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## **Report**

**on the application by the Central Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation  
(ZEvA) from 6 May 2015 for accreditation and for verification of compliance  
with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European  
Higher Education Area (ESG).**

- submitted on 1 June 2016 -

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### **I. Summary**

In the discussions with ZEvA's representatives, the expert group received an overwhelmingly positive impression of the agency's work. This impression was confirmed by the higher education institutions and the peers that have in the past either been assessed in procedures with ZEvA or have conducted assessments of ZEvA. The great commitment and the professionalism of the agency's employees is worthy of particular mention.

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In the area of programme accreditation, ZEvA works in a well-established and professional manner. With the five ongoing system accreditation procedures, the agency has begun to expand into this new and important field in the institutional evaluation of the internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions. The expert group believes ZEvA should pay considerably more attention to this area of activity, which was initially given little attention. As it can be assumed that ZEvA will possess the necessary attributes to perform high-quality work oriented towards the criteria of the Accreditation Council in this area too, the expert group recommends that ZEvA is accredited (with conditions) and therefore granted renewed certification for conducting programme and system accreditation procedures.

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ZEvA's activities in its original area of activity of evaluations should also be assessed positively in all respects.

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However, it also became clear during the procedure that ZEvA is currently going through a period of considerable change: on the one hand, programme accreditation, which was previously one of the agency's primary areas of activity, is becoming less important due to

the rapidly growing interest in system accreditation, and on the other hand, ZEvA's portfolio, which has been expanded by several international procedure types, has, in the expert group's opinion, not yet been sufficiently established.

5 In the previous ENQA evaluation, ZEvA was recommended to increase its activities in the area of evaluations and to provide additional resources for this. In deciding to use its extensive experience in the areas of programme accreditation and evaluations to expand its business areas and to further improve its service quality, ZEvA has addressed this recommendation. Nonetheless, from the expert group's perspective, ZEvA has acted with considerable caution in its international activities so far, with the result that the relationship  
10 between the low order volume and the generally much greater volume of required resources in international procedures could prove to be problematic in the long term. If ZEvA decides to expand its international activities, it should endeavour to increase its human resources in good time. However, as a priority, ZEvA should pursue the expansion of system accreditation, which the expert group believes to be of key importance in the development of the agency.  
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During the assessment of ZEvA, it became clear at several points that the process for reorientating the agency has not yet been completed. In its key areas of activity (programme accreditation and evaluation) ZEvA is very well positioned; the new areas of activity are, however, not yet sufficiently integrated into the agency's structures and processes. This concerns the internal quality assurance system above all, but also the complaints procedure and appointment procedure for experts.  
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The accreditation of doctoral programmes, which are conducted by ZEvA as part of programme accreditation – and therefore not as complete, separate procedures but nonetheless relevant to the ESG – shows some shortcomings, particularly with a view to the ESG's transparency requirements.  
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Although these weaknesses should not be exaggerated due the low proportion of "new" procedures and procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes in the agency's overall spectrum of activities, trust in the agency's compliance with the ESG across *all* procedures offered by the agency must be established on a systematic level.

30 The expert group therefore concludes that some of the ESG standards can currently only be regarded as having been partially fulfilled.

For the assessment procedure it might have been beneficial if the agency had taken the internal debates conducted under the heading "Strategy paper 2015-2020" as the basis for its self-evaluation and linked this with statements regarding foreseeable or conceivable

consequences. The accreditation procedure could have then been better used to accompany the change process and to implement the agreed goals taking the result of the accreditation procedure into account.

5 The expert group explicitly encourages ZEvA to adopt a more proactive approach in its strategic reorientation and, based on previous successes, to communicate its objectives more clearly.

## II. Procedural framework

### II.1. Statutory mandate

10 In accordance with § 2 Para. 1 No. 1 of the law on establishing a *Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany* the foundation's task is to certify accreditation agencies. It grants, for a limited period of time, the right to accredit study programmes or the internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions by awarding the seal of the foundation. The Accreditation Council's accreditation decision, as well as the  
15 implementation of the procedure for certifying an accreditation agency, is based on the resolution "*Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Agencies*" from 8 December 2009 in the version adopted on 10 December 2010.

In order to promote international recognition for the decisions made by the Accreditation Council and the accreditation agencies, in approving its criteria for accreditation, the Accreditation Council adopted the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the  
20 European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, as they were passed at the Bologna Follow-Up Conference in Bergen in May 2005 by the ministers responsible for higher education. By taking these standards into account, the Accreditation Council underlined the central role played by accreditation in achieving the objectives of the Bologna Process and made  
25 clear that quality assurance, and above all accreditation, in the higher education sector can no longer focus exclusively on national standards or distinctions. Further important sources for the Accreditation Council's criteria were the Code of Good Practice of the European Consortium for Accreditation from 3 December 2004 and the Guidelines of Good Practice of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education  
30 from April 2005. The Accreditation Council will take *the adoption of the new Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in May 2015 in Yerevan as an opportunity to fundamentally revise its rules and criteria.*

## II.2 Compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

In order to be recognised as a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) or to be included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), an agency must demonstrate, through an external assessment that it complies with the ESG. Although for EQAR full membership of an agency in ENQA is considered prima facie evidence of compliance with the ESG.

In order to avoid the need for two external assessments, the Accreditation Council also offers agencies a review of their compliance with Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG as part of the accreditation procedure, and to present this explicitly in a separate part of the assessment. This assessment is therefore performed in accordance with the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the EHEA*.

## II.3. Significant results from the previous accreditation/ENQA review/EQAR registration

### **Accreditation**

The accreditation of ZEvA in 2011 gave rise to an essentially positive result. In its accreditation decision from 16 February 2011, the Accreditation Council found that the agency had substantially fulfilled the criteria. In addition, it highlighted in particular ZEvA's increasing professionalism in its internal organisation and in quality management. The accreditation was linked to the following three conditions:

**Condition 1:** ZEvA shall submit criteria for the establishment of programme clusters in programme accreditation by 15 August 2011 these must guarantee sufficient academic and disciplinary affinity and a suitable size for the expert group in accordance with Cl. 1.3 of the resolution "Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation" (C 2.2.1).

**Condition 2:** ZEvA shall submit a procedure specified with binding effect that ensures the involvement of all interest groups in the appointment of experts for programme accreditation by 15 August 2011 (Criterion 2.2.2). Here dependence of individual opinions must be precluded.

**Condition 3:** ZEvA shall demonstrate by 15 August 2011, in a suitable manner and documented for external interested parties, that the resolution by the Accreditation Council,

the “Standards for Structuring the Relationship between System Accreditation and Consultation Services” dated 31 October 2008 are taken into account.

The Accreditation Council found that these conditions had been fulfilled by the set deadline with a resolution dated 23 September 2011.

- 5 A range of recommendations were also made by the experts in 2011, the Accreditation Council has explicitly referred to these in its accreditation decision.

**Recommendation 1:** The agency should ensure greater diversification with regard to duties and responsibilities in light of the fact that decision-taking powers are clustered in one person in the body structure (see explanations regarding Criterion 2.2.1).

- 10 **Recommendation 2:** The statute should also allow for student members in the SAK to have alternate members with voting rights.

**Recommendation 3:** The agency should provide suitable internal documentation of decisions by its own committees regarding questions that arise in relation to the accreditation of study programmes (see explanations regarding Criterion 2.2.1).

- 15 **Recommendation 4:** The agency should introduce concrete measures to reach the goals set down in the statutes regarding the proportion of women with voting rights in the SAK (see explanations regarding Criterion 2.2.1).

- 20 **Recommendation 5:** In future, more international experts should be appointed and more international members should be appointed to the SAK (see explanations regarding Criterion 2.2.1).

**Recommendation 6:** The procedures for demonstrating the fulfilment of conditions should be changed in such a way that students members of the expert groups can be more easily reached (see explanations regarding Criterion 2.2.2).

- 25 **Recommendation 7:** In the accreditation of larger programme clusters, two people from the student group and two from professional practice should be included in the expert group (see explanations regarding Criterion 2.2.2).

**Recommendation 8:** Students and representatives of professional practice should also be represented in the Review Commissions (see explanations regarding Criterion 2.2.2).

- 30 **Recommendation 9:** In the medium term, the agency should not employ anyone in programme accreditation procedures who has not been given structured preparation or who does not possess many years of experience in the area (see explanations regarding Criterion 2.2.3).

**Recommendation 10:** The passage in the contracts with the higher education institutions which states that any costs that arise in the event of a complaint by the higher education institution towards the Accreditation Council within the scope of a review carried out for a specific-purpose are borne by the higher education institution, provided this does not relate to faults in the procedure, should be deleted (see explanations regarding Criterion 2.6).

**Recommendation 11:** For reasons of transparency, the Review Commission should be incorporated into the Foundation's statute. The appointment of members to the Review Commissions should be incorporated as a duty in the responsible body's rules of procedure (see explanations regarding Criterion 2.6).

### **ENQA – ESG 2005**

The conditions and recommendations from the accreditation procedure are reflected in the ESG evaluation. The ESG standards were evaluated as being completely fulfilled with the exception of Standards 2.4, 3.4 and 3.7:

#### **ESG Standard 2.4 (partially compliant)**

**Recommendation 1:** In future, more international experts should be appointed and more international members should be appointed to the SAK.

**Recommendation 2:** In the medium term, the agency should not employ anyone in programme accreditation procedures who has not been given structured preparation or who does not possess many years of experience in the area.

#### **ESG Standard 2.8 (fully compliant)**

**Recommendation:** ZEvA should make the findings from its activities available to the higher education institutions and the interested public through structured analyses and should institutionalise the structured processing of findings for this purpose.

#### **ESG Standard 3.3 (fully compliant)**

**Recommendation:** ZEvA should be more active in the area of evaluations and should also provide additional resources for acquisition for this purpose.

#### **ESG Standard 3.4 (substantially compliant)**

**Recommendation:** In order to facilitate increase activities in evaluations, the agency should provide additional resources for acquisition.

**ESG Standard 3.7 (partially compliant)**

**Recommendation:** In the accreditation of larger programme clusters, two people from the student group and two from professional practice should be included in the expert group.

5 **ENQA – ESG 2005**

The EQAR Register Committee identified the following points as “flagged issues”:

**ESG Standard 2.4 (International experts):** It should receive attention whether ZEvA has increased the involvement of international experts and included international perspectives in its committees more prominently.

- 10 **ESG Standard 2.4 (Expert groups for clustered programme accreditations):** It should receive attention whether ZEvA has ensured appropriate representation of the perspectives of students and professional practice in assessments of large clusters including study programmes from different disciplines.

- 15 With a letter dated 27 November 2012, ZEvA was asked by ENQA to report on its responses to the recommendations from the previous assessment in a *progress report*. The recommendations are taken from the conditions and recommendations listed above and were also taken into account in the current assessment.

**II.4 Outline**

- 20 ZEvA submitted the application for accreditation as an accreditation agency to the Accreditation Council in a letter dated 6 May 2015. On 11 January 2016, the agency submitted an explanatory statement for the application alongside additional documentation. Additional documents were subsequently requested by email on 28 January 2016. These documents were received by post on 8 February 2016.

- 25 The following experts were nominated by the Accreditation Council by a resolution on 30 September 2015:

**Prof. Dr. Wilfried Müller**, former Rector of the University of Bremen (Chair)

**Prof. Dr. Karlheinz Sonntag**, University of Heidelberg, former Prorector for Quality Development

- 30 **Dr. Anett Loescher**, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

**Thomas Kreiml**, Education department of the Union of Private Sector Employees (GPA)  
– Graphical workers and journalists

**Stanislaw Bondarew**, Student of the Dresden University of Technology

5 For the Accreditation Council, Dr. Bernd Kaßbaum accompanied the procedure on behalf of Ms Gerstenkorn. The expert group was supported by Franz Börsch from the head office of the Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany.

10 On 7/8 January 2016, a preparatory meeting was held for the experts during which the applicable criteria set by the Accreditation Council and the ESG were presented and explained. The preparatory meeting also served to deepen the experts' knowledge of the course of the procedure and their understanding of their roles in accreditation procedures.

### **Explanatory statement for the application**

15 The application documents submitted by ZEvA are characterised by a brief application text and in extensive volume of annexes. The application text composed by the head of office of the agency refers to the respective relevant annexes to explain the matters discussed and as evidence for the statements made therein.

20 From the expert group's perspective, ZEvA's application text is too short with its very brief explanations on the fulfilment of the standards and criteria. Without intensively reading the extensive annexes, the application text is not informative enough and is lacking a self-evaluation as well as considerations regarding the agency's strategic planning. The agency's areas of activity are not explained in full. In addition, the text only sporadically refers to the ESG guidelines and the EQAR document "Use and Interpretation of the ESG".

25 ZEvA also only made limited use of the opportunity to fundamentally review its application documents upon the request of the head office of the Accreditation Council in coordination with the Chair of the expert group. Here the agency only made a few additions to the application text and added additional annexes. In addition, it submitted a mapping diagram for ESG Part 1, which relates the standards used by ZEvA in its procedures with the ESG standards.

30 On the basis of the application text, the preparatory briefing of experts proved to be somewhat difficult; in contrast, the numerous discussions which took place as part of the on-site visit gave a comprehensive picture of the activities, the ambition and the potential for development of ZEvA (see the following chapter on the on-site visit regarding this).

Worthy of note is above all the detailed progress report provided by the agency (Annex 50), which provides information about the fulfilment of the conditions from the previous

accreditation procedure and about the agency's response to the recommendations and the so-called "flagged issues" identified by the European Register (EQAR)..

5 The agency's guidelines, which are particularly important in aiding understanding of the different procedures offered by ZEvA, also give a good overview of the individual procedures offered by the agency. This applies above all to programme and system accreditation procedures and for evaluations.

### On-site visit

10 An on-site visit took place at the agency's head office on 23 and 24 February 2016, which was preceded by a preliminary discussion between the members of the expert group on 22 February 2016. The expert group conducted discussions with the agency's management, with the members of the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK), the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK), the Commission for International Affairs (KIA), the Commission for System Accreditation and the Foundation Council, discussions were also held  
15 with the employees of the head office, with experts who have been appointed in national and international accreditation, evaluation and certification procedures as well as representatives from the higher education institutions in Germany and abroad, for which the agency has performed accreditation, evaluation or certification procedures. (The schedule is included as Annex A.)

20 The expert group submitted the enclosed report for 2016 with a unanimous vote on 1 June 2016, taking the statement by ZEvA from 31 May 2016 into account.

This report is based on the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* from May 2015 and the resolution of the Accreditation Council "*Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Agencies*" from 8 December 2009 in the version adopted on 10 December 2010. The resolution of the EQAR  
25 "Policy on the Use and the Interpretation of the ESG" from 12 June 2015 was included in the assessment.

30 In the opinion of the expert group, the discussions held as part of the on-site visit made it clear that ZEvA is currently going through a period of considerable change due to the declining significance of the programme accreditation market and the resulting search for new operation fields. In contrast to the well-established fields of activity of programme accreditation and evaluations, the new procedures, above all certification and auditing, have more of a pilot character and are, in the expert group's estimation, not yet systematically incorporated into the agency. This is expressed in part in the guidelines, but primarily in the agency's application. The note in the introduction to ZEvA's application text that the

statements regarding the ESG 2015 standards relate primarily to accreditation procedures due to the low number of international procedures also corresponds to this estimation.

The experts appreciate the efforts made by ZEvA to enter new fields of activity and highlight as particularly positive the great commitment of the agency's employees in this context.

