



FIBAA

YOUR PARTNER FOR EXCELLENCE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Guidelines for
FIBAA Quality Seal
for certified continuing education courses**

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Preface

Congratulations: You have decided to subject your continuing education programmes to an external quality management process based on standards that are internationally valid.

FIBAA has developed the procedure for the certification of continuing education courses to support you in the continuous development and quality assurance of your educational offerings. FIBAA certification ensures comparability and transparency and facilitates recognition in the European Higher Education Area. With FIBAA certification, you also support the vision and promise of lifelong learning opportunities for all in accordance with the United Nations' fourth Sustainable Development Goal! What's more, FIBAA certification pays attention to the professional applicability of the course. In this way, we support you in ensuring the professional development of your participants.

FIBAA is a European, internationally orientated agency for quality assurance and quality development in academic education as well as continuing education. In our work, we see ourselves as a partner to universities and other education providers. With our many years of experience and a large network of proven experts, we are happy to support you and accompany you in the implementation of your quality strategy.

Good preparation for a certification procedure is essential for its smooth running. This handout is intended to make this preparation easier for you by providing information on the subject matter, the criteria and the certification procedure for continuing education courses. In addition, it is also intended to support you with information on the preparation of self-documentation. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Your FIBAA team

Part 1: Certification Process

1. Subject matter

Continuing education courses that do not lead to an academic degree can be certified by FIBAA. FIBAA carries out so-called 'initial certifications' of new or existing continuing education courses as well as 're-certifications' of already certified continuing education courses. All certifications are carried out based on FIBAA's own quality criteria (see 'Aspects of the quality of continuing education courses' below), the fulfilment of which leads to the award of the FIBAA quality seal for continuing education courses.

Even if a course has not yet produced any graduates, the principle applies that all criteria are to be assessed in the same way as for a course that is already running. Essential quality criteria for continuing education courses, which are labelled as so-called asterisk criteria (*), must at least reach the assessment level 'Quality requirement fulfilled'. Failure to fulfil these criteria will result in corresponding conditions being imposed. Criteria other than Asterisk criteria that are assessed as 'not fulfilled' do not result in a condition but may result in a recommendation and therefore do not jeopardise certification. The deadline for fulfilment of conditions is usually nine months and can be shortened or extended (by a maximum of three months) in justified cases.

Particular importance must be attached to the following aspects during re-certification compared to initial certification:

- Assessment of the success of the course, including surveys of graduates as well as retention studies,
- Review of the calculations of the workload of participants in the individual modules,
- Assessment of results from evaluations,
- Assessment of statistical data regarding capacity utilisation, the number of participants, the percentage of foreign participants, the success rate, the average course duration and the average final grade.

In addition, the experts make recommendations for the further development of continuing education courses.

As part of the re-certification procedure, any measures taken by you to implement recommendations associated with the previous certification and all significant changes affecting the continuing education course (course content, modularisation/ECTS, personnel, material equipment, cooperation agreements, etc.) are also reviewed.

The aim of the FIBAA certification procedure is to provide you with incentives and instruments for the further development of your continuing education courses through the differentiated assessment, the recommendations of the experts, the internationally applicable quality criteria, the possibility of awarding a premium seal and the summary of the results in a quality profile. In addition, certification also serves to provide transparency about the quality of continuing education courses for the public, and to ensure international comparability and the possibility of simplified recognition in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The quality of a continuing education course must be demonstrated as part of an expert procedure. It is checked whether and to what extent the FIBAA quality criteria are adhered to in the development of a continuing education course and its implementation. The award of the FIBAA quality seal documents that a course fulfils these requirements.

2. Aspects of the quality of continuing education courses

The quality of continuing education courses is essentially measured in three areas:

- Content: Is the qualification objective of the course appropriate and are the necessary content and competences conveyed in the continuing education course (e.g. correspondence with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning)?
- Formal: Does the formal design of the course meet the relevant requirements (e.g. in terms of legal certainty, modularisation, workload calculation, examination design, etc.)?
- Resource-related: Are sufficient resources available for the implementation of the course in the form of qualified staff (teachers, administration) and equipment (e.g. number of rooms and workstations, equipment in the classrooms, access to course-relevant literature, technical infrastructure for the implementation of online or blended learning course elements)?

