

Guidelines of the Swiss University Conference for Academic Accreditation in Switzerland (Accreditation Guidelines)

of 28 June 2007 (of 1st September 2007)

The Swiss University Conference (SUK/CUS),

based on Article 7 Para. 2 of the Cooperation Agreement between the Federal Government and University Cantons on Matters Relating to Universities of 14 December 2000¹

has decided on the following:

I. General provisions

Art. 1 Scope of these Guidelines

These Guidelines govern the requirements and procedures for the accreditation of academic institutions and their programmes.

Art. 2 Candidates for accreditation

¹ Public and private academic institutions in Switzerland are candidates for accreditation (institutional accreditation), as well as their individual programmes.

² An institution can be accredited as a:

- a. University;
- b. Academic institution;
- c. Academic institutions offering bachelor's degrees;
- d. Academic institutions offering continuing education.

³ The following programmes can be accredited:

- a. Programmes leading to a bachelor's degree;
- b. Programmes leading to a master's degree;
- c. University level continuing education (i.e. programmes leading to a Master of Advanced Studies).

⁴ Doctoral programmes can also be accredited.

Art. 3 Prerequisites for institutional accreditation

¹ An institution can be accredited as a university when it fulfills the following minimum requirements:

- a. The following admission preconditions are required:
 1. General Admission: as a rule a Swiss maturity or federally-recognised maturity or the recognised equivalent education,
 2. Admission to master's programmes and to continuing education: as a rule a university degree or the recognised equivalent of a university degree.
- b. The institution has an adequate spectrum of scientific areas permitting interdisciplinarity, and employs at least the equivalent of 100 full-time positions; of which at least one-third are permanently employed professors.
- c. It regularly offers bachelor's and master's programmes.
- d. It awards doctoral degrees.
- e. Its professors devote an average of at least 30 percent of their working time to research.
- f. It adheres to the Bologna Guidelines of 4 December 2003² and the corresponding recommendations of the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS).
- g. It fulfills the quality standards according to Art. 9 of these Guidelines.

² An institution can be accredited as an academic institution when it fulfills the following minimum requirements:

- a. The following admission preconditions are required:
 1. General Admission: as a rule a Swiss maturity or federally-recognised maturity or the recognised equivalent education,
 2. Admission to master's programmes and to continuing education: as a rule a university diploma or the recognised equivalent of a university diploma.
- b. It regularly offers independent bachelor's, master's, or continuing education programmes, or its programmes are linked to a recognised university.
- c. There is at least the equivalent of two full-time permanently employed professors per Programme at the institution.
- d. The professors devote an average of at least 30 percent of their working time to research.
- e. It adheres to the Bologna Guidelines and the corresponding recommendations of CRUS.
- f. It fulfills the quality standards according to Art. 9 of these Guidelines.

² SR 414.205.1

³ An institution can be accredited as an academic institution that offers bachelor's programmes if it fulfills the following minimum requirements:

- a. General admission: as a rule a Swiss maturity or federally-recognised maturity or the recognised equivalent education.
- b. There is at least the equivalent of one full-time permanently employed professor per programme at the institution.
- c. The institution regularly offers bachelor's programmes.
- d. It has its own research budget that permits its professors to undertake research on an average of at least 20 percent of their working time.
- e. It adheres to the Bologna Guidelines and the corresponding recommendations of CRUS.
- f. It fulfills the quality standards according to Art. 9 of these Guidelines.

⁴ An institution can be accredited as an academic institution that offers continuing education, if it fulfills the following minimum requirements:

- a. General admission is normally a university diploma or its recognised equivalent.
- b. There is at least the equivalent of one full-time permanently employed professor per two programmes.
- c. The institution regularly offers programmes for continuing education for at least 60 ECTS credits.
- d. It has its own research budget which permits the professors to participate in research for an average of at least 20 percent of their working time, or its professors are active in research at a universities for at least 30 percent of their working time.
- e. It adheres to the Bologna Guidelines and the corresponding recommendations of CRUS.
- f. It fulfills the quality standards according to Art. 9 of these Guidelines.

