

Quality Report of the Accreditation Council Foundation for the Years 2022/2023

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1 Introduction: Quality Management at the Accreditation Council Foundation

The implementation of quality management at the Accreditation Council Foundation takes place in two areas that, as core operational processes, are highly relevant to the work of the Accreditation Council: On the one hand, through structured evaluations conducted regularly as part of accreditation procedures, as well as through a recurring external evaluation in accordance with Article 15 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation.

On the other hand, 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 a case-by-case basis.

In 2022 and 2023, the focus was particularly on evaluating and implementing the findings from the ENQA review conducted in December 2021. The insights from this external evaluation provide important impetus for the further development of the Accreditation Council, the Secretariat, and the accreditation system as a whole.

In addition, the approach of feedback formats has been further established in recent years by introducing, in addition to the Quality Dialogue (held once a year), smaller event formats in the form of the “Accreditation Council in Dialogue” (held several times a year). These formats, which are aimed at all stakeholders in the accreditation system, were also supplemented by regular consultations with the agencies and participation in the Forum of System-Accredited Universities.

The questionnaire tool regarding applications for program and system accreditation, which was established in the summer of 2021, was also continued. The current survey took place from December 13, 2023, to January 24, 2024.

2 Evaluation of Instruments and Processes

2.1 Structured evaluation of accreditation procedures

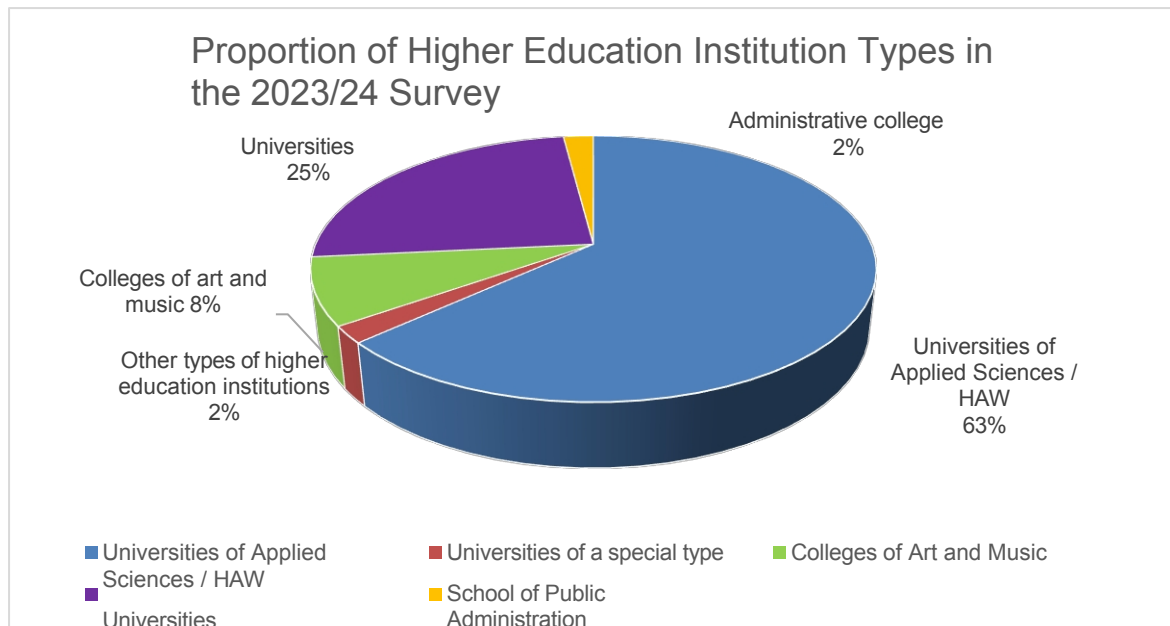
The feedback presented here was collected in anonymized form between December 11, 2023, and January 24, 2024, and documented here by the Secretariat in aggregated form.

2.1.1 Responding institutions and types of applications

A total of 49 higher education institutions participated, with varying numbers of applications; therefore, the feedback in some cases pertains to multiple application processes.

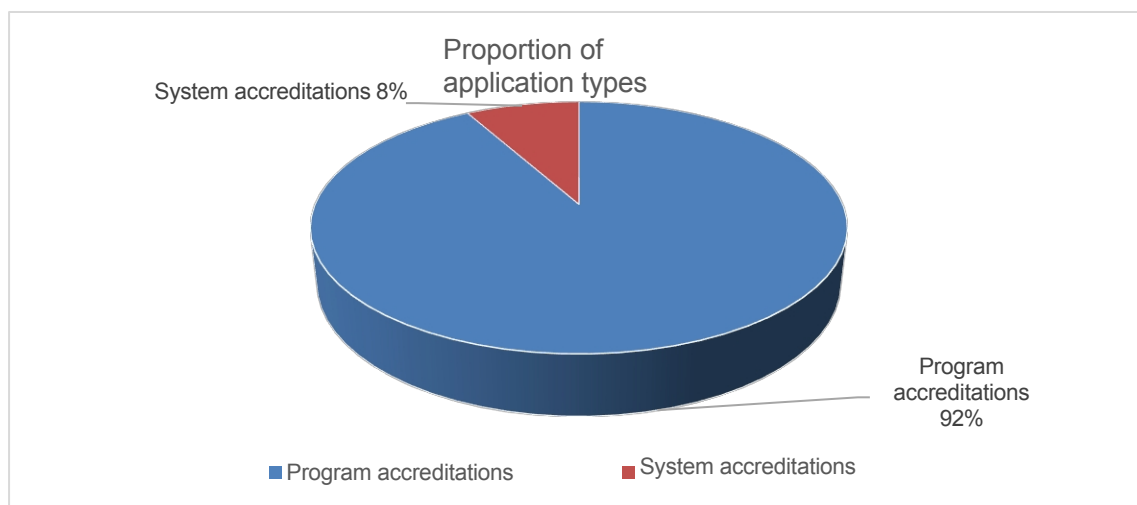
The participating institutions include 12 universities, 31 universities of applied sciences / HAWs, 4 colleges of music and art, as well as 1 college of public administration and 1 institution of a unique type.

Figure 1



The majority of the applications processed by these institutions were for program accreditation (45 applications), while four applications were for system accreditation.

