



Final report on the evaluation of the Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss universities

August 8, 2006

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Established on the mandate of the Swiss University Conference (SUC) by the international expert group, composed of:

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- **Dr. Karl Dittrich**, Chairman, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), Netherlands;
- **Professor Christiane Heitz**, Vice-President, Louis Pasteur University, France;
- **Dr. Achim Hopbach**, Managing Director, German Accreditation Council, Germany;
- **Dr. Christian Thieme**, Christian Thieme, former Deputy Secretary-General, Conference of Cultural Ministers in Germany (KMK), Germany;
- **Ms Lesley Wilson**, Secretary General, European University Association (EUA), Belgium.
- **Dr. Gerhard Schuwey** (Advisory Services)
- **Dr. Andrea Stegmann** (Administration)

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Summary

Evaluation of the OAQ was performed in Bern during the first half of 2006. Based on a self-evaluation report prepared by the OAQ, a group of international experts studied various OAQ procedural files. Subsequently, they held two, two-day meetings in Bern during which they interviewed representatives from the OAQ and its various contacts, as the Swiss University Conference (SUC), the Swiss Council of the Universities of Applied Sciences, the Rector's Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS), students, as well as representatives of accredited institutions. Our special thanks are directed to Professor Stephanie Teufel and to Kirstin Stadelmann from the International Institute of Management in Technology (iimt), as well as to Dr. Karin Faisst from Public Health for their willingness to assist in the interviews.

The evaluation led to several significant realisations and conclusions: the OAQ has a very broad field of activity and is very well networked internationally. Basically all dialogue partners shared the opinion that the OAQ carries out its procedures in a highly professional manner. Accreditation and other quality assurance procedures are not always differentiated with the necessary selectivity. The separation of procedural management and the examination of the respective material criteria (OAQ) on the one hand, and final decision-making (SUC) on the other hand, is unusual. In various points, the OAQ's accreditation procedure and decision recommendations should be more strongly adapted to the requirements of administrative procedures. The evaluators made the following three main recommendations:

- They suggest the establishment of an independent accreditation council.
- Procedural rules for the various OAQ assessments should be configured in such a way as to prevent the mixing of procedures. Especially important is the clear separation of evaluation, accreditation and quality audit procedures. Accreditation processes should be clearly disengaged from any OAQ assessments connected with qualifying for financial support.
- The evaluators recommend organising quality assurance on the basis of uniform principles in all higher education institutions, i.e. especially to avoid developing any separate system for the universities of applied sciences (UAS).

Finally, the experts concluded that the OAQ essentially fulfils Part 3 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (EGS) as well as the Code of Good Practice of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

A. Introduction

1. Assignment / Mandate

The Swiss University Conference (SUC) ordered the evaluation of the OAQ as set down in the SUC's 2005 working programme adopted on 2 December 2004. The impulse for the evaluation came from developments at the international level, foreseeing an external review of quality assurance agencies every five years. Then in spring 2005, European education ministers decided at their conference in Bergen that all national quality assurance agencies should be subject to an international peer review, based on European standards, within the next five. The results of these evaluations should also serve for the creation of a European registry of highly-qualified quality assurance agencies. It was also proposed that national and international evaluations be done together.

The executive committee of the SUC selected a monitoring group for the evaluation. Its members were: the SUC President Regine Aeppli; Dr. Nivardo Ischi, Secretary-General of the SUC; Prof. Dr. Ulrich Gäbler, Vice-President of the Swiss Rectors' Conference; Dr. Mathias Stauffacher, Secretary-General of the Swiss Rectors' Conference; Dr. Christoph Grolimund, Officer of the ETH-Board; Margrit Meier, Vice-Director State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER); Prof. Dr. Susanne Suter, President of the Swiss Science and Technology Council; Dr. Andrea Stegmann, SUC Secretariat.

The goal of the evaluation, as determined by the monitoring group, was to investigate whether the OAQ was fulfilling its accreditation and quality assurance functions in accordance with the *Federal Law of October 8, 1999, on Financial Aid to Universities and Cooperation in matters relating to Universities (UFG, SR 414.20)*, the *Intercantonal Convention on Coordinating University Policy and the Cooperation Agreement between the Federal Government and University Cantons*. The point of view was clearly to be a retrospective one. At the express wish of the monitoring group, the assessment was to consider the OAQ performance to date and should not include any possible future development. However the past and the future were not always clearly separable during the evaluation. The expert group felt that in many points it was favourable also to refer to future developments.

In view of the partial revision of accreditation guidelines, the evaluation was also intended to include **recommendations** about how the future work of the OAQ could be better organised in the context of current law (extended application of UFG until 2011).

The evaluation was also to create the basis for future OAQ **recognition or accreditation at the international level**.

