



Agentur für
Qualitätssicherung
und Akkreditierung
Austria

Decree on Accreditation of Universities of Applied Sciences

Adopted in the 27th meeting of the AQ Austria Board of 28 May 2015

Pursuant to section 23 para. 5 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz, HS-QSG), Federal Law Gazette I no. 74/2011 as ammended, the Board of the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria issues the following Decree:

Decree on Accreditation of Universities of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschul-Akkreditierungsverordnung, FH-AkkVO)

PART 1

Chapter 1

Subject and scope

§ 1. This Decree shall govern the procedure, the assessment areas and the criteria for institutional accreditation of universities of applied sciences, for the extension of institutional accreditation and the accreditation of university of applied sciences degree programmes.

Definitions

§ 2. The following definitions shall apply to the terms used in this Decree:

1. Institutional accreditation can either be an initial accreditation or an extension of accreditation:
 - a. Initial accreditation:
Initial accreditation is an institutional ex-ante accreditation involving the accreditation of the individual university of applied sciences degree programmes. Accreditation is granted upon verification that the criteria for the assessment areas specified in section 13 are met. The evaluation procedure in the course of initial accreditation addresses aspects both at institutional level and at the level of the individual university of applied sciences degree programmes.
 - b. Extension of accreditation (re-accreditation):
The prerequisites for an extension of institutional accreditation are the same as for initial accreditation; such extension covers also the university of applied sciences degree programmes accredited up to this date. The evaluation procedure for re-accreditation comprises the same assessment areas as for initial accreditation.
2. Programme accreditation: Each university of applied sciences degree programme to be established at a university of applied sciences shall be subject to ex-ante programme accreditation. Accreditation is granted upon verification that the criteria for the assessment areas specified in section 16 are met. New university of applied sciences degree programmes can also be accredited in the course of a procedure extending the institutional accreditation.

Chapter 2

Application for accreditation

§ 3. (1) An application for accreditation concerns either

1. accreditation as a university of applied sciences; or
2. accreditation as a university of applied sciences degree programme; or
3. the extension of accreditation.

(2) The application shall be submitted to the Board of the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (hereinafter referred to as Board).

(3) The application shall indicate the applying legal entity and be signed by its legal representative. If the applicant institution is a legal entity governed by private law, a recent extract from the company register or the register of associations shall be enclosed in the case of initial accreditation.

(4) The application shall be submitted in writing and electronically to the Management Office of the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (hereinafter referred to as Management Office).

(5) The application shall contain all information and documents required to verify that the statutory prerequisites for accreditation are met. As a minimum, it shall contain information with respect to the assessment areas specified in section 13 and/or section 16.

(6) Pursuant to section 23 para. 7 and section 26 para. 1 no. 1 HS-QSG, the application for the extension of accreditation shall be submitted no later than nine months before the end of the approval period; otherwise the accreditation will expire.

(7) If a provider applies for accreditation of several degree programmes at the same time, the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria can handle the degree programmes in a joint procedure if this is reasonable, in particular considering the relatedness of the degree programmes.

Review of the application

§ 4. (1) The Management Office shall verify the application as to its completeness and formal correctness. If any remediable shortcomings are identified, a request to correct those shortcomings in line with section 13 para. 3 of the General Administrative Procedure Act (Allgemeines Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz, AVG), Federal Law Gazette no. 51/1991, shall be issued.

(2) After completeness and formal correctness of the application have been verified and it has been found that the application is ready for evaluation, further copies shall be submitted in the number to be announced by the Management Office.

External experts

§ 5. (1) The Board shall appoint the external experts required to review the application and shall ensure the review of all assessment areas relevant to the procedure, taking into account the specific features of Austrian universities of applied sciences. The external experts are non-certified experts pursuant to section 52 para. 2 AVG. If the Board considers a scientific review for the assessment of the application as not necessary, the appointment of experts can be waived.

