



center of accreditation and quality assurance
of the swiss universities

Quality Audits 2007/08

Concept, Procedure and Quality Standards

Guide for Universities

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Quality Audits 2007/08

In the years 2003/04 the institutional quality assurance of universities in Switzerland was examined for the first time by means of a quality audit (excluding the Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology ETHZ/EPFL). The results of the examination were recorded in a published final report.¹ Legal requirements prescribe a second round of quality audits to take place in 2007/08 that for the first time will also include an examination of the ETHZ and the EPFL.

The following document describes in three chapters the concept, the procedure of the quality audits in 2007/08, and the quality assurance standards applied in the procedures at the universities.

1 Concept

1.1 Legal bases

In order to qualify for financial aid, universities or institutions must provide "high quality services, which are evaluated by the center of accreditation and quality assurance and are recognized by the Swiss University Conference." Every four years the Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ) receives a mandate from the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) to examine in a summary procedure whether the recipients of federal subsidies meet the prerequisites. The legal bases for these procedures are:

- Art. 11 Para. 3 of the Federal Law of October 8, 1999 on Financial Aid to Universities, (UFG, SR 414.20)
- Art. 6 of the Guidelines of 10 December 2002 for the qualifying procedure for financial support stipulated by the Federal Law on financial aid to universities

The quality assurance requirements of universities and the procedure of this examination are regulated by the Quality Assurance Guidelines for Swiss Universities established by the Swiss University Conference (SUC) on December 7, 2006 (Quality Assurance Guidelines, SR 414.205.2, see Annex 1). These guidelines are compatible with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area², developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

1.2 Subject and objectives of the procedure

The subject of the procedure, according to the SUC Guidelines for Quality Assurance, are the measures taken by universities to ensure quality in teaching, research and any interconnected supporting services.

According to SUC guidelines, the second procedural round will examine both the quality assurance at institutional level and the implementation of quality assurance in teaching by

¹ http://www.oaq.ch/pub/downloads/synthesebericht_de.pdf

² <http://www.enqa.eu/files/ENQA%20Bergen%20Report.pdf>

looking at selected study programmes that are representative of the university in question (Art. 4 of the Quality Assurance Guidelines).

The audit will focus on quality assurance processes and consider the experts' recommendations from the quality audits 2003/2004. At study programme level, the implementation of institutional quality assurance in programme management and teaching will be checked rather than the quality of programme content.

The goal of the procedure is to investigate the current state of quality assurance measures at universities using the standards of the SUC's Quality Assurance Guidelines as a measure. The audits should also provide recommendations for improving quality assurance measures at individual universities.

Available results of any evaluations carried out by the universities themselves and of any external quality assessments (e.g. accreditations, evaluations) will be taken into account as far as possible. In which form and to what extent this is possible will be discussed with the respective university.

1.3 Selection of study programmes

Depending on the size of the university, the OAQ's Scientific Advisory Board will select three to five programmes out of a representative list of study programmes provided by the individual university.

1.4 Procedure

The procedure is divided into three steps, consisting of a self-evaluation phase of the university, an on-site visit by independent experts and a final report prepared by the OAQ.

A group of four to six experts visits the university for three to four days and – based on the interviews and the self-evaluation report – compiles an expert report that the respective university may comment on. The OAQ's final report is then based on the self-evaluation, the expert report and the comments from the university. It includes a presentation of the quality assurance system, an evaluation on the basis of the quality standards, as well as recommendations for improvements and further development.

The results of the procedure serve the SER, i.e. the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA), as a basis for making decisions on whether or not institutions qualify for financial aid, pursuant to Arts. 6 and 7 of the Guidelines of 10 December 2002 for the qualifying procedure for financial support stipulated by the Federal Law on financial aid to universities. The OAQ's final reports are published in agreement with the SUC (Art. 6 Quality Assurance Guidelines).

