aaq

swiss agency of
accreditation and
quality assurance

Focus on quality

AAQ in brief

The Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance safeguards and promotes the quality of teaching and research at higher education institutions in Switzerland. It is independent, uses internationally recognised methods and is able to draw on the knowledge and experience of leading experts.

The AAQ develops guidelines and quality standards, conducts accreditation and evaluation procedures, and works at an international level. It perceives its role as an external partner for quality assurance and development, and provides a range of supporting services. The AAQ operates under the authority of the Swiss Accreditation Council.

Key data:

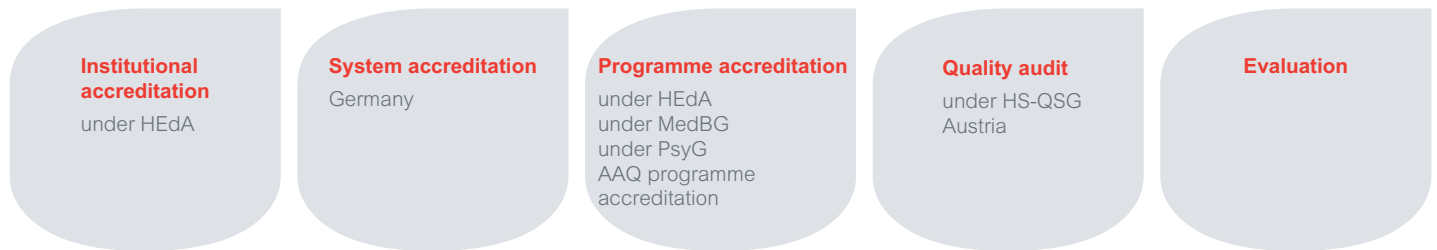|	
Universities:	some 85 accreditations and quality audits
Universities of applied sciences:	some 100 accreditations and evaluations
Abroad:	several system accreditations, quality audits and evaluations
Law on the medical professions:	more than 110 accreditations of basic and postgraduate courses

Versatile activities

The Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (AAQ) was created on the legal basis of the Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Swiss Higher Education Sector (HEdA) on 1 January 2015. It is the successor organisation to the OAQ and is subordinate to the Swiss Accreditation Council.

The AAQ carries out institutional accreditations pursuant to HEdA in Switzerland. In addition, the Federal Law on Medical Professions and the Federal Law on Psychology Professions assign to the AAQ the role of accreditation agency for basic and postgraduate medical education and postgraduate education in psychotherapy.

The AAQ is part of an international network and is authorised to conduct procedures in Germany and Austria. International evaluations are also carried out in specific cases. As an external partner, the AAQ supports universities to formulate their quality assurance systems, thus contributing to the development of a culture of quality.

Institutional accreditation	**System accreditation**	**Programme accreditation**	**Quality audit**	**Evaluation**
under HEdA	Germany	under HEdA under MedBG under PsyG AAQ programme accreditation	under HS-QSG Austria	

Exacting processes and procedures

Institutional accreditation

The institutional accreditation procedure focuses on the internal quality assurance system in a higher education institution.

Since the introduction of the HEdA, institutional accreditation has become a requirement for the right to use a specific designation in Switzerland – institutional accreditation is therefore mandatory for any institution wishing to call itself a University, University of Applied Sciences or University of Teacher Education. The criteria are defined in Article 30 HEdA. The AAQ conducts institutional accreditation procedures in Switzerland. The decision-making body is the Swiss Accreditation Council.

System accreditation

The system accreditation procedure appraises the internal quality assurance system in a higher education institution in Germany in terms of its teaching.

As an approved agency in Germany, AAQ checks that all the structures and processes of relevance to teaching and learning meet the criteria of the German Accreditation Council. If a higher education institution is system-accredited, it can take responsibility for reviewing its own degree courses – programme accreditation is no longer obligatory. If a decision is made in favour of accreditation, AAQ will award the seal of the German Accreditation Council.

Programme accreditation

Programme accreditation procedures assess Bachelor and Master degree courses and continuing education programmes (MAS or EMBA), as well as postgraduate programmes in the fields of medicine or psychology.

Programme accreditation based on HEdA is voluntary in Switzerland. Institutional accreditation is a pre-requisit for programme accreditation. Universities that are not (yet) institutionally accredited are offered the option of an AAQ programme accreditation. The AAQ carries out programme accreditation procedures in the fields of graduate and postgraduate education in medicine (law on medical professions) and advanced training in psychology (law on psychology professions) on a separate legal basis.

