

The external quality assurance system in my country

External Quality Assurance

Since 1st March 2012, external quality assurance is based on the HS-QSG. This act introduced a major reform of external quality assurance in the Austrian higher education system aimed at strengthening mutual trust between the three higher education sectors of public universities including the Danube University Krems, private universities and universities of applied sciences, and at fostering mutual recognition in order to support mobility between the sectors through

- common (minimum) standards for higher education;
- abolition of the fragmentation of bodies and procedures in external quality assurance and thus ensuring better integration and coordination of the different higher education sectors;
- establishment of a cross-sectoral external quality assurance and accreditation agency;
- cross-sectoral regulation of framework conditions for quality assurance procedures;
- establishment of common assessment areas for quality assurance procedures that apply across sectors.
- legal regulation for the notification of foreign degree programmes.

The university colleges of teacher education, however, were not covered by this act.

Based on HS-QSG various external quality assurance procedures are applied in the Austrian higher education system:

- Public Universities have to obtain certification of their internal quality management system through a quality audit every seven years. The certification decisions are not linked to any legal or financial consequences. The universities can commission AQ Austria or another internationally recognised independent agency, for example an agency listed on EQAR.
- Private universities have to obtain institutional accreditation (equals licence for operation) by AQ Austria every six or twelve years. New degree programmes must also undergo accreditation; however, re-accreditation of degree programmes is part of the institutional re-accreditation.
- Universities of Applied Sciences have to obtain institutional accreditation (equals licence for operation) by AQ Austria. New degree programmes must also undergo accreditation; however, re-accreditation of degree programmes is part of the institutional re-accreditation. In this case institutional re-accreditation is applied only once after six years and thereafter the audit scheme applies. However, legal consequences apply because the validity of the institutional accreditation status depends on a positive certification of the internal quality management system.
- In 2014 the HS-QSG was amended by way of introducing compulsory programme accreditation was implemented for the newly established PhD-programmes at DUK.
- In addition new regulations for the notification of degree programmes offered in Austria by foreign higher education institutions.

External Quality Assurance at Higher Education Institutions according to HS-QSG

	Quality Audit	Institutional Accreditation	Programme Accreditation	Annual Reports
Public Universities				
Danube University Krems			Only PhD-Programmes	

Private Universities				
Universities of applied sciences				

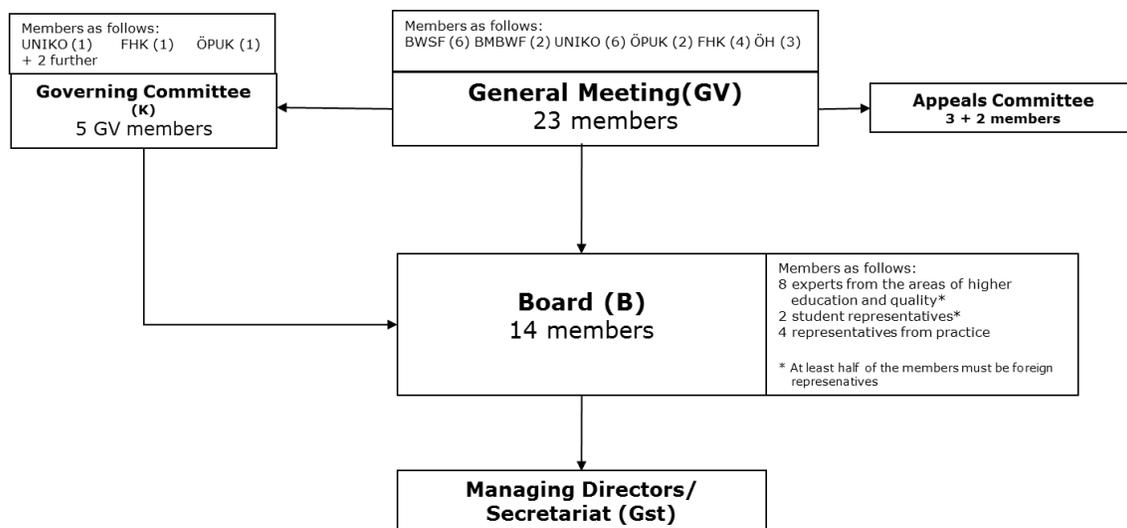
In conclusion, all procedures with statutory functions i.e. accreditation of private universities and universities of applied sciences and their programmes and also accreditation of the doctoral programmes at DUK have to be carried out by AQ Austria. As far as the non-statutory quality audits are concerned public universities and universities of applied sciences can choose either AQ Austria or other agencies for conducting the audits.

