28, 2021.

The reviewers from Harz University of Applied Sciences propose **the** following additional **requirement**:

- *“The completion of a bridge course worth 5 ECTS credits in cases of missing entry qualifications must be documented in the program’s admission regulations, specifying the scope of the course. The study regulations must stipulate that these courses must be completed prior to the curriculum or by the end of the second semester at the latest.”*

The AkAsHSH has replaced the term “lacking entry qualifications” with the phrase “insufficient prior knowledge in the subject area,” as the term “entry qualification” is more closely associated with formal admission requirements, such as the possession of a bachelor’s degree or similar.

The reviewers from Harz University of Applied Sciences also propose the following **recommendation**:

- *“The practical or study abroad semester in the 4-semester version should be included in the qualification objectives for this version.”*

The AkAsHSH has modified this recommendation to specify that the competencies acquired through the practical or study abroad semester should be included in the qualification objectives.

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with the aforementioned assessment, the conditions imposed, and the recommendation with regard to compliance with § 12(1) StAkkVO LSA. The proposed conditions and the recommendation of the experts from Harz University of Applied Sciences are appropriate, and the clarifications provided by the AkAsHSH are reasonable.

b) Staffing (Section 12(2) StAkkVO LSA) Status

The Department of Economics has 40 tenured faculty positions and, as of the 2020/21 winter semester, employs a total of 49 faculty members—including adjunct professors, instructors for special assignments, and research assistants—who supervise 1,693 enrolled students. In addition, a sufficient number of technical and administrative staff are available. In the MBC program, as of the time of this report,

20 full-time professors, four adjunct professors, and twelve lecturers. In the TDM program, there are 14 full-time professors, one adjunct professor, five faculty members for special assignments, and eight lecturers.

The faculty members all have many years of professional experience in the management of the tourism or other service industries, are experienced in teaching, and many of them are recognized within the academic community through scholarly publications and the conduct of research projects. In addition to their academic qualifications, most of them have extensive experience in applying academic findings to the service industry.

The appointment of professors is governed by the university's appointment regulations. The quality of study and teaching is significantly shaped by the faculty. Therefore, a culture of quality is being developed in which all full-time faculty members participate in university-level teaching training at least once a year. This is mandatory for all professors with W-salary grades and is anchored in their individual performance agreements. Harz University of Applied Sciences organizes its own continuing education opportunities, particularly as part of "Teaching Day," but faculty members also have access to programs offered by other universities in the state.

Evaluation

The reviewers from Harz University of Applied Sciences consider the staffing of the TDM program with both internal and external faculty to be adequate and evaluate it positively: The majority of courses are taught by full-time faculty. The filling of vacant positions is planned for the long term. The number and qualifications of full-time professors are considered appropriate for the programs offered, both in terms of subject matter and teaching methodology. Staff resources are supplemented by the use of adjunct instructors with practical experience. The evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences appreciate the personal commitment of the program coordinators and the close-knit network of faculty in the tourism management track. The evaluators from Harz University therefore consider the requirements under § 12(2) StAkkVO LSA to be met for both degree programs.

The panel of reviewers of the Accreditation Council concurs with this assessment.

c) Resource allocation (Section 12(3) StAkkVO LSA)

Status

The Department of Economics in Wernigerode is the largest department at Harz University of Applied Sciences and is housed in a modern, bright building featuring six lecture halls, 19 seminar rooms, five computer labs, two group study rooms, and a meeting room. Work is currently underway

the building is being expanded to include a Welcome Center. The lecture and seminar rooms are equipped with modern learning and seminar technology, which students can also use outside of lecture hours, e.g., for group work or exam preparation.

Since March 2020, the TeachingLab has served as an organizational unit that supports instructors in the design, implementation, use, and evaluation of digital teaching elements. Technical support for the relevant systems (Zoom, BigBlueButton, StudIP, ILIAS, etc.) is provided by the University Computer Center and the TeachingLab.