## II.5 The German Accreditation System

Germany has a decentralised accreditation system which is characterised by the fact that the accreditation agencies are certified for practise in Germany by the Accreditation Council. Accreditation was introduced in 1998 and has always been based on the involvement of academics, students and professional practice.

The role of accreditation is to ensure the standards of the specialised content covered which, alongside a review of the study programme concept and the academic feasibility of the programme offered, also takes into account the quality of teaching as well as a review of a programme's professional relevance and the promotion of gender equality. As a general rule, accreditation is a prerequisite for introducing and running Bachelor's and Master's study programmes. In addition to programme accreditation, system accreditation was introduced in 2007. Positive system accreditation entitles a higher education institution to award the quality seal of the Accreditation Council for study programmes in accordance with their own internal quality assurance system.

The activities of the Accreditation Council are based on the law on establishing a Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany, which was passed on 15 February 2005. Alongside certifying agencies temporarily for their activities in Germany, the Accreditation Council stipulates the basic requirements for accreditation procedures, which must be conducted according to reliable and transparent standards. At the same time, the Accreditation Council ensures that issues relating to the overall system for which individual states are responsible are given consideration in the scope of accreditation. The Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany also functions as a centralised documentation office for accreditation and manages the database of accredited study programmes in Germany.

With the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereafter ESG), a European consensus regarding quality assurance in higher education institutions was reached for the first time at the Bologna Follow-Up Conference in Bergen in May 2005 by the ministers responsible for higher education. A revised version of the ESG was enacted in May 2015 at the conference of ministers in Yerevan. In

order to promote international recognition for the decisions made by the Accreditation Council and accreditation agencies, the Accreditation Council has always taken the ESG into account.

### III. Central Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation, Hanover (ZEvA)

#### III.1 Foundation

The Central Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation Hanover (ZEvA) was established in 1995 by the Conference of the Higher Education Institutions (LHK) in Lower Saxony as a joint institution of the higher education institutions in this federal state with the task of supporting quality assurance and quality improvement in teaching and learning in higher education institutions.

Initially, ZEvA conducted procedures for extensive evaluations of teaching and learning in all higher education institutions in Lower Saxony. In 2000, ZEvA was expanded with the addition of an accreditation department and was the first agency to be accredited by the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of study programmes.

On 11 September 2008, ZEvA adopted a new organisational structure following a resolution by the state government of Lower Saxony. The agency has been a foundation under civil law since 2009.

#### III.2 Organisation

The duties of ZEvA and its organisational structure are stipulated in the agency's statute. The bodies belonging to ZEvA are the Foundation Council, the Foundation's Board of Directors, the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK), the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK) and the Commission for International Affairs (KIA). The bodies are supplemented by ZEvA's System Accreditation Commission (KSA) and the Review Commission.

**Foundation Council:** The Foundation Council is responsible for all matters concerning the foundation that are of fundamental importance for evaluation and for accreditation. The Foundation Council is composed of seven members who are experienced in the area of quality assurance in higher education institutions. The members are selected by the Conference of the Higher Education Institutions in Lower Saxony (LHK) in consultation with the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony (MWK); one member is nominated by the ministry responsible for the higher education institutions. The Foundation Council appoints the members of the SAK, SEK and the KIA.

**SAK:** The Standing Accreditation Commission is the central decision-making body for decisions in programme and system accreditation. The SAK appoints the expert groups for programme accreditation procedures, controls the accreditation process in accordance

with the procedural principles determined by the Accreditation Council and decides on ZEvA guidelines regarding their implementation.

**SEK:** The Standing Evaluation Commission controls the overall evaluation process. For this, it adopts work plans each relating to a period of two years. It receives the reports for ongoing evaluation procedures and determines the recommendations for quality assurance contained within them. In addition, it determines the procedural principles and monitors compliance with them.

**KIA:** The Commission for International Affairs decides on the accreditation of foreign study programmes on the basis of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Based on the suggestion made by the head office, it appoints the expert groups to evaluation and accreditation procedures and approves the evaluation reports created by the expert groups for audits in foreign higher education institutions.

**KSA:** The Commission for System Accreditation appoints the expert groups for system accreditation including the programme random samples as well as their respective Chair based on recommendations by the head office of ZEvA. It determines the result of a preliminary assessment and decides on certification of a higher education institution for the primary procedure of system accreditation. When the procedure is completed, it provides the SAK with a recommended decision.

**Review Commission:** The Review Commission receives objections from higher education institutions regarding accreditation decisions by the SAK and concludes recommendations for the SAK as to whether and to what extent the objections raised should be allowed. The members of the KSA are selected by the SAK based on the recommendations made by the head office.

### III.3 Equipment

According to ZEvA's own information, it currently has an annual turnover of around EUR 1.2 million from accreditation procedures, in addition to this it receives funding of around EUR 0.5 million for quality assurance projects in Lower Saxony.

One managing director, 11 consultants (9.35 FTEs) and 6 administrative personnel (3.85 FTEs) currently work in the agency's head office.

The head office has office spaces covering 580 m<sup>2</sup> in addition to 64 m<sup>2</sup> of storage space. IT equipment includes 17 desktop computers and 11 laptops. The infrastructure is made

up of a corresponding computer network with LAN and WiFi as well as an external web and email server.

### III.4 Spectrum of activities

5 In accordance with coordination made with the EQAR in advance, ZEvA offers the following ESG-relevant procedures for quality assurance in the higher education sector.

**1. Programme and system accreditation in Germany:** Between 2010 and 2015, ZEvA accredited a total of 1,196 (partial) study programmes in Germany, of these 633 were at universities, 529 at universities of applied science and 34 at universities of cooperative  
10 education (Annex 19).

In addition, ZEvA completed one system accreditation procedure, a further five are currently still pending.

**2. Evaluation:** This area of activity is divided into:

- (a) Institutional evaluations of quality management in the area of teaching and learning
- 15 (b) Study programme and subject area evaluations
- (c) Thematic evaluations

Between 2011 and 2015, ZEvA conducted 18 thematic and structural evaluations in Lower Saxony, two procedures for subject area and/or study programme evaluations and one procedure for evaluating a study programme concept (Annex 20).

20 **3. Quality audit:** ZEvA has so far conducted one quality audit at an Austrian higher education institution.

**4. International programme accreditation:** Between 2010 and 2015, the agency assessed a total of 37 study programmes at seven higher education institutions outside of Germany (Annex 21).

25 **5. Certification:** A document on ZEvA's website provides information about seven selected procedures for the certification of state and private education institutions in the tertiary education sector; the procedures primarily relate to facilities other than higher education institutions.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The subject of the evaluation documented in this report is procedures from the higher education sector.

**6. Programme accreditation in Switzerland:** In Switzerland, ZEvA has conducted a programme accreditation procedure at a Swiss university of applied science (Application, p. 8).

The procedure is no longer offered by ZEvA, as the guidelines from the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research, which were applicable at the time, are no longer valid since the Swiss Federal Act on the Funding and Coordination of the Higher Education Sector (HEdA) came into force. ZEvA is not currently certified for activities in Switzerland, this procedure therefore does not form part of the subject of the following assessment in Chapter 4.

**7. Accreditation of doctoral programmes:** According to ZEvA, the agency has so far decided on 22 doctoral programmes in Lower Saxony. 14 study programmes are currently listed on ZEvA's website.<sup>2</sup>

The accreditation of doctoral programmes is not mentioned in the "Eligibility Confirmation" from the EQAR. Nonetheless, the expert group is of the opinion that the procedure should be included with the agency's ESG-relevant activities in spite of its quantitatively insignificant scope.

The agency's primary field of activity in the last five years has been programme accreditation in Germany (around 1,200 procedures) and thematic and structural evaluations in Lower Saxony (18 procedures). System accreditation has been growing in significance for around a year (five ongoing procedures).

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<sup>2</sup> The information is taken from ZEvA's statement from 31 May 2016 regarding this report.

## IV. Evaluation of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

### 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

#### STANDARD:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

#### GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance in higher education is based on the institutions' responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision; therefore it is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance. To ensure the link between internal and external quality assurance, external quality assurance includes consideration of the standards of Part 1. These may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance.

### Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation

None

#### Documentation

- 5 ZEvA has produced a table comparing the criteria it uses in the various procedures with the corresponding ESG standards (Annex 59). According to the table, Part 1 of the ESG standards is taken into account in the following procedures offered by the agency: (1) Programme and system accreditation (2) Institutional evaluations (3) Quality audits (4) International accreditations (5) Certification (6) Programme accreditation in Switzerland
- 10 (7) Accreditation of doctoral programmes.

**1. Programme and system accreditation:** Programme and system accreditation procedures are conducted by ZEvA on the basis of the relevant rules of the Accreditation Council (Annex 01). The evaluation parameters and rules of procedure are specified in the agency's relevant guidelines (Annexes 02 and 03).

- 15 **2. Evaluation:** ZEvA conducts institutional evaluations, study programme and subject area evaluations as well as thematic evaluations. The evaluation of study programmes is geared towards the needs of the higher education institutions and the statutory guidelines, in Lower Saxony this is pursuant to § 5 of the Lower Saxony Higher Education Act (NHG). In the procedures, the focus is sometimes placed on individual aspects (and standards).

- 20 In institutional evaluations and in study programme and subject area evaluations the ESG are covered overall, however, the information in the self-evaluation reports from the higher education institutions and in the evaluation reports is ordered differently (Annex 04). In the thematic evaluation procedures, the ESG criteria are generally only covered in parts, de-

pendent on the specific question asked in the evaluation procedure. These procedures relate to, for example, the evaluation of a third-party funded project (teaching quality pact) or of funding proposals from calls for tender across Lower Saxony. Alongside the assessment of a project's success (achievement of goals), project management and quality assurance are also assessed.

**3. Quality audit:** The subject of quality audits are internal quality management systems in Austrian higher education institutions. The legal basis for the procedure is the Austrian Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (§ 22 HS-QSG), which regulates the certification of quality management systems and specifies the content areas for testing.

In addition, the procedure is also used for further education courses at institutions offering university of applied science courses pursuant to § 9 of the Austrian University of Applied Sciences Studies Act (FHStG) as well as further education courses run in a form of cooperation pursuant to § 3 Para. 2 Cl. 11 FHStG (Annex 5, p. 15).

In the ZEvA guidelines "Certification of internal quality assurance systems at universities of applied science in Austria", the testing areas are laid down in the form of guidelines, explanations and requirements profiles (Annex 05).

**4. International programme accreditation:** For international programme accreditation procedures, ZEvA has described eight quality standards in its guidelines, which are oriented around the ESG (Annex 06). In the introduction to Chapter C "Assessment Framework" and in the *Contractual Agreement* (Annex 22) it is stated explicitly that the evaluation of study programmes is based on the European qualification framework, the ESG and the ECTS Users' Guide.

In addition, ZEvA offers the procedures certification (5) and accreditation of doctoral programmes (6) specified below, which currently still only play minor role within ZEvA spectrum of activities. The expert group discovered this during the discussions on site.

**5. Certifications:** Certification is primarily regarded as a pilot procedure; the final decision as to whether it will be incorporated into the agency's portfolio of services has not yet been reached.

The target group for certifications is competitive state and private education institutions in the tertiary education sector. In the case of certifying the possibility of crediting knowledge and skills gained outside of higher education institutions as part of higher education studies, the education providers may come from non-tertiary sectors (Annex 16, p. 2). The certification standards are adapted to the subject of the certification as specified in advance of the procedure and put together in modules (Annex 16, p. 3). The following

standards always apply: (1) evaluation of the qualification objectives (2) evaluation of the underlying concept, (3) evaluation of the implementation with regard to the quality and quantity of human resources, equipment and spatial setup, (4) evaluation of the internal quality management system in terms of achieving the abovementioned goals. (Annex 53).

5 **6. Accreditation of doctoral programmes:** This procedure is conducted on the basis of § 6 Para. 2 and § 9 of the Lower Saxony Higher Education Act. In accordance with this, higher education institutions should offer so-called doctoral programmes for the education and support of doctoral students. These programmes must also be accredited. The evaluation parameters are the guidelines of the Lower Saxony Ministry of Science (Annex 52).

10 Strictly speaking, the accreditation of doctoral programmes is not one of the agency's fields of activity on its own. Doctoral programmes are accredited in so-called cluster procedures together with Bachelor's and Master's study programmes following the same procedure rules. The seal of the Accreditation Council is, however, not awarded (Application, p. 7).

## 15 **Assessment**

The table overview, which sets out the relationship between the standards used as a basis in ZEvA procedures and the ESG Standards from Part 1 (Annex 59), demonstrates that the individual standards from Part 1 of the ESG are observed and also shows they way in which they are observed.

20 The current applicable rules of the Accreditation Council, which ZEvA takes as a basis for the implementation of its programme and system accreditation procedures, are oriented around Part 1 of the ESG (2005). Although the adaptation of the rules of the Accreditation Council to the revised ESG Standards (2015) has not yet been completed, it is already possible to state that the majority of the standards from Part 1 of the ESG are implement-  
25 ed (see AC mapping – ESG, Annex C).

The inclusion of the ESG Standards from Part 1 can also be stated for evaluation procedures. This applies in equal measure to all evaluation types, therefore for procedures with a thematic focus on individual aspects (and standards).

30 Although the tabular allocation of the applicable standards taken as a basis in audit procedures to the ESG Standards from Part 1 is schematic and lacking in detail (Annex 59), the guidelines in Chapter B (topic areas for the self-evaluation report and the assessment) show a clear link to the ESG Standards from Part 1 (Annex 05).

In international procedures, Part 1 of the ESG standards is applied throughout. This is not only stated explicitly in ZEvA's guidelines (Annex 06) but can also be seen from the agency's allocation of the nine sections of the assessment framework to the individual ESG Standards (Annex 59). This assessment was confirmed in the discussions with the experts and the representatives of higher education institutions that have been involved in international procedures.

In certification procedures the situation is unclear: From the certification guidelines it can be seen that the certification procedures are always oriented towards the ESG (Annex 16, p. 4). However, this statement clearly relates more to the organisation of the procedure and therefore to Part 2 of the ESG. Implicit and rather basic reference is made to ESG Part 1 in the Chapter "Standards for certification" (Annex 16, p. 3); in the "Documents to be consulted" (Annex 16, p. 5) the ESG are not mentioned. Nonetheless, no contradictions can be identified between the standards used by ZEvA and ESG Part 1.

The accreditation procedure for doctoral programmes is neither mentioned in the EQAR confirmation of ESG-relevant fields of activity nor explained in greater detail in light of the ESG (2015) in the application submitted by ZEvA. It only became clear in the discussions on site that the accreditation of doctoral programmes is conducted following the principles for procedures for the accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's study programmes, and therefore in compliance with the ESG. However, this cannot be determined from ZEvA's publicly available documents.

The expert group is of the opinion that ZEvA fulfils the ESG Standard 2.1 in the area of its key activities, i.e. in programme and system accreditation and in evaluations; this largely also applies for international programme accreditation procedures and for audit procedures. In certification procedures the situation is ambiguous.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** The expert group recommends that *all* quality assurance procedures offered by the agency in the higher education sector are clearly aligned with the ESG Standards from Part 1 and that this is made transparent.

## Result

**Standard 2.1 is substantially fulfilled.**

## 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

### STANDARD:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

### GUIDELINES:

In order to ensure effectiveness and objectivity it is vital for external quality assurance to have clear aims agreed by stakeholders.

The aims, objectives and implementation of the processes will

- bear in mind the level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions;
- take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality;
- allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement;
- result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up.

The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.

### Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation

None

### Documentation

5 ZEvA has defined the goals and purposes of the individual procedures in its guidelines, which are published on the agency's website (see Annexes 02 – 06, 15 and 16).

10 In *programme and system accreditation*, study programmes or the internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions must be accredited in accordance with the guidelines of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (KMK) and of the Accreditation Council (AC). The rules of the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of study programmes and for system accreditation specify clear criteria for the organisation of the procedures, in addition, the agency is contractually obliged to take the relevant statutory regulations into account. ZEvA's guidelines concretise and interpret the guidelines of the Accreditation Council where necessary.

15 The *evaluation procedures* are conducted on the basis of the guidelines "Quality assurance in teaching and learning. Handbook for external evaluations of higher education institutions" (Annex 04), in which ESG-compliant processes and criteria are described. Where higher education institutions in Lower Saxony are concerned, the procedures are also based on the requirements of the Lower Saxony Higher Education Act (§ 5 NHG).

20 *Auditing* is conducted on the basis of the guidelines for the certification of internal quality assurance systems in universities of applied science in Austria (Annex 05). In *auditing* procedures, the statutory guidelines are observed (e.g. § 22 HS-QSG for auditing).

In the guidelines for *certification procedures*, compliance with the statutory regulations is specified as a procedure guideline.

The procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes are conducted on the basis of the “Guidelines and criteria for the accreditation of doctoral programmes in Lower Saxony” from the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony.

The guidelines for the procedures offered by ZEvA, according to the statement made during the on-site visit, are developed by the responsible head of unit in coordination with the managing director and then discussed and adopted in the relevant commission. The relevant stakeholders (professors from various types of higher education institution and subject groups, representatives of professional practice and students) are represented in the agency’s commissions in accordance with ZEvA’s statute (see also Section III.2).

On the level of the German accreditation system, the rules for programme and system accreditation are further developed by the Accreditation Council with the involvement of the agencies and the relevant stakeholders.

## Assessment

The detailed and clear presentation of the procedures offered by ZEvA in the agency’s individual guidelines leads to the conclusion that the procedures are largely defined and organised in a way that allows them to achieve their goals and purposes and also observe the statutory regulations. This assessment has been confirmed in the discussions on site and by the representatives of the higher education institutions who have reported on their experiences with ZEvA and by the experts appointed by ZEvA.

In addition, through the discussions with the agency’s employees it became clear that the discussions in ZEvA’s commissions and in the conferences and seminars held by the agency are an important source of knowledge for the creation and further development of the guidelines and that the stakeholders are adequately involved in the creation process through the individual commissions.

No informative guidelines from the agency are available for procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes. The “Guidelines and criteria (...)” from the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony define the evaluation parameters and general goals of doctoral programmes, however, the document does not include information regarding the process and the goals of the *procedure*. In the discussions on site the expert group was informed that the accreditation of doctoral programmes is conducted in accordance with the rules for the accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's study programmes.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation 2:** The agency should provide information on the procedure for the accreditation of doctoral programmes in a transparent and appropriate way and be able to demonstrate that the procedure can achieve its objectives.

5 **Result**

**Standard 2.2 is substantially fulfilled.**

**2.3 Implementing processes****STANDARD:**

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

**GUIDELINES:**

External quality assurance carried out professionally, consistently and transparently ensures its acceptance and impact.

Depending on the design of the external quality assurance system, the institution provides the basis for the external quality assurance through a self-assessment or by collecting other material including supporting evidence. The written documentation is normally complemented by interviews with stakeholders during a site visit. The findings of the assessment are summarised in a report (cf. Standard 2.5) written by a group of external experts (cf. Standard 2.4).

External quality assurance does not end with the report by the experts. The report provides clear guidance for institutional action. Agencies have a consistent follow-up process for considering the action taken by the institution. The nature of the follow-up will depend on the design of the external quality assurance.

**Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation**

None.

10 **Documentation**

ZEvA has submitted guidelines for programme accreditation (Annex 02), for system accreditation (Annex 03), for external evaluations at higher education institutions (Annex 04), for quality audits in Austria (Annex 05), for international programme accreditation procedures and institutional accreditation (Annex 06) and for the certification of state and private education institutions in the tertiary education sector (Annex 16). The quality assurance procedures offered by ZEvA are described in these.

15

The procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes are conducted on the basis of the “Guidelines and criteria for the accreditation of doctoral programmes in Lower Saxony” from the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony. Separate guidelines from ZEvA regarding the outline of the procedures and the procedural components are not available.

It can be determined from the guidelines published on the agency’s website that the procedures listed contain the procedure elements from the ESG Standard 2.3. This includes a self-evaluation or self-documentation, an expert report by an external expert group, documentation of the results (report on the external assessment) and consistent follow-up.

The complete reports for programme and system accreditation procedures have been published and entered into the Accreditation Council’s database since 2015 (HRK Compass).

The guidelines regarding Standard 2.3 refer to a “Self-evaluation report or (a) collection of other materials and evidence”. According to ZEvA, it encourages the higher education institutions to draw on the available documents and evidence for the documentation to the greatest possible extent in order to reduce their workload to a reasonable level. The requirements towards documentation were reviewed for this purpose (Annex 08, Annex 09).

#### *Regarding the follow-up*

In accreditation procedures, the follow-up is conducted within the framework of conditions that must be met within the accreditation term, or as part of recommendations whose implementation forms the subject of subsequent accreditation procedures. The conditions can have considerable consequences; if they are not met the accreditation is usually withdrawn.

In the evaluation of study programmes and subjects, the higher education institutions are requested to report on follow-up measures after the procedure is completed. The reports are published on the agency’s website.

In institutional evaluations, ZEvA reviews the implementation as planned of the measures concluded upon the request of the higher education institution. In addition, if requested by the higher education institution ZEvA issues a certificate which confirms that the audit has been carried out and documents its key findings as well as the measures concluded by the higher education institution (Annex 04, p. 14).

According to the information in the guidelines (p. 58), the same basic principles apply to thematic evaluations as do to other evaluation procedures conducted by ZEvA.

Certification is optional for higher education institutions and other education institutions, the results are therefore non-binding and are instead only to be considered a recommendation. If and when ZEvA conducts certification procedures (as a pilot scheme) it uses specially created (provisional) guidelines as a basis (Annex 16).

## 5 Assessment

It can be determined from the agency's guidelines that the procedures described there contain the following procedure elements: self-evaluation or self-documentation, report by an external expert group, report on the external assessment and consistent follow-up.

The procedure for the accreditation of doctoral programmes is an exception to this. Relevant information regarding the procedure and its components cannot be found in the application documents or on the agency's website. It became clear during the discussions on site that the accreditation of doctoral programmes is conducted on the basis of the rules for programme accreditation. These are not independent procedures that are only evaluated parallel to the corresponding Master's programmes. Nonetheless, the procedure is not mentioned in the agency's documents and is therefore not pre-defined in line with ESG 2.3. In the context of Germany, the term "programme accreditation" and the evaluation parameters found in the corresponding guidelines relate to Bachelor's and Master's study programmes (and not to doctoral programmes), with the result that there is a need for action here with regard to considerations of transparency.

Formal follow-up is not planned in certification procedures. This is comprehensible and logical insofar as a higher education institution only requests such a procedure in order to receive recommendations and to coordinate its follow-up measures to this.

Overall, it can be established that ZEvA has a set of instruments for follow-up measures that takes the measures taken by higher education institutions into account. Here the organisation of the follow-up procedure depends on the nature of the selected quality assurance procedure.

The expert group is of the opinion that ZEvA fulfils ESG Standard 2.3 well in its key areas of activity, i.e. in programme and system accreditation and in evaluations. This also applies to quality audits, international programme accreditation and certifications, but not to procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 3:** The procedure for the accreditation of doctoral programmes should (even if it is not an independent procedure) be defined and presented externally, just as

the other quality assurance procedures offered by ZEvA, in a way that renders the procedure components (self-evaluation, external assessment, reporting and follow-up) transparent.

**Result**

**5 Standard 2.3 is substantially fulfilled.**

**2.4 Peer-review experts**

**STANDARD:**

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

**GUIDELINES:**

At the core of external quality assurance is the wide range of expertise provided by peer experts, who contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners.

In order to ensure the value and consistency of the work of the experts, they

- are carefully selected;
- have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
- are supported by appropriate training and/or briefing.

The agency ensures the independence of the experts by implementing a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest.

The involvement of international experts in external quality assurance, for example as members of peer panels, is desirable as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.

**Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation**

In appointing experts for programme accreditation, students and professional practice should be involved systematically (Condition 1).

- 10 In the medium term, the agency should not employ anyone in programme accreditation procedures who has not been given structured preparation or who does not possess many years of experience in the area (recommendation).

ZEvA should increase the involvement of international experts and ensure more pronounced consideration of international perspectives in its committees (EQAR flagged issue).

15

In procedures with larger study programme clusters, ZEvA should ensure that student perspectives and perspectives from professional practice are represented appropriately (EQAR flagged issue).

## Documentation

In its quality assurance procedures, ZEvA generally appoints external expert groups. It can be determined from the guidelines for the individual procedure types that the expert groups are composed of representatives from the higher education institutions, from professional practice *and at least one student member*. As far as accreditation procedures in Germany are concerned, ZEvA works together with the student accreditation pool, which puts forward suitable recommendations upon request. In all other cases, ZEvA independently recruits student members and uses its own database for this.

Pursuant to § 12 and/or § 13 of the statute, the SAR and/or the KIA should have at least two representatives from foreign higher education institutions. The SAK currently has two foreign members, one practitioner from the profession who works in Switzerland and one student from Austria. The international procedures that are not conducted according to the rules of the Accreditation Council, are now nonetheless decided on by a special international Commission for International Affairs (KIA), to which international members are also appointed.

Pursuant to the Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance, the agency always seeks to appoint a foreign member to the expert groups for system accreditation procedures (Annex 36, p. 31).

As criteria for defining a cluster in programme accreditation, the SAK has determined that the (partial) study programmes to be accredited are generally based on one of the study areas defined in the official student statistics and, at the same time, that the expert group consists of less than ten people (SAK Resolution from 5 July 2011).

### *Regarding selection, preparation and impartiality*

In all operating fields, experts are appointed by the “respective relevant committee” upon the suggestion of the responsible consultant (Application, p. 11).

For programme accreditation, the SAK appoints the expert groups (§ 1 Para. 2 of the rules of procedure of the SAK) and for system accreditation the KSA is responsible for this (§ 1 Para 2 of the rules of procedure of the KSA). The expert groups in international programme accreditation procedures are appointed by the KIA. The selection criteria are set down in the relevant guidelines (Annex 06, p. 5).

Regarding the other procedure types (audit procedures and certifications), the relevant documents (statute, rules of procedure, guidelines) do not indicate which committee is responsible for appointing the expert groups.

According to a statement in the application by ZEvA, the experts must be fundamentally professionally qualified, independent and impartial.

Criteria for the selection and suitability of experts are contained in the guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance, which are not publicly available (Annex 36). However, the statements made there refer exclusively to programme accreditation (pp. 20 and 26) and to system accreditation (p. 31).

A short passage regarding the appointment of expert groups in evaluation procedures is contained in the handbook for external evaluations at higher education institutions (Annex 04, p. 7). The handbook indicates that ZEvA attaches great value to the selection of suitable experts, reviews their impartiality and finally agrees on the composition of the expert group in consultation with the higher education institution. The composition of the expert group is once again discussed in an introductory session in the higher education institution concerned.

Corresponding guidelines also provide information regarding the appointment of expert groups in audit procedures (Annex 16). According to the details on p. 3, the agency ensures that experts possess the skills and experience necessary to perform their duties. According to the guidelines, the agency takes due care in making its selection.

According to information provided by the agency regarding the preparatory briefing of experts, informational material containing the relevant guidelines, the ZEvA guidelines and a manual for experts is sent out in all procedures. As a general rule a preliminary meeting on site is also held (Application, p. 11). In system accreditation procedures, experts must be bound by contract in advance to take part in a ZEvA training course for experts (Annex 13).

In audit procedures, experts are prepared for the procedure and for their role by ZEvA in a separate session in good time before the start of the assessment. This includes information of the European Standards, the statutory guidelines, the particular features of the Austrian higher education sector and the process of the audit as well as a run-through of the on-site visit and the creation of the expert report (Annex 05, p. 3 et seq.).

A leading representative of an Austrian university of applied science (e.g. from the rectorate) or, if appropriate, someone responsible for quality assurance, is summoned for the preparatory briefing of experts in audit procedures. In addition, ZEvA regularly runs training courses for experts and offers three to four events for this purpose annually (Annex 14).

The agency seeks to guarantee the impartiality of experts through the conclusion of contracts between ZEvA and the individual experts. The model contracts included as annexes (Annexes 07, 13, 54 and 55) apply to programme and system accreditation procedures, evaluations and certifications and include the following criteria concerning the impartiality of experts:

- Relatives, personal connection or conflicts
- Teaching position (also assistant lecturer, visiting professor or lecturer) at the higher education institution to be assessed within the last 3 years or planned future position there
- 10 • Teaching position at a higher education institution in the same federal state
- Involvement in ongoing appointment procedure or such procedures that have been concluded shortly before the assessment
- Involvement in mutual assessments (“cross-over assessment”)
- Own or shared economic interest in the accreditation decision
- 15 • Direct economic competition with own projects or plans
- Close cooperation e.g. through joint research or other intensive cooperation projects within the last three years
- Ongoing or recent study at the university to be assessed

### Assessment

#### 20 *Composition of the expert groups*

ZEvA appoints external expert groups in all procedures, as a general rule at least one student member is always included in these groups. According to the information in the guidelines (Annex 16, p. 4), the expert groups in certification procedures are composed of a selection of people who can represent the academic perspective of the education provider, the perspective of the participants and that of the demand side (professional practice). The question of whether it is *categorically* guaranteed that the interest groups, i.e. higher education institutions, professional practice and students, are represented is at the very least left open by this formulation with “can”.

#### *Selection and appointment of experts*

30 The selection procedure and selection criteria remain comparatively unclear. The guidelines and the rules of procedure contain individual descriptions, however, it is not com-

pletely clear which measures ZEvA uses to apply its demand for quality to the area of the selection procedure in operational terms.<sup>3</sup>

There are also no clear guidelines concerning the nomination and appointment of experts in certification procedures. The criteria for the selection and suitability of experts in the  
5 Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance (pp. 20, 26 and 31) clearly apply primarily to accreditation procedures, but not for the other procedures offered by ZEvA.

Information regarding the nomination and appointment of experts in procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes can also not be found in the documents.

#### *Preparatory briefing of experts*

10 The agency's measures for preparing experts are sufficient overall. A positive factor worth noting is the obligatory participation by experts in training for system accreditation procedures.

The seminars offered three to four times per year by ZEvA, which are organised independently of specific procedures, nonetheless seem to focus on the area of activity of ac-  
15 creditation. The discussions on site showed that special preparation promotes team development within the expert group and that this process had a positive impact on the quality of the assessment procedure. Against this backdrop, the agency should intensify its efforts to increase participation in these seminars in accordance with the objective set in its internal quality assurance system (at least 50%).

20 Overall, it is clear here that ZEvA is well structured in its key areas of activity, however, the newly added procedures and those that are in less demand have not yet been adequately integrated into the agency's internal processes and committee structures.

The expert group is of the opinion that ZEvA fulfils ESG Standard 2.4 in its key areas of activity, i.e. in programme accreditation and evaluations as well as in system accredita-  
25 tion. In contrast, in the other procedures offered by the agency, clear statements regarding the processes and responsibilities for the selection, nomination and appointment of experts are lacking.

