



Tasks and Challenges of a German Accreditation Agency

Visit to Cologne on 30.11.2016

Learning Outcomes

The participants understand:

1. Core Elements of the German Higher Education System
2. Structure of the German Accreditation System
3. Accreditation Agency (AQAS)
 - a) Organisational Structure
 - b) Commissions and staff
 - c) Joint programmes
 - d) Strength and Weaknesses
4. Future Challenges

Background: creating the EHEA

In 1999 decision of the Ministers of Education to establish the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). 49 countries signed the Bologna-Declaration with the following goals :

- encourage the European co-operation in quality assurance of higher education with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies,
 - easily comparable degrees, a system based on two main degree cycles (= introduction of bachelors' / masters' degrees),
 - a common European system of credits (= ECTS)
 - improvement of mobility of students and teachers.
- The biggest study reform initiative for centuries in Germany. Without the Bologna Process there wouldn't have been an initiative to implement an accreditation system.

European Higher Education Area (EHEA)





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- 1. The German Higher Education System**
2. The German Accreditation System
3. Accreditation Agency AQAS

Data on Higher Education in Germany

Number of higher education institutions (392 in total)	
Universities	121
Universities of Applied Sciences	215
Universities of Arts and Music	56

Maintenance of higher education institutions	
Public higher education institutions	239
Private, but state-approved higher education institutions	153

Number of programmes and students	
study programmes as a total	16,144
study programmes with a Bachelor's degree	7,233
study programmes with a Master's degree	6,796
Total number of students	2,500,000
Teaching staff in general	337,102
Inclusive professors	42,924



The Higher Education System

- HEI are in every region in Germany
- Differences between institutions are not as high as in other countries
- Private institutions play a minor role (little number of students)
- Politically strong (German Rectors Conference) and traditional HEI (e.g. University of Cologne since 1388)
- Idea of autonomy of HEI (responsibility for QA lies within the institutions)
- Education is funded by the state (federal states / Länder)
- Students do not pay for their studies (besides for further education)
- Professors are civil servants (freedom of teaching and learning, can not be dismissed)

Strength and Weaknesses of HE-System

Strengths	Weaknesses
Qualified staff (Prof + PhD)	16 laws of HE in the Länder + federal interests
Enough resources for teaching and research	Lack of funding compared to GDP (4,8%)
Level of programmes is o.k.	Too specialised programmes
No degree mills, no uncontrolled expansion of HEI	Lack of quality of some private HEI
Employability (2.5% unemployment of academics)	Graduates get jobs which are not adequate
Joint programmes	Lack of internationalisation
Awareness of value of good teaching	Lack of digitalisation of learning