Evaluation

The experts from Harz University of Applied Sciences assess the department's facilities as very good and appropriate for its purpose. Since an on-site visit was not possible, the university provided a detailed video of the department's premises and facilities. The building at the Wernigerode campus is inviting and offers students a pleasant working environment. The evaluators from Harz University consider the requirements under § 12(3) StAkkVO LSA to be met

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with this assessment.

d) Examination system (Section 12(4) StAkkVO

LSA) Status regarding both degree programs

Generally, Harz University holds a three- to four-week exam period at the end of each semester. This is when most of the written exams typically take place. The planning and scheduling of the exams are the responsibility of the Dean's Office of the Department of Economics. The Examination Board is directly responsible for examination matters, while the Department of Student Affairs handles the organizational aspects. This corresponds to standard practice at German universities.

In both master's programs, other forms of assessment such as project work, presentations, and term papers are also frequently used. The stated goal, in addition to a competency-based assessment approach, is to spread out the exam schedule so that not all exams are concentrated at the end of the semester, but rather can be taken throughout the semester. The exam schedule lists only written exams that regularly take place during the exam period at the end of the semester.

Status: MBC

The examination system is not entirely module-based but is partly course-based. In a total of four modules, students must take partial exams, which are weighted and combined to form the module grade. In the three-semester track, this results in seven

exams in the first semester and four exams in the second semester—the third semester is reserved for the master's thesis. In the four-semester track, students must take five to eight exams in the first semester, four exams in the second semester, and seven exams in the third semester. However, due to the flexible entry into the program, the order of the semesters may vary. The course-related partial exams are designed with the exam format precisely tailored to the course content. The university notes that, particularly in the master's programs, established teaching and examination methods are increasingly supplemented by newer teaching formats such as case studies and practical project work integrated into the curriculum. In particular, "soft skills" (facilitation, teamwork, leadership, conflict management, presentation, intercultural management, etc.) are not only taught in additional, separate courses but are specifically integrated into the program's subject-specific courses. With regard to assessment methods, the majority of modules and units allow for a wide variety of assessment formats.

Assessment MBC

The evaluators from Harz University expressly welcome the use of different examination formats to support competency-based assessment and, at the same time, to streamline the examination schedule. In discussions with students, they have also gained the impression that this approach is strongly supported by the students as well. In this context, however, they do not consider the listing of multiple examination formats in the study regulations and module handbook to be effective. Instead, depending on the specific learning outcomes of a module, it should be possible to limit the examination format to those formats that best assess the learning outcome in terms of competency-based assessment. A reduction in the number of options was already suggested during the previous accreditation and is supported by the evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences. Additionally, students should be provided with an exam schedule at the beginning of the semester that offers an overview of the exam format and timing for all modules, enabling students to plan their workload. Compared to the time of the last accreditation, the examination workload has been significantly reduced (in the first semester, students still had to take eleven (partial) exams, and in the second semester, twelve (partial) exams). This is viewed positively. In discussions with the evaluators, students indicated that while they found the examination workload challenging, they did not consider it excessive. The evaluators from Harz University nevertheless recommend reviewing the modularization concept with regard to the possibility of reducing the number of partial exams. The portfolio exam format could be suitable here for fulfilling the objectives while taking various exam formats into account.

The evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences therefore consider § 12(4) of the StAkkVO LSA to have been fulfilled. They issue the following **recommendation**:

“The options for examination formats should be limited for each module to those that enable competency-based assessment. In addition, the modularization concept should be reviewed again with a view to reducing the number of partial exams. If necessary, the portfolio assessment format may be helpful here. Students should be provided with an examination schedule at the beginning of the semester that specifies the type and timing of each exam.”

