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# AAQ Evaluations

Guide | June 2020





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## **AAQ evaluations – made-to-measure procedures**

Would you like to have the internal quality assurance processes appraised at your higher education institution, your entity or for your study programme? Would you also like to receive evidence to help you develop and improve standards of quality?

The evaluation procedures provided by the AAQ are in line with internationally recognised practice and principles of quality assurance procedures, in particular with part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), and examine the objectives of applicants in the process. The object of AAQ evaluations may be institutions, basic and postgraduate study programmes or other entities in the Swiss higher education sector. The evaluation is voluntary and does not lead to a formal decision by the Swiss Accreditation Council (SAC).

The quality standards for study programmes take into account part 1 of the ESG.

The evaluation procedures are carried out in partnership with all parties and help to improve the quality of the entity to be evaluated and to develop a culture of quality in the relevant institution. The procedures focus on dialogue between stakeholders at every stage. A central element is the on-site visit of the AAQ with designated experts who are appointed as peers. They are selected specifically to match the profile of the entity to be evaluated.

The evaluated entity receives a seal of quality ('AAQ evaluated') from the AAQ. The seal certifies an evaluation has been carried out by the AAQ. However, in contrast to the evaluation report, it makes no statement about the quality of the object of evaluation. The evaluation report is published on the AAQ website.

The fundamental principles and the evaluation procedure of the AAQ are documented in this guide.

## 1 Objective, principles, sequence of the evaluation procedure

### 1.1 Objective, object and quality standards

Evaluations are external quality assurance procedures. They describe and assess the current status of quality assurance measures. They also create a framework for a process of reflection, the aim of which is continuous quality development. The evaluation takes the form of a peer review procedure.

A binding definition of the object of the procedure – the entity to be assessed – is drawn up when submitting an application for an AAQ evaluation. The quality standards consulted for the evaluation are binding for all parties and are duly recorded in the contract with the client. They form the basis of the self-assessment report and serve the experts in their external evaluation, in which they assess the different quality standards. Throughout the procedure, the evaluation focuses not only on the appraisal of the standards, but also on the development of quality.

The quality standards used by the AAQ in the evaluation procedures are existing sets of standards: the quality standards for institutional accreditation pursuant to HEdA, the quality standards for programme accreditation pursuant to HEdA and the standards for the quality audits according to HS-QSG. Depending on its objective, the client selects a set of standards. Additional quality standards can be incorporated into the evaluation procedure and appraised by the experts on request. These standards create value added by facilitating an assessment that is directed at the requirements of the entity to be evaluated.

The AAQ thus makes a distinction between evaluation and accreditation. After an AAQ institutional evaluation, it is not possible to apply for an AAQ institutional accreditation according to the HEdA within three years.

