



swiss center of accreditation and
quality assurance in higher education

Accreditation of the universities of applied sciences

Guide to accreditation procedure

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Introduction

The subject of accreditation is the internal quality assurance system of a university of applied sciences (UAS) in the areas of education, research, continuing education and services.

The procedure conforms to the general rules for performing accreditation and is closely linked with the "FDEA¹ guidelines² on accreditation of universities of applied sciences and degree programmes" dated May 4, 2007.

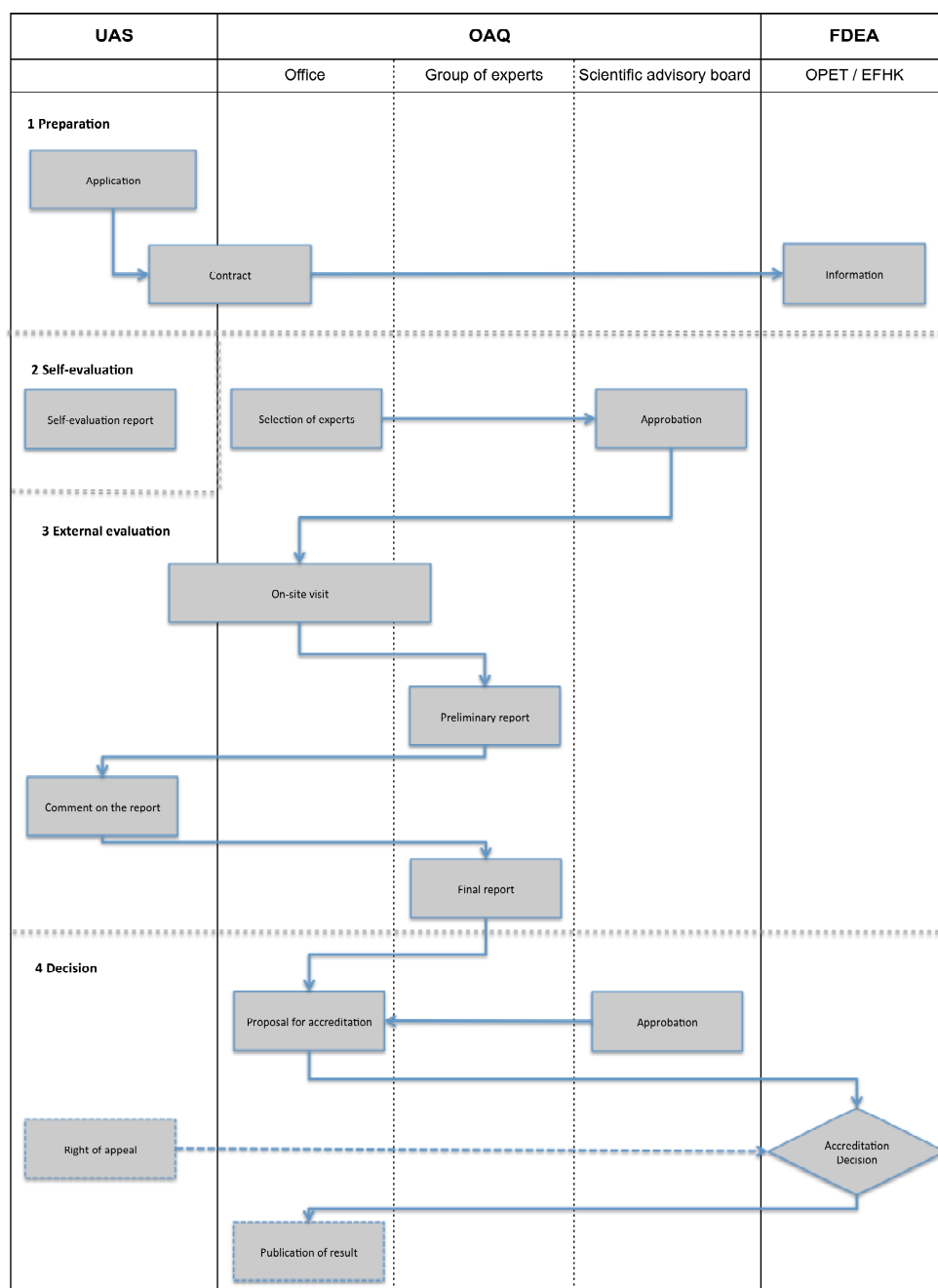
Moreover, the OAQ emphasizes the aspect of quality development when organizing the procedure. The entire process is therefore performed in close collaboration with the university of applied sciences itself. Renowned experts are considered peers, whereby their selection will be aligned especially with the development goals of the UAS itself.