2. Expert group and method

The expert group consisted of the following persons:

- Professor Marco Baggiolini, President, Università della Svizzera Italiana and Leader of the expert group, Switzerland;
- Dr. Karl Dittrich, Chairman, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), Netherlands;
- Professor Christiane Heitz, Vice-President, Louis Pasteur University, France;
- Dr. Achim Hopbach, Managing Director, German Accreditation Council, Germany;
- Dr. Christian Thieme, former Deputy Secretary-General, Conference of Cultural Ministers in Germany (KMK), Germany;
- Ms Lesley Wilson, Secretary General, European University Association (EUA), Belgium.

The evaluation group was joined in an advisory capacity by Dr. h.c. Gerhard Schuwey (former director of the Federal Office for Education and Science, OFES, now known as the State Secretariat for Education and Research, SER) as senior adviser. Dr. jur. Andrea Stegmann, attorney, SUC general-secretariat, was in charge of the secretariat.

The evaluation followed the usual steps. These consisted in:

- Self-evaluation by the OAQ (SWOT analysis)
- Investigation by the evaluation group
 - Study of files on OAQ procedures¹
 - Interviews by experts²
- Evaluation report on the strengths/weaknesses of the OAQ and recommendations to the SUC about quality improvements of the OAQ.

The evaluation was based on the international standards defined by the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA), taking into account ECA standards on the one hand, and the predefined, more nationally oriented questionnaire from the SUC monitoring group on the other hand.³

¹ See Appendix 1 for the list of the 15 procedures examined. The list is not published for reasons of data protection.

² See Appendix 2 with the list of persons interviewed.

³ See Appendix 3 for answers to the more nationally oriented questionnaire formulated by the monitoring group.

B. Evaluation

I. Characterisation of the OAQ

1. OAQ Organisation

(Art. 20 f. of the Cooperation Agreement between the Federal Government and University Cantons)

The OAQ is composed of a Scientific Advisory Board and a business office. When speaking of the OAQ one usually means the business office. The Scientific Advisory Board is made up of five experts in university accreditation. Members of the Scientific Advisory Board and the OAQ director are elected by the Swiss University Conference (SUC). Essentially, the Scientific Advisory Board is responsible for the scientific quality of the OAQ's work and for guaranteeing adherence to international standards.

2. Position of the OAQ in the Swiss system

The Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ) assumes a central role in assuring the quality of the Swiss higher education system.

a) Legal Foundation

Ensuring the quality of the Swiss university system is regulated by the following legal texts:

- *Article 63a of the Federal Constitution* adopted in the plebiscite of May 21, 2006, which allocates joint responsibility for such quality assurance to both the Federal Government and the cantons;
- *the Federal Law on Financial Aid to Universities and Cooperation in matters relating to Universities* dated October 8, 1999 (UFG, SR 414.20);
- *the Intercantonal Convention on Coordinating University Policy* dated December 9, 1999; and
- *the Cooperation Agreement between the Federal Government and University Cantons on Matters Relating to Higher Education* dated December 14, 2000 (Cooperation Agreement, SR 414.205).

Established as a common institution of the Federal Government and the cantons based on these legal foundations, the OAQ began its activities on October 1, 2001.

b) OAQ Functions

Based on this legal foundation the OAQ has the following responsibilities in connection with establishing the guidelines for the Swiss University Conference (SUC):

- Preparing a description of quality assurance requirements to be issued by the SUC. Checking regularly if these requirements are being fulfilled (periodic quality audits on behalf of the State Secretariat for Education and Research, SER, i.e. evaluating applications to qualify for financial aid pursuant to Art. 4 Para. 3, and Art. 6 Para. 3 of the *Guidelines on procedures for qualifying for financial aid* dated December 10, 2002, pursuant to the *Federal Law on Financial Aid to Universities*).
- Submitting proposals for accreditation procedures to be applied throughout Switzerland (SUC Accreditation Guidelines).

According to the legal foundations, the OAQ is responsible for carrying out the following procedures:

- aa) The OAQ handles accreditation procedures and the SUC makes the final decisions on granting accreditation.
- bb) The OAQ performs quality audits on behalf of the SER to check whether public universities provide „high-quality services“. In addition, it assesses the qualifications of universities applying for financial aid for the first time. Based on this report, the SER, respectively the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA), and the Federal Council decide on whether or not a university qualifies for subsidies.
- cc) In agreement with the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS), the OAQ is authorised to evaluate specific disciplines at public universities. To date no such evaluations have been made.
- dd) The OAQ is authorised to provide services for third parties against payment. Until now most such services have consisted of the following:
 - Performing accreditation procedures for postgraduate medical education on behalf of the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH), respectively the Swiss Medical Association (FMH). In these cases the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA) made the accreditation decision.
 - Devising an accreditation concept for postgraduate medical education on behalf of the FOPH.
 - Analysing evaluation reports of universities of applied sciences (UAS) as requested by the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET).
 - Establishing the basis for accreditation in the UAS sector under an OPET mandate.
 - Developing a concept for the accreditation of private vocational schools for the OPET.

