

Interim evaluation on Reaccreditation

February 2025

1. context of the interim evaluation

After carrying out the first reaccreditations in accordance with the AAQ guidelines of 1 April 2023, AAQ carried out an interim evaluation. The aim was to collect feedback from the HEI on the cooperation with AAQ and the experts¹ and in particular to analyse the new elements in the reaccreditation procedure. To this end, feedback interviews were conducted with five HEI that had completed reaccreditation by the end of 2024. The interviews were conducted using a guiding questionnaire that was made available to the institutions prior to the interviews.

The following institutions took part:

- Hochschule für Wirtschaft Zürich (HWZ)
- Hochschule für Heilpädagogik (HfH)
- Berner Fachhochschule (BFH)
- Pädagogische Hochschule Luzern (PHLU)
- Pädagogische Hochschule Bern (PHBern)

On the HEI side, 1 to 2 people from quality management, HEI development and/or the rectorate were represented. On the AAQ side, the discussions were conducted and recorded by the person responsible for the format and/or the project manager.

2. results of the interim evaluation

2.1 Cooperation with AAQ

The HEI rated the cooperation with AAQ as predominantly positive. The following were particularly emphasised:

- Good support from AAQ throughout the entire process
- Prompt clarification of questions
- Pleasant and professional communication
- Meeting deadlines
- Clear role allocation
- Openness to customisation

Some institutions explicitly expressed their gratitude for the good cooperation and the high quality of AAQ's work.

2.2 Feedback on the experts

¹ One feedback from the workshop at AAQ Day 2022 was that the roles of the actors involved were sometimes unclear. The question of the roles of AAQ and experts was therefore explicitly asked.

The role of the experts was also rated positively overall by the universities. They were particularly appreciated:

- A sound understanding of the HEI on the part of reviewers
- Helpful and differentiated feedback
- Respectful and appreciative communication
- Leading discussions at eye level
- In-depth analysis of the topics
- Clearly defined roles

There was one criticism regarding the understanding of the preliminary visit, which is not yet fully available.

2.3 Feedback on the new elements

Focus topics

The possibility for HEI to choose a focus topic was largely received positively (with the exception of one institution, which was more critical of the concept). However, the associated effort was rated as high and the direct output as rather low. In addition, one institution noted a mixture of peer feedback and assessment.

The focus topic defined by the expert group was also rated positively overall, but the timing of the announcement (on the occasion of the preliminary visit) was perceived as relatively late.

Open Slot "Meet and Greet"

The open-slot format was viewed sceptically by the majority:

- Lack of clarity about meaning and purpose
- Little interest on the part of employees
- The format was perceived as a "foreign body"

However, there was also some positive feedback: It was appreciated that people who could not be included in the discussions during the on-site visit were able to take part

New report format (Accreditation report)

As the new report format was not yet available when these five procedures were opened, there are no empirical values for this interim evaluation. The assessment of the contact persons regarding the new template tends to be rather sceptical, although - as already noted - they have not worked with the new template.

Effort?

The HEI have different assessments of the effort involved. There is a consensus that the shortening of the VOV has made things easier. Some institutions again involved a large number of people for the visit as well as for the self evaluation and therefore consider the considerable effort involved to be partly "home-made". Despite AAQ's recommendation to reduce the number

of participants for the interviews, the HEI frequently utilised the maximum number of participants.

The internal use of resources was reduced due to the fact that the accreditation was being renewed and we knew "how it works". This has, for example, significantly reduced the work involved in editing the self-assessment.

2.6 Further general feedback

The following innovations were rated positively:

- Realignment of the discussions as a "roundtable" as part of the on-site visit
- Involvement of various stakeholder groups in a roundtable discussion
- Shortening the visit to two days (instead of 2.5 days)

One higher education institution suggested an increase in the accreditation period to ten years as a suggestion for improvement. AAQ is not authorised to change the duration of accreditation.

3. learnings and measures

Improving feedback on the HEI's focus topics

- The expert group should present its feedback in more detail in the accreditation report (and not just verbally in the debriefing, as this has already been partially implemented).
- The experts should be made even more aware of the importance of the focus topics.
- The AAQ project manager are briefed to keep an eye on the workload for the universities (e.g. with regard to documents to be submitted)

Adaptation of the experts' focus topics and improved communication

- Close supervision of the experts by the AAQ project manager
- Limitation to one focus topic that is within the scope of the accreditation standards
- Communication to the HEI: It helps if the "accreditation core group" reserves the time slot well in advance (analogous to debriefing)
- The focus topic serves to enable the experts to assess the standards (closing gaps)

Optimisation of the Open Slot

- Transparent communication about the purpose of the format
- Testing new settings, increased moderation (an introductory question as an introduction, etc.)
- Transparent handling of resistance: AAQ is aware of the universities' concerns regarding open slots. The reviewers can categorise any criticism expressed. The format will be continued; it is too early to make a final assessment.

Implementation of the new template (Accreditation report with included self evaluation)

- HEI may of course continue to use their own reporting format for internal purposes.
- The new template is to be used for the official basis for the assessors, AAQ and SAR.

4 Next steps

- Information to project managers (provided in December 2024)
- Implementation of the measures
- Continuation of feedback discussions with the HEI