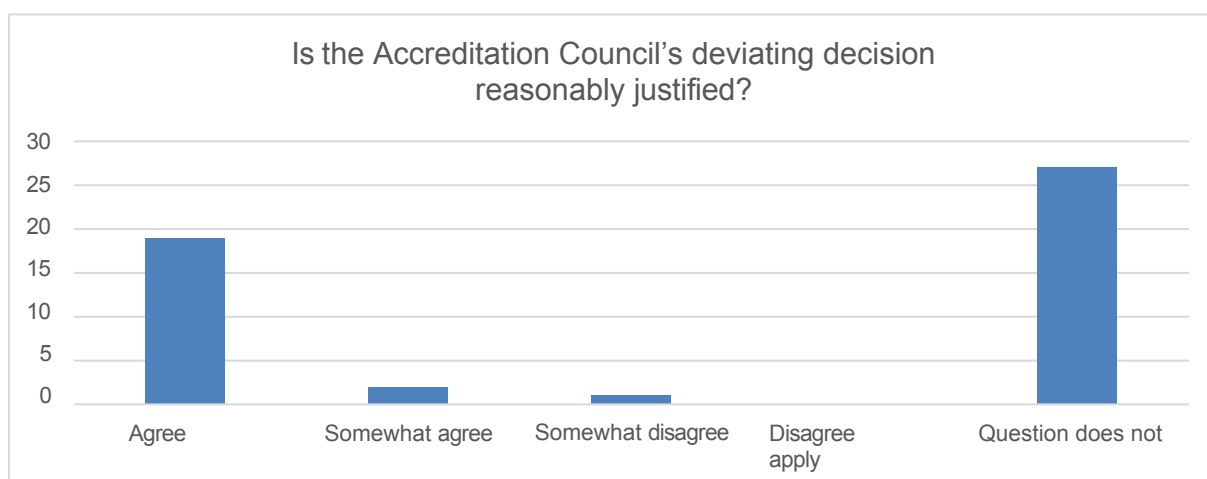
Figure 2



2.1.2 Analysis of the surveys

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.

Figure 3

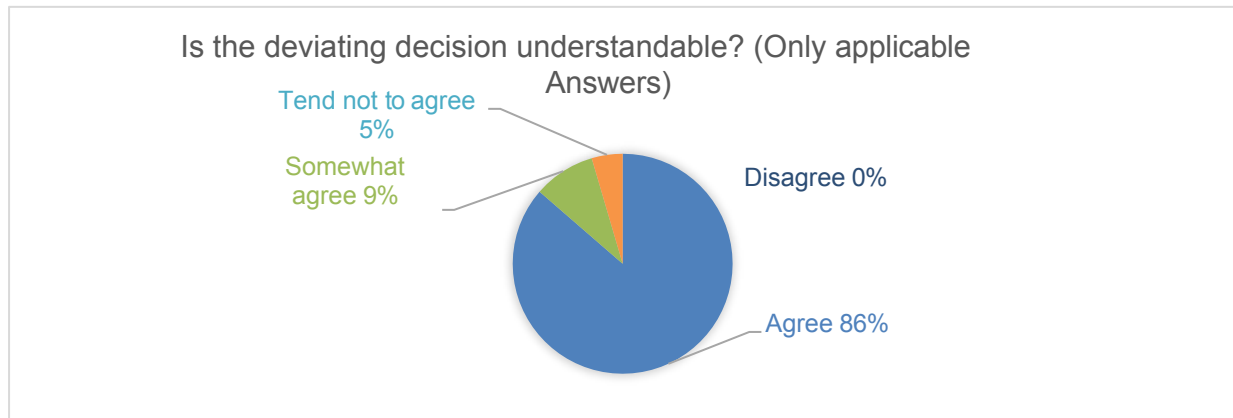


Here, 43% confirm the plausibility of the deviating decision (agree / somewhat agree). 2% of the surveyed universities disagree with the comprehensibility of the

deviating decision (somewhat disagree / disagree). Approximately 55% skipped the question because it did not apply to them.

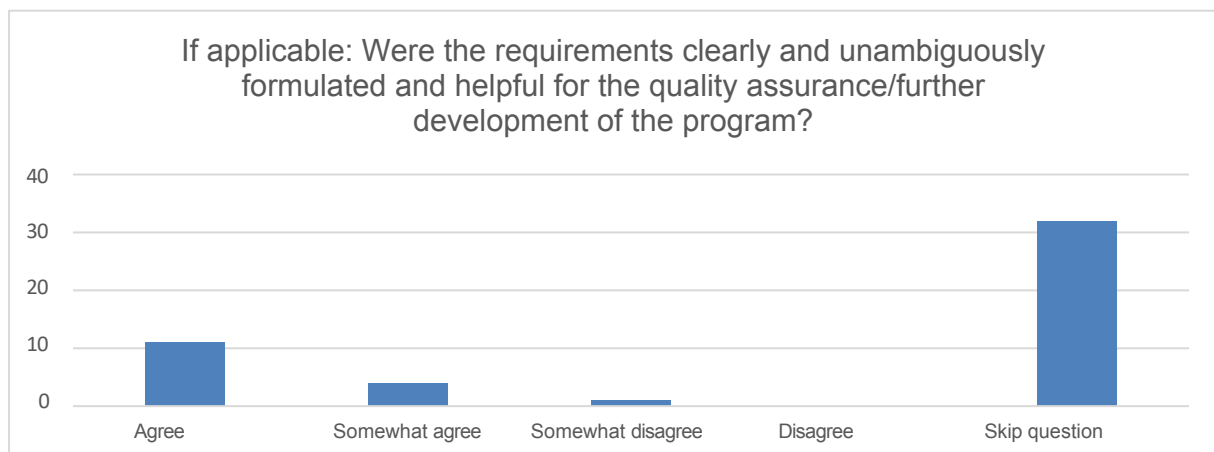
If the participants for whom this question does not apply (since no deviating decision was made) are excluded, agreement on the plausibility of the Accreditation Council's deviating decision stands at 95% (tend not to agree / disagree).

Figure 3a



This indicates predominantly positive feedback regarding the Accreditation Council's non-standard decisions.

Figure 4



The question regarding the clear and unambiguous wording of the requirements and their implications for the degree program or the institution's QMS is optional and delves deeper into the issue of the transparency and plausibility of the requirement for the institution.

