



FIBAA

YOUR PARTNER FOR EXCELLENCE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

FIBAA-Guideline
for
Institutional Accreditation (Switzerland)
according to the
**Higher Education Funding and
Coordination Act, HEdA**

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General Information

The Higher Education Funding and Coordination Act (HEdA) stipulates that HEIs must periodically review the quality of their teaching, research and services as well as to ensure long-term quality assurance and quality development.

Proof of this can be provided by HEIs through institutional accreditation.

Institutional accreditation is mandatory if an institution wishes to call itself a "University", "University of Applied Sciences" or "University of Teacher Education". It is also a requirement for universities regulated by public law in order to be eligible for federal contributions as well as it is mandatory to be able to carry out programme accreditations according to HEdA.

By decision of 16 September 2016, the Swiss Accreditation Council recognized FIBAA as an accreditation agency. This allows FIBAA to carry out accreditation procedures according to HEdA. The Swiss Accreditation Council takes the decisions about the procedures. They are based on a self-evaluation report of the HEIs, an assessment report, an application for accreditation by FIBAA and a statement of the HEI.

The Swiss Accreditation Council currently consists of members who represent higher education institutions, the world of work, students, non-professional teaching staff and academic staff. Five of its members work abroad.

FIBAA's procedure is a peer review process. External experts evaluate the quality assurance system of the HEIs and check the appropriate tools and procedures to determine whether they meet predefined quality standards.

The method of institutional accreditation according to HEdA can, if applicable, be carried out parallel to another accreditation procedure of FIBAA (programme accreditation according to FIBAA quality standards / Institutional Strategic Management Accreditation / Institutional Quality Management Accreditation). During the process, the quality standards for institutional accreditation according to HEdA, as well as FIBAA-Standards of the other procedure are checked. Such combined procedures require the consent of the Swiss Accreditation Council.

The results of external quality audits can be taken into account in the institutional accreditation process if they are not older than three years.

Duration of Proceedings

The duration of proceedings take between 12 to 18 months.

Procedural Costs

Regarding the costs, it is differentiated between direct costs (expert fees, travel costs, accommodation costs, etc.) and indirect costs (expenditure of the Swiss Accreditation Council and FIBAA). Public HEIs, whose sponsors contribute to the financing of the Swiss Accreditation Council, pay a flat rate of 32,000.00 Swiss francs (without VAT) for the direct costs. Regarding the indirect costs FIBAA claims additional costs according to the specific efforts in the procedure. In addition to the lump sum for the direct costs, private HEIs, whose sponsors do not contribute to financing the Accreditation Council, pay a flat rate for the indirect costs of 27,000.00 Swiss francs (excluding VAT). The costs of the check of conditional fulfillment for conditions, which are specified in the procedure, are not included. The FIBAA pays lump-sums for the experts involved in the procedure for their co-operation. In total, FIBAA acts in matters

of costs and lump-sums according to the provisions of the Swiss Accreditation Council's fee regulations

Procedures

The course of the procedure follows the guidelines of the Higher Education Council for accreditation in the field of higher education (accreditation guidelines HEdA). The following procedural steps result from the directives:

- Filing a substantiated application of the HEI at the Accreditation Council for admission to the procedure;
- If the prerequisites are met, the Accreditation Council admits the HEI for the procedure (Eintretensentscheid);
- Planning and opening of the procedure by conclusion of contract between the HEI and FIBAA;
- The HEI sends a self-evaluation report to FIBAA;
- Compilation of an independent expert team by FIBAA in consultation with the HEI;
- On-site visits (alternative: division of the assessment on two dates);
- Preparation of an Assessment Report and an Accreditation Application;
- Possibility of a statement from the HEI;
- Submission of the application for accreditation and other documents to the Swiss Accreditation Council
- Decision on the accreditation of the Swiss Accreditation Council;
- Publication of the decree and of the assessment report;
- If applicable verification of the fulfillment of conditions.

Admission for the Procedure

Article 4 of HEdA regulates the admission requirements for the institutional accreditation process. The following points are presupposed:

- the independence and unity of teaching and research are guaranteed;
- the applicant is a universitäre Hochschule, Fachhochschule or pädagogische Hochschule;
- the admission requirements of HEdA are complied with;
- a quality assurance system is implemented;
- compatibility with European Higher Education sector is preexisting;
- Infrastructure, personnel, teaching, research and services are tailored to the HEI's type and profile;
- a student cohort has completed a course of study;
- sufficient resources for their long-term work are available and begun courses can be fully completed by students.
- the applicant is a legal person in Switzerland.

An authorization for the procedure is also made without a review of the above mentioned. Prerequisites if:

- the HEI was already established before the legal validity of HEdA;
- the HEI was already recognized as a contributory beneficiary before the legal validity of HEdA;
- the HEI was already a öffentlich-rechtliche pädagogische Hochschule according to cantonal law the legal validity of HEdA..

