

Rules for the Accreditation of Degree Programs and for System Accreditation

Resolution of the Accreditation Council dated December 8, 2009, last amended on February 20, 2013¹

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and February 20, 2013 (Drs. AR 20/2013). This resolution replaces the following resolutions of the Accreditation Council: "Accreditation of Degree Programs with Dual Degrees and Joint Degrees" of April 25, 2005, "Communication of the Reviewers' Recommendation to the Institution" dated June 20, 2005, "Minimum Requirements for Key Competencies" dated June 20, 2005, "Awarding of ECTS Credits in Intensive Study Programs" dated June 22, 2006, "Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programs" as amended on October 8, 2007, "General Rules for the Implementation of Procedures for the Accreditation and Reaccreditation of Degree Programs" as amended on February 22, 2008, Resolution: "Decisions of Accreditation Agencies: Types and Effects" as amended on October 31, 2008, "General Rules for the Conduct of System Accreditation Procedures" as amended on October 31, 2008, "Criteria for System Accreditation" as amended on October 31, 2008, and "Rules for Compiling the Sample of Characteristics" dated February 29, 2008.

Introduction

An important step in the German implementation of the Bologna Process was the decision made jointly in 1998 by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) to introduce the program accreditation process for the new tiered degree programs. Since then, accreditation has generally been a prerequisite for state approval of bachelor's and master's degree programs. In addition to the quality of the degree programs, compliance with formal requirements set by the KMK and European standards is also reviewed. After ten years of experience with program accreditation, the new system accreditation procedure was introduced in 2008. In institutional accreditation, the quality of the degree programs and compliance with formal requirements are no longer assessed through the evaluation of the degree programs themselves. Instead, the university's internal management and quality assurance systems focused on study and teaching are now evaluated for their suitability and effectiveness in ensuring the quality of the degree programs and compliance with formal requirements. Successful evaluation leads to the accreditation of these systems and, at the same time, to the accreditation of the degree programs.

A specific feature of the German accreditation system is its two-tier structure, with the Accreditation Council acting at the central level and the agencies at the decentralized level.

The Accreditation Council is tasked with creating the conditions necessary for the German accreditation system to function by establishing criteria and procedures for accreditation. Specifically, the tasks assigned to it are set forth in Section 2 of the Accreditation Foundation Act:

- Accreditation and reaccreditation of accreditation agencies through the temporary granting of the authority to accredit degree programs and internal university quality assurance systems by awarding the Foundation's seal,
- Consolidation of joint state and state-specific structural requirements into binding guidelines for the agencies,
- Establishment of minimum requirements for accreditation procedures, including the conditions and limits of bundled accreditations,
- Monitoring of accreditations carried out by the agencies.

The agencies approved by the Accreditation Council conduct the accreditation procedures by applying the criteria, procedural rules, and decision-making rules of the Accreditation Council.

This resolution provides agencies and higher education institutions with guidance and legal certainty regarding the application, implementation, decision-making, and effects of program and system accreditations. It summarizes all binding rules for the accreditation of degree programs and for system accreditation.

To ensure the consistent application of the criteria, procedural rules, and decision-making rules, the Accreditation Council reviews the accreditations conducted by the agencies on a random basis and in specific cases.

In developing the criteria, procedural rules, and decision-making rules, the Accreditation Council took into account the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. These form the basis for the international recognition of the Accreditation Council and the agencies through full membership in the *European Association for Quality Assurance* (ENQA) and the *European Quality Assurance Register* (EQAR).

I. Rules for the Accreditation of Degree Programs

1. Procedural Rules for the Accreditation of Degree Programs

1.1 General Rules

1.1.1 During the acquisition phase, the Agency informs the applicant institution about the essential content, procedural steps, and criteria of the accreditation process. In this context, the Agency ensures a complete description of services and sets the fees.

1.1.2 The applicant must submit a substantiated application that includes a description of the degree program or programs and documents compliance with the criteria for the accreditation of degree programs.

1.1.3 The Agency appoints a review panel to ensure the evaluation of all areas relevant to the review process (e.g., academic aspects, program structure and formal aspects, social aspects). The review panel includes relevant stakeholders, in particular academic representatives, students, and representatives of professional practice.

The Agency ensures the impartiality of the evaluators and maintains fairness toward the applying institution. To this end, the Agency grants the institution a right of objection. The institution does not have a right of proposal or veto.

1.1.4 The Agency prepares the evaluators for their evaluation work, their specific role, and the specific accreditation process. This preparation also covers conducting interviews and drafting evaluation reports.

1.1.5 The evaluation is based primarily on

- an analysis of the application justification and
- an on-site visit, which includes, among other things, separate interviews with the institution's administration, faculty, and students.

The Agency may (except in the case of initial accreditation) waive the on-site visit if evaluation results are available that are no more than two years old and were obtained in accordance with the relevant rules of the Accreditation Council for program accreditation.

1.1.6 The review panel prepares a report with a recommendation for the accreditation of the degree program or programs, in which the evaluation of each crit—

is clearly justified and documented in accordance with the criteria for the accreditation of degree programs (Section 2).

1.1.7 Prior to the decision, the institution receives the expert report without the expert's recommendation for a decision for comment.

1.1.8 The accreditation agency makes its decision based on the report and the expert's recommendation, taking into account the institution's comments. It grants accreditation (with or without conditions) or denies accreditation. The accreditation decision may be supplemented by recommendations and/or suggestions. A one-time suspension of the procedure is possible for 18 months.