The AkAsHSH takes up this recommendation but rephrases it: *“The examination formats most suitable for assessing competencies should [sic] be specified in the module handbook. Students should be informed of the examination format at the beginning of the semester. Students should be provided with a draft examination schedule at the beginning of the semester that specifies the type and timing of each examination.”*

The panel of experts from the Accreditation Council concurs with the evaluation, the imposed condition, and the recommendation. The reformulation of the recommendation takes up a phrasing used by the experts from Harz University of Applied Sciences in their report and aligns with the experts' intention; in the evaluation section of their report, they had not doubted that the exams are fundamentally competency-based, which the original recommendation might have implied. The recommendation of the Harz University of Applied Sciences' evaluators and the clarifications provided by the AkAsHSH are effective.

Status of TDM

The examination system is course-based in many respects, which entails a correspondingly high number of module exams. Thus, up to three exams must be taken in each of the four modules. These exams are weighted and combined to determine the module grade. This results in ten exams in the first semester and eight exams in the second semester. In the third semester, depending on the track, students must complete a semester abroad or a practical semester, or write their master's thesis.

Due to the flexible entry into the program, the order of the semesters may vary. The use of partial exams is primarily justified by the program's pedagogical concept. The exam formats allow for a wide variety of assessment methods for the majority of modules and units. The university notes that this option is rarely used, allowing students to adapt to the exam format over the long term.

TDM Assessment

The reviewers from Harz University generally view the use of different examination formats to support competency-based assessment positively. In discussions with students, however, the impression was gained that group work is often a prerequisite for passing the (partial) examination. For students,

This involves a correspondingly high level of coordination (see also the comments under §12(5) of the StAkrVO LSA). Students who were already enrolled in the program prior to the pandemic-related restrictions confirmed that the number of group assignments and exams is similar even during regular in-person instruction. The reviewers therefore recommend limiting the options for exam formats to those that best assess learning outcomes in terms of competency-based assessment. In principle, the number of group assignments, particularly those relevant to exams, should be reduced.

Following the revision of the program concept, the number of partial exams was not reduced to any significant extent (previously: 13 exams in the first semester, 10 exams in the second semester). The reviewers consider this volume to be very high. This impression was confirmed both by the student survey, in which the workload was rated as too high, and in direct conversations with the students. The number of partial exams should therefore be reduced so that, if possible, only one exam per module is required. The portfolio exam format could serve as a suitable tool in this context.

The reviewers can only partially agree with the argument that, despite the option to choose for each module or unit, the exam format rarely changes and can therefore be anticipated. It cannot be assumed that every student will thoroughly review the exam schedule in advance and be familiar with the “standard” exam formats for the module or unit. An examination schedule at the beginning of the semester that lists all examinations by type and date is therefore recommended.

The reviewers from Harz University of Applied Sciences therefore consider § 12(4) StAkrVO LSA to be unfulfilled. They therefore propose the following **requirement**:

- *“The number of partial module exams must be reduced so that, if possible, only one exam per module is required. If necessary, the portfolio exam format may be helpful in this context.”*

The AkAsHSH clarifies this requirement by introducing the concept of a “cross-module” exam. The reference to the portfolio exam is removed from the requirement and formulated as a recommendation.

The reviewers from Harz University also make the following **recommendation**:

- *“The options for examination formats should be limited for each module to those that enable a competency-based assessment. The number of examination-relevant*

Group work should be reduced to limit the coordination burden on students. Students should be provided with an exam schedule at the beginning of the semester that specifies the type and timing of each exam.”

The AkAsHSH takes up this recommendation but rephrases it: *“The examination formats most suitable for assessing competencies should [sic] be specified in the module handbook. Students should be informed of the examination format at the beginning of the semester. Students should be provided with a draft exam schedule at the beginning of the semester that specifies the type and timing of each exam.”*

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with the evaluation, the condition imposed, and the recommendation. The reformulation of the recommendation takes up a phrasing used by the experts from Harz University of Applied Sciences in their report and aligns with the experts' intention; who, in the evaluation section of the report, had not doubted that the exams are fundamentally competency-based, which the original recommendation might have implied. The proposed condition, the recommendation of the Harz University of Applied Sciences' experts, and the clarifications provided by the AkAsHSH are effective.

