



# FOLLOW-UP REPORT

## TO THE 2021 ENQA REVIEW

---

of the Central Evaluation and  
Accreditation Agency Hanover  
(ZEvA)

*September 2023*



# Content

Content .....	1
1 Introduction .....	2
2 Development of the Agency since the Review.....	2
3 Implementation of the Recommendations.....	3
ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance .....	3
ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis.....	4
ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct .....	5
ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose.....	5
ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts .....	5
ESG 2.7 Complaints and Appeals.....	6
4 Key Challenges .....	7
5 Conclusion.....	8



# 1 Introduction

ZEvA has undergone an ENQA review for the first time in 2021 after being a member since ENQA's founding in 2000. In ENQA's former decisions about ZEvA's membership, the assessment conducted by the German Accreditation Council (GAC) in the context of ZEvA's reaccreditation for the German accreditation system had functioned as a review of ZEvA's compliance to the ESG. The site visit was conducted in April 2021. In September 2021, the ENQA Board reconfirmed ZEvA's membership for five years on the basis of the expert report. The review report also served as the basis for ZEvA's application for renewal of its inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register EQAR. In March 2022, EQAR has approved ZEvA's application. ZEvA's inclusion in the EQAR is an essential requirement for ZEvA's license to operate in the German accreditation system as well as our work in other countries of the EHEA.

The review report contained a number of recommendations for further enhancement of ZEvA's work as a quality assurance agency. We are grateful for these recommendations and have taken them as an opportunity to reflect on our processes and refine them further. Several of these recommendations have been the subject of working groups that have developed new processes and guidelines that take these recommendations into account, and we have since addressed them in three corporate retreats. In the following, we will address all of the recommendations individually and document our progress so far.

## 2 Development of the Agency since the Review

ZEvA's areas of activity have not changed significantly since the site visit in 2021. At the time, our work was strongly influenced by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which meant that we had to change our procedures to an online-based system, carrying out virtual "site-visits" via video conferencing tools like Zoom, Webex or others. Since the protective measures concerning the pandemic have been lifted, our procedures have mostly reverted to regular in-person site visits. The German Accreditation Council (GAC) has made in-person site-visits mandatory again with their decision from March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023, so all newly started procedures since then have to include an in-person site visit. The GAC only made one exception for the procedure of System Accreditation, which involves two site visits. In their decision, the GAC has clarified that one of these site visits has to be in-person, while the other could also be conducted as a videoconference.

Yet, even though site-visits now have to be in-person, ZEvA still widely uses video-conferencing systems for various purposes, as for instance preparatory meetings with experts and HEIs, and for meetings with various stakeholders and customers. The digitalisation of ZEvA's processes is still progressing, as we have since 2021 changed our telephone to an online system, which makes working from home easier. All project officers have been equipped with smart phones, and we are in the process of introducing Microsoft 365 as a further collaboration tool to enable us to increase our opportunities of mobile work. As laid out in a company agreement in 2021, ZEvA's employees have the opportunity of choosing two days per week as mobile work, which ZEvA considers expanding to three days in the future. To account for the reduced requirements in office space due to mobile work and the dissolution



of our paper-based archive, ZEvA is also looking for a new, smaller office, and we hope to move to a new location in 2025.

Furthermore, ZEvA has launched a new website and corporate design in February 2023. The new website is designed to bring even more transparency to ZEvA's work and present it in a modern, easily accessible manner. As part of the process, all of ZEvA's handbooks have been revised and transferred to the new corporate design, all of which are available on ZEvA's website, <https://www.zeva.org/>.

Internationally, ZEvA's work has been affected by the Russian attack on the Ukraine, as ZEvA has been very active in both countries. In line with current policies in Western Europe, ZEvA has ceased all cooperation with Russia and Russian institutions. Ongoing accreditation procedures have been put on indefinite hold until the end of the conflict. On the other hand, ZEvA continues to support Ukrainian HEIs and is still carrying out accreditation procedures. ZEvA has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ukrainian agency NAQA and is in discussion with them on the possibilities of joint procedures. Another memorandum has been signed with the Moldovian agency ANACEC.

