



QUALITY MANUAL

of the Central Evaluation and
Accreditation Agency Hanover
(ZEVA)

October 2023



Content

Content.....	1
1 Quality understanding and key processes.....	2
1.1 Initial status.....	2
1.2 ZEvA's principles for understanding quality	2
1.3 Organizational goals of ZEvA.....	4
1.4 Quality objectives	5
1.5 Structure and processes	6
2 Quality Management and Assurance of ZEvA	7
2.1 Project Software	7
2.2 Selection and preparation of the reviewers	8
2.3 Jour Fixe and Corporate Retreats	9
2.4 Preparation of Commission Meetings	10
2.5 Co-signing procedure.....	10
2.6 Employee appraisals, training and continuing education.....	10
2.7 Evaluation of procedures.....	11
2.8 Feedback talks with customers.....	11
2.9 External evaluation	11



1 Quality understanding and key processes

1.1 Initial status

ZEvA's understanding of quality in its quality assurance procedures requires strict adherence to procedural standards and a high degree of reliability in decision-making practice. The universities as customers expect that all procedural steps are transparent, comprehensible and justified, and that comparable circumstances do not lead to divergent decisions. ZEvA strives to ensure that its employees, the universities, the experts and its internal commissions (ZEvA Commission (ZEKO), Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK)) actively support the preparation, implementation and decision-making of the procedure as a process based on mutual trust and that they are satisfied with the results. This applies equally to the current standards of programme and system accreditation, international accreditation and auditing procedures, and certification procedures, as well as to the active role that ZEvA plays in the further development of these quality assurance procedures and the accreditation system. In addition to the comprehensibility of the expert opinions and decisions, the efficiency and timeliness of the procedures are also required. This applies in particular to the key processes of the accreditation procedures, which are carried out in a largely standardized manner. The procedures for German bachelor's and master's degree programs are based on the State Treaty on Study Accreditation and the Model Law Ordinance. For international procedures and certifications, the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) serve as the basis for the criteria formulated by ZEvA itself.

The quality of knowledge-based organizations such as ZEvA lives and grows through the interdependent sharing and multiplication of knowledge. This requires internal trust and a continuous open exchange of information. ZEvA understands the principle of "increasing knowledge by sharing knowledge" also as a continuous training process for its employees and those involved in the procedures and thus as an element of quality assurance. A prerequisite for the willingness to share knowledge and to work effectively together as a team is an organization that rewards this willingness. Starting from the core processes of evaluation, accreditation, auditing and certification procedures, the organization must design its workflows efficiently, increase procedural security and keep knowledge resources available without restriction within the framework of procedural requirements.

1.2 ZEvA's principles for understanding quality

The Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK) of ZEvA passed the following basic resolution on its understanding of quality at its 29th meeting on 5 December 2006. This resolution is the basis for the audit approach in the national accreditation procedures supervised by ZEvA and applies equally to international accreditation and auditing procedures:

Understanding of quality as related to the study programme

On the occasion of its foundation in 1995, ZEvA dealt intensively with the concept of quality assurance in teaching and study and examined the concept of quality in detail. In its understanding, quality of teaching and study is a concept that must be unfolded in at least three dimensions, namely as

- Input quality
- Process quality and



- Output, target or result quality.

Whereas the output quality consists of the coherent justification of the qualification goals, the input and process quality is shown in the degree of suitability of the available resources and the design of the teaching-learning process for the achievement of the qualification goals.

The description of the qualification objectives is based on the competence requirements of future professional practice, on the intended contribution to personal development and on enabling students to actively participate in social life in a democratic community. In describing the competencies to be taught and the qualification levels associated with the degrees, explicit reference is made to the Dublin Descriptors and the National or European Qualifications Framework.

The input quality is expressed in the degree of suitability of the material and personnel basis of the qualification process for the realization of the qualification goals, while the process quality is reflected in the consistency, coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of the conception, organization, and implementation of the study programme.

