

# **„Systemakkreditierung“ Expectations, Experiences and Challenges of Institutional Accreditation in Germany**

***ECA 1<sup>st</sup> Regional Thematic Seminar  
„Institutional Accreditations in Europe – 2 Cases“  
Lisbon, 31 January 2017***

Jürgen Petersen

Zentrale Evaluations- und  
Akkreditierungsagentur (ZEVA)

Lilienthalstr. 1

30179 Hannover

<http://www.zeva.org>

# Outline

- (1) Context
- (2) Expectations
- (3) Experiences
- (4) Challenges

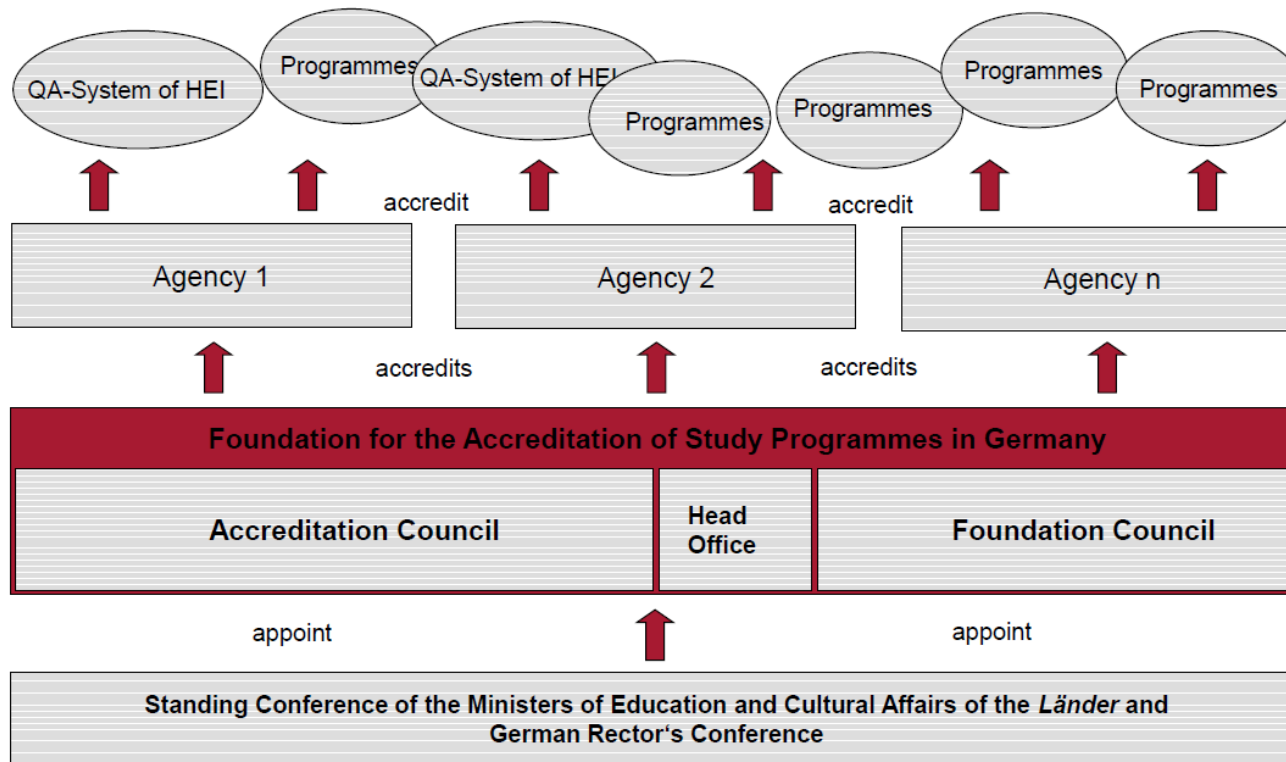
# (1) Context

# (1) Context: Higher Education in Germany (2015/16)

- 426 Higher Education Institutions
  - 107 universities, 212 universities of applied sciences
  - 24 pedagogical and theological HEIs
  - 53 art colleges, 29 colleges of administration
  - (116 private HEIs)
- 18,467 study programs
  - 8,471 Bachelors' programs (45.9%)
  - 8,358 Masters' programs (45.3%)
  - 1,285 state (law, medicine etc.) or clerical exams
  - 353 other (Diploma, Magister etc.)
- Students
  - 506,580 freshmen
  - 2.76 million students enrolled

# (1) Context: External QA in Germany

## The Accreditation System in Germany II



# (1) Context: Quality Assurance & Governance

- Phases of external QA
  - 1st phase (1990s): evaluations, rankings, ZEvA 1997, Ministries approved programs, frameworks for examinations
  - 2nd phase (2000s): 1998 establishment Accreditation Council, since 2003 compulsory program accreditation in most *Länder*
  - 3rd phase (2010s): shift in focus: internal QM, 2007 introduction ‘Systemakkreditierung’
- Parallel developments
  - Bologna process (levels, ECTS, modularization...)
  - Re-location of power: self-administration → centralized leadership

## (2) Expectations

## (2) Expectations: Critique of Program Accreditation

- Infringement on autonomy of HEIs
- Too formalistic (KMK structural guidelines)
- Too bureaucratic (large self-reports, long duration of procedure...)
- Too costly (€ 10 to 30,000 per program)
- Summative review
- Inconsistent decisions (inter-/intra-agency, agencies - AC)
- Minimal benefits for HEI/ (continuous) program improvement
- [.....]