Here, 31% of respondents rate the requirements as clearly formulated and helpful for the further development of degree programs or QM systems (agree / somewhat agree).

Only 2% of the surveyed institutions disagree with the clarity and usefulness of the requirement (somewhat disagree / disagree). The vast majority—nearly 67%—skipped the question because it did not apply to them.

This results in positive feedback regarding the wording of conditions imposed by the Accreditation Council. For the majority of respondents, however, the optional question was not relevant.

If we exclude the participants for whom this question does not apply (since no conditions were imposed), agreement with the plausibility of the Accreditation Council's deviating decision stands at 94% (agree / somewhat agree).

Figure 4a

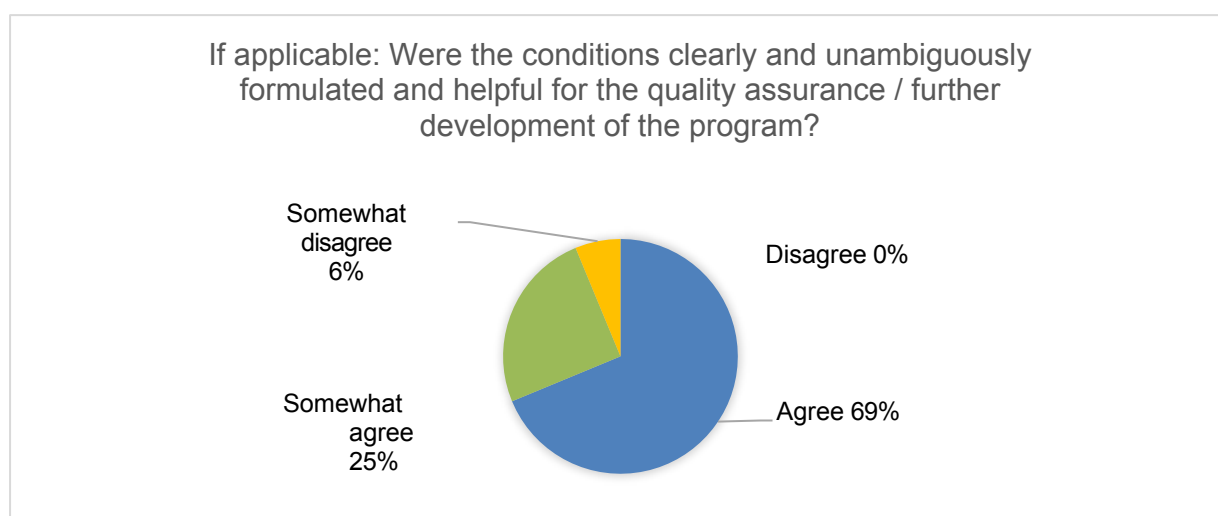
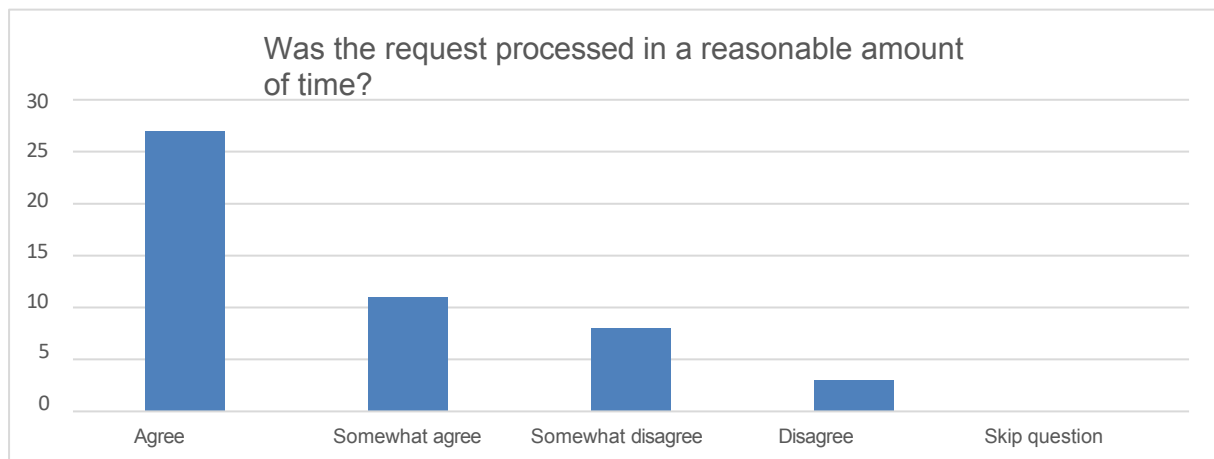


Figure 5

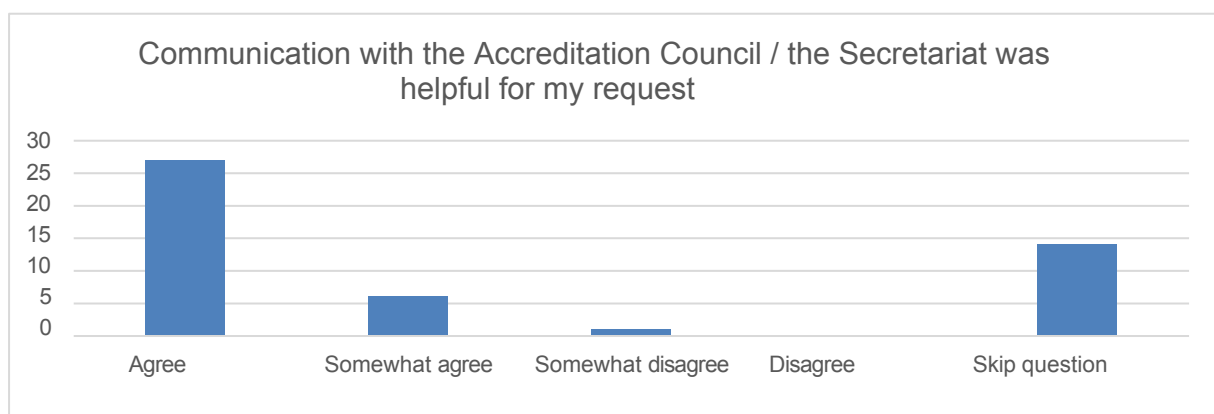


The question of whether applications are processed in a reasonable amount of time pertains to how the Accreditation Council and its secretariat organize the application process.