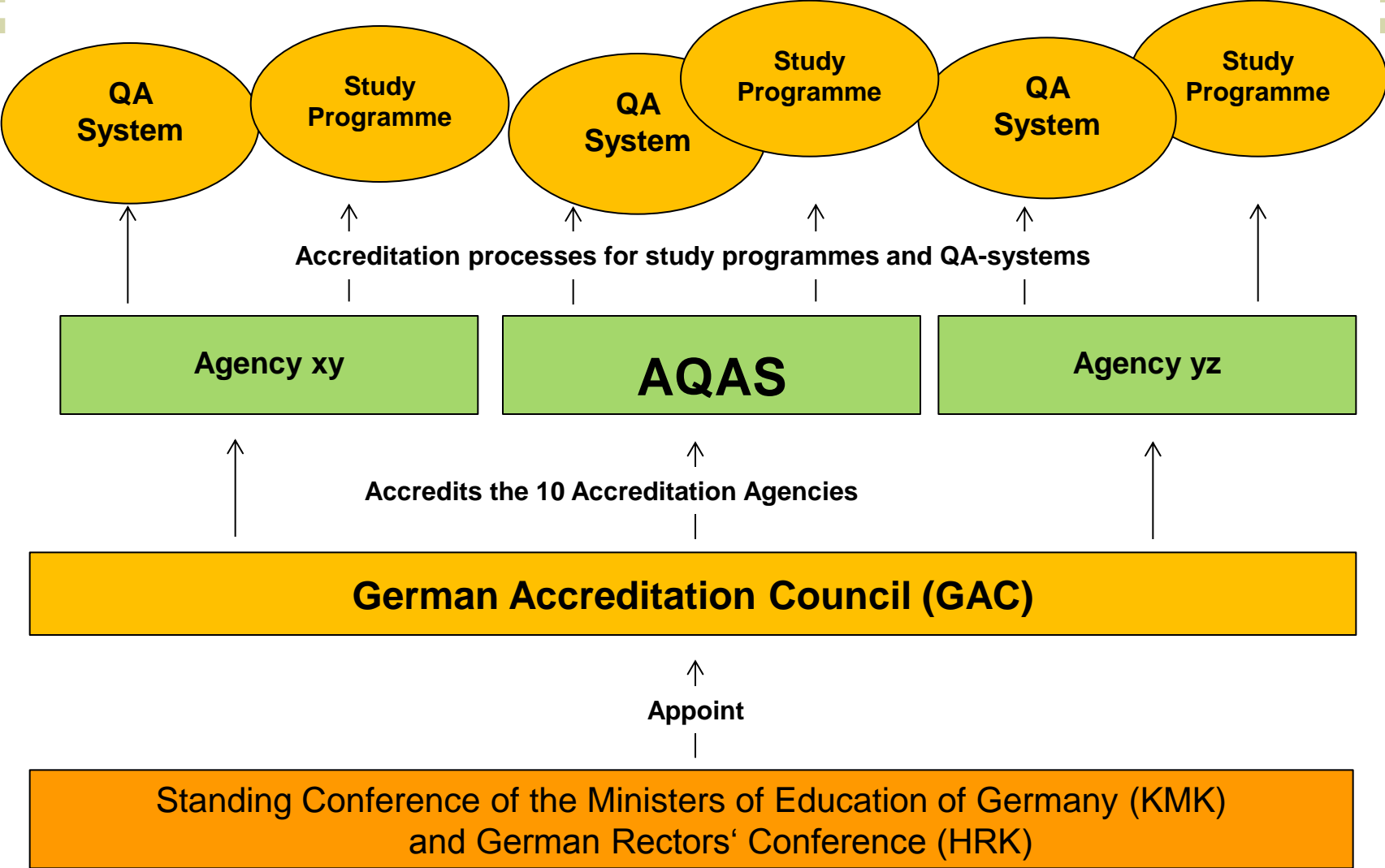
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The German Accreditation System

- Together with the introduction of a two-cycle structure of programmes (bachelor and master degrees), accreditation was introduced as a new form of external quality assurance.
- QA was delegated from the state (ministries) to (private) accreditation agencies.
- There is only an accreditation system for HE (not for VET, nor schools, both have different QA-systems).
- Each new bachelor/master programme needs an accreditation either before it starts or within a given time frame after it has started.

AQAS within the accreditation systems



The German Accreditation System

- KMK and GAC give the regulations for accreditation (based on ESG).
- Agencies carry out the procedures and take the decisions.
- Since January 2009 HEIs can choose between “programme accreditation” and “system accreditation” (institutional level).
- Both types of accreditation are carried out on a regular cycle of five, six or seven years.
- Stakeholder principle (professors, labour market and students) in all commissions and panels of GAC and agencies
- Accreditation agencies operate on a non-profit basis.
- Agencies are not funded by the state but charge HEIs for the costs of accreditation.

Changes within the System

- Since 2000 the German accreditation system has always changed!
- One agency is older than the GAC. The number of agencies rised during the years (8 + 2 foreign agencies).
- The number of regulations rised (e.g. 3 in the beginning up to numerous regulations and interpretations during the last years). And the regulations changed often (= difficulties for HEI).
- 2008 Accreditation of QA-systems of HEI was introduced.
- 2017 new regulations by the GAC (based on the new ESG 2015) are expected.

Strength and Weaknesses of the Accreditation-System

Strengths	Weaknesses
Number of agencies sufficient for number of HEI and programmes	Complexity of the system, Diversity of approaches and decisions
HEI can choose between agencies (e.g. better services, experts)	Competition of agencies (e.g. costs of accreditation)
Independence of agencies from the state	No funding by the state and no responsibility
National regulations (KMK, GAC) fit to German HE-system	Some regulations from GAC are not up-to-date (lack of reference to ESG 2015)
Widely accepted by management of HEI	Less accepted by single professors
Honorary office, commitment of experts	Limits of what can be expected from voluntary experts