1.1.9 Following the procedure, the agency publishes the decision, the expert report, and the names of the experts. In the case of negative decisions, a corresponding notification is sent to the Accreditation Council instead of publication. The agency ensures confidentiality without prejudice to its reporting obligations to the Accreditation Council. ²

1.1.10 The Agency shall provide reasons for its accreditation decision. This includes accreditation decisions that are restricted by the imposition of conditions or are negative, decisions regarding the suspension of a procedure, and accreditation decisions that deviate from the expert evaluation.

1.1.11 The Agency shall document the procedure in an appropriate manner and, in the event of a positive outcome, publish the result by making a corresponding entry in the database of accredited degree programs.

1.1.12 The Agency shall verify the institution's compliance with the conditions imposed at the time of accreditation.

⁽²⁾ The publication of expert reports is mandatory in procedures initiated after June 1, 2010.

1.2 Special Rules for the Accreditation of Combined Degree Programs

1.2.1 According to the *Joint State Structural Guidelines for the Accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programs* of October 10, 2003, in their currently applicable version, and the relevant resolutions of the Accreditation Council, the subject of accreditation in so-called combined degree programs is the combined degree program itself and not its component programs.

1.2.2 The criteria for the accreditation of degree programs (Section 2) must therefore apply to the degree program as a whole, together with its combination options, and not merely to the component degree programs.

1.2.3 The institution has a concept for its combined degree offerings that integrates the qualification objectives of the sub-programs.

1.2.4 The requirement for a coherent conceptual structure of the degree program, as specified in Section 2.3, applies to the individual degree tracks.

1.2.5 For all sub-programs, the institution must demonstrate that courses and module exams are coordinated in such a way as to ensure the feasibility of the program

For the entire combined degree program, the institution ensures the feasibility of the program, including the absence of overlap, at least for the most frequently chosen combinations, and strives to achieve this for the less frequently chosen combinations. In these cases, the institution has a special duty to inform students.

1.2.6 The accreditation of a combined degree program may be supplemented by the inclusion of additional component programs in the catalog of selectable component programs. The above criteria must be applied during the corresponding reviews. The accreditation period remains unchanged.

1.2.7 If accreditation agencies cooperate in the accreditation of combined degree programs by evaluating separate bundles, a joint accreditation decision must ultimately be made. If the institution changes accreditation agencies for the evaluation of the sub-programs to be added, the newly selected agency shall, if applicable, certify the eligibility for accreditation of these sub-programs without making its own accreditation decision. It shall inform the agency that accredited the combined degree program of this. The latter shall supplement the accreditation certificate with the newly added component programs.

1.2.8 The accreditation certificate shall list all sub-programs whose combination was the subject of the accreditation.

If, after the certificate has been issued, the accreditation is supplemented by the inclusion of additional component programs in the list of combinable component programs, these must be included in a new certificate to be issued.

1.3 Special Rules for Bundled Accreditation Procedures

1.3.1 The bundled accreditation of degree programs requires a high degree of subject-specific affinity among the individual (sub)degree programs. This is only given if it goes beyond mere affiliation with a subject area (humanities and cultural studies, social sciences, or natural sciences) and there is a disciplinary proximity among the (sub)degree programs.

Common structural features of the (sub-)programs alone do not constitute subject-specific affinity.

1.3.2 When forming the review panel, sufficient evaluation of all (sub)programs must be ensured. Limiting the panel to only one subject expert for each discipline represented in the bundle requires justification. Restricting the panel to only one representative from professional practice and one student per procedure requires justification, taking into account the number of degree programs and professional fields to be evaluated.

1.3.3 The scheduling of the site visit must ensure that each program in the bundle can be adequately reviewed for compliance with the criteria for program accreditation. This must also be explained in the report.

1.3.4 In teacher education programs, the grouping may, in justified cases, also be organized by school type. When forming the review panel, it must be ensured that the review is appropriate in terms of subject matter and school type.

1.4 Special Rules for the Accreditation of Intensive Degree Programs

1.4.1 In particularly justified cases, up to 75 ECTS credits per academic year may be awarded for degree programs with special organizational measures. In this context, the workload for one ECTS credit is calculated at 30 hours (intensive degree programs).

1.4.2 Special organizational measures relate, for example, to the learning environment and supervision, the structure of the program, academic planning, and measures to ensure students' livelihood.

1.5 Special Rules for Joint Programs

1.5.1 The following regulations apply to degree programs that are jointly offered by at least one foreign and one German institution of higher education and that lead to at least a recognized degree under German law³ (Joint Programs).

They also apply to the accreditation of a national degree program that offers an option corresponding to a joint program.

1.5.2 The Agency verifies whether the “Joint Structural Requirements of the Federal States” and the requirements adopted by the Accreditation Council for program accreditation are met throughout the *entire* degree program.

1.5.3 In the event that the application of one of the requirements mentioned under 1.5.2 would likely prevent the accreditation of the degree program because it conflicts with a requirement of another participating accreditation institution or a national requirement of one of the participating partner countries, the Accreditation Council may grant the competent agency permission not to apply the relevant requirement in the accreditation. The decision is made by the Foundation’s Executive Board upon the agency’s request.

1.5.4 It must be ensured that the facilities and the organization of studies at all locations meet the requirements set forth in Section 2.7. At least one site visit must take place at a program location. During the site visit(s), program administrators as well as students and faculty from all program locations must be interviewed. The use of modern forms of communication is permitted.