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<sup>3</sup> In its position paper from 31 May 2016 regarding this report, ZEvA indicates that this statement is not entirely correct with regard to audit procedures as this procedure falls within the activity area "International" and the KIA is therefore not responsible for the nomination and appointment of experts. However, it can be seen from the rules of procedure for the KIA, which ZEvA refers to in this context, that the KIA appoints the expert groups for evaluation and accreditation procedures. Audit procedures, in contrast, are not mentioned.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation 4:** ZEvA should specify and publish clearly designed procedures for the selection, nomination and appointment of its experts for *all* of the quality assurance procedures it offers in accordance with the requirements from ESG Standard 2.4 and the corresponding guidelines.

**Recommendation 5:** ZEvA should intensify its efforts to increase the proportion of experts who take part in the agency's preparatory seminars.

**Result**

**Standard 2.4 is partially fulfilled.**

**2.5 Criteria for outcomes****STANDARD:**

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

**GUIDELINES:**

External quality assurance and in particular its outcomes have a significant impact on institutions and programmes that are evaluated and judged.

In the interests of equity and reliability, outcomes of external quality assurance are based on pre-defined and published criteria, which are interpreted consistently and are evidence-based. Depending on the external quality assurance system, outcomes may take different forms, for example, recommendations, judgements or formal decisions.

**Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation**

None

**Documentation**

The criteria and outlines of the procedures are documented and explained in the individual guidelines to the different procedures (Annex 02 – 06, 15, 16). This does not apply to procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes.

In Germany, the criteria set by the Accreditation Council including the Common Structural Guidelines of the Länder set by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder form the basis for assessments.

In evaluation procedures, the standards set in the ZEvA guidelines are applicable; for audit procedures in Austria, ZEvA has published its own guidelines (Annex 05) on the basis of the HS-QSG, which describe the applicable standards.

5 In purely international procedures, the ESG and the relevant (national and European) qualification frameworks are applied directly (Annex 06) as are supplements to these insofar as the statutory regulations provide for this. ZEvA's "Contractual Agreement" (Annex 22) thus states that: "The review procedure will be based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (...)"

10 In certification procedures, which have previously related to recognition for knowledge and skills gained outside of higher education institutions, the criteria set by the Accreditation Council for programme accreditation apply, according to a statement by ZEvA. Adapted to the predefined subject, the standards are put together in modules and then determine the continued process of the procedure as well as the applicable criteria in detail (Annex 16, p. 3). The evaluation parameters forming the basis for the procedures offered by ZEvA are  
15 defined and publicly available. As part of internal quality assurance, their consistent application is guaranteed by the responsible committees in ZEvA, the head office's 14-day jour fixe and the four-eyes principles.

In thematic evaluations one particular challenge is fulfilling the ESG standards and guidelines for external evaluations, as in some cases the framework conditions for the procedure may only be finalised at the start of the procedure.  
20

### Assessment

The results and evaluations aimed for by ZEvA as part of external quality assurance procedures are predominantly based on explicit and published criteria.

25 Consistent application of the criteria is ensured by ZEvA's guidelines and the discussions in the responsible commissions. As part of the on-site visit, the expert group took part in a meeting of the SAK and, through this, was satisfied by the high standards of the commission members regarding the consistency of accreditation decisions. In this context, the collective memory of the committee in combination with the reliable support provided by the head office was highlighted. In addition, it became clear through the discussions with  
30 ZEvA's consultants that the regular team meetings ensure consistent interpretation of the evaluation parameters and therefore comparable decision-making practices across the individual procedures.

However, the procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes are an exception to this. The criteria for the procedure are defined in the "Guidelines and criteria for the ac-

creditation of doctoral programmes in Lower Saxony” and published on the Ministry’s website.<sup>4</sup> However, the agency’s website contains neither the guidelines nor information regarding the basic procedure.

5 The fact that the framework conditions for thematic evaluation procedures can only be finalised at the start of the procedure is comprehensible, appropriate to the nature of the procedure and corresponds to the intention of ESG 2.5 as the criteria are established in good time and remain consistent throughout the continued procedure.

10 The expert group has come to the conclusion that ZEvA fulfils ESG Standard 2.5 in all of the procedures it offers with the exception of procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes, which are not carried out on a stand-alone basis.

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 6:** The criteria for the accreditation of doctoral programmes should be clearly defined and published.

### Result

15 **Standard 2.5 is substantially fulfilled.**

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[http://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/100861/Leitlinien\\_und\\_Kriterien\\_fuer\\_die\\_Akkreditierung\\_von\\_Promotionsstudiengaengen\\_in\\_Niedersachsen\\_Stand\\_10.07.2015.pdf](http://www.mwk.niedersachsen.de/download/100861/Leitlinien_und_Kriterien_fuer_die_Akkreditierung_von_Promotionsstudiengaengen_in_Niedersachsen_Stand_10.07.2015.pdf)

## 2.6 Reporting

### STANDARD:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

### GUIDELINES:

The report by the experts is the basis for the institution's follow-up action of the external evaluation and it provides information to society regarding the activities of an institution. In order for the report to be used as the basis for action to be taken, it needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover

- context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context);
- description of the individual procedure, including experts involved;
- evidence, analysis and findings;
- conclusions;
- features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution;
- recommendations for follow-up action.

The preparation of a summary report may be useful.

The factual accuracy of a report is improved if the institution is given the opportunity to point out errors of fact before the report is finalised.

### Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation

None

### Documentation

5 Statements regarding ZEvA's publication practices are contained in the agency's individual guidelines:

10 *Programme and system accreditation:* Accreditation decisions are published on the agency's website and also in the Accreditation Council's database (HRK Higher Education Compass). ZEvA is obliged to this by its contract with the Accreditation Council and on the basis of the binding rules for the accreditation of study programmes and programme accreditation.

15 *Evaluation:* The report as well as the written statement and the programme of measures from the higher education institutions are published by ZEvA as an evaluation report. Publication is online on ZEvA's website and, in the case of procedures in higher education institutions in Lower Saxony, generally also as a report in printed form. If parts of the evaluation procedure primarily have an advisory function or concern internal matters of the higher education institution that are not intended for publication, it is possible, upon the request of the higher education institution, to exclude individual sections of the report (and

of the higher education institution's statement where applicable) from publication (evaluation of guidelines, p. 9). Upon the request of the higher education institution, a summary report on the subject and result of the procedure is published (ibid. p. 14).

5 *Audit:* The experts use the self-evaluation report and the discussions on site (on-site visit at the higher education institution) to create a report. For each topic area the experts first summarise the state of affairs as well as the method and processes used for quality assurance in the higher education institution. In the second step, the experts present a nuanced assessment in which they work out the strengths and areas with potential for improvement (audit of guidelines, p. 5). Once the procedure has been completed, the report  
10 is published. This is coordinated with the higher education institution (ibid. p. 6).

*International programme accreditation:* "As soon as the expert report is finalised, the project coordinator passes it on to the HEI for scrutiny. On principle, the HEI gets a chance to generate a brief written statement in response to it (1-2 pages) which is published along with the report after completion of the review procedure." (Annex 06, p. 7)

15 *Certification:* The subject of the agreement, the reference documents as well as the criteria for the assessment are defined in the first chapter of the report have to be published. (Certifications by ZEvA, p. 4)

*Accreditation of doctoral programmes:* Reports from these procedures can be found on ZEvA's website.

20 All procedures conducted by ZEvA provide higher education institutions with the option of making a statement on the draft reports to criticise any factual inaccuracies.

The subject areas of the reports are specified by the respective applicable criteria (see Annexes 02, 03, 04, 05 and 06). In addition, the reports contain information regarding the context and the procedural framework and also document the recommendations and/or  
25 conditions made, if applicable. (Application, p. 12)

### **Assessment**

The reports for which ZEvA is responsible are published in programme accreditation procedures, in national and internal procedures and in the system accreditation. For evaluations (institutional, thematic and subject-related) the guidelines initially suggested that  
30 publication practices may be limited where applicable in individual cases (see above). However, in the discussions on site the agency ensured that the reports for evaluation procedures are always published in full.

According to ZEvA's guidelines, reports are published in auditing procedures in Austria. At the time of the on-site visit, the report from the procedure conducted by ZEvA on the University of Applied Science of Tyrol (FHG) could not be found on the agency's website.

5 The extent to which the reports created in certification procedures are publicly available is unclear. In any case, no reports on certification procedures are published on ZEvA's website, although the website does contain an overview of selected certification procedures.

In the procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes, reports are evidently published as part of the programme accreditation reports created in accordance with the rules of the Accreditation Council.

10 The expert group sees no reason to criticise the comprehensibility and structure of the reports produced by ZEvA. In the Accreditation Council's report on its experiences with the agency, the quality and informative value of ZEvA reports (for the area of programme accreditation) was even explicitly highlighted. (Annex 02, p. 8)

15 The expert group is of the opinion that ZEvA meets the requirements for publication practices and for the quality of reports in accordance with ESG Standard 2.6 in its core area of activities. However, action is required in audit and certification procedures.

### Recommendations

20 **Recommendation 7:** ZEvA should ensure that the complete expert reports are published in all of the quality assurance procedures it offers. In the handbook concerning external evaluations of higher education institutions, the agency should avoid giving the impression that reports may, where applicable, not be published in full upon the request of the higher education institution.

**Result: Standard 2.6 is partially fulfilled.**

## 2.7 Complaints and appeals

### STANDARD:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

### GUIDELINES:

In order to safeguard the rights of the institutions and ensure fair decision-making, external quality assurance is operated in an open and accountable way. Nevertheless, there may be misapprehensions or instances of dissatisfaction about the process or formal outcomes.

Institutions need to have access to processes that allow them to raise issues of concern with the agency; the agencies need to handle such issues in a professional way by means of a clearly defined process that is consistently applied.

A complaints procedure allows an institution to state its dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out.

In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcomes of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, that criteria have not been correctly applied or that the processes have not been consistently implemented.

### Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation

Students and representatives of professional practice should also be represented in the Review Commissions.

### Documentation

- 5 ZEvA has a Review Commission, to which complaints and appeals against formal decisions can be submitted. According to a statement by the agency, each formal notification contains explicit reference to this procedure step, which can be processed out of court.

Tasks and methods are set down in the rules of procedure (Annex 17). Pursuant to § of the Rules of Procedure of the Review Commission, the tasks are described as follows:

- 10 “The Commission receives objections from higher education institutions regarding accreditation decisions by the SAK and concludes recommendations for the SAK as to whether and to what extent these objections should be allowed.”

- 15 The Review Commission addresses its suggestion for dealing with complaints and appeals to the responsible body within ZEvA i.e. to the SAK or the KSA depending on the procedure. The Review Commission reviews the complaints, acquires the documents and a summarising assessment from the head office and, following consultation, gives a recommendation for dealing with the complaint to the SAK.

- 20 ZEvA has not applied the recommendation to involve students and members of professional practice in the Review Commission. In its progress report (Annex 50, p. 4) the agency submitted the following argument for this: the task of the Review Commission

should be to review whether the SAK has made the correct decision. ZEvA considers only experienced higher education teachers as qualified to conduct this review. Student members and representatives of professional practice in the SAK itself are involved in decisions regarding complaints.

- 5 In the discussions on site the agency indicated that it is faced with an average of seven complaints procedures per year; in around 30% of cases the appeals are granted to the higher education institutions.

### Assessment

10 The Review Commission appears to be responsible only for SAK decisions and therefore for decisions in programme and system accreditation procedures – and possibly also procedures for the accreditation of doctoral programmes – in Germany. It therefore appears that higher education institutions whose procedures are decided on by the KIA have no option to make complaints or appeals.

15 In addition, the complaints procedure should not be limited to appeals against formal accreditation decisions, as is stipulated in § 1 of the Rules of Procedure of the Review Commission (Annex 17) but should also allow for complaints concerning the manner in which a procedure is conducted, errors in the procedure or deviations from the published outline of the procedures by the expert group and/or the agency.

20 In addition, ZEvA's complaints procedure has not been published with sufficient transparency. On the agency's website only the following passage is available in the description of the outline of the procedures for programme accreditation:

25 "Complaints against accreditation decisions by the SAK may be submitted within one month of notification of the accreditation decision. Complaints must be submitted to the head office of ZEvA's Review Commission in writing. The SAK decides on the complaints on the basis of a recommendation from ZEvA's Review Commission."

This information is, however, difficult to find and no mention is made of the option to submit a complaint in the description of the other procedure types including system accreditation.

30 In light of the improvement in service quality ZEvA is aiming for, the agency should have a complaints procedure that also serves to settle conflicts related to procedures and, with this in mind, can be understood as part of a high-quality internal quality assurance procedure.

The expert group does not consider it absolutely necessary that students and professional practice are represented in the Review Commission as the involvement of both groups in the decisions regarding all complaints is guaranteed.

### Recommendations

- 5 **Recommendation 8:** ZEvA should define a complaints and appeals procedure for all of the quality assurance procedures offered by the agency and should publish these in a prominent position on the agency's website. The procedure should allow for objections to formal decisions as well as complaints about the way procedures are conducted.

### Result

- 10 **Standard 2.7 is partially fulfilled.**

#### 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

##### STANDARD:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

##### GUIDELINES:

To ensure the meaningfulness of external quality assurance, it is important that institutions and the public trust agencies.

Therefore, the goals and objectives of the quality assurance activities are described and published along with the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the scope of the agencies' work. The expertise in the agency may be increased by including international members in agency committees.

A variety of external quality assurance activities are carried out by agencies to achieve different objectives. Among them are evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities at programme or institutional level that may be carried out differently. When the agencies also carry out other activities, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and their other fields of work is needed.

#### Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation

None.

## Documentation

ZEvA has a missions statement published on its website which describes the agency's goals, understanding of quality and working methods (Annex 18). The missions statement is regularly revised and decided upon by the Foundation Council as part of the strategy discussion; it was last revised during the 13th meeting on 11 December 2014 as part of the strategy plan 2015 – 2020.

According to the representatives of the agency, the change and further development of the mission statement was based on feedback from the committees, the higher education institutions, the experts and from the internal discussions within the head office. As part of this, the mechanisms for feedback defined in the internal quality assurance system played an important role.

ZEvA has set itself the goal of carrying out quality assurance tasks in the tertiary education sector and promoting quality development in teaching and learning through this. ZEvA supports privately or publicly sponsored higher education institutions that aim to offer quality on an internationally comparable level in research, teaching and academic further education. ZEvA does not want to stipulate quality goals or finalised solutions for implementing this. Instead it considers that the responsibility for “performance goals and quality management lies with the higher education institutions” themselves. In particular, it promotes procedures which allow the higher education institutions' quality goals to be systematically monitored in various service areas, above all in teaching and learning, and which allow the achievement of objectives to be reviewed.

ZEvA considers itself a learning organisation, in which active further development and changes to its strategy, products and services form part of its self-image.

During the report period ZEvA conducted numerous accreditation and evaluation procedures. They relate to all types of higher education institution existing in Germany and to the whole subject spectrum of study areas at universities and universities of applied science (Annex 19, Annex 20). Since its foundation, ZEvA has accredited 3,700 study programmes. The commission responsible for this is the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK), in which all relevant stakeholders are represented (Annex 24). For system accreditation procedures the SAK has appointed its own expert commission, which is also composed in accordance with ESG (Annex 25).