⁵ An institution that offers both bachelor's and continuing education programmes can be accredited in both categories.

⁶ Private institutions which claim the right to confer doctoral degrees can only be accredited as a university or an academic institution.

⁷ Only persons who have a habilitation or its equivalent are considered according to these Guidelines, as professors.

⁸ The minimum requirements for research must be proven by the institution by means of the publications of the professors. A substantial part of the publications must appear in nationally or internationally recognised publications that enforce a selection procedure.

Art. 4 Preliminary accreditation

¹ Institutions which have not yet begun operation, or only recently started operating, may only acquire preliminary accreditation.

² Preliminary accreditation certifies that the institution complies with the quality standards required to begin operating at university level.

³ Preliminary accreditation proceeds in the same manner as accreditation. The quality standards are applied analogously.

⁴ Preliminary accreditation lapses after three years.

Art. 5 Prerequisites for the accreditation of programmes

¹ Programmes will only be accredited if they:

- a. are offered by an institution accredited or recognised according to the Federal Law on Financial Aid to Universities from 8 October 1999 (UFG);³
- b. adhere to the Bologna Guidelines.

² Continuing education programmes must have at least 60 ECTS-Credits.

³ Doctoral programmes will only be accredited when they are offered by an accredited institution or from an institution recognised according to the UFG.

Art. 6 Quality of the accreditation procedures

¹ Accreditation procedures and quality standards are derived from the best international accreditation practices.

² The Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ) is for ensuring that adjustments are made periodically as needed. If these Guidelines are affected, the OAQ makes the appropriate request to SUK/CUS.

Art. 7 General accreditation procedures

¹ The accreditation procedures are structured so that the burden for the universities is as little as possible. When feasible, internal evaluations by the universities and accreditation procedures are coordinated.

² Several applications for accreditation of similar programmes may be evaluated in the same procedure and by the same group of experts.

³ An accreditation procedure in Switzerland may be combined with accreditation in another country or with accreditation by an international accreditation body.

³ SR 414.20

Art. 8 Areas evaluated and standards

¹ In accreditation procedures, teaching and research are to be evaluated according to the standards defined in cipher II in the specific areas to be evaluated. The accreditation decision is based on an overall evaluation of the standards.

² Institutions are examined according to quality standards of Art. 9. Individual quality standards for programmes according to Art. 10 can also be examined as an example in this procedure.

³ Upon consultation with the OAQ the experts decide which standards are to be examined in depth with regard to the institution or programme to be assessed.

II. Quality standards**Art. 9** Quality standards for institutions

Area of evaluation: Strategy, organisation, and quality management of the institution

- 1.01 The academic institution has a mission statement available to the public which states its educational and research objectives, and which describes the position of the institution in its academic and social context. The institution has a strategic plan.
- 1.02 Decision-making processes, competencies, and responsibilities have been defined. The academic staff participates in decision-making processes concerning teaching and research. The students participate in decision-making processes concerning their education, and are able to make their opinions heard.
- 1.03 The institution has the human resources, structures and financial and material means enabling it to realise its defined goals according to its strategic plan.
- 1.04 Financial sources and all conditions attached to financing are transparent and do not restrict the autonomy of the institution to make decisions in teaching and research.
- 1.05 The institution has a quality assurance system.
- 1.06 The institution has established a gender equality committee, or has arranged access to such a committee.

Area of evaluation: Range of programmes

- 2.01 The institution offers a range of programmes leading to academic or professional degrees with defined goals. They are integrated into the existing range of higher education programmes or are a meaningful complement.
- 2.02 The institution participates in national and international exchanges of students, teaching and academic staff.

- 2.03 The institution has specified the conditions for measuring and certifying performance and conferring academic degrees, and monitors adherence to these conditions.
- 2.04 The institution makes use of periodically collected information on its graduates.

Area of evaluation: Research

- 3.01 The institution's current research activities are in concordance with its strategic plan and meet international standards.
- 3.02 The institution ensures that current scientific findings are integrated into its teaching practices.