The HEI must submit a well-founded application for institutional accreditation by means of an official form (available at: <http://akkreditierungsrat.ch/en/accreditation-switzerland/>) no later

than 2020 or no later than two years before the end of the current institutional accreditation period to FIBAA. FIBAA will check if the prerequisites and write a report regarding the their fulfilment. Then, FIBAA will send both documents to the Swiss Accreditation Council. The Council decides upon the admission (Eintretensentscheid).

Conclusion of Contract / Briefing

If the HEI has received a positive decision, it can conclude a contract with FIBAA on the implementation of the procedure. The course of the procedure, the schedule and the requirements for the expert team as well as the self-evaluation report are discussed in a meeting between the HEI and FIBAA. It is also possible to determine whether the procedure should be carried out in German or English.

Self-Evaluation Report

The HEI provides self-evaluation report to FIBAA, in which the areas are described, which are relevant to the procedure. To ensure that the self-evaluation report contains all the necessary information, FIBAA provides the **FIBAA Assessment Guide** for procedures according to HEdA. In the process of compiling self-evaluation report, HEI involves students, mid-level faculty, teaching staff, administrative and technical personnel. Components of the self-documentation are as followed:

- a description of the factual situation (special characteristics, organization, key figures);
- a description of the progress of the self-assessment process in the preparation of the self-evaluation report;
- if applicable, reports or results from previous quality assurance procedures;
- a presentation of the quality assurance system in all its facets as well as the degree of its implementation;
- an assessment of the quality standards regarding the fulfillment;
- a description of the strengths, weaknesses and development opportunities for each quality standard or standard area;
- a plan of action for the further development of the quality assurance system.

The completed questionnaire and evaluation catalogue is a maximum of 50 pages long (without attachments) and is compiled within 6 months.

Team of Experts

Parallel to the preparation of self-documentation by the HEI, FIBAA brings together a team of experts. Criteria for the selection of the experts are as followed:

- HEI representatives: Experience in the field of supervision of HEIs respectively in the field of internal HEI quality management or the development of the course of studies
- Students: Participation in committees of their HEI as well as knowledge of accreditation or evaluation procedures
- Where reasonable: Representatives of professional practice: Several years of management experience in business / practice or experience in the implementation or management of quality processes
- All experts: Adequate knowledge of the Swiss HEI sector as well as
- active knowledge of German or English.

The expert panel consists of a total of five people: three representatives of HEIs, a representative of professional practice and a student team member. In addition, FIBAA ensures that at least two experts are from Switzerland, the rest are from Germany or respectively from a third party country. In addition, the gender ratio in the team is 2: 3.

If an expert panel is compiled, the HEI receives the relevant information and – for example in the event of a potential conflict of interest - has an opportunity to raise objections on one or more members of the expert panel. The HEI, however, has no power of veto.

If the HEI agrees on the expert panel, the Swiss Accreditation Council is informed and asked for the approval of the Expert panel.

The expert panel determines which member presides the panel. The task of the chairperson is to conduct the discussions during the on-site visit(s) and to provide feedback on the decision to the HEI at the end of the on-site visit(s).

The members of the expert panel are prepared for the procedure before the assessment. The experts are prepared by FIBAA via:

- Expert Workshops (These are held annually on various topics of accreditation and procedures);
- Online Trainings,
- Information on Switzerland.

Feedback on the Self-Evaluation Report

FIBAA provides the experts with the self-evaluation report. After the experts reviewed the report, the HEI gets feedback on the completeness of the documents as well as on open questions. Afterwards the HEI has the opportunity to submit missing or supplementary documents prior to the on-site visit.

On-Site Visits

The on-site visits takes place on the premises of the HEI. The members of the expert panel travel to the HEI for a first preparatory meeting in order to conduct an expert panel internal preliminary talk and first talk rounds with representatives from the HEI. At the end of this first meeting they give oral feedback to the HEI and have the chance to tell the HEI if additional information/documents are needed.

An additional on-site visit lasts 2.5 days and it is particular used for the analysis of the system as well as the final assessment based on the quality standards. The on-site visit ends with an oral feedback on the results of the visit from the expert panel for the HEI.

At the second on-site visits the following participants of the HEI shall participate:

- the Management of the HEI;
- the persons responsible for the most important units respectively services;
- the persons responsible for quality assurance;
- as well as representatives of students, mid-level faculty, teaching staff, administrative and technical personnel.

Assessment Report and Accreditation Application

Subsequently, the expert panel, with the support of FIBAA, prepare a report of about 40 pages on the basis of the on-site visit(s). The following items are listed in the report:

- a portrait of the HEI;

- an overview of the procedure (composition of the expert panel, time schedule, assessment of the self-evaluation report, on-site visit(s) and their preparation);
- if an institutional accreditation has already taken place in the past, the handling of its results are analyzed;
- the quality management system is described and an analysis is carried out to determine whether or to what extent the quality standards are met;
- in the case of improvement potentials of the system, recommendations are made to give the opportunity of further developing the system;
- the report concludes with an overall assessment and contains a recommendation of the expert panel in regard to the decision on the accreditation/certification.