Here, 78% of respondents confirm that their application was processed within a reasonable timeframe (agree / somewhat agree). Approximately 22% of the surveyed institutions rate the processing time for their application as unreasonable (somewhat disagree / disagree). 0% skipped the question.

This results in overall positive feedback regarding the timely processing of applications, even though the proportion of negative feedback—at just over one-fifth of the applications—stands out clearly.

Figure 6



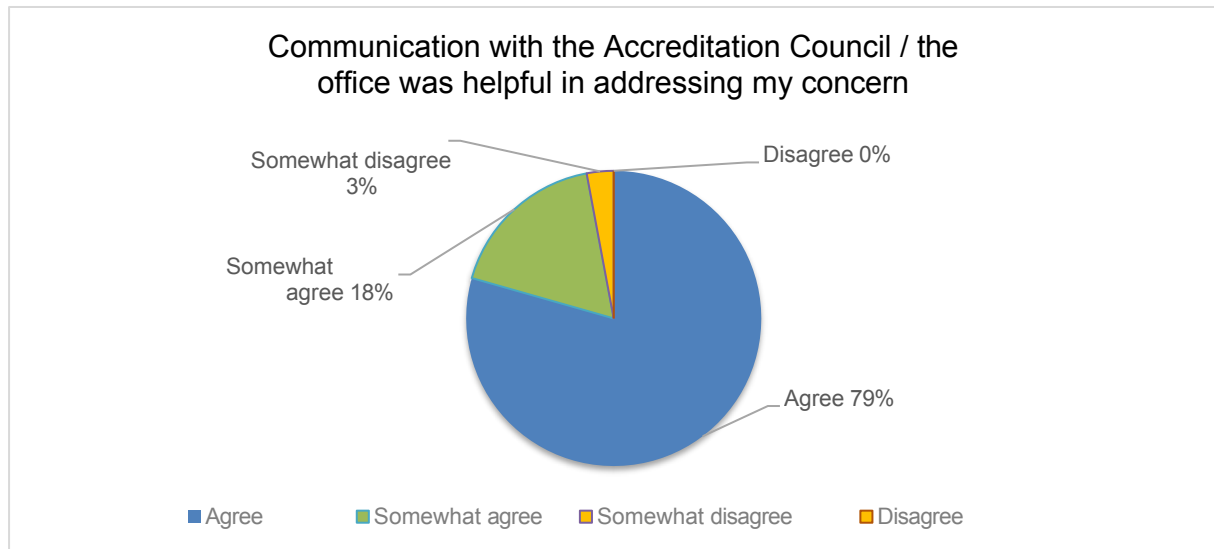
The question regarding communication with the office pertains to the support provided for the application and is an integral part of the office's management of the application process. This communication encompasses the preparation, execution, and follow-up of the application.

In the survey, 69% of the universities surveyed stated that communication with the office was helpful for their application (agree / somewhat agree). Only 2% of the universities surveyed considered the communication to be unhelpful (somewhat disagree / disagree). 29% skipped the question because it did not apply to them.

If participants for whom this question does not apply (because no communication took place) are excluded, the agreement regarding the plausibility of the Accreditation Council's deviating decision stands at 94%.

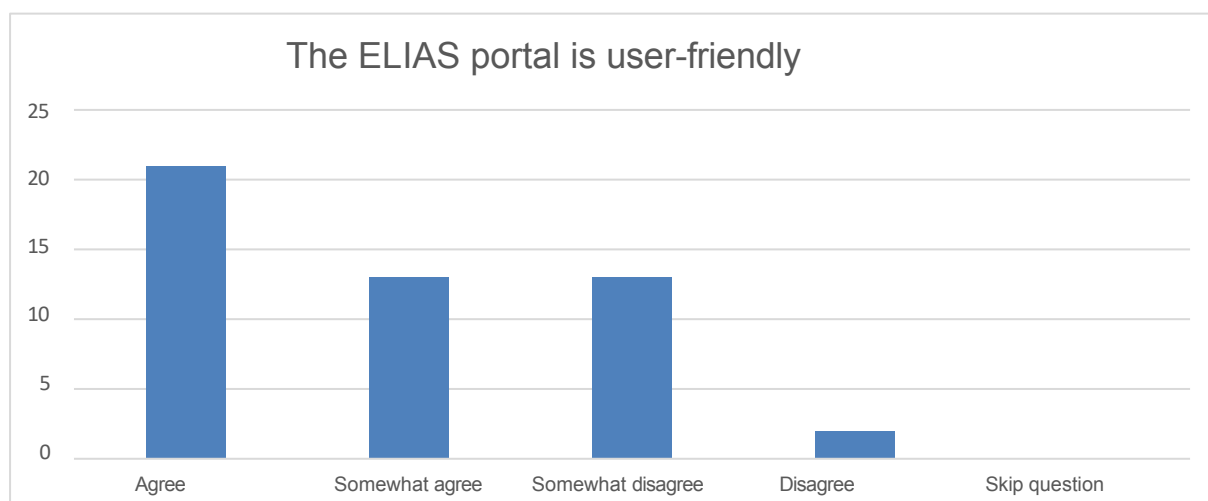
Figure

6a



This indicates very positive feedback regarding the support provided by the office to the applicant universities.

Figure 7



The question regarding the user-friendliness of the electronic application processing system aims to assess the usability of ELIAS. This evaluates the technical implementation of a fast, reliable, and transparent application processing system.

69% of the surveyed universities rate ELIAS as user-friendly (agree / somewhat agree). In contrast, 31% of the surveyed universities found ELIAS to be not user-friendly.

This results in positive feedback on the user-friendliness of ELIAS from slightly more than two-thirds of the surveyed universities.

2.1.3 Interpretation of the results

Compared to the previous survey of higher education institutions, which was presented in the 2022 Quality Report for the year 2021 (Drs. 69/2022), a similarly high participation rate was observed. In 2021, 46 universities participated in the survey conducted from October 12 to 31, 2021; thus, the number of participants has increased slightly (+3).

The responses from the universities showed comparable figures. It is notable, for example, that the assessment regarding the processing times for applications remains at a comparable level: in 2021, 76% of the surveyed universities reported that their application was processed within a reasonable timeframe. About 20% of the universities surveyed rated the processing time for their application as unreasonable. 4% skipped the question because it did not apply to them.