2 Organization and procedure of quality audits 2007/08

2.1 Selection of study programmes to be examined

The universities compile lists of study programmes, out of which the OAQ's Scientific Advisory Board selects three, or in larger universities a maximum of five study programmes to be examined by the experts as examples for the implementation of quality assurance at

programme level. The university's proposal takes into consideration the following selection criteria:

- Study programmes from different faculties with large and small student numbers;
- Bachelor's and Master's degree courses;
- Master of Advanced Studies (MAS)
- PhD programmes – at the university's request

2.2 Accompanying instruments

Together with the legal bases, this document serves as a basis for self-evaluation to the participating universities. University management is responsible for the internal distribution of the material to all persons and committees participating in the audit.

The OAQ compiles a documentation for experts that includes this document, excerpts from legal documents, as well as a guide for experts that describes the procedure, their role in the procedure and the specifications for the expert report. This guide is sent to the universities for their information.

2.3 Procedure

Based on international practice, the procedure takes place in three steps:

1. Self-evaluation by the respective university
2. On-site visits by an independent expert group
3. Final report by the OAQ

The OAQ is responsible for organising the procedures and selecting the independent experts. Two OAQ representatives accompany the expert group during the on-site visits.

2.3.1 Self-evaluation by the university

The standards specified in the SUC's Quality Assurance Guidelines are authoritative for the self-evaluation and the external review. The OAQ elucidates the application of the individual standards in its comments which are non-binding and should serve as an aid for internal reflection on the part of the universities.

Each university compiles a self-evaluation report. The report can be written in German, French, Italian or English and consists of two parts:

- Part 1: Overall situation and the state of implementation of quality assurance at different institutional levels (e.g. faculty and study programme level);

- Part 2: Responses to the quality standards

In particular, the self-evaluation report should outline:

- measures implemented in teaching and research and their effects: What are the effects of implemented measures to date? Can anything be said about the cost-benefit ratio? Which measures have proven to be particularly effective?
- how the recommendations by experts in the 2003/2004 audits were dealt with;
- the strengths and weaknesses with regard to the fulfilment of the individual standards and the opportunities for further development: Which improvements are deemed realistically achievable on a medium-term basis? In what time frame?

The viewpoint of the institution's subunits should be integrated in the self-evaluation report.

The self-evaluation report (excl. annexes) should not exceed approximately 60 pages.

Documents to be attached / Annexes

The documentation serves to elaborate on the established quality assurance processes and includes examples to illustrate their effectiveness.

For **selected study programmes**, rather than a separate part in the self-evaluation report, on-site documentation is expected to show the quality assurance measures at programme level implemented by the university and the faculty,:

1. Programme evaluations / revisions (examples)
2. Assessments of courses and lectures (examples)
3. Feedback and reporting (to the attention of students, the faculty, the university management; examples)
4. Educational, i.e. learning objectives and – as far as available – competencies to be achieved at the end of programme modules and with the final degree.
5. Assessment procedures used, statistics on final degrees, description of linkage between teaching and research.

2.3.2 On-site visits by an independent expert group

The length of on-site visits depends on the size of the university and may take between three and four days. Two days are devoted to the institutional assessment, another one to two days for the study programmes. During on-site visits, the expert group talks to representatives from various organisational levels of the university. Interview partners are designated by the university based on OAQ criteria.

Two to three hours are scheduled for the evaluation of each selected study programme.

2.3.3 Selection of expert group

Four to six experts are invited to participate in the on-site visits per procedure. As with the last quality audits, a group of experts should be committed for several procedures (e.g. GE/LA, BS/BE).

The groupings are coordinated with the Quality Network of Swiss universities and take into consideration aspects of language and region.

The OAQ's Scientific Advisory Board selects the members of the expert group. The university can express an opinion on the selected experts and – by asserting important reasons – may call for the rejection of individual persons.

The following criteria apply for the selection of experts:

- In order to facilitate comparability and continuity, at least two experts who participated in the 2003/04 quality audits will again visit the same universities.
- The experts must be independent and capable of impartial judgment.
- As a rule, the head of a quality assurance agency is selected as peer leader.
- The majority of experts work in a foreign country.
- At least one expert should have good knowledge of the Swiss educational system.
- The majority of the group consists of qualified academics.
- The expert group is formed in a way that guarantees expertise in leadership, quality assurance, current research and teaching, taking into account the profile of the individual university.
- One expert should stem from a student body in Switzerland, but not from the university being assessed. Prerequisite is that the student receives the training that is organised in collaboration with the OAQ within the scope of the student accreditation pool³.

