



Description of the quality assurance system in Switzerland

The Federal Constitution assigns responsibility for quality assurance in Swiss higher education to the federal government and cantons. Together, they established the Swiss Accreditation Council (SAC), an independent body with a legal mandate in the field of accreditation and quality assurance in the Swiss higher education sector.

In fulfilling its legal mandate, the SAC verifies whether the quality assurance system used within higher education institutions serves to ensure quality in teaching, research and services and contributes to the development of higher education not only in Switzerland, but also in other countries of Europe and internationally. The SAC makes its decisions on the basis of the procedures carried out by the recognised agencies in Switzerland. The SAC is responsible for the recognition of Swiss or foreign accreditation agencies, if they meet the requirements.

The SAC aims to promote the development of a Swiss higher education and research system that meets international quality standards in the interest of science and the arts, acquisition of knowledge, innovation, economy and society in general.

The Swiss system includes two types of recognitions in the higher education sector: accreditation according to the Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector (Higher Education Act, HEEdA) and mandates on behalf of third parties.

Accreditation according to the HEEdA:

Institutional accreditation:

For institutional accreditation, the HEEdA requires that universities have their own quality assurance systems and that quality assurance is carried out effectively in accordance with national criteria and the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The purpose of institutional accreditation is to raise the national and international profile of universities, to serve as a guide and decision-making aid, to help universities make a name for themselves and to improve international recognition for degree qualifications.

Institutional accreditation is a requirement for the right to use a reserved designation– in other words, 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 (Cf. HEEdA art.29).

Public universities – all cantonal universities, universities of applied sciences, universities of teacher education, other institutions within the higher education sector and federally universities and institutions recognised under previous law – are subject to compulsory accreditation.

Private universities and institutions must undergo a process of institutional accreditation if they wish to make use of the above-mentioned designation right or – with regard to international recognition – require their institutions to be accredited by a government body.

The Swiss Accreditation Council is the national legal decision-making body for institutional accreditations.

Programme accreditation:

With the exception of the study programmes in medical education, programme accreditation pursuant to HEEdA is voluntary. It may only be requested by higher education institutions that have institutional accreditation. Higher education institutions are free to apply for their courses to be accredited by an international agency that awards its own quality label. The approval requirements of the respective agency apply in such cases.

Study programmes in medical education:

According to Article 23 of the Medical Professions Act (MedPA), compulsory accreditation



applies to study programmes in the field of university medical professions that lead to a Swiss federal diploma. This relates human medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, pharmacy and chiropractic.

These study programmes must be accredited pursuant to the requirements of the HEdA and MedPA. The quality standards to be applied therefore combine the requirements of these two legal bases.

Higher education institutions may apply to an accreditation agency approved by the SAC to request accreditation for their study programmes in human medicine, dentistry, chiropractic, pharmacy and veterinary medicine accredited.

The Swiss Accreditation Council is the decision-making body for programme accreditations pursuant to HEdA.

Mandate on behalf of third parties:

Accreditation and/or recognition of controlled professions is also a part of the Swiss quality assurance system in higher education. The SAC, as Commission of AAQ, assures the quality of all procedures carried out on behalf of third parties.

Postgraduate medical education:

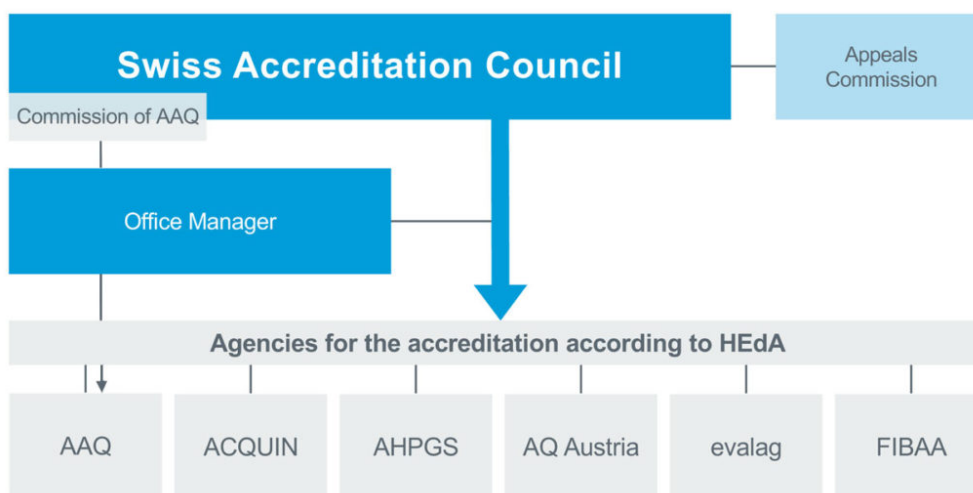
Postgraduate medical education is subject to the accreditation requirement according to Article 23 MedPA: Postgraduate courses leading to a Swiss federal postgraduate title must be accredited every seven years.

The ruling body is the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA).

