

Guideline for the Audit of Higher Education Institutions' Quality Management Systems

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Preamble

Autonomous higher education institutions have the responsibility for quality management, which comprises quality assurance and quality enhancement regarding degree programmes, teaching, research or the development and appreciation of the arts, as well as administrative support. They develop and design their internal quality management systems in accordance with their individual profiles and in compliance with European standards. The main focus of external quality assurance pursuant to the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz*) is on the certification of these internal quality management systems based on an audit.

The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (AQ Austria) supports this responsibility of the higher education institutions and wishes to support their quality enhancement with its audit. In the shaping of its audit procedure, AQ Austria also takes into consideration international experience and examples of good practice.

The audit of AQ Austria involves the higher education institution, the experts as well as AQ Austria in a co-operative process.

The audit of AQ Austria is in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and uses the peer view approach for the conduct of the procedures, involving foreign experts in order to include international perspectives and expertise.

With its procedural rules (Part I), this Guideline specifies in detail the provisions of the Austrian Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education 2011 (HS-QSG), F. L. G. I No. 74/2011 on the conduct of audits at Austrian public universities and universities of applied sciences. Supplementary information on conducting the procedure is given in Part II, describing the audit procedure in more detail.

I. Procedural rules

A. Objectives of the audit

The objective of the audit is to confirm that the higher education institution has established its quality management systems pursuant to the statutory provisions. The quality management system supports the higher education institution in ensuring and enhancing the quality of its activities. Furthermore, the audit shall provide impulses for the further development of the higher education institution's quality management system.

B. Standards

The quality management system is assessed using five standards, which define the requirements for a functioning quality management system and specify the assessment areas pursuant to section 22 paragraph 2 HS-QSG.

Standard 1

The higher education institution has an **understanding of its concept of quality** and a **quality management strategy**, which is part of its internal management. The quality management strategy includes the higher education institution's core tasks, cross-cutting tasks as well as its administrative support.

Explanatory note: The higher education institution reaches agreement among its members on what quality means in their respective task areas. It is also agreed that all members of the higher education institution are responsible for quality management. The higher education institution's members comprise its students, staff in teaching and research as well as non-academic staff.

The quality management strategy is aimed at reaching the higher education institution's objectives and enhancing its quality. The higher education institution's core responsibilities comprise the areas of learning and teaching, research or the advancement and appreciation of the arts, or applied research and development. Their cross-cutting tasks include internationalisation and social goals. The administrative support covers

the fields of organisation, administration, and human resources at the higher education institution.

Standard 2

The higher education institution has established a quality management system, which is derived from its quality management strategy, and has defined the **structures, responsibilities, and competences** for implementing the quality management system. The quality management system covers the higher education institution's core tasks, cross-cutting tasks as well as their administrative support.

Explanatory note: The quality management system fosters the achievement of the higher education institution's objectives and the enhancement of its quality. The quality management system supports the higher education institution in regularly and systematically collecting information on its core, cross-cutting and supporting tasks and using this information for the assurance and enhancement of its quality. The information is also used to inform management decisions.

The responsibilities for the quality management system at the management level have been clearly specified, and their interaction is regulated. The competences regarding the implementation of the quality management system are known to the members of the higher education institution. External stakeholders of the higher education institution shall be involved in the quality management system in suitable places.

Standard 3

The higher education institution implements quality management measures on the basis of the defined objectives in the fields of **studies and teaching** and assesses their contribution to the achievement of the objectives and to the enhancement of the quality in those fields. The results of this assessment contribute to the systematic adaptation of the implemented measures.

Explanatory note: The measures are suitable for assuring and enhancing the targeted quality of the higher education institution's degree programmes and of the teaching.

The degree programmes include degree programmes as well as 'non-degree programmes' and certificate programmes for further education at universities of applied sciences.

In any case, the quality management in the fields of degree programmes and teaching focuses on

- the development of new degree programmes and their further development,
- the implementation of the degree programmes,
- the assessment of students' competences/performance in all phases of their studies (including access to higher education and, if necessary, admission procedures),
- supporting and counselling services for students in all phases of their studies
- supporting students in learning processes,
- supporting teachers in teaching processes,
- organisational and administrative tasks in the field of degree programmes and teaching.