ZEvA's legal bodies are undergoing a period of change. At the moment, we are in the process of filling the position of Scientific Director after the departure of Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Lücke, with Prof. Dr. Katja Koch and Dr. Marion Rieken serving as acting scientific directors until a replacement can be installed. The current managing director Henning Schäfer stands to be re-elected for a second 5-year term, starting 2024. Moreover, the State Rector's Conference of Lower Saxony has elected a new Foundation Council which will be constituted in the new year. The current chairman and another current member are ending their terms, so the Council will elect a new chairperson in 2024. The ZEvA commission also starts a new term next year and will be elected by the Foundation Council in December.

In the light of these changes and the start of new terms in ZEvA's bodies as well as the review team's recommendations, ZEvA is hard at work on its strategy for the next five years, to be presented to the new Foundation Council in 2024, and has employed external coaches for institutional development. Thus, in some cases the implementation of the recommendations is still ongoing, especially to give new members of the Board and Council the opportunity to contribute.

## 3 Implementation of the Recommendations

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

The agency is recommended to formalise the approach to agreeing, documenting and monitoring progress towards the strategic priorities of the agency.

In general, ZEvA's Board develops the overall strategy and monitors its progress in close collaboration with the department heads. Mainly at corporate retreats and the regular Jour Fixe meetings, ZEvA's employees also get the opportunity to contribute and give their input, often also in the form of working groups. Every five years, the Board presents its overall strategy to the Foundation Council for approval and gives regular updates on changes and progress. The Department Heads are responsible for developing individual strategies for their areas of activity based on the overall strategy, which will then be approved by the Board and presented to the Council. ZEvA then documents its progress in the yearly reports delivered to the Council.



At the moment, ZEvA is in the process of developing a matrix of tasks and responsibilities of the Board and Department heads, which also includes a clarification of the individual responsibilities concerning the development and monitoring of strategic goals. Our work on formalising these processes is ongoing and will continue with the new Scientific Director and the newly elected Foundation Council in 2024.

The agency is recommended to review and ensure a shared understanding of the responsibilities of its board, commissions and management following a period of major change, including responsibility for approving new and revised external quality assurance methodologies.

New and revised quality assurance methodologies are approved by the Foundation Board and will be presented to the relevant commission, either the ZEvA Commission or the Standing Evaluation Commission. Formalizing these processes is also part of ZEvA's ongoing strategy development and will continue with the new Scientific Director and the newly elected Foundation Council in 2024.

### ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

The agency is recommended to develop, assign resources to, and implement a plan for thematic analysis of findings from across the range of the agency's QA procedures.

In ZEvA's corporate retreat in 2021, ZEvA has put together a working group for Thematic Analysis that has developed a new concept for publishing Thematic Analyses regularly and a process for their development. The new concept guarantees a minimum of two publications per year. One publication is set to be an overview of ZEvA's activities of the past year containing short quantitative and qualitative analyses of ZEvA's procedures and general trends. In addition to that, at least one publication will be an in-depth analysis of a specific topic. The topics will be selected through a yearly pitching event, organised by the working group. For the purpose of publication, ZEvA has started a new scientific series, „Studien zum Qualitätsmanagement im Hochschulwesen“ (ISSN 2750-7475). So far, two publications have been put forth, the yearly review “2021: Themen, Trends und Perspektiven” and a study on the implications of the Covid-19-pandemic, “Programmakkreditierung in der Corona-Pandemie – Eine Bilanz” by Antje Kuhle. Two more are currently being prepared for publication, the yearly review for 2022 and an analysis of international accreditations.

The analyses are being published on ZEvA's website:

<https://www.zeva.org/en/publications/>

In addition to ZEvA's concept, a working group by GAC and the German agencies is exploring the possibilities of joint thematic analyses, which would offer a broader view of the German accreditation system by including data from all agencies and the GAC.



## ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

The agency is recommended to complete the review of operating procedures used by staff to guide the delivery of external quality assurance activities and monitor the effectiveness of their implementation.

To review and revise our internal quality assurance system, we have installed a working group at the corporate retreat 2021. The working group has devised new procedures and documented them in ZEvA's new Handbook for Internal Quality assurance, which will be published on ZEvA's website later this year. In the handbook, the processes for collecting feedback from experts and customers, analysing the collected data and translating them in measures to be taken are laid out in a comprehensive manner. Drawing conclusions from the collected feedback is the responsibility of the Board in conjunction with the department heads. The results are presented yearly at ZEvA's corporate retreats.

The agency is recommended to formalise and systematise the way in which feedback from stakeholders informs the agency's approach to strategic development and internal quality assurance.