In the current survey, 78% of the surveyed universities reported that their application was processed within a reasonable timeframe, while 22% of the surveyed universities rated the processing time as unreasonable. 0% skipped the question because it did not apply to them.

Figure 8

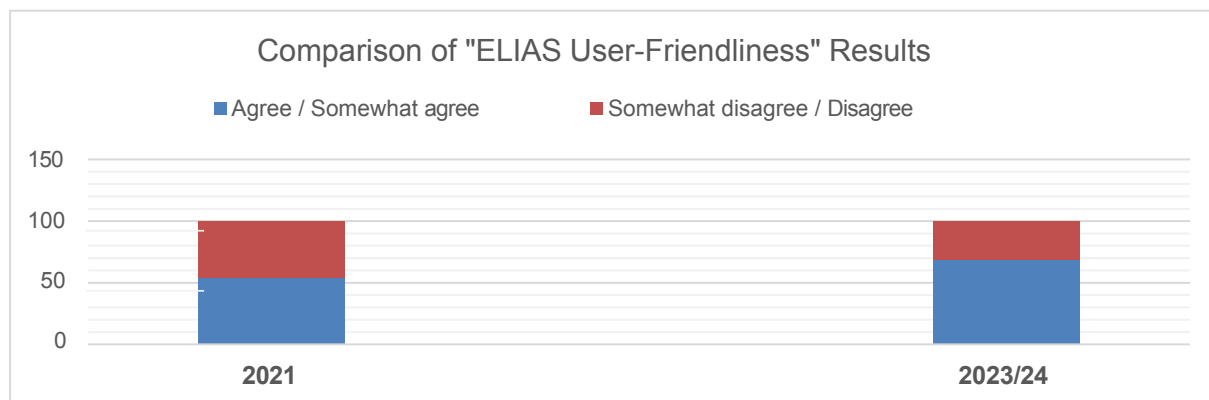


Given the long processing times in 2021 and 2022, it can be concluded that the assessment of processing time remains comparable and is considered appropriate by over three-quarters of respondents.

Also worth noting is the assessment of the user-friendliness of the electronic application processing system ELIAS. In 2021, 54% of the surveyed universities rated ELIAS as user-friendly. In contrast, 46% of the surveyed universities found ELIAS to be not user-friendly.

In the current survey, 69% of the universities surveyed rated ELIAS as user-friendly. In contrast, 31% of the universities surveyed rated ELIAS as not user-friendly.

Figure 9



This results in a significantly more positive assessment of ELIAS's usability.

3 External evaluation pursuant to Article 15 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation

3.1 Results of the ENQA Review

In 2021, the Accreditation Council Foundation conducted an evaluation in accordance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. The goal was to regain full membership in the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)* and to be listed for the first time in the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)*.

The criteria for the external evaluation were based on the ESG standards. Consequently, the review covered not only the standards for internal quality assurance at higher education institutions and for external quality assurance by agencies, but also the internal structures of the agencies themselves. As part of the evaluation, the Accreditation Council Foundation had to demonstrate compliance with all three components. Compliance with the requirements for external quality assurance by agencies, as well as the internal structures of agencies, was assessed directly at the Foundation. Implementation of the standards for internal quality assurance at higher education institutions was assessed indirectly through an examination of the German accreditation criteria.

The Foundation's compliance with the ESG was outlined in the self-evaluation report, which was prepared by the Accreditation Council and submitted to ENQA in September 2021. The site visit took place online in conjunction with the 111th meeting of the Accreditation Council from November 29 to December 2, 2021.

With the decision of the ENQA Board, the Accreditation Council received a list of requirements and suggestions for further developing the Accreditation Council's working methods, which is to be the subject of a separate strategic process.

The review panel noted the following:

“GAC appears—in the view of various stakeholders as well as in aspects of its own language and culture—to be struggling to define a clear identity: Is it still a system-level regulator? A quality assurance agency? A public authority? Where does its responsibility for quality assurance processes begin and end? In particular, discussions with the agencies revealed that, following the 2018 system overhaul, doubts persist regarding the new system design, and GAC's role within it has not yet been firmly established.”

The expert panel also issued a recommendation regarding a reflection process:

“The panel invites GAC to urgently launch a reflection process regarding its role and future strategy, in collaboration with its key stakeholders and constituencies (and beyond the stakeholder representatives already involved in the agency), and to subsequently revisit its mission statement and quality policy accordingly.”

Revising its own self-concept should be the starting point for strategic planning. This is partly accompanied by the panel's recommendation regarding ESG 2.2

“The panel believes that as the central body in the German system, GAC should initiate a reflection process on the ownership of processes and their methodologies in collaboration with its key stakeholders and constituencies (and beyond the stakeholder representatives already involved in the agency). One of the outcomes of the process could be a revision of its mission statement and quality policy.”

Another key focus of the report concerned the planning and implementation of thematic analyses:

GAC is recommended to strategically plan thematic analyses in consultation with external stakeholders as soon as possible, rather than wait for the end of the accreditation cycle. In developing the new plan, GAC should consider the centrality of its role in the system for producing thematic analyses. The strategic plan should thus be more ambitious than is currently the case, both in terms of the number of analyses produced annually and the topics they cover. “

Thematic analyses should therefore be developed as part of an overarching strategy in collaboration with external stakeholders.

3.2 Handling the Results of the ENQA Review

3.2.1 Strategy Process

At its 112th meeting, the Accreditation Council established an internal, temporary preparatory group to develop a strategic plan for the topics on which the Accreditation Council will focus during its new term from 2022 to 2025. The ENQA report provided an important impetus. The preparatory group met for the first time on August 23, 2022, and discussed the necessary steps for implementing a strategic process as well as potential topics.

The Accreditation Council had already initiated key steps upon which a strategic process could be built. Thus, central elements of a vision and a mission exist through the legal mandate of the State Treaty, as well as through the quality objectives in the mission statement. With the preparation, implementation, and results of the ENQA review, further aspects of a SWOT analysis and the identification of key objectives in the context of ESG have been carried out and documented.

The strategy process was facilitated by a team of external facilitators and took place in the form of a preparatory meeting and two in-person workshops.