## (2) Expectations: 'Systemakkreditierung'

- Re-locating responsibility for quality of teaching & learning in HEIs
- General, strategic quality management instead of detailed steering
- Development of encompassing quality definition and quality culture
- Cost reduction
- Consistent internal standards and decisions for QA-processes
- Continuous self-improvement, formative elements
- [...]

## (2) Expectations: Introducing Institutional Accreditation

- 2004-2006: Pilot procedures („Prozessakkreditierung“)
- 2006-2011 project + first institutional accreditation (University of Mainz)
- 2007 Decision on implementing „Systemakkreditierung“ (KMK)

## (2) Expectations: Aims (AC)

“In system accreditation, the structures and processes relevant to teaching and learning are assessed on whether they guarantee that the qualification objectives will be achieved, and that there is a high standard of quality for the study programmes, whereby the [European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education \(ESG\)](#), the [guidelines set by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder](#) and the [Accreditation Council criteria](#), apply.

A positive system accreditation attest the higher education institution that its quality assurance system in the field of teaching and learning is appropriate to achieve the qualification objectives and the quality standards of its study programmes.”

## **(2) Expectations: Criteria (AC)**

- **Qualification Objectives**
- **Internal Management in Teaching and Learning**
- **Internal Quality Assurance**
- Reporting System and Data Collection
- Responsibilities
- Documentation
- Cooperation

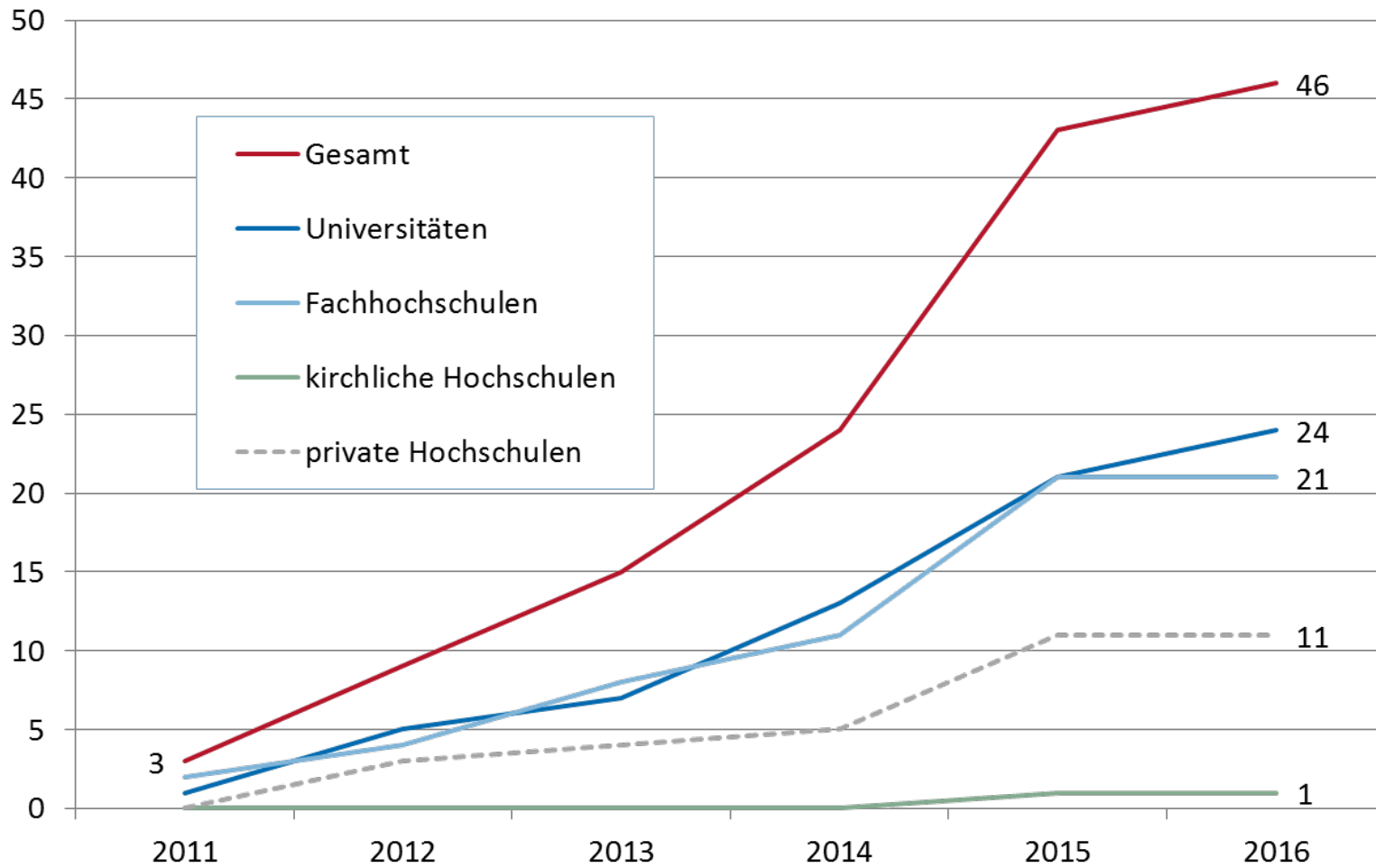
## (2) Expectations: Procedural rules (AR)