2.3.4 Selection of interview partners

On the institutional level, one can proceed along the same lines as in the quality audits 2003/04 (45- to 90-minute interviews with the university management, quality representatives, deans, vice deans, representatives of important commissions, lecturers, non professorial teaching staff). University units with special assignments such as the units for continuing education, specialized didactics, course guidance services and services for career counseling, gender equality, promotion of young academics, offices for international exchange, innovation centers, etc. should be included. At the level of the study programmes, the following people will be interviewed in group discussions: those responsible for the study programme (director of the institute, director of the programme, lecturers, assistants) as well as students.

³ <http://www.vss-unes.ch/d/akkreditierungspool.html>

The experts may request additional discussion partners before or during the visits.

2.3.5 Report on the on-site visit

The expert team writes a report based on the discussions held and the university's self-evaluation. The university is invited to comment on this report.

2.4 Final report of the OAQ

The OAQ prepares a final report for the SER (i.e. the Federal Department of Home Affairs), the SUC, the supporting cantons as well as the university itself (Art. 6 Quality Assurance Guidelines for Swiss Universities, Art. 6 Para. 3 Guidelines for the qualifying procedure for financial support).

This report is based on the self-evaluation and comments from the university and the report of the expert group. It includes a description of the quality assurance system as well as an examination of the quality standards. Based on the latter, the OAQ then formulates recommendations for improvements and further development.

2.5 Decisions and publication of results

Pursuant to Arts. 6 and 7 of the Guidelines for the qualifying procedure for financial support, and based on the results of the quality evaluations performed by the OAQ, the SER (i.e. the FDHA) decides whether or not the conditions for qualifying for subsidies are still fulfilled at the university.

The final reports prepared by the OAQ are published in consultation with the SUC and by observing personal rights and data protection aspects (Art. 6 Quality Assurance Guidelines).

2.6 Deadlines

The self-evaluation phase lasts between 4 and 6 months, depending on the size of the university. Staggering the procedures from a time point of view provides a certain amount of flexibility. The self-evaluation phase begins on December 1, 2007. On-site visits are scheduled for May/June 2008 (see Annex 2).

2.7 Costs

Costs for the self-evaluation are borne by the universities. Costs for the external evaluation (e.g. experts' fees, travel expenses, OAQ expenses, translation fees for experts and final reports) are covered by the federal government's annual subsidy to the OAQ, according to Art. 7 Para. 4 UFG. Costs are based on the OAQ tariff dated October 24, 2002.

2.8 Evaluation

Following completion of the Quality Audits 2007/08, the OAQ and the Quality Network will evaluate the procedures, putting special emphasis on examining the comments on the quality standards and their benefits for the self-evaluation procedure of the universities and the work of the experts.

3 Quality standards and OAQ recommendations

Each quality standard (Arts. 3.1- 3.7 of the Quality Assurance Guidelines) is accompanied by recommendations for compiling the self-evaluation report, as follows:

- OAQ commentary on the standard;
- Recommended documentation.

The quality standards (red) are binding. The OAQ's comments (green) serve to illustrate the application of individual standards. In the form of a footnote, they refer to the respective ENQA standards and guidelines (ESG) that should also be considered.

References to documentation are listed for each standard (blue). If appropriate, Web links to the respective documents may be listed rather than attaching printed documents.

Minimum requirements to be fulfilled by quality assurance systems (Art. 3)

The universities are responsible for ensuring that the quality assurance system fulfills the following standards:

3.1 Strategy

The university establishes its quality assurance strategy and communicates it publicly. This strategy includes the guidelines to a quality assurance system whose objective is to ensure and continually improve the quality of university activities, as well to promote the development of a quality culture.

