

Quality Report of the Accreditation Council Foundation for the Year 2021

1. Fundamentals of Quality Management at the Accreditation Council Foundation

Quality management is intended to meaningfully link the existing goals, concepts, and processes of the Accreditation Council Foundation, particularly those of the Secretariat, through a quality cycle, thereby providing impetus for sustainable further development. Accordingly, the Quality Report addresses the quality objectives and concepts, as well as their implementation and evaluation, as defined in the Mission Statement (Drs. AR 51/2019) and the Quality Management Concept (Drs. AR 67/2019):

- The Accreditation Council Foundation ensures that accreditation procedures are conducted swiftly, reliably, on time, and transparently, from the submission of the application through to the decision-making by the Accreditation Council. In particular, the administrative burden associated with the application process for higher education institutions and agencies should be kept to a minimum.
- The Foundation acts in accordance with the *European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)* and the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, as well as its implementation through corresponding state ordinances.
- It ensures that accreditation decisions are made independently of third parties and that potential conflicts of interest are prevented through appropriate measures.
- It promotes dialogue among all actors involved in the accreditation process and works toward a trusting collaboration among all represented stakeholders.

2. Status of Quality Management Implementation

The quality objectives are implemented operationally by the Secretariat through the routine processing of accreditation applications, the preparation and follow-up of accreditation decisions, the preparation and implementation of resolutions, and other tasks of the Accreditation Council.

Quality management is implemented in two areas that, as core operational processes, are highly relevant to the work of the Accreditation Council: First, structured evaluations, which are conducted regularly as part of accreditation procedures, as well as through a regular external evaluation in accordance with Article 15 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation. Second, various feedback formats are used for all stakeholders in the accreditation system (universities, students, agencies, federal states, etc.), which can also initiate a review of core operational processes on an ad hoc basis.

The implementation of the quality management concept and its tools achieved two key milestones in 2021:

With the 16th ELIAS Sprint, the questionnaire tool for applications for program and system accreditation was established in the summer of 2021 and evaluated for the first time in preparation for the ENQA review.

In December 2021, the ENQA review was conducted, subjecting the Accreditation Council Foundation to an external evaluation. The resulting findings (see ENQA report) provide important impetus for the further development of the Accreditation Council, the Secretariat, and the accreditation system as a whole.

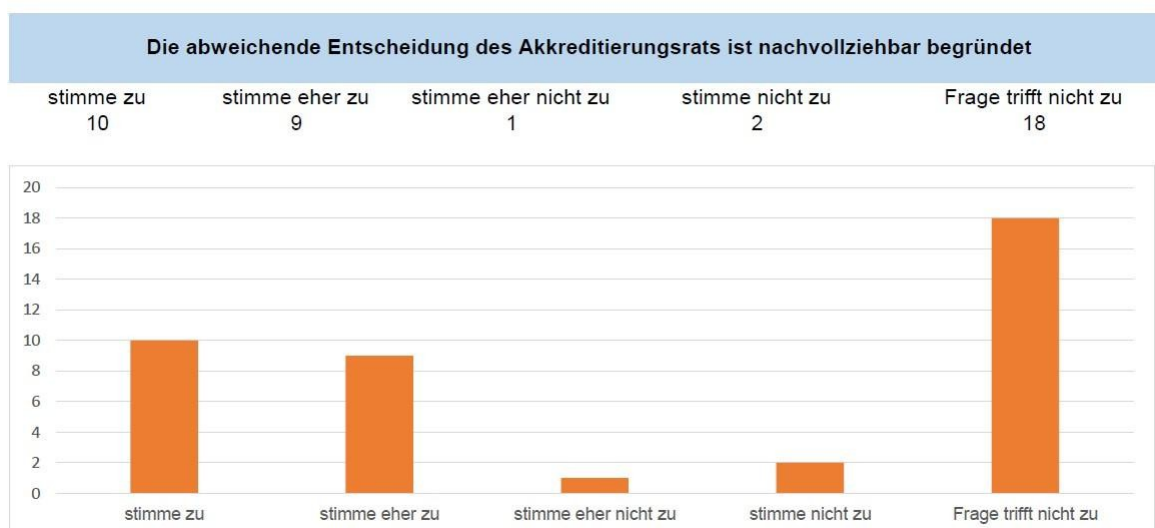
In addition, key feedback channels such as discussions with the agencies, exchanges with the Forum of System-Accredited Universities, and the quality dialogue were continued and further intensified throughout the year.