1.5.5 Experts with international experience must be involved. For each participating country, an expert with relevant knowledge of that country should participate if possible.

1.5.6 Procedures may be conducted jointly with a foreign agency. In addition to 1.5.1–1.5.5, the following applies:

a) The participating agencies should draw up a joint catalog of the evaluation criteria to be applied. In doing so, compliance with the “Common Structural Requirements for All Countries” as well as with the requirements for the entire degree program adopted by the Accreditation Council for program accreditation must be ensured.

³ As a rule, “double degrees” or “joint degrees” are awarded.

b) The agencies should cooperate in appointing the evaluators. The evaluation panel must include representatives of the relevant stakeholder groups. These include, in particular, academia, students, and the professional community.

c) A joint self-evaluation report should be submitted that addresses the country-specific characteristics or national requirements in the partner countries.

d) A single report should be prepared for all locations.

1.5.7 An accreditation agency approved by the Accreditation Council may recognize accreditation decisions made by an agency that is not approved by the Accreditation Council—hereinafter referred to as a “foreign agency”—in the area of program accreditation under the following conditions:

a) The recognition decisions relate to joint programs as defined in Section 1.5.1.

b) The foreign agency or agencies is/are listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) or is/are full members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

c) The agency approved by the Accreditation Council ensures that there are no significant differences between its own accreditation criteria and procedural rules and those of the foreign agency.

d) It also ensures that the “Joint Structural Requirements of the States” are essentially complied with.

1.5.8 The legal consequence is that the relevant degree programs are accredited with the Accreditation Council’s seal. The accreditation periods and any conditions are governed by the rules of the foreign agency. In the event of a subsequent revocation of an accreditation decision, the agency approved by the Accreditation Council is obligated to revoke the recognition decision.

1.5.9 The agency approved by the Accreditation Council is obligated to report to the Accreditation Council on the individual recognition decisions in a timely manner.

1.6 Special Rules for Concept Accreditation

If a degree program is accredited for which a concept exists at the time of application and which is not yet offered, rules 1.1 through 1.5 shall apply with the following deviations:

1.6.1 An on-site visit pursuant to Section 1.1.5 shall take place only following a corresponding decision by the evaluators. However, the evaluators shall in any case conduct separate meetings with the university administration, with faculty members, and with student representatives of the university.

1.6.2 In accordance with the nature of program accreditation, no empirical findings regarding the feasibility of the program or the effectiveness of internal quality assurance need to be submitted or evaluated with respect to criteria 2.4 and 2.9.

2. Criteria for the Accreditation of Degree Programs

2.1 Learning Outcomes of the Program Concept

The program concept is based on qualification objectives. These encompass subject-specific and interdisciplinary aspects and relate in particular to the areas of

- scientific or artistic competence,
- the ability to take up qualified employment,
- the ability to engage in social responsibility
- and personal development.

2.2 Conceptual classification of the program within the degree system

The program complies with

- (1) the requirements of *the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees* of April 21, 2005, as amended,
- (2) the requirements of *the Joint State Structural Guidelines for the Accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programs* of October 10, 2003, as amended,
- (3) state-specific structural guidelines for the accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's degree programs,
- (4) the binding interpretation and summary of (1) through (3) by the Accreditation Council.

2.3 Program Concept

The program concept encompasses the imparting of subject-specific knowledge and interdisciplinary knowledge, as well as subject-specific, methodological, and generic competencies.

It is structured in a coherent manner through the combination of individual modules with regard to the formulated qualification objectives and provides for appropriate teaching and learning methods. Any practical components provided for are designed in such a way that credit points (ECTS) can be earned.

It specifies the admission requirements and, where applicable, an appropriate selection procedure, as well as recognition rules for credits earned at other institutions of higher education in accordance with the Lisbon Convention and for credits earned outside of higher education. In doing so,

provisions are made to compensate for disadvantages faced by students with disabilities. Any mobility windows provided for are integrated into the curriculum.

The program administration ensures the implementation of the program concept.

2.4 Feasibility of Study

The program's accessibility is ensured by:

- taking into account the expected entry qualifications,
- an appropriate curriculum design
- the specification of the student workload, which has been verified for plausibility (or, in the case of initial accreditation, estimated based on empirical data),
- an adequate and workload-appropriate frequency and organization of examinations,
- appropriate support services, as well as
- academic and non-academic study advising.

The needs of students with disabilities are taken into account.

2.5 Examination System

Exams serve to determine whether the stated learning objectives have been achieved. They are module-specific and focused on knowledge and competencies. Each module generally concludes with an examination covering the entire module. Accommodations for students with disabilities regarding time and formal requirements in their studies, as well as for all final or ongoing assessments, are ensured. The examination regulations have undergone a legal review.

2.6 Program-Related Collaborations

If the university involves or commissions other organizations to carry out parts of the program, it ensures the implementation and quality of the program concept.

The scope and nature of existing collaborations with other universities, companies, and other institutions are described, and the agreements underlying the collaboration are documented.

2.7 Facilities

The adequate implementation of the program is ensured in terms of qualitative and quantitative personnel, material, and spatial resources. Interconnections with other programs are taken into account. Measures for personnel development and qualification are in place.

2.8 Transparency and Documentation

The program, course of study, examination requirements, and admission requirements—including provisions for compensating for disadvantages for students with disabilities—are documented and published.

