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AAQ and AACSB: Mapping Standards and Procedures

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1 Context and objective

Accreditation according to the Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector (HEdA)

The Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector (HEdA) stipulates that all universities, universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education must undergo institutional accreditation if they wish to make use of protected designations such as “University”, “University of Applied Sciences” and “University of Teacher Education” (Art. 29 HEdA). Institutional accreditation is valid for seven years.

The decision on institutional accreditation and accreditation of programmes is taken by the Accreditation Council based on the report by experts and on the conclusions (proposal for accreditation) by the AAQ or other recognised agencies.

The rules of procedures and the quality standards which put into concrete terms the requirements laid down in the law (Art. 30 HEdA) are defined in the institutional accreditation guidelines (SR. 414.205.3).

Furthermore, the HEdA permits other agencies to carry out accreditation according to regulations governing the HEdA.

For several years, business schools in Switzerland have relied on internationally recognised external quality assurance procedures – such as AACSB Business Accreditation or EQUIS accreditation by EFMD. As these accreditations are considered the gold standard by the sector, accreditation according to the HEdA can only be an additional procedure leading to more work and further expenses for business schools.

AACSB

AACSB is a global business education network and association, which during its 100-year history has specialised in the accreditation of business schools, among other things.

Recently, AACSB has institutionally reinforced its presence in the European Higher Education Area by establishing AACSB International's Europe, Middle East and Africa Headquarters in Amsterdam and by seeking collaboration with agencies throughout the region. Currently, AACSB conducts joint accreditation visits with NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) and is a partner in a project supported by the German Accreditation Council.

To alleviate the administrative burden of accreditation according to the HEdA, the Swiss Higher Education Conference (SHEC) introduced into its accreditation guidelines – which are the binding legal basis for implementing institutional accreditation in Switzerland – the option of basing the proposal of the agency on the results of other external quality assurance processes.

Objective

This paper explores the option of basing AAQ's proposal for accreditation to the Accreditation Council on a report produced and provided by AACSB to reduce the costs both in human resources and direct expenses for HEI committed to AACSB accreditation.

2 Models of cooperation

There are three models of cooperation:

1. Combined accreditation visits by AACSB and AAQ
2. Recognition of AACSB reports according to Article 9 Paragraph 3 of the accreditation guidelines
3. AACSB recognition as an accrediting agency in Switzerland

It appears that AACSB prefers the model of combined accreditation visits, as the current collaboration with NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) is proving successful for the Dutch system.

AAQ prefers a model where AACSB adapts its rules and standards to meet the requirements of the HEdA, which would then allow AAQ to base its proposal for accreditation on the report by AACSB (unfeasible for AACSB).

If AACSB were to be registered in EQAR, AACSB could also be recognised by the Accreditation Council and could perform the institutional accreditation on its own. AACSB is an affiliated member of ENQA (unfeasible for AACSB: 1. no students on the panel; 2. no publication of reports).

3 Considerations

Whichever model is pursued, the starting point for further discussion must be a mapping of AACSB and AAQ standards and procedures.

Such a mapping is carried out in Annexes 7.1 (Standards) and 7.2 (Procedures).

The HEdA focuses on the quality assurance system of a higher education institution, its processes and how it works. AACSB accreditation is a voluntary, nongovernmental process that is mission-driven and aims to promote high quality and continuous improvement in education. AACSB offers business accreditation and a supplemental, optional accounting accreditation. AACSB's accreditation relies on the 'Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation'. Schools must demonstrate a commitment to, and alignment with, both the values specified in the eligibility criteria and with the accreditation standards in order to achieve and continue accreditation. When taking into account the eligibility criteria and the accreditation standards in the mapping exercise, there are only 2 standards pursuant to the HEdA that cannot be found in AACSB's standards:

1.1 Quality assurance strategy	√
1.2 QA strategy is part of overall strategy	√
1.3 Involvement of representative groups	√
1.4 Relevance of quality assurance system	√
2.1 Mission and strategic objectives	√
2.2 Relevant information to make current and strategic decisions	√
2.3 Participatory right and independent operations	√
2.4 Sustainability	√
2.5 Equal opportunities	√
3.1 Teaching, research and services	√
3.2 Evaluation	√

3.3 Principles of European Higher Education Area	x
3.4 Compliance with criteria for admission	√
4.1 Financial, personnel resources	√
4.2 Staff qualification	√
4.3 Career Development of Staff	√
5.1 Internal and external communication	x
5.2 Publication of objective information	√

A comparison of the procedural aspects showed that in order to comply with the requirements of the HEdA guidelines, AACSB would have to add two persons (one person with experience of higher education institution management and one student) to the team of experts.