3. Evaluation of Instruments and Processes

a) Structured evaluation of accreditation procedures

With the implementation of the survey tool in ELIAS, universities were given the opportunity for the first time in the fall of 2021 to provide feedback following the application process. This feedback covers organizational, content-related, and technical aspects of the application process. The feedback presented here was collected in anonymized form between October 12 and 31 and documented here by the office in aggregated form. A total of 46 universities participated, with varying numbers of applications; therefore, some of the feedback refers to multiple application processes.

Figure 1

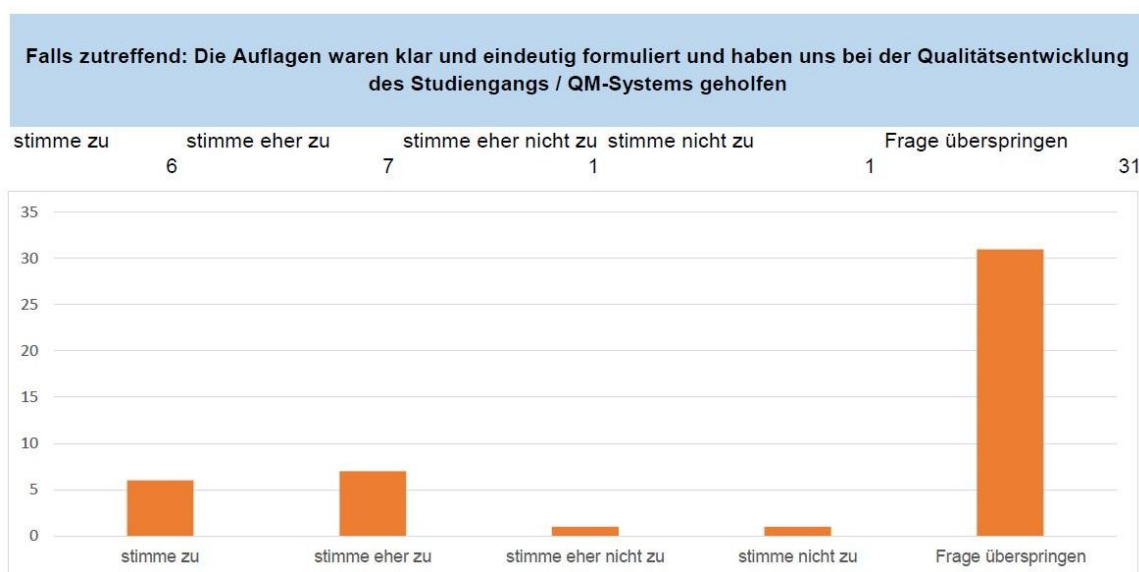


The question regarding the Accreditation Council's deviating decision refers to the imposition of one or more conditions as well as the removal of one or more conditions by the Agency and/or the review panel. The background to this question is the transparency of the Accreditation Council's deviating decision relative to the original accreditation report.

Here, approximately 41% confirm the plausibility of the deviating decision (agree / somewhat agree). Approximately 6% of the surveyed universities disagree with the plausibility of the deviating decision (somewhat disagree / disagree). Approximately 39% skipped the question because it did not apply to them.

This results in predominantly positive feedback regarding the Accreditation Council's deviating decisions.