OAQ commentary⁴

The quality assurance strategy of the university is applied to all its activities and administrative levels and is an integral part of daily processes. An exchange of experience on quality assurance (best practices) takes place at all levels.

The university sets priorities for quality assurance in the future and periodically examines its quality assurance strategy, adapting it whenever necessary.

Recommended documentation

- Strategy paper on quality assurance
- Status of implementing the strategy into a quality assurance system

¹ A transparent reporting on procedures and results of quality assurance measures guarantees feedback to the involved groups within the university.

² Periodically, the universities publish objective information on study programmes and conveyed degrees.

3.2 Area of application

The quality assurance system incorporates the university's key tasks, especially teaching and research, as well as the interconnected supporting services. It is an integral part of the overall strategy and supports university development.

OAQ commentary⁵

Quality assurance measures are typically implemented in the following areas:

- management and decision processes in teaching and research
- communication and reporting
- development and revision of study programmes and curricula
- development and revision of assessment procedures
- personnel recruitment and management, including promotion of gender equality
- personnel allocation in teaching, research and services
- continuing and further education of personnel
- support of young academics
- allocation of resources
- sustainable and environmentally friendly planning and business operations

In the self-evaluation the university also describes (examples):

- the influence of quality assurance on resource management;
- the quality assurance processes existing on the management and administration levels;
- the role of quality assurance in performance-related mandates and agreements with authorities.

Recommended documentation

- Examples of applied methods and instruments

⁵ ESG Standard 1.1

3.3 Processes and responsibilities

The university regulates the quality assurance processes and ensures that its personnel and students are familiar with these processes. The responsibilities for quality and quality assurance are assigned transparently.

OAQ commentary⁶

The objectives and processes of quality assurance are defined at all university levels.

Quality assurance processes are clearly regulated with regard to contents, normative and financial criteria.

The university has quality assurance processes for the authorization of new study programmes.

Quality assurance processes are periodically analysed and adapted whenever necessary.

Personnel and students know the regulations and can actively participate in the development, introduction and evaluation of quality assurance measures.

In its self-evaluation, the university describes:

- the instruments and processes for quality improvement established in research, teaching and supporting services;
- the quality assurance measures, processes as well as responsibilities introduced over the past four years.

Recommended documentation

- Quality assurance regulations
- Quality assurance objectives and processes at management, faculty and study programme level with assigned responsibilities
- Communication of these regulations (e.g. references on website, personnel information, etc.)

⁶ ESG Guideline 1.1

3.4 Evaluations

The university performs periodic internal evaluations of teaching, study programmes and curricula: procedures to assess student performance, results of teaching, research and services, as well as resources, gender equality and learning infrastructure. An external evaluation is performed whenever necessary.

OAQ commentary⁷

The applied evaluation processes and their contents are examined to see if they consistently follow established and published criteria and if they reach the objectives strived for.

For example, in its self-evaluation the university describes:

- the system used in internal evaluations,
- the guidelines and criteria according to which external evaluations are performed,
- how evaluation processes are checked and assessed for their effectiveness.

Recommended documentation

- Regulatory basis for evaluations
- Summary of internal and external evaluations and accreditations initiated since the last audits
- Mechanisms for the periodic revision of evaluation processes

⁷ ESG Standards 1.2-1.5, ESG Guidelines 1.2-1.5

3.5 Human resources development

The university supports and encourages the continuing education and development of its teaching and research staff. This also includes career planning for young academics and the promotion of gender equality.

OAQ commentary⁸

The university offers its employees further training opportunities. It keeps its employees informed on training opportunities and advisory services, and supports them in realizing internal and external offers.

Employees can voice their opinion on the quality of further training offers, and these are periodically reviewed and adapted whenever required.