Standard 4

The higher education institution implements quality management measures on the basis of the defined objectives in the fields of **research** or the **advancement and appreciation of the arts** or **applied research and development** and assesses their contribution to the achievement of the objectives and to the enhancement of the quality in those fields. The results of this assessment contribute to the systematic adaptation of the implemented measures.

Explanatory note: The measures are suitable for assuring and enhancing the targeted quality of the higher education institution's research or the advancement and appreciation of the arts or applied research and development. In any case, the quality management focuses on

- supporting researchers in their activities,
- assessing the research performance or achievements in the advancement and appreciation of the arts or in applied research and development,
- promoting young academics,
- knowledge transfer,
- technology transfer (if applicable),
- organisational and administrative support in the field of research, the advancement and appreciation of the arts, or applied research and development.

Standard 5

The higher education institution implements quality management measures on the basis of the defined objectives in the field of **human resources** and assesses their contribution to the achievement of the objectives and to the enhancement of the quality in those fields. The results of this assessment contribute to the adaptation of the implemented measures.

Explanatory note: The measures ensure that the higher education institution has suitable staff for achieving the targeted objectives.

In any case, the measures in the field of human resources comprise

- quality management for the appointment of teaching and research staff,
- quality management for the appointment of non-academic staff,
- staff development for the teaching and research staff as well as the non-academic staff.

C. Procedure

The audit is carried out as a peer review procedure. On the basis of the higher education institution's self-evaluation report and a site visits, a panel of external independent experts shall assess the internal quality management system, using the five audit standards, and draw up an expert report. The report shall contain opinions and recommendations on the higher education institution's quality management system. The expert report and a comment of the higher education institution constitute the basis for the certification decision of the Board of the AQ Austria.

Agreement

The higher education institution and AQ Austria shall enter into an agreement about the conduct of an audit, specifying, among other things, AQ Austria's services, a schedule for the audit, the confidentiality obligation and data protection as well as the costs of the procedure.

Experts

The expert panel shall consist of at least four experts, one of them being a student. They shall have demonstrated experience in the management and organisation of higher education institutions and in quality

management and be familiar with the Austrian higher education system. The expert panel shall consist of international experts.

The Board of AQ Austria appoints the experts. The higher education institution shall have the right to raise substantiated objections against individuals on grounds of bias.

The experts shall declare in writing that they are unbiased and that they will keep confidential all information received and findings made in the course of the review. AQ Austria shall prepare the experts for the procedures and support them in their expert activities.

Self-evaluation report

The higher education institution shall prepare a self-evaluation report, presenting its internal quality management system and the effective implementation thereof. It is autonomous in defining the structure and design of the self-evaluation report.

Site visit

There shall be a site visit to the higher education institution, taking two to three days. The experts shall talk with members of the higher education institution's different groups. For their preparation, they shall receive the higher education institution's self-evaluation report as well as information provided by AQ Austria on the procedure and on the Austrian higher education system. The site visit aims at giving the experts an understanding of the organisation of the higher education institution's internal quality management system and its implementation which goes beyond the information included in the self-evaluation report, in order for them to have sufficient evidence-based knowledge for the assessment of the audit standards.

AQ Austria shall accompany the site visit and prepare the experts.

Expert report

On the basis of the findings made through the self-evaluation report and the site visit, the experts shall, with editorial support of AQ Austria prepare a preliminary expert report which includes statements on the higher education institution's quality management system alongside the Audit standards and the Assessment of the fulfilment of the standards using the categories "met", "met with reservations" or "not met".

Comment of the higher education institution

The higher education institution shall be submitted the preliminary review report and may comment on possible factual errors and reply on the expert's statements and assessments. The experts shall consider the comments and decide on modifications to the expert report.

Certification of the internal quality management system

The Board shall make a decision on the certification based on the final version of the expert report and on the higher education institution's comment. The higher education institution's self-evaluation report as well as any documents submitted at a later date shall be available to the Board for inspection.

The Board may grant certification if all standards are met or met with reservations.

If one or more standards are met with reservations, the Board may make certification conditional. A standard is assessed as being "met with reservations" if shortcomings in the quality management system are identified which, in the opinion of the Board, can most likely be remedied within two years.