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AQAS - Facts and Figures

- Established in early 2002 – reaccredited by the German Accreditation Council (until 2017)
- Membership organization: 88 Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences and 2 scientific associations
- AQAS operates on a national and international level
- Fields of experience:
 - programme validations (national and international)
 - Validation of joint / double degree programmes
 - validations of teacher training programmes
 - evaluations
 - management of expert committees (e.g. on teacher training)

International Networks

AQAS Membership in international associations:

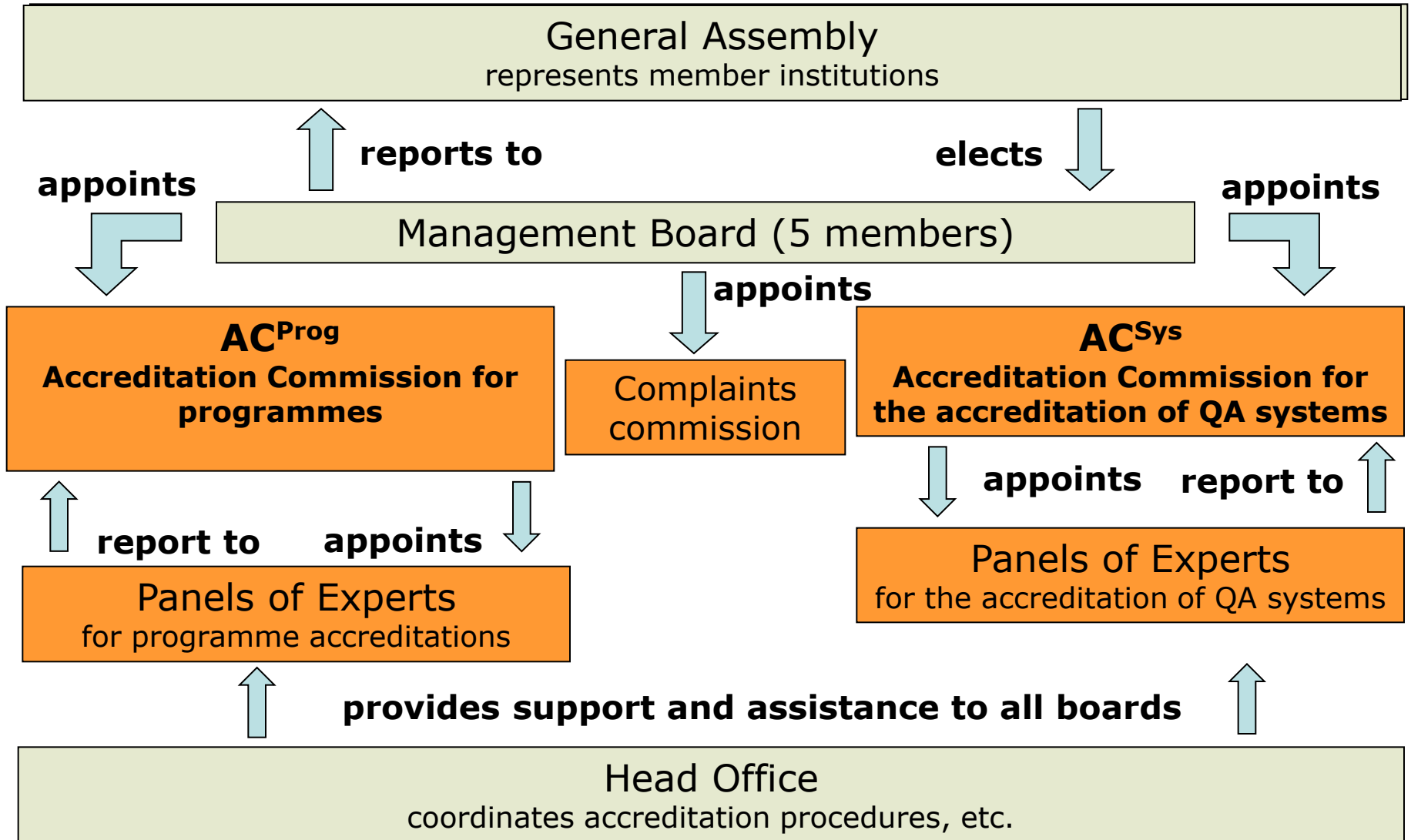
- Full Member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education)
- Listed in EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education)
- Full member of ECA (European Consortium of Accreditation Agencies)
- Full Member of INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education)

Moreover AQAS cooperates on a operational level with agencies in Spain, the Netherlands, Moldova and Poland (joint procedures, exchange, training of experts).