From 2003 to 2005, the OAQ carried out a total of 65 accreditation procedures in which it examined 84 objects. For the SUC, it examined a total of 18 accreditation procedures, including 15 institutions and 22 study programmes. The FOPH commissioned 47 accreditation proceedings in the area of postgraduate medical training, 43 of which involved human medicine programmes and the remaining 4 dental medicine programmes.

Out of the 18 accreditation procedures carried out for the SUC, 4 applications involved the accreditation of an institution and 11 the accreditation of study programmes, all of which emanate from the public sector. Another 11 applications for accreditation of institutions and 11 for accreditation of study programmes stemmed from private institutions.⁴

- Other duties of the OAQ (see Art. 19 Paras. 3 and 6 of the Cooperation Agreement) include information activities in the areas of accreditation and quality assurance and international cooperation in this area.

3. Conclusion

The OAQ's role in the quality assurance system in Swiss higher education is characterised by its serving a wide variety of customers and by applying numerous different procedures, which can be summarised as follows:

- The OAQ carries out quality assessments which include – with evaluations, accreditations and quality audits – the currently most important internationally introduced quality assurance procedures in the area of higher education.
- Mandatary bodies are public or private higher education institutions as well as governmental bodies, namely the SUC, the SER, the FOPH and the OPET.
- Final (formal) decisions in quality assessment procedures are made by governmental bodies. These decisions are in part directly coupled with decisions on the recognition or funding of institutions⁵. An essential objective of the quality assessments of the OAQ is to lay down the basis for those decision-making processes.
- The OAQ advises and supports governmental offices – responsible for quality assurance in higher education institutions – in the development of quality assurance standards and procedures, or it elaborates these on behalf of the responsible public authorities.

⁴ The number of applications and the number of proceedings do not match because some proceedings treated various applications.

⁵ This is not the case for accreditation procedures at public universities. Accreditation of private higher education institutions or study programmes also does not lead to qualification for financial support. Institutional evaluations and the periodic quality audits made subsequently by the OAQ are, however, a prerequisite for qualifying for financial support.

The OAQ's lack of decision-making competency demonstrates two essential characteristics of the Swiss quality assurance system in the area of higher education:

- In the quality assessments the procedure itself is separated from the final decision. The examination procedure is carried out by an independent quality assurance agency, but the final decision is made by public authorities.

As a consequence:

- Decisions on quality assessments are made by the same authority that makes administrative and/or political decisions on the development of Switzerland's higher education system. A more adequate procedure would be to separate quality assessments from governmental decisions so that quality assessments are made independently (and are thus focused exclusively on judging quality), and that public authorities make decisions based on their own considerations, supported by an independently compiled report on quality.

II. Comparison with Europe

The OAQ's position in the Swiss higher education system, or more precisely in the Swiss system of quality assurance in the higher education sector, is from one point of view without parallel in the European higher education systems. It is characterised by the fact that quality assessments are separated from the final decision-making. I.e. an independent agency is entrusted with carrying out a scientifically sound quality evaluation of universities while the final decision is made by public authorities whose primary task or objective is not based solely on judging quality assurance or quality development, but essentially is one of making political decisions on higher education. In other words, this is a two-stage system, whereby the stage housing decision-making competency is not anchored in the university but in the political sphere.

The OAQ prepares the drafts of guidelines for accreditation and quality assurance, i.e. it submits proposals to the SUC. The guidelines are issued by the SUC which decides on their contents.

One glance at other quality assurance systems at European universities proves the OAQ's special position. At best, parallels can be made to other two-stage systems which separate decision-making from accreditation procedures:

In the Dutch-Flemish quality assurance system at higher education institutions, there is no counterpart to the OAQ except for the Netherlands-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (NVAO), when measured in terms of „defining procedural rules“. The NVAO defines the central procedural rules and engages agencies to carry out accreditation procedures, but

then makes the accreditation decisions itself. As concerns decision competency and the role of „performing accreditation procedures“, the counterparts to the OAQ would more likely be the agencies engaged by the NVAO.

A similar situation was found when comparing with the German accreditation system: The Accreditation Council defines the procedural rules for approving agencies and study programmes. In this respect it could be a counterpart to the OAQ. However, the Accreditation Council not only carries out the authorization process of agencies, but also makes the final decision. The agencies themselves carry out the procedures and make the final decision on programme accreditations, but are not responsible for defining any procedural rules and thus cannot be compared to the OAQ.