4 Findings

AAQ has made extensive clarifications to find out whether there is a possibility for cooperation with AACSB to reduce effort and costs for business schools seeking both accreditations. The key findings are as follows:

- “Combined Accreditation Visits”, which AACSB is already carrying out in cooperation with NVAO, are currently the only option for institutions seeking both accreditations.
- For AACSB, it is not possible to adapt its procedures as to simultaneously examining the HEdA standards. Furthermore, AACSB itself does not publish any reports.
- Currently, AACSB does not qualify for recognition as an accrediting agency in Switzerland.

5 Conclusion

AAQ reports to the Swiss Accreditation Council that extensive clarifications – including a mapping of both procedures and the set of standards – have been made. An integration of the HEdA standards into the AACSB procedure for “Business Accreditation” seems conceivable, but there are differences in the respective composition of the expert groups (no students and no active rectors), as well as the matter pertaining to the publication of reports. Moreover, qualifying for recognition as an accrediting agency in Switzerland is not an option for AACSB at the moment.

AAQ concludes that a “Combined Accreditation Visit” is currently the only option for combining the HEdA Institutional Accreditation and the AACSB “Business Accreditation”.

6 References

The mapping is based on the following documents and interactions:

- Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation, AACSB International, 31 January 2016
- Institutional accreditation guidelines (SR. 414.205.3) from 28 May 2015
- AAQ Institutional accreditation guide from 1 January 2016
- The Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector (HEdA) from 30 September 2011
- Email correspondence of AAQ and AACSB (Tara Jongma) from 24 March 2016 as well as AACSB and AAQ websites
- Visit of AACSB delegation (Tim Mescon, Executive VP and Chief Officer EMEA, Tom Robinson, CEO, and Marine Condette, Manager, Accreditation and Member Services) to AAQ, 29 August 2017, Berne
- Virtual conference meeting of AAQ and AACSB (Marine Condette) on 2 March 2018
- Document approved by AACSB (Marine Condette) and AAQ, 3 July 2018

7 Annexes

7.1 AAQ – AACSB comparison of quality standards (including “Eligibility criteria and standards for AACSB business accreditation”)

HEdA	AACSB
Area 1: Quality assurance strategy	
<p>1.1 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall define its quality assurance strategy. This strategy shall contain the essential elements of an internal quality assurance system aimed at ensuring the quality of the activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and their long-term quality development as well as promoting the development of a quality culture.</p>	<p>Standard 1: Mission, Impact, Innovation</p>
<p>1.2 The quality assurance system shall be incorporated into the strategy of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and efficiently support its development. It includes processes verifying whether the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector fulfils its mandate while taking account of its type and specific characteristics.</p>	<p>Standard 1: Mission, Impact, Innovation: and Standard 2: Intellectual Contributions, Impact and Alignment with Mission</p> <p>Eligibility Criteria E: Oversight, Sustainability and Continuous Improvement)</p>
<p>1.3 At all levels, all representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall be involved in developing the quality assurance system and its implementation, in particular students, mid-level faculty staff, professors and administrative and technical staff. Quality assurance responsibilities must be transparently and clearly assigned.</p>	<p>Standard 1: Mission, Impact, Innovation</p>
<p>1.4 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall periodically analyse the relevance of its quality assurance system and make the necessary adjustments.</p>	<p>Eligibility Criteria E: Oversight, Sustainability and Continuous Improvement</p> <p>Standard 1: Mission, Impact, Innovation</p>