The following assessments are possible regarding quality standards:

- completely fulfilled: there are concepts and mechanisms for quality assurance which are fully and coherently implemented and allow the university to ensure the quality of its activities;
- mostly fulfilled: no significant shortcoming regarding the concepts and mechanisms for quality assurance and their implementation can be identified;
- partly fulfilled: concepts and mechanisms for quality assurance exist only for certain sub-sectors or are complete, but show significant deficiencies or considerable weaknesses in their implementation;
- not fulfilled: regarding the quality assurance system, there is a lack of central concepts and mechanisms and / or the HEI is not in a position to ensure its implementation and the quality of its activities.

The expert panel can also decide on an accreditation/certification subject to conditions. In this case, the HEI must provide proof of compliance with the conditions within a set period of time. If the expert's opinion is that the deficiency / deficiencies are not to be fulfilled within a reasonable time, the expert panel has to recommend the refusal of the accreditation.

Based on the results of the evaluation report (including the accreditation recommendation of the expert panel), FIBAA prepares a corresponding accreditation application.

Statement

The HEI receives the evaluation report and the application for accreditation and get the opportunity to submit a written statement on the report.

In its statement the HEI can also comment on its ability to meet any requirements within the prescribed period.

Afterwards the expert panel has the opportunity to revise its evaluation report and the accreditation recommendation on the basis of the HEIs statement. In accordance, FIBAA can adapt the application for accreditation.

Accreditation Decision

Afterwards FIBAA submits the self-valuation report of the HEI, the evaluation report of the expert panel as well as the application for accreditation to the Swiss Accreditation Council, which remains the decision-making body for institutional accreditations.

The Swiss Accreditation Council can

- declare an institutional accreditation;
- declare an institutional accreditation subject to conditions (specifying the modalities and deadline for the fulfillment of obligations);

- decline an institutional accreditation.

In case of a positive declaration, the accreditation term is seven years.

If the HEI has objections to the decision of the Accreditation Council, it can submit a request for re-examination to the Swiss Accreditation Council.

Terms

In case of condition(s) the Swiss Accreditation Council decides if FIBAA or itself shall check on the fulfillment of the condition(s). When the condition(s) is/are fulfilled the regular accreditation term of seven years applies. In case of not fulfilling the condition(s) the Council can dun the HEI, can formulate further condition(s) or deprive the accreditation (Art. 64 HFKG).

In case of declining or depriving the accreditation the HEI can apply for a new accreditation procedure at the Swiss Accreditation Council after 24 months at the earliest.

Publication

The Swiss Accreditation Council informs the HEI about its decision and publishes a list of the accredited universities which have been given the right to designate according to HEdA.

FIBAA publishes the application of accreditation and the expert panel's evaluation report. For the latter, the HEI must give its consent.

Duties of HEIs

The accredited HEI obliges to respect the quality standards on which basis it has been accredited, throughout the duration of accreditation, at all its locations, as well as all its activities. Any change of the HEI, which could alter the results of the assessment of the quality standards and, consequently, the decision of the Accreditation Council, must be immediately reported to the Accreditation Council. If applicable, the Accreditation Council takes the necessary administrative measures, namely an admonition, the imposition of conditions or the withdrawal of accreditation (Article 64 HEdA).

References on / Links to further Information:

Swiss Higher Education Funding and Coordination Act (HEdA)

→ http://www.fibaa.org/uploads/media/HEdA_Engl.pdf

Institutional Accreditations according to HEdA

Bulletin of the Swiss Accreditation Council

→

http://akkreditierungsrat.ch/download/Dokumente/Merkblatt_Institutionelle%20Akkreditierung_HFKG.pdf

Guidelines of the Higher Education Council for accreditation within the higher education sector

→ <http://www.fibaa.org/uploads/media/414.205.3.pdf>

Fee Regulations of the Swiss Accreditation Council

→ http://www.fibaa.org/uploads/media/Fee_Regulation_Engl.pdf

Explanations of quality standards

Quality standards

The structure of the quality standards reflects a vision of the HE institution considered as a system oriented towards the achievement of the institution's mission, namely teaching, research and the provision of services. Governance, including the strategy of the HE institution, seeks to create the overall coherence.

The quality standards therefore cover the fields of internal quality assurance strategy, governance, mission and activities (teaching, research and the provision of services), resources and communication (internal and external), the latter being an important element both in the development of a quality culture and in ensuring transparency for internal and external stakeholders.