Following the discussion at the beginning of the 1990s both in the German Rectors' Conference and in the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat), ZEvA has oriented itself to the following expressions of the concept of quality and adapted them to the (minimum) standards later defined by the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs:

1. A quality related to the educational profile of the graduates of a study programme, describing their knowledge, skills and qualifications and assessing them as a result of the education. The assessment is based on the implicit or explicit objectives, standards or norms formulated by the higher education institution, considering scientific, social and economic frames of reference.
2. A quality that is related to the qualification process between the beginning and the end of the study programme and focuses on the growth of education, competence, knowledge, and skills and the development of personality.
3. A quality resulting from the coherence and consistency of the educational process, which assesses the organization of the teaching and study process, as well as its coherence and effectiveness in relation to the educational and training objectives set and pursued.
4. A quality that is based on the fulfillment of expectations and demands that are placed on scientifically based higher education. In this context, quality expectations can be shaped by different interests and considered to varying degrees.

A quality oriented to efficiency aspects, based on a favorable relationship between the means employed and the result achieved.

Fundamentals of the audit approach

For ZEvA's assessment approach, it is the university's task to define its understanding of quality against the background of the respective requirements. In this context, it is expected that the departments responsible for the implementation of the study programs specify and justify the standards inherent in the respective discipline and academic culture and thus make them accessible for review. This precludes a standard imposed in a binding manner from outside the department or college. In this respect, it is not the task of ZEvA to set quality standards, but to review them. In this sense, ZEvA carries out



accreditation, auditing and certification procedures across disciplines and higher education institutions.

The agency's understanding of its mission

It is ZEvA's task to organize the assessment process on the basis of the formal requirements and procedural standards and to rely on the peer review principle formulated in the ESG. The assessment procedures result in expert recommendations for accreditation and are concluded by a decision of the ZEvA Commission or by a decision of the Accreditation Council. The composition of the ZEvA Commission ensures the necessary professional and interdisciplinary expertise as well as an appropriate further development of the procedural standards. From the described understanding of quality, the ESG and, in Germany, from the legal ordinances of the federal states, it follows that representatives of the academic disciplines, representatives of professional practice and students must be involved in accreditation procedures. Furthermore, the procedures respect the constitutional principle of freedom of art and science, research, and teaching, and at the same time contribute to the realization of the goals of the European Bologna Process.

1.3 Organizational goals of ZEvA

ZEvA aims to remain one of the leading European agencies for quality assurance, evaluation and accreditation for higher education institutions and study programs. In addition to carrying out evaluation, accreditation, auditing, and certification procedures, ZEvA's mission is to further develop quality assurance procedures through cooperation in the national and international context. ZEvA is a founding member of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and participated in the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI), which developed criteria for Bachelor and Master programs (Dublin Descriptors) on a European level. ZEvA is registered in the European Register of Accreditation Agencies (EQAR), has been licensed as an agency in Austria since November 2013, and its decisions are recognized in several countries within and outside of Europe.

With its two business units Evaluation and Accreditation, ZEvA has the most extensive and longest experience among German accreditation agencies. The accreditation procedures are constantly adapted to changing requirements and findings. They are based on international standards and are updated in a continuous international dialogue.

ZEvA pioneered the further development of the German accreditation system. At the request of the higher education institutions, programme accreditation can be preceded by a system or model assessment, which evaluates the process control at the various management and administrative levels of the higher education institution. This emphasizes the system context of the university's programme offerings and relieves the subsequent programme accreditation process. Model evaluations can also support the university in its preparation for system accreditation, which may be sought at a later date.

ZEvA has lean and manageable structures. Systematic and formalized processes as well as information and communication processes contribute to quality assurance, with particular emphasis on:

- Organizational efficiency,
- Compliance with the procedural deadlines,



- Transparency through complete documentation of procedures and processes,
- Division of tasks and perception of responsibility,
- Economy and good cost-effectiveness ratio,
- internal or external evaluation of the process quality,
- Consideration of all work processes and fields of activity.

