



QUALITY MANUAL

of the Central Evaluation and
Accreditation Agency Hanover
(ZEVA)

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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 Measures for quality assurance	7
2.1 Guidelines for internal quality assurance.....	7
2.2 Project database	7
2.3 Selection and preparation of the reviewers.....	8
2.4 Jour Fixe and closed meetings.....	9
2.5 Session preparation.....	9
2.6 Co-signing procedure	10
2.7 Employee appraisals, training and continuing education	10
2.8 Evaluation of procedures	10
2.9 Feedback talks with customers	11
2.10 Board of Trustees	11
2.11 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 program 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 program

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 program.

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 program, 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 program 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) and has also been accredited as an agency in Austria since November 2013.

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, program accreditation can be preceded by a system 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 program offerings and relieves the subsequent program accreditation process. System 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

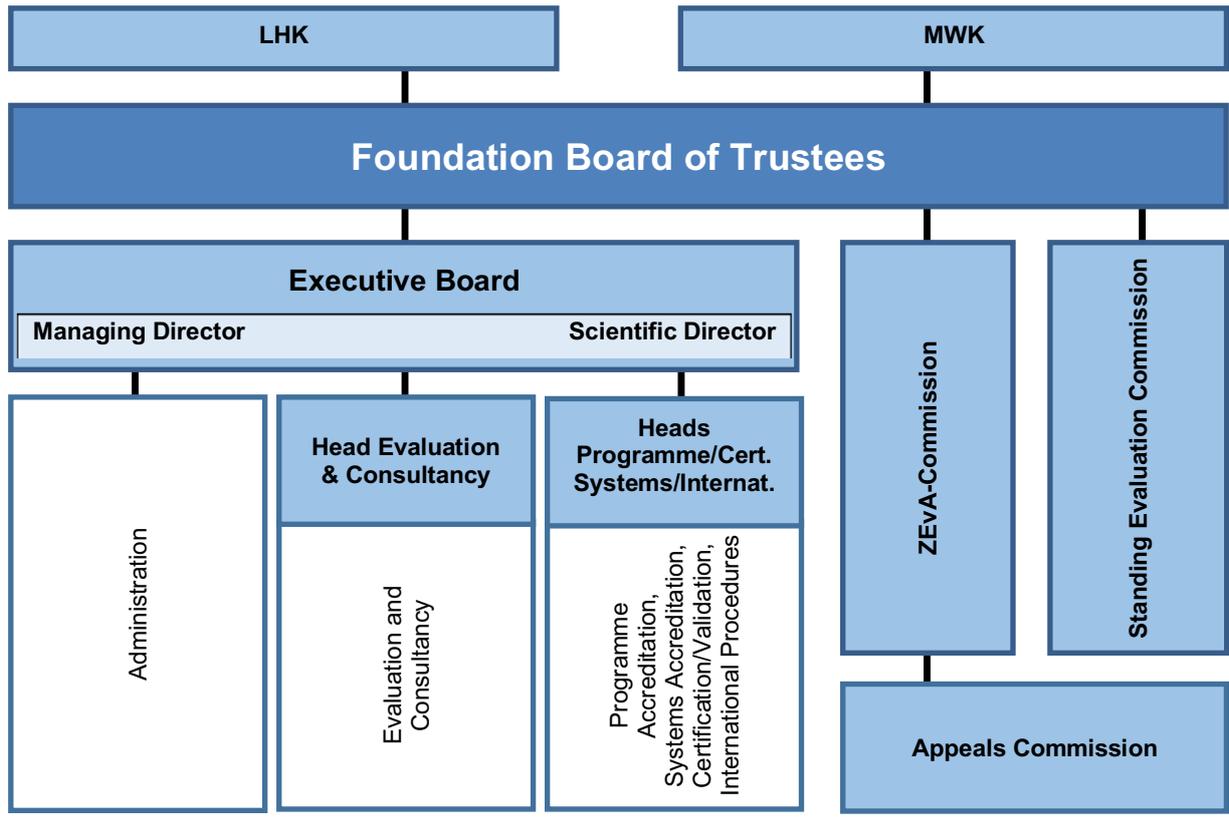
Objective	Measure
High quality of assessments	The reviews and evaluation reports, as well as the subsequent decisions, consider all evaluation criteria. The assessments are comprehensibly justified. The factual basis for the evaluation is sufficient.
Customer satisfaction	Benefits for students in the 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
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1.5 Structure and processes

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



The Board of Trustees consists of seven members experienced in the field of quality assurance at universities. 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 ministry responsible for higher education. The foundation board appoints the scientific director and the managing director, who form the foundation board.

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 Board of Trustees appoints the ten members of the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK) and the 20 members of the ZEvA Commission (ZEKO). The ZEKo in turn elects the six members of the Appeals Commission. In the SEK, the Ministry of Science (MWK) and the LHK each have one seat.

The ZEKo is responsible for appointing the peer review groups for program 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, the ZEKo makes the final decisions. In addition, it makes final decisions on all appeals and complaints following the recommendation 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.

2 Measures for quality assurance

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 the quality assurance of ZEvA's procedures are described below.

2.1 Guidelines for internal quality assurance

As a manual for the employees of ZEvA, a guideline for internal quality assurance was formulated, which since March 2007 has been made binding in its current version as an instruction for use by the employees.