(2) When selecting external experts, care shall be taken that the following competences are covered by the review panel, taking into account the requirements on a case-by-case basis:

1. proven scientific qualification in the relevant discipline;
2. knowledge of the vocational field based on pertinent professional activities;
3. research in the relevant discipline and familiarity with the research environment at higher education institutions;
4. verifiable international experience;
5. experience in quality management and quality assurance in higher education;
6. experience in management and organisational structures at higher education institutions;
7. teaching experience as well as experience in the development, implementation and evaluation of curricula.
8. current student experience based on studies in the relevant discipline;

(3) The Board takes care that the composition of the review panel is diverse and that the gender ratio is balanced

(4) For applications filed by educational institutions for higher medico-technical services, midwives and for general health and nursing services, additional experts nominated pursuant to section 3 para. 6 of the Federal Act Regulating High Level Allied Health Professions (Bundesgesetz über die Regelung der gehobenen medizinisch-technischen Dienste, MTD-Gesetz), section 11 para. 4 of the Midwifery Act (Hebammengesetz; HebG), and section 28 para. 4 of the Nursing Act (Gesundheits- und Krankenpflegegesetz; GuKG) are to be brought in.

(5) The Management Office shall inform the applicant institution about the external experts and shall grant the applicant institution an appropriate period of time to raise objections against the experts. The reasons for objections must be given in writing. The applicant institution does not have the right to propose external experts. If any objections are raised, the Board shall investigate them pursuant to section 53 AVG and, if necessary, appoint a new member.

(6) External experts must be independent and unbiased. They shall declare in writing that there are no grounds for bias and that they will keep all facts they become aware of in relation with their work as experts confidential.

Site visit

§ 6. (1) The evaluation includes a site visit to the applicant institution, which is organised and accompanied by the Management Office. If it is intended to offer an accredited degree programme at another site, the visit shall take place at this new site. If the Board considers a site visit for the assessment of the application as not necessary, it can be waived.

(2) Depending on the individual procedure, the site visit takes one to three days and comprises a preparatory meeting of the external experts and a representative of the Management Office and a visit of the applicant institution. In the preparatory meeting of the experts and the representative of the Management Office any open issues shall be clarified and the visit of the applicant institution shall be prepared.

(3) The following guidelines shall apply to the organisation and agenda of the applicant institution's site visit:

1. The agenda shall be tailored to the specific requirements of the procedure (initial accreditation, programme accreditation, re-accreditation) and be coordinated with the applicant institution.
2. The external experts, representatives of the Management Office as well as representatives of the applicant institution shall participate in the site visit. The applicant institution shall be free to select its representatives, making sure that competent participants are available for all subject areas. The student representatives shall, where applicable, be selected by the students' council.
3. The procedure shall ensure that there will be enough time to hear all relevant groups of the applicant institution and that the individual groups are able to present their positions autonomously and without influence.

Expert report

§ 7. (1) The external experts shall draw up a joint expert report, which shall consist of statements on and assessments of the criteria pursuant to section 14 (institutional accreditation) and/or section 17 (programme accreditation).

(2) The joint evaluation report shall be drawn up respecting the diversity of the experts' opinions, while at the same time aiming at a broad consensus in order to provide a summary assessment. If diverging experts' opinions on specific issues cannot be eliminated, they shall be expressed in the report.

Comment of the applicant institution

§ 8. The Management Office shall send the expert report to the applicant institution. The applicant institution shall be granted a reasonable timeframe to comment on the expert report in writing.

Decision and administrative decision on accreditation

§ 9. (1) After thorough consideration, the Board shall make a decision. After the Board's decision and its approval by the competent Federal Minister, an administrative decision (Bescheid) will be issued.

(2) The administrative decision on accreditation shall contain the following information as a minimum:

1. the term of accreditation;
2. the name of the legal entity of the higher education institution;
3. the site/s of the university of applied sciences and/or site/s where the accredited degree programme/s is/are allowed to be held;
4. name, type, workload, duration of the degree programmes and number of study places;
5. exact wording of the academic degrees to be awarded, including their abbreviations;
6. organisational structure;
7. languages;
8. any potential conditions.

Publication of the findings of the procedure

§ 10. After the procedure has been completed, the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria shall publish a report on the findings of the accreditation procedure, which shall include the expert report, the applicant institution's comment (upon its approval), the decision of the Board including the reasons for the decision as well as any potential conditions. This report on the findings shall be published on the website of the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria as well as by the applicant institution for the entire accreditation period. Any personal data, funding sources and business or trade secrets shall be exempt from publication.