2.9 Quality Assurance and Further Development

The results of the university's internal quality management system are taken into account in the further development of the program. In doing so, the university considers evaluation results, studies of student workload, academic success, and graduate retention rates.

2.10 Degree programs with a distinctive profile

Degree programs with a special profile must meet specific requirements. The aforementioned criteria and procedural rules must be applied with due consideration of these requirements.

2.11 Gender Equality and Equal Opportunity

At the program level, the university's policies on gender equity and the promotion of equal opportunity for students in specific life situations—such as students with health impairments, students with children, international students, students with a migration background, and/or students from so-called educationally disadvantaged backgrounds—are implemented.

3. Decision-making criteria for the accreditation of degree programs

3.1 Decision Criteria and Their Prerequisites

3.1.1 Accreditation⁴ of a degree program must be granted if the quality requirements are met.

3.1.2 Accreditation shall be granted subject to conditions if deficiencies exist that are expected to be remedied within nine months.

3.1.3 Accreditation shall be denied if there are deficiencies that are not expected to be remedied within nine months.

3.1.4 In the cases described in sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3, the Agency may, after receiving the institution's statement, suspend the accreditation process once for a period of no more than 18 months if it is expected that the institution will remedy the deficiencies within this period.

3.2 Time Limit

3.2.1 Accreditation shall be limited to a period of seven years. The period begins on the date the accreditation decision takes effect (Section 3.7). The period calculated from that date shall be extended to the end of the last academic year concerned.

3.2.2 If accreditation is granted subject to conditions, the accreditation period may be shortened.

3.2.3 If accreditation is granted subject to conditions, the accreditation may alternatively be limited until a decision is made regarding the fulfillment of the conditions and accompanied by a note stating that the term will be extended to the standard term upon fulfillment of the conditions.

3.2.4 In the case of initial accreditation, including concept accreditation, the accreditation period is five years. For the calculation of the period, Section 3.2.1, sentences 2 and 3, apply accordingly.

3.2.5 If, in the case of initial accreditation—including program-level accreditation—the degree program is not launched until after the accreditation decision takes effect, the period begins on the date of its launch, but no later than the start of the

⁴ The provisions of this resolution applicable to the accreditation of a degree program shall also apply to the initial accreditation of a degree program, unless the initial accreditation is governed by different rules.

the second academic year following the accreditation decision. The period calculated in this manner shall be extended, upon application by the institution, to the end of the most recently affected academic year.

3.3 Provisional Accreditation and Extension of the Accreditation Period

3.3.1 If accreditation of a degree program is applied for with an accreditation agency before the expiration of the accreditation period and the documents required to conduct the procedure are available, the agency may provisionally accredit the degree program for a maximum of an additional 12 months, unless there is clearly no prospect of a successful conclusion of the procedure. The duration of this provisional accreditation of the program shall be included in the relevant period specified in Section 3.2 for the subsequent accreditation. If accreditation is denied during the provisional accreditation period, the accreditation remains in effect until the end of the set period. In the event of a suspension, the period for provisional accreditation may be extended until the Agency's final decision.

3.3.2 If the institution does not apply for accreditation of the program before the expiration of the accreditation period because it has discontinued the program and is no longer accepting new enrollments, the accreditation period may be extended in accordance with state legal provisions on the protection of legitimate expectations for students still enrolled at the time of the accreditation period's expiration. This is subject to the institution providing evidence that the program has not undergone any significant changes and that the necessary personnel and material resources will be maintained on a sustainable basis. The accreditation agency that accredited the expiring program is responsible for the decision.

3.4 Suspension of the Procedure

3.4.1 The suspension of the accreditation procedure requires a statement from the institution. The suspension must be issued in writing, stating the reasons and the deadline within which the institution may apply for the resumption of the procedure.

3.4.2 It is the responsibility of the institution to apply to the Accreditation Agency for the resumption of the procedure within the set deadline; in this case, the interrupted procedure shall be resumed immediately. Upon resumption of the procedure, the Agency shall decide on any procedural steps that may need to be repeated.

3.4.3 If the institution does not submit a request for resumption within the set deadline, the accreditation agency shall deny accreditation.

3.5 Conditions

3.5.1 Conditions and deadlines for demonstrating their fulfillment must be clearly defined.

3.5.2 Accreditations subject to conditions must be accompanied by a note stating that failure to provide proof of compliance with the conditions generally leads to the revocation of accreditation or, in the case of Section 3.2.3, to the accreditation period generally not being extended to the standard duration.

3.5.3 The accreditation agency shall verify compliance with the conditions vis-à-vis the institution of higher education. In this case, the accreditation decision shall apply without restriction for the intended duration or, in the case of Section 3.2.3, shall be extended to the standard period.

3.5.4 If the institution fails to demonstrate compliance with the requirements by the deadline and the accreditation was subject to a condition of revocation, the accreditation agency shall, following a formal notice and the expiration of a reasonable grace period, revoke the accreditation immediately, effective at the end of the following semester. In justified cases, the accreditation agency may grant a one-time grace period of up to an additional three months.

3.5.5 If the accreditation period has been shortened in accordance with Section 3.2.3, the accreditation period shall not be extended to the standard period but only to the end of the semester in question if proof of compliance with the conditions is not provided by the deadline. In justified cases, the agency may grant a one-time extension of the accreditation period by up to three months.