Area of evaluation: Academic staff

- 4.01 The procedures for selecting, appointing, and promoting academic staff are regulated and made public. For teaching staff, these procedures consider both teaching skills and scientific qualifications.
- 4.02 The institution regulates the continuing education of its academic staff with respect to both teaching skills and subject knowledge.
- 4.03 The institution pursues a long-range policy of promoting upcoming young academics.
- 4.04 The institution ensures that its academic staff has access to career development counselling.

Area of evaluation: Administrative and technical staff

- 5.01 The procedures for selecting and promoting administrative and technical staff are regulated and made public.
- 5.02 The institution ensures that continuing education is available to administrative and technical staff.

Area of evaluation: Students

- 6.01 The conditions and procedures for admission to the institution's range of programmes have been declared and substantiated.
- 6.02 Gender equality is assured.
- 6.03 The institution observes the development of students' achievements and the duration of study.
- 6.04 The ratio of staff to students must be adequate to ensure that the educational goals of the institution and its organisational units can be achieved.
- 6.05 The institution ensures that potential and current students have access to counselling and guidance services. The institution implements measures which allow the students to assess their progress through the programme.

Area of evaluation: Infrastructure

- 7.01 The institution has an infrastructure adequate to fulfil its medium and long-range objectives.

Area of evaluation: Cooperation

- 8.01 The institution has established successful relationships on the national and international level. It promotes cooperation with other academic institutions, the professional environment, and relevant stakeholders in society.

Art. 10 Quality standards for programmes

Area of evaluation: Implementation and teaching objectives

- 1.01 The range of programmes is regularly carried out.
1.02 The objectives of the programme correspond to the institution's mission and strategic plan.

Area of evaluation: Internal organisation and quality assurance measures

- 2.01 The decision-making processes, competencies, and responsibilities have been defined and communicated to all those involved.
2.02 Measures are taken to ensure the active participation of the academic staff and students in decision-making processes concerning education and teaching.
2.03 There are quality assurance measures for the programmes. The institution makes use of the results to periodically revise the range of programmes.

Area of evaluation: Curriculum and teaching methods

- 3.01 The programme has a structured curriculum corresponding to the coordinated implementation of the Bologna Declaration in Swiss higher education.
3.02 The range of programmes covers the major aspects of the subject area in question. It allows students to acquire scientific working methods and ensures that scientific findings are integrated into their studies. The teaching and evaluation methods used are in line with the defined teaching goals.
3.03 The conditions for acquiring certificates of achievement and academic degrees are regulated and made public.

Area of evaluation: Teaching staff

- 4.01 Courses are taught by educationally competent and academically qualified teachers.
4.02 The workload assigned to teaching and research activities is defined.
4.03 The mobility of the teaching staff is facilitated.

Area of evaluation: Students

- 5.01 The conditions for admission to the institution and/or programme are public.
5.02 Gender equality is assured.

- 5.03 Student mobility is possible and is promoted by the mutual recognition of credits between universities and between disciplines.
- 5.04 Measures are taken to ensure that students have access to adequate counselling.

Area of evaluation: Facilities and premises

- 6.01 The programme has adequate resources to attain its objectives. These resources are available on a long-term basis.

Art. 11 Specific quality standards

The quality standards defined in Articles 9 and 10 may be supplemented by specific standards relating, for example, to a particular profession, discipline, or academic degree. These standards must be submitted to the SUK/CUS for approval.

Art. 12 Specific quality standards for basic medical education at Swiss universities

Area of evaluation: Strategy, organisation, and quality management at the institution

- 1.01 The mission statement and educational objectives ensure that the training provided is adequate to enable future doctors to be trained in specialised areas.
- 1.02 The faculty ensures that adequate practical clinical training is available.

Area of evaluation: Range of programmes

- 2.01 The curriculum encompasses adequate training in both scientific aspects of medicine and in practical clinical areas; students who have successfully completed this training are able to assume clinical responsibility. The institution ensures that students have patient contact appropriate to their level of education.

Area of evaluation: Academic staff

- 3.01 Candidates for the academic staff are selected on the basis of academic qualifications, teaching skills, and clinical activities.
- 3.02 The faculty's human resources policy ensures a balance between teaching activity, research, and service functions.