The quality standards shall specify the requirements set out in Art. 30 para. 1 HEdA based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)⁸. In accordance with the HEdA, they revolve around the internal quality assurance system rather than the institution itself. They constitute a binding framework and their evaluation must allow for an assessment of whether the quality assurance system allows the HE institution to ensure the quality of its teaching, its research and the provision of its services while permitting a continuous improvement in the quality of its activities.

Explanations of quality standards: objectives

Quality standards must be usable by the various HE institutions constituting the Swiss higher education landscape, regardless of their type, their specific characteristics and their strategic objectives. The composition of the expert group reflects the profile of the HE institution and takes account of the type and specific characteristics of the institution when assessing its quality assurance system. Those specific characteristics may apply to its teaching methods (e.g. distance learning) or to fields of teaching, research and service provision.

The explanations of quality standards for institutional accreditation serve to assist in the interpretation of standards by the experts and by the HE institutions, without being exhaustive or exclusive. They should ensure a common understanding of the quality standards. Their goal is not to impose additional requirements.

The document includes information of two types:

- Explanations that describe standards by listing the different factors that can be Examples of supporting data for the assessment (self-assessment and external assessment) offered to provide a more specific idea of usable relevant evidence. Such lists are not exhaustive and do not involve a full analysis of all the elements referred to.

Area I: Quality assurance strategy

1.1 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall define its quality assurance strategy. This strategy shall contain the essential elements of an internal quality assurance system aimed at ensuring the quality of the activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and their long-term quality development as well as promoting the development of a quality culture.

Explanations

→ In order to guarantee the long-term quality assurance and development required by the law (Art. 27 HEdA), the HE institution defines an internal quality assurance strategy (ESG 1.1). This strategy defines a global vision for quality assurance at an institutional level and allows connections to be made between different processes and development objectives to be set.

→ The concept of a quality system refers to all the procedures and practices for documenting and improving the quality of the HE institution's activities. It requires a complete, coherent and dynamic set of rules, mechanisms and processes designed to:

- the achievement of objectives by implementing selected strategies;
- the implementation of actions arising from the objectives and strategies, and their evaluation;
- the introduction of corrective mechanisms, if necessary;
- the continuous improvement of the HE institution's activities and its adaptation to changes in its environment.

The resources deployed for the quality assurance system are proportional to the goals sought.

→ In accordance with the HEdA, the internal quality assurance system incorporates at least the following fields: governance (e.g. direction, decision, organisational mechanisms), resources, teaching, research and services. It addresses the organisation as a whole.

→ An assessment of the quality assurance system provides an assurance that the HE institution possesses the tools to ensure and develop the quality of its activities in accordance with its type, mission and its specific characteristics.

→ The development of a quality culture allows the entire HE institution community to take ownership of quality-based initiatives and to assume its responsibility for quality assurance. In particular, this requires the involvement of representative groups from the HE institution that will help to enrich and to spread the culture of quality.

Supporting evidence useful for the self-assessment and the external assessment

The assessment of that standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- the institution's quality strategy (documents and other elements);
- a description of its quality processes.

1.2 The quality assurance system shall be incorporated into the strategy of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and efficiently support its development. It includes processes verifying whether the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector fulfils its mandate while taking account of its type and specific characteristics.

Explanations

→ In order to contribute effectively to the development of the HE institution and to support it in achieving its objectives, the quality assurance system must be integrated into the overall strategy of the HE institution.

→ Each HE institution has a clear mandate set for it by a supervisory authority, be it public or private. This mandate defines the mission of the institution according to its type and its specific characteristics. By means of the appropriate monitoring methods, the quality assurance system must allow the achievement of the objectives set by the HE institution to be verified together with the completion of its mandate; it must also ensure that its duty to account to its supervisory authority is fulfilled (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 7 HEdA).

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- strategy documents belonging to the HE institution;
- legal text for the foundation of the HE institution;
- other national and/or international legal requirements;
- reports intended for supervisory authorities (management, business or financial audit reports etc.).

1.3 At all levels, all representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall be involved in developing the quality assurance system and in its implementation, in particular students, mid-level faculty staff, professors and administrative and technical staff. Quality assurance responsibilities must be transparently and clearly assigned.

Explanations

→ In order to ensure that the expectations of different interest groups are taken into account, the development and implementation of the quality assurance system shall involve, among others, the students, the mid-level teaching staff and the professors of the HE institution together with its administrative and technical staff, but it may also include external partners such as supervisory authorities, alumni and representatives from the working environment, professional associations, the political sphere, civil society or any other interest group, depending on the specific characteristics and working methods of the HE institution (ESG 1.1).

→ The involvement of different groups may be required, for example, at the level of strategic discussions about quality assurance, and in the development of tools for quality assurance, their monitoring and use of their results for further development.

