



Agency for
Quality Assurance
and Accreditation
Austria

Audit of the Internal Quality Management System

Guidelines for Universities

adopted by the Bord of AQ Austria at its
65th meeting on 10 February 2021

2021

Imprint:

Board of AQ Austria - Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria

Franz-Klein-Gasse 5, 1190 Vienna

office@aq.ac.at

www.aq.ac.at

Vienna, adopted by the Board of AQ Austria at its 65th meeting on 10 February 2021, VI.1

Table of Contents

Preamble	2
I. Procedural rules	3
A. Objectives of the audit	3
B. Standards	3
C. Procedure	5
D. Voluntary in-depth focus of the audit	8
E. Entry into force	9
II. Supplementary information on performing the procedure	10
1 Preparing the audit	10
2 Self-evaluation report	10
2.1 Presentation of the university	11
2.2 Representation and analysis of the university's quality management system in consideration of the audit standards	11
2.3 References and evidence	12
3 Reviewers	12
3.1 Requirements of AQ Austria for the selection of the review panel	12
3.2 Principles regarding the activities of the reviewers	13
3.3 The reviewers' tasks	13
3.4 Preparing the reviewers	14
4 Site visit	14
5 Review report	15
6 Comment of the university	17
7 Certification	17
7.1 Certification decision	17
7.2 Fulfilment of conditions	17
8 Publication	17
9 Follow-up	18
10 Complaint	18
11 Re-Audit	18
12 Glossary	19

Preamble

Autonomous universities are in charge of quality management which comprises quality assurance and quality development with respect to degree programmes, teaching, research or the advancement and appreciation of the arts (AAA), to their cross-cutting tasks regarding internationalisation and societal goals, as well as to their supporting administrative tasks. They develop and design their own internal quality management system in accordance with their individual profile and in compliance with European standards. The main focus of external quality assurance pursuant to the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) is on the certification of this internal quality management system based on an audit.

The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (AQ Austria) supports the universities' responsibility, and wishes to promote their quality development with its audit. In the shaping of its audit procedures, AQ Austria also takes into consideration international experience and examples of good practice from different external quality assurance systems at universities and other higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area.

The audit of AQ Austria involves the university, the reviewers as well as AQ Austria itself 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 performance of the procedures, involving foreign reviewers to include international perspectives and expertise.

With its procedural rules (Part I), these Guidelines specify in detail the provisions of the HS-QSG, F. L. G. I no. 74/2011, last amended by the Federal Act published in F. L. G. I no. 20/2021, on the performance of audits at universities. The supplementary information on performing the procedure (Part II) describes the audit procedure in more detail.

I. Procedural rules

A. Objectives of the audit

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

B. Standards

The quality management system is assessed using five standards, which define the requirements for an efficient quality management system and specify the assessment areas pursuant to § 22 para. 2 HS-QSG.

Standard 1

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

Note: The university reaches an agreement among its members on what quality means in their respective areas of responsibility and on quality management being a shared responsibility of all university members. University members include students, staff in teaching and research resp. AAA as well as non-academic staff.

The quality management strategy aims at reaching the university's objectives and enhancing its quality. The university's core responsibilities comprise the performance areas studying and teaching as well as research or AAA. The cross-cutting tasks include internationalisation and societal objectives. The supporting tasks cover the fields of organisation, administration, and human resources.

Standard 2

The university 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 comprises core responsibilities, cross-cutting tasks as well as supporting administrative tasks.

Note: The quality management system fosters the achievement of the university's objectives and the enhancement of its quality. The quality management system supports the university in regularly and systematically collecting information on its core and cross-cutting as well as its supporting tasks and uses this information for the assurance and enhancement of its quality. The information is also used as a basis for university 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 university. Where appropriate, external stakeholders of the university are involved in the quality management system.

Standard 3

The university implements quality management measures along the targeted objectives in the fields of **studying and teaching** and the societal goals as well as the goals of internationalisation relating thereto. It assesses their contribution to the achievement of the objectives and to the enhancement of the quality in those fields. The results of this assessment are incorporated in the systematic adaptation of the implemented measures.