Recommended documentation

- Further training opportunities for academic and non-academic staff
- Concept for human resources development / measures to support young academics (offers for career planning, advancement training programmes, etc.)
- Measures foreseen and taken when lecturers demonstrate inadequate performance (e.g. obligation to participate in further training, ...)
- Gender equality: strategy, agreements, statistics

⁸ ESG Guideline 1.4

3.6 Application of information and decision-making

The university management bases its strategic decisions concerning research, study programmes as well as the recruitment and promotion of its teaching staff on relevant and up-to-date quantitative and qualitative information. This information is systematically collected, analyzed and applied in order to continuously improve the quality of university activities.

OAQ commentary⁹

The university has an information and reporting system that not only provides statistical data but also quality indicators. Data from various university administrative levels is continually collected and periodically evaluated. For example, this information system contains data on the following subjects:

- Profile of student population (student statistics)
 - course of studies
 - success and dropout rates
 - gender relations
 - percentage of part-time students
- Study programme profiles
 - educational goals and learning outcomes
 - student satisfaction with study programmes and teaching
 - process and results of study programme monitoring
 - availability of learning resources
 - results of alumni surveys
- Research profiles
 - statistical data and quality indicators on research activities
 - process and results of research monitoring.

In its self-evaluation the university describes, for example:

- how often and how any collected data is analyzed;
- if and how information is communicated within the university;
- if a profile of the strengths and weaknesses is made based on study programme data

⁹ ESG Standards and Guidelines 1.6

and is then communicated to all relevant people;

- if a profile of the strengths and weaknesses is made based on research data and then communicated to all relevant people;
- if and how quality indicators served as a basis for making decisions.

Recommended documentation

Documentation on the information and reporting system (registration and evaluation of students and study programme data, periodicities and results of study programme and teaching evaluations, applied quality indicators, links to performance-related agreements, monitoring of research, etc.)

3.7 Communication

¹ A transparent reporting on procedures and results of quality assurance measures guarantees feedback to the involved groups within the university.

² Periodically, the universities publish objective information on study programmes and conveyed degrees.

OAQ commentary¹⁰

The university pursues an open and objective communication and information policy, both internally and externally.

Within the scope of its public communication efforts, the university informs especially its prospective students and the business world about its quality assurance strategy. The information exchange is regulated.

The university informs all involved groups on the results of internal and external quality assurance measures and on any decisions based on these measures.

In its self-evaluation report, the university describes, for example:

- the principles it follows when informing on procedures, results and consequences of quality assurance measures;
- how students, faculty and management levels of the university are informed of quality assurance measures, results and consequences in actual practice;
- whether or not published information on study programmes also contains the opinions of graduates as well as information on their occupational fields.

Recommended documentation

- Rules governing the university's internal and external information and communication policy
- Samples of information material

¹⁰ ESG Standards and Guidelines 1.7

Annex 1 SUC Quality Assurance Guidelines

Quality Assurance Guidelines for Swiss Universities dated December 7 2006,¹¹ established by the Swiss University Conference.

Preamble

The Swiss University Conference (SUC)

based on Article 6 Para. 1 let. e of the Cooperation Agreement of 14 December 2000 between the Federal Government and University Cantons on Matters Relating to Universities, dated December 14, 2000,¹²

based on Article 5 Para. 1 let e of the Intercantonal Convention of 9 December 1999 on Coordinating University Policy dated December 9, 1999, and

based on Article 6 let e of the Federal Law of October 8 1999 on Financial Aid to Universities¹³ (UFG), and

convinced that the main responsibility for quality assurance lies with the universities,

in agreement with the "Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, May 19-20, 2005" (Bergen Communiqué), that calls for the universities to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal quality assurance mechanisms and their direct correlation to external quality assurance,

in agreement with the European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA Standards for Internal Quality Assurance) that were adopted in Bergen by the European educational ministers,

with the objective of ensuring qualitatively outstanding performance in teaching and research and of improving transparency for students and the general public,

hereby issues

at the recommendation of the center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ) the following binding guidelines that include minimum standard requirements on university quality assurance systems:

¹¹ SR 414.205.2

¹² SR 414.205

¹³ SR 414.20

Art.1 Scope of validity

These guidelines are valid for all universities and university institutions that receive federal subsidies, pursuant to Article 11 UFG, and analogously for the Federal Institutes of Technology (ETHZ, EPFL).