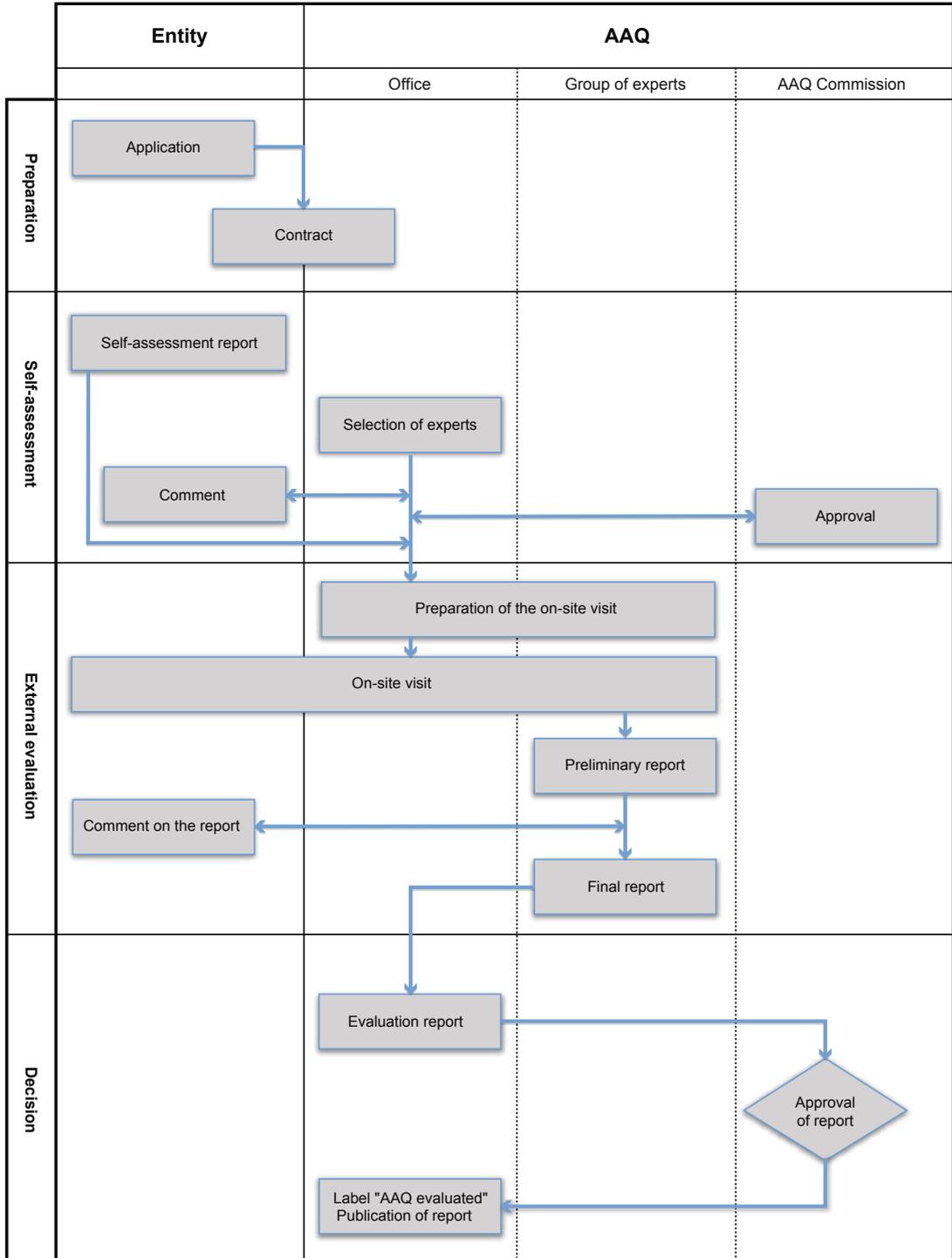
### 1.2 Sequence of the procedure

The evaluation procedure comprises the following stages:

- Filing of the application to the agency
- Preparation/opening of the procedure, including conclusion of contract
- Self-assessment by the entity to be evaluated
- Selection of experts
- External evaluation (on-site visit) by the expert group, including a report
- Position statement of the evaluated entity
- Report on the evaluation by the agency, approval of report by the AAQ Commission
- Award of the 'AAQ evaluated' quality seal, including specification of year and publication of the evaluation report. The quality seal is linked to the evaluation report and the quality standards.

An evaluation procedure takes at least 12 months from the signing of contracts to the award of the 'AAQ evaluated' seal by the AAQ.

**Schematic overview of the evaluation procedure**



## **2 Opening of the procedure**

### **2.1 Application for evaluation and preparatory meeting**

The client submits an application for an evaluation procedure to the AAQ. This application must be signed by the management of the Higher Education Institution (HEI).<sup>1</sup>

Before starting the evaluation procedure, the AAQ holds a preparatory meeting with the client in order to discuss the object of the evaluation and the sequence, content, language, focal points and costs of the procedure. The AAQ submits an overview of services and a statement of costs to the client.

### **2.2 Conclusion of contract and costs of the procedure**

The AAQ draws up a contract with the client stipulating the object and the standards, and the performance, time frame and costs of the procedure.

The costs of the evaluation are borne by the client. The AAQ charges the costs in accordance with the Fee Regulations of the Swiss Accreditation Council (FeeReg-SAC) of 12 March 2015<sup>2</sup>. The costs depend mainly on the number of experts and the duration of the on-site visit. The design of made-to-measure quality standards may also be invoiced.