Note: The measures are suitable for assuring and enhancing the targeted quality of the university's study programmes and teaching and of the societal goals as well as goals of internationalisation relating thereto.

The studies include degree programmes as well as non-degree programmes.

In any case, the quality management covers

- the development of new study programmes and the further development of existing study programmes,
- the review and assessment of students' competences and performance in all phases of their studies (including access to higher education and possible admission procedures),
- the further enhancement of teaching and learning processes,
- supporting and counselling services for students in all phases of their studies
- support for students in the learning process,
- support for teachers in the teaching process,
- organisational and administrative tasks in the field of studying and teaching.

Standard 4

The university implements quality management measures along the targeted objectives in the fields of **research** or the **advancement and appreciation of the arts (AAA)** and the societal goals and goals of internationalisation relating thereto. It assesses their contribution to the achievement of the objectives and to the enhancement of the quality in those fields. The results of this assessment are incorporated in the systematic adaptation of the implemented measures.

Note: The measures are suitable for assuring and enhancing the targeted quality of the university's research or AAA and of the societal goals and the goals of internationalisation relating thereto.

In any case, the quality management supports

- the researchers in their activities,
- the assessment of the research performance or achievements in AAA,
- the promotion of young academics,
- the transfer of knowledge and/or technology,
- organisational and administrative tasks in the field of research or AAA.

Standard 5

The university implements quality management measures along the targeted objectives in the field of **human resources**. It assesses their contribution to the achievement of the objectives and to the enhancement of the quality in the field. The results of this assessment are incorporated in the adaptation of the implemented measures.

Note: The measures ensure that the university has suitable staff for achieving the targeted objectives.

In any case, the measures support

- the quality management for the selection and the appointment of teaching and research staff or staff for AAA,
- the quality management for the selection and appointment of non-academic staff,
- the human resources development for teaching and research staff or staff for AAA as well as non-academic staff.
- the societal goals with regard to human resources,
- internationalisation and mobility of the staff.

C. Procedure

The audit is carried out as peer review. On the basis of the university's self-evaluation report and a site visit at the university, a group of external independent reviewers shall assess the internal quality management system, using the five audit standards, and draw up a review report. The report shall contain opinions and recommendations on the university's quality management system. The review report and a comment of the university constitute the basis for the Board of AQ Austria's certification decision.

Agreement

The university and AQ Austria shall enter into an agreement about the performance 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.

Reviewers

The review panel shall consist of at least four reviewers, one of them being a student. The panel shall have demonstrated experience in the management and organisation of universities or higher education institutions and the related quality management and be familiar with the Austrian higher education system. The review panel shall consist of international reviewers.

The Board of AQ Austria shall appoint the reviewers. The university shall have the right to raise substantiated objections against recommended individuals on grounds of bias.

The reviewers shall declare in writing that they are unbiased and that they will keep confidential all information received and lessons learned in the course of the audit. AQ Austria shall prepare the reviewers for the procedure and support them in their reviewer activities.

Self-evaluation report

The university shall prepare a self-evaluation report, presenting and reflecting on its internal quality management system and the actual implementation thereof. While taking into account the standards of these Guidelines, it is autonomous in defining the structure and design of the self-evaluation report.

Site visit

There shall be a site visit to the university, taking two to three days, during which the reviewers shall talk with members of the university. For their preparation, they shall receive the university'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 reviewers an understanding for the organisation of the university'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 reviewers.

Review report

On the basis of the knowledge gained through the self-evaluation report and the site visit the reviewers shall prepare a preliminary review report with the editorial support of AQ Austria. The report includes statements on the university's quality management system according to the audit standards and the assessment on whether the standards may be categorised as being "met", "met with reservations" or "not met".

Comment of the university

The university shall be submitted the preliminary review report and may comment on

possible factual errors and reply on the reviewers' statements and assessments. The reviewers shall consider the comment and decide on modifications to the review report.