Certification will be denied if at least one standard has been assessed as being "not met". This is the case if shortcomings are identified which, in the opinion of the Board, are not likely to be remedied within two.

Certification is limited to a period of seven years.

If the Board denies certification, the higher education institution shall undergo a re-audit pursuant to section 22 paragraph 6 HS-QSG after two years.

Follow-up

The AQ Austria offers the higher education institution an optional follow-up workshop to discuss topics related to the audit procedure.

Fulfilment of conditions

If certification is granted subject to conditions, the higher education institution shall document their fulfilment within two years. The Board shall decide upon certification if the assessment of whether the conditions have been fulfilled shall entail a site visit to the higher education institution or if a written documentation explaining the measures taken by the higher education institution is sufficient.

The Secretariat of AQ Austria shall verify the fulfilment of the conditions and may, if necessary, involve one or more members of the expert panel. As a rule, this/these expert(s) already formed part of the expert panel appointed for the audit and has/have not conducted any consultancy to the higher education institution after the decision on certification had been made. The expert/s shall submit a justified written assessment of the fulfilment of the conditions which is based on the higher education institution's documentation.

The decision of the Board of AQ Austria on the fulfilment of the conditions is based on the higher education institution's documentation and, provided that it was obtained, on the expert's assessment.

In the case that the fulfilment of the conditions cannot be verified and, consequently, the Board of AQ Austria decides negatively on the certification, the quality management system shall be classified as "not certified". If a higher education institution's quality management system is not awarded a certification, a re-audit pursuant to section 22 paragraph 6 HS-QSG shall be carried out.

Publication

After a certification decision has been made, AQ Austria shall publish a report on the outcome of the audit procedure. The report on the outcome shall include the certification decision of the Board, the expert report as well as the higher education institution's comment (the latter upon its approval). The higher education institution shall publish the outcome of the audit procedure in an easily accessible form for the period of certification.

Costs

The higher education institution shall pay the lump sum that has been determined by the Board of AQ Austria and which is published on their website as well as the costs for the experts, which are made up of the fixed expense allowance as well as the travel and accommodation costs.

If experts are involved in the procedure for the verification of the conditions, their fixed expense allowance will be charged separately.

Complaint

The higher education institution can appeal to AQ Austria's Appeals Committee against the procedure, against the certification decision as well as in the case that inaccuracies of the report on the outcome are

observed. The complaint shall be filed within three months following the certification decision of the Board.

Entry into force

The Guideline for the Audit of Higher Education Institutions' Quality Management Systems shall enter into force on 1 December 2018. For procedures currently pending, the Guideline of 27/28 May 2015 shall apply.

II. Supplementary information on the conduct of the procedure

1 Preparing the audit

Upon request, AQ Austria shall submit an offer to the higher education institution for conducting the audit procedure. AQ Austria's offer includes a presentation of the audit procedure as well as an initial meeting with the higher education institution. During this meeting, the most important elements of the audit are explained by AQ Austria and a detailed presentation of the procedure is given. Furthermore, the higher education institution is given the opportunity to present its own quality management system. Together, a first rough time schedule is developed, which provides sufficient time for the higher education institution to prepare and to draw up a self-evaluation report and for AQ Austria to select and prepare the experts.

The higher education institution and AQ Austria conclude a written agreement for the conduct of the audit which comprises the rights and obligations of both contracting parties.

The higher education institution and AQ Austria each name a review coordinator. AQ Austria's review coordinator shall be responsible that the formal requirements of the procedure are fulfilled. He/she shall, at no point, assume the role of an expert, but shall ensure a proper and fair conduct of the procedure.

2 Self-evaluation report

The self-evaluation report is the central document for the audit procedure. With this document, the experts shall be provided a broad insight into the structures, areas, and instruments of the higher education's quality management system and its implementation.

The structure of the self-evaluation report is within the responsibility of the higher education institution. It is advisable that the higher education institution explicitly addresses the individual audit standards, demonstrating how it operates with regard to the issues mentioned in each of the standards. The review coordinator of the AQ Austria may, upon request of the higher education institution, provide feedback on the

structure, comprehensibility, and completeness of the report, without already making an assessment of the quality management system.