e) Feasibility of Study (Section 12(5) StAkkVO

LSA) Status regarding both degree programs

The Department's Dean's Office is responsible for the curriculum as well as the scheduling of classes and rooms. Courses in the same semester should not overlap. A three- to four-week exam period is scheduled at the end of the semester. During this period, primarily written exams are administered. When optimizing the exam workload for students, the department assumes that, in particular, the concentration of exams during the exam period leads to a very high workload; on the other hand, exams are not always the most appropriate form of assessment. Therefore, students' knowledge in the master's programs at the department is not primarily assessed through exams at the end of the semester, but also during the semester in other examination formats. The program coordination coordinates exams through discussions with instructors to avoid a concentration of exams at a specific time.

Each module concludes with an exam; in some cases, partial exams are also administered. The program coordination team coordinates the workload in individual courses through discussions with instructors. The workload is regularly monitored as part of course evaluations and student surveys. The results of these surveys are evaluated in active feedback sessions organized by the program coordination team.

The program coordinator, in close consultation with the department head and the module coordinators, selects the instructors for the program-specific modules, coordinates the alignment of course content among instructors, and, together with the quality management team, coordinates regular course evaluations and student surveys. The program coordination team provides individual support to students in the program and accompanies them throughout their entire academic journey—from advising prospective students to the master’s thesis. This ensures that students always have a single point of contact.

Status of MBC

The program’s manageability, particularly the workload, is considered appropriate by the students in the program.

MBC Assessment

According to the evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences, the program is feasible. The program is structured in such a way that students can complete it within the standard period of study. Program statistics show a comparatively longer standard period of study. However, this figure fluctuates and can be attributed, among other things, to the inclusion of practical training phases. The frequency and organization of exams are generally adequate and commensurate with the workload. The evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences view the program’s mentoring program particularly positively, as it not only supports students in their current studies but also helps them establish initial contacts in the professional field. They therefore suggest highlighting this “asset” much more prominently than before in public relations and informational materials, etc. The evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences consider the criterion of feasibility to be met and issue the following recommendation:

“The mentoring program is a valuable unique selling point of the degree program. It should be highlighted more clearly in public relations and informational materials.”

The AkAaHSH has confirmed this recommendation, with only editorial revisions:

“The mentoring program, which is a valuable unique selling point of the degree program, should be highlighted more prominently in public relations efforts and informational materials.”

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with the evaluation and the recommendation.

Status of TDM

In the current student survey, students in the TDM program indicate that the volume of material and the time required for preparation and follow-up work for the courses tend to be too high.

Assessment of TDM

The experts from Harz University of Applied Sciences view the comprehensive support provided to students by the program coordination team—which was also evident in discussions with the students—and the involvement of the Tourism Faculty in the program’s further development as very positive. However, despite the efforts of the program coordination office, it has not been possible to prevent exams from “piling up” during certain periods or to avoid the significant coordination effort required of students to prepare for them. The evaluators refer here to the recommendations under §12(4) StAkkVO. However, the statistics on program development demonstrate that the program is manageable and that a degree can be completed within the standard period of study.

The Accreditation Council’s panel of experts concurs with the assessment made by the university’s experts. It, too, views the workload very critically: the “end-of-semester stress” associated with the exam period appears to have given way in this program to “constant stress” caused by term papers, presentations, etc. With regard to § 12(5) MRVO, the program’s feasibility can still be considered to be met, but compliance with the requirements set forth in § 12(4) is urgently recommended.

§ 13 StAkkVO LSA Academic and Content-Related Design of Degree Programs

Status: MBC

The relevance and appropriateness of the program’s academic and professional requirements are ensured through the teaching of theoretical and methodological foundations—proven in consulting practice—which are applied to real-world research topics and consulting cases within the context of projects, as well as through modern and innovative approaches. The program is continuously refined through ongoing review of its content, faculty, and teaching methods based on regular, anonymous written evaluations by students, as well as through feedback sessions with the entire student body. Additionally, an advisory board has been established for the program, which provides current input for curriculum development during regular meetings. Through constant contact with the professional world via lecture series, consulting projects, and master’s theses developed in close cooperation with companies, students gain ongoing insight into current developments and challenges. They have the opportunity to work independently on current topics and thus apply their theoretical knowledge on their own.