ZEvA also conducts external quality assurance procedures outside of Germany (Annex 21). The expert commission responsible for this is the Commission for International Affairs (KIA). The relevant stakeholders are also represented in this commission (Annex 23).

The members of the Foundation Council are selected in accordance with the statute by the Conference of the Higher Education Institutions in Lower Saxony (LHK) in consultation with the Ministry for Science and Culture of Lower Saxony (MWK); one member is nominated by the ministry responsible for the higher education institutions.

- 5 The goals and purposes of the procedures offered by ZEvA are detailed in the guidelines cited above (Annex 02, 03, 04, 05, 06).

In the discussions on site, the representatives of the agency made it clear that a clear decline in programme accreditation procedures is expected. ZEvA has therefore set itself the goal of using its experience in the key areas of accreditation and evaluation to enter  
10 additional fields of activity. This includes the expansion of the agency's international activities. In addition, the agency wishes to reinforce its traditional activities with a stronger emphasis on service, for example through faster processing and a more transparent procedure routine, but also by reducing the effort required by the higher education institutions. For this, the agency intends, amongst other things, to establish an online platform to present the individual procedures, which can be used in the same way by both the higher  
15 education institutions and the agency's committees.

In terms of content, the agency would like to focus on the topics of student-centred learning and teaching and skills-oriented assessment.

### Assessment

- 20 In its mission statement ZEvA has listed clear objectives for its activities, which are reflected in the design of the individual quality assurance procedures offered by the agency and their guidelines.

The relevant stakeholders are involved in all of the agency's commissions as well as in the expert groups appointed for each procedure in accordance with the agency's statute  
25 and the relevant rules of procedure. This does not apply to the Foundation Council, which is not directly involved in the agency's operational activities.

Observance of ESG Standards 2.1 to 2.7 varies depending on the procedure type and/or the agency's area of activity (see previous chapter). Although ZEvA carefully and continuously maintains its key areas of activity, it shows deficiencies here – for example in relation to ESG reference – in the agency's new and currently still marginal areas of activity.  
30

The expert group is of the opinion that ZEvA is currently going through a transition period in which new areas of activity are being targeted and corresponding pilot procedures are being conducted without the objective having been clearly developed. On the one hand,

ZEvA refers to its strategy 2015-2020, which, according to the agency, resulted from the internal debates within the agency held up to 2015 and which the agency would like to now start implementing. On the other hand, the agency acts in a defensive way in the development and integration of the new procedure types in ZEvA's portfolio, particularly with regard to the significance of the ESG to international activities, with the result that the contents of the strategy referred to are not mentioned in ZEvA's documents.

Compared with the contradictory image that the application documentation presents of ZEvA, the expert group was, in contrast, able to receive a positive impression of the agency's work overall during the on-site visit. In this context, above all the professionalism and commitment of the agency's employees, who have already produced good pioneering work in the "young" procedures, should be highlighted. This assessment was confirmed by the experts in the discussions on site.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation 9:** ZEvA should follow the path paved in entering new areas of activity with greater force and should above all place its focus on the area of system accreditation, which has been given very little attention over the years.

**Result**

**Standard 3.1 is substantially fulfilled.**

**3.2 Official status**

**STANDARD:**

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

**GUIDELINES:**

In particular when external quality assurance is carried out for regulatory purposes, institutions need to have the security that the outcomes of this process are accepted within their higher education system, by the state, the stakeholders and the public

**20 Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation**

None

**Documentation**

On 11 September 2008 ZEvA become a legally independent foundation under public law (Annex 27). Its duties and body structure are stipulated in the statute (Annex 28).

5 ZEvA has been certified by the Accreditation Council since February 2000 as a quality assurance agency entitled to award the seal of the Accreditation Council. On the basis of the Accreditation Council's re-accreditation decision regarding ZEvA made in 2011, the agency's full ENQA membership was renewed and extended by five years up to 31 December 2016. In addition, ZEvA is also listed in the EQAR European Register (also up to 31 December 2016).

In order to conduct evaluation procedures within the meaning of § 5 of the Lower Saxony Higher Education Act, ZEvA is recognised by the responsible body at the level of the state of Lower Saxony.

#### 10 **Assessment**

As a legally independent foundation under public law, ZEvA has a secure legal basis and is officially recognised as a quality assurance agency by the relevant authorities.

#### **Recommendations**

None.

#### 15 **Result**

**Standard 3.2 is fulfilled.**

**3.3 Independence**

**STANDARD:**

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

**GUIDELINES:**

Autonomous institutions need independent agencies as counterparts.

In considering the independence of an agency the following are important:

- Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation) that stipulates the independence of the agency’s work from third parties, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations;
- Operational independence: the definition and operation of the agency’s procedures and methods as well as the nomination and appointment of external experts are undertaken independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders;

Independence of formal outcomes: while experts from relevant stakeholder backgrounds, particularly students, take part in quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency (e.g. as expert) is informed that while they may be nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency. Independence is important to ensure that any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise

**Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation**

None

**Documentation**

5 ZEvA works on the basis of a statute in which the structures and responsibilities within the agency are clearly regulated.

10 ZEvA’s supervisory Foundation Council is composed of six academic representatives and one member of the founder, namely the state of Lower Saxony. The members of the Foundation Council are natural persons in the legal sense and are not representatives of any institutions. In accordance with § 1 of its rules of procedure, the duties of the Foundation Council include appointing and dismissing the members of the SAK and SEK on the basis of the commission composition stipulated in § 11 and § 12 of the Foundation’s statute.

15 According to ZEvA, operational independence is guaranteed by bodies that are not bound by instructions and provide consultation services and make decisions on the basis of general guidelines, e.g. the rules of the Accreditation Council, the guidelines from the German

Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder, the ESG, the ECTS conventions or on the basis of relevant laws (e.g. the national Higher Education Act, the Lisbon Recognition Convention). These bodies are the Foundation Council, the Foundation's Board of Directors, the Standing Evaluation Commission, the Standing Accreditation Commission and the Commission for International Affairs.

The experts appointed by the agency conclude contracts with the agency in all of the procedures offered by ZEvA. Part of these contracts is the obligatory statement of the expert's impartiality.

In the discussion on site it was explained to the expert group that a procedure is terminated immediately if bias on the part of one of the experts first comes to light during the procedure. In the event of possible bias on the part of a commission member, that member leaves the meeting while the agenda point concerned is discussed.

### Assessment

Due to its legal form as a foundation under public law, ZEvA has legal entity status, which provides a guarantee of its independence towards third-parties. According to the expert group, no restriction to the agency's operational independence of influence or intervention by third parties can be identified. Rather, ZEvA's statute and the rules of procedure of its bodies and commissions indicate that the agency works independently of any third parties. In the definition of the procedures and methods and in making decisions regarding the results of quality assurance procedures or the appointment of commission members, ZEvA's decisions are not bound by instructions within the specified legal framework.

In addition, due to the obligatory statement regarding the impartiality of experts, it can be assumed that no unfair influence is exerted upon experts also during the assessment.

In the opinion of the expert group, the agency's response to possible impartiality emerging during a procedure is also adequate.

### Recommendations

None

### Result

**Standard 3.3 is fulfilled.**

### 3.4 Thematic analysis

#### STANDARD:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

#### GUIDELINES:

In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts.

A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty.

#### Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation

ZEVA should make the findings from its activities available to the higher education institutions and the interested public through structured analyses and should institutionalise the structured processing of findings for this purpose.

## 5 Documentation

ZEVA places great value on the analysis and consideration of external quality assurance procedures and, amongst other things, holds conferences whose results are published for this purpose. The agency allows its academic personnel the opportunity to conduct independent research such as an empirical analysis of the Bologna reform in Germany in 2012 and a dissertation of the impact of accreditation on the quality of study programmes in 2013 (Annex 31). Alongside the titles listed by the agency on the topic of the higher education structural reform, accreditation and quality development or the contributions to the handbook "Handbook of quality in teaching and learning" (loose-leaf collection from the publisher RAABE) above all the following reports are worthy of mentioning:

- 15 • STEM education report; closing conference 8 October 2014: "Thinking STEM – strategies for successful STEM educational attainment in Lower Saxony" („MINT denken – Strategien für erfolgreiche MINT-Bildungsabschlüsse in Niedersachsen“)
- Evaluation report on dual degree programmes; closing conference 24 November 2015: "Evaluation of dual degree programme concepts in higher education institutions and universities of cooperative education in Lower Saxony" („Evaluation dualer Studienkonzepte an niedersächsischen Hochschulen und Berufsakademien“)<sup>5</sup>

5

[http://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Evaluationsberichte/Gesamtbericht\\_Duale\\_Studienkonzepte\\_2016.pdf](http://www.zeva.org/fileadmin/Downloads/Evaluationsberichte/Gesamtbericht_Duale_Studienkonzepte_2016.pdf)

- Assessment Report on the Master’s programme European and International Law (LL.M.) at the Europa-Institut of Saarland University: „Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation“, published by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), Dagmar Ridder et. al., 2014

5 **Assessment**

ZEvA regularly publishes reports in which it analyses the findings it has gained through its activities and demonstrates the applicability of these for continuous further development and quality assurance. For example, with its evaluation report on dual study programmes the agency has made an interesting contribution to the current debate on quality assurance in these study programmes, not least with regard to the upcoming review of the Accreditation Council’s accreditation rules.

In doing this the agency has also implemented the recommendation from the previous procedure that the agency should institutionalise the structured processing of the knowledge acquired in the various quality assurance procedures.

15 Overall, the projects pursued by ZEvA in the area of analysis of and reflection on external quality assurance procedures can be described as exemplary.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation 10:** The agency could highlight with even greater clarity how and to what extent the findings from its analyses could be used in its daily work and for the benefit of the higher education institutions.

**Result**

**Standard 3.4 is fulfilled.**

**3.5 Resources**

**STANDARD:**

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

**GUIDELINES:**

It is in the public interest that agencies are adequately and appropriately funded, given higher education’s important impact on the development of societies and individuals. The resources of the agencies enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance activities in an effective and efficient manner. Furthermore, the resources enable the agencies to improve, to reflect on their practice and to inform the public about their activities.

**Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation**

None

**Documentation**

Alongside the administrative staff, the agency employs 11 academic employees (9.35 FTEs), of these five who have been awarded doctoral degrees have the task of supervising and supporting external quality assurance procedures (Annex 32, 35). ZEvA currently employs 6 people in administrative roles (3.85 FTEs). The employees' tasks are defined in a schedule of responsibilities (Annex 32). The Foundation's Board of Directors includes by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Lücke, President of the University of Osnabrück and Hermann Reuke, Managing Director of ZEvA (see also [www.zeva.org](http://www.zeva.org)).

For several years the agency's turnover has been around EUR 1.2 million from accreditation procedures in addition to funding of around EUR 0.5 million for quality assurance projects in Lower Saxony. The latest annual financial statement for 2014 shows revenues of EUR 1.076 million and other operating income of EUR 0.493 million (Annex 33). The economic plan 2016 adopted by the Foundation Council represents, in principle, a continuation of the situation up to now (Annex 34).

Regarding the facilities, the annexes include a floor plan of the office spaces (Annex 57), the rental contract for the premises (Annex 58) and a list of the IT equipment (Annex 56). The head office is located on the second floor at Lilienthalstraße 1, 30179 Hanover and covers a total of 580 m<sup>2</sup> of office place and 64 m<sup>2</sup> of storage space. Alongside several printers etc., the IT equipment includes 17 desktop computers and 11 laptops. The infrastructure is made up of a corresponding computer network with LAN and WiFi as well as an external web and email server.

**Assessment**

From the point of view of the expert group, ZEvA has sufficient means at its disposal to perform its duties and is capable of setting up projects that extend beyond the routine tasks belonging to the supervision and support of external quality assurance procedures, e.g. independent research and publications.

The personnel setup can also be assessed as fundamentally positive. ZEvA has at its disposal a suitably qualified team of staff for the agency's current spectrum of activities; the staff are also capable of performing the upcoming tasks well in terms of their numbers. However, an expansion of the agency's areas of activity must also be accompanied by a corresponding increase in human resources.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 11:** For the potential planned expansion of its areas of activity, the agency should increase its portfolio of personnel at an early stage and support the responsible employees with appropriate further education measures.

### 5 Result

**Standard 3.5 is fulfilled.**

#### 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

##### STANDARD:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

##### GUIDELINES:

Agencies need to be accountable to their stakeholders. Therefore, high professional standards and integrity in the agency's work are indispensable. The review and improvement of their activities are ongoing so as to ensure that their services to institutions and society are optimal.

Agencies apply an internal quality assurance policy which is available on its website. This policy

- ensures that all persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically;
- includes internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to a continuous improvement within the agency;
- guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination;
- outlines the appropriate communication with the relevant authorities of those jurisdictions where they operate;
- ensures that any activities carried out and material produced by subcontractors are in line with the ESG, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance activities are subcontracted to
- other parties;
- allows the agency to establish the status and recognition of the institutions with which it conducts external quality assurance.

#### Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation

None

### 10 Documentation

In order to meet the quality requirements and to put its understanding of quality into operation in its own actions, ZEvA has developed a formalised and binding system for internal quality management and recorded this in the "Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance". According to a statement by the agency, the quality management system was made binding in March 2007 "through instructions for employees" and approved by the SAK in September 2010. The internal quality assurance system aims to analyse the

agency's own processes, to improve the quality of procedures through feedback from experts and higher education institutions, to reinforce the agency's capacity for self-correction through functional feedback processes and to provide training for the agency's employees as well as the experts. Through these measures, ZEvA would like to ensure that all those involved in the procedures complete the tasks entrusted to them by ZEvA professionally, competently and in compliance with the ESG.

In the guidelines (Annex 36) six quality objectives are first defined in combination with the measures designated for their implementation (p. 9). Following this, ZEvA specifies the following as key quality objectives:

- (1) High quality of assessments
- (2) Customer satisfaction
- (3) Expertise, appropriateness of decisions and reliability
- (4) Efficiency and efficacy
- (5) Transparency
- (6) Compliance with the procedural principles

Following this, the agency's structure and processes for the areas programme accreditation, system accreditation, evaluation and quality assurance in higher education institutions outside of Germany are described. In programme and system accreditation procedures the guidelines differentiate between core, sub- and support processes. The description of core and sub-processes provides information about the levels of action and participants, procedure steps, responsibilities, time frames, milestones and the documents assigned to the individual action steps, whereas the support processes primarily relate to feedback mechanisms and the preparatory briefing of experts.

Pursuant to § 1.5.5.1 of the Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance, all experts and higher education institutions are surveyed about the course and the results of the accreditation procedure. The survey uses internet-supported questionnaires and is conducted using the system "SurveyMonkey". The Standing Accreditation Commission, the Evaluation Commission and the Foundation Council of ZEvA are informed of the results of the survey. According to the agency, appropriate corrections and adjustments to the procedures are made where necessary.

The members of the SAK are also involved in the feedback procedure (Annex 41). According to a statement by ZEvA the evaluations also serve to improve the procedures and procedure documentation, just as with the survey of the expert groups.

The experts in evaluation procedures are also surveyed online via the “SurveyMonkey” system. However, in contrast to accreditation procedures, feedback on the procedures is requested from evaluated higher education institutions through a structured telephone interview. A standardised questionnaire was regarded as unsuitable as the evaluation procedures are sometimes incorporated into longer-term project support activities and therefore vary greatly between one another (Annex 40).

