Agentur für Qualitätssicherung und Akkreditierung Austria
Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria – AQ Austria

CEENQA Bi-Monthly Meeting
19. January 2022

Dr. Kristina Svensson
Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria
Content

Higher Education in Austria

External Quality Assurance in Austria & AQ Austria

AQ Austria: principles, set up, structure, scope of tasks

AQ Austria: procedures
Higher Education in Austria
Higher Education in Austria

- 22 Public Universities; 268,420 students in 2021
- 14 University Colleges for Teacher Training; 16,526 students in 2021
- 16 Private Universities; 13,963 students in 2021
- 21 Universities of Applied Sciences; 2021: 58,735 students

For more information see
BMBWF uni: data Higher Education statistics
BMBWF Higher Education system
External Quality Assurance in Austria & AQ Austria
External Quality Assurance until 2012

Different agencies & different approaches

- **Fachhochschul-Council (FHR):** Accreditation and supervision of the Universities of Applied Sciences since 1993

- **Accreditation Council (ÖAR):** Accreditation and supervision of Private Universities since 1999

- **Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA):** Public Universities could voluntarily get Quality Audits since 2004

**2012 AQ Austria is founded** on the basis of merger of the three predecessor organisations, as a result of a legal reform.
Major reform in 2012: The HS-QSG

Law on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz HS-QSG):

- **AQ Austria**: established as part of a reorganisation as an independent institution and legal entity under public law responsible for external QA in the entire Austrian Higher Education sector.

- **Principles and procedures**: addressing all Higher education institutions except Teacher training colleges

- **Notification** of Cross-Border Degree Programmes
AQ Austria: principles & setup, structure, scope of tasks
AQ Austria: principles & setup

Core principles in accordance with ESG:

- **Legal foundation**: organisational setup and type of procedures defined but not standards and criteria

- **Independence**: in particular as regards standards, procedures and decisions

- **Stakeholder Involvement**: within the governance of AQ Austria

- **European / International activity**: international accreditations, ERASMUS+ projects, member of CEENQA, ENQA, EQAR, BFUG, etc., and foreign experts in the Board of AQ Austria as well as within the peer-review procedures
AQ Austria: structure

General Meeting (GM)
14 members

Appeals Committee
3 + 2 members

Board
14 members

AQ Austria Secretariat

UNIKO (1)
FHK (1)
ÖPUK (1)
ÖH (1)
RÖPH (1)
BWSF (2)
ÖH (2)
UNIKO (2)
FHK (2)
ÖPUK (2)
BMBWF (2)

8 HE/QA-Experts*
2 Students*
4 Practitioners*

*At least half of the members come from abroad

BWSF – Advisory Council for Economic and Social Affairs
BMBWF – Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research
ÖH – Austrian National Union of Students
RÖPH – Rectors Conference of Austrian University Colleges of Teacher Education
UNIKO – Public Universities Austria
FHK – Austrian Association of Universities of Applied Sciences
ÖPUK – Austrian Private Universities’ Conference

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AQ Austria: scope of tasks

- **Higher education institutions** are autonomous, main responsibility for quality
- **External quality assurance** is necessity, added value & aims at quality development
- **Cooperation = communication & reliability**

**Tasks:**
- development and implementation of external quality assurance procedures
- audit and accreditation procedures, according to national and international standards
- supervision of accredited HEI and degree programmes regarding accreditation requirements
- studies and system analyses as well as information, advice and consultancy
- international cooperation and notification of cross-border degree programmes
AQ Austria: procedures
AQ Austria: procedures *in general*

**Accreditation**
- *ex-ante*
- national
- international
- Programme
- Institutional
  - initial accreditation
  - re-accreditation
- joint degrees
- European approach

**Audit**
- audit of the internal quality management
  - public universities
  - universities of applied sciences
  - university colleges of teacher education

**Notification**
- notification of foreign degree programmes from EHEA countries
- for operation in Austria

**Further voluntary procedures**
- evaluation: programmes & HEIs
- accreditation of continuing education programmes
- system and degree programme accreditation in Germany
- institutional accreditation in Switzerland
- programme accreditation in EHEA countries
- audits of HEIs in EHEA countries
- consulting to HEIs

*See also: Definitions of Accreditation and Audit*
AQ Austria: procedures & type of HEI

Accreditation of HEI
- **Private Higher Education Institutions**
- **Universities of Applied Sciences**
- **Foreign HEIs**
  - Once only for all types and valid for 6 years