- Admission/pre-check (2 years max)
- Peer group 3-1-1 (1 international)
- Self-report (40 pages + annexes)
- First site-visit, incl. (non-random) sample: programs + features ('tracing QM'), add. documents
- [3 months]
- Second site-visit: from process to implementation
- Report, statement, decision: 6/8 years, conditions, suspension, rejection

(since 2013)

## (3) Experiences

# (3) Experiences: Quantitative



## (3) Experiences: Quantitative

- 51 institutionally accredited HEIs (01/2017)
  - 39 state HEIs, 1 church, 11 private
  - 28 Universities, 23 Universities of Applied Sciences



## (3) Experiences: Reflection on first procedures (2010-13)

- Quantitative:
  - Slow start
  - Few agencies
- Validity
  - Start of review process before QM-system implemented
- Applicability
  - Complex review (15% program sample, review in the review)
  - Costly (up to 20 peers, different site-visits)

## (3) Experiences: Change in procedural rules 2013

- Criteria unchanged
- Procedural adjustments
  - Pre-assessment, application process
  - Peers with experience in HE governance/QM
  - No additional program reviews (no additional peers)
  - Sampling on selected characteristics
  - Conditional accreditation
  - Focus on development, recommendations
  - Accreditation of sub-institutional units

## (4) Challenges

## (4) Challenges I: Higher Education Institutions

- Governance
  - Balancing responsibilities and location of power (central vs. decentral, academic self-government vs. administration)
  - Ensuring internal standards, fulfillment of conditions
  - Conflict solution
- Implementation/Quality Management
  - Vertical and horizontal integration, ‘quality culture’
  - Closing of quality cycle(s)
  - Integration of external perspective
  - (Over-)Use of data, setting intervention levels
- Transparency
  - Internal documentation
  - External information

## (4) Challenges II: Procedural/Agencies

- Validity
  - Restricted towards teaching and learning
  - Core aspects of quality not evaluated (teaching, achieved LOs)
  - Review of processes easier than review of ‘quality culture’
- Replicability
  - No given standards/benchmarks for QM-systems
  - Variable assessment by peers, agencies
  - High level of trust needed
- Comparability
  - International acceptance of self-accreditation
  - Re-accreditation of HEIs

## (4) Challenges II: Procedural/Agencies

### A Tale of Two Logics

- Formal Criteria (Accreditation Council)
  - Logic of program accreditation,
  - Oriented towards ‚product‘ (programs) and ‚results‘ (internally accredited programs, self-accreditation),
  - Defined minimal standards (low level).
- Applied Review process (Agencies)
  - Logic of quality cycle,
  - Oriented towards processes and structures (system),
  - Evaluate assumptive future developments, trust.

## (4) Challenges III: Juridical

- February 2016: Constitutional court decision
- December 2016: state treaty, end of 2017: 'procedural rules'
- Program acc., system acc., experimental clause
- Peer-selection to be developed by German Rectors' Conference
- Review by agencies, decision by AC
- Admission of all EQAR-registered agencies
- Split: formal criteria (agency) – ,fachlich-inhaltlich' (peer group)
- Change in Accreditation Council: 16 (4) → 22 (8) members

## (4) Challenges: Outlook

- Higher Education Institutions
  - ‘Systemakkreditierung’ as a means to (different) ends
  - Reputational gains for ‘systemakkreditierte’ HEIs
  - ‘Failed’ HEIs (re-accreditation)
- System
  - Further increase in ‘Systemakkreditierung’
  - Co-existence of program and institutional accreditation
  - Changes in standards and procedural rules for 2018
- Agencies
  - Changing role: quality assurance → quality counselling
  - Professionalization of experts
  - Exchange of experiences



# Thank you!