In this guideline, the key processes of the various work areas are described and graphically documented and were thus made the subject of project and financial controlling. The diagram provides the following information: Levels of action and actors, procedural steps, responsibilities, handover to internal and external interfaces, timeline, milestones, feedback, documents and records assigned to the steps of action.

The guidelines are made available to all employees via the intranet.

2.2 Project database

ZEvA controls its procedures via a project database, which supports the project officers, the reviewers and the universities in carrying out the assessment procedures and also supports the commission members in preparing the commission meetings. A first project database for program accreditation procedures was introduced in 2009. Since then, the documentation of the procedures, the organization of the commission meetings of the ZEKo and the tracking of deadlines for accreditation and the fulfillment of requirements are fully computerized. The database contains master data of the involved stakeholders and stores the assigned documents 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 can check and confirm the implementation of the requirements in the specified time despite the large number of procedures.



Furthermore, the database serves to document the working time spent on a procedure. 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 database serves

- the process control of the procedures and their documentation,
- as a repository for all relevant sample documents and papers,
- to document the decisions and rulings of ZEvA,
- to organize the meetings of all decision-making bodies of ZEvA,
- as an electronic deadline book for all procedural steps, in particular accreditation deadlines and deadlines for suspensions and conditions,
- 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 database software is regularly updated and adapted to the current regulations and specifications for the respective procedures.

2.3 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 selection of the peer reviewers and are given the opportunity to raise objections, if necessary. The institutions are not granted a right of veto or proposal.

The preparation of the reviewers for the reviewer-based procedures is based on various instruments such as guidelines, handouts, the preliminary meeting of the inspection and the reviewer training courses (reviewer seminars) offered by ZEvA.

The seminars for reviewers of accreditation procedures are held annually by ZEvA. The seminars focus on the communication and discussion of the innovations in the accreditation system, as well as a discussion and feedback on the interpretation of the criteria of the Accreditation Council. For other business areas, training courses are held on an ad hoc basis.

The training courses are conducted by experienced ZEvA employees. The topics for the seminars are determined, among other things, by the surveys of the reviewers and universities as well as by suggestions for topics in the seminars themselves. The concept of the seminars is regularly adapted to current developments. After the seminars, the participants are asked about their satisfaction by means of evaluation questionnaires. These are evaluated centrally at ZEvA.

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.

2.4 Jour Fixe and closed meetings

ZEvA holds a Jour Fixe every two weeks. 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. Program Accreditation
2. System accreditation
3. International affairs
4. Evaluation
5. Certification
6. Projects
7. Administration
8. IT
9. Miscellaneous

Alternating with the general Jour Fixe, a Management Jour Fixe is held between the management and the management of the individual departments, in which central topics of the management of ZEvA are discussed.

Another quality-assuring element is ZEvA's internal closed meetings, which are usually held annually. These lay the foundations for ZEvA's strategic orientation in the respective departments. In addition, the closed meetings serve to revise the individual procedures and sample documents. The employees prepare working papers in advance for the closed meetings 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.

2.5 Session preparation

The commission meetings of the respective decision-making bodies (ZEKO, SEK) are intensively prepared by the branch office. The 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 Foundation 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.

By documenting the results of the meetings in the project database, a "memory" of the commissions has also been established, enabling comparison with earlier decisions.

The processors of the respective procedures present them themselves in the commission meeting and can provide the commission with useful background information on them.



2.6 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 head of department or the Managing Director.

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.

2.7 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. At irregular intervals, joint training sessions are also held for employees, in the past for example on counseling and rhetoric. In addition, employees are given the opportunity to further their education by participating in conferences and workshops.

New colleagues are trained by the head of the respective department and experienced employees. An important tool for this is the guideline for internal quality assurance. In addition, the new employees sit in on the assessment procedures of experienced colleagues and are also accompanied in their first own procedures. In addition, colleagues who have been working at ZEvA for a longer period of time accompany each other during on-site assessments in order to exchange experiences.

2.8 Evaluation of procedures

Within the framework of internal quality assurance, all reviewers and universities are surveyed on the course and results of the accreditation procedures. The survey is conducted via internet-based questionnaires and is carried out using the 'SurveyMonkey' system. The ZEvA Commission, the Standing Evaluation Commission and the ZEvA Board of Trustees are informed about the survey results. Where necessary, appropriate corrections and procedural adjustments have been made.

In addition, the members of ZEvA's decision-making bodies are also regularly surveyed. Here, as in the surveys of the reviewer groups, the evaluations of the commission members give rise to improvements. In ZEvA's seminars, participants are asked about their satisfaction directly afterwards via a paper-based questionnaire.

In less standardized procedures, where evaluation via a questionnaire is not possible or meaningful,



feedback from the institutions on the procedures is obtained via a structured telephone interview.

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.

2.9 Feedback talks with customers

ZEvA conducts on-site feedback interviews with the institutions assessed. These are scheduled 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.

2.10 Board of Trustees

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

The Board of Trustees 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,
- 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 and their dismissal,
- Appointment and dismissal of members of the ZEvA Commission,
- Resolution on amendments to the Articles of Association,
- 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 Board of Trustees. In addition, the annual report and the annual financial statements of ZEvA are presented.

2.11 External evaluation

ZEvA is regularly externally reviewed, first in 2000 and since then in 2003, 2006, 2011 and 2016 by the Accreditation Council. From 2021, the assessment will be 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.



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