

# GUIDELINES FOR EXPERTS<sup>1</sup> IN ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES



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## 1. ESSENTIAL INFORMATION AT A GLANCE

### TYPES OF PROCEDURE AND TASKS OF THE EXPERTS

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The subject of an accreditation procedure can be an individual academic study programme, several academic study programmes or internal quality assurance systems of a Higher or Further Education Institution (HEI/FEI). Certification procedures are primarily concerned with continuing education courses.

The task of FIBAA Experts is to assess the quality of a study programme/a continuing education course or an institution, based on the self-evaluation submitted by the HEI/FEI and the outcomes of the site visit. After the site visit, the responsible FIBAA project manager will draft the assessment report, which contains the experts' assessment.

The decision regarding accreditation/certification is taken on the basis of this expert assessment. A FIBAA Committee decides on the award of the FIBAA Quality Seal and the German Accreditation Council makes the final decision regarding the award of the national seal.

### CODE OF CONDUCT AND CONFIDENTIALITY

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FIBAA experts are independent. They do not represent particular societal interests, are committed to the principle of equal opportunities and do not discriminate either directly or indirectly against anyone on grounds of ethnic origin, religion and ideology, disability, age, sexual identity, or gender. FIBAA takes it for granted that the expertise of the experts is based on their profound academic and/or professional experiences. The experts' institution should not be the dominating benchmark for the assessment in the accreditation procedure. FIBAA experts are obliged to study the documents relevant for the individual accreditation procedure, to prepare themselves for the site visit and to support the project manager in the preparation of the assessment report with their feedback.

Before the first assignment, FIBAA will advise the experts on the duty to keep any information confidential which they obtain in the course of a procedure. Before receiving any documentation of the HEI/FEI, experts are required to fill in and sign the [Code of Conduct/Confidentiality and Data Protection Declaration](#), and submit it to FIBAA.

### IMPARTIALITY

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At the start of each procedure, FIBAA asks the experts to declare their impartiality by submitting the [Declaration of Impartiality](#). FIBAA follows the *Guidelines for the Appointment of Experts and the Compilation of Expert Panels for Accreditation Procedures of the German*

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<sup>1</sup> Only to simplify readability there is no gender-neutral differentiation in many parts of these guidelines. Forms such as "experts", which correspond to the grammatical masculine, are to be understood gender unspecifically here.

*Rectors' Conference ("HRK-Benennungsleitlinien")* and the *Guidelines for Avoiding Conflicts of Interest by the German Research Foundation (DFG)*. If the applicant institution offers a position or future cooperation in teaching or research in the course of the accreditation or certification procedure, experts should inform FIBAA instantly. For reasons of compliance, persons with a close relationship to employees of FIBAA's office can under no circumstances take on an expert activity for FIBAA.

## 2. THE PROCEDURE

### THE EXPERT PANEL

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FIBAA Experts are members of a panel which is being composed by FIBAA in accordance with the relevant academic and professional requirements. Furthermore, social competencies, experience in the accreditation/certification system, in academic teaching methods or continuing education, international experience, and familiarity with Bachelor's, Master's and PhD-programmes degrees are part of their qualification profile. For the selection of experts, the *"HRK-Benennungsleitlinien"*, are crucial. As a rule, the HEI/FEI is being informed of the composition of an expert panel prior to the site visit. Any reasonable objection to the composition raised by the HEI/FEI will be taken into account as appropriate under the specific circumstances. In addition, an expert committee of FIBAA, consisting of representatives of academia, professional practice and the student body, reviews every proposal for an expert panel.

### PREPARATION OF THE SITE VISIT

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As part of an accreditation procedure (at programme or institutional level) or certification procedure for the FIBAA Quality Seal, the HEI/FEI is requested to provide a comprehensive description of the study programme or the continuing education course in accordance with FIBAA Assessment Guide. Within the scope of the accreditation procedure for the national seal the self-evaluation report must be based on the template of the German Accreditation Council. In Institutional Audit procedures according to the Austrian *Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz* (HS-QSG) the self-evaluation report is based on the FIBAA Assessment Guide for Institutional Audit and within the framework of the Institutional Accreditation according to the *Swiss Higher Education Promotion and Coordination Act* (HEdA) on the Assessment Guide for Institutional Accreditation according to the HEdA.

An important step in the preparations of the site visit is the appointment of an expert panel. FIBAA contacts experts approximately three months to six weeks prior to a scheduled site visit to invite them to an accreditation or certification procedure. At the latest three weeks before the site visit, the experts will receive the self-evaluation report in electronic format. In case the experts prefer to receive it in print, the HEI/FEI will send them the self-evaluation report in print. For this purpose, FIBAA needs the expert's written permission by submitting a special form to pass their name and address on to the HEI/FEI.