In conclusion, despite the fact that the implementation of HS-QSG introduced a common framework for quality assurance in Austrian higher education significant differences between the three higher education sectors covered by HS-QSG persist in terms of purpose, legal consequences, procedure and actor.

Description of the responsibilities and structure of AQ Austria

Organisational Structure of AQ Austria

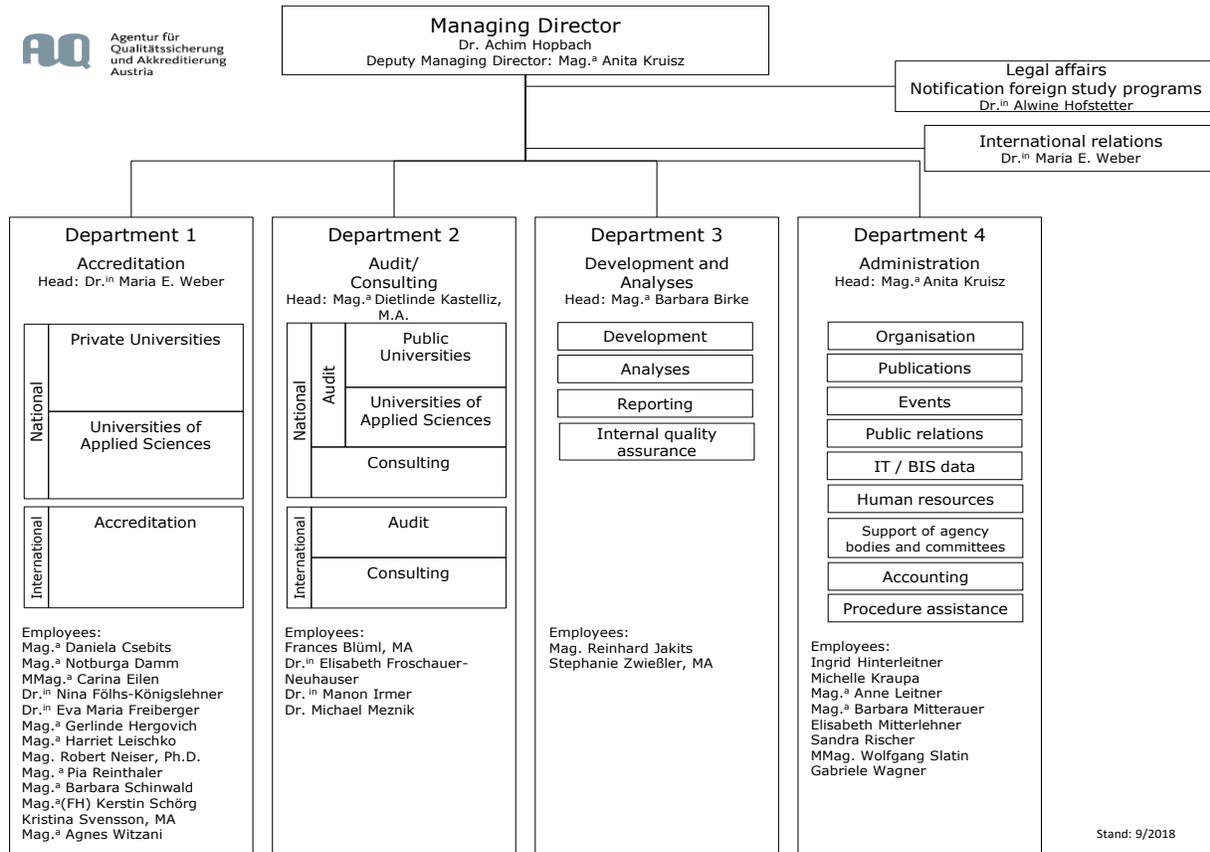
AQ Austria's organisational structure is legally determined by the HS-QSG and consists of the Board, the General Meeting, the Governing Committee, and the Appeals Committee. The bodies are supported by a secretariat.