Quality of the course is assessed by FIBAA on the basis of 42 quality criteria. Of these, 24 criteria are labelled so-called asterisk criteria (*). They are categorised as essential quality criteria for continuing education courses, the fulfilment of which is mandatory for successful certification.

The FIBAA quality criteria are assigned to questions and quality requirements in five chapters ('Objectives and strategy', 'Approval', 'Implementation', 'Resources and services' and 'Quality assurance') in the so-called "FIBAA Assessment Guide for the certification of continuing education courses/Micro-Credentials)", which is intended to highlight and assess the various aspects of continuing education courses.

Each quality requirement is clearly defined and characterised by an upper, regularly monitored and updated benchmark. The orientation towards the current quality standards results in an individual profile that clearly identifies the quality of the course.

3. FIBAA Quality Seals

3.1 FIBAA Quality Seal for certified continuing education courses

We award the FIBAA quality seal for certified continuing education courses to courses that have been certified in accordance with our FIBAA quality requirements. This enables you to communicate the quality of your programmes both internally and externally.

3.2 FIBAA Premium Seal

We are the only accreditation agency that awards a premium seal for established continuing education courses. This distinction is awarded as soon as a course demonstrates excellent quality in the individual chapters as part of a FIBAA certification process. This special distinction provides interested parties, participants, graduates, institutions and the labour market with reliable information about the outstanding quality of the continuing education course.

Principles for awarding the FIBAA Premium Seal in certification procedures

In order to award the FIBAA Premium Seal to a continuing education course, FIBAA requires special requirements in all five core areas (objectives, admission, implementation (content, structure and didactics), resources and services as well as quality assurance and further development).

The premium seal can only be awarded to continuing education courses that are already established on the market, i.e. have already had their first graduates. The premium seal is not awarded if certification is granted subject to conditions. If the basic requirements are met, the premium seal will be awarded once the conditions have been fulfilled.

Procedure

The assessment criteria are weighted with a number of points between 2 and 4. The weighting of the assessment criteria is based on the question of which aspects of the continuing education course are central to the acquisition of work-related competences. The score is multiplied in each case by a defined factor, depending on the assessment by the experts.

The weighting for the assessment levels is defined as follows:

- Excellent: x3
- Quality requirements exceeded: x2
- Quality requirements fulfilled: x1
- Quality requirements not met: x -2

For the calculation of the hurdle to be set, the 100% mark is set at 'Quality requirements exceeded'. If this evaluation level is not provided for a criterion, it is set at 'Quality requirement fulfilled'.

The award of the premium seal requires that at least 60% of the points are achieved in all six of the five core areas. The premium seal is awarded if at least 65% of the total number of points is also achieved.

If a criterion is assessed as 'not relevant', the criterion is not taken into account when calculating points for the award of the Premium Seal.

If the requirements for the premium seal are not achieved, but the requirements that must be fulfilled for certification are met, FIBAA awards its regular quality seal.

4. The Procedure

4.1 Admission Criteria

Further education programmes from universities or alternative educational institutions that do not lead to an academic degree and that are at levels 5 to 8 of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning are eligible for FIBAA certification procedures. The principle of modularisation should be implemented or should be aimed for within the next 18 months.