Figure 2



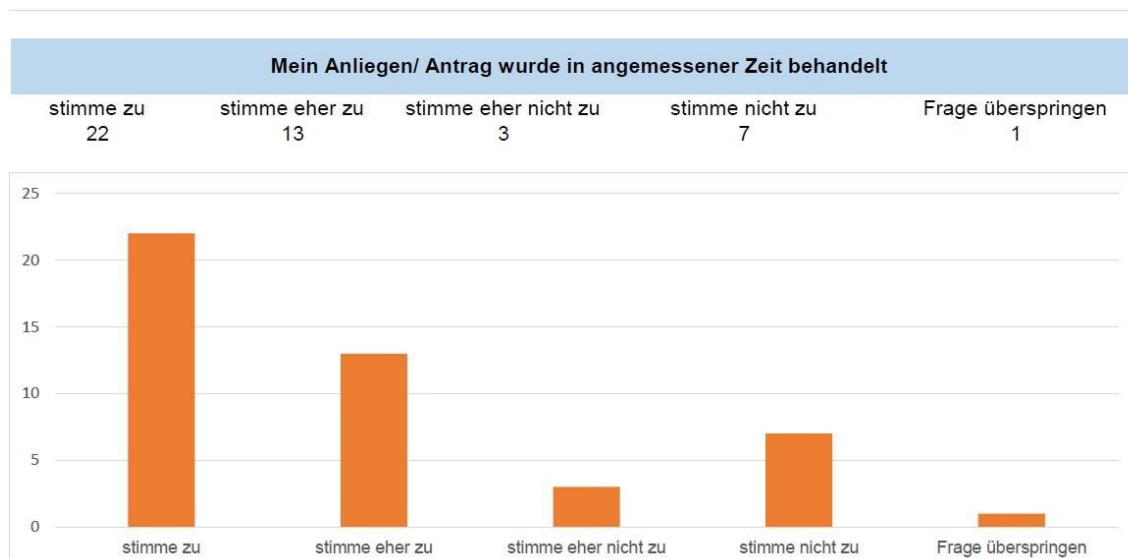
The question regarding the clear and unambiguous formulation of the conditions and their implications for the degree program or the institution’s QMS is optional and delves deeper into the comprehensibility and plausibility of the conditions for the institution.

Here, approximately 28% of respondents rate the requirements as clearly formulated and helpful for the further development of the degree program or QMS. Approximately the same percentage supports the deviating decision (agree / somewhat agree). Only about 4% of the surveyed institutions disagree with the clarity and usefulness of the requirement (somewhat disagree / disagree).

The vast majority—nearly 68%—skipped the question because it did not apply to them.

This indicates positive feedback regarding the formulation of requirements issued by the Accreditation Council. For the majority of respondents, however, the optional question was not highly relevant.

Figure 3



The question regarding the processing of the application within a reasonable timeframe pertains to the organization of the application process by the Accreditation Council and the Secretariat.

Here, 76% of the surveyed universities confirm that their application was processed within a reasonable timeframe (agree / somewhat agree). About 20% of the surveyed universities rate the timeframe for processing their application as unreasonable (somewhat disagree / disagree). Approximately 4% skipped the question because it did not apply to them.

This results in very positive feedback regarding the timely processing of applications, even though the volume of negative feedback—affecting one-fifth of the applications—is statistically significant.