Taking a look into the other single-stage European accreditation systems which do not separate the establishment of procedural rules, performance of procedures and decision-making, it becomes even more clear that the special status held by the OAQ is not due primarily to its position in the two-stage system, but to the „outsourcing“ of decision-making competency from the independent higher education system into the political sphere.

In no other European system of higher education responsibility for carrying out procedures and the results of quality procedures are decoupled from the formal competence to decide. At best there are differences with regard to the players who perform the evaluation procedures, in other words whether ‚the‘ agency itself performs the procedure (single-stage systems), or whether it engages other players in the process (two-stage systems). Quality is the only basis for any ultimate decisions on procedures. Other university-political considerations do not play a role because of the independence of quality assessment.

In comparison to many other players in the area of quality assurance and accreditation in Europe, one special characteristic of the OAQ can be found in its broad scope of activities. Not many agencies carry out evaluations, audits and accreditation procedures in equal measure. Apart from the Norwegian agency NOKUT, whose range of activities is similar to those of the OAQ, most agencies have a more limited purview.

III. Results of the Peer Review

1. General Remarks

The interviews with the experts led to several important realizations which must be considered when evaluating the OAQ's activities:

- a) The OAQ's field of operation is very heterogeneous: At various institutions in the tertiary area (state vs. private universities) according to the law different procedures with different objectives are carried out (institutional vs. programme-oriented, evaluation vs. accreditation vs. audit). Added to these functions are special tasks such as in the accreditation of postgraduate medical education programmes (on behalf of the FOPH).
- b) The goals and procedural rules for accreditation and evaluation procedures are not always sufficiently precisely formulated and indicate therefore unclarity and overlap in their practical implementation. This is reinforced by the fact that only a limited number of procedures have been carried out so that certain routines seem to have been only partially developed.
- c) The OAQ bears responsibility for carrying out evaluation procedures, but it cannot be held accountable for final formal decisions because these are made by the SUC, the OPET and the FOPH. Although this has no influence on the OAQ's activities, it does manifest a specific characteristic of the Swiss quality evaluation system: Outsourcing decision-making to public authorities and the resulting coupling with university-political decisions basically weakens the quality and role of the evaluation.

It would be correct to separate quality judgements and governmental decisions so that quality judgements remain independent, i.e. are exclusively guided by quality-oriented thinking, and that public authorities make political decisions based on their own considerations, supported by independently made quality assessments.

- d) The OAQ fulfils the European criteria for accreditation agencies.
- e) The OAQ is well networked internationally and has soon integrated the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* into the guidelines for its own work. Worth special mention is the OAQ's strong engagement in the European Consortium for Accreditation which establishes procedures for the mutual recognition of accreditation decisions.

With this in mind it is hard to understand why the OAQ has not yet applied for membership in ENQA (the European Association for Quality Assurance), since close integration in their work is indispensable for the international networking so highly valued by the OAQ.⁶

- f) Practically all interviewed persons agree that the OAQ operates with a very high degree of professionalism in its procedures and in addition praise its cooperation with customers and the qualified experts involved in the procedures.
- g) The OAQ plays an important and active role in the process of reforming the field of higher education since it develops a variety of quality assurance initiatives itself.
- h) The OAQ shows a strong disposition to learn whenever modifications of guidelines or procedures are required.
- i) Referring to b) above it must be added that some fundamental decisions on Swiss university politics – which are necessary for OAQ procedures – are either missing or not adequately formulated. One serious example is the lack of binding criteria for awarding a tertiary educational institute the status of „university“. In actual practice the OAQ must then implicitly answer such questions during the procedure before it can make a solidly based decision. As an independent quality assurance agency, the OAQ itself is thus forced into becoming active in setting norms, a competence which is not legally foreseen. Universities and/or public authorities may thus deem such action presumptuous. This situation has the potential to weaken the agency since the assumption could be made that university-political considerations influenced the independence of the quality evaluation.

⁶ Since the OAQ was founded it applied for membership in ENQA, but until the end of 2004 membership was only open to the members of the EU and participants of the European Economic Area. In consultation with the ENQA board of directors, the membership application of the OAQ is submitted by 1 Aug. 2006, including the results of this evaluation. Since 2001, the OAQ participated in all ENQA events (observer status). In the year 2003, the OAQ organised a seminar for ENQA in Zurich concerning „Quality Audits“.

2. Special Remarks

Based on the analysis of the OAQ's standing (see Part B Evaluation) and the special results outlined under Clause 1 above, the experts diagnosed three problem areas.

a) System Level

A tension exists between recommendations made by the OAQ, which according to the latter are completely tenable from an academic and quality orientation point of view, and any subsequent decisions made by the SUC, etc., which can also be politically motivated.

b) Concept Level

From the very beginning, the OAQ's tasks were not defined sufficiently in two areas. First, the objective of the various procedures was not clearly formulated or the objectives overlapped (accountability through quality control vs. quality improvement). Second, the OAQ itself was forced into filling regulatory loopholes caused by missing legal and/or other binding norms (e.g. publication of negative results). As a result it became more unclear in the course of time whether the OAQ had to establish norms, provide advisory services or only to be active on the operating level. The OAQ thus performed also in borderline situations between these kinds of activities.