MBC Evaluation

The evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences consider the requirements under § 13 StAkkVO LSA to have been met. They expressly welcome the establishment of an advisory board and regular feedback sessions with students and graduates, the involvement of the latter as lecturers for lecture series, and the resulting integration of alumni management and teaching. The evaluators from the university consider these efforts to adequately ensure that the academic and scientific requirements are met.

The panel of reviewers of the Accreditation Council concurs with this assessment.

Status of TDM

According to the university, the curriculum is regularly coordinated through collegial consultation rounds. The results of the teaching evaluation and student survey are explicitly incorporated into this process. Furthermore, the program has a very extensive and active alumni network, which is organized into a group on the XING platform. This network was also actively involved in the revision of the program concept, the goal of which was to realign the program's academic and content-related focus. The faculty team led by the program directors also maintains numerous professional contacts, whose feedback is continuously incorporated into the design of the program.

TDM Evaluation

The evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences consider the requirements under Section 13 of the StAkkVO LSA to have been met and view the regular review of the curriculum and the initiation of further developments as assured. They justify this, among other things, by pointing to the redesign of the program concept, which demonstrates that valuable feedback and suggestions for the further development of the programs are incorporated into program development through numerous contacts with the professional field. In particular, the strong connection with graduates should definitely be maintained and expanded. In this way, regular review of the curriculum and the initiation of further developments are ensured.

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with this.

§ 14 StAkkVO LSA Academic

Success Status

The academic success of both master's programs is supported by a comprehensive quality management system utilizing a wide range of tools (e.g., regular student surveys, course evaluations), as well as, in particular, the evaluation workshops and the measures derived from their results.

Assessment

The evaluators from Harz University of Applied Sciences have given the university's quality management system a consistently positive assessment and consider the requirements under Section 14 of the StAkkrVO LSA to have been met. However, they make the following recommendation:

- To immediately address Monita's concerns, *"the systematic introduction of a midterm evaluation accompanying the course as a format for interim evaluation of courses"* (for example, after the first third of the semester) should take place.

The AkAsHSH has deleted the term "accompanying the course," as this is already implied by the term "midterm."

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with the positive assessment of the experts from Harz University of Applied Sciences regarding § 14 StAkkrVO LSA. However, the recommendation for an interim evaluation seems impractical to them. The Accreditation Council's panel of reviewers would have preferred a statement on actual academic success at this point. This statement, however, can be found in the explanations regarding § 12(5) STAKKRVO LSA.

Section 15 StAkkrVO LSA Gender Equality and Compensation for Disadvantages Status

In accordance with its mission statement, Harz University is family-friendly and service-oriented. This is reflected, for example, in its membership in the "Family-Friendly University" best-practice club. Accordingly, equal opportunity, consideration of diversity, gender equality, and the enforcement of general anti-discrimination policies in teaching are also key priorities in the MBC and TDM degree programs. Students in special life situations, such as parents, international students, and students with a migrant background, are supported through measures promoting equality. Furthermore, Harz University has adopted a code of conduct governing interpersonal interactions and the implementation of equal opportunity. To translate gender equality into teaching practice, a guide on gender and diversity sensitivity in pedagogy has been published and is available to all faculty members.

Assessment

The evaluators at Harz University consider the requirements under § 15 StAkkrVO LSA to be met.

The panel of experts of the Accreditation Council concurs with this regarding § 15 StAkkrVO LSA.

§ 16 StAkkrVO LSA Special provisions for joint degree programs Not applicable.

Section 17 StAkkVO LSA Concept of the Quality Management System (Objectives, Processes, Instruments)

For the concept of the quality assurance system, see Part 1 of this report.