3.6 Revocation of the Accreditation Decision

3.6.1 The Accreditation Council may require the Agency to revoke an accreditation decision or, if there are deficiencies that can be remedied within nine months, to impose a condition, if the decision was made in disregard of or improper application of an accreditation criterion or in violation of a material procedural rule. The revocation or subsequent imposition of conditions must take effect immediately at the end of the following semester. This obligation does not apply if the same accreditation decision would have been made even had the error been avoided; in this regard, the burden of proof lies with the agency.

the error; in this respect, the burden of proof lies with the Agency.

3.6.2 If, in the case of Section 3.6.1, a positive, negative, or conditional accreditation decision should have been issued, the Agency shall immediately make the corresponding decision.

3.6.3 In the event of significant changes to the design or profile of a degree program, the Agency shall determine whether the change compromises quality and therefore requires re-accreditation. In such a case, it shall immediately revoke the accreditation effective at the end of the following semester, unless re-accreditation is applied for. The Agency shall decide whether the procedure may be shortened in individual cases.

3.7 Effective Date of Decisions

Decisions by the accreditation agencies in the aforementioned cases take effect upon written notification.

II. Rules for system accreditation

4. Subject of Accreditation and Admission Requirements

4.1 Definition of the subject of accreditation

The subject of system accreditation is a higher education institution's internal quality assurance system in the area of study and teaching. The structures and processes relevant to teaching and studies are reviewed to determine whether they ensure the achievement of qualification objectives and the high quality of degree programs, applying the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ESG), the guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK), and the criteria of the Accreditation Council.

A positive system accreditation certifies that the institution's quality assurance system in the areas of academic studies and teaching is suitable for ensuring that the qualification objectives and quality standards of its degree programs are met. Degree programs established in accordance with the requirements of the accredited system, or those that have already been subject to internal quality assurance in accordance with the requirements of the accredited system, are thus accredited. Catholic theological degree programs within the full theological curriculum are exempt from this.

In exceptional cases, a higher education institution may apply for system accreditation for the internal quality assurance system of one or more of its academic organizational units, provided that these units possess managerial authority and operational responsibility for studies and teaching—that is, for the planning and implementation of the degree programs they offer—and for quality assurance in studies and teaching. In this case, all rules for system accreditation must be applied to the academic unit.

4.2 Requirements for the admission of institutions of higher education to system accreditation

4.2.1 The institution can plausibly demonstrate that it uses an institution-wide quality assurance system in the area of studies and teaching, and can provide evidence that at least one degree program has already undergone this system.

4.2.2 The institution has not received a negative decision in a system accreditation procedure within the past two years.

4.3 Requirements for the admission of subunits of a higher education institution to system accreditation in special exceptional cases

4.3.1 The university administration applies for system accreditation for one or more academic organizational subunits and provides a clear justification as to why the accreditation of the quality assurance system for the entire university is not yet appropriate or feasible. It also declares that it assumes responsibility for the internal organization of the process.

4.3.2 For the academic unit, the institution can plausibly demonstrate that the unit uses a quality assurance system in the area of studies and teaching, and can prove that at least one degree program has already undergone this system. The unit's quality assurance system is integrated into the institution.

4.3.3 No negative decision has been issued in a system accreditation procedure for the academic unit in the past two years.

5. Procedural Rules for System Accreditation

5.1 The accreditation agency conducts a preliminary discussion with the applying institution and informs the institution about the essential content, steps, and criteria of the procedure. The agency provides the institution with a complete scope of services and sets the fees.

5.2 The institution submits an application that includes brief descriptions of the institution and its internal management and quality assurance systems in the areas of study and teaching. The application must plausibly document the functionality of the institution's internal systems using at least one degree program as an example. If applicable state-specific regulations exist, the application must be submitted through the competent ministry.

5.3 The Agency conducts a preliminary review to determine whether the eligibility requirements for institutional accreditation have been met. The Agency informs the institution and the Accreditation Council of the results of the preliminary review.

5.4 The institution submits documentation to the Agency that clearly outlines, in particular, the internal governance and decision-making structures, the mission statement and profile of the institution, its academic programs, the defined quality objectives, and the internal quality assurance system in the areas of study and teaching. The documentation clarifies how the quality assurance and development procedures function.

The documentation should not exceed 40 pages (excluding appendices). A statement from the university's student council must be attached to the documentation.

5.5 The accreditation agency appoints an evaluation panel for the review process, consisting of at least the following persons:

- three members with experience in the field of higher education governance and internal quality assurance,
- one student member with experience in university self-governance and accreditation,
- one member with professional experience.

One member of the review panel should have extensive experience in university administration, curriculum design, and quality assurance in academic programs and teaching.

One member of the review panel should be from abroad.

The review panel must be composed in such a way that it is capable of conducting a proper review in all areas relevant to the review process. The size, focus, and disciplinary diversity of the institution must be taken into account. In particular, the Agency may, on a case-by-case basis, involve additional reviewers if the conduct of the spot checks so requires.

If the procedure involves decisions regarding additional findings under professional law, an expert must also be involved to the extent required by state regulations. If the institution offers teacher training or combined degree programs with theological components, an expert from the Protestant or Catholic Church must be involved in conducting the spot checks.

The Agency shall appoint a chairperson.

The Agency ensures the impartiality of the evaluators and upholds fairness toward the institution. To this end, the Agency grants the institution a right of objection. The Agency does not grant a right of nomination or a right of veto.