Furthermore, there is partial contradiction as to how each involved partner – the OAQ, the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER), the SUC and the CRUS – interprets basic guidelines (draft guidelines for internal quality assurance at Swiss universities, currently under discussion through a consultation mechanism: the SUC has sent the current draft to the rectors and various categories of university members, asking them to provide their opinion on this topic).

c) Process Level

In part, the OAQ's reports and submissions for decisions lack sufficient legal substantiation and are thus susceptible to appeals. For this fact the OAQ is only partially to blame, in part because this can be traced back to imprecise formulations or unavailable criteria used as a basis for making decisions. This situation bears considerable risk for the entire quality assurance system.

IV. Recommendations

Based on the analysis and peer review of the OAQ, the experts make the following recommendations:

- a) Responsibility for decision-making in accreditation procedures should be transferred from the SUC to an independent accreditation council. Such a council should be composed in a way which gives academic representatives a substantial influence. Furthermore, depending on the composition of the accreditation council, a scientific advisory board should be consulted before the council makes any decisions.
- b) Priority should be given to precisely defining the various procedures and to clearly separating the different areas of responsibility (evaluation, accreditation, quality audit and recognition in the context of qualifying for financial support) so that the respective supplier of study programmes, i.e. OAQ's customers, unequivocally know which procedure is applied in their particular case.
- c) The competencies of individual players – the government (SUC), the OAQ, universities and the CRUS – should be clearly defined and separated from each other. At the same time, the task of the Quality Network of the Swiss Universities (Q-Network Switzerland) should also be clearly established.
- d) The task of quality assurance should be performed with unified principles throughout the whole higher education sector, and consolidated standards should be applied to both formal as well as material aspects. As a logical consequence, it would be wise to refrain from establishing a second quality assurance system for universities of applied sciences. Instead, the respective qualifications for these institutes should be integrated in the scope of one quality assurance system to allow proper assessment of the individual specialities of each school of applied sciences. In due time the same system should also apply to Teacher Training Institutions in the tertiary education sector.⁷
- e) The joint theses dated November 7/11, 2005, stemming from the CRUS and the OAQ should be implemented quickly. Nevertheless, since there are different interpretations of this paper between the different players, here a consensus should first be reached.
- f) The experts advise the OAQ to set priorities for its work, giving precedence to its core task of evaluating quality assurance systems and accrediting study programmes offered by public and private suppliers.

⁷ The evaluation of Teacher Training Institutions in the tertiary education sector was not included in this assessment, nor was it part of the task given to the expert team. Extending the recommendation to Teacher Training Institutions in the tertiary education sector was introduced later on by a member of the expert team.

V. Assessment of the OAQ with respect to Part 3 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

On the basis of the analysis of the documentation submitted to them and the interviews, the evaluators agreed that the OAQ is essentially acting in conformity with the ESG.

On the one hand, this applies to the legal and economic foundation and requirements. The OAQ is established by law and thus is recognised by the governmental offices in Switzerland responsible for quality assurance at Swiss universities (Standard 3.2). Legally, the OAQ has its own responsibility for carrying out its procedures and makes its recommendations independently and without being subject to the influence of the Swiss administration, universities or other third parties (Standard 3.6). The OAQ has the personnel and material resources, which enable it to offer sustainable and quality services (Standard 3.4).

On the other hand, the assessment also applies to the agency's functions. The OAQ has a documented mission statement, showing subsequently a clear understanding of its task (Standard 3.5), which is to conduct regularly external quality assurance procedures (Standard 3.3).

Basically, the assessment also refers to the most important procedural regulations. In its procedures, the OAQ relies as essential components on the self-evaluation by the higher education or university institution concerned and a subsequent appraisal by external experts (Standard 3.7). However, a reservation was expressed here because of the fact that students do not participate in the procedures as members of the expert panel.

The applicable regulations and accreditation criteria in the procedures are defined beforehand and accessible to the public (Standard 3.7). A further reservation was made concerning the publication of the final expert reports and its recommendations (Standard 3.7), insofar as negative results are not published. However, the necessary legal basis for this should become available with the initiation of a constitutional amendment to reform the educational system.

In its procedures, the OAQ takes into consideration the existence and the results of internal quality assurance mechanisms of the higher education institutions and thus fulfils Standard 3.1, too.