Figure 4

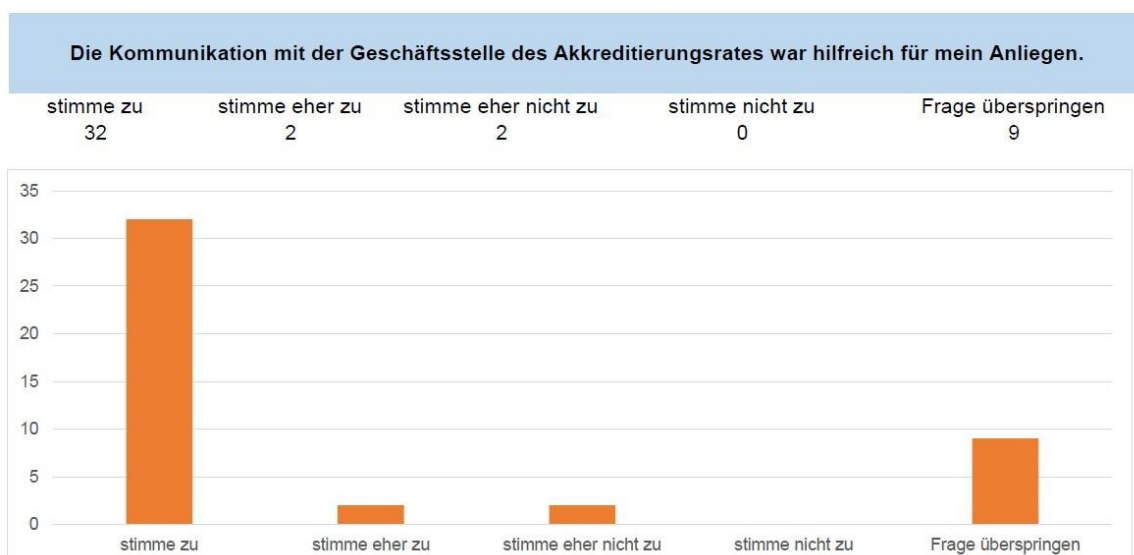
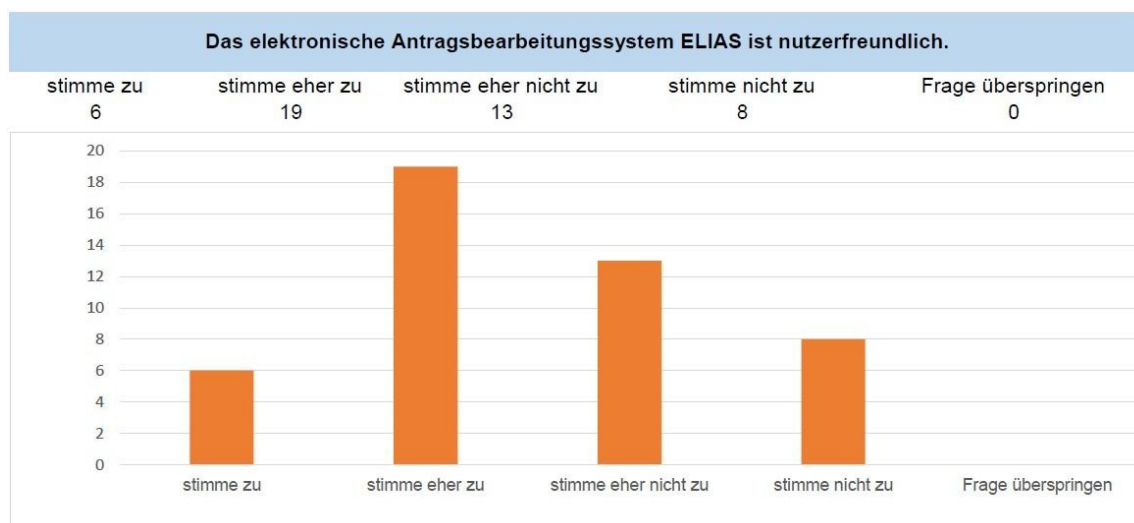


Figure 5



The results are also published in aggregated form in the quality report and thus form the basis for the further development of operational processes and conceptual frameworks in process step *d) Act*.

The survey tool has not yet been set up, but will be operational by summer 2021 as part of the 16th ELIAS Sprint.

b) External Evaluation in accordance with Article 15 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation

At the 96th meeting of the Accreditation Council, it was decided to apply for “affiliate” status with ENQA. In addition, the foundation’s listing in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) was announced. The associated ESG evaluation was initiated at the 103rd meeting of the Accreditation Council, during which the Secretariat was tasked with preparing the self-evaluation report for the ESG evaluation. The self-evaluation report is scheduled to be approved by the Accreditation Council in June 2021. The ENQA site visit will take place at the end of 2021, coinciding with the last Council meeting of the year.

c) Feedback Formats

Communication Strategy

At the 103rd meeting, a communication strategy was adopted that, in addition to the information available on the Accreditation Council’s website and the established communication channels of press releases and outcome letters to the KMK, the HRK, the agencies, the KASAP, and the system-accredited universities, also introduced additional proactive communication formats in the form of a Twitter account and a redesigned newsletter (with a subscriber list of over 1,000 addresses).