Costs

§ 11. The applicant institution shall reimburse the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria for the fees of the external experts pursuant to section 76 para. 1 AVG and pay a lump sum for the procedure to be determined by the Board pursuant to section 20 HS-QSG. The obligation to pay the lump sum for the procedure shall arise upon submission of the (revised) application documents as stipulated in section 4 and shall fall due upon completion of the procedure.

Changes relevant to accreditation

§ 12. (1) Changes relating to any of the following items require approval by administrative decision:

1. legal entity
2. name of the higher education institution
3. name of degree programmes
4. qualification objective and profile of the degree programmes
5. duration and scope of the degree programmes
6. organisational structure
7. languages;

8. number of available study places
9. wording of the academic degrees to be awarded
10. site/s of the higher education institution
11. site/s of the higher education institution

(2) The application for modification of the administrative decision on accreditation shall be addressed to the Board and be filed in writing as well as electronically with the Management Office; it shall contain all information and documents necessary for reviewing the admissibility of the change in light of the statutory prerequisites for accreditation. Section 4 shall apply.

(3) If the decision on the modification of the administrative decision necessitates an external evaluation, sections 5 to 11 shall apply.

PART 2

Assessment areas and criteria

Chapter 3

Institutional accreditation

Assessment areas for institutional accreditation

§ 13. The assessment areas for institutional accreditation shall comprise as a minimum:

- (1) objectives and profile development
- (2) development planning
- (3) Degree programmes and teaching
- (4) Applied research and development
- (5) Organisation of the higher education institution and its services
- (6) funding and resources
- (7) National and international co-operation
- (8) Quality management system
- (9) Information

Assessment criteria for the assessment areas

§ 14. For the assessment of the assessment areas in the framework of institutional accreditation, the following criteria shall apply in particular:

- (1) objectives and profile development

The university of applied sciences has defined university-relevant objectives and has developed an institutional profile that is in line with these objectives.

- (2) Development plan

- a. The university of applied sciences has a development plan comprising the fields of studying and teaching, research and development, staff, organisation, administration and quality management.

- b. The development plan is in line with the objectives of the institution and can be put into practice with the planned measures and resources.
- c. The development plan takes gender equality and the advancement of women into account.

(3) Degree programmes and teaching

- a. The university of applied sciences offers degree programmes and/or further education programmes, whose focus is logically related to the institution's objectives and its profile.
- b. The university of applied sciences has defined procedures for the development and establishment of degree programmes.
- c. The university of applied sciences ensures that adequate support structures are available for students seeking advice on scientific, study-related organisational, or sociopsychological matters.
- d. The criteria pursuant to section 17 para. 1 of this Decree shall apply to the assessment area "Degree programmes and teaching".

(4) Applied research and development

- a. The university of applied sciences has a research and development concept that is in line with its objectives and its profile.
- b. The envisaged research and development complies with international methodological-scientific standards.
- c. The university of applied sciences ensures that the research and development results are included in the teaching process.
- d. The university of applied sciences ensures the transfer of knowledge and technology in the business world and in the society.
- e. The envisaged organisational and structural framework conditions are sufficient and suitable to implement the scheduled research and development activities.

(5) Organisation of the higher education institution and its services

- a. The applicant institution is a legal entity pursuant to section 2 para. 1 of the University of Applied Sciences Studies Act (Fachhochschulstudiengesetz, FHStG).
- b. The university of applied sciences has defined its organisational and decision-making structures. The tasks and responsibilities as well as the communication and decision-making processes have been specified.
- c. The organisational and decision-making structures ensure the autonomy of the teaching and research staff adequate for a higher education institution.
- d. A statute has been drawn up, made public and easily accessible which governs the following aspects as a minimum:
 - study and examination regulations;
 - electoral rules for the faculty, the establishment of any working committees and their bylaws;
 - gender equality measures;
 - provisions concerning the advancement of women as well as guidelines for the appropriate use of designations used in the university system and for the award of academic honours.
- e. If the university of applied sciences intends to offer degree programmes mostly or entirely at a location different from the main site and/or the accredited sites, it shall ensure - in addition to meeting the criteria under sections 14 and 17 - that
 - the accountability and the responsibilities of the main institution and the other sites have been clearly defined and are adequate;