This document describes the OAQ's accreditation procedure (in a schematic overview) and serves as a guide for the UAS in performing its self-evaluation and in writing the respective report. It also serves as guide for the expert panel in its external evaluation.

¹ FDEA: Federal Department of Economic Affairs

² Referred to in this document as the "FDEA Guidelines"

Schematic overview of accreditation process for universities of applied sciences



1 Preparation

Prior to initializing the accreditation process, the OAQ holds a preliminary meeting with the responsible staff of the UAS to discuss the procedure, contents, objectives as well as relevant costs.

1.1 Application

The university of applied sciences submits an application for accreditation to the OAQ's administrative office. The application form can be viewed and downloaded on the OAQ's homepage³. It is to be signed by the management of the UAS and then forwarded to the OAQ via mail.

1.2 Examination of the application, conclusion of a contract

After examining the application, the OAQ concludes a contract with the respective university of applied sciences concerning the performance, time frame and process costs. In addition, the contact persons within the UAS and in the OAQ's administrative office are specified.

2 Self-evaluation

The self-evaluation process should involve as many relevant groups in the university of applied sciences as possible. To ensure this, the formation of a steering group is recommended. In addition, one person should be assigned the responsibility of supervising the self-evaluation phase.

The steering group ideally comprises five to seven members who represent various key groups and who will be questioned by the expert team during the latter's on-site visit. This includes the academic management, the administration, the faculty, the academic staff, the students and the quality assurance department.

During the entire self-evaluation procedure it is imperative that any quantitative and qualitative data is collected in a systematic and well structured manner because this data forms the basis for evaluating all accreditation criteria.

Two meetings with the OAQ's administrative office are foreseen during the self-evaluation phase for the purpose of clarifying questions and discussing any problems. If necessary, the university of applied sciences may, however, turn to the OAQ at any time during the entire accreditation process.

2.1 Self-evaluation report

As a rule, the self-evaluation phase lasts between three to four months. In this phase the university of applied sciences writes its self-evaluation report which must include all documents relevant to the process, in particular an analysis of all evaluated areas and the

³ www.oaq.ch

extent to which the quality standards of institutional accreditation based on FDEA Guidelines have been implemented.

The OAQ has set-up so-called reference points to the evaluation areas and to the standards for universities of applied sciences in order to aid the applicant UAS in collecting the information necessary for its evaluation (see OAQ document Quality standards for institutional accreditation, points of reference, March 2011).

With a view towards developing quality, the applicant UAS may request that special areas and themes are also checked.

The self-evaluation phase should establish a good foundation which will enable experts to assess the accreditation criteria. When compiling the self-evaluation report, those responsible should ensure that it includes both descriptive as well as analytical elements, and in particular, an analysis of strengths and weaknesses.

The self-evaluation report should be submitted to the OAQ at least four weeks prior to the foreseen date of external evaluation.

Instructions on the scope of the documents as well as a checklist are found in ANNEX A: self-evaluation checklist.

3 External evaluation

The external evaluation phase includes the on-site visit, the preliminary expert report, the comment from the respective university of applied sciences, the final expert report as well as the selection of experts, whereby the latter begins with the self-evaluation.

3.1 Selection of experts

The OAQ puts together an expert team and designates a peer leader. This expert team shall consist of minimum five individuals that must be approved by the Scientific Advisory Board.

The selection of experts will be aligned with the strategic objectives of the university of applied sciences and should be guided by the following criteria:

- The experts must be independent and must be able to make an impartial assessment.
- The majority of experts should have sound knowledge of the Swiss educational system, and especially that of the UAS.
- The majority of experts should have excellent command of the language of instruction used at the UAS undergoing the accreditation procedure.
- Two of the experts usually come from abroad.
- The composition of the team should exhibit gender equality.

- The team includes a student representative.
- The team includes a representative from the labor market.

The expert team should incorporate the following characteristics:

- experience in management of a higher education institution (HEI);
- experience in accreditation, i.e. quality assurance procedures at higher education institutions;
- suitable qualifications and a scientific and/or professional reputation in the field(s) being scrutinized;
- confirmed teaching experience (peer knowledge); and
- expert knowledge in the development, organization and evaluation of academic programmes of higher education institutions.