The Agency prepares the evaluators for their evaluation work, their specific role, and the specific accreditation process. This preparation also covers conducting interviews and drafting evaluation reports.

The Agency ensures that the evaluators assess the institution's internal quality assurance system in conjunction with the institution's own understanding of quality

and do not use specific system models as the basis for their evaluation.

5.6 The evaluation process includes two site visits and a random review of relevant aspects of program design, program implementation, and quality assurance (random sampling).

If the institution offers regulated degree programs, one of these must additionally be evaluated on a random basis, taking into account the criteria for the accreditation of degree programs. In the case of teacher education programs, one program from each type of teaching qualification offered must also be included.

5.7 The first site visit serves primarily to gather information about the institution and its governance and quality assurance system. The evaluators review the submitted documents for completeness and decide which additional documents the institution must submit for the second site visit. In addition, the evaluators agree on the composition of the samples in accordance with Section 5.8.

The second visit is intended for the critical analysis of the submitted documents and the conduct of random checks. It should be scheduled so that the institution has sufficient time to compile the necessary documentation.

During the process, the evaluators generally conduct separate meetings, in particular with the university administration and the equal opportunity officers, the administrative staff, those responsible for quality assurance, as well as representatives of the faculty and students. The Agency decides on the specific structure of the second site visit and, if necessary, additional meeting participants based on a proposal from the evaluation team.

5.8 In the spot checks, relevant characteristics of program design, program implementation, and quality assurance are examined to determine whether the intended outcomes of the evaluated system are actually achieved at the program level and whether the programs thus meet the criteria for program accreditation, the guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, and state-specific requirements. The following applies to the composition of the samples:

a) The Agency determines the characteristics as well as the selection and scope of the degree programs to be examined based on a substantiated proposal from the evaluators.

b) The sample comprises several characteristics. An in-depth evaluation of degree programs is to take place; deviations must be justified. In selecting the degree programs to be included in the sample and determining their scope, the evaluators take into account the university's range of disciplines in its teaching.

c) The characteristics are derived from the requirements of *the criteria for the accreditation of degree programs* in their currently valid version, as well as from the *joint state and state-specific guidelines for accreditation*, which have been consolidated or interpreted by the Accreditation Council into binding guidelines.

d) The subjects of the spot checks may include, *for example*:

- for the qualification objectives: the definition of concrete and plausible qualification objectives for the degree programs; the consideration of subject-specific and interdisciplinary aspects; the alignment of the qualification objectives with academic or artistic competence, the ability to take up qualified employment, the ability for social engagement, and personal development
- For conceptual integration into the degree system: the alignment of qualification objectives with the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees; compliance with legal requirements, particularly the joint state and state-specific structural requirements and, where applicable, existing special regulations for degree programs that prepare students for state-regulated professions
- For program concepts: the implementation of qualification objectives and intended learning outcomes in program concepts; the imparting of subject-specific and interdisciplinary knowledge as well as subject-specific, methodological, and generic competencies; the establishment of admission requirements and selection procedures, as well as recognition rules for credits earned at other institutions of higher education and through non-academic pathways; the ECTS compatibility of in-curricular practical components; the institution's modularization concept; the organizational implementation of degree program concepts

Likewise, all requirements regarding the feasibility of study, the examination system, facilities, transparency and documentation, the consideration of specific program profiles, gender equity and equal opportunity, or quality assurance and further development may also be potential subjects of investigation. The focus of the spot checks may also be on the consideration of all criteria within a single program or across multiple programs.

If the institution offers regulated degree programs (e.g., teacher education programs), additional characteristics include the relevant specifics (e.g., state-wide and, where applicable, state-specific regulations for the accreditation of teacher education programs).

5.9 The random evaluation of regulated bachelor's and master's degree programs serves, in particular, to verify compliance with the guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, as well as with state-specific requirements and the criteria of the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of degree programs within these programs. In accordance with program accreditation, the following applies:

a) If the accreditation agency is also authorized to accredit degree programs, it conducts the random evaluation of regulated degree programs as part of the institutional accreditation process. The agency may commission another agency authorized by the Accreditation Council for this purpose to carry out the evaluation.

If the agency is not authorized for program accreditation, the random assessment must be conducted by an agency authorized for program accreditation.

b) For the random assessment, the accrediting agency conducting the review appoints review panels that ensure a proper expert evaluation of the degree programs in all areas relevant to the review process. Reviewers from the student body and professional practice, as well as at least one member of the review panel for institutional accreditation, must be included. In the case of Protestant theological degree programs comprising a full theological curriculum, an expert from the Protestant Church must be included. In the case of teacher training or combined degree programs with theological components, an expert from the Protestant or Catholic Church must be included.

c) The evaluation in these procedures follows the procedural rules for the accreditation of degree programs in accordance with Section 1, without leading to independent accreditation decisions. The joint state and state-specific structural requirements, as well as the criteria for the accreditation of degree programs in accordance with Section 2, apply accordingly.

d) The Agency makes the reports from the random review available to the reviewers for system accreditation.

5.10 The system accreditation evaluators prepare a report containing a recommendation for system accreditation, in which the assessment of each criterion for system accreditation (Section 6) is documented in a complete and traceable manner.

. In particular, the assessors must evaluate the relationship between the findings from the spot checks and the institution's internal governance and quality assurance.

5.11 The accreditation agency forwards the report to the institution without a recommendation for a decision, for the institution's comments.