Art. 2 Principles

¹ The universities are responsible for introducing an internal quality assurance system.

² They align the quality assurance system with their mandate and objectives.

Art. 3 Minimum requirements to be fulfilled by quality assurance systems

The universities make sure that the quality assurance system fulfills the following standards, corresponding to international practice, and based on ENQA Standards and Guidelines for internal Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area in the version of February 2005:

3.1 Strategy

The university establishes its quality assurance strategy and communicates it publicly. This strategy includes the guidelines to a quality assurance system whose objective is to ensure and continually improve the quality of university activities, as well to promote the development of a quality culture.

3.2 Area of application

The quality assurance system incorporates the university's key tasks, especially teaching and research, as well as the interconnected supporting services. It is an integral part of the overall strategy and supports university development.

3.3 Processes and responsibilities

The university regulates the quality assurance processes and ensures that its personnel and students are familiar with these processes. The responsibilities for quality and quality assurance are assigned transparently.

3.4 Evaluations

The university performs periodic internal evaluations of teaching, study programmes and curricula: procedures to assess student performance, results of teaching, research and services, as well as resources, gender equality and learning infrastructure. An external evaluation is performed whenever necessary.

3.5 Human resources development

The university supports and encourages the continuing education and development of its teaching and research staff. This also includes career planning for young academics and the promotion of gender equality.

3.6 Application of information and decision-making

The university management bases its strategic decisions concerning research, study programmes as well as the recruitment and promotion of its teaching staff on relevant and up-to-date quantitative and qualitative information. This information is systematically collected, analyzed and applied in order to continuously improve the quality of university activities.

3.7 Communication

¹ A transparent reporting on procedures and results of quality assurance measures guarantees feedback to the involved groups within the university.

² Periodically, the universities publish objective information on study programmes and conveyed degrees.

Art. 4 Periodic evaluations pursuant to Article 6 Guidelines for the qualifying procedure for financial support according to the UFG

At the request of the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) the OAQ periodically evaluates, in the scope of institutional procedures, if the universities fulfill the standards. In these procedures the application of the standards is also checked on examples of study programmes in order to ensure that the objectives of these guidelines are achieved.

Art. 5 OAQ recommendations for the implementation and application of standards pursuant to Article 3

The OAQ makes recommendations for the implementation and application of standards according to Art. 3. These recommendations are based on the ENQA standards for internal quality assurance in the university area. In its recommendations, the OAQ makes allowances for national distinctions and the results of already performed institutional quality assessments.

Art. 6 Publication of reports on quality evaluations

The OAQ sends the respective participants of the quality examination – namely the universities, the supporting canton, the SER as well as the SUC – a copy of its final report and of the expert report. The OAQ publishes its final reports in consultation with the SUC.

Art. 7 Effective Date

These guidelines enter into force on January 1, 2007.

Annex 2 Time Schedule

Stage	Who	When
Forwarding of accompanying instruments to the universities	OAQ	June 2007
Clarification of open procedural questions	OAQ with Network Quality	October 10, 2007
Lists from universities: study programmes that can be examined	Institution	Mid-October 2007
Selection of study programmes to be examined out of the lists provided by the universities	OAQ (Advisory Board)	Mid-November
Beginning of self-evaluation / Generation of a self-evaluation report	Institution	December 1, 2007
Selection of experts	OAQ (Advisory Board)	January/February 2008
Completion of self-evaluation	Institution	April/May 2008
Forwarding of self-evaluation report to the experts	OAQ	April/May 2008
On-site visits	OAQ, Institution, Experts	May/June 2008
Forwarding of the expert report to the institution	OAQ, Experts	June/July 2008
Comment from the university on the expert report	Institution	In agreement with the OAQ, at the latest 4 weeks after receipt of the expert report
Forwarding of the final expert report to the OAQ	Experts	1 week following receipt of comments
OAQ final report: Forwarding to the SER	OAQ, Scientific Advisory Board	1 month following receipt of the expert report / September/October 2008