To prepare the site visit, experts also receive the FIBAA Assessment Guide with the accreditation/certification criteria and the tiered assessment options ("Quality Profile"). In procedures for the award of the seal of the German Accreditation Council, FIBAA will send the experts a draft of the first part of the accreditation report on the formal criteria ("Pruefbericht"). After reviewing the documents, the FIBAA project manager will ask the experts to pro-

vide him and the other members of the expert panel with an informal electronic assessment or an analysis of strengths and weaknesses at the latest ten days before the site visit. The project manager will forward the assessment to the other members of the expert panel. If experts need additional information from the HEI/FEI, the project manager will demand it.

## **THE SITE VISIT**

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The responsible FIBAA project manager coordinates the schedule with the HEI/FEI. FIBAA experts prepare themselves for the site visit by studying the documents relevant for the accreditation procedure. At the beginning of a site visit, there will be preparatory meeting of the expert panel. Subsequently, the site visit includes, among others, separate talks with the HEI/FEI's executives, programme heads (in procedures for programme accreditation), lecturers, staff of the quality management, and students (in re-accreditation/certification procedures also with alumni), administrators, and an inspection of the relevant facilities (such as the library, lecture halls, seminar rooms etc.) as well as a review of documents provided on-site (e.g. teaching and learning materials, graded tests, evaluation results, etc.). Sufficient time will be scheduled for internal discussions of the expert panel. As part of this, the members of the expert panel will assess the extent to which the HEI/FEI complies with the relevant accreditation/certification criteria. Subsequently, the evaluation is carried out in accordance with the relevant assessment criteria and recommendations are given for further development and conditions. By the end of the site visit, the HEI/FEI will receive a brief feedback (summarising strengths and weaknesses) on the overall impression of the expert panel.

The duration of the site visit is 1 to 3 days, depending on the type of procedure (in the case of individual procedures for programme accreditation/certification as a rule 1 day; in the case of a system accreditation in Germany two dates of 1 and 2.5 days; in the case of procedures for several programmes and international procedures with longer arrival and departure sometimes also more than 3 days), whereby arrival and departure are not included. The project manager knows the procedural rules in detail and accompanies the experts through the entire assessment process. The FIBAA project manager drafts a written assessment report based on the expert's oral appraisal during the site visit. Thereafter, he asks the experts to review the draft.

## **THE ASSESSMENT REPORT**

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The draft report compiled by the FIBAA project manager on the basis of the expert's assessment will be counter-checked, supplemented and, if necessary, corrected by experts. In addition to the presentation of facts and the expert opinions, the report also contains recommendations for further development and conditions. In procedures for the award of the FIBAA Quality Seal, the assessment is submitted to the responsible FIBAA Committee for decision. For the last time, the experts are asked for their expertise within the framework of fulfilling the conditions if the conditions concern subject areas.

In procedures for the national seal, the activity of the experts already ends with the completion of the assessment. FIBAA has fulfilled its contract with the HEI/FEI as soon as the final accreditation report has been sent to the HEI/FEI (The HEI/FEI can then submit an application for accreditation to the German Accreditation Council).

## HANDLING SENSITIVE INFORMATION

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After the completion of a procedure, experts have to return all confidential documents to FIBAA or destroy them. Confidential information and documents are all commercial, technical, financial or other information disclosed by a HEI/FEI, in particular as part of the self-evaluation report or of the site visit. Information is deemed public when generally known, having become public without violation of the above stipulations or having been disclosed by a third party without violating the duty of confidentiality.

## TRAVEL EXPENSES AND COMPENSATION & INSURANCE

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Participation in accreditation and certification procedures is a non-salaried and voluntary activity. However, FIBAA pays an expense allowance for costs and input incurred to the experts. The amount of the expense allowance depends on the type of procedure and the number of study programmes or courses. The expense allowance covers preparation, participation in the site visit and follow-up feedback. The invitation email to a procedure already specifies the expense allowance.

Travel plans are made by FIBAA in consultation with the expert. FIBAA will book the accommodation at the destination of the site visit and cover all travel costs. For precise coordination, the experts can contact the FIBAA travel office (e-mail: [buchung@fibaa.org](mailto:buchung@fibaa.org) and Tel.: +49(0)228/280356-26). In any case the [travel guidelines](#) of FIBAA have to be respected.

FIBAA has accidental damage insurance which covers against the cost of repairs or damage to the property or belongings of the experts, following an accident or crisis on the way to or from the location of the site visit. Please use the Billing Statement for Travel Expenses and the Billing Statement for Allowances, which are available on [FIBAA's website](#).

## 3. FURTHER INFORMATION

### TRAINING AND SEMINARS

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The expertise of the experts is based on their profound academic and/or professional experiences. Nonetheless, the tasks of a FIBAA Expert necessarily require adequate knowledge of the assessment and accreditation/certification criteria and procedural rules. For this purpose, FIBAA offers online training sessions and face-to-face seminars for FIBAA Experts. Current dates and registration forms for training sessions and seminars are available on [FIBAA's website](#).

### INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

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Further information about FIBAA, the applicable legal framework for each procedure, results of previous accreditation and certification procedures and other related materials are available on [FIBAA's website](#). For personal advice, please contact us at [gutachter@fibaa.org](mailto:gutachter@fibaa.org)