5.12 The accreditation agency makes its decision based on the report and the recommendation for a decision, taking into account the university's response. It grants accreditation with or without conditions, or denies it. The accreditation decision may be supplemented by recommendations and/or suggestions. The agency may suspend the procedure once, generally for 12 months, but for no more than 24 months.

5.13 The agency shall provide reasons for its accreditation decision. This includes accreditation decisions that are restricted by the imposition of conditions or are negative, decisions regarding the suspension of a procedure, and accreditation decisions that deviate from the expert evaluation.

5.14 Following the procedure, the accreditation agency publishes the decision, the expert report, and the names of the experts. Furthermore, without prejudice to its reporting obligations to the Accreditation Council, the agency ensures confidentiality in the procedures.

5.15 The Accreditation Agency documents the procedure in an appropriate manner and, in the event of a positive outcome, publishes the result by making a corresponding entry in the database of accredited degree programs.

5.16 The agency verifies the institution's compliance with the conditions imposed during the accreditation process.

5.17 Halfway through the first accreditation period, the institution submits a self-evaluation to the agency (interim evaluation). This essentially includes an overview of the quality assurance procedures carried out during the accreditation period to date. The Agency prepares a report on the results of the interim evaluation, which may include recommendations for addressing quality deficiencies, makes it available to the institution, and publishes it.

6. Criteria for System Accreditation

6.1 Educational Objectives

The institution has defined and published an educational profile for itself as an institution and for its degree programs. It continuously employs procedures to review and further develop the qualification objectives of its degree programs.

6.2 Internal university management of studies and teaching

The institution continuously employs a management system in the area of studies and teaching. This system ensures the establishment of concrete and plausible learning outcomes for the degree programs, taking into account the current version of the *criteria for the accreditation of degree programs*. The qualification objectives encompass subject-specific and interdisciplinary aspects, in particular scientific or artistic competence, the ability to take up qualified employment, the ability to engage in social involvement, and personal development. The system ensures

- the implementation of qualification objectives and intended learning outcomes into program designs that are feasible and ensure the attainment of the intended qualification level and profile. This includes a realistic assessment and review of the student workload, application of the ECTS, appropriate modularization, adequate examination organization, counseling and support services, consideration of gender equality and the special needs of students with health impairments, students with children, international students, students with a migration background, and/or those from so-called educationally disadvantaged groups, as well as recognition rules for credits earned at other institutions of higher education in accordance with the Lisbon Convention and credits earned outside of higher education;
- the adequate implementation of degree programs based on sufficient qualitative and quantitative resources, as well as measures for staff development and training;
- the alignment of qualification objectives with the *Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees* and compliance with legal requirements, in particular the joint and state-specific structural requirements and, where applicable, existing special regulations for degree programs that prepare students for state-regulated professions;

- the consideration of the results of internal quality assurance and the involvement of faculty and students, graduates, and external experts, as well as representatives from professional practice, in the development and further development of degree programs. In the case of degree programs leading to state-regulated professions, the relevant experts must be involved.

6.3 Internal Quality Assurance

The institution uses an internal quality assurance system that meets the requirements of the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*.

The internal quality assurance system has the personnel and material resources necessary to ensure sustainability. It is designed to assess the effectiveness of the university's internal governance in the areas of study and teaching, as well as to ensure and continuously improve the quality of study and teaching.

Specifically, it includes

- regular internal and external evaluation of degree programs, taking into account the organization of studies and examinations,
- regular assessment of the quality of study and teaching by students,
- the assessment of faculty members' competence in teaching and examination procedures during the hiring process, as well as their regular professional development,
- the regular review of compliance with the guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of degree programs,
- binding procedures for the implementation of recommendations and an incentive system.

It ensures the participation of faculty and students, administrative staff, graduates, and representatives from the professional field, and guarantees that independent bodies (individuals) conduct quality assessments as part of internal and external evaluations.

6.4 Reporting System and Data Collection

The university uses an internal reporting system that documents the structures and processes involved in the development and implementation of degree programs, as well as the structures, processes, and measures of quality assurance, their results, and their effects.

6.5 Responsibilities

The decision-making processes, competencies, and responsibilities within the governance system for studies and teaching and within the internal quality assurance system are clearly defined and published university-wide.

6.6 Documentation

The institution shall inform the bodies responsible for academic programs and teaching at least once a year, and shall also inform the public, the institution's governing body, and the state in which it is located, in an appropriate manner, about the procedures and results of quality assurance measures in the area of academic programs and teaching.

6.7 Cooperation

If the university involves or commissions other organizations in the area of studies and teaching, it shall ensure the quality of the relevant degree programs and their continuous improvement through appropriate measures. The scope and nature of existing collaborations with other universities, companies, and other institutions are described, and the agreements underlying the collaboration are documented.

This provision also applies to degree programs jointly offered by at least one foreign and one German institution of higher education and leading to at least a recognized degree under German law (Joint Programs). It also applies to national degree programs that offer an option corresponding to a Joint Program. In the event of conflicts between the national regulations of the participating partner countries, Section 1.5.3 applies *mutatis mutandis*, provided that the Foundation's Executive Board makes the decision upon application by the institution.