European Level

- ENQA members have to go through an review process every 5 years.
- European Register (EQAR): registration procedure for agencies based on the ESGs.
- *Only for German agencies*: the procedure for the German accreditation of agencies by GAC can also be used for ENQA and EQAR (avoiding double work)
- ECA membership: no special procedure but agencies can apply to sign MULTRA (cooperation to recognize accreditations decisions of other European agencies). Therefore ECA send observers to an international accreditation.

Organisation of AQAS: structure



Accreditation is made by people



Accreditation Commissions

AC^{Prog} - Accreditation Commission for the accreditation of programmes	AC^{Sys} - Accreditation Commission for the accreditation of QA systems
Chair: elected member of the AC	Chair: elected member of the AC
18 members, among them 14 members from universities and universities of applied sciences	9 members, among them members from universities and universities of applied sciences with experience in university management and/or quality assurance
2 representatives of professional practice 2 students (one from a university/one from a university of applied science)	representatives of professional practice and students
2 foreign experts	a foreign expert

Tasks of the Accreditation Commissions

The Accreditation Commissions (AC)...

- define processes for accreditation procedures
- formally open accreditation procedures
- nominate the panels
- take decisions on accreditation on the basis of the panels' reports
- deal with complaints and appeals
- Members don't act as members of a panel themselves!

Panel of Experts

Each panel is individually selected to suit the requirements of each accreditation procedure.

Typical constitution of a panel for programme accreditation

- 1 or 2 expert(s) from a university
- 1 or 2 expert(s) from a university of applied sciences
- 1 expert from the labour market
- 1 student member (coming from a pool managed by student organizations)

Panels may be larger in “cluster accreditations” (cluster of programmes).

The quality of the experts is crucial for the acceptance of the panel in the HEI and for the success of an agency.

Stakeholder principle

- AQAS worked with more than 3000 experts in the last 14 years
- High commitment of experts to time consuming, unpaid task
- Panels without position of a chairman, every member has the same value but focus differs (e.g. profs - scientific perspective, labour market - employability, student - feasibility)
- Students are trained by a student organisation for accreditation (self-organised). Good knowledge of criteria and procedures, high motivation.
- Commitment of labour market is good. Representatives of important companies support our work. Chambers help in finding/identifying such experts.

Joint programmes

- AQAS has carried out accreditation processes for more than 60 joint programmes in which German HEIs are involved (e.g. together with universities in Jordan, Laos, China, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Brazil, Turkey)
- AQAS has taken part in multinational projects with the goal to reduce the effort for international accreditation procedures
- The number of joint programmes is limited but rising.
- Many „international programmes“ are no „joint programmes“.
- Number of students in programmes: between 5 to 30 (small programmes).

Criteria for Joint Programmes

- The ESG are the basis for accreditation of joint programmes, but there are some national criteria, too.
- A joint programme with a partner outside of Europe has to fulfill all German criteria, instead the HEIs chose the „European Approach“ (only ESG as a basis)!
- Exceptions are possible: If national criteria collide with a partner institutions' regulations, the German Accreditation Council (GAC) may decide that the criterion need not be applied in this particular process.

Reality Check for agencies

Reality: agencies sit between all chairs



Wishful: sitting on one table



Strength and Weaknesses of an Agency

Strengths	Weaknesses
Long and profound experience	We could consult HEI but conflict of interest between accreditation and consultancy
Efficiency concerning procedures and strategic decisions	Finding own problem solutions, little exchange with other agencies (competition)
Independent decision taking (no political influence)	Standing alone in all kind of conflicts (e.g. political, lawsuits)
Financial independence	Economic pressure
Young motivated team, specialised colleagues (broad range of expertise)	Changes in staff, loss of experience, challenge to deal with conflicts

Future Challenges for the system

- GAC will perhaps take over all accreditation decisions. Agencies will work more on an operational level?
- The accreditation „market“ will shift from a national to an international → the competition in the EU will become harder
- Will institutional accreditation replace programme accreditation (390 HEI / 16 000 programmes)?
- Will there be sufficient financing for all agencies?
- Will there be enough experts for all accreditation procedures?