Accreditation of programmes
- **Private Higher Education Institutions**
  - Limited for the duration of institutional accreditation
- **Universities of Applied Sciences**
  - Unlimited
- **Public Universities**:
  - Only voluntary accreditation, valid for 6 years
- **Foreign HEIs**
  - Valid for 6 years

Re-Accreditation of HEI
- **Private Higher Education Institutions**
  - Valid for 6-12 years
- **Universities of Applied Sciences**:
  - After being accredited for 6 years switch to audit scheme
- **Foreign HEIs**
  - Valid for 6 years

Audits
- **Universities of Applied Sciences**
- **Public Universities**
- **Foreign HEIs**
  - For all types valid for 7 years
Accreditation

**Basic assumptions**

→ Does the HEI meet externally set, quantitative & qualitative standards?
→ Experts in peer-reviews as *critical friends*
→ Since 2021: conditions for initial accreditation possible
→ In every case: focus on quality assurance & quality development

→ Different areas of focus: [Institutional Accreditation](#) & [Programme Accreditation](#)

**Legal framework**

- Official procedures based on Administrative Law
- Decision Period 9 months
- Obligation to publish results
- Control mechanisms in certain cases

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**Applying Education Institution**

- AQ Austria secretariat
  - Assignment of project manager

- Project manager
  - Formal check and review,
  - Possibility to adapt the application

- Peer-Review panel
  - Desk review, site visit,
  - Writing the peer-review report

- Board of AQ Austria
  - Decision
Audit

• Review of the institutional quality management system, its organisation and performance in core areas of the HEI, see areas of assessment
• HEI have free choice of Agency

Aims
✓ Certification of the internal QM-System
✓ Development of the internal QM-System

Procedure
✓ Peer-Review
✓ min. 4 experts, (1 student)
✓ 1 site-visit

Foundation
HS-QSG §22
Guideline of AQ Austria
defines
Assessment areas
operationalises

Review
✓ 5 interconnected Standards
✓ Findings, assessments, recommendations
Notification of foreign degree programmes

- **Programmes are notified** *(not recognized!)* if the offering HEI is recognized in the home country.
- If the programme is offered by collaborating with an Austrian educational institution the Austrian partner has to be evaluated.
- Criteria refer to whether the partner guarantees high quality provision of those parts of the programme he conducts. The programme as such is not reviewed.

**Legal framework and procedures:**
- §27 HS-QSG: AQ Austria as reporting office, keeps a register of reporting procedures; task with official character.
- §27a EU/EEA Provider: Desktop procedure; low reporting effort; Confidence principle: European quality assurance.
- §27b non-EU/EEA: Peer-review procedure; Assessment criteria based on accreditation; Assessment mostly at Austrian cooperation partners.
Thank you!

For further questions, suggestions, interaction –

kristina.svensson@aq.ac.at or LinkedIn
Further Information
AQ Austria: Secretariat
AQ Austria: definitions

**Accreditation** - is legally defined as a formal and transparent quality review procedure, based on defined criteria & standards, leading to state recognition of a higher education institution and/or of study programme

→ Universities of Applied Sciences, Private HEIs (Private Universities and Private University Colleges)

**Audit & Certification** - Certification is legally defined as the formal certificate documenting the conformity of an educational institution's quality management system with pre-defined criteria and standards involves reviewing and certifying a higher education institution’s internal quality management system as well as providing support in continued development of that system

→ applies to all types of HEIs
Institutional Accreditation, areas of assessment

Areas of assessment for institutional accreditation

- objectives and profile
- development planning
- degree programmes and teaching
- (applied) research and development
- organisation of the higher education institution and its activities
- funding and resources
- national and international cooperations
- quality management system
Programme Accreditation, areas of assessment

Areas of assessment for programme accreditation

- degree programme and its management
- staff
- quality assurance
- funding and infrastructure
- applied research and development
- national and international cooperation
Audit, areas of assessment

**Areas of assessment for programme accreditation**

- quality strategy and its integration into the management of the HEI
- quality assurance structures and procedures in the areas of degree programmes and teaching, (applied) research or advancement of the arts, organisation and administration and staff
- integration of internationalisation and societal objectives into the QM system
- information systems and involvement of stakeholder groups
- quality assurance structures and procedures for certificate programmes for further education offered by providers of University of Applied Sciences