- organisation, management and support structures are established in the same quality as they are maintained at the other accredited sites;
 - degree programmes which are offered at several sites are of uniform quality;
 - offering degree programmes at an additional site does not lead to a lack of resources and, subsequently, a deterioration in quality at existing sites;
 - all sites are included in the institution's quality management system;
- f. if the university of applied sciences intends to offer degree programmes abroad, it shall ensure - in addition to meeting the criteria under sections 14 and 17 - that
- the respective national legislation is observed;
 - educational traditions and cultural differences regarding teaching and learning, including examinations, are respected - only if and insofar this would not affect the university of applied sciences' quality standards and in particular with regard to the student's role in the teaching and learning process as well as in any quality assurance processes.
- g. The university of applied sciences has a sufficient number of teaching and research staff as well as other staff.
- h. Job profiles for teaching and research staff in accordance with the various fields of activity have been drawn up. The weighting of teaching and research activities has been defined and ensures that the core responsibilities of the university of applied sciences are met.
- i. The composition of the faculty meets the requirements of a profound scientific education and ensures adequate student support.
- j. The integration of part-time teachers in teaching and programme organisation is ensured.
- k. A transparent and quality-driven recruitment procedure adequate for a higher education institution is in place for hiring teaching and research staff.
- l. The university of applied sciences provides for adequate further training and staff development measures.

(6) Funding and resources

- a. The university of applied sciences has a financial plan which outlines the funding for at least six years, transparently documenting the funding sources.
- b. The university of applied sciences has enough facilities and equipment to adequately meet the requirements of the degree programmes and/or research and development activities.
- c. Proof is available that the university of applied sciences is authorised to use the facilities and equipment.

(7) National and international co-operation

- a. In line with its profile, the university of applied sciences enters into co-operation projects with partners inside and outside the higher education sector.
- b. The university of applied sciences takes adequate measures to support the mobility of students and staff.

(8) Quality management system

- a. Incorporated in the university of applied sciences' strategic higher education management, a quality management system is in place which ensures the regular quality assessment of the core responsibilities and fosters their advancement.
- b. The structures and procedures of the quality management system have been defined and documented and ensure the participation of full-time and part-time teachers,

students, external experts and other relevant stakeholders. The most essential points of the quality management system have been made easily accessible to the public.

- c. The university of applied sciences ensures that it gathers information that is relevant to a high-quality execution of its core responsibilities, analyses this information and incorporates it into quality-enhancing measures.

(9) Information

The university of applied sciences provides the public with easily accessible and accurate information on its services, which also includes its degree programmes.

§ 15. (1) For the extension of institutional accreditation, the assessment areas pursuant to section 13 and the criteria for the assessment areas pursuant to section 14 shall apply.

(2) Accreditation can be extended subject to conditions if any shortcomings are identified which can most likely be remedied within two years.

Chapter 4

Programme accreditation

Assessment areas for programme accreditation

§ 16. The assessment areas for programme accreditation shall comprise as a minimum:

- (1) degree programme and degree programme management;
- (2) staff;
- (3) quality assurance;
- (4) funding and infrastructure;
- (5) Applied research and development
- (6) National and international co-operation

Assessment criteria for the assessment areas

§ 17. For the assessment of the assessment areas in the framework of programme accreditation, the following criteria shall apply in particular:

- (1) Degree programme and degree programme management
 - a. The degree programme is aligned with the objectives of the institution and is logically connected with the plan for its development.
 - b. The business world's/society's demand for graduates of the degree programme is transparently presented and corresponds to the planned number of graduates.
 - c. The students' demand (acceptance) for the degree programme is transparently presented and corresponds to the planned number of study places.
 - d. The professional fields of activity related to the educational programme have been defined clearly and realistically.
 - e. The qualification objectives of the degree programme (learning outcomes of the degree programme) have been clearly defined and meet the scientific and professional requirements and are in accordance with the respective levels of the qualification framework of the European Higher Education Area.