4.2 Self-Documentation

After concluding the contract, you prepare the self-documentation. This consists of the self-report and all necessary attachments. In the self-evaluation report, you write a description of all relevant aspects of the continuing education course. If several courses in the cluster are to be certified, please write a joint self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation report follows the question and assessment catalogue for the FIBAA quality seal for certified continuing education courses. The catalogue supports you in describing the course by asking questions on the aspects of 'Objectives and strategy', 'Approval', 'Implementation', 'Resources and services' and 'Quality assurance'. The self-evaluation report should not exceed 40 pages and, in the case of cluster certifications, a maximum of a further 10 pages for each additional continuing education course. Please attach documents¹ that will be created anyway as part of the planning and implementation of the continuing education course (e.g. regulations and module handbook). Please also indicate if results of other evaluations/certification procedures from the last two years are already available for the continuing education course, as we may be able to take these into account in the certification procedure.

Format

- Please ensure that the format of the self-evaluation report is standardised.
- Ensure sufficient line spacing (e.g. 1.15) for better readability.
- Font size and spacing are not specified by FIBAA. We recommend the usual standards such as Arial 11.
- The self-evaluation report must be submitted in word and pdf format.

Peer review process

The certification procedure is a peer review process: On the basis of written information/documents, expert reviewers discuss all relevant aspects of the continuing education course with representatives of the institution in a constructive and critical dialogue. As a result of its deliberations, the team of experts prepares an expert opinion that contains a recommendation to the FIBAA Accreditation and Certification Commission (F-ACC) as the decision-making body.

¹ See "3. FIBAA-Checklist_CERT (appendices to self-evaluation report)"

4.3 Scheduling

In order to ensure that the process runs smoothly and swiftly and to plan the necessary resources, we will discuss a rough timetable once the contract has been signed. It includes the notified date for the submission of the self-documentation, the time corridor of the assessment and the F-ACC meeting targeted for the completion of the procedure.

Even before the self-documentation is received, FIBAA will appoint a project manager as your responsible contact person and begin organising the actual assessment procedure. FIBAA's project manager will agree a specific date for the assessment with you (on-site or digital). Please note that FIBAA requires approx. four to six months from the submission of the self-documentation to the decision of the F-ACC after prior consultation. The F-ACC meets at least four times a year. The specific dates can be found on our [homepage](#).

4.4 Allocation of the Expert Team

After agreeing possible dates for the review, FIBAA will allocate the expert team and finally confirm the review date. We will inform you of the composition of the expert team in good time. If there are justified objections to team members (e.g. bias), the team will be modified accordingly. However, your institution does not have the right to make suggestions. The final decision on the composition of the expert team is the responsibility of FIBAA.

Expert Team

The composition of the expert team ensures that all areas relevant to the examination procedure (e.g. subject-related aspects, structural and formal aspects of the course, social aspects) are assessed. The group of reviewers always includes representatives from academia and practice as well as students.

A FIBAA review team usually consists of four people, including

- two experts from academia, namely one university professor and one university of applied sciences professor with experience in continuing education,
- one representative of professional practice and
- one student member.

FIBAA experts are regularly trained and only appointed as FIBAA experts after a trial phase. The pool of experts currently comprises approx. 1,200 experts from various disciplines, from professional practice and from the student body.

4.5 Review of the Self-Documentation

The first step is to check the submitted self-documentation for completeness. If important documents or information are missing, we will point this out to you in good time and ask you to provide additional information.

As soon as the expert team has been confirmed by you, they will receive the self-documentation for review. If the experts require further information, we will forward these requests to you in good time.

4.6 Assessment Conference

As a rule, the assessment is carried out by the expert team on site or digitally at the earliest eight weeks after receipt of the self-documentation. The experts conduct separate interviews with representatives of the educational institution, including the management as well as the teachers and participants of the continuing education course. They may also include administrative staff, alumni and representatives of co-operating institutions and companies. Overall, care should be taken to provide different dialogue partners in the respective discussion rounds and to avoid duplication in the discussions by persons with multiple functions as far as possible. In the discussion round with the participants and graduates, representatives of the educational institution are generally excluded. Hierarchical dependencies should be excluded as far as possible in the other discussion rounds. Exceptions to this are the kick-off and final interviews. Here, all representatives of the educational institution are invited, even if they do not contribute directly to the discussion.