The OAQ ensures that each expert is independent and has unbiased judgment. The university of applied sciences has the opportunity to comment on the expert team and in justified cases may reject any foreseen expert.

In order to guarantee the availability of experts, these must be approached well in advance. The date for the on-site visits should thus be set as early as possible.

3.2 On-site visit

During the on-site visit, the experts conduct interviews with representatives from all relevant functional groups of the university of applied sciences. An example of an on-site visit programme is found in ANNEX B. An OAQ staff member shall accompany the team performing the external evaluation as an advisor.

3.3 Preliminary report

The experts compile a preliminary expert report based on the documents submitted and the interviews conducted in connection with the areas and quality standards being examined. The report includes the particularities and strengths of the university of applied sciences and, if applicable, suggestions for improving quality. It closes with a proposal for accreditation.

3.4 Comment on the report

The OAQ sends the expert report to the university of applied sciences at the latest four weeks after completion of the on-site visits. Based on OPET⁴/FDEA Guidelines, this report cannot contain neither a proposal for accreditation nor any conditions or recommendations.

⁴ Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET)

The university of applied sciences then has two weeks to express its position on the report, in particular to correct any factual errors or describe already initiated improvement measures.

3.5 Final report

Based on the university of applied sciences' comments, the experts can adapt the report accordingly. This final report with the proposal for accreditation is then forwarded to the OAQ's administrative office.

4 Decision

4.1 Proposal for accreditation

The OAQ assesses the self-evaluation report, the expert report and as well as any comments received from the applicant university of applied sciences.

Based on this input, the OAQ prepares the accreditation proposal that is approved by the Scientific Advisory Board before submitted to the OPET.

The proposal for accreditation as well as the self-evaluation made by the university of applied sciences, the expert report and any comments are then forwarded to the OPET. The OPET prepares then the accreditation decision for the decision-making authority (FDEA).

4.2 Accreditation decision

The FDEA usually makes its final decision accreditation decision within six months, based on the OAQ's recommendation and the comments submitted by the university of applied sciences.

The following accreditation decisions are possible:

- Accreditation is granted.
- Accreditation is granted under conditions.
- Accreditation is refused.

The decision to make accreditation subject to conditions is only declared when deficiencies exist which most likely can be resolved within a year. The OAQ checks if these conditions are fulfilled within the set deadline(s).



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ANNEX A: Self-evaluation checklist

Preparation

Put together a steering group.	
Make sure that all key groups of the university of applied sciences are represented in the steering group (including students).	
Establish an internal schedule for compiling data and writing the self-documentation.	

Formal requirements for writing the self-evaluation report

Scope (max. 80 pages without annexes)	
Cover sheet (subject, date)	
List of steering group members (name and function)	
Signature page (rector / steering committee)	
Introduction / Executive Summary	
Contents / Structure	
Fulfillment of quality standards	
Glossary	
Annexes	

Required contents of the self-evaluation report

– (Brief) presentation of the university of applied sciences	
– Areas (including all quality standards)	
– Strategy, management and structure, financial and material resources, quality management, gender equality	
– Teaching	
– Research	
– Continuing education and training (CET)	
– Services	
– Teaching and research staff	
– Administrative and technical staff	
– Student body	
– Facilities	
– Cooperation	
– Sustainable development	
– Summary of strengths and weaknesses	



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ANNEX B: Sample schedule on-site visit



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Day 1

08.00 – 08.15	Opening session
08.15 – 10.15	Governance
10.15 – 10.30	Coffee break
10.30 – 11.30	Students and Alumni
11.30 – 12.30	Review of students' work (exams, diploma work, etc.)
12.30 – 13.45	Lunch
13.45 – 14.45	Teaching staff
14.45 – 15.30	Non-professorial, administrative and technical staff
15.30 – 16.15	Campus tour: Introduction of infrastructure
16.15 – 16.30	Coffee break
16.30 – 17.30	Work environment (employers and partners)
17.30 – 18.45	Working session of experts

Day 2

08.00 – 09.00	Research
09.00 – 10.00	Continuing education
10.00 – 10.15	Coffee break
10.15 – 11.30	Quality assurance / Mobility / Equal opportunities / Sustainability
11.30 – 12.30	Lunch
12.30 – 13.30	Optional session for open questions (if requested by the experts)
13.30 – 16.30	Preparation for debriefing
16.30 – 17.00	Debriefing