The first workshop was focused on establishing a common framework. Participants worked together on key questions prepared by the strategy working group, which served as a guide for the discussions. The goal was to ensure that all participants shared a common starting point while also developing follow-up questions to identify topics requiring further clarification.

The workshop began with a few fundamental questions:

- What is our purpose? Who do we serve? What are our core responsibilities?
What are the priorities?

In the plenary session, the following follow-up questions were also collectively identified for in-depth discussion:

- What is our legitimate scope of action, and where are our limits?
- What regulations are needed, and what do we need to effectively fulfill the tasks defined in the group work?
- Who is relevant for these tasks in this context?
- What perspectives need to be taken into account?
- Who are the other stakeholders? Are there parallel processes (interfaces)?

It became clear that these questions would need to be answered for each individual task area. In particular, the following would need to be clarified:

- Do the listed tasks provide a complete picture?
- Are there areas of tension that need to be described?
- Is this how everyone on the Supervisory Board sees it?
- Is it forward-looking?

From the wide range of tasks, the secretariat developed and presented a proposed structure during the workshop. This proposal was accepted and could thus be used as the basis for further work. Four working groups were subsequently formed:

- Group: Transparency and Dialogue
- Group: Accreditation (formerly Monitoring and Quality Development)
- Group: (International) Cooperation with Stakeholders
- Group: Helping to Shape the Further Development of the Accreditation System

In addition to the structured group work, the participants already began developing initial ideas for a vision for the committee, which (in addition to the mission statement) was intended to positively describe the tasks of the AR.

a) Results of the group work from the first workshop:

Transparency and Dialogue

- The working group notes that the dialogue formats (Quality Dialogue and Accreditation Council in Dialogue) are already well-established and should be continued in their current form.
- For the future, it would be desirable to establish a common understanding of criteria. To this end, transparency in procedures and decision-making—both within the Accreditation Council and regarding the entire accreditation process—is of central importance.
- An analysis of past decision-making practices (possibly by external scholars) could be helpful in this regard. Furthermore, to enable this transparency, target-group-specific dialogue formats should be utilized.

Group: Accreditation (formerly Control and Quality Development)

- The working group chose the title “Accreditation” because it appropriately combines the two areas of control and quality development. Thus, accreditation is intended to enforce minimum standards and criteria through the awarding of seals while simultaneously promoting quality development.
- In the working group’s view, the individual tasks of this area have been fully compiled in the plenary session. One remaining point of contention is the requirement for the “control” of degree programs and quality management systems, as well as alternative procedures, by the Accreditation Council—a view not shared by all participants, as was also evident in the plenary discussion.
- Among the challenges is the need to define and take into account parallel processes to accreditation (such as universities in the process of being established / institutional accreditations).
- Looking ahead, it would be desirable for the awarding of the seal to build trust among students and for universities to confidently use it as a marketing tool to attract prospective students.
- Another goal for the future should be to reduce the perception of the “black box” through transparency and more information. There is already a great deal of transparent information available (decisions and justifications can be viewed in ELIAS; FAQs and decisions are on the homepage); perhaps awareness of these databases also needs to be broadened.
- To increase acceptance of the system, it would also be beneficial to discuss selected criteria in dialogue formats.

Group: (International) Collaboration with Stakeholders

- The working group identified numerous stakeholders: higher education institutions (specifically: universities, universities of applied sciences, private higher education institutions, dual higher education institutions, vocational academies, administrative colleges, church-affiliated higher education institutions); agencies; evaluators; students; federal states; ENQA/EQAR; BIBB; the Science Council; the German Rectors' Conference; foreign agencies within the EHEA and outside the EHEA. Ultimately, however, the list is not exhaustive and is not intended to be so.

At the same time, the Accreditation Council itself is already a collaboration involving a large portion of the stakeholders mentioned above. To define tasks in this area, the following questions must be clarified:

- Which stakeholders are relevant to the Accreditation Council through the existing status groups, and how do these stakeholders participate in the accreditation process—for example, through legal requirements or subject-area standards?
- Which stakeholders are relevant to the Accreditation Council?
- How does participation in the further development of the ESG take place?
- How can the Accreditation Council participate in European or international projects and initiatives—within the scope of its legal authority?
- How can the international activities of stakeholders be integrated into this?

Group: Helping to Shape the Further Development of the Accreditation System

- From the working group's perspective, the tasks in this area are fully summarized; only the aspect of the international comparison of accreditation systems emerged from the discussion.
- The legal framework is well established, as are its limits. It is telling that there are no substantive restrictions on participation in the further development of the accreditation system, but there are restrictions on its implementation. The State Treaty provides for the Accreditation Council to make proposals for further development, but implementation is the responsibility of the federal states.

b) Results of the Second Workshop

Three objectives were defined for the second workshop:

1. Onboarding members who have not yet participated
2. Clarification of open questions regarding areas of responsibility
3. Positive wording for the content

In the second workshop, the first two points were addressed and explored in greater depth using the *fishbowl* method. The focus was on examining in greater detail the tension between control and

dialogue, or the role of a “critical friend”—which had become apparent in the Accreditation Group during the first workshop—was considered a central focus. Therefore, the areas of action related to the remaining three topics (*helping to shape the further development of the accreditation system, transparency and dialogue, and (international) cooperation with stakeholders*) were initially set aside to make room for the essential question of the Accreditation Council’s self-definition and its members’ understanding of their roles.

The discussion centered on the tension between oversight and dialogue within the context of accreditation. During the workshop, it became clear that there is a fundamental understanding of the oversight function. The states’ mandate for quality assurance as the final authority encompasses not only the task of ensuring the comparability of degree programs and quality management systems, but also the role of providing guidance and fostering trust and reliability in degree programs and higher education credentials. These tasks are aimed at students, employees, and employers.

The discussion also addressed the issue of oversight at various levels, including the secretariat, agencies, degree programs, and higher education systems. Participants defined the Council’s oversight function as the verification of minimum standards, which simultaneously establish guidelines within which the development of degree programs and quality systems can take place. Ultimately, the Accreditation Council’s final decision results in a seal of quality. Vision: The Accreditation Council’s seal of quality is understood as an accolade and used to promote a degree program or a higher education institution.