How ZEvA collects feedback from stakeholders is described in the quality handbook. In all our procedures, we are using the evaluation software Survey Monkey to evaluate the quality of our procedures. Through discussions of the Board with the Department Heads, ZEvA identifies measures to be taken which then will be included in ZEvA's strategy.

## ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

The agency is recommended to establish a systematic approach to periodically and comprehensively reviewing each of the external quality assurance methodologies operated by the agency.

We are regularly reviewing our methodologies by collecting feedback in all procedures, as described in our Quality Handbook, and during the annual corporate retreats. Apart from that, defining our processes further is part of the ongoing strategy development.

## ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

The agency is recommended to clarify its expectations for experts to engage with training, including a more robust mandatory requirement for newer experts to undertake initial training, and implement systems to record experts' engagement with training in order to monitor that these expectations are met.

During the 2021 corporate retreat, a working group was formed to revise ZEvA's approach to training experts and, more importantly, to documenting which experts have undergone some form of training. As already discussed during the review, due to the specifics of the German accreditation system, especially in programme accreditation it is not possible to make it mandatory for ZEvA's experts to undergo formal training before they conduct procedures, as that would exclude many possible experts



and thus would severely limit ZEvA's possibilities of carrying out their procedures according to the contractually agreed schedule. However, many experts that ZEvA employs have already undergone some form of training. On the one hand, all agencies working in Germany are offering training seminars as well as ZEvA, and thus training experts is a collective task. Furthermore, organisations like the student accreditation pool and the trade union network of experts from professional practise also offer trainings. Since almost all of ZEvA's student experts are part of the student pool, most of them have undergone extensive training. For system accreditation, all individual expert groups receive an extra training well before the start of the assessment procedure.

Additionally, we regard experts who have already been part of several accreditation procedures as properly trained, and thus they would not necessarily need to attend further training seminars (although some of them do). In all of ZEvA's procedures (which holds true for the other German agencies as well), our project officers use the evening prior to the site visit to explain the experts' tasks and responsibilities as well as the criteria and procedural rules, which serves as "training on the job" and makes sure that all experts are well informed. The new concept for training experts and for keeping track of their training status is documented in new internal guidelines devised by the working group. The concept on the one hand includes plans for yearly in-person seminars and several webinars per year (depending on the number of attendants). Attendance of these seminars and webinars will be documented and a summary will be included in the yearly report.

Additionally, the new concept formulates a new process of assessing and documenting the experts' status of training. Prior to every assessment procedure, ZEvA asks the experts if they have attended training seminars before and where, and whether they have already been an expert in more than three individual procedures, in which case we also consider them as trained. This information will then be documented in our database QuoJob.

## ESG 2.7 Complaints and Appeals

The agency is recommended to further develop the complaints and appeals procedure to include a more detailed operating procedure, the point of submission, expected timescales and authority delegated by the Board of Trustees to other governance and management bodies in handling complaints and appeals.

As we have stated before, we still see this recommendation as a simple misunderstanding during the site visit, and the perceived shortcoming is in no way evident from the individual cases and how they have been handled by the Appeals Commission in the past. All of ZEvA's customers are being thoroughly informed of these procedures, both through ZEvA's handbooks and website, through our terms and conditions attached to every contract, and through ZEvA's written decisions, which always contain a note on the possibilities to appeal the decision and the deadline for appeals. ZEvA's relevant bodies (Appeals Commission, ZEvA Commission and Standing Evaluation Commission) are well aware of their tasks and will be reminded of them with every case brought before them, which are at the moment very few. The procedure has worked quite well in the past and we see no need to improve it further. That being said, while we have not revised the procedure as such, we have placed the relevant information even more prominently on our new website, and, as before, the procedure is described in all of ZEvA's handbooks, which can also be downloaded from our website in their current version.



## 4 Key Challenges

Key Challenges for ZEvA almost entirely pertain to outside influences that we have no control over. Even though the Covid-19 pandemic is supposedly over, the dangers of another similarly disruptive event are high, and we have to be prepared to work under comparable conditions again. Thus, possibilities of working digitally will have to be developed further. Additionally, the need to rely on digital tools during the pandemic has opened new opportunities, and with these opportunities comes external pressure of exploiting them. HEIs and experts often are very much in favour of virtual site visits wherever possible, but this stands in contrast to regulations from the GAC and EQAR which require in-person meetings again. This is a challenge that has to be addressed by the accreditation system in general, as many, including agencies, see a dogmatic return to the former status quo, thereby ignoring the progress made in digitalisation, as unsustainable. Questions of reducing over-all costs and carbon footprints of accreditation procedures have to be addressed, e.g. by devising guidelines under which conditions and in which cases online site visits could be possible. At the moment, ZEvA has to regularly deny requests to switch to online, but the HEIs are often unhappy about this, and some experts are unwilling to go back to in-person meetings, making it harder to put together expert teams.