Finally it must be noted that the OAQ has introduced a system and regular internal self-assessment quality assurance procedures and that it can be externally accountable regarding its activities thanks to a reporting system based on an official quality policy (Standard 3.8).

To sum up, the OAQ meets the provisions of Part 3 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, albeit with small reservations concerning student participation and the publication of results.

The same applies to the Code of Good Practice of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), as this corresponds considerably to the ESG. Only Art. 11 on the promotion of international cooperation between agencies is beyond the scope of the ESG. The OAQ clearly meets this standard through its intensive work internationally in the field of accreditation. In conclusion, it just remains to be said that OAQ activities are also in keeping with the Code of Good Practice of the ECA.

OAQ conformity with the ESG:

ESG, Part 3	OAQ Standard/Practice	Respective. ECA Code
Standard 3.1 „...agencies should take into account... the external quality assurance procedures (of HEI)....”	The internal quality assurance at higher education institutions is central to quality audits and is considered in all other procedures according to proven procedural standards.	–
Standard 3.2 „Agencies should be formally recognized by competent public authorities...”	Clear legal basis in UFG SR 414.20 and cooperation agreement SR 414.205.	Standard 2
Standard 3.3 „Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities ... on a regular basis.”	External quality assurance activities as primary task as stipulated by law.	Standard 13
Standard 3.4 „Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources...”	Core tasks in the public sector financed equally by Confederation and cantons; financing assured to 2007; a prolongation will be proposed by the Federal Council in December 2006; further income available.	Standard 5

ESG, Part 3	OAQ Standard/Practice	Respective ECA Code
Standard 3.5 „Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.”	Published mission statement available to public.	Standard 1
Standard 3.6 „Agencies should be independent...”	Independence stipulated by law and demonstrated, for example, through the practice of appointing experts.	Standards 3, 15
Standard 3.7 „ <i>The processes, criteria and procedures... should be pre-defined... public... and... normally include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A self-assessment;</i> • <i>An external assessment by a group of experts;</i> • <i>Publication of a report;</i> • <i>A follow-up procedure”</i> 	Procedural guidelines are established and published by the SUC.	Standards 4, 12, 14, 17
Standard 3.8 „Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.”	OAQ publishes quality principles and all other guidelines, etc.	Standard 8
	OAQ is a member of ECA.	Standard 11 International cooperation
		Standard 16 Enhancement orientation

Annex 1

List of 15 Examined Procedures

For data protection reasons this list is not published.

Annex 2

Interviewed Persons and Organisations

- Swiss University Conference and the Swiss Council for Universities of Applied Sciences, SUC and FHR (Regine Aeppli, Government Council of Canton Zurich; Rainer Huber, Government Council of Canton Aargau; Dr. Nivardo Ischi; Eric Baier and Jakob Locher)
- OAQ Scientific Advisory Board (Professor Martine Rahier, President since September 1, 2005, and Professor Dominique de Werra)
- Former President of the OAQ Scientific Advisory Board from 2001 to 2005 (Professor Marie Theres Fögen)
- Quality Network Switzerland (Dr. Jacques Lanares from the University of Lausanne, Professor Guido Vergauwen from the University of Freiburg, and Dr. Olivier Binet from the University of Basel)
- State Secretariat for Education and Research, SER (Margrit Meier)
- Federal Office of Public Health, FOPH (Dr. Beat Sottas and Marlene Stritt)
- Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities, CRUS (Professor Jean-Marc Rapp, Professor Markus Ries and Dr. Mathias Stauffacher)
- Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET) (Chantal Haunreiter and Nicole Schaad)
- Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ), (Dr. Rolf Heusser; Stephanie Maurer, lic.iur; and Anne Crausaz Esseiva, PhD)
- Association of Swiss Student Groups, VSS (Lea Brunner and Vincenzo Ribi)
- Accredited Organisation: „international institute of management in technology“ (iimt) (Professor Stephanie Teufel and Kirstin Stadelmann)
- Accredited Organisation: Public Health (Dr. Karin Faisst)

Annex 3

Replies to Questions posed by the SUC's Monitoring Group

I. Quality Assurance

1. *Were uniform minimum standards for the internal quality assurance of universities developed (best international practices)?*

Yes, in Spring 2006, the OAQ developed minimum quality assurance standards (draft of guidelines for internal quality assurance at Swiss universities). The guidelines have been given by the SUC to a consultation and in Autumn / Winter 2006 they can be treated in the SUC.

2. *Were these minimum standards clearly communicated to those affected?*

The OAQ coordinated its work on the guidelines with the Q-Network Switzerland. Once the guidelines will be adopted, they shall be immediately communicated to those concerned and published on the homepages of the SUC and the OAQ. At the SUC's request, the OAQ also wrote a comment to these guidelines, which is expected to considerably ease communication.