7. Decision-making rules for system accreditation

7.1 Decision Content and Prerequisites

7.1.1 System accreditation must be granted if the quality requirements are met. This means that degree programs established in accordance with the requirements of the accredited system, or that were already subject to internal quality assurance in accordance with the requirements of the accredited system, are accredited. If system accreditation was applied for a subunit of the institution, all decisions by the Agency apply only to the degree programs of that subunit.

7.1.2 Accreditation shall be granted subject to conditions if deficiencies exist that are expected to be remedied within nine months.

7.1.3 Accreditation shall be denied if deficiencies exist that are not expected to be remedied within nine months. Existing program accreditations remain unaffected. If renewal of system accreditation (reaccreditation) is denied, the degree programs remain accredited for an additional one and a half years.

7.1.4 In the cases described in sections 7.1.2 and 7.1.3, the Agency may, after consulting with the institution, suspend the accreditation process once for a period of generally 12 months, but no more than 24 months, if it is expected that the institution will remedy the deficiencies within this period.

7.2 Time Limit

7.2.1 System accreditation shall be limited to a term of eight years. The term begins on the date the decision takes effect (Section 7.7). The term calculated thereafter is extended to the end of the most recent academic year in question.

7.2.2 If accreditation is granted subject to conditions, the accreditation may be limited in duration until a decision is made regarding the fulfillment of the conditions and may be accompanied by a note stating that the term will be extended to the standard term upon fulfillment of the conditions.

7.2.3 In the case of initial system accreditation, the accreditation period is six years. For the calculation of the period, Section 7.2.1, sentences 2 and 3, apply accordingly.

7.3 Provisional Accreditation

7.3.1 If an application for renewal of system accreditation is submitted no later than one year before the accreditation expires, the accreditation agency shall, upon granting admission to the procedure,

grant provisional system accreditation for a maximum of two additional years. The duration of the provisional extension of accreditation shall be included in the relevant period specified in Section 7.2 in the case of renewal of accreditation. The provisional system accreditation shall lapse with immediate effect in the event of a negative decision in the procedure. Section 7.1.3, sentence 3, applies to the institution's degree programs.

7.3.2 Upon admission to a procedure for initial system accreditation, the Accreditation Agency shall accredit the degree programs whose accreditation periods expire during the procedure, initially for two years.

7.3.3 In the cases described in Sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2, the agency may, in the event of a suspension, extend the period of provisional accreditation until a final decision on system accreditation is reached.

7.4 Conditions

7.4.1 Conditions and deadlines for demonstrating compliance must be clearly defined.

7.4.2 Accreditations subject to conditions must be accompanied by a note stating that failure to provide evidence of compliance with the conditions generally leads to the revocation of accreditation or, in the case of Section 7.2.2, to the accreditation period generally not being extended to the standard duration.

7.4.3 The accreditation agency shall verify compliance with the conditions vis-à-vis the institution of higher education. In this case, the accreditation decision shall apply without restriction for the intended duration or, in the case of Section 7.2.2, shall be extended to the standard period.

7.4.4 If the institution fails to demonstrate compliance with the conditions by the deadline and the accreditation was subject to a reservation of revocation, the accreditation agency shall revoke the accreditation immediately, effective at the end of the next semester, following a reminder and the expiration of a reasonable grace period. In justified cases, the accreditation agency may grant a one-time grace period of up to an additional three months.

7.4.5 If the accreditation period has been shortened in accordance with Section 7.2.2, the accreditation period shall not be extended to the standard period but only to the end of the semester in question if proof of compliance with the conditions is not provided within the deadline. In justified cases, the accreditation agency may grant a one-time grace period of up to an additional three months.

7.5 Suspension of the Procedure

7.5.1 The suspension of the accreditation procedure shall be issued in writing following a statement from the institution, stating the reasons and the deadline within which the institution may apply for the resumption of the procedure.

7.5.2 It is the responsibility of the institution to apply to the accreditation agency for the resumption of the procedure within the set deadline; in this case, the interrupted procedure shall be continued without delay. Upon resumption of the procedure, the agency shall decide on any procedural steps that may need to be repeated.

7.5.3 If the institution does not submit the request for reinstatement within the set deadline, the accreditation agency shall reject the system accreditation.

7.6 Revocation of the Accreditation Decision

7.6.1 The Accreditation Council may require the Agency to revoke an accreditation decision or, if there are deficiencies that can be remedied within nine months, to impose a condition, if the decision was reached through non-compliance with or improper application of an accreditation criterion or through a violation of a material procedural rule. The revocation or subsequent imposition of conditions must take effect immediately as of the end of the next semester. This obligation does not apply if the same accreditation decision would have been made even if the error had been avoided; in this regard, the burden of proof lies with the Agency.

7.6.2 If, in the case of Section 7.6.1, a positive, negative, or conditional accreditation decision should have been issued, the Agency shall immediately make the corresponding decision.

7.6.3 In the event of significant changes to the accredited system, the Agency shall determine whether the change results in a decline in the quality of the degree programs. In such a case, it shall immediately revoke the accreditation unless a new application for system accreditation is submitted. In the event of revocation, Section

7.1.3, sentence 4, shall apply to the institution's degree programs. The Agency shall decide whether the procedure may be shortened in individual cases.

7.7 Effective Date of Decisions

Decisions by the accreditation agencies in the aforementioned cases take effect upon their written notification.

III. Transitional Provisions

Legal relationships between universities and agencies are governed by the regulations of the Accreditation Council in effect at the time the contract is concluded. However, the contracting parties may agree on the immediate applicability of all or individual new regulations to their contractual relationship.