The communication concept serves as an essential foundation for the various feedback formats by ensuring a regular and transparent flow of information from the Accreditation Council to all stakeholders in the accreditation system.

Quality Dialogue

In September 2019, the first annual Quality Dialogue of the Accreditation Council Foundation took place in Frankfurt in cooperation with the University of Oldenburg. The topic of the Quality Dialogue was quality standards and quality assurance in academic continuing education. The next Quality Dialogue was originally scheduled to take place in June 2020 on the eve of the 104th meeting of the Accreditation Council at the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the roundtable discussion was postponed to 2021.

The second Quality Dialogue will discuss how the contractual, organizational, and content-related integration required by the MRVO can be taken into account in the review and evaluation of dual degree programs during accreditation procedures. Representatives from the various stakeholder groups will be invited to participate.

Feedback Meetings with Accreditation Agencies

The joint meeting of the Accreditation Council held at the beginning of each year provides an opportunity for an exchange with representatives of the accreditation agencies from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. At the 103rd meeting in March 2020, a mid-term review of the current term was presented and discussed with the agencies. Overall, the Accreditation Council and the accreditation agencies concluded that the accreditation system, which was reformed in early 2018, has proven its effectiveness and that the Accreditation Council and the agencies generally work well together.

To optimize cooperation at the operational level, feedback meetings were held as early as 2019 between the Secretariat and the agencies evalag and ACQUIN, as well as a feedback meeting with AHPGS in 2020.

Exchange Forum for System-Accredited Universities

Members of the Executive Board and/or the Secretariat regularly participate in the “Exchange Forum for System-Accredited Universities” initiated by Münster University of Applied Sciences, in which up to 50 system-accredited universities are represented. This allows for active participation in the discussions among system-accredited universities, thereby ensuring that exchange and

feedback on a regular basis, even independently of system accreditation procedures. The next exchange forum will take place on March 18, 2021.

ELIAS Training Sessions for User Groups

The office conducted ELIAS training sessions for university staff in November 2019 and in March and May 2020. Further training sessions could not take place initially due to the COVID-19 pandemic; in addition, interest in training on the part of the universities has declined.

d) Internal Tools

An important complement to regular evaluations and feedback mechanisms is the establishment of internal tools and process descriptions for the quality development and assurance of core processes. The FAQs provided on the Accreditation Council's website and regularly updated translate the requirements of the State Treaty and state ordinances into operational guidelines for applicants. Likewise, the FAQs reflect decisions made by the Accreditation Council and the Executive Board regarding the operational processes of application processing.

To ensure consistent standards in the review of accreditation applications, the Secretariat developed "Guidelines for the Review Process in Program Accreditation" as early as 2019. In 2020, work also began on the creation of a "Program Accreditation Handbook." The aim of the handbook is to systematically document the Accreditation Council's decision-making processes regarding issues that regularly arise in review practice, thereby creating a central repository of knowledge for the Secretariat.

4. Outlook for upcoming implementations

By the end of 2021, two major milestones for quality management will have been achieved. First, with the 16th ELIAS Sprint, the questionnaire tool for applications for program and system accreditation will be ready for use starting in the summer of 2021.

Second, the ENQA review will be conducted in December 2021, subjecting the Accreditation Council Foundation to an external evaluation and thereby providing important impetus for the further development of the accreditation system.

Together with the instruments and processes already initiated, these two milestones complete the quality management framework and create a broad foundation for the implementation and further development of the Akkreditierungsrat Foundation's quality objectives.

Future quality reports will therefore place an even stronger focus on the areas of
c) *Check* and d) *Act*. Consequently, future reviews, evaluations, and measures for implementing the quality objectives through the core operational processes—including both regular and ad hoc reviews—will take center stage.

Reflect again on the GOALS from the mission statement:

Results from the evaluation

This is particularly interesting given the delays that have already occurred in 2021! (See MN's analysis!)