→ A clear and transparent assignment of quality assurance responsibilities shall ensure that all duties and tasks are known to everyone at every level of the system.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- terms and conditions for the involvement of different interest groups;
- organisation chart.

1.4 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall periodically analyse the relevance of its quality assurance system and make the necessary adjustments.

Explanations

→ A relevant quality assurance system implies that the objectives set meet the needs of the HE institution. Its periodic analysis allows the HE institution to ensure that it conducts adequate monitoring of its teaching, research and service provision, thereby applying itself to long-term quality development (Art. 27 HEdA and ESG 1.10).

→ Periodic analysis of the quality assurance system implies internal and external assessment. Those assessments may take different forms and apply at different organisational levels (institution, faculty/department, unit/service, study programme etc.).

→ The concept of external assessment implies an external perspective of the unit concerned or a perspective external to the institution itself while ensuring that conflicts of interest are avoided.

→ The results of assessments offer the HE institution new perspectives, particularly if external, and they allow the activities of the institution to be adapted or improved. They are taken into account in subsequent assessments in order to ensure coordinated and continuous improvement.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- descriptions of the quality assurance system's assessment processes;
- examples of self-assessment and external assessment reports;
- examples of changes in the quality assurance system subsequent to assessments.

Area II: Governance

2.1 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the organisational structure and decision-making processes enable the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector to fulfil its mission and to achieve its strategic objectives.

Explanations

→ The managerial and organisational mechanisms put in place by the institution are effective when they allow it to achieve its strategic objectives and to thereby complete its mandate (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 3 HEdA). They are relevant when they take account of the needs of the different stakeholders. In particular, they involve the preparation of a strategic plan together with its implementation, its monitoring and its adaptation to address internal changes and those deriving from the political, economic and social environment.

→ The mandate, mission and objectives of the HE institution are defined by agreement with the (public or private) supervisory authorities and are established in the founding legislation of the institution.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- description of the competencies of the HE institution in relation to its supervisory authority;
- organisational structure and assignment of responsibilities within the HE institution;
- processes for appointments to senior management roles;
- examples of detailed job descriptions;
- documents explaining decision-making processes in detail;
- mission and strategic plan of the HE institution;
- examples of changes in organisation and decision-making processes subsequent to

the monitoring of strategic objectives.

2.2 The quality assurance system shall systematically contribute to providing relevant and current quantitative and qualitative information on which the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector relies to make current and strategic decisions.

Explanations

→ The quality assurance system shall incorporate an information system that allows the collection, analysis and use of recent, relevant information for the management of all the activities of the HE institution at every level (ESG 1.7).

→ The data collected shall meet the needs of stakeholders and allow for the monitoring of the activities of the HE institution; in particular, it shall concern the issues of resources (infrastructure and financial, human and documentary resources), activities (teaching, research and service provision), the results of activities (research performance, student performance development, student population profile, monitoring of graduates, satisfaction etc.).

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- descriptions of data collection and analysis systems (responsibilities, indicators, technical resources etc.);
- statistical reports;
- examples of the systematic use of the quantitative and qualitative data produced by the system.

2.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector have an appropriate participatory right and that basic conditions are in place allowing them to independently operate.

Explanations

→ Effective and appropriate governance implies the participation in decision-making processes of all representative groups of people from the institution, including the student body, the mid-level teaching staff and the professors, as well as administrative and technical staff (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 4 HEdA and ESG 1.1).

→ The right to participate, which relies if necessary on the cantonal legislation applicable, corresponds to the specific characteristics of the HE institution and it also encompasses the following elements: processes for the appointment of representatives, type of involvement in specific process type and at specific level, effective influence of those representatives, transparency of information, assignment of responsibilities, framework conditions and type of operation that they guarantee, and resources available.

Supporting evidences useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- legislation and regulations that establish participative bodies and their operating terms and conditions;
- description of the resources placed at the disposal of participatory bodies and representatives (premises, resources, internal and external channels of

communication, administrative support, discharge etc.).

2.4 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall give consideration to an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development in the completion of its tasks. The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector sets objectives in this area and also implements them.

Explanations

→ In order to guarantee its long-term development, and therefore its durability, in completing its tasks the HE institution is to take account of issues concerning social, economic and ecological sustainability, according to its specific characteristics and within the limit of its powers (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 6 HEdA).

→ Social sustainability may encompass the following elements:

- the role of social partnerships in working conditions and workplace relations;
- consideration of medium and long-term needs at every hierarchical level (e.g. junior scientists and academics) within staff development policy;
- transparency and fairness in income and social security policy, including for outsourced work;
- health and safety for all.

→ Economic sustainability may encompass the following elements:

- the management of financial resources from a long-term perspective according to the mandate, objectives and tasks entrusted to the HE institution, including investment and debt policy;
- transparency in the use of public funds and in the terms and conditions for the acquisition of private funds;
- consideration of the source of products and equipment, and of the conditions of production within purchasing policy.