Postgraduate psychological education:

As for the medical professions, the Federal Law on Psychology Professions (Psychologieberufegesetz, PsyG) brought in the accreditation of postgraduate courses as a requirement for the award of Swiss federal postgraduate titles.

The ruling body is the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA).





Description of the responsibilities and structure of the AAQ

Responsibilities:

The AAQ is the Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance has a main legal mandate defined in the HEdA: “The Swiss Accreditation Agency and other accreditation agencies recognised by the Swiss Accreditation Council shall carry out the accreditation procedure according to this Act and under the terms of the Cooperation Agreement. The accreditation procedure must meet international standards.”

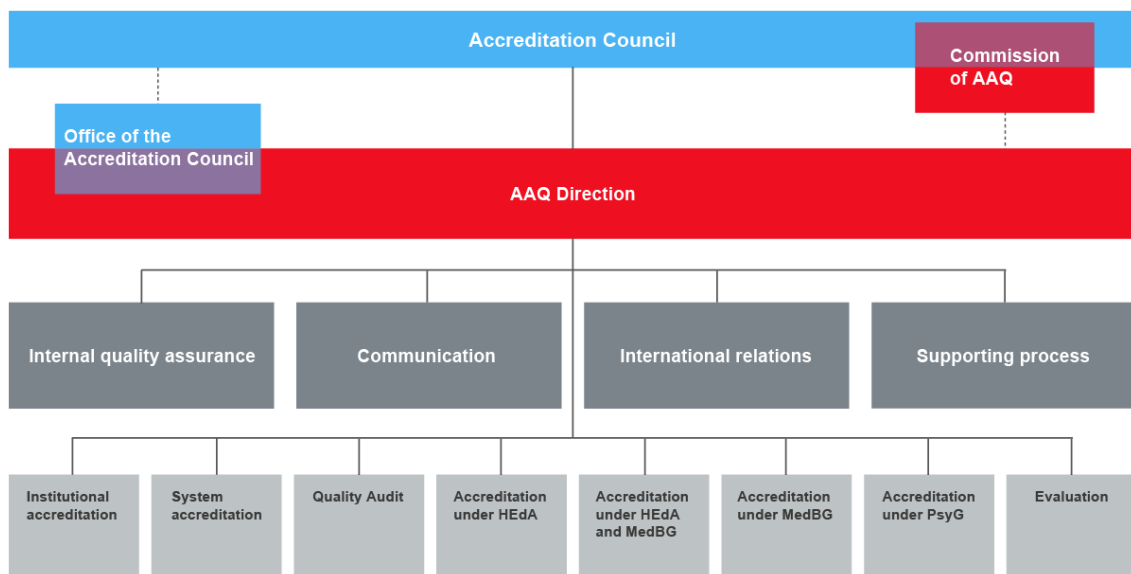
Furthermore, the Swiss law on medical and psychology professions assigns to the AAQ the role of accreditation body for study programmes and postgraduate programmes in medicine and for postgraduate programmes in psychotherapy.

The AAQ has an international network and is entitled to conduct procedures in system accreditations in Germany and quality audits Austria. International evaluations are also carried out in some specific cases.

The role of the AAQ is limited to external quality assurance for institutional accreditation. It is focused on quality assurance system and oriented towards quality enhancement. It aims to safeguard and promote the quality of teaching and research at universities. It is independent, uses internationally recognised methods and is able to draw upon the knowledge and experience of leading experts. The AAQ develops guidelines and quality standards, conducts accreditation and evaluation procedures, and works at an international level. It perceives its role as an external partner for quality assurance and development, and provides a range of supporting services.

Structure:

The AAQ is a small agency under the authority of the SAC. The team is composed of 14 members (1 full-time) covering a broad range of tasks from administration to management of accreditation format. The agency works and conducts procedures in 4 languages (German, French, Italian and English).



**Procedures:**

The AAQ procedures respect the autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs): they are committed to the principle that HEIs themselves are primarily responsible for quality assurance systems. By having external reviews carried out by qualified experts, the AAQ makes an important contribution to the development of quality assurance systems. On a practical level, AAQ procedures take account of the specific features of different types of universities in Switzerland.

The accreditation procedure is a transparent, multi-layered process with a decision founded in law. The university submits an application to the SAC. The procedure is opened if the criteria are fulfilled. The first phase, self-assessment, is a time of critical reflection on the HEIs and its quality assurance system. In the meantime, the AAQ assembles a team of experts to carry out an external evaluation in the form of on-site visits: The contents of the self-assessment report are examined during discussions with university representatives. The experts draw up a report on the degree to which standards are met and make a recommendation for an accreditation. Together with a statement by the applying university, this reaches the decision-making body, the SAC.

The AAQ devises and supervises the procedure, ensuring that it conforms to the relevant regulations. Once the procedure has been completed, the AAQ publishes the reports. Irrespective of the type of procedure, HEIs or degree courses may apply to be reassessed if they disagree with the decision of the Accreditation Council.