The client pays an instalment of 50% of the all-inclusive set price at the beginning of the evaluation procedure. The second instalment is the remaining 50% of the all-inclusive price and must be paid when the self-assessment report is handed over to the AAQ. If these payments are not made on schedule, the AAQ will discontinue the evaluation procedure; the agency may postpone the on-site visit by experts until the amount owing has been transferred.

## **3 Self-assessment report**

The self-assessment report of the entity to be evaluated forms the basis of the on-site visit carried out by experts and accompanied by the AAQ. The quality of the self-assessment in terms of its completeness and validity therefore underpins the procedure and contributes to a better understanding for the expert group.

The self-assessment report consists of the following sections:

- Description of the entity to be evaluated (portrait, profile, relevant key data, etc.)
- Self-assessment of the quality standards
- Appraisal of strengths and weaknesses

The AAQ recommends that all relevant groups in the entity – academic directors, teaching staff, mid-level faculty staff, students, quality assurance managers and administration – participate in the self-assessment process if at all possible. The appointment of a working group is a constructive step.

The report is analytical and self-critical. It contains information, descriptions and

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1 The application form can be downloaded at <http://aaq.ch/akkreditierung/evaluation/> under Downloads.

2 The Fee Regulations can be downloaded at [http://akkreditierungsrat.ch/en/download/Akkreditierungsrat/GebV-SAR\\_EN.pdf](http://akkreditierungsrat.ch/en/download/Akkreditierungsrat/GebV-SAR_EN.pdf).

analyses on the basis of which it is possible to assess the extent to which the quality standards are fulfilled.

The self-assessment – without appendices – should not comprise more than 50 pages. The AAQ will provide an electronic template on request. The AAQ is also available to clarify technical questions during the compilation of the self-assessment.

#### **4 Selection of experts**

The expert group is compiled in the light of the profile and development targets of the entity to be evaluated. As a rule, the group consists of at least three but no more than five people. The final number of experts is specified by agreement with the client at the opening session and confirmed in the contract.

The AAQ undertakes the selection of experts in accordance with criteria that comply with international specifications:

- Independence of the entity to be evaluated
- Knowledge of the Swiss education system
- Knowledge of the procedural language
- International activities
- Gender balance

Depending on the object of the procedure, the group also includes students or representatives of the labour market.

The body of assembled experts shall possess expertise of use to the entity to be evaluated. The competence profile of the expert group is defined on a binding basis and is deemed to be the starting point for the selection of experts.

The AAQ then prepares a 'longlist' of possible experts. The AAQ Commission approves the list of experts in its capacity as the supervisory body of the AAQ.

The AAQ mandates the experts, appoints a leader of the peer group and informs the HEI about the expert group.

#### **5 External evaluation**

The external evaluation (on-site visit) serves to facilitate a deeper critical analysis of the self-assessment report and to evaluate whether the quality standards are fulfilled. To this end, the experts hold separate discussions with all the relevant groups of people (in every case a representative of the management of the HEI, those responsible for the entity to be evaluated, quality assurance officers and teacher and student representatives). The AAQ coordinates arrangements for the on-site visit with the entity to be evaluated on the one hand, and with the expert group on the other. The group of experts is briefed by the AAQ at the beginning of each on-site visit.

## 6 Expert report and position statement of the evaluated entity

The experts compile a report based on the documentation submitted and the on-site visit. This comprises an analysis of the documents provided, the conclusions of the evaluation and the review of each quality standard. Each quality standard is assessed according to a scale comprising four levels: entirely fulfilled, largely fulfilled, partially fulfilled and not fulfilled. The report also contains recommendations for ongoing quality development.

The AAQ project manager provides editorial assistance for the expert group, ensuring that the report is complete and has addressed all the areas of relevance. The AAQ provides the expert group with a template for the structure of the report.

The evaluated entity receives the report in order that it can make a statement. The expert group finalises the report once this has been done.

## 7 Final stage

The AAQ completes the report. This contains the evaluation of the experts and the position statement of the evaluated entity. The AAQ evaluation report is submitted to the AAQ Commission for approval. In its capacity as the supervisory body of the AAQ, the AAQ Commission checks that the procedure has been properly conducted and approves the AAQ evaluation report.