In the run-up to the assessment, further documents² must be submitted in digital form to provide the experts with an in-depth insight into the quality of the teaching and learning materials, the examinations used, the publicly accessible information on the continuing education course and the evaluation results.

The assessment usually lasts one day, or longer if there are several courses to be certified and ends with initial feedback from the experts regarding the compliance of the continuing education course with the relevant requirements.

The timing and composition of the discussion rounds depends on a number of factors such as the profile of the continuing education course or the availability of the discussion partners and is worked out by FIBAA's project manager together with you. When selecting the student representatives for the interview as part of the assessment, care must be taken to ensure that they are not dependent on the continuing education institution (e.g. tutor, freelancer, employee).

² See "4. FIBAA-Checklist_CERT (documents for assessment conference)"

Example of an on-site assessment schedule

Time	Programme item	Discussion participants
Evening before, if applicable	Arrival of experts	Expert Team, FIBAA project management
8:30 – 9:00 a.m.	Welcome / kick-off meeting - Presentation of the FIBAA team - Presentation of the institution Short presentation (max. 15 min.) on structure and objectives of the course to be certified and its position in the institution's strategy. Discussion may follow.	
9.30 – 11:00 a.m.	Discussion with course management Focal points: Objectives and positioning of the course in the labour and education market, curriculum (structure and content, further development in the participants' professional field), course design and development, examination density and organisation, course content, professional support for participants, course management	
11:00 – 11:15 a.m.	Break / internal expert meeting	Expert Team, FIBAA project management
11:15 – 12:00 a.m.	Discussions with teachers Focal points: Supervision of participants, teaching content, didactics/methods, involvement in decision-making processes, staff development and qualification, internal cooperation and coordination.	
12:00 – 12:30 p.m.	Presentation of the teaching and learning platform Focal points: Navigation, administration of the course (including participation in courses and examinations); teaching and learning materials; contact and exchange opportunities/interactivity	
12:30 – 1:30 p.m.	Internal expert meeting Review of documents: Teaching and learning material, examination results incl. final papers etc. (see checklist) Lunch break	Expert Team, FIBAA project management

1:30 – 2:15 p.m.	Group discussion with participants and graduates Focal points: Course organisation, course progression, course content, advice and support, examination organisation, working conditions, administrative support, workload, involvement in decision-making processes, evaluations → selected interview partners should not be dependent on the continuing education institution (e.g. tutor, freelancer, employee).	
2:15 – 3:00 p.m.	Discussion with the administration and quality management Focal points: Course and process organisation, decision-making processes, support for participants, alumni activities, international aspects (if applicable), further qualification; Quality objectives, quality assurance procedures/evaluations (workload, retention of graduates, academic success)	
	If necessary, additional discussion round (e.g. clarification of open questions with course management, cooperation partners, presentation of distance learning materials, etc.)	
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.	Closed Expert meeting	Expert Team, FIBAA project management
appr. 5:00 p.m.	Closing discussion/feedback	
Thereafter	Departure	

4.7 Expert Report

Based on the self-documentation and, if necessary, further information as well as the findings from the assessment conference, the expert team prepares an expert report.

The structure of the report follows the structure of the question and assessment catalogue. In it, the experts evaluate the compliance of key features of the course with the relevant requirements and draw up a recommendation to the F-ACC. The report is sent to you for comment.

The main purpose of your comments is to check the report for possible errors in the factual description of the course(s) and in the findings of the expert group (assessment).

If the assessment report contains recommendations or requirements that you have already processed and fulfilled in the meantime, you are welcome to submit the evidence (information, documents) as part of your statement. They will then be reviewed by the panel and the condition/recommendation may be cancelled/amended. However, if the condition requires a comprehensive review of the content, the documents will be reviewed as part of the standard procedure for fulfilling the condition (see section 4.10).

Formal requirements:

- The statement must be a separate document. Please refrain from commenting in the assessment report document.
- In your statement, please indicate the point and the corresponding page of the assessment report to which you are referring.
- If you do not find any factual errors and do not need to provide any further information, it is sufficient to write (in a statement document or by e-mail) that you agree with the assessment report.