3. *Does the OAQ check the quality assurance of the universities based on predetermined uniform minimum standards? Describe the steps involved in establishing concepts, carrying out procedures, evaluating procedures, up to the publication of results. Describe cooperation, especially with universities, authorities and the Rectors' Conference.*

Future quality audits should be performed in accordance with the above mentioned quality assurance guidelines. The Q-Network Switzerland would like to receive a mandate from the CRUS so that it can negotiate with the OAQ on a binding basis. The remaining questions cannot yet be answered on the basis of current experience.

II. Accreditation

1. *Does accreditation in the private sector fulfil the function of consumer protection sufficiently, namely also with regard to the independent status of experts and the disclosure of their interest connections (i.e. possible conflicts of interest)?*

Consumer protection interests might be hampered due to the fact that applicants can propose an expert because they feel the latter will not be impartial and objective. In the future it might be better if applicants were only allowed to reject experts. The OAQ accentuates that the propositions of the applicants are carefully examined and that the OAQ reserves the right to reject the propositions, which has already happened in the past. In the OAQ's opinion the consumer protection is more undermined by the fact that negative decisions cannot be published and by the very long appeal procedures.

2. *How is work organised when it comes to establishing concepts, performing procedures, evaluating procedures, up to the publication of results?*

Work appears to be organised relatively progressively. Following a common meeting, the green light is given for the self-evaluation report. Shortly after delivery of the self-evaluation report, the experts make an evaluation including an on-site-visit, followed by the delivering of an experts report in a relatively short space of time – within a month. After the applicant's position is received, the OAQ completes its final report to the SUC. Some time is usually lost at the OAQ and SUC interface because of the need for discussions within the SUC.

Negative accreditation decisions may not be published due to the lack of adequate legal basis. The positive list is published on the internet on the homepages of the OAQ and the SUC.

Some interview partners pointed out that the OAQ lacks a well-known national profile, making it difficult to market accreditation. Accreditation through a foreign agency may thus be more appealing because these are also better known in Switzerland than the OAQ. Today's OAQ label reads as follows: OAQ accredited in Switzerland / Accredited by the Swiss University Conference. The interview partners would like the OAQ to become more active nationally, in other words to undertake more efforts to increase their public image in Switzerland. One interview partner missed having any kind of contact with the OAQ after completion of the accreditation procedure and said it was not informed about what the OAQ was doing (i.e. of the evaluation). There is general consensus that the procedures are normally speedy and well organised, but that certain improvements could be made after its completion (publication of results, as well as contact and cooperation with the accredited institutions for marketing purposes).

3. *Does the accreditation instrument show the desired effect publicly and privately? If not, are the reasons for any lack of success identifiable?*

Accreditation is voluntary both on a public or private basis. There is a very low number of accreditation requests in both areas. The expectation of lawmakers' that accreditation would lead to more transparency in both the private and public sector, i.e. that good institutions could be better differentiated from bad ones, has not yet been fulfilled.

4. *Are the accreditation guidelines of October 16, 2003, a suitable instrument to implement the objective associated with accreditation in Swiss universities?*

Some parts of the guidelines lack concise formulation and leave important educational-political questions open (e.g. the question of critical mass of a university). In particular such educational-political questions cannot /should not be handled by the OAQ because the OAQ is not the proper body for that.

5. *How was cooperation, especially between those affected, the SUC and the Rectors' Conference?*

Although initial cooperation between the OAQ and the CRUS was tedious, the relationship continually improved after they agreed in a Thesis Paper to limit accreditation to quality assurance systems. However, there are different interpretations of the stakeholders about the common Thesis Paper. Cooperation between the OAQ and the SUC, the Q-Network Switzerland, interviewed accredited institutions, the FOPH, OPET, the SER, students' associations, the scientific advisory board, etc. is functioning well. All those involved attest to the OAQ's high degree of professionalism and substantial „customer friendliness“.

III. OAQ performance in areas other than accreditation and quality assurance procedures

1. *Does the OAQ orient itself to international practice and does it cooperate internationally on matters of accreditation and quality assurance?*

The OAQ's international commitment was generally found to be positive.

2. *Did the OAQ establish recommendations for those evaluations that are performed by universities themselves?*

No.

3. *Were any discipline-specific evaluations performed in agreement with the Rectors' Conference?*

No.

4. *What additional services did the OAQ offer besides concrete procedures (e.g. accreditation in the medical area, participation in international accreditation and quality assurance projects, organisation of conferences and seminars)?*

The OAQ handled a large number of complex procedures for the FOPH. In addition it helped the OPET establish its own accreditation guidelines. The OAQ is very active internationally and has also received acknowledgement of its high professionalism and customer-friendly policy in this area. FOPH representatives, in particular, point to the OAQ's excellent work in handling complex procedures, even in the face of short-term deadlines.