However, the second workshop also made it clear that dialogue and the creation of quality initiatives are viewed as equally important and compatible with the oversight mandate. Accreditation—that is, the expert opinion in the form of the accreditation report and the decision of the Accreditation Council—should not only ensure compliance with minimum standards but also provide quality-enhancing impetus. The goal is for the institution to proactively further develop its degree programs and quality management systems.

To this end, the Accreditation Council promotes the further development, translation, and clarity of the criteria for stakeholders (agencies, higher education institutions, students, and the professional community) and facilitates dialogue formats for this purpose. The Accreditation Council contributes to the shaping of the European Higher Education Area through the active implementation of the legal framework for accreditation.

The topics discussed regarding control versus dialogue/quality development in accreditation can be summarized as follows:

- Definition of the role of the Accreditation Council and the individual stakeholder groups:

- Control within the framework of reliable parameters; a task of the Council across all status groups;
- Ensuring standards as the primary task;
- Control not as a mere checklist exercise, but as an ongoing process;
- Different interpretations of the term “control” – “critical friends” as an alternative;
- The Council’s responsibility to explain the criteria and establish a common understanding of them;
- Control and dialogue as complementary rather than opposing forces.

Attention was also focused on the members’ understanding of their roles on the Accreditation Council. It became clear that there is consensus that members bring the perspective of their respective groups to bear in carrying out the Accreditation Council’s tasks and act as an interface to their stakeholder group. At the same time, however, it also became apparent that incorporating one’s disciplinary and cultural background—particularly for university faculty—also involves ambivalence, as disciplinary and content-related issues in accreditation reports require a more in-depth disciplinary engagement.

Thus, a fundamental question remains regarding the level of scrutiny with which the Accreditation Council and its members (including the secretariat) handle the accreditation procedures for program and system accreditations. This point should be addressed in greater detail, particularly for the onboarding of new members who also serve as rapporteurs. This question also applies to alternative procedures, even though the Accreditation Council assumes a somewhat different role in these procedures.

For accreditation procedures, consideration could be given to conducting more random sampling rather than full-scale reviews, taking into account the accreditation history of degree programs and institutions.

Furthermore, as part of the development of a mission statement, the objectives for oversight and those for dialogue could be elaborated and integrated with one another. This also applies to the defined areas of action: *helping to shape the further development of the accreditation system, transparency and dialogue, and (international) cooperation with stakeholders*. During the discussion, workshop participants graphically presented the findings on the topic of “Control vs. Dialogue” in the context of the Accreditation Council’s self-image and the role of the Accreditation Council on flipcharts. These can be found in the slides below as well as in the photo documentation of the second workshop (see Appendix 01).

Conclusion and Further Agenda

At the 119th meeting of the Accreditation Council, the results of the two strategy workshops were discussed and the further agenda was established. A working group is to develop a *mission* that will lead to the achievement of the existing mission statement—in the role of a vision.

On the one hand, this provides an opportunity to discuss and define the identified duality of control and dialogue. On the other hand, the other areas of action—*further development of the accreditation system, transparency and dialogue, and (international) cooperation with stakeholders*—should be addressed and defined in terms of objectives and concrete implementation formats.

3.2.2 Thematic Analyses

Several approaches to thematic analyses have already been implemented:

Master's Thesis on Academic Success

A thematic analysis on the topic of academic success was prepared as part of the master's thesis of a staff member at the office and is expected to be published in the first half of 2024.

Data analysis

The Office has developed a new tool for analyzing data from accredited degree programs in ELIAS under the label AR-DatenAnalyse (ARDA). The analysis is based primarily on information that is already freely accessible via the public view. It is semi-automated, meaning it can be easily expanded to include additional degree programs or sufficiently definable groups of degree programs as needed with minimal effort. A large number of such analyses have already been published on the website of the Accreditation Council Foundation and are thus available to the general public. (<https://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/de/aktuelles-und-veroeffentlichungen/ar-daten-analyse/ar-datenanalyse>)

The following analyses can be found there (not on the Accreditation Council Foundation's homepage):

Thematic Analyses

Regarding the evaluation "Conditions in Program Accreditation under New Legislation – Thematic Analysis":
[https://rpubs.com/MNE/aufli ta](https://rpubs.com/MNE/aufli_ta)

Evaluations by subject group

For the evaluation of degree programs in the field of agricultural and forestry sciences: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/agrar>

For the evaluation of degree programs in the field of humanities and social sciences: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/gesell>

For the evaluation of degree programs in the field of engineering: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/ing>

For an evaluation of degree programs in the fields of art, music, and design: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/kunst>

For the evaluation of degree programs in mathematics and natural sciences: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/matnat>

For an evaluation of degree programs in the fields of medicine and health sciences: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/med>

For an evaluation of degree programs in the field of public administration: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/verw>

For an evaluation of degree programs in the field of language and cultural studies: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/sprach>

For an evaluation of degree programs in the fields of economics and law: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/wirt>

Further evaluations

For an evaluation of degree programs in the field of nursing: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/pflege>

For an evaluation of midwifery programs: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/heb>

For an evaluation of psychology degree programs: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/psycho>

To view the summary: <https://rpubs.com/MNE/all>

Survey on the preparation of joint thematic analyses by agencies and the Accreditation Council

At its 116th meeting, the Accreditation Council discussed with the agencies a proposal for a joint analysis by the agencies and the Accreditation Council, which could serve to identify needs and objectives for future thematic analyses.

The Accreditation Council, together with the agencies, had decided to establish a working group to draft a proposal for such a survey. The working group consisted of Dr. Hinsken from evalag and Dr. Petersen from AQ Austria, as well as Dr. Neuhaus and Dr. Grünes from the Foundation's office.

The working group developed a proposal to first conduct surveys within the Accreditation Council and among the committees of the individual agencies. The survey results will be evaluated by the Secretariat of the Accreditation Council Foundation, broken down by status groups.

The core topic proposed is the acceptance of the accreditation system under the new legislation, which is to be examined in greater detail using the following guiding questions: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current accreditation system in Germany?

Strengths and weaknesses can be identified at various levels and for different stakeholder groups. These include the program level (faculty / students / prospective students); the institutional level, the federal states, and the system-wide level (the German higher education system).

The aim of the survey is to identify aspects of the accreditation system that represent a strength or weakness for the various stakeholder groups and/or have potential for improvement, in order to identify areas for action. In a subsequent step, proposals for joint thematic analyses by the Accreditation Council and the agencies will be developed based on the results.