→ Environmental sustainability may encompass the following elements:

- effectiveness in the management of energy resources (consumption, recycling, renewable energies);
- consideration of the standards applicable in terms of environmental protection and energy consumption for the renovation or construction of buildings;
- soft mobility for personnel and students, including any relevant items of infrastructure, if applicable.

→ Sustainability also concerns teaching, research and service provision, and may encompass the following elements:

- consideration of sustainability issues in the courses, research and services on offer;
- promotion of sustainability activities and results;
- information and support that allow HE institution students and personnel to conduct their activities in a sustainable manner.

→ The sustainability policy or strategy concerns all the activities of the HE institution. In particular, it includes the objectives that the HE institution sets in this field for its areas of activities, and the methods of implementation and evaluation.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- policy or strategy and projects concerning social, economic and environmental sustainability;
- annual sustainability reports;
- statistics.

2.5 To carry out its tasks, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall promote equal opportunities and actual gender equality for its staff and students. The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector sets objectives in this area and also implements them.

Explanations

→ In order to achieve excellence and with a view to fairness, responsibility and development in completing its tasks and depending on its particular characteristics the HE institution shall take account of the issues of equal opportunities and gender equality (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 5 HEdA).

→ Equal opportunities encompass the issues of gender equality, disability, social integration, minorities and concern cases of direct or indirect discrimination (Art. 8 para. 2, 3, 4 of the Swiss Constitution; Gender Equality Act; Disabled Equality Act)⁹. It applies horizontally to all the HE institution's spheres of activity and to the governance of the institution with appropriate resources (personnel, representation policies within various committees, finances etc.).

→ The evaluation of equal opportunities may encompass the issues of access to and involvement in studies, research and academic or administrative supervisory and management positions, the balance of different personal needs or occupations (study, research, work, family, health), integration and participation in the life of the institution, advice and financial support, and awareness-raising.

→ The evaluation of equal opportunities for disabled people includes, in particular, the issues of the suitability of the duration and organisation of the studies and exams available (compensatory principle for disadvantages), and of access to infrastructure and equipment.

→ Equal opportunities policy or strategy covers students and all personnel. In particular, it includes the objectives that the HE institution sets in this field for its areas of activities, as well as the methods of implementation and evaluation.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- legislation and regulations guaranteeing non-discrimination;
- policy or strategy, measures adopted and equal opportunities projects;
- reports from the services responsible;
- objective indicators and statistics;
- description of mechanisms promoting the institutional embedding of equality policies.

Area III: Teaching, research and services

3.1 The activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall correspond to its type, specific features and strategic objectives. They shall mainly relate to teaching, research and services and be carried out in accordance with the principle of freedom and in-dependence within the limits of the mandate of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.

Explanations

→ Each HE institution is different and provides teaching, research and services according to its type and its specific characteristics, in various disciplines or areas of study (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. b HEdA and ESG 1.2).

Teaching encompasses Bachelor and Master degree education and continuing education.

→ The coherence and consistency of the offer in terms of teaching and its suitability to the specific characteristics of the HE institution are expressed, in particular, in terms of the design and approval of study programmes, learning objectives, level of qualifications to be achieved (alignment with the national qualification framework nqf.ch-HS), workload and feasibility for students, scope of subject area, position in relation to the environment, internationalisation, involvement of students and other interest groups, and connection to specific characteristics of the institution (e.g. distance learning).

→ The suitability of the research to the particular characteristics of the HE institution is expressed, in particular, through the research strategy of the institution and through the inclusion of the latter in its overall strategy, its positioning in relation to other institutions, the relationship between internal and external funding, the valuation modes, the international dimension and innovation.

→ The services provided encompass all service-based activities provided to the community and to civil society, such as short-term continuing training, on-line courses (e.g. MOOCs)¹⁰, scientific mediation work, institutional or individual projects and assignments for public and private-sector organisations.

→ The freedom and independence of research and teaching constitute a basic principle of HE institutions guaranteed by Swiss constitutional law (Art. 20 of the Swiss Constitution). In particular, the following elements are covered by this principle:

- transparency related to the source of funding and assignment of funds in all spheres of activity;
- the influence of external financial partners on the contents of teaching or the purpose of research;
- the sovereignty of the HE institution in the procedure for the selection and management of its staff at every level;
- the potential for personnel to report threats to or infringements of the principle of academic freedom, and the risks incurred by whistleblowers.

Supporting evidence

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- founding legislation of the HE institution;
- strategic documents;
- reports intended for those responsible (management and business reports, financial audits etc.); description of mechanisms that guarantee that the activities of the HE institution comply with its mission, its specific characteristics and its strategic

- objectives (e.g. preparation and approval of study plans, focus of research and priorities with regard to service provision);
- description of mechanisms that guarantee that account is taken of competitors when preparing new projects;
- description of mechanisms that allow research to be conducted in accordance with the best international practices;
- distribution of funds according to activities;
- description of mechanisms that allow the freedom and independence of research to be guaranteed (e.g. regulations connected to third-party funds, to secondary services of academic staff, research contracts, sponsorship contracts, procedures and guidelines for the selection and appointment of staff, description of terms and conditions laid down for reporting abuse).