§ 18 StAkkVO LSA Measures for Implementing the Quality Management Concept

Current Status

The functioning of Harz University's quality management system in the form of the requested alternative procedure has already been presented and reviewed in the descriptions and evaluations of §§ 3–17 StAkkVO LSA. A description of the current status is therefore unnecessary at this point.

Assessment

Overall, the implementation of Harz University of Applied Sciences' quality management concept can be assessed very positively. This is due, on the one hand, to the careful selection of a highly professional team of evaluators and, on the other hand, to the willingness of the engaged students in both master's programs to participate in discussions during the respective workshops. The panel of evaluators from the Accreditation Council was able to gain a good understanding of the degree programs and considers the critical findings to have been addressed within the framework of the alternative procedure.

§ 19 StAkkVO LSA Cooperation with Non-Higher Education Institutions

§ 20 StAkkVO LSA Higher education collaborations **Not applicable, as neither paragraph applies.**

3 Review Procedure

3.1 General Information

The evaluation procedure included the following dates:

- February 11, 2021: Reviewer training
- March 29, 2021: Preliminary meeting and initial discussion with the university administration / quality management team at Harz University
- May 5–6, 2021: Participation in the program workshops as part of the “Accreditation Evaluation” for the “Business Consulting” (M.A.) and “Tourism and Destination Management” (M.A.) programs (in an observer capacity, as part of the panel of evaluators)
- May 21, 2021: On-site visit
- September 6, 2021: Evaluation of the samples and final meeting

Due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the site visits took place online.

At the request of the panel of evaluators following the initial meeting, the university submitted the following documents:

- Expanded self-evaluation report
- Accreditation report template
- AkAsHSH Rules of Procedure dated February 15, 2021, in the adopted version
- Composition of the QuAsHSH and AkAsHSH committees
- Declarations of impartiality by the evaluators
- Student survey questionnaire
- Graduate survey questionnaire
- Evaluation of the graduate survey
- Guidelines for selecting reviewers
- Guidelines for the Formal Review (AkAsHSH)
- Guidelines for the Substantive Review (Reviewers)

3.2 Legal Basis: *State Accreditation Treaty, Model*

State Regulation / State Regulation, European

Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

Rules of Procedure for Alternative Accreditation Procedures (VoAAv)

3.3 Committee of Reviewers

a) University Faculty

- Prof. Dr. Kerstin Fink, President of NORDAKADEMIE University of Applied Sciences, Elmshorn (Spokesperson for the Review Panel)
- Prof. Dr. Matthias Kropp, Chair of General Business Administration, Pforzheim University
- Prof. Susanne Lengyel, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Hamm-Lippstadt University of Applied Sciences
- Prof. Dr. Zahradnik, Dean, Dean of Studies in Public Management, Nordhausen University of Applied Sciences

b) Representative from the professional field

- Dipl.-Ing. Martina Baucks, Lenze SE, Aerzen/Groß Berkel

c) Student Representative

- Liv Teresa Muth, Ph.D. candidate in Industrial Biotechnology/Synthetic Biology, Ghent University

3.4 Supervision by the Accreditation Council (Section 34(5), second sentence, MRVO)

- Prof. Dr.-Ing. Stefan Bartels, Lübeck University of Applied Sciences
- Daniel Irmer, Ecole de MINES ParisTech

4 Data Sheet

Accreditation Data

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| Approval by the Science Authority: | April 22, 2020 |
| Approval by the Accreditation Council: | June 4, 2020 |
| Agreement between the university and the Accreditation Council: | October 15, 2020 |
| Receipt of self-documentation: | January 29, 2021 |
| Date of site visit: | May 21, 2021 |
| Initial accreditation on: <i>For reaccreditation</i> | - |
| Evaluation pursuant to § 9 VoAAv on: <i>For reaccreditation</i> | - |
| Groups of individuals with whom interviews were conducted: | University administration Quality management representatives Faculty Students Representatives of the AkAsHSH |