BWSF – Advisory Council for Economic and Social affairs (6 members)
 BMWWF – Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (2 members)
 ÖH – Austrian Students' Union (3 members)

UNIKO – Universities Austria (6 members)
 FHK – Association of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences (4 members)
 ÖPUK – Austrian Private Universities' Conference (2 members)

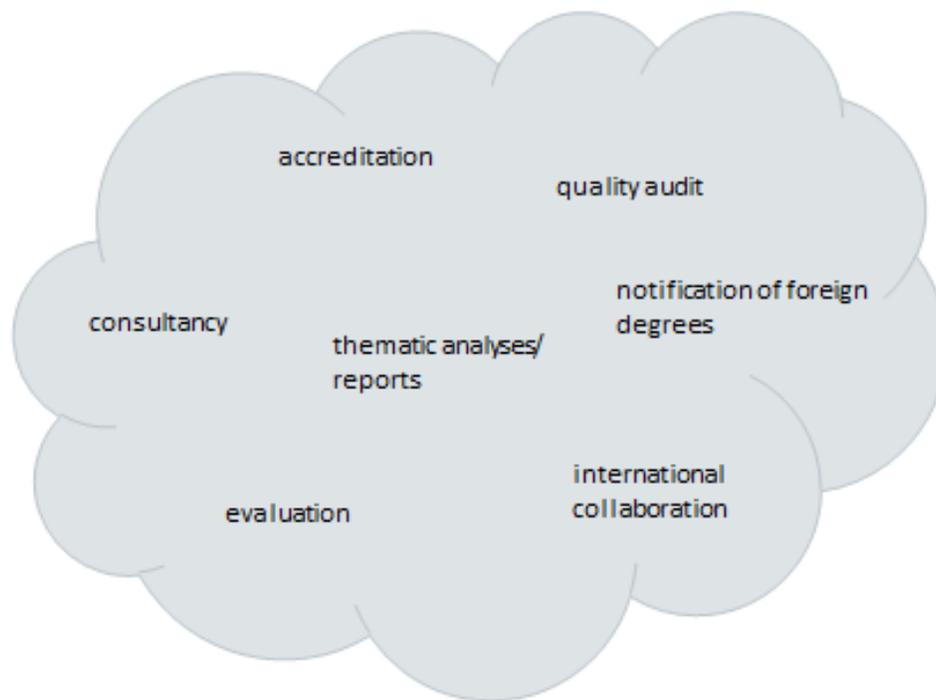
Secretariat of AQ Austria (as of September 2018)



Higher education quality assurance activities of AQ Austria > focus external QA

Activities

Conducting external quality assurance procedures at higher education institutions forms the largest part of the agency's activities. Between 2013 and 2018 AQ Austria conducted over 700 quality assurance procedures.



The agency's remit comprises a large array of legally regulated functions in the field of external quality assurance, notably quality assurance procedures based on its legal mandate such as:

- audits of the internal quality management systems of public universities of applied sciences
- accreditation of private universities and their programmes (equals state approval)
- accreditation of universities of applied sciences and their programmes (equals state approval)
- notification of foreign degree programmes (2014-2018, new law in preparation).

In addition to these quality assurance procedures AQ Austria is also responsible for the supervision of accredited higher education institutions as far as the compliance with the accreditation criteria is concerned. Although not a quality assurance procedure in the narrow sense this is an important activity as regards the continuous collaboration with accredited higher education institutions.

In addition AQ Austria offers quality assurance procedures such as

- voluntary evaluation of programmes
- voluntary accreditation of continuing education programmes at Austrian higher education institutions
- system accreditation and programme accreditation in Germany
- institutional accreditation in Switzerland
- programme accreditation in EHEA countries
- audits of the internal quality management systems of higher education institutions in EHEA countries

AQ Austria also offers consultancy to HEI such as support for the preparation of external reviews or for the development of strategies. Different from the above mentioned activities these activities are not external quality assurance reviews and are hence not conducted in accordance with ESG.