Area of evaluation: Students

- 4.01 Each phase of the programme has a defined number of places for students.

Area of evaluation: Cooperation

- 5.01 The faculty maintains constructive contacts with the health and health-related sectors of society and government.

Area of evaluation: Curriculum and teaching methods

- 6.01 The faculty establishes the content, scope and sequence of the curriculum. It defines the importance given to health promotion, preventive medicine, and rehabilitation, and to the inclusion of complementary medicine. The programmes teach both basic knowledge, as well as clinical knowledge and skills.
- 6.02 The programmes follow the objectives listed in the Swiss Catalogue of Learning Objectives for Undergraduate Medical Training.⁴
- 6.03 All parts of the curriculum teach the principles of the scientific method and evidence-based medicine, and encourage analytical and critical thinking.
- 6.04 The programmes have a defined relationship to subsequent postgraduate training.
- 6.05 The curriculum and teaching methods encourage students' individual responsibility and prepare them for lifelong, self-directed learning.
- 6.06 The knowledge of the basic biomedical sciences and related concepts and methods needed to learn and apply medical science are integrated into the programmes.
- 6.07 The knowledge of behavioural, social, and educational sciences and the legal principles relevant to the health care system that enable doctors to communicate effectively, reach clinical decisions, and act ethically are integrated into the programmes.
- 6.08 The use of information and communication technologies is a part of the training.
- 6.09 Assessment principles are compatible with the educational objectives and promote learning. The examinations contain various elements of the curriculum.

WFME Standards

The accreditation procedure is also oriented according to Article 6, Para. 1 of the accreditation guidelines on the quality standards and accreditation practice of the World Federation of Medical Education (Basic Medical Education, WFME Global Standards for Quality Improvement).⁵

III. Procedure

Art. 13 Structure of the accreditation procedure

The accreditation procedure is based on a three-phase evaluation:

- a. Phase 1: Self-evaluation by the unit seeking accreditation.

⁴ <http://www.smifk.ch>

⁵ <http://www.wfme.org> (WFME Global Standards)

- b. Phase 2: External evaluation: Site visit by an independent group of experts to assess compliance with the quality standards.
- c. Phase 3: Accreditation decision by the SUK/CUS.

Art. 14 Applications submitted by public institutions

¹ Applications for accreditation may be submitted by:

- a. The heads of public universities and academic institutions;
- b. The bodies responsible for public universities and academic institutions.

² Applications are to be submitted to the OAQ.

Art. 15 Accreditation of public academic institutions

¹ Public institutions that have successfully undergone a quality assessment for Swiss universities according to the Quality Assurance Guidelines for Swiss Universities dated December 7 2006⁶ can be accredited as a university or academic institution by the SUK/CUS based on this procedure.

² The SUK/CUS can, on request of the OAQ, and after consultation with the CRUS, decide that for the institutional accreditation according to Para. 1 additional assessments on the basis of the quality standards according to these Guidelines need to be carried out.

³ In the cases according to Article 7, Para. 1 of the Guidelines from 10 December 2002⁷ for the qualifying procedure for financial support stipulated by the Federal Law on Financial Aid to Universities (UFG) the accreditation can be granted for a shorter time period than that of Article 30 of these Guidelines.

Art. 16 Preliminary examination of applications from private academic institutions

¹ Applications by private institutions for an institutional accreditation have to undergo a preliminary assessment by the OAQ.

² The preliminary examination is based on the documentation submitted by the institution.

³ The preliminary examination is considered as passed if the institution meets the following requirements:

- a. It is a legal entity with seat in Switzerland;
- b. It fulfills the criteria for its category, listed in Article 3 (without the quality standards according to Article 9);

⁶ SR 414.205.2

⁷ <http://www.sbf.admin.ch>

- c. It demonstrates that it has the appropriate human resources, premises, and material equipment necessary to pursue university level teaching and research, and sufficient financial resources to ensure its operation.

⁴ The OAQ writes a report on the preliminary examination.

⁵ When the preliminary examination is successful, the OAQ begins the accreditation procedure, after having previously established the costs of the accreditation in a contract with the institution.