### 7.1 Certificate and seal

Once the evaluation report has been approved by the AAQ Commission, the agency awards the 'AAQ evaluated' seal of quality, which also specifies the year in which the procedure took place.

The entity may use the seal in its communication.

The quality seal is linked to the evaluation report and the quality standards applied for the evaluation.

The client undertakes to notify the AAQ immediately of any substantial changes within the entity.



### 7.2 Publication of findings

The AAQ publishes the evaluation report with due regard for personal privacy and data protection, as well as the names of the participating experts.

### 7.3 Validity period, follow-up and re-evaluation

The AAQ does not stipulate a validity period for the evaluation. Two years after evaluation, the unit will provide to AAQ a follow-up report on the recommendations. The report should be written in letter form and is published on the AAQ website. It does, however, recommend a re-evaluation within seven years.

## 8 Overview of standards/costs of AAQ evaluations

The costs are based on the Fee Regulations of the Swiss Accreditation Council (FeeReg-SAC) of 12 March 2015 and may vary depending on the number of experts and the length of the on-site visit.

<b>Standards</b>		
<b>Standards Institution</b>		<b>Standards Programme</b>
<b>Focus Process</b>	<b>Focus Control</b>	
<p><b>Institutional Evaluation</b></p> <p>Costs as per FeeReg-SAC of 3.5-day on-site visit, group of five experts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct costs: CHF 32,000</li> <li>• Indirect costs: CHF 27,000</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quality audit</b></p> <p>Costs as per FeeReg-SAC of 3.5-day on-site visit, group of five experts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct costs: CHF 32,000</li> <li>• Indirect costs: CHF 27,000</li> </ul>	<p><b>Programme Evaluation</b></p> <p>Costs as per FeeReg-SAC of 1.5-day on-site visit, group of five experts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct costs: CHF 13,000</li> <li>• Indirect costs: CHF 20,000</li> </ul>

## **9 Code of conduct**

The evaluation procedures are to be carried out as part of a comprehensive partnership based on the principles of trust, autonomy, responsibility, subsidiarity and participation. The agency and HE institutions together are to take responsibility for instilling trust during the preparation, completion and monitoring of evaluations. Jointly, they are to ensure that the experts can work independently. All interest groups from an HE institution, particularly students, are to be involved in the procedure.

The members of the expert group, the HE institution representatives and the agency therefore undertake to abide by the following code of conduct, particularly during the on-site visit.

### **Members of the expert group**

The members of the expert group shall abide by the contractual principles of independence and confidentiality. In their assessment, they shall confine themselves to an objective, impartial and factual report.

The experts:

- shall take account of the type and specific characteristics of HE institutions;
- shall be constructive, benevolent and critical when necessary;
- shall be respectful, encouraging a diversity of opinions through open discussion and shall ensure that all partners can express themselves during meetings;
- shall be prepared and shall play an active part in interview and work sessions, while keeping to the schedule;
- shall seek a consensus when taking decisions.

Apart from interviews, members of the expert group shall never communicate directly with the HE institution.

### **Representatives of the HE institution**

Through their attitude, the representatives of the HE institution shall contribute to the success and the constructive atmosphere of on-site visits.

Participants in interviews:

- shall be frank, courteous, cooperative and scrupulously transparent;
- shall respond clearly and constructively;
- shall allow other interview participants to express themselves.

Apart from interviews, HE institution representatives shall never communicate directly with members of the expert group.

**Representatives of the agency**

Agency representatives shall contribute to the success of the evaluation by supporting the HE institution during preparations for the procedure and by lending their support to members of the expert group during the on-site visit.

Agency representatives:

- shall ensure the integrity of the procedure by protecting it against any external influences;
- shall, if necessary, provide information about formal requirements of the procedure;
- shall participate in the entire on-site visit;
- shall lend support to the peer leader and to members of the expert group;
- shall ensure that all important information is collected and that all compulsory requirements of the evaluation are taken into consideration;
- shall not influence opinions of the expert group;
- shall provide communication between the expert group and the HE institution.



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