Area 2: Governance	
<p>2.1 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the organisational structure and decision-making processes enable the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector to fulfil its mission and to achieve its strategic objectives.</p>	<p>Eligibility Criteria E: Oversight, Sustainability and Continuous Improvement</p> <p>Standard 1: Mission, Impact, Innovation Standard 3: Financial Strategies and Allocation of Resources</p>
<p>2.2 The quality assurance system shall systematically contribute to providing relevant and current quantitative and qualitative information on which the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector relies to make current and strategic decisions.</p>	<p>Standard 1: Mission, Impact, Innovation</p>
<p>2.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector have an appropriate participatory right and that basic conditions are in place, allowing them to independently operate.</p>	<p>Eligibility Criteria B: Collegiate Environment</p> <p>Standard 1: Mission, Impact, Innovation</p>
<p>2.4 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall give consideration to an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development in the completion of its tasks. The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector sets objectives in this area and implements them.</p>	<p>Eligibility Criteria C: Commitment to Corporate and Social Responsibility</p>
<p>2.5 To carry out its tasks, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall promote equal opportunities and actual gender equality for its staff and students. The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector sets objectives in this area and also implements them.</p>	<p>Eligibility Criteria C: Commitment to Corporate and Social Responsibility</p>

Area 3: Teaching, research and services	
<p>3.1 The activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall correspond to its type, specific features and strategic objectives. They shall mainly relate to teaching, research and services and be carried out in accordance with the principle of freedom and independence within the limits of the mandate of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.</p> <p>3.2 The quality assurance system shall provide for a periodic evaluation of teaching and research activities, of services and of results achieved in these areas.</p>	<p>Standard 2: Intellectual Contributions, Impact and Alignment with Mission</p> <p>Standard 6: Faculty Management and Support</p> <p>Standard 8: Curricula Management and Assurance of Learning (satisfactory as regards HEdA standards 3.1 / 3.2 but only with focus on teaching/learning)</p> <p>Standard 9: Curriculum Content</p> <p>Standard 10: Student-Faculty Interactions</p> <p>Standard 11: Degree Programme, Educational Level, Structure and Equivalence</p> <p>Standard 12: Teaching Effectiveness</p> <p>Standard 14: Executive Education</p> <p>Standard 15: Faculty Qualifications and Engagement</p>
<p>3.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that principles and objectives linked to the European Higher Education Area are taken into consideration.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>3.4 The quality assurance system shall ensure compliance with the criteria for admission, for the assessment of student performance and for issuing final diplomas according to the mission of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. These criteria shall be defined, communicated and applied systematically, transparently and consistently.</p>	<p>Standard 4: Student Admissions, Progression and Career Development</p>

Area 4: Resources	
<p>4.1 With its competent authorities, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall assure that its personnel resources, infrastructure and financial means allow for operating on a going concern basis and for achieving its strategic objectives. The origin and allocation of financial resources and financing conditions shall be transparent.</p>	<p>Standard 3: Financial Strategies and Allocation of Resources</p>
<p>4.2 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the entire staff is qualified according to the type and specific characteristics of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. To this end, it shall also provide for its periodic assessment.</p>	<p>Standard 5: Faculty Sufficiency and Deployment</p> <p>Standard 6: Faculty Management and Support</p> <p>Standard 7: Professional Staff Sufficiency and Deployment</p> <p>Standard 15 Faculty Qualifications and Engagement</p>
<p>4.3 The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector supports the career development of its entire staff, particularly the new generation of scientists.</p>	<p>Standard 6: Faculty Management and Support</p> <p>Standard 7: Professional Staff Sufficiency and Deployment</p>
Area 5: Internal and external communication	
<p>5.1 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall make public its quality assurance strategy and ensure that the provisions corresponding to quality assurance processes and their results are known to employees, students and, if necessary, external stakeholders.</p>	<p>None: It is the school's decision as to whether it publishes PRT reports</p> <p>AACSB's Confidentiality Policy states: "All documentation filed with AACSB by schools involved in the accreditation process (initial or continuous improvement reviews) are considered the property of the school filing the documents. AACSB will not release any of these documents without the written permission of the school or as may be required by law". Policy available here.</p>
<p>5.2 The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall regularly publish objective information</p>	<p>Standard 4: Student Admissions, Progression and Career Development</p>

about its activities, its study programmes and the qualifications awarded.	
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7.2 Mapping of the procedures