The proposal was approved at the 119th meeting of the Accreditation Council and is to be conducted in the first half of 2024 using an online tool (e.g., LimeSurvey).

4 Feedback formats

4.1 Quality Dialogue

Quality Dialogue 2022 – Teacher Education

On June 8, 2022, the third edition of the “Quality Dialogue” took place, this time focusing on teacher education programs. Approximately 140 participants discussed various topics from the guide [“Promoting Quality Development through Accreditation – A Focus on Teacher Education Programs”](#) with the presenters and in two parallel panel sessions.

Teacher-training programs are subject to specific requirements regarding their design, implementation, and quality assurance, which may vary by state and, in some cases, by institution. In addition, they are mostly combined degree programs comprising various sub-programs, as, in accordance with the agreements of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, students must study two subjects and educational sciences. Being able to adequately reflect and evaluate all of this in accreditation procedures presents a particular challenge.

An internal working group of the Accreditation Council has addressed the topic at various levels and developed a guide titled “Promoting Quality Development through Accreditation – A Focus on Teacher Education Programs.” The guide will be presented and discussed as part of the Quality Dialogue. Feedback from participants will be incorporated into the Accreditation Council's final resolution.

Quality Dialogue 2023 – “Diversity at Universities – Challenges and Opportunities for Teaching”

On June 26, 2023, the “Quality Dialogue” entered its fourth round. This time, the Accreditation Council focused on the topic “Diversity at Universities – Challenges and Opportunities for Teaching.” With approximately 240 participants, the event was very well received.

With the increasing diversity of students and faculty at universities, this issue is also gaining importance for the quality assurance of degree programs in Germany. Key questions include how degree programs can be designed to meet the needs of a wide variety of students in different life situations, and how teaching can contribute to creating a diverse and inclusive academic environment.

To discuss this, the Accreditation Council hosted the 2023 Quality Dialogue, which brought together various stakeholders: university representatives, faculty members, students, representatives and representatives from the professional field as well as from

accreditation agencies, members of the Accreditation Council, and other interested parties discussed the significance of diversity for the quality development of degree programs and accreditation in Germany. The Accreditation Council had established an internal working group to prepare this event. Together, they explored why diversity plays an important role in high-quality teaching at universities.

The event, which was accompanied by graphic recording, also provided a space for the exchange of experiences and examples of best practices.

4.2 The Accreditation Council in Dialogue

Since 2021, several online events under the “The Accreditation Council in Dialogue” format have taken place. Unlike the Quality Dialogue, these events are shorter in duration and focus on a narrower range of topics.

- The second edition of the “Accreditation Council in Dialogue” series, which took place on February 17, 2022, on the “Topic of the Day: The Importance of Learning Outcomes for the Accreditation of Degree Programs,” attracted around 250 participants, far exceeding expectations.
- The third edition of the “Accreditation Council in Dialogue” series, which took place on May 5, 2022, on the “Topic of the Day: System Accreditation,” once again drew significant interest with approximately 230 participants. Representatives of the Council, the Secretariat, the agencies, and other keynote speakers were able to engage with participants not only on specific questions arising from accreditation practice but also on topics concerning the handling of diversity and complexity or the innovation potential of system accreditation as a whole.
- On November 21, 2022, the fourth edition of the “Accreditation Council in Dialogue” series took place, focusing on the “Topic of the Day: The Role and Self-Conception of Review Bodies.” Moderated by Dr. Verena Kloeters (Commercial Director of the AQAS e.V. agency, representative of the agencies on the Accreditation Council), representatives of the Council, the Secretariat, the agencies, and other guests engaged in a discussion with the approximately 170 participants regarding the various expectations for the work of review panels, as well as what constitutes a good peer review process—including from the perspective of the reviewers.
- On October 19, 2023, the fifth edition of the “Accreditation Council in Dialogue” series took place on the “Topic of the Day: Diversity of QM Systems – What Leeway Do Universities Have?” The Model Statute defines, on the one hand, the

key requirements for a functional quality management system, while also emphasizing that the specific design of QM systems is left to the discretion of individual institutions, depending on their respective circumstances. The range of over 50 system accreditation procedures successfully completed under the new legislation was discussed during the event through the presentation of QM models from several universities. In the subsequent panel discussion, the approximately 300 participants discussed the tension between non-negotiable framework conditions on the one hand and deliberately created, innovation-promoting design freedoms on the other.

4.3 Formats for exchange between agencies and the Accreditation Council¹

The joint meeting of the Accreditation Council and the agencies held at the beginning of each year provides an opportunity for dialogue with representatives of the accreditation agencies from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. In addition, regular consultations take place between the executive boards of the agencies and the Accreditation Council's Executive Board (annual "Frankfurt Roundtable" since 2021). Furthermore, regular exchange meetings at the staff level between the agencies and the Secretariat have been established.

4.4 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 regular exchange and feedback even independently of system accreditation procedures

4.5 FAQ

An important complement to regular evaluations and feedback formats 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 translate decisions of the Accreditation Council and the Executive Board into operational

¹ The Accreditation Council is also an agency; however, the aforementioned terminology, which has evolved over time, has proven effective and will therefore continue to be used for the time being.

Processes for handling applications. The FAQs are regularly reviewed, supplemented, or expanded. In 2022 and 2023, 22 FAQs were revised or newly developed.

4.6 ELIAS Training and Consultation Sessions

In 2023, the ELIAS database team conducted training sessions and consultation meetings with sixteen universities, during which the functionalities and processes were explained and specific situations at universities (such as cooperative degree programs with other universities) were addressed.

5 Conclusion and Outlook

With the strategic process that has been initiated—including the further development of the Accreditation Council’s self-understanding and the implementation of its tasks—as well as the initial steps taken toward thematic analyses, the Accreditation Council has begun to analyze and implement the results of the ENQA review.

These measures are supported by the results of the structured evaluations conducted following accreditation procedures. The most recent survey continues the generally positive assessment of the applicant institution from the last survey.

It is also clear that the various feedback formats regularly organized by the Accreditation Council and aimed at all stakeholders in the accreditation system are well-established and widely utilized. In particular, the high level of participation in the “*Quality Dialogue*” and “*Accreditation Council in Dialogue*” formats demonstrates a high degree of acceptance and strong demand for the Accreditation Council’s dialogue initiatives.