Certification of the internal quality management system

The Board shall make a decision on the certification based on the final version of the review report and on the university's comment. The university'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 subject to condition(s). 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 18 months.

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 18 months.

Certification is limited to a period of seven years.

If the Board denies certification, the higher education institution shall perform a re-audit pursuant to § 22 para. 6 HS-QSG.

Publication

After a certification decision has been made, AQ Austria shall publish a report on the outcome of the audit procedure on its website. The report shall include the certification decision of the Board, the review report as well as the university's comment (the latter upon its approval). The university shall publish the report on the outcome of the audit procedure which in any case shall be easily accessible on its website for the period of certification.

Follow-up

AQ Austria offers the university an optional follow-up workshop to discuss topics related to the audit procedure.

Fulfilment of conditions

If a certification is granted subject to condition(s), the university shall document the fulfilment within 18 months. The Board shall decide upon certification if the examination of whether the condition(s) have been fulfilled shall entail a site visit, or if a written documentation explaining the measures taken by the university is sufficient.

The Secretariat of AQ Austria shall verify the fulfilment of the condition(s) and may, if

necessary, involve one or more members of the review panel. This/these person(s) shall submit a justified written assessment on the fulfilment of the condition(s) which is based on the university's documentation and, if applicable, on the site visit.

The decision on the fulfilment of the condition(s) of the Board of AQ Austria is based on the university's documentation and on the reviewers' assessment, provided that it was obtained.

In the case that the fulfilment of the condition(s) cannot be verified and, consequently, the Board of AQ Austria decides negatively, the quality management system is classified as not certified. If a university's quality management system is not awarded a certification, a re-audit pursuant to § 22 para. 6 HS-QSG shall be carried out.

Costs

The university shall pay the lump sum that has been determined by the Board of AQ Austria for the audit procedure as well as the costs for the reviewers which are made up of the fixed expense allowance as well as the travel and accommodation costs.

If reviewers shall be involved in the verification procedure for the condition(s), their fixed expense allowance will be charged separately.

Complaint

The university can appeal to the AQ Austria's Appeals Committee against the procedure, against the certification decision and 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.

D. Voluntary in-depth focus of the audit

The university may agree on a specific in-depth focus of the audit with AQ Austria which presents an addition to the certification with a sole view to enhancing the quality. It does not, however, influence the certification decision. AQ Austria offers to include an in-depth focus of the audit free of charge. The university may make use of this offer on a voluntary basis.

As a rule, an in-depth focus is laid on a clearly definable, independent aspect of an assessment area or a standard which the university strives to further develop and thus would like to receive external feedback on within the framework of the audit.

According to § 22 para. 5, second sentence, the in-depth focus cannot be subject to conditions. This is why it is not possible to choose an entire assessment area pursuant to § 22 para. 2 subparas. 1 to 6 HS-QSG or an entire standard pursuant to the Audit Guidelines at hand as an in-depth focus. The definable aspect for the in-depth focus is chosen in such a way that makes it possible to fully assess the fulfilment of the assessment areas or the

standards of the Audit Guidelines independently from it.

AQ Austria and the university agree on which aspect is chosen to put an in-depth focus on. The university shall describe this aspect in an own section of the self-evaluation report portraying the status quo as well as possible strengths, weaknesses and any potential for development with regard to this issue and specifying the points on which they wish to exchange with the reviewers during the site visit.

In the review report, which forms the basis for the certification decision of the Board of AQ Austria, the aspect for the in-depth focus is merely named. It does, however, not include any descriptions of possible problems or recommendations on the part of the reviewers. The reviewers' feedback is made available only to the university.

E. Entry into force

The Guidelines for the Audit of the Internal Quality Management System at Universities shall enter into force on 10 February 2021. For procedures pending at the time of the entry into force, the Guidelines of 11 September 2018 shall apply.