In addition to the certification of the internal quality management system, the audit shall ideally also promote and support its continuous enhancement. This starts with the institutional preparation and the associated preparation of a self-evaluation report. The report shall be drawn up, involving the members of the higher education institution. The resulting self-reflection helps to better define one's own strengths and weaknesses. The knowledge gained shall eventually be reflected in the written presentation.

The internal preparations at the higher education institution, for example in workshops, and the self-reflection and strengths and weaknesses analysis are key elements of the long-term effect of an audit and may provide the higher education institution with profitable stimuli for its further development.

AQ Austria recommends to take into consideration the following three points when drawing up the self-evaluation report:

2.1 Presentation of the higher education institution

In order to present a picture of the higher education institution, it is helpful to begin the self-evaluation report with a short presentation of the higher education institution. The experts shall be given an overview of the profile, the key indicators, and the most important developments of the institution and learn, which objectives the higher education institution pursues.

The presentation of the higher education institution shall not exceed five pages.

2.2 Presentation and analysis of the higher education institution's quality management system in consideration of the audit standards

Following the presentation, the focus shall be put on the quality management system. The presentation depends on the type or model of the system developed or chosen by the higher education institution. A graphic presentation of the quality management system may be useful for giving an overview.

All audit standards shall be addressed. Since the audit shall assess the functioning of the quality management system, the system's practical operability shall be furthermore assessed in a self-reflection. It has proven

to be of great value to illustrate the implementation of measures in the quality cycle using concrete examples.

The higher education institution shall describe which developments in the quality management system have been driven forward since the last audit, and how recommendations, if any, have been processed.

The extent of the presentation and self-analysis of the quality management system shall not exceed 50 pages. The higher education institution shall ensure that its statements are comprehensible, consistent, and unambiguous.

2.3 References and evidence

In order to prevent duplication of information which has already been sufficiently described in existing documents, the higher education may reference to text passages in such documents and attach them for the experts (for example a development plan, annual report, performance agreement, financial statement, or intellectual capital reports, a handbook on quality management, sample curricula, or templates for target agreements etc.). Ideally, the higher education institution shall make these documents available on a platform, to which the experts are provided access for the duration of the audit procedure. It may be helpful to use existing schematic presentations for the illustration of processes or organisational plans, whereas links to the higher education institution's website shall be avoided.

The submission of templates for existing documents relevant for assuring and enhancing quality does not, however, substitute the self-evaluation report, which shall present the most important information as well as comprehensible explanations regarding the audit standards, and not only comprise references to the attachments.

3 Experts

3.1 Requirements of AQ Austria for the selection of the expert panel

The expert panel shall consist of at least four persons, one of them being a student. AQ Austria recommends the appointment of five experts in order to obtain a differentiated perspective on the quality management system.

The profile of the higher education institution to be audited (above all, its size, range of disciplines, teaching and research focus, strategic orientation, and type of institution) as well as the nature of its quality management system (e.g. centralised/decentralised QM, EFQM-model) are decisive factors for the selection of the experts. The experts must be

sufficiently fluent in the language of the proceedings (German or English), both in writing as well as orally.

In its entirety, the expert panel shall have experience in the management and organisation of higher education institutions and in quality management and be familiar with the Austrian higher education system. Irrespective of their function at their own higher education institution, the experts shall be equal members of the expert panel.

The expert panel shall be composed of international members. Internationality here may be expressed by origin as well as by professional working experience abroad. The higher education institution may decide that the expert panel shall be composed exclusively of persons working outside Austria. The composition of the expert panel shall allow for a broad perspective of experienced individuals from within the European Higher Education Area on the higher education institution's quality management system.

AQ Austria shall take into consideration any specific requirements on a case-by-case basis and aim at diversity in the composition of the expert panel. Furthermore, AQ Austria shall aim for the involvement of an expert from the preceding audit.

When choosing the experts, the AQ Austria shall check if any reasons for bias or incompatibility with the activity as expert at the higher education institution to be audited can be found. Such reasons may be, for example:

- employment or any other contractual relationship with the higher education institution to be audited within the last five years;
- applications to the higher education institution to be audited within the last five years;
- involvement/co-operation with the higher education institution to be audited or with their bodies within the last five years;
- personal research co-operation or co-operation with persons linked to the higher education institution to be audited within the last five years;
- examinations taken or degrees awarded at the higher education institution to be audited within the last five years; or
- private proximity to persons linked to the higher education institution to be audited.

