

## **FAQ – Reaccreditation**

### **Can a higher education institution choose whether to carry out re-accreditation in accordance with the format described in the AAQ Guide or in the same way as initial institutional accreditation?**

No, a choice is not possible. However, there is scope for adjustments (e.g. a longer on-site visit of 2.5 days is still possible). Otherwise, the higher education institution has the option of choosing another agency approved by the Swiss Accreditation Council. These agencies either carry out their procedures according to their own guidelines or adopt the guidelines of AAQ (Recognition Regulations of the Swiss Accreditation Council).

### **Why do higher education institutions prepare their self-evaluation using the template supplied by AAQ?**

The template developed by AAQ is intended to reduce the workload for all parties involved – both higher education institutions and experts – while improving the consistency and traceability of the submitted information. The notes included in the template help institutions provide clear, focused, and structured responses in line with the required standards. The unified format also enables more efficient preparation and execution of the evaluation process.

### **May parts of the self-evaluation report from the first cycle be adopted?**

AAQ assumes that the higher education institutions start with the analysis from the first accreditation for the reaccreditation. Of course, it is legitimate to reuse the self-evaluation report from that time as a basis, which is also possible with the new report format.

### **Do the recommendations from the initial accreditation have to be implemented?**

The recommendations are inputs from the experts that can, but do not have to, be implemented by the higher education institutions. AAQ recommends that when presenting the effectiveness of the initial accreditation in the self-evaluation, the recommendations should also be addressed (depending on the type and number of recommendations, also by way of example).

### **Can it be assumed that the experts know the documents from the initial accreditation?**

The procedural reports of the initial accreditation and the reviews of the requirements are published and brought to the attention of the experts. The self-evaluation reports "belong" to the institutions and are not forwarded by AAQ; they may be submitted as an enclosure to the self-evaluation report for reaccreditation. It should be borne in mind that the experts cannot study all the comprehensive documents in detail.

### **Isn't the setting of focus topics more of an additional effort than a relief?**

No, it is a reduction or focussing from the topic setting of the Accreditation Ordinance HFKG. During the on-site visit as part of the reaccreditation, not all standards are examined in equal depth, but rather a selection of them. The focus is set individually or adapted to the higher education institution.

### **Which focus topics are possible? What does "not relevant for accreditation" mean?**

The higher education institution can set the focus on a topic area from the standards (free choice), or on a specific topic that it would like to reflect on with the assessors and thus use directly for quality development (e.g. setting up a new degree programme, department, etc.). The definition is made in consultation with the AAQ project management.

**Can the reviewers choose the same focus topic as the HEI?**

No. The higher education institution chooses its topic first, within the framework of its self-assessment. The evaluators determine their focus during their meeting on the basis of the documents during the preliminary visit. The definition is made in consultation with AAQ project management.

**If the HEI only learns about the focus topic chosen by the evaluators during the preliminary visit, does it not have too little time to prepare it for the on-site visit and invite the relevant people?**

The focus topic of the experts goes deeper into a standard or complex of topics from the Accreditation Ordinance HFKG; corresponding documents should be available and keep the effort manageable. The discussion is conducted as a roundtable with a maximum of 8 persons. The corresponding slot is known early in the procedure and can be reserved by the "core persons".

**Can conditions be imposed on the focus topics?**

The focus topics are not described in detail in the expert report and no conditions can be imposed. However, where the contents touch on the standards, conditions can be imposed on the standards. Feedback on the focus topics is given verbally during the debriefing.

**If a higher education institution has fulfilled the requirements from the initial accreditation, are requirements possible at all during re-accreditation?**

Overall, it can be assumed that fewer conditions will be imposed in the second cycle, but they are still possible: the experts have leeway in interpreting the standards. Moreover, the duration of 7 years should not be underestimated: The demands on the QM system are likely to have changed during this time, as are the higher education institutions themselves.

**One HEI is sceptical about the "Meet & Greet". Can this be omitted?**

In the sense of equal treatment, this slot is provided for at all HEIs. The HEIs may assume that the reviewers know how to classify any particular interests that may be brought forward. The interviews are conducted in a group (no individual interviews).

**Who is the target audience for the "Meet & Greet" and how do potentially interested people find out about it?**

In principle, all members of the HEI can register for this discussion with the experts. AAQ assumes that the HEI will make its self-evaluation report known internally to all members of the institution and asks that they be invited to the "Meet & Greet" in this context. Interested parties are asked to register with AAQ by e-mail. If no one from the HEI registers for the slot, it will be used as an internal working session.

**During the rounds, the discussions are held as a "round table". Does this mean that all discussions are always mixed?**

Separate discussions still take place with the HEI management (on the occasion of the pre-visit - this is thus strengthened overall in terms of content) and with the students. AAQ has had good experience with round table discussions in other procedural formats.

**Can the rounds be conducted digitally or hybrid?**

AAQ has decided to conduct both rounds physically, i.e. on site. In specific individual cases, which are to be discussed with the AAQ project management, it is possible to conduct the preliminary rounds digitally. Hybrid formats are not planned (exception: short-term absence of core staff).

**Wouldn't it be better to conduct all procedures with a smaller pool of well-trained reviewers so that the results are more comparable?**

It is a basic principle that the reviewers should cover the type and characteristics of a HEI. The criteria for the experts are regulated in the accreditation ordinance and require, among other things, active experience in the management of a higher education institution. AAQ also examines other criteria that are important to the respective higher education institution in order to put together a panel that is as suitable as possible. The principle of profile discussion and long-listing developed by AAQ has proven its worth. For these reasons, it is neither possible nor desirable for the procedures to be carried out by a small pool of reviewers.

**Are the experts for re-accreditation the same as for the first accreditation?**

The appointment of experts works according to the same principle (profile discussion, longlist) as in the first accreditation. The higher education institution therefore has the opportunity to comment on this. It can be an advantage if one person from the expert group was already present at the initial accreditation, but this is not mandatory.

**How are the roles of the actors in the procedure defined?**

The *Swiss Accreditation Council* makes the decision on admission to the procedure, approves the longlists and makes the accreditation decision. The SAR publishes the accreditation decision.

The *agency* carries out the procedure (AAQ project management). This includes planning the procedure, putting together the expert group, training and supervising the experts, communicating with the HEI and supporting it throughout the procedure, and editing the first draft of the expert report. The agency (AAQ Directorate) writes the accreditation application (in accordance with the HFKG ordinance). The agency publishes the expert opinion.

The *experts* carry out an assessment of the quality standards and are responsible for the expert report. They conduct the interviews during the visits and write the accreditation proposal (in accordance with the HFKG ordinance).