II. Supplementary information on performing the procedure

1 Preparing the audit

Upon request, AQ Austria shall submit an offer to the university for the performance of the audit procedure. Together with the offer, AQ Austria provides a presentation of the audit procedure as well as an initial meeting with the university. During this meeting, AQ Austria will explain the most important elements of the audit and give a detailed presentation of the procedure. Furthermore, the university 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 university to prepare and to draw up a self-evaluation report and for AQ Austria to select and prepare the reviewers.

The university and AQ Austria conclude a written agreement for the performance of the audit, which comprises the rights and obligations of both contracting parties.

The university and AQ Austria each name a person who will be responsible for the procedural coordination. The AQ Austria's procedural coordinator shall be responsible that the formal requirements of the procedure are fulfilled and shall, at no point, assume the role of a reviewer, but shall ensure an orderly and fair procedure.

2 Self-evaluation report

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

The structure of the self-evaluation report is within the responsibility of the university. It is advisable that the university explicitly addresses the individual audit standards, demonstrating how it operates with regard to the issues mentioned in each of the standards. The procedural coordinator of AQ Austria may, upon request of the university, provide feedback on the structure, comprehensibility, and completeness of the report, without 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 preparation of the university and the drawing up of a self-evaluation report. The report shall be drawn up, involving the members of the university. The resulting self-reflection helps to better define the strengths and weaknesses of the own quality management system.

The internal preparation at the university may give positive encouragement to further development measures and thus contributes to a long-term effect of the audit.

The knowledge gained shall eventually be reflected in the written presentation.

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

2.1 Presentation of the university

A short presentation of the university at the beginning of the self-evaluation report helps the reviewers to create a picture of the university. The reviewers shall be given an overview of the profile, the key indicators and the most important developments of the institution and learn, which objectives the university pursues.

The presentation of the university shall not exceed five pages.

2.2 Representation and analysis of the university's quality management system in consideration of the audit standards

The overview on the university is followed by a description of the quality management system which depends on the type or model of the system developed or chosen by the university. A graphic representation of the quality management system may be useful for giving an overview. With a view to the quality management system's orientation towards the university's objectives, it should be made clear to the readers of the self-evaluation report, what these objectives are. The same applies to the university's cross-cutting tasks (societal objectives and internationalisation).

All audit standards shall be discussed. Since the audit shall evaluate the efficiency 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 university shall describe which developments of the quality management system have been driven forward since the last audit and how recommendations, if any, have been processed.

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

2.3 References and evidence

The university may refer to information which has been sufficiently described in existing documents. These documents (for example a development plan, performance agreement, intellectual capital report, handbook on quality management, sample curricula or templates for target agreements etc.) shall be provided by the university. It may be helpful to take up existing schematic representations for the illustration of processes or organisational plans, whereas links to the university's website shall be avoided.

The use of existing documents shall reduce the workload for the university. Evidence of measures that have already been implemented may be provided in an attachment. The self-evaluation report itself shall comprise the most important information as well as comprehensible explanations on the university's quality management system.

3 Reviewers

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

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

The profile of the university (above all its size, range of disciplines, points of focus in teaching and research or AAA, strategic orientation) as well as the nature of its quality management system (e.g. centralised or decentralised quality management, EFQM-model) are decisive factors for the selection of the reviewers. The reviewers must be sufficiently fluent in the language of the proceedings (German or English), both in writing as well as orally.

Overall, the review panel shall have experience in the management and organisation of universities or higher education institutions and the related quality management and be familiar with the Austrian higher education system. Independent of their function at their own higher education institution, the reviewers shall be equal members of the review panel.

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

AQ Austria shall take into consideration any special requirements on a case-by-case basis and aims at diversity in the composition of the review panel. Furthermore, AQ Austria shall

intend for the involvement of a member of the review panel from the preceding audit.