This holds especially true for international procedures, which face further challenges as exemplified by the war in the Ukraine, which makes travelling there impossible. Still, ZEvA wants to continue supporting HEIs in the Ukraine which are still required to undergo accreditation, and thus it is necessary to find creative solutions. In the case of Ukraine, ZEvA aims to include Ukrainian experts along with German or international ones so we can conduct hybrid site-visits and make sure that at least part of the expert group gets the chance to be on-site. A closer collaboration with NAQA or their partner agency ACEQ (Analytical Centre for Quality Education) could be of help in this regard. As other regions in which ZEvA is active are sometimes also subject to conflicts and subsequent travel warnings by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this hybrid mode could be a model for future procedures in these countries.

As for the German accreditation system, one of the major challenges is the growing pressure on costs, as most procedures are being offered in a public tender, and the main criterion for selection is almost always the offered price. Agencies thus have to balance the need for cost reduction with the necessities of the procedure so that they can continue to offer high quality work.

Another challenge is the uncertain future of the German accreditation system itself, for as yet no information about the results of the evaluation of the Specimen Decree (MRVO) has been communicated. It is to be expected that at least some changes will be implemented, but so far, it is impossible to predict how far-reaching these will be.

As a final point, the German accreditation system has proven to be difficult to explain in recent ENQA reviews of the GAC and German agencies as it is rather different from most other European countries. Eleven agencies are competing for procedures in a free market but do not have decision-making powers, which are held by the GAC. Publication of accreditation decisions, a follow-up to and appeals of these decisions are all in the hands of the GAC, and the agencies themselves and the experts employed by them have no part in this. As one result, Appeals and Complaints commissions of the agencies have very little cases to discuss, as complaints have always been rare and appeals in the German system are not their responsibility anymore.





Furthermore, the agencies are also competing for experts, who are often conducting procedures for several agencies. The task of training these experts thus falls on several heads, and it is not possible for one agency to train all their possible experts themselves. Lastly, the issue of thematic analysis is problematic insofar as every agency usually only has access to their own procedures and thus only a fraction of the entire German accreditation system, which limits the reach of the analyses and makes them less representative. Thus, interest in publications by German agencies is traditionally quite low, and the agencies are so small and under such financial pressure that the resources they can dedicate to thematic analyses is very limited. We hope that this special situation can be taken into account at the next round of ENQA reviews, as by now, the inner workings of the German accreditation system have been the subject of several reviews and should be well-known by ENQA and EQAR.

## 5 Conclusion

With this follow-up report, we hope to have demonstrated that ZEvA is regarding quality of our work as an on-going process that is constantly being reviewed and enhanced where necessary, and that we take the recommendations of the experts as a highly valued input for further improvement. ZEvA is thoroughly committed to the European Quality Assurance Framework and to its membership in ENQA, which remains the most important organisation representing agencies in the EHEA. In light of an upcoming revision of the ESG and ENQA's process of re-defining its role and for the future, we hope that, while all member agencies are beholden to the ESG, some diversity of approaches can be allowed, and that the specific circumstances under which agencies are functioning can be taken into account while at the same time recognising that they are offering the best work they possibly can in their respective contexts. Another task we are all facing together is devising ways to work in times of crisis, be it a global pandemic, armed conflicts or the effects of climate change, as even under these difficult circumstances high quality education continues to be of vital importance. ZEvA is very willing to take an active part in the further development and strengthening of the EHEA and ENQA and we are looking forward to working together continuously to further these ends.





Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency  
Hanover (ZEVA)  
Lilienthalstraße 1  
30179 Hannover

**Chairman of the Board of Trustees**

Prof. Dr. Ulrich Teichler

**Managing Director**

Henning Schäfer

**Acting Scientific Directors**

Prof. Dr. Katja Koch

Dr. Marion Rieken

**Contact**

Tel.: 0511 54 355 701 (Secretariat)

Fax: 0511 54 355 999

[www.zeva.org](http://www.zeva.org)