Ensuring the coherence and consistency of evaluations and decisions is a key quality objective. For this purpose, regular feedback with the reviewers takes place. The decision-making competencies of the employees, the management (GF), the scientific management (WL), and the ZEvA commission are clearly defined. The employees work independently on the basis of job descriptions and task assignments that correspond to their qualifications.

1.4 Quality objectives

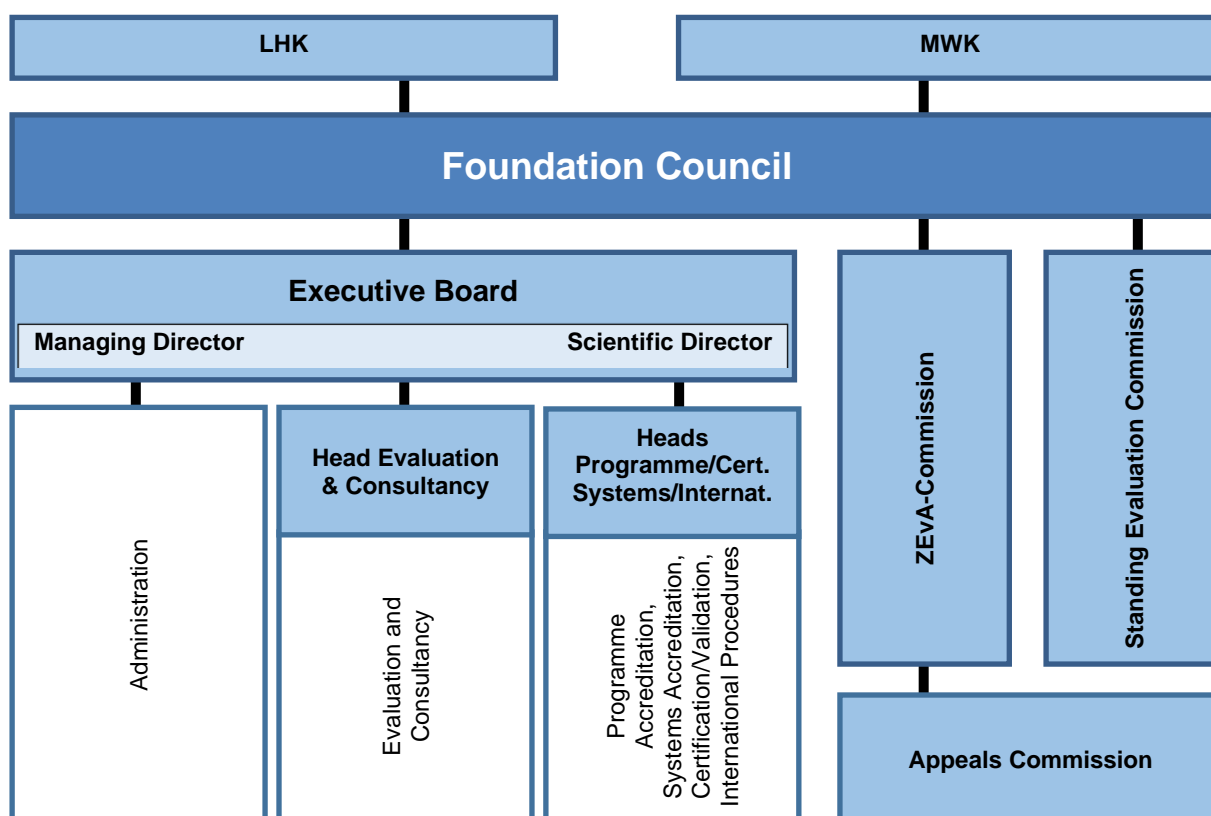
Objective	Measure
High quality of assessments	The reviews and evaluation reports, as well as the subsequent decisions, consider all evaluation criteria. The assessments are comprehensibly justified. The factual basis for the evaluation is sufficient.
Customer satisfaction	Benefits for students in the focus Effective quality management Internal evaluation through evaluation of procedures
Expertise, appropriateness of decisions and reliability	Ensure comparable decisions in comparable cases, e.g. by entering the decisions in the ZEvA database. Ensuring the quality of the reviewers through feedback with commissions and within the team. Further training of the reviewers, employees and commission members.
Efficiency and effectiveness	Adherence to deadlines Internal controlling of processes Consulting and publications for universities Securing resources
Transparency	Documents completeness Actuality of the documents Quality of documents Flawless documentation Publications