3.2 The quality assurance system shall provide for a periodic evaluation of teaching and research activities, of services and of results achieved in these areas.

Explanations

→ The teaching, research and service provision activities of the HE institution and the results achieved in those fields are to be assessed periodically – and therefore continuously adapted – in order to ensure the achievement of the objectives set and to allow the HE institution to measure the completion of its mission (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 1 HEdA and ESG 1.9).

→ The assessment of teaching, research and service provision activities should take account of the specific characteristics of the HE institution and include internal and external assessment procedures based on quantitative and qualitative indicators. The quality assurance system is designed to ensure that the analysis of the results obtained is used to develop and improve those activities.

→ The assessment procedures provide for the involvement of people external to the unit for assessment. These people possess the expertise and skills necessary in order to provide an external view of the quality of the activities, avoiding any conflict of interest. This external perspective is complemented by the view of groups benefiting from the services of the HE institution, which may include, for example, students for the assessment of teaching activities, assistants/PhD students for the evaluation of research activities or the beneficiaries of services.

→ The assessment of teaching, research and service provision activities requires the assessment of the respective supporting entities or services.

→ The assessment of teaching activities, which is distinguished from the assessment of teaching staff, includes the assessment of lessons and study programmes and elements specific to the particular forms of teaching (e.g. distance learning). It reflects the active participation of students in the creation of learning processes (“student-centred learning, teaching and assessment”) (ESG 1.3).

→ The assessment of service provision ensures that the offer complies with the strategy of the HE institution and meets its mandate expectations.

→ The services provided are assessed periodically according to terms and conditions adapted to suit their specific characteristics.

→ The assessment relates not only to the activities carried out but also to their effects, their impact and to the results achieved in the context of those activities (e.g. the assessment of a lesson by the students, and analysis of the performance of students in that lesson, or the assessment of the resources invested in a research activity and of the performance of that research activity).

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- descriptions of assessment processes for teaching, research and service provision;
- examples of self-assessment and external assessment reports;
- description of framework conditions and measures adopted in order to improve the quality of teaching, research and service provision, and their effects;
- examples of improvements made following assessments;
- student statistics;
- activity reports at different levels of the institution;
- description of processes that guarantee the connection of teaching with research and with changes in society and professional fields.

3.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that principles and objectives linked to the European Higher Education Area are taken into consideration.

Explanations

→ Switzerland is participating in the construction of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and is a signatory country of the Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999. It is committed to the implementation of its objectives. Using their own means and according to their particular characteristics, Swiss HE institutions implement the principles and objectives that underpin the EHEA (ESG 1.2)¹¹.

→ In particular, the EHEA promotes mobility (of students, researchers, teaching staff, and administrative and technical staff), the recognition of degrees Europe-wide, the promotion of a European dimension within the development of curricula, the promotion of cooperation between institutions, and cooperation in the field of quality assurance.

→ The degree of internationalisation of the higher education institution depends on its type, profile and strategic goals.

→ The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), produced by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), approved in 2005 and revised in 2015 by the European Education Ministers, constitutes a European benchmark in quality assurance. The ESG also provides a frame for the agencies' activities; the agencies must comply with the ESG in order to be recognised at the European level.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- strategy for the internationalisation of the institution
- rules on mobility and measures to promote it (e.g. support services, funding);
- rules on the validation of the learning outcomes and the awarding of degrees in relation to the nqf.ch;
- examples of degrees awarded;
- description of mechanisms that allow students to play an active part in the creation of learning processes;
- documents showing how the ESG Part I are implemented;
- measures and instruments for the recognition of titles and certifications.

3.4 The quality assurance system shall ensure compliance with the criteria for admission, for the assessment of the student performance and for issuing final diplomas according to the mission of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. These criteria shall be defined, communicated and applied systematically, transparently and consistently.

Explanations

→ Student admissions, the assessment of student performance and the awarding of their degrees are essential components of the “student life cycle”.

→ The awarding of degrees and allocation of credits rely on the assessment of the performance levels of students, including examination and other methods of assessing the achievement of learning outcomes.

→ Rigour and transparency underpin the criteria for admissions, student performance assessments throughout their studies and the awarding of degrees and certificates for all education modes (including distance learning). Admission conditions are also to comply with the requirements imposed in the HEdA (Art. 23-25, Art. 73) on admissions to universities, universities of teacher education and universities of applied sciences (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 2 and ESG 1.4).