- f. The designation of the degree programme corresponds to the qualification profile.
- g. The academic degree corresponds to the qualification profile and the degrees according to section 6 para. 2 FHStG.
- h. The "Diploma Supplement" complies with the specifications laid down in section 4 para. 9 FHStG.
- i. The students are involved in an appropriate manner in shaping the teaching and learning processes. They are encouraged to be actively involved in the learning process.
- j. The contents and structure of, and teaching method applied to the curriculum and the modules meet the scientific and professional requirements and are suited to achieve the intended learning outcomes. They furthermore take into account the requirements of a diversified student body.
- k. The allocation of ECTS credits is plausible.
- l. The workload required for the degree programme is devised in a way so as to allow the students to reach the intended qualification objectives in the study period specified. The organisation of the degree programme and the students' workload of a part-time degree programme can be reconciled with a regular job.
- m. The university of applied sciences has adopted examination rules. The methods of examination are suitable for assessing whether or not the defined learning outcome was met. Work placements form an educationally relevant part of the curriculum of bachelor and diploma degree programmes. The job profile, the selection, support and assessment of placements contribute to achieving the degree programme's qualification objectives.
- n. Admission requirements for the degree programme have been clearly defined and contribute to achieving the educational objectives of the degree programme while promoting the permeability of the education system.
- o. The selection criteria applied in the admission procedure and their weighting are logical and ensure a fair and transparent selection of applicants.
- p. The university of applied sciences provides the public with easily accessible information on the general conditions for student agreements which each student has to sign.
- q. Adequate support structures are available for students seeking advice on scientific, specialist, study-related organisational, or sociopsychological matters.
- r. If e-learning, blended learning and distance learning are part of the programme, suitable didactic, technical, organisational and financial preconditions have been created to ensure the achievement of the degree programme's qualification objectives.
- s. The following additional criteria apply to the accreditation of joint degree programmes:
 - The partner institutions are recognised post-secondary educational institutions.
 - The degree programme has been accredited, if so required, in accordance with the national laws and regulations applicable in the partner institutions' countries, or a parallel or joint accreditation procedure is underway.
 - In a co-operation agreement the institutions involved have specified the following aspects as a minimum:
 - academic performance to be rendered by the students at the respective institutions;
 - admission and selection procedures;
 - determination of the applicable study and examination regulation(s);
 - automatic and full recognition of examinations and scientific papers produced at the institutions involved;
 - academic degree and specification of how and by whom academic degrees will be awarded;
 - organisational rules and administrative accountability.

- t. For the accreditation of degree programmes offered mostly or entirely at a location different from the main site and/or the accredited sites - in addition to the normal requirements - the criteria under section 14 (5) e, f shall apply.

(2) Staff

- a. With respect to its composition and the extent of its teaching activities, the development team meets the statutory requirements and is qualified in the relevant scientific field and/or has vocational experience in line with the profile of the degree programme.
- b. The designated head of the degree programme is qualified in the relevant field and works full-time in this position.
- c. A sufficient number of teaching and research staff are available for the degree programme, who are scientifically qualified, have adequate vocational experience and are qualified in terms of their teaching methods.
- d. The composition of the faculty meets the requirements of a profound scientific education and ensures adequate student support.

(3) Quality assurance

- a. The degree programme has been integrated into the institution's quality management system.
- b. The degree programme includes a regular quality assurance and enhancement process which takes into account the degree programme, the study conditions and the programme organisation, and which involves all relevant groups as well as external experts.
- c. Students can participate in regular reflections on the degree programme and the conditions and organisation of the degree programme.

(4) Funding and infrastructure

- a. Funding of the degree programme is ensured for at least five years, with the funding sources being transparently documented. Provisions have been made to fund expiring degree programmes.
- b. The financial plan is based on a calculation showing the costs per study places.
- c. The facilities and equipment required for the degree programme are available.

(5) Applied research and development

- a. The objectives and perspectives of applied research and development defined for the degree programme are consistent with the strategic orientation of the institution.
- b. The members of the teaching and research staff are involved in application-related research and development projects. The interaction between applied research and development and teaching is ensured.
- c. To the extent required by the type of degree programme, students will be integrated into research and development projects.
- d. The (planned) organisational and structural framework conditions are sufficient and suitable to implement the scheduled research and development activities.

(6) National and international co-operation

- a. In line with the degree programme's profile, national and international co-operation projects with higher education institutions or partners outside the higher education sector are envisaged.
- b. The co-operation projects encourage and support the advancement of the degree programme and the mobility of students and staff.

PART 3

Entry into force

§ 18. (1) This Decree shall enter into force on 1 July 2015.

(2) For pending procedures regarding accreditation of degree programmes, the Decree on Accreditation of Universities of Applied Sciences of 20 June 2013 shall apply.