Compliance with procedural principles	Co-signing procedure Project management separate from planning/controlling and organizational controlling. Internal feedback, with the other agencies, with the Accreditation Council Accountability and division of labor; Reliability Truthfulness
---------------------------------------	---

1.5 Structure and processes

The following diagram illustrates the structure of ZEvA and the decision-making processes.



The highest supervisory body of ZEvA is the Foundation Council. It consists of six representatives of science and one member of the founder, the state of Lower Saxony.

The members are elected by the State Conference of Higher Education Institutions in Lower Saxony (LHK) on the recommendation of a search committee; one member is nominated by the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science and Culture (MWK).

The Foundation Council is responsible for all matters of the Foundation that are of fundamental importance for both evaluation and accreditation. In particular, it has the following tasks:

- Appointment and dismissal of members of the Foundation Board (Managing Director and scientific Director),



- Acceptance of the Foundation Board's accountability report, resolution on the business plan and granting of discharge to the Foundation Board,
- Appointment of the members of the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK) and their dismissal,
- Appointment and dismissal of members of the ZEvA Commission (ZEKo) and their dismissal,
- Resolution on amendments to the Foundation Charter,
- Resolution on the abolition of the foundation,
- Approval of the Rules of Procedure of the Foundation Board, the Standing Evaluation Commission and the ZEvA Commission.

The strategy of ZEvA is also coordinated in the Foundation Council. In addition, the annual report and the annual financial statements of ZEvA are presented.

The scientific director is the chairman of the Standing commissions. He/she chairs the meetings without voting rights. The managing director represents the foundation in and out of court, manages the branch office, is the superior of the employees and participates in the committee meetings in an advisory capacity.

The ZEKo is responsible for appointing the peer review groups for programme and system accreditation, international accreditation and auditing procedures, and certification and validation procedures. For all procedures that do not fall within the competence of the Accreditation Council and end with a formal resolution, the ZEKo makes the final decisions. In addition, it makes final decisions on all appeals and complaints following the recommendation of the Appeals Commission and elects the six members of the Appeals Commission.

The SEK controls evaluation processes as a whole. To this end, it adopts a two-year work plan. It receives the reports on ongoing evaluation processes and adopts the evaluation reports with the recommendations for quality assurance contained therein. It adopts the procedural principles and monitors compliance with them. The MWK and the LHK each have one seat in the SEK.

2 Quality Management and Assurance of ZEvA

In order to meet the quality requirements and to operationalize its understanding of quality for its own actions, ZEvA has developed a formalized and binding system of its internal quality management. It serves the quality of procedures, the analysis of its own processes, the systematic self-correction capability through functional feedback processes such as evaluation procedures and the training of employees and reviewers.

The individual elements of ZEvA's stakeholder-related quality management and the quality assurance of ZEvA's procedures are described below.

2.1 Project Software

ZEvA controls its procedures via a project software, which supports the project officers in carrying out the assessment procedures. A first project database for programme accreditation procedures was introduced in 2009. Since then, the documentation of the procedures and the tracking of project deadlines are fully computerized. In 2021, a new, externally provided project software was implemented.



The software contains master data of the involved stakeholders and documents ZEvA's procedures along the process diagram of the accreditation procedures. At the same time, the database contains a deadline calendar for the accreditation deadlines and for the fulfillment of requirements, which ensures that ZEvA's project officers can follow up the respective tasks in due time despite the large number of procedures.

Furthermore, the software serves to document the working time spent on a procedure, related to the individual milestones. This documentation is evaluated by the ZEvA administration and used as a basis for cost calculations for the respective procedures. In addition, it is used to determine whether there is still a need for optimization in the timing of the procedural steps.

