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Institutional accreditation University of St.Gallen, Verification of the fulfilment of conditions

Report | 21 April 2024



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Part A

Decision of the Swiss Accreditation Council

21 June 2024





The Swiss Accreditation Council publishes its accreditation decisions:
<https://akkreditierungsrat.ch/en/decisions/>



Part B

Verification report

19 April 2024





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1 Verification procedure

1.1 General information

On 25 March 2022, the Swiss Accreditation Council accredited the University of St.Gallen as a university subject to one (1) condition.

In its decision, the Accreditation Council specified the following deadline and means of verification:¹

Deadline: 24 months. The University of St.Gallen must submit a report on the fulfilment of the conditions to the Accreditation Council by 24 March 2024.

Means of verification: Verification will be performed *sur dossier* with two experts.

The Accreditation Council has commissioned the Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (AAQ) to verify the fulfilment of the conditions.

1.2 Procedure

The University of St.Gallen sent the report on the fulfilment of the conditions to the SAC on 19 February 2024. The SAC office forwarded the report to the AAQ on 20 February 2024, with the mandate to carry out the evaluation in accordance with the established procedures. The AAQ then recruited two members of the group of experts who had carried out the external evaluation during the 2022 accreditation and signed a new mandate contract with them:

- Hanappi-Egger, Edeltraud. Professor for Gender and Diversity in Organizations, WU Wien
- Waarts, Eric. Professor of Marketing at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University (RSM)

On 20 March 2024, the preliminary report on the verification of the fulfilment of the conditions was forwarded to the University of St.Gallen, which expressed its considerations in a formal position statement on 16 April 2024. Based on the experts' report and the University of St.Gallen's position statement, the AAQ then finalised the report and included a proposal addressed to the SAC. The complete dossier was forwarded to the SAC Secretariat on 19 April 2024 and was dealt with by the SAC at its meeting on 21 June 2024.

¹ HEdA Accreditation Ordinance, Article 15(3)

2 Verification report

2.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of conditions

Condition 1:

Die Universität St. Gallen muss eine übergreifende Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie entwickeln, die aufzeigt, wie die Universität für sie relevante SDGs identifiziert und welche Ziele sie sich für die ökologische, soziale und ökonomische Nachhaltigkeit setzt.

The University of St.Gallen must develop an overarching sustainability strategy that shows how the university identifies SDGs that are relevant to it and what goals it sets itself for ecological, social and economic sustainability.

Description

Over the last two years, the University of St.Gallen (HSG) has initiated a threefold effort in the field of sustainability to fulfil the condition issued as a result of its institutional accreditation procedure (2021/22). This effort included updating HSG's Integrated Sustainability Strategy, identifying and integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), as well as defining and monitoring sustainability objectives, both medium- and long-term.

A Working Group on Social and Economic responsibility was established in the autumn of 2022 to support the Delegate for Responsibility & Sustainability in developing an integrated sustainability strategy that encompasses economic, social and environmental dimensions. To achieve this goal, stakeholder engagement and insight gathering – from 16 internal and 10 external actors at different hierarchical and functional levels – were carried out through interviews and workshops. Benchmarking with relevant peers was also performed.

From these consultations the concept of Societal Engagement (SE) emerged as HSG's relevant impact in the various dimensions of sustainability. Going beyond the transfer and implementation of knowledge, in an extensive interpretation of the university's 'Third Mission', SE encompasses the fostering of innovation and the establishment of collaboration and co-creation with actors across different sectors.

HSG's Integrated Sustainability Strategy and related core activities were updated to include SE. Specifically, the corresponding overarching goal 'to foster knowledge exchange and collaboration' was added to HSG's strategy along with the 'core activity' of societal engagement.

Further features of the updated strategy include a stronger emphasis on sustainable infrastructure operations integrated into the fourth core activity. Finally, a cross-cutting leadership commitment to sustainability aimed at the top-down management of activities carried out by various actors in HSG's four core activity fields (teaching, research, societal engagement and campus & operations) was also introduced as a new feature.

The stakeholder engagement and benchmarking described above also contributed to HSG's revised approach to the United Nations' 17 SDGs in its own sustainability strategy, prompted by the experts' analyses in the external evaluation.

The school undertook a systematic assessment of the impact of all its activities on each SDG; the significance of each action's impact was then categorised according to a three-level scale of 'strategic', 'significant' and 'supportive'. These insights will be used as a steering tool to direct the definition of future strategies beyond 2025.