Another basic component of the internal quality management system is the agency’s project database, which supports the consultants and experts as they conduct the assessment procedure and also supports the SAK members in their preparation for commission meetings. The database contains key data from those involved and saves the allocated documents according to the process diagram for the accreditation procedures. At the same time, the database contains the schedule of deadlines for fulfilling conditions, which is intended to guarantee that ZEvA is able to review and confirm in due time that conditions have been applied in spite of the high number of procedures conducted. The database software is regularly updated and aligned to the current guidelines and specifications for accreditation procedures (Annex 37). The existing database is to be replaced by a completely new online platform with improved quality assurance processes in 2017.

In addition to the regulating operations, the regular meetings which take place every two weeks are above all intended to aid knowledge sharing in assessment procedures (evaluation and accreditation) and the development of a common interpretation of the standards, criteria and guidelines. The results of these meetings are recorded. This quality assurance measure is supplemented by ZEvA’s internal closed conferences, which generally take place once per year.

An additional element of quality assurance relates to the introduction of the “four eyes principle” in the preliminary assessment of applications for accreditation and in the composition of evaluation reports. The consultants submit the drafts of these reports to the head of programme accreditation for revision. The managing director has taken on the task of revising the preliminary comments.

The preparatory briefing of experts for accreditation or evaluation procedures draws on various tools such as guidelines, manuals, the preliminary discussion regarding the on-site visit and, in accreditation procedures, above all the training sessions offered to experts by ZEvA (expert seminars).

The expert seminars are conducted by ZEvA each year in the spring. According to the agency 366 experts took part in 25 seminars in the period 2010-2015. The seminars focus

on communicating and discussing new developments in the accreditation sector as well as on the discussion of and feedback on the interpretation of the Accreditation Council's criteria. Topics for the seminars are determined by surveying the experts and higher education institutions as well as through topic suggestions in the seminars themselves.

## 5 Assessment

ZEvA has a formalised and binding internal quality assurance system which defines the agency's quality objectives, specifies the different processes and responsibilities and also contains feedback procedures for continuously improving the agency's activities.

10 Above all surveys with experts and higher education institutions regarding the quality of the accreditation procedures (Annex 38), surveys with experts regarding the quality of ZEvA's evaluation procedures (Annex 39) and surveys with the members of the SAK (Annex 40) as well as their respective evaluations prove the functionality and suitability of the planned feedback processes.

15 On page 16 of its application, ZEvA states that: "Due to the expansion of various tools for internal quality assurance since 2006, it can be noted that, in evaluation reports by ZEvA and decisions by the SAK, the evaluation reports have become more consistent and also guarantee the evaluation of all accreditation criteria." This assessment corresponds with the Accreditation Council's experiences, which are documented in the progress report for the accreditation period from 16 February 2011 to 30 June 2016.

20 Nonetheless, it is apparent that, in several places, ZEvA's audit and certification procedures, which have only recently been added to the services offered by the agency, as the agency mentions itself in its application, are not fully integrated into the quality handbook. In this way Chapter 1.1 (ZEvA's understanding of quality) and Chapters 2 to 8 (Role of ZEvA's consultants, Description of the outline of the procedures, Record keeping etc.) are  
25 in large part limited to the area of activity of accreditation. In Chapter 1.4 (Structure and processes) the Commission for International Affairs (KIA) and its duties are not mentioned, and the description of the processes and procedures for quality assurance in higher education institutions outside of Germany (Chapter 1.8) are described in relatively vague terms. For example, the support processes, which are an important component of the  
30 feedback processes for programme and system accreditation, are discussed only in a few, very general sentences in Chapter 1.8 (Annex 36, p. 40 et seq.).

In the description of the key process of programme accreditation in higher education institutions outside of Germany, no information is given on the publication of reports. The same applies for the description of the key process "Audits in universities of applied sci-

ence in Austria” where information regarding reporting and follow-up measures is also missing.

According to a statement on p. 26 of the Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance, ZEvA endeavours to ensure that the majority of the members of expert groups have participated in a training seminar or gained similar qualification through participation in several accreditation procedures by the middle of 2011. In guidelines from 2015, this statement is somewhat infelicitous. In the discussions held on site, the agency stated that, in total, around 25% of the experts had taken part in a training seminar, meaning that the agency has clearly not yet been able to achieve the figure aimed for in 2011 of more than 50%.

The Evaluation Department’s processes are described in the guidelines, however, the quality development processes are limited to surveying the experts and higher education institutions involved.

The process description for system accreditation procedures is based on the decision by the Accreditation Council from 2012. However, in February 2013, the Accreditation Council’s procedure rules for system accreditation were further developed, particularly with regard to the implementation of programme and feature random sampling. The corresponding changes are not represented in the Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance.

The outdatedness of the ZEvA Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance as well as the insufficient presentation of the (newer) internationally oriented procedures could suggest a gap in the agency’s quality assurance system. It is possible that ZEvA’s capacity for self-correction is primarily concentrated on the feedback from higher education institutions and experts regarding the implementation of concrete (accreditation and evaluation) procedures, but disregards the agency’s quality development as a whole.

The Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance are not published on ZEvA’s website. Here only a brief summary of the agency’s quality objectives, procedure elements and demand for quality can be found.

According to the expert group, the internal quality assurance system is essentially geared towards programme accreditation procedures. Above all in the light of its demand regarding the quality, professionalism and integrity of its work, ZEvA must update its internal quality assurance system immediately and expand it to incorporate all of the procedures offered by the agency.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 12:** ZEvA’s internal quality assurance system should be updated and expanded to incorporate all of the procedure types offered by the agency.

**Result**

**Standard 3.6 is partially fulfilled.**

5

**3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies**

**STANDARD:**

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

**GUIDELINES:**

A periodic external review will help the agency to reflect on its policies and activities. It provides a means for assuring the agency and its stakeholders that it continues to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.

**Recommendation/conditions from the previous accreditation**

None

**Documentation**

10 ZEvA was reviewed externally by the Accreditation Council for the first time in 2000, since then it has been reaccredited in 2003, 2006 and 2011. The cycle of 5 years now applicable is a fixed component of the agency’s certification as an accreditation agency in Germany.

**Assessment**

15 In the past, ZEvA has undergone an external review every five years and, as part of this, has demonstrated its compliance with the ESG.

**Result**

**Standard 3.7 is fulfilled.**

**V. Evaluation concerning the criteria from the Accreditation Council****Criterion 2.1: Self-image and understanding of the accreditation task**

**2.1.1 The agency has an openly documented understanding of quality, from which it derives the basis of its accreditation activities. It focusses its activities on the objective of enhancing quality and takes as its basis the higher education institutions' primary responsibility for the profile and quality of teaching and learning.**

**Recommendations from the previous accreditation** None.

**Documentation**

- 5 See the explanations under Standard 3.1 regarding this.

**Assessment**

In its mission statement ZEvA has listed clear objectives for its activities, which are reflected in the design of the programme and system accreditation procedures.

- 10 The importance of quality development and the responsibility of higher education institutions for quality in teaching and learning are derived from both from the agency's mission statement and from the guidelines mentioned.

**Recommendations**

None.

**Result**

- 15 **Criterion 2.1.1 is fulfilled.**

**2.1.2 The agency's accreditation activities span different types of higher education institution and, in certification for programme accreditation, also cover different disciplines.**

**Recommendations from the previous accreditation**

None.

**Documentation**

- 20 Between 2010 and 2015, ZEvA accredited a total of 1,196 (partial) study programmes in Germany, of these 633 were at universities, 529 at universities of applied science and 34 at universities of cooperative education (Annex 19).

The procedures related to all types of higher education institution existing in Germany and to the whole subject spectrum of study areas at universities and universities of applied

science (Annex 19, Annex 20). Since its foundation, ZEvA has accredited 3,700 study programmes.

### Assessment

The data submitted by ZEvA demonstrates that the agency performs accreditations procedures across different types of higher education institution and different subject areas.

### Recommendations

None

### Result

**Criterion 2.1.2 is fulfilled.**

### Criterion 2.2: Structures and procedures

**2.2.1 For certification for programme accreditation and/or system accreditation, the agency demonstrates binding internal structures and procedures, which guarantee the correct and consistent application of the “Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation” in its current version. The competences and responsibilities of the institutions, as well as their staffing, are governed appropriately and by law.**

### Recommendations from the previous accreditation

ZEvA shall submit criteria for the establishment of programme clusters in programme accreditation by 15 August 2011, these must guarantee sufficient academic and disciplinary affinity and a suitable size for the expert group in accordance with Cl. 1.3 of the resolution “Rules of the Accreditation Council for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation” (Condition 1).

The agency should ensure greater diversification with regard to duties and responsibilities in light of the fact that decision-taking powers are clustered in one person in the body structure (Recommendation 1).

The statute should also allow for student members in the SAK to have alternate members with voting rights (Recommendation 2).

The agency should provide suitable internal documentation of decisions by its own committees regarding questions that arise in relation to the accreditation of study programme (Recommendation 3).

The agency should introduce concrete measures to reach the goals set down in the statutes regarding the proportion of women with voting rights in the SAK (Recommendation 4).

### Documentation

5 The internal structures are governed with binding force by the statute (Annex 28) and by the rules of procedure allocated to the bodies and committees (Annex 24, 25). Here competences and responsibilities are clearly defined and the procedure for appointing the expert groups is set down. The members of the bodies, particularly the members of the SAK, have for the most part been contributing for many years and are regularly invited to the expert workshops.

10 The Foundation Council consists of seven members with experience in the area of quality assurance in higher education institutions. The members are selected by the Conference of the Higher Education Institutions in Lower Saxony (LHK) upon a recommendation by the selection committee; one member is nominated by the ministry responsible for the higher education institutions. The Foundation Council appoints the academic director and  
15 the managing director, who form the Foundation's Board of Directors.

The academic director is the Chair of the Standing Commissions. He/she directs the meetings without having voting rights. The managing director represents the Foundation both in and out of court, directs the head office, is supervisor to the employees and takes part in committee meetings in an advisory capacity.

20 The Foundation Council appoints the 28 members of the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK).

The SAK is ZEvA's central committee for programme accreditation and is composed of the following members in accordance with § 12 of the Foundation's statute (Annex 28):

- a) the academic director as chair,
- 25 b) five representatives from the university's or equivalent higher education institution's fields of study (humanities and cultural studies, mathematics and natural sciences, engineering, law, economics and social sciences, life sciences including medicine) as well as five alternate members,
- c) three representatives from the fields of study of the universities of applied science  
30 (economics and social sciences, engineering and architecture, natural and life sciences) as well as three alternate members,
- d) one representative from the field of study of art and music, as well as two alternate members from these areas with different specialisms,

e) two representatives from professional practice, who are to be assigned to the side of employers and employees as well as their alternate members,

f) one student representative each from a university or equivalent higher education institution and from a university of applied science as well as one alternate member for each.

- 5 At least eight women with voting rights and two members of foreign higher education institutions should be in the SAK. The commission works on the basis of the relevant resolutions by the Accreditation Council regarding programme and system accreditation in the respective relevant version and decides on ZEvA's guidelines for implementing them. The commission appoints the expert groups for programme accreditation upon the recom-
- 10 mendation of ZEvA's head office. It also appoints the Commissions for System Accreditation (KSA) consisting of eight people, which is primarily responsible for appointing expert groups for system accreditation, for the preliminary assessment of application documents, for the certification of the applicant for system accreditation procedures, for receiving the evaluation report and the decision recommendation from the expert groups and for pre-
- 15 paring the accreditation recommendation for the SAK. The other expert groups are appointed by the Standing Evaluation Commission or the Standing Accreditation Commission in agreement with the Foundation's Board. The SAK decides on accreditations in programme and system accreditation procedures.

The contracts with the applicants (as well as the guidelines) are intended to guarantee

20 that the Accreditation Council's rules are applied (Annex 44, 45). The evaluations regarding all of the criteria of the Accreditation Council are documented in the reports, as can be seen from the template for ZEvA reports (Annex 46). In addition, the General Terms and Conditions (Annex 47) govern all required procedure steps in accordance with the guidelines of the Accreditation Council.

- 25 Regarding Condition 1: ZEvA has fulfilled Condition 1, as issued in the previous procedure, of submitting criteria for the establishment of programme clusters in programme accreditation procedures in order to guarantee the sufficient academic and disciplinary affinity and the appropriate size of the experts groups. As part of the so-called "horizontal evaluation" in 2011/12, the Accreditation Council reviewed a two-figure number of accredi-
- 30 tation procedures conducted by ZEvA with regard to the agency's compliance with the rules for the compilation of programme clusters and composition of expert groups and reached a thoroughly positive conclusion (AC progress report, p. 3).

Regarding Recommendation 1: The clustering of decision-making powers in the academic director was reduced to the extent that the academic director is no longer involved in ap-

pointing experts and will also no longer be involved in the selection committee to appoint his/her successor.

Regarding Recommendation 2: The position of alternate member was created for student members of the SAK (§ 2 Para. 1 of the rules of procedure of the SAK).

- 5 Regarding Recommendation 3: To provide documentation on decisions regarding frequent questions relating to the accreditation of study programmes, ZEvA has created a central collection of sample resolutions by the SAK. According to the agency, however, these sample resolutions are rarely used in order to avoid rules internal to the agency being established alongside those of the Accreditation Council.
- 10 Regarding Recommendation 4: The agency has increased the proportion of female SAK members since the accreditation in 2011. There are currently three female members and four female alternate members.

### Assessment

15 The expert group believes that the responsibilities and competencies of ZEvA's bodies and commissions as well as the composition of their members are regulated appropriately and legally.

Correct and consistent application of the "Rules of the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of study programmes and for system accreditation" in its current version is also largely guaranteed. However, the Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance, which have  
20 clearly not been updated, point to a fault in the agency's internal procedures. The process description for system accreditation procedures contained there is based on the decision by the Accreditation Council from 2012. In February 2013, the Accreditation Council's procedure rules for system accreditation were further developed, particularly with regard to the implementation of programme and feature random sampling. The corresponding  
25 changes are not represented in the Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance (see also Criterion 2.5 regarding this). The same applies to the form "Outline plan for on-site visit for system accreditation of the higher education institution" (Annex 11), which also describes programme random sampling (and not random sample assessments of the relevant features of the curriculum design, how study programmes are conducted and quality assurance).  
30

In the expert group's estimation, the collaboration and exchange between ZEvA's individual commissions and bodies should be improved. This applies above all to the cooperation between the SAK as the decision-making committee and the KSA, which prepares decisions in system accreditation procedures, but also to the exchange between the

Foundation Council, which operates on a strategic level, and the agency's commissions, which works on an operational level. In the expert group's view, the Foundation Council should gain an insight into ZEvA's operational activities that is as comprehensive as possible in order to aid the development of strategies and the decision regarding the agency's future.

The expert group believes ZEvA has applied the recommendations made in the previous procedure well. The expert group encourages the agency to continue its practice of appointing women to positions that have become vacant, although the objective set in the statute (at least eight women with voting rights in the SAK) has still not been achieved (Recommendation 4).

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** ZEvA should introduce a binding procedure that ensures the correct and consistent application of the "Rules of the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of study programmes and for system accreditation" in its current version, also in the agency's internal documents.

**Recommendation 2:** ZEvA should intensify the communication between the agency's commissions and bodies.

### Result

**Criterion 2.2.1 is substantially fulfilled.**

**2.2.2 The agency involves the interest groups that are relevant with regard to the fulfilment of conditions (academics, students and professional practice).**

### Recommendations from the previous accreditation

ZEvA shall submit a procedure specified with binding effect that ensures the involvement of all interest groups in the appointment of experts for programme accreditation by 15 August 2011. Here dependence on individual opinions must be precluded (Condition 2).