The project software serves

- the process control of the procedures and their documentation,
- as a repository for relevant documents and papers related to the project,
- as an electronic deadline book for all procedural steps,
- as documentation of all reviewers with their CVs and the procedures in which they have been active,
- the project-related recording of working time
- and thus, as a management information system for the management of ZEvA.

The project software is regularly updated and adapted to the current regulations and specifications for the respective procedures.

2.2 Selection and preparation of the reviewers

The appointment of the reviewers is made by the decision-making body responsible for the respective type of procedure on the recommendation of the ZEvA project officers in charge. In addition, the institutions to be evaluated are informed about the nominated peer reviewers and are given the opportunity to raise objections, if necessary. The institutions are not granted a right of veto or proposal.

In addition to the qualification and preparation of the experts at the beginning of each (virtual) site visit, their qualification is ensured by additional seminars, webinars and workshops. As a rule, three webinars and one workshop are to be held each year. The goal is that at least 50% of a group of reviewers consists of persons who have undergone training by ZEvA or other qualified agencies or who have completed at least three procedures. It must be taken into account that the student representatives in the group of reviewers are usually requested via the student accreditation pool and have thus also undergone training and are considered to be trained accordingly.

The 2.5-hour webinars are intended to be as low-threshold an offer as possible for potential experts to inform themselves about the latest specifications and interpretations of criteria. In addition to input presentations on the current guidelines, the webinars will also provide sufficient time for an exchange of experiences regarding typical problems and their solutions in teaching and studying.

In addition to the general requirements covered in the webinars, the workshops will focus on specific topics. As the workshops consist of a thematic part on accreditation (based on the contents of the webinars) and the respective thematic focus (e.g. examination system, dual programmes, joint and double degrees, digital teaching, etc.), the workshops are conducted jointly by the evaluation and



programme accreditation sections as well as external experts. The formats always provide for special interactive forms of work, among other things by means of case studies, which allow the participants to contribute their own experiences. Thus, the workshops are valuable for ZEvA in three ways: on the one hand, evaluators are further qualified, ZEvA can contribute to specific topics and further raise its profile with the universities, and on the other hand, ZEvA obtains information on problems and experiences from an external perspective.

After the seminars, the participants are asked about their satisfaction by means of evaluation questionnaires (in the webinars by means of the integrated webinar survey tool). These surveys are evaluated centrally at ZEvA and are incorporated into the process for revising procedural methods.

For the individual procedures, the reviewers receive a guideline as well as a compilation of the resolutions relevant to the procedure. ZEvA concludes contracts with the experts, which explain their tasks and the principles of the evaluation and ensure the experts' impartiality. As an annex to the contract, a "Code of Conduct" is submitted, which sets out ZEvA's understanding of the appraiser's work.

Before on-site assessments, the reviewers are also prepared for the respective procedure by means of an internal preliminary meeting.

2.3 Jour Fixe and Corporate Retreats

ZEvA holds a monthly general Jour Fixe. The results are recorded in a protocol. The Jour Fixe serves, in addition to the regulation of the service operation, in particular the exchange of experience in the assessment procedures and the development of a common interpretation of standards, criteria and guidelines.

The agenda of the Jour Fixe always follows the same pattern:

1. To-Dos of previous Jour Fixes
2. Information by the management
3. Programme Accreditation
4. System accreditation
5. International affairs
6. Evaluation
7. Certification
8. Projects
9. Administration
10. IT
11. Miscellaneous

Every two weeks, a Jour Fixe of administrative personnel is held as well as a Jour Fixe of the management and the section heads, in which central topics of the management and administration of ZEvA are discussed.

Another quality-assuring element are ZEvA's corporate retreats, which are usually held annually. These lay the foundations for ZEvA's strategic orientation in the respective departments. In addition, the retreats serve to revise the individual procedures and sample documents. The employees prepare working papers in advance for the retreat and present them there to introduce the topics of the individual



meetings. They are then responsible for securing the results in their respective areas of responsibility.