When choosing the reviewers, AQ Austria shall check that there are no reasons for bias or incompatibility with the activity as a reviewer at the university to be found. Such reasons may be, for example:

- employment or any other contractual relationship with the university within the last five years;
- applications to the university within the last five years;
- involvement or cooperation with the university or its bodies within the last five years
- personal co-operation in research or AAA or co-operation with university members within the last five years;
- examinations taken or degrees awarded at the university within the last five years; or
- close relationships to members of the university.

Based upon the requirements described above, AQ Austria shall draw up a proposal for potential reviewers to be submitted to the university. The university 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 reviewers concerning their participation in the audit procedure. The reviewers shall declare that they are unbiased and that they will keep confidential all information on the university received and lessons learned in the course of the audit. A Code of Conduct gives the reviewers practical advice for their activities and establishes rules of conduct.

3.2 Principles regarding the activities of the reviewers

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

3.3 The reviewers' tasks

The reviewers are obliged to participate actively in the procedure. This includes that they prepare themselves with the material provided by AQ Austria and with the university's self-evaluation report.

They shall also attend the preparatory meetings organised by AQ Austria and participate in the site visit as well as in drawing up the review report. If the reviewers require further information or documents for their activities, they shall inform the AQ Austria's procedural coordinator immediately.

One person from within the review panel shall assume the chair. Customarily, this person will moderate the discussions during the site visit and coordinate the preparation of the review report on the side of the reviewers.

3.4 Preparing the reviewers

The preparation of the reviewers through AQ Austria is carried out in several phases. It aims at the reviewers' participation in the audit procedure according to the principles 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 reviewers are furthermore expected to familiarise themselves prior to the site visit with the university and its quality management system on the basis of the self-evaluation report.

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

The procedural coordinator of AQ Austria shall contact the university 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 procedural coordinator of AQ Austria and the reviewers prepare the talks to be carried out at the university, discussing the conduct and contents of the talks in detail and, if necessary, clarifying the responsibilities within the group once again.

4 Site visit

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

Building on the insights gained from the university's self-evaluation report, the site visit shall support the reviewers in developing the necessary understanding of the concept of the quality management system and its structure. This shall enable them to evaluate the effective implementation of the quality management in the different performance areas, taking into account the different perspectives, and assess the fulfilment of 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 university on the basis of a model agenda. This

allows for the university's procedural coordinator to invite the dialogue partners in a timely manner. The nomination of the students for the discussions shall be made by the student representation. The agenda shall be finalised following the preparatory video conference with the reviewers.

On the part of the university, the reviewers' dialogue partners at the site visit shall in any case be representatives of the university management, persons responsible for quality management, teaching, research or AAA staff, heads or employees of relevant organisational units and students. In the interviews with the reviewers, each of these persons shall present their positions autonomously and uninfluenced.

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

The procedural coordinator of AQ Austria shall participate in the site visit, prepare the reviewers, and ensure that the procedure is properly conducted, the standards are given equal consideration and all required information are obtained. The procedural coordinator is available throughout the entire site visit for the university as well as for the reviewers for the clarification of questions regarding the Austrian higher education system or the audit procedure, and shall act as a link between the university and the reviewers.

5 Review report

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

The review report is based on the insights gained through the university's self-evaluation report and the discussions during the site visit. All reviewers contribute equally to the review report. If necessary, they are obligated to clarify or refine their statements, points of criticism, and recommendations.

The recipients of the review report are the university, the Board of AQ Austria as well as the public, which is informed by way of publication of the review report. The statements and assessments in the review report shall be complete, comprehensible, and meaningful, 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 review report

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

AQ Austria shall provide a template, which is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: General information on the procedure

- Objectives and standards of the audit
- Information on the university
- Method and audit procedure
- Review panel

This chapter shall be prepared by AQ Austria.

Chapter 2: Summary

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

- the most important characteristics of the university'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, which comprises statements and assessments.

In their review report, the reviewers shall name elements of good practice in the university's quality management system where appropriate.

Independent of the outcome of their assessment, they shall give recommendations for enhancing the quality management system, which the university may implement on a voluntary basis.