AAQ	AACSB
Size and composition of expert panels	
<p>The expert group appointed by the agency shall be composed of at least 5 people and possesses national and international experience and the knowledge necessary to accomplish its task, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Experience in leading the internal quality assurance and development of HE institutions; – Experience of teaching and research and, if necessary, a non-academic perspective; – Adequate knowledge of the Swiss higher education landscape; – Active knowledge of the language of the procedure; – Ideally, the chair of the group (peer leader) shall be an active member of management at a HE institution. In addition, one member of the group must come from the student body. 	<p>In AACSB global operations, the panel consist of 3 members – 1 team chair and 2 additional panel members (all deans from accredited schools). In the accreditation process with NVAO, 1 secretary and 1 student are added to the team. Additionally, one of the thesis reviewers (which is done separately prior to the visit) also joins the team during the visit.</p> <p>1 additional expert</p> <p>The joint AACSB/NVAO panel is composed of 6 members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 AACSB volunteers (deans from accredited schools) - 1 student representative - 1 secretary - 1 NVAO expert, usually part of the thesis advisory panel. Thesis review is done separately prior to the visit.
Competencies in the expert panel Body responsible for selection	
<p>The group is to have an international dimension if necessary; it ought to be balanced and take account of the gender, origin and age of the experts, as well as the specific characteristics of the institution and, if necessary, its particular teaching methods. The experts must be independent and be able to make impartial judgments.</p> <p>During the opening meeting for the procedure, the profile of the expert group shall be discussed with the HE institution. A long list of potential names for the expert</p>	<p>The Peer Review Team (PRT) Chair is a dean from an accredited school with extensive experience serving on Peer Review Teams, who is from a comparable or aspirant school and/or familiar with the type of school and/or education system in the country. Following assignment of the Chair, two additional team members will be selected by AACSB based upon eligibility, experience, suitability and availability. These individuals are also deans of accredited schools. PRT members may continue to be assigned to</p>

<p>group shall then be submitted to the HE institution. Persons suspected of having a conflict of interests or a lack of independence in relation to the HE institution shall be removed from the list.</p> <p>The agency shall submit the long list to the Accreditation Council for approval and shall then establish an expert group and appoint the peer leader.</p>	<p>peer review teams for three years after leaving their position (i.e. retirement, change in role, etc.). Potential conflicts of interest are also considered. Suggestions for team members by the institutions applying for accreditation will be considered but are not guaranteed.</p>
<p>Duration of on-site visit Programme of on-site visit</p>	
<p>One day will be spent on a preliminary visit; two and a half days will be spent on the on-site-visit. AAQ has a standardised the programme of the on-site visits.</p>	<p>The school should expect initial accreditation visits to last at least two and a half days. The visit may be shortened or lengthened by agreement between the school and Team Chair. Team members generally arrive in the late afternoon or early evening prior to the first full day. One day is added in the case of a joint visit.</p> <p>For CIR: 1.5 days</p> <p>For joint visits: 0.5–1 additional day</p>
<p>Decision-making body</p>	
<p>The Accreditation Council shall base its decision on the agency proposal, the self-assessment report, the expert report and the position statement from the HE institution.</p>	<p>Within 10 days following the on-site visit, the Peer Review Team submits to the school and the Initial Accreditation Committee (or Continuous Improvement Review Committee) a team visit report with the Team’s accreditation recommendation. The school has the option of submitting a response to the PRT report. When concurrence is reached, the PRT and IAC recommendation for accreditation is forwarded for ratification to the AACSB Board of Directors. If the Board concurs, the school is awarded accreditation and joins the AACSB Accreditation Council, with a continuous improvement review to occur in year five.</p>
<p>Publication of results</p>	
<p>The Accreditation Council notifies the HE institution of its decision and publishes a list of accredited HE institutions that have</p>	<p>AACSB does not publish school and team reports. With the NVAO, we have three sets of reports. One for AACSB (drafted by the team chair); one for NVAO for current</p>

<p>obtained the right to use their designation under the HEdA.</p> <p>The agency publishes the documents related to the external evaluation procedure that include the expert report, the agency accreditation proposal, the position statement of the HE institution, the decision of the Accreditation Council and, when applicable, the results of the procedure verifying the fulfilment of the conditions. The publication is settled in the contract signed between the agency and the HE institution.</p>	<p>programmes (drafted by the secretary in collaboration with the Team Chair), and potentially a third report for NVAO for new programmes (drafted by the secretary in collaboration with the Team Chair). NVAO requires one report per programme reviewed.</p> <p>AACSB does not publish PRT reports, but the school can decide to do so (see confidentiality policy).</p>
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