Based upon the requirements described above, AQ Austria shall draw up a proposal for potential experts which shall be submitted to the higher education institution. The higher education institution shall have the right

to raise substantiated objections against recommended individuals on grounds of bias and/or incompatibility.

AQ Austria shall conclude a written agreement with the experts concerning their participation in the audit procedure. The experts declare that they are unbiased and that they will keep confidential all information on the higher education institution received and findings made in the course of the audit. A Code of Conduct gives the experts practical advice for their activities and establishes rules of conduct.

3.2 Principles regarding the activities of the experts

The experts are understood as being "critical friends" in the context of a peer review. They are external individuals competent in the specialist field who at the same time have an attitude of goodwill as well as a critical attitude towards the higher education institution to be audited, and through their participation in the audit procedure contribute to achieving the objectives of the audit. In this role, the experts shall interact cooperatively with the representatives of the higher education institution to be audited.

3.3 The experts' tasks

The experts are obliged to participate actively in the procedure. This includes that they prepare themselves with the material provided by AQ Austria and with the self-evaluation report of the higher education institution. They shall also attend the preparatory meetings organised by AQ Austria and participate in the site visit as well as in drawing up the expert report. If the experts require further information or documents for their activities, they shall inform AQ Austria's review coordinator immediately.

One person from within the expert panel shall assume the chair. This person shall moderate the discussions during the site visit and coordinate the preparation of the expert report on the side of the experts.

1.1 Preparing the experts

The preparation of the experts through AQ Austria is carried out in several phases and aims at the experts' participation in the audit procedure according to the assessment criteria defined by the agency and at their knowledge of the objectives, standards, and the procedural structure, as well as of the legal provisions relevant for the audit procedure and of the Austrian higher education system. The experts are furthermore expected

to familiarise themselves prior to the first visit with the higher education institution and its quality management system on the basis of the self-evaluation report.

A video conference moderated by the review coordinator of AQ Austria approximately three weeks prior to the site visit offers the experts the opportunity to exchange their impressions on the self-evaluation report and on the higher education institution's existing quality management system. If necessary, they may ask the higher education institution to submit further information (e.g. documents or key indicators as an orientation). Furthermore, the agenda for the site visit (see chapter 4) prepared by AQ Austria together with the higher education institution is discussed and, if need be, adapted.

The review coordinator of AQ Austria shall contact the higher education institution in the event that further information is needed and discuss any modifications made to the proposed agenda.

In the course of an internal preparatory workshop just before the site visit, the review coordinator of AQ Austria and the experts prepare the interviews to be carried out at the higher education institution, reviewing in detail the schedule for and contents of the discussions and, if necessary, clarifying once again the responsibilities within the group.

1 Site visit

Audit procedures conducted by AQ Austria include a site visit at the higher education institution to be audited, which is preceded by the above-mentioned internal preparatory workshop for the experts. Depending on the size of the higher education institution, a site visit is scheduled to take two to three days.

Building on the insights gained from the higher education institution's self-evaluation report, the site visit shall support the experts in developing the necessary understanding of the concept of the quality management system and its structure in order for them to be able to review the effective implementation of the quality management in the different performance areas, taking into account the different perspectives, and assess the audit standards.

The schedule for the site visit is tailored to the specific requirements of the procedure and coordinated between AQ Austria and the higher education institution on the basis of a model agenda. This allows for the review coordinator to send out an invitation to the contact persons in a

timely manner. The nomination of the students for the discussions shall be selected by the student union. The agenda shall be finalised following the preparatory video conference with the experts.

The interviewees at the site visit shall be representatives of the higher education management, persons responsible for quality management, as well as teaching, research, and – if applicable – artistic staff, heads or employees of relevant organisational units, and students. During the discussions with the experts, each person shall present their position freely and uninfluenced.

At the end of the site visit, the experts meet for a final discussion with the higher education management, collecting some last details and giving a first feedback on their impressions. There shall, however, be no detailed assessment, nor shall they anticipate the certification decision, since the final decision is taken by the Board of AQ Austria.