Quality audit

Quality audits are procedures that focus on the internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions.

Quality audits were carried out in Switzerland in a four-year cycle between 2004 and 2014 until the introduction of the HEdA. Quality audits at Swiss HEIs have been replaced by institutional accreditation under the HEdA. AAQ conducts quality audits in Austria. These are based on Austrian legislation (Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education - HS-QSG), which requires quality management systems in Austrian universities to be duly certified.
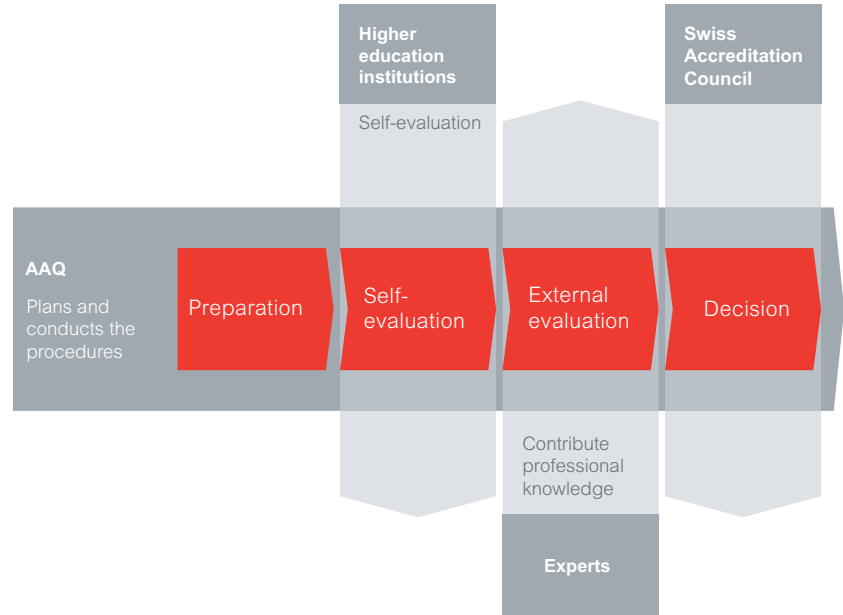
Evaluation

Evaluations review study programmes and institutions. They are carried out on a voluntary basis and do not lead to a formal decision on accreditation by a federal authority.

AAQ conducts evaluations in Switzerland and at international level. The procedures and standards are adapted to the university that submits a request and cater for its specific requirements.

Transparency at every stage

The AAQ quality assurance procedures are transparent at every stage and lead to a reasoned decision. They respect the autonomy of the HEI and hold to the principle that the accountability and responsibility for a quality assurance system lie primarily with the university itself. By mandating qualified experts for external reviews, the AAQ makes a vital contribution to the development and refinement of the quality assurance system. In terms of their practical implementation, the AAQ's procedures are based on principles accepted throughout Europe and take account of the specific features of the various types of higher education institution.

After a procedure has been concluded, the AAQ publishes the procedural report on its website.

Higher education institutions

Self-evaluation

Swiss Accreditation Council

AAQ

Plans and conducts the procedures

| Preparation | Self-evaluation | External evaluation | Decision |

Contribute professional knowledge

Experts

Internationally acknowledged

AAQ has an international network. It works with foreign agencies and institutions, making an active contribution to the development of a culture of quality in the European higher education area. Its international outlook ensures that European standards are adhered to and that best practices from throughout Europe are applied.

AAQ meets the requirements of the ESG (European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area). It is a member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), and is registered in the EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education). In addition, AAQ is a member of the QAN (Quality Audit Network) and co-founder of the Réseau FrAQ-Sup, a network of French-speaking agencies.

The AAQ is approved by the German Accreditation Council to conduct system and programme accreditation procedures in Germany. AAQ's procedures comply with the standards of the ENAEE (European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education) and thus it is entitled to award the EUR-ACE label to engineering courses.

Quality first and foremost

Quality is of the utmost priority for the AAQ. It places the same high demands for quality on its own work and processes as those placed on the procedures conducted at the HEIs. The AAQ views itself as a learning organisation with a corporate culture marked by respect, mutual support and loyalty.

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