IV. Evaluation based on international standards

See expert reports, Part B, Clause V (evaluation of the OAQ with regard to Part 3 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ESG*).

V. Evaluation of possible additional aspects

1. *Examination of procedures, especially with regard to the following aspects:*
 - a) *Are procedures target-oriented? Is the length of a procedure appropriate? Are experts selected with the necessary foresight?*

As a consequence of mixing evaluations, audits and accreditations, the procedures partially lack sufficient target orientation. The length of the procedures is appropriate. Basically experts are carefully selected, but only impartial experts must be chosen (i.e. the right of applicants to choose experts should be deleted from Art. 16 Para. 2 of the Accreditation Guidelines).

- b) *Are the proposals, i.e. the OAQ's final reports, justiciable? How is the interaction between the OAQ proposal, a SUC decision and the actions of the arbitral authority?*

Some of the proposals of the OAQ are formulated too diplomatically. The OAQ states: „In the end a global judgment is made on whether accreditation criteria are fulfilled.“ If the decision is to stand up to closer scrutiny by the courts, then it must be justified in a comprehensible manner, explaining for what reasons an application is rejected or approved. A general overall statement cannot fulfil these requirements. The SUC's task is to issue a decision. Sometimes this leads to inquiries with the OAQ, hence to a postponement of such decisions on the part of the SUC. In cases where the SUC's decisions were challenged it took quite a long time for the arbitral authorities to make a ruling.

2. *Effects of terminology which needs to be interpreted, especially in laws and guidelines*

In the end, the experts, respectively the OAQ, reach an overall decision. Because they are international experts, their decision may be slightly „toned down“. This could be countered by formulating criteria more precisely. Although the OAQ feels it cannot make decisions on educational-political questions, keeping criteria relatively open serves their own purpose because at the end of a proceeding they would still like to make a global judgment.

3. *Connection with the guidelines negotiated at the Bologna Summit*

Ever since the Bologna Summit, the questions arise both in Switzerland and throughout Europe as to whether or not an institution which only offers a master's or bachelor's degree can be accredited, and how a master's and a bachelor's degree level can be defined with regard to accreditation and quality assurance. In Switzerland they are currently only defined on the basis of credit points and formal admission requirements.

4. *Application of guidelines to private institutions*

The same procedures and criteria are applied to the accreditation of public and private institutions. The same bodies (OAQ and SUC) are responsible for the accreditation of public and private institutions. The hurdles to be taken by private schools to obtain accreditation are thus very high. Specifically, the requirements to be fulfilled by research are always met by public universities without problems: Even when no research is performed in a single study programme, the research performed throughout an institution is taken into account so that this standard is normally fulfilled. One problem that arises with the accreditation of private institutions is that such institutions are elevated to the same level as a public university. The minimum standards for accreditation of private institutions must thus remain relatively high.

5. *A wide scope of objectives are pursued with different procedures (e.g quality assurance through summary quality evaluations in the scope of qualifying for financial support or perhaps consumer protection with the accreditation of private institutions). Could this not be simplified?*

Procedures must be more clearly separated. A convergence of procedures is out of the question.

Annex 4

Decrees

- New Constitutional articles on Education (Art. 63a BV, adopted by the popular vote of May 21, 2006);
- *Federal Law on Financial Aid to Universities and Cooperation in Matters Relating to Universities* dated October 8, 1999 (UFG, SR 414.20);
- *Intercantonal Convention on Coordinating University Policy* dated December 9, 1999;
- *Cooperation Agreement between the Federal Government and University Cantons* on Cooperation in the area of Higher Education dated December 14, 2000 (Cooperation Agreement, SR 414.205);
- *Ordinance on the Federal Law on Financial Aid to Universities* dated March 13, 2000 (UFV, SR 414.201);
- *Guidelines on procedures for qualifying for financial support* dated December 10, 2002, pursuant to the *Federal Law on Financial Aid to Universities*;
- Procedural Rules of the Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance dated February 22, 2001.

Annex 5

Abbreviations

CRUS	Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation
e.g.	for example
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ETH	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich
EUA	European University Association
FDEA	Federal Department of Economic Affairs
FDHA	Federal Department of Home Affairs
FHR	Swiss Council for Universities of Applied Sciences
FMH	Swiss Medical Association
FOPH	Federal Office of Public Health
i.e.	that is, to be precise
iiimt	International Institute of Management in Technology
KMK	Conference of Cultural Ministers in Germany
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders
OPET	Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology
OAQ	Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities
SER	State Secretariat for Education and Research
SSTC	Swiss Science and Technology Council
SUC	Swiss University Conference
UAS	Universities of Applied Sciences
UFG	Federal Law on Financial Aid to Universities
vs.	versus
VSS	Swiss Students Union
VSH	Swiss Students Association