In addition, the SDG's analysis and grouping contributed to the integration of three action pathways within HSG's strategy. Intersecting all core activities, the action pathways are

intended as a 'guiding light' or inspiring approach for actors across the university in the development of their activities and the definition of specific goals.

The third and final action undertaken by HSG involved its Strategic Plan, the main planning and controlling instrument within the university's management toolkit. The Plan sets principles and goals within eight focal areas; their achievement is pursued through measures and initiatives and is monitored against 24 identified 'criteria of success'. Every two years, principals from each focus area gather and document information and data pertaining to the attainment of these strategic objectives. The qualitative and quantitative evaluation of goals is integrated in a monitoring dashboard (strategy cockpit) and submitted for review by the President's Board to determine the strategy's overall fulfilment as well as any possible corrective actions.

Within the current HSG Strategic Plan 2025, which came into effect in April 2022, sustainability was transversally integrated across several dimensions and placed more explicitly at the core of the university's activities.

Targets and initiatives were identified for three focus areas:

- 1) Responsibility & Sustainability
- 2) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- 3) International and Regional Engagement.

Moreover, due to the overarching nature of sustainability, the Plan integrated sustainability across all dimensions of the university, including teaching, research and operations. Finally, objectives within the new core activity of Societal Engagement were approved by the President's Board in December 2023, with plans for integration into the future Strategic Plan beyond 2025.

Analysis

HSG has started an intensive process to develop a sustainability strategy and to be able to reflect systematically on the relevance of the SDGs. Likewise, the HSG leadership has established the Working Group on Social and Economic Responsibility. Stakeholder involvement, which is an important aspect of both the development and implementation of the strategy, included workshops and interviews with 16 internal and 10 external key players. The result of the stakeholders' feedback was a clearer picture on the impact that HSG can have on various SDGs.

International benchmarking was also part of the process, allowing HSG to identify its positioning within the HEI sustainability community.

HSG has specified a new goal signalling its commitment to sustainable development and social impact. This leadership commitment is important for all staff, faculty and students to understand that sustainability is of strategic importance. The introduction of a new core activity, namely societal engagement, is an important sign that HSG will actively co-create sustainability knowledge with its external environment. The identification of three pathways linked to the university's core activities – research, teaching, societal engagement (new) and campus & operations – offers a consistent framework for all areas of HSG's operations. HSG has set objectives with respect to the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability and has specified milestones as part of the monitoring system. It should be mentioned that HSG has revised its process of identifying relevant SDGs and has evaluated all SDGs related to the impact that the university can have on these SDGs: supportive (three), significant (six) and strategic contributions (eight). Thus, a stronger and more visible connection has been made to the motto of the university, 'from Insight to Impact'.



In summary it can be said that HSG has come up with a very consistent and comprehensive sustainability strategy that includes a differentiated view of its impact on the different SDGs as well as an implementation plan.

HSG has proven that it worked on the condition and fulfilled the identified subtasks, namely developing a comprehensive sustainability strategy, showing how the university identifies relevant SDGs and presenting which economic, environmental and social sustainability objectives HSG is setting for itself.

The group of experts finds that the condition is fulfilled.

2.2 AAQ proposal

The AAQ takes note of the analysis and conclusions from the group of experts, which it considers well-founded and sound. The AAQ finds the measures implemented by the University of St.Gallen convincing with respect to the fulfilment of the condition, and proposes to the Swiss Accreditation Council to confirm the University of St.Gallen's institutional accreditation for the remaining term of validity, i.e. until 24 March 2029.

2.3 Statement by the higher education institution

The University of St.Gallen expresses its satisfaction with the positive assessment provided by the group of experts and the valuable insights received, while also mentioning the positive collaboration established with AAQ.



Part C

Statement of the University St.Gallen

16 April 2024





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St.Gallen, 16 April 2024

Institutional Accreditation: Position statement on the verification of the fulfilment of conditions report

Dear Dr. Grolimund,

The condition review report was received on 20 March 2024, and we appreciate the opportunity to provide you with a short statement in response.

We are pleased with the report's positive assessment, confirming that the University of St.Gallen has successfully fulfilled the condition. This acknowledgment of our comprehensive sustainability strategy and engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is encouraging. The report highlights our efforts in establishing a clear framework for sustainability, involving key stakeholders, and integrating societal engagement into our core activities. These initiatives reflect our commitment to impactful sustainability, aligned with our motto, "from Insight to Impact".

We value the constructive feedback provided by the review panel and the collaboration with AAQ and look forward to further enhancing our institutional quality and societal impact.

Sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Manuel Ammann
President

From insight to impact.

University of St.Gallen – School of Management,
Economics, Law, Social Sciences,
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