2.4 Preparation of Commission Meetings

The commission meetings of the respective decision-making bodies (ZEKo, SEK) are intensively prepared by the business office. ZEvA employees prepare the meeting documents for the agenda items relating to the procedures for which they are responsible. Approximately four weeks before the respective meeting, a preliminary discussion of the meeting takes place with the Executive Board, in which each procedure is discussed intensively, and a proposed resolution is prepared for the meeting. This ensures that consistent decisions are made in comparable situations.

The project officers responsible for the respective procedures present them themselves in the commission meeting and can provide the commission with useful background information on them.

2.5 Co-signing procedure

A co-signature procedure has been established for various ZEvA processes to ensure the quality of documents given to the outside world.

Contracts with institutions are drawn up by the management of the respective department in cooperation with the administration. These are co-signed by the Managing Director. In addition, if necessary, time schedules are agreed upon with the respective procedure managers.

The decisions and certificates in accreditation, auditing and certification procedures are drawn up by the administration and signed by the project officers in charge of the procedure and the Managing Director.

Evaluation reports are quality assured in accordance with the "four-eyes principle". As a rule, evaluation reports are proofread by the respective section head, the Managing Director or another project officer.

These co-signing processes minimize potential errors in the preparation of these documents. In addition, it is ensured that formalized documents are prepared in accordance with a standardized principle.

2.6 Employee appraisals, training and continuing education

The Managing Director conducts regular staff appraisals with the ZEvA project officers. In these meetings, the work of the respective employee is reflected upon and, if necessary, the need for optimization and further training is identified. In addition, employees are given the opportunity to further their education by participating in conferences and workshops (e.g. events by the German accreditation Council, the German Rectors Conference or various associations). ZEvA also offers its employees professional coaching on an ad hoc basis or employs external support for its organizational development processes.

New colleagues are trained by the head of the respective department and experienced employees. In addition, the new employees sit in on the assessment procedures of experienced colleagues and are also accompanied in their first self-conducted procedures.



2.7 Evaluation of procedures

As part of ZEvA's quality management, all experts and universities are surveyed on the course of the accreditation and evaluation procedures. The survey is conducted via internet-based questionnaires and is carried out using the 'SurveyMonkey' system. The results are evaluated every six months. Whereas the officers receive personalized result reports to reflect on their own work, the section heads and management receive reports aggregated to the relevant business area to assess the overall performance of the individual areas. In a defined process for revising procedural methods, appropriate corrections and procedural adjustments are developed.

The evaluation of the questionnaires is done centrally in the administration of ZEvA. The aggregated results are made available to all employees. In addition, all project officers receive the evaluation of their own processes. The Managing Director receives the overall overview and the individual results and consults with the employees concerned in the event of negative results. If necessary, measures for improvement are defined.

2.8 Feedback talks with customers

ZEvA conducts on-site feedback interviews with the institutions assessed on an ad-hoc basis. These could be scheduled e.g. after completion of a larger quantity of procedures in order to determine the general satisfaction with ZEvA's procedures and to solicit suggestions for improvement. The results are documented in writing and used for ZEvA's general quality management. The suggestions of the institutions are used to further develop ZEvA's procedures and to increase customer satisfaction.

2.9 External evaluation

ZEvA is regularly externally reviewed, first in 2000 and since then in 2003, 2006, 2011 and 2016 by the Accreditation Council. Since 2021, the assessment is carried out by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). In this procedure, the conformity of ZEvA's procedures with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) will be reviewed. At the end of the procedure, the Executive Board of ENQA decides on the renewal of ZEvA's membership in ENQA, and the Register Committee of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) decides on the renewal of the listing in EQAR. The listing in EQAR is the prerequisite for the accreditation as an accreditation agency in Germany. The assessment has to be repeated every 5 years.



Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency
Hanover (ZEVA)
Lilienthalstraße 1
30179 Hannover

Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Teichler

Foundation Executive Board

Henning Schäfer (Managing Director)
Prof. Dr. Katja Koch / Dr. Marion Rieken
(Provisional Scientific Directors)

Contact

Tel.: 0511 54 355 701 (Secretariat)

Fax: 0511 54 355 999

www.zeva.org