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- admissions regulations and other institutional founding documents, including their compliance with the HEdA;
- examination regulations;
- description of mechanisms introduced in order to provide information about admission and assessment methods;
- regulations on the awarding of degrees;
- description of appeal mechanisms (e.g. ombudsman).

Area IV: Resources

4.1 With its competent authorities, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall assure that its personnel resources, infrastructure and financial means allow for operating on a going concern basis and for achieving its strategic objectives. The origin and allocation of financial resources and financing conditions shall be transparent.

Explanations

→ In order to fulfil its mission, the institution is to have continuous sufficient resources at its disposal in terms of personnel, infrastructure and funding, and which are allocated with a long-term perspective (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. c HEdA). Resources are to support teaching and learning (ESG 1.6).

→ The resources and infrastructure are to suit the particular characteristics of the HE institution, including in terms of teaching methods (e.g. distance learning) and to meet the needs of the institution’s activities, including in terms of organisation, planning and method of allocation.

→ In particular, the resources are to include staff, infrastructure, equipment, and documentary and financial resources.

→ In particular, the evaluation of financial resources is to include the type and degree of engagement of the competent local authority, funding methods and external financial audits, methods for the use of external funds, methods for the approval of budgets and accounts, and financial planning.

→ The evaluation of resources is also to include support measures and structures for students (services, advice etc.).

→ Transparency of the provenance and allocation of funds and conditions for funding imply data publication.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- documents relating to the financial commitment of the competent local authority;
- financial audit reports;
- rules for the preparation of budgets and the use of funds;
- documents guaranteeing the long-term use of infrastructure;
- statistics concerning personnel and student supervision rates;
- examples of contracts;
- documents relating to the acquisition and conservation of documentary resources;
- description of mechanisms allowing the suitability of organisations and student support measures to be guaranteed.

4.2 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the entire staff is qualified according to the type and specific characteristics of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. To this end, it shall also provide for its periodic assessment.

Explanations

→ In order to adequately complete its mission, the institution is to ensure that all its personnel is appropriately qualified (Art. 30 para. 1 lit. a, ch. 1 HEdA and ESG 1.5).

→ In particular, the assessment of staff qualifications includes recruitment, selection and promotion processes and, for academic staff, assessment of teaching and scientific skills. The assessment is to also consider the transparency of the processes.

→ The periodic assessment of personnel should take into account the nature of the appointment (academic or administrative) and of the specific characteristics of the HE institution.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- description of staff categories;
- personnel statistics;
- legislation and regulations relating to the recruitment, assessment and promotion of personnel;
- descriptions of staff assessment processes;
- examples of specifications.

4.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector supports the career development of its entire staff, particularly the new generation of scientists.

Explanations

→ The assessment of staff career development encompasses the issues of equal opportunities, continuing education and training and other professional development support measures (counselling, scientific leaves, training placements, “protected time” for project research and development etc.), career prospects and measures for internal placement and promotion of junior staff.

→ It should also involve career policies for its personnel and encourage internal promotion up to the top of the hierarchy.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- personnel promotion policy, particularly for junior scientists and academics;
- regulations for promotion and continuing education and training;
- description of organisations and measures that offer counselling and support;
- examples of detailed job descriptions;
- regulations with regard to scientific conferences;
- description of personnel categories;
- special projects to support junior staff.

Area V: Internal and external communication

5.1 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall make public its quality assurance strategy and ensure that the provisions corresponding to quality assurance processes and their results are known to employees, students and if necessary external stakeholders.

Explanations

→ Internal and external communication is an important part of quality assurance both in order to develop a quality culture and to ensure transparency for internal and external stakeholders. HE institutions shall therefore ensure that regular and transparent information about objectives, quality processes and their results is provided to personnel and students and to external stakeholders, wherever applicable.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- internal and external communication strategy and means;
- description of the measures introduced in order to ensure a good understanding of quality assurance processes and results.

5.2 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall regularly publish objective information about its activities, its study programmes and the qualifications awarded.

Explanations

→ In order to ensure transparency for students and other stakeholders regarding its activities, HE institutions shall regularly publish current, impartial and objective information, both qualitative and quantitative, concerning the activities, study programmes and degrees that it awards (ESG 1.8).

→ Information and communication means vary according to the target group.

→ In particular, this information is to include the issues of admission conditions, deadlines, costs, duration, assessment conditions and ECTS credits awarded.¹² In addition, it is to include information about infrastructure, students and teaching staff, and teaching, research and service activities. Information about funding shall be published as well, including, for example, an annual report distributed both internally and externally.

Supporting evidence useful for self-assessment and external assessment

The assessment of this standard may, for example, rely on the following items:

- description of methods for providing information about the HE institution's activities according to the target group;
- description of measures in place for the updating of data;
- sample descriptions of programmes and of supporting means for the presentation of activities;
- annual report;
- external evaluation reports;
- website.