The procedures for demonstrating the fulfilment of conditions should be amended in such a way that student members of the expert groups are better reached (Recommendation 6).

In the accreditation of larger programme clusters, two people from the student group and two from professional practice should be included in the expert group (Recommendation 7).

Students and representatives of professional practice should also be represented in the Review Commissions (Recommendation 8).

### Documentation

5 The agency involves the interest groups that are relevant with regard to the fulfilment of conditions (academics, students and professional practice):

**Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK):** Pursuant to § 12 Para. 1 of the statute (Annex 28), the SAK, as the body that conducts programme and system accreditation procedures, is composed of representatives from academia, the student body and professional practice (employees and employers).

10 **Commission for System Accreditation (KSA):** Pursuant to § 2 of the rules of procedure (Annex 25), the KSA is composed of eight members with voting rights. The relevant interest groups (academic and student representatives and professional practice) are also represented here.

15 **Expert groups:** ZEvA appoints representatives from academia, professional practice and the student body to the expert groups for programme and system accreditation (Annex 02 and 03).

Regarding Condition 2: In § 1 Para. 2 of the rules of procedure, ZEvA has stated that the SAK appoints the expert groups for programme accreditation upon the recommendation of the head office, whereby this duty can be performed by the relevant specialist members  
20 as well as one representative of professional practice and one from the student body (Condition 2).

Regarding Recommendation 6: ZEvA states that, in some cases, the student experts can no longer be reached following changes to their contact details. However, this reachability does not generally present a problem (any more) (Annex 50, p. 4).

25 Regarding Recommendation 7: ZEvA has set itself rules (which also serve to fulfil Condition 1), which take the resolution by the Accreditation Council into account and ensure sufficient consideration of students and professional practice in the expert groups in procedures for the accreditation of larger programme clusters (Annex 50, p. 4).

30 Regarding Recommendation 8: The Review Commission still contains neither students nor practitioners from the profession. In its progress report, ZEvA states that it has not applied the recommendation and also sees no reason to do so. The Review Commission's duty is to review whether the decisions made by the SAK are correct. ZEvA considers only experienced higher education teachers as qualified to perform such reviews in

accreditation procedures. Student members and representatives of professional practice in the SAK itself are involved in decisions regarding complaints (Annex 50, p. 4).

### Assessment

5 The agency comprehensively involves the interest groups that are relevant with regard to the fulfilment of conditions.

The reasons cited by ZEvA for not applying Recommendation 8 can only be understood to a limited extent. Students and representatives of professional practice can also be qualified to make accreditation decisions. Nonetheless, the expert group does not consider it absolutely necessary that students and professional practice are represented in the Review Commission as the involvement of both groups in decisions regarding all complaints is guaranteed.

10

ZEvA has fulfilled Condition 2 issued in the previous procedure, which requested that the agency provide a defined procedure that ensures the involvement of all interest groups in the appointment of experts for programme accreditation, through a change to § 1 Para. 2 of the rules of procedure.

15

The agency's explanations regarding Recommendation 6 are comprehensible. There is no information available that suggests there may be regular problems related to the reachability of experts.

Recommendation 7 from the previous accreditation was taken into account through the application of Condition 1 (criteria for the establishment of programme clusters).

20

### Recommendations

None

### Result

**Criterion 2.2.2 is fulfilled.**

25

30

**2.2.3 The competence of those involved in the procedures with regard to all of the areas relevant to programme accreditation or system accreditation testing procedures is guaranteed by a suitable selection procedure and preparation.**

### Recommendations from the previous accreditation

In the medium term, the agency should not employ anyone in programme accreditation procedures who has not been given structured preparation or who does not possess many years of experience in the area (Recommendation 9).

#### 5 Documentation

For programme accreditation, the SAK appoints the expert groups (§ 1 Para. 2 of the rules of procedure of the SAK) and for system accreditation the KSA is responsible for this (§ 1 Para. of the rules of procedure of the KSA). The selection criteria are set down in the relevant guidelines (Annex 06, p. 5).

- 10 Criteria regarding the selection and suitability of experts can be found in the Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance on pp. 20 and 26 (programme accreditation) and on p. 31 for system accreditation (Annex 36). However, this document is not publicly available.

Criteria for selection in programme accreditation:

- 15 • The spectrum of subjects covered by the study programmes to be accredited should be represented; participation by professors with managerial experience is desirable.
- The experts support the Bologna process; as a general rule they have experiences as experts and taken part in an expert seminar where possible.
- 20 • Generally, each faculty is represented by at least one expert. Exceptions to this require justification.

In principle, the experts should also meet the following criteria regarding their suitability:

- academic and/or specialist expertise for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning (application of study programme concept),
- 25 • expertise for evaluating academic feasibility (requirements placed on students in teaching and testing, quantitative aspects),
- knowledge of the key objectives of the structural reform of studies and a thoroughly positive attitude towards this,

- familiarity with the goals and methods of quality assurance (primarily in the higher education sector), understanding of roles:
- willingness to contribute to the peer review in a team in a targeted way,
- 5 • willingness to express opinions in the capacity of an expert on topics which go beyond the core area of one's own subject,
- a constructive and critical approach towards the requested study programmes,
- impartiality and
- representation for the subject areas and gender parity in the group.

Criteria for selection in system accreditation:

- 10 • Three people in the expert group must be qualified in matters of higher education institution governance and self-administration of higher education institution and have managerial experience. For these duties, rectors and presidents of higher education institutions as well as their alternate member or corresponding page on a faculty or subject area level may be considered for this, for example. As a general rule, they will have experience of assessments in the higher education sector, preferably in evaluation and accreditation procedures.
- 15 • The student member shall have experience in the committees for the self-administration of a higher education institution.
- The member from professional practice shall represent the perspectives of the interest groups in the employment system with particular emphasis on professional qualifications.
- 20 • The agency definitely endeavours to appoint a foreign member from the above-mentioned group of experts.
- If required, the group is supplemented by an expert that meets supplementary determinations in terms of professional law.
- 25 • The expert group must demonstrate that it has taken part in the preparatory events for system accreditation or declare itself willing to take part in such an event (Annex 13).

The academic director of ZEvA appoints the expert group and its chair upon the recommendation of the Standing Commission for System Accreditation (KSA).

30

In order to prepare for the procedure, the experts are given the ZEvA guidelines, a manual for experts and, as a general rule, conduct a preparatory discussion on site (Application, p. 11). In addition, the agency regularly runs training courses for experts and offers three to four events for this purpose annually (Annex 14).

- 5 It can be determined from the guidelines for quality assurance that the feedback process and the training for employees are intended to guarantee that the duties entrusted to them by ZEvA are performed professionally and competently. In addition, two-day internal closed conferences take place regularly involving the employees, the academic director and the managing director, these are intended to aid internal further education and quality assurance. (Annex 36, p. 27).

To discuss the application of criteria, the agency makes use of regular fixed meetings, internal closed conferences and the expert seminars. The consultants regularly take part in national and international conferences.

- 15 Regarding Recommendation 9: ZEvA endeavours to increase the proportion of experts who have taken part in training and records this in its expert database. In looking for experts, experienced experts are approached first. Appointing only trained and experienced experts is simply not possible, as this would render the search for experts unnecessarily difficult and would prevent schedules from being kept to. In addition, increasing diversification of study programmes can be noted, meaning that ever more specialised experts are required (Annex 50, p. 4).

### Assessment

- 25 In the expert group's opinion, the procedures and criteria for selecting experts in programme and system accreditation procedures and the measures for preparing experts are appropriate. A positive factor worth noting is the obligatory participation by experts in system accreditation procedures in appropriate preparatory seminars.

The biographical details of the members of the SAK document a wide range of competencies in the relevant fields such as academic performance, design of study programmes or the management and control of higher education institutions. This assessment was confirmed by the participation of the expert group in the SAK meeting.

- 30 The measures for the internal further training of consultants, which are documented in the guidelines for quality assurance, are also suitable for guaranteeing their competence. The expert group could be satisfied of this during the discussions on site.

The expert group follows ZEvA's argument that it is barely possible to only appoint specially prepared and experienced experts (Recommendation 9). It supports the agency's efforts to increase the proportion of experts who have taken part in training by ZEvA (see the explanations regarding ESG Standard 2.4 regarding this).

## 5 Recommendations

**Recommendation 3:** The expert group recommends that the agency publishes the criteria for the selection of experts in programme and system accreditation procedures.

### Result

**Criterion 2.2.3 is fulfilled.**

10

**2.2.4 If the agency commissions other organisations to implement parts of the procedures, it guarantees that these parts are implemented correctly using reliable rules and procedures.**

### Recommendations from the previous accreditation

None.

### Documentation

ZEvA conducts all accreditation procedures fully independently.

## 15 Assessment

As ZEvA has not commissioned any other organisations to perform parts of its procedures, Criterion 2.2.4 is not relevant.

### Result

**The criterion is not relevant.**

20

**Criterion 2.3: Independence****2.3.1 The agency has legal entity status.****Recommendations from the previous accreditation**

None

**Documentation**

- 5 ZEvA is a legally responsible foundation under public law (Annex 27) and, in the capacity, has legal entity status.

On 11 September 2008, the state of Lower Saxony established ZEvA as a legally responsible foundation under public law with its head office in Hanover. ZEvA is subject to the foundation supervisory authority of the state of Lower Saxony. This duty is performed by  
10 the Ministry of the Interior. The deed of foundation has been submitted (Annex 27).

**Assessment**

As a legally responsible foundation under public law, ZEvA has legal entity status.

**Recommendations**

None

15 **Result**

**Criterion 2.3.1 is fulfilled.**

**2.3.2 It is a non-profit organisation and carries out the accreditation procedures on a full-costs basis.****Recommendations from the previous accreditation**

None

20 **Documentation**

Pursuant to § 3 of its statute, ZEvA pursues non-profit causes exclusively and directly within the meaning of the section "Tax-privileged purposes" in the German Fiscal Code (Annex 28). The agency is non-profit making and does not primarily pursue its own financial purposes. This is shown, for example, by the 2014 annual financial statements (Annex  
25 33) and the 2016 business plan (Annex 34). According to ZEvA, procedures are performed on a full-cost basis. The agency estimates 50 to 60 consultant hours (70 euros per hour) for the workload and/or the costs in programme accreditation procedures. For sys-

tem accreditation in a medium-sized university (around 15,000 students) ZEvA calculates costs of 35,000 to 40,000 euros.

### Assessment

5 The public benefit of ZEvA's work is derived from the purpose of the foundation as defined in the statute and is reviewed by the state as its founder within the scope of the statutory requirements.

10 In the expert group's opinion, the information in the 2016 business plan suggests a possible – albeit very minor – cross-subsidisation of accreditation by evaluation (Annex 34, columns 1 and 2). The agency thus expects operating income of EUR 1,176,000 for the current year. This is contrasted with material and personnel costs of EUR 665,147 and operating costs of EUR 559,400. The resulting difference of EUR -47,547 may potentially be offset by the area of activity evaluation (without financing from the MWK) and projects from which the agency anticipates profits of EUR 50,100.

15 If this were the case, the agency would not be performing accreditation procedures entirely on a full-cost basis. As this doubt could not be unequivocally dispelled during the discussions on site, the expert group is unable to confirm complete fulfilment of Criterion 2.3.2.

### Recommendations

20 **Condition 1:** The agency shall demonstrate, using suitable documentation, that it conducts procedures on a full-cost basis and does not make use of cross-subsidisation.

### Result

**Criterion 2.3.2 is partially fulfilled.**

**2.3.3 The agency guarantees the freedom from instruction of the bodies on an individual case basis as well as the independence and impartiality of those acting on behalf of them.**

### Recommendations from the previous accreditation

25 None

### Documentation

See the explanations under Standard 3.3 regarding this.

### Assessment

The agency guarantees the freedom from instruction of the bodies on an individual case basis as well as the independence and impartiality of those acting on behalf of them.

See the explanations under Standard 3.3 for more detail regarding this.

### Recommendations

5 None

### Result

**Criterion 2.3.3 is fulfilled.**

### Criterion 2.4: Equipment

The agency is sufficiently equipped with staff and resources to sustainably carry out its function in all the required areas.

10 **Recommendations from the previous accreditation**

None

### Documentation

See the explanations under Standard 3.5 regarding this.

### Assessment

15 In the expert group's opinion, the agency is sufficiently equipped with staff and resources to sustainably carry out its function in all the required areas.

See the explanations under Standard 3.5 for more detail regarding this.

### Recommendations

None

20 **Result**

**Criterion 2.4 is fulfilled.**

### Criterion 2.5: Internal quality management

The agency continuously uses a formalised internal quality management system, which is suitable for judging the efficacy of internal controlling processes and which guarantees the assurance and continuous improvement of the quality of activities. It is publicly accessible and includes systematic internal and external feedback processes.

**Recommendations from the previous accreditation**

None

**Documentation**

See the explanations under Standard 3.6 regarding this.

**5 Assessment**

ZEvA has a formalised and binding internal quality assurance system which defines the agency's quality objectives, specifies the different processes and responsibilities and also contains feedback procedures for continuously improving the agency's activities.

10 The process description for system accreditation procedures is based on the decision by the Accreditation Council from 2012. In February 2013, the Accreditation Council's procedure rules for system accreditation were further developed, particularly with regard to the implementation of programme and feature random sampling. The corresponding changes are not represented in the Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance.

15 The outdatedness of ZEvA's Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance could indicate a gap in the agency's quality assurance system. It is possible that ZEvA's capacity for self-correction is primarily concentrated on the feedback from higher education institutions and experts regarding the implementation of concrete (accreditation and evaluation) procedures, but disregards the agency's quality development as a whole.

20 The Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance are not published on ZEvA's website. Here only a brief summary of the agency's quality objectives, procedure elements and demand for quality can be found.

25 On page 16 of its application, ZEvA states that: "Due to the expansion of various internal quality assurance tools since 2006, it can be determined in the evaluation reports by ZEvA and the decisions by the SAK that the evaluation reports have become more consistent and that they guarantee the evaluation of all accreditation criteria."

This assessment actually corresponds to the Accreditation Council's experiences, which are documented in the progress report for the accreditation period 16 February 2011 – 30 June 2016.

A detailed evaluation can be found under Standard 3.6.

**30 Recommendations**

**Condition 2:** ZEvA shall submit an updated internal quality management system which guarantees continuous and sustainable quality development, also with regard to the system itself, and is publicly available.

### Result

- 5 **Criterion 2.5 is partially fulfilled.**

### Criterion 2.6: Internal complaints procedure

The agency has a publicly accessible, formalised internal procedure for assessing accreditation decisions upon request from the higher education institution.

### Recommendations from the previous accreditation

- 10 The passage in the contracts with the higher education institutions which states that any costs that arise in the event of a complaint by the higher education institution towards the Accreditation Council within the scope of a review carried out for a specific purpose shall be borne by the higher education institution, provided this does not relate to faults in the procedure, should be deleted (Recommendation 10).

- 15 For reasons of transparency, the Review Commission should be incorporated into the Foundation's statute. The appointment of members to the Review Commissions should be incorporated as a duty in the responsible body's rules of procedure (Recommendation 11).

### Documentation

- 20 ZEvA has a so-called Review Commission. Pursuant to § 1 of its rules of procedure, the Commission receives objections from higher education institutions regarding accreditation decisions by the SAK and concludes recommendations for the SAK as to whether and to what extent these objections should be granted. The commission's decisions are based on documents submitted by a higher education institution and on a statement by the head office regarding the objections (Annex 17).