The review coordinator of AQ Austria shall participate in the site visit, prepare the experts, and ensure that the procedure is properly conducted, the standards are given equal consideration, and all required information is obtained. He or she is available throughout the entire site visit for the higher education institution as well as for the experts with regard to the clarification of questions relating to the Austrian higher education system or the audit procedure, and shall act as a link between the two parties.

2 Expert report

The experts' statements on the audit standards and their assessment of the degree of fulfilment of each individual audit standard shall be documented in a written expert report.

The expert report is based on the findings made through the higher education institution's self-evaluation report and the discussions during the site visit. All experts contribute equally to the expert report. If necessary, they are obligated to clarify or refine their statements, points of criticism, and recommendations.

The recipients of the expert report are the higher education institution to be audited, the Board of AQ Austria as well as the public, which is informed by way of publication of the expert report. The statements and assessments in the expert report shall be complete, comprehensible, and convincing, and clearly and understandably formulated. They shall be

factually correct, fair, and objective and written with the awareness for its different target groups.

Content of the expert report

The expert report's structure shall be based on the five audit standards.

The AQ Austria shall provide a template for the expert report, which is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: General information on the procedure

- objectives and methods of the audit
- short information on the Austrian higher education system
- short information on the higher education institution (taken from its website or from its presentation in the self-evaluation report)
- agenda for the audit at the higher education institution, incl. a schedule
- names of the experts and function at their affiliated institution

This chapter shall be prepared by the AQ Austria.

Chapter 2: Summary

The summary shall give an overview of the most important questions and assessments of the experts and, where appropriate, shall include statements on the following elements:

- the most important characteristics of the higher education institution's quality management system
- examples of good practice regarding the quality management system

Chapter 3: Assessment and fulfilment of the audit standards

A separate section shall be devoted to each standard, comprising statements and assessments. The experts shall illustrate their findings on the basis of their insights on the chosen areas of activity.

In their expert report, the experts shall name elements of good practice in the higher education institution's quality management system.

Independent of the outcome of their assessment, they shall give recommendations for developing the quality management system further, which the higher education institution may implement on a voluntary basis.

Lastly, the experts shall assess the degree of fulfilment of the respective audit standards on the basis of the three categories "met", "met with reservations", or "not met". The assessment shall be substantiated and comprehensible.

If the experts have concluded that a standard has been "met with reservations", they shall suggest a recommendation or a condition that shows, what is required in order for the standard to be assessed as "met". If a condition is recommended, it shall be made sure that it is possible for the higher education institution to fulfil it within a period of two years. Such a circumstance arises if a required standard is not met.

Chapter 4: Annex

The annex comprises the agenda of the site visit.

The expert report shall be drawn up respecting the diversity of the experts' opinions, while at the same time aiming at a broad consensus. If there are diverging experts' opinions on an issue, they shall be expressed in the report. AQ Austria's review coordinator shall support the preparation of the review report.

1 Comment of the higher education institution

AQ Austria's review coordinator shall send the preliminary review report to the higher education institution. The higher education institution shall be given the opportunity to present their own views and, if applicable, express diverging views on the experts' statements and assessments. The experts shall review the comment and decide on changes to the expert report. The entire expert panel shall approve the final expert report before AQ Austria forwards it as the final expert report to the higher education institution.

2 Certification

2.1 Certification decision

The Board shall make a decision on the certification of the internal quality management based on the final version of the expert report and on the higher education institution's comment. The higher education institution's self-evaluation report is available to the Board.

Following the Board's decision, AQ Austria shall notify the higher education institution immediately of its decision. The experts shall also be informed.

2.2 Fulfilment of conditions

The two-year period for the fulfilment of the conditions shall start on the date of the Board's decision on certification. If experts are appointed for the examination of whether the conditions have been fulfilled, the higher education shall bear the resultant expenditures for the expert (compensation as well as travel and accommodation costs, if any). The higher education institution shall not have to bear any costs for AQ Austria.

3 Publication

AQ Austria shall publish the report on the outcome on their website.

Pursuant to section 21 HS-QSG, the higher education institution is also obligated to make available the outcomes of the audit procedure in an easily accessible and readily apparent form.