4.8 Resolution and Outcome of the Proceedings

The F-ACC discusses the result of the audit (expert opinion) and decides on the certification, taking your opinion into account. It meets at least four times a year; the current dates are published on our homepage. Possible resolutions of the F-ACC can be

- Certification with the FIBAA quality seal for certified continuing education courses
- Certification with the FIBAA quality seal for certified continuing education courses subject to conditions (if a maximum of five Asterisk criteria are not met)
- Refusal of certification with the FIBAA Quality Seal for certified continuing education courses (if more than five Asterisk criteria are not fulfilled or the deficiencies are of such a nature that the definition, regulation or lack of qualification objectives, access, curriculum, teaching organisation, teaching design, resources or examinations lead to significant disadvantages for participants)

If the result of the procedure is positive (without conditions), the continuing education course is certified for 5 years.

Even if a course has not yet produced any graduates, the principle applies that all criteria are to be assessed in the same way as for a course that is already running. For courses with essential quality criteria that are labelled as so-called asterisk criteria(*), at least the assessment level 'Quality requirement fulfilled' must be achieved. Failure to fulfil these criteria will result in corresponding conditions being imposed. Criteria other than asterisk criteria that are assessed as 'not fulfilled' do not result in a requirement, but rather a recommendation and therefore do not jeopardise certification. The deadline for fulfilment of conditions is usually nine months and can be shortened or extended in justified cases (by a maximum of six months).

If certification with the FIBAA quality seal for certified continuing education courses is denied, it can be reapplied for after a blocking period of generally one year.

The FIBAA Premium Seal is awarded to established courses that already have graduates and demonstrate a quality of study and teaching that clearly exceeds FIBAA's quality criteria in the certification process. This provides interested parties, course participants, graduates, continuing education institutions and the labour market with reliable information about the outstanding quality of the continuing education course.

In the case of certification or certification subject to conditions, the continuing education institution is awarded the FIBAA quality seal, in the latter case supplemented by an indication of the conditions.

FIBAA then sends the expert opinion and the certification certificate to the further education institution. Even in the event of a negative decision by the F-ACC, the full report is published on the FIBAA homepage.

4.9 Proof of fulfilment of conditions (if applicable)

If conditions were imposed with the certification, there are nine (9) months after the certification decision of the F-ACC to implement the changes. After this time, the evidence must be submitted to FIBAA in written form by email to Auflagen@fibaa.org. The evidence will be reviewed by the team of experts. In the case of requirements of a purely formal nature, the FIBAA office will process the documents without consulting the team of experts. Subsequently, a short report is prepared which contains the assessment of the FIBAA office/the review team on the fulfilment of the requirements. The F-ACC finally decides on the fulfilment of the conditions in one of its meetings.

If the F-ACC considers the condition(s) to be fulfilled, this will be determined by a decision and the certification certificate and the report on www.fibaa.org will be amended accordingly.

Occasionally, an institution may not be able to fulfil the conditions within the set deadline. In justified cases, the deadline can be extended once by up to three months at the request of the institution. If an institution fails to demonstrate fulfilment of the requirements within the deadline set (or extended at the request of the institution), this will generally result in the certification of the continuing education course being withdrawn.

The implementation of recommendations is reviewed as part of the re-accreditation process. Die Umsetzung von Empfehlungen wird im Rahmen des Re-Akkreditierungsverfahrens überprüft.

If you have any questions, please contact the responsible FIBAA project manager or certification@fibaa.org.

4.10 Appeals procedure

Please contact us directly if any problems arise during the certification process. In many cases, these can be resolved in the further process and any misunderstandings clarified. You also have the opportunity to point out any points that you believe have not been correctly presented or assessed when commenting on the draft report. Before the F-ACC reaches a decision, the team of

experts will then look at the facts of the case and the arguments put forward once again and amend the report if necessary.

If you believe that the certification decision has not been made appropriately, you have the option of lodging a reasoned complaint with FIBAA within one month of the decision being announced. In this case, the F-ACC - after receiving a statement from the assessors - will first look at the continuing education course and the institution's arguments again. If the committee accepts the institution's arguments, it can amend the certification decision directly. Otherwise, it instructs the FIBAA Appeals Committee to deal intensively with the certification procedure, its result and the arguments put forward by the institution and to submit a reasoned recommendation to the F-ACC ('Appeals procedure'). On this basis, the Commission will consider the certification decision again at a subsequent meeting and then make a final decision.

Part Two: The Self-Documentation

1. Principles/recommendations

Start in good time

The self-documentation serves the assessors as a basis for evaluating the training course and is therefore of central importance for successful certification. The self-documentation consists of the self-report and the necessary attachments. Experience has shown that sufficient time should be planned for the preparation of the self-documentation - documentation that is prepared 'in the final spurt' sometimes shows inconsistencies, may not be known to all relevant persons or may not be sufficiently coordinated with other bodies.

Please avoid requiring prior knowledge of your educational institution

In an assessment procedure, a review is usually carried out by external experts (so-called 'external quality assurance'). They are appointed with the intention of looking at things from an 'outside perspective' and thus arriving at an unbiased assessment. It is in the nature of things that these experts are not familiar with internal matters. This should be taken into account when preparing the self-documentation.

Please provide consistent information

The self-evaluation report and the appendices characterise the first impression of the evaluators and give an impression of the quality of a continuing education course. The self-evaluation report should describe relevant aspects and answer questions, but sometimes also raises new questions. The more consistent the information is, the easier it is to understand the self-evaluation report. Thus, statements in the self-evaluation report should always result conclusively from what has previously been said and, in case of doubt, should not be presented in a contradictory manner in the appendices.

Please limit to the essential facts and provide evidence

The scope of the self-evaluation report should also reflect a balanced relationship between the costs and benefits of the certification process. It is advisable to provide clear information on the key facts and, if necessary, references to relevant appendices that will be created anyway as part of the planning and implementation of the training course. The question and assessment catalogue will guide you safely through the individual topics and clarify which information is required to check the quality standards. The length of a self-evaluation report for a single continuing education course should not exceed 40 pages (excluding annexes).

2. Checklist

Done?

With regard to its formal organisation, the continuing education course complies with the relevant requirements in their respective CURRENT version ☐

The content of the continuing education course complies with the relevant requirements in their respective CURRENT version ☐

Self-Documentation

Based on the FIBAA question and assessment catalogue (AC), explanatory texts on:

Objectives and Strategy ☐

Admission ☐

Implementation (Structure, Content, Teaching and Learning Methodology) ☐

Resources and Services ☐

Quality Assurance ☐

Appendices (see: "3. FIBAA-Checklist_CERT (appendices to self-evaluation report)") ☐

Preparation of the Assessment

Suggested dates for the assessment (onsite, digital)

Internal coordination ☐

Coordination with FIBAA ☐

Overall organisation

Snack for assessors during the assessment ☐

Refreshments and drinks for the participants during breaks ☐

Wi-Fi access for assessors ☐

Scheduling

Clarify the timing of the assessment (start and duration of the interview rounds) with FIBAA

Premises for on-site assessment

Sufficiently large meeting room in the institution (min. 15 people) ☐

If necessary, signposting of the building/room ☐

Prepare hybrid implementation ☐

Participants in the discussion

Clarify the composition of the discussion rounds with FIBAA ☐

Inform participants ☐

Name badges for assessors and interview participants ☐

Documents for assessment

(please provide 3 weeks before assessment, see "4. FIBAA-Checklist_CERT (documents for assessment conference)")

3. FAQ

see FIBAA: Certification Procedures, Dropdown FAQ

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us:

Division management certifications

Tel.: +49 (0) 228 280 356 0

certification@fibaa.org