- 25 Pursuant to § 2 of the rules of procedure, the commission is composed of three members and up to two alternate members. They are appointed by the SAK. The members and alternate members should be people experienced in conducting assessment procedures and familiar with accreditation procedures.

Each accreditation notification contains, amongst other things, a reference to ZEvA's internal complaints procedure, for which the Review Commission is responsible. Corresponding information is also contained on ZEvA's homepage ([www.zeve.org](http://www.zeve.org)) with the description of the outline of the procedures (under programme accreditation). The T&Cs (Cl. 7.3) also refer to this option (Annex 47).

Regarding Recommendation 10: The passage in the T&Cs governing who covers the costs in the event of complaints by the higher education institution that do not uncover any fault by the agency has been deleted.

Regarding Recommendation 11: ZEvA has not met this recommendation. In a legal sense, the Review Commission is not a body but a committee of the Standing Accreditation Commission, just like the Commission for System Accreditation. The committees do not make any final decisions, instead they submit recommendation to the SAK. All executive organs are incorporated into the By-laws of the Foundation (Annex 50, p. 5).

### Assessment

ZEvA has a formalised internal complaints procedure, however, this is not easy to find on the agency's website. The following passage can be found on the agency's website in the description of the outline of the procedures for programme accreditation:

"Complaints against accreditation decisions by the SAK may be submitted within one month of notification of the accreditation decision. Complaints must be submitted to the head office of ZEvA's Review Commission in writing. The SAK decides on the complaints on the basis of a recommendation from ZEvA's Review Commission."

However, the complaints procedure cannot be viewed as an independent topic and the option to make a complaint is not mentioned in the description of system accreditation procedures. As information on complaints procedures could also be of interest to people who have not been issued with an accreditation notification, ZEvA should, particularly in the light of its intended improvement in service quality, provide information about the options for making complaints and the corresponding procedures in a prominent place.

ZEvA has applied Recommendation 10. The expert group considers the reasons cited by ZEvA for not applying Recommendation 11 to be comprehensible.

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 4:** ZEvA should publish its complaints procedure on the agency's website where it can be found easily.

**Result****Criterion 2.6 is substantially fulfilled.****Criterion 2.7: Reporting**

The agency describes its procedures and assessment criteria in sufficient detail and publishes them. It publishes the names of the experts, the reports and the decisions from the accreditation procedures which it has carried out.

5 **Recommendations from the previous accreditation**

None

**Documentation**

The programme and system accreditation procedures are described in detail in ZEvA's guidelines (Annex 02 and 03). The names of experts and the decisions are published on  
10 ZEvA's homepage and, in accordance with the contractual obligation, in the Accreditation Council's database.

In addition, the current composition of the committees, a database of study programmes that have been accredited by ZEvA from which the reports are available for download and an overview of the current and completed system accreditation procedures can be found  
15 on ZEvA's website.

**Assessment**

ZEvA informs the interested public in a suitable way about the procedures it performs, the evaluation parameters taken as a basis and the results.

In the previous accreditation procedure, ZEvA agreed that, in future, a dataset should be  
20 entered into the Accreditation Council's database within four weeks following the accreditation decision. This assurance has not yet been consistently implemented, as a review by the head office of the Accreditation Council made clear.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation 5:** ZEvA should apply the practice it has agreed to of entering the required data in the Accreditation Council's database within four weeks following the accreditation decision.  
25

**Result****Criterion 2.7 is substantially fulfilled.**

## VI. Recommendations from the expert group

### VI.1 Regarding compliance with the ESG

The expert group recommends that the Accreditation Council finds that ZEvA has partially fulfilled the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG).

According to the assessment by the expert group, the following standards are fulfilled:

3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.7 (5 standards)

According to the assessment by the expert group, the following standards are substantially fulfilled:

2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 2.5; 3.1; (5 standards)

According to the assessment by the expert group, the following standards are partially fulfilled:

2.4; 2.6; 2.7; 3.6 (4 standards)

The expert group issues the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** The expert group recommends that all quality assurance procedures offered by the agency in the higher education sector are clearly aligned with the ESG Standards from Part 1 and that this is made transparent (ESG Standard 2.1).

**Recommendation 2:** The agency should provide information on the procedure for the accreditation of doctoral programmes in a transparent and appropriate way and be able to demonstrate that the procedure can achieve its objectives (ESG Standard 2.2).

**Recommendation 3:** The procedure for the accreditation of doctoral programmes should (even if it is not an stand-alone procedure) be defined and presented externally, just as the other quality assurance procedures offered by ZEvA, in a way that renders the procedure components (self-evaluation, external assessment, reporting and follow-up) transparent (ESG Standard 2.3).

**Recommendation 4:** ZEvA should specify and publish clearly designed procedures for the selection, nomination and appointment of its experts for *all* of the quality assurance procedures it offers in accordance with the requirements from ESG Standard 2.4 and the corresponding guidelines (ESG Standard 2.4).

**Recommendation 5:** ZEvA should intensify its efforts to increase the proportion of experts who take part in the agency’s preparatory seminars (ESG Standard 2.4).

**Recommendation 6:** The criteria for the accreditation of doctoral programmes should be clearly defined and published (2.5).

**Recommendation 7:** ZEvA should ensure that the complete expert reports are published in all of the quality assurance procedures it offers. In the handbook concerning external evaluations of higher education institutions, the agency should avoid giving the impression that reports may, where applicable, not be published in full upon the request of the higher education institution (ESG Standard 2.6).

**Recommendation 8:** ZEvA should define a complaints and appeals procedure for all of the quality assurance procedures offered by the agency and should publish these in a prominent position on the agency's website. The procedure should allow for objections to formal decisions as well as complaints about the way procedures are conducted (ESG Standard 2.7).

**Recommendation 9:** ZEvA should follow the path paved in entering new areas of activity with greater force and should above all place its focus on the area of system accreditation, which has been given very little attention over the years (ESG Standard 3.1).

**Recommendation 10:** The agency could highlight with even greater clarity how and to what extent the findings from its analyses could be used in its daily work and for the benefit of the higher education institutions (ESG Standard 3.4).

**Recommendation 11:** For the potential planned expansion of its areas of activity, the agency should increase its portfolio of personnel at an early stage and support the responsible employees with appropriate further education measures (ESG Standard 3.5).

**Recommendation 12:**

ZEvA's internal quality assurance system should be updated and expanded to incorporate all of the procedure types offered by the agency (ESG Standard 3.6).

## VI.2 Regarding compliance with the Accreditation Council's criteria

The expert group recommends that the Accreditation Council accredit ZEvA for both programme accreditation and system accreditation procedures and that it should, as part of this, issue the following conditions and recommendations:

**Condition 1:** The agency shall demonstrate, using suitable documentation, that it conducts procedures on a full-cost basis and does not make use of cross-subsidisation. (Criterion 2.3.2).

**Condition 2:** ZEvA shall produce an updated internal quality management system which guarantees continuous and sustainable quality development, also with regard to the system itself, and is publicly available (Criterion 2.5).

5 **Recommendation 1:** ZEvA should introduce a binding procedure that ensures the correct and consistent application of the “Rules of the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of study programmes and for system accreditation” in its current version, also in the agency’s internal documents (Criterion 2.2.1).

**Recommendation 2:** ZEvA should intensify the communication between the agency’s commissions and bodies (Criterion 2.2.1).

10 **Recommendation 3:** The expert group recommends that the agency publishes the criteria for the selection of experts in programme and system accreditation procedures (Criterion 2.2.3).

**Recommendation 4:** ZEvA should publish its complaints procedure on the agency’s website where it can be found easily (Criterion 2.6).

15 **Recommendation 5:** ZEvA should apply the practice it has agreed to of entering the required data into the Accreditation Council’s database within four weeks following the accreditation decision (Criterion 2.7).

**Annex 1: Schedule for the on-site visit**

<b>22 February 2016</b>		
6:00 p.m.	Internal preparatory meeting at the hotel	
8:00 p.m.	Internal dinner discussion at the hotel	
<b>23 February 2016</b>		
09:00 – 10:30 a.m.	Meeting with the management of the agency	Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Lücke, academic director Hermann Reuke, managing director Rolf Bohnsack, administrative director
10:30 – 10:45 a.m.	Break	
10:45 – 11:45 a.m.	Participation in the meeting of the Standing Accreditation Commission (SAK) and discussion with the members of the SAK	SAK members, ZEvA management and members
12:00 – 12:45 p.m.	Lunch and internal discussion, afterwards (12:45 p.m.) transfer to ZEvA's head office	
1:00 – 2:00 p.m.	Discussions with experts from the agency's procedures	Prof. Dr. Klaus Rütter, Hanover University of Applied Sciences and Arts (programme accreditation, certification) Prof. Dr. Marianne Merkt, Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences (evaluation, certification of higher education didactics) Prof. Dr. Lutz Leutelt, Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (evaluation) Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Voegeli, University of Hamburg (programme accreditation, international accreditations) Gerald Pörschmann, Zukunftsallianz Maschinenbau (practitioner from the profession for programme and system accreditation)

		Maja Wolniak, Leibniz University Hanover, Hanover University for Music, Drama and Media (student, programme accreditation, evaluation)
2:00 – 2:15 p.m.	Break	
2:15 – 3:15 p.m.	Discussion with representatives from study programmes that have been accredited by ZEvA	<p>Prof. Dr. Jörg Winterberg, SRH University Heidelberg</p> <p>Prof. Dr. Christian Kröger, Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences</p> <p>Prof. Dr. Jens Hoßfeld, Mittelhessen University of Applied Sciences</p> <p>Prof. Dr. Albert Busch, University of Göttingen</p> <p>Nicola Stauder-Bitzegeio, University of Koblenz and Landau</p>
3:15 – 4:15 p.m.	Discussion with representatives of higher education institutions and educational institutions that have been accredited, evaluated or advised by ZEvA.	<p>Prof. Dr. Roland Stenzel, Dresden University of Applied Sciences (system accreditation)</p> <p>Dr. Ulrich Löffler, Georg August University of Göttingen (evaluation of the teaching quality pact)</p> <p>Dr. Florian Nolte, Hanover University of Cooperative Education for Banking [<i>Berufsakademie für Bankwirtschaft Hannover</i>] (evaluation dual study programmes)</p> <p>Dipl.-Päd. Heike Kröpke, Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences (certification of higher education didactics)</p>
4:15 – 4:30 p.m.	Break	

4:30 – 6:00 p.m.	Discussion with members of the Foundation Council, the Standing Evaluation Commission (SEK), the Commission for System Accreditation (KSA) and the Commission for International Affairs (KIA)	<p>Prof. Dr. Ulrich Teichler, University of Kassel, Chair of the Foundation Council</p> <p>Prof. Dr. Katharina Belling-Seib, Emden/Leer University of Applied Sciences, Alternative Chair of the Foundation Council</p> <p>Prof. Dr. Werner Kiehl, Emden/Leer University of Applied Sciences, Standing Evaluation Commission</p> <p>Prof. Dr. Charlotte Schubert, University of Leipzig, Chair of the Commission for System Accreditation</p> <p>Prof. Dr. Jürgen Schlaeger, Commission for International Affairs</p>
6:00 – 6:15 p.m.	Break	
6:15 – 7:00 p.m.	Internal concluding meeting for day 1	
Approx. 7:30 p.m.	Internal dinner discussion in the restaurant L'Osteria	
<b>24 February 2016</b>		
09:00 – 10:00 a.m.	Discussion with the employees of ZEvA's head office	<p>Henning Schäfer, deputy managing director, unit director for programme accreditation</p> <p>Dr. Jürgen Petersen, unit director for system accreditation, international procedures</p> <p>Dr. Torsten Futterer, unit director for evaluation</p> <p>Monika Topper, programme accreditation</p> <p>Dr. Paulina Helmecke, programme accreditation</p> <p>Dr. Dagmar Ridder, programme accreditation, certification</p> <p>Stefan Claus, programme accreditation</p> <p>Dr. Barbara Haferkorn, programme accreditation</p>

		Anja Grube, system accreditation, international procedures Jürgen Harnisch, evaluation
10:00 – 10:15 a.m.	Break	
10:15 – 11:15 a.m.	Discussion regarding international activities with representatives from higher education institutions  (via Skype/video conference if appropriate)	Prof. Dr. Werner Stueber, Technical Trainers College in Riyadh (programme accreditation in Saudi Arabia)  Mag. Walter Draxl, MSc, University of Applied Sciences Tyrol, Innsbruck (quality audits in Austria)  N.N.  via Skype:  Prof. Dr. Stefan Höchli, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (programme accreditation in Switzerland)  Alexandra Khudaykulova, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (programme accreditation in Russia) -> Only in English
11:15 – 11:30 a.m.	Break	
11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.	Internal concluding meeting and preparation of the report  12:30 – 1:00 p.m. lunchtime snack	
2:45 p.m.	Short concluding meeting with management of the agency and departure	Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Lücke, academic director Hermann Reuke, managing director Henning Schäfer, deputy managing director Rolf Bohnsack, administrative director

**Annex 2: Abbreviations**

EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
FHStG	Austrian University of Applied Sciences Studies Act [ <i>Österreichisches Fachhochschul-Studiengesetz</i> ]
HRK	German Rectors' Conference [ <i>Hochschulrektorenkonferenz</i> ]
HS-QSG	Austrian Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education [ <i>Österreichisches Hochschulqualitätssicherungsgesetz</i> ]
KIA	Commission for International Affairs [ <i>Kommission für Internationale Angelegenheiten</i> ]
KMK	Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany [ <i>Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland</i> ]
KMK Structural Guidelines	Common Structural Guidelines of the Länder for the Accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's study programmes. Resolution by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder from 10 October 2003 in the version adopted on 4 February 2010
KSA	Commission for System Accreditation [ <i>Kommission Systemakkreditierung</i> ]
LHK	State Conference of the Higher Education Institutions [ <i>Landeshochschulkonferenz</i> ]
Rules	Rules for the Accreditation of Study Programmes and for System Accreditation from 8 December 2009 in the version adopted on 20 February 2013 [ <i>Regeln für die Akkreditierung von Studieng-</i>

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	<i>ängen und für die Systemakkreditierung]</i>
SAK	Standing Accreditation Commission [ <i>Ständige Akkreditierungskommission</i> ]
SEK	Standing Evaluation Commission [ <i>Ständige Evaluierungskommission</i> ]
ZEvA	Central Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation, Hanover [ <i>Zentrale Evaluations- und Akkreditierungsagentur Hannover</i> ]

**Annex 3: Equivalence between Part 1 of the ESG 2015 and the criteria for programme and system accreditation**

As of September 2015

<b>ESG 2015</b>	<b>Programme accreditation</b>	<b>System accreditation</b>
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	Implicit in 2.9 Quality assurance and further development	6.3 Internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	Implicit in 2.3 Study programme concept	Implicit in 6.2 Internal management of higher education institutions
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	Animated learning – examinations: 2.5	Animated learning – organisation of examinations: 6.2
1.4 Student admission, progression and certification	Certification: 2.3 Curriculum design: 2.4 Recognition: 2.3 Certificates: 2.2	Implicit in 6.2
1.5 Teaching staff	2.7 Setup	Teaching staff: 6.2
1.6 Learning resources and student support	2.7 Setup	Setup: 6.2
1.7 Information management	2.9 Quality assurance	6.3 Internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions
1.8 Public information	2.8 Transparency and documentation	6.4 Report system and data collection
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programme	2.9 Quality assurance	6.3 Internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions

1.10 Cyclical external  
quality assurance

3.2.1 Time limitation

7.2.1 Time limitation