In any case, personal data and the parts of the report referring to funding sources and business or trade secrets shall be exempt from publication.

4 Follow-up

The topics of an optional follow-up workshop may concern the recommendations from the expert report or, if applicable, reasons for conditions. The workshop shall take up concrete outcomes of the audit and contribute to the sustainability of the procedure.

Upon request of the higher education institution, an expert of the audit is invited to the workshop. The costs incurred shall be borne by the higher education institution. The participation of the review coordinator of the AQ Austria does not incur further costs for the higher education institution.

5 Complaint

In the event of an appeal against the audit procedure, the certification decision or in the case that inaccuracies of the report on the outcome are observed, the higher education institution can file a substantiated, informal written complaint to the Secretariat of AQ Austria. The complaint shall be handled by the Appeals Committee¹, which shall report the results

¹Members of the Appels Committee and Rules of Procedure: <https://www.aq.ac.at/en/about-us/agency-bodies-committees/appeals-committee.php>

of their investigations to the Board of AQ Austria and the higher education institution and, if necessary, recommend suitable remedial measures.

The final decision shall lie with the Board of AQ Austria. The Appeals Committee's assessment is not binding for the Board of AQ Austria. In the case that it reaches a contrary assessment, it shall give reasons why it does not follow the Appeals Committee's recommendations.

6 Re-audit

If a higher education institution's quality management system is not awarded certification, a re-audit pursuant to section 22 paragraph 6 HS-QSG shall be carried out. Certification is not awarded following a negative certification decision or in the event that conditions are not met. If the conditions are not met, a re-audit shall be conducted following a period of two years after the negative decision on the fulfilment of the conditions.

The re-audit follows the same procedural rules as an audit conducted by AQ Austria. The higher education institution shall prove that it has established a quality management system in accordance with the statutory regulations and that the shortcomings identified during the preceding audit have been remedied. It may reference to the report on the outcomes of the initial audit and the documents used that time.

7 Glossary

Audit procedure

An audit is a periodic peer review process, where external experts assess the organisation and implementation of a higher education institution's internal quality management system in order to certify it. It supports the development of the quality management system and allows for feedback among colleagues on its enhancement potential.

Audit standards

The audit standards specify in detail the assessment areas pursuant to section 22 paragraph 2 HS-QSG and describe the requirements of a quality management system in accordance with the statutory provisions. The five audit standards constitute the basis of the higher education institution's self-evaluation of its internal quality management system, and of the experts' external assessment.

Conditions

Conditions are only given if shortcomings are identified in the implementation of the quality management system which, in the opinion

of the Board, can most likely be remedied within two years. Conditions are binding and must be fulfilled within a period of two years in order to keep certification.

Recommendations

Recommendations of the experts are not binding and shall support the enhancement of the quality management system.

ESG

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) are the main reference framework for the designing of the audit by AQ Austria.

University of applied sciences

In the Guideline at hand, this means the providers of university of applied sciences degree programmes pursuant to the University of Applied Sciences Studies Act (FHStG), F. L. G. No. 340/1993.

Members of the higher education institution

These include students as well as administrative, teaching, research and artistic staff.

External stakeholder groups

Societal groups participating in the work of a higher education institution. The stakeholder groups are determined by the higher education institution's profile and objectives. For instance, they may be composed of representatives of society, science, and the labour market.

Assessment areas

Those fields to be evaluated in any case within the course of an audit pursuant to section 22 paragraph 2 HS-QSG. The statutory assessment areas contain different closely interrelated dimensions of a quality management system. AQ Austria specifies the assessment areas in the five standards.

Quality loop

Description of the process of continuing quality assurance and, if necessary, improvement through a sequence of planning – doing – checking – acting. This loop is closed when improvement measures are incorporated in the planning process.

Quality management system

Entirety of coordinated and interrelating measures taken to assure and develop internal organisational and management processes, which help the higher education institution achieve its objectives. The higher education institution is autonomous in designing these processes.

Certificate

With the certificate, the higher education receives a document, which proves that it fulfils its obligation of assuring the quality of its core responsibilities and cross-cutting tasks and that the quality management system is suitable to support the higher education institution in achieving its objectives.