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

If the reviewers 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 university to accomplish it within the period of 18 months. Such a circumstance arises if a requirement of the standard is not fulfilled.

Chapter 4: Attachments

The annexe shall comprise an anonymised agenda for the site visit and the Guidelines at hand.

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

6 Comment of the university

The AQ Austria's procedural coordinator shall send the preliminary review report to the university. The university shall be given the opportunity to present their own views and, if applicable, express diverging views on the reviewers' statements and assessments and clarify possible factual errors. The reviewers consider the comment and decide on modifications to the review report. The entire review panel shall approve the final review report before AQ Austria forwards it as final review report to the university.

7 Certification

7.1 Certification decision

The Board of AQ Austria shall make a decision on the certification of the internal quality management based on the final version of the review report and on the university's comment. The self-evaluation report as well as any documents submitted at a later date shall be available to the Board for inspection.

Following the Board's decision, AQ Austria shall notify the university immediately of its decision. The reviewers shall also be informed.

7.2 Fulfilment of conditions

The 18-month period for the fulfilment of the conditions shall start on the date of the Board's certification decision. If one or more members of the review panel are appointed for the examination of whether the conditions have been fulfilled, the university shall bear the resultant expenses (compensation as well as travel and accommodation costs, if any). The university shall not have to bear any costs for AQ Austria.

8 Publication

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

Pursuant to § 21 HS-QSG, the university is also obligated to make available the outcomes of the audit procedure in an easily accessible form. Therefore, it shall publish the report on the outcome on its website.

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.

9 Follow-up

The topics of an optional follow-up workshop may concern the recommendations from the review 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 university, a member of the review panel for the audit is invited to the workshop. The costs incurred shall be borne by the university. The participation of the procedural coordinator of AQ Austria does not incur further costs for the university.

10 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 university shall 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 of their investigations to AQ Austria and the university 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.

11 Re-Audit

If a university's quality management system is not awarded a certification, a re-audit pursuant to § 22 para. 6 HS-QSG shall be carried out, to be conducted by AQ Austria. 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 university 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.

¹ Members of the Appeals Committee and Rules of Procedure, accessed on 21.12.2020: <https://www.aq.ac.at/de/ueber-uns/gremien-organe/beschwerdekommission.php>

12 Glossary

AAA

The "advancement and appreciation of the arts" is one of the tasks to be fulfilled by universities pursuant to § 3 subpara. 1 UG 2002. The "quality-assurance structures and procedures in the areas of [...] advancement and appreciation of the arts" are among the assessment areas pursuant to § 22 para. 2 subpara. 2 HS-QSG.

Assessment areas

Those fields to be evaluated in any case within the framework of an audit pursuant to § 22 para. 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.

Audit procedure

An audit is a periodic peer review process, where external reviewers assess the organisation and implementation of a university'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 § 22 para. 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 university's self-assessment regarding its internal quality management system and of the reviewers' external assessment.

Certificate

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

Conditions

Conditions are only given if shortcomings are identified in the effective implementation of the quality management system, which, in the opinion of the Board, can most likely be remedied within 18 months. Conditions are binding and must be fulfilled within the period of 18 months in order to be able to keep certification.

Core responsibilities

The university's core responsibilities comprise the performance areas studying and teaching, research or AAA.

Cross-cutting tasks

The cross-cutting tasks include the societal objectives defined by the university in accordance with its profile and its strategy as well as internationalisation.

ESG

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

External stakeholder groups

Groups of society participating in the work of a university. The stakeholder groups are characterised by the university's profile and objectives. For instance, they may be composed of representatives of society, science and the labour market.

Quality cycle

Description of the ongoing process of quality assurance and, if necessary, improvement by 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 advance internal organisational and controlling processes which help the university achieve its objectives. The university is autonomous in designing these processes.

Recommendations

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

Supporting tasks

The supporting tasks cover the fields of organisation, administration, and human resources of the university.

University members

These include students as well as non-academic (administrative), teaching or research staff or staff serving the advancement and appreciation of the arts (AAA).