Art. 17 Time limits and pending procedures

¹ Applications for accreditation may be submitted to the OAQ at any time. The OAQ includes the application in its work schedule.

² The accreditation procedure can be expected to begin after a period of six months.

³ The OAQ publishes a list with the pending preliminary examinations and accreditation procedures on its website.

IV. Self-evaluation

Art. 18

¹ The academic institution requesting accreditation is responsible for carrying out a self-evaluation. The procedures are agreed upon in conjunction with the OAQ.

² The time frames for the self-evaluation are agreed on with the OAQ. The self-evaluation report and related documentation must be submitted to the OAQ at least four weeks before the date of the external evaluation (on site visit by the group of experts).

³ Article 24 regulates the conditions to be met by academic internal evaluation procedures and by evaluations or accreditations by third parties.

V. Evaluation by independent experts

Art. 19 Expert group

External evaluations are based on the self-evaluation. They are carried out by a group of experts generally consisting of three to five members. This group is headed by an individual with recognised expertise in the field to be accredited, and preferably has prior experience with accreditation or evaluation procedures.

Art. 20 Selection of experts

¹ The experts are selected as soon as the decision has been taken to begin the accreditation procedure.

² The OAQ consults specialists in Switzerland and abroad for recommendations for the expert committee. The Scientific Council of the OAQ selects the members of the group from this list. The institution to be accredited may ask that individual experts be excluded from the group, if there are relevant reasons.

³ The selection is governed by the following criteria:

- a. The majority of the group must be qualified academics with high competencies in teaching and research and proven experience in didactics (peers). They may be complemented by additional experts (i.e. from education science, quality assurance, the professional field in question, distance learning), as well as student representatives.
- b. The experts must be independent and must be able to make an impartial assessment.
- c. The majority of the experts must be employed outside Switzerland.
- d. At least one expert should have a good understanding of the Swiss educational system. As a rule, at least two members of the expert group should have a good working knowledge of the teaching language used in the unit to be accredited.
- e. When programmes are accredited, the range of subjects involved must be adequately reflected by the composition of the expert group.
- f. When institutions are accredited, at least one expert must have experience in managing an academic unit similar in size to the unit to be accredited.

Art. 21 Duties of the experts

Contractual agreements (subject to civil law) concerning their duties and the expectations of the OAQ are made with the experts. Experts are obliged, in particular, to carry out a site visit (Article 22) and to contribute to writing the report (Article 23).

Art. 22 Site visit by the expert group

¹ Before the visit, the experts review the self-evaluation report. The site visit generally lasts two days. During the visit the experts talk to all individuals and groups playing an important role in the unit to be accredited.

² The external evaluation is accompanied by a member of the OAQ, who has the status of an advisor.

Art. 23 Report of the expert group

¹ The head of the group is responsible for drawing up the report, and proceeds according to the guidelines for the external evaluation provided by the OAQ and bases the report on the self-evaluation and on the areas for evaluation and standards listed above. The report concludes with a recommendation on whether the unit should be accredited, and with recommendations for quality enhancement where appropriate. The report should also list any special features and strengths of the unit that has been evaluated.

² The report is approved by a majority vote of the expert group. The group sends its report, and dissenting votes where applicable, to the institution in question within four weeks of the end of the site visit. The institution has two weeks to express its position. The expert group may revise its report in light of the position expressed by the institution, and has to submit the final version to the OAQ no more than eight weeks after the end of the visit.

Art. 24 Use of third-party evaluations

The results of self-evaluations or external evaluations not carried out as part of the Swiss accreditation procedure can be taken into consideration provided that they were carried out not more than three years previously, and comply with the methods and standards of these Guidelines for academic accreditation in Switzerland. The same applies to accreditation procedures carried out by foreign/international accreditation agencies.

VI. Accreditation decisions

Art. 25 Preparation of the accreditation decision

¹ The OAQ evaluates the self-evaluation, the experts' report, and the position statement of the applicant. On this basis, the director prepares a report for the SUK/CUS with recommendations concerning the accreditation of the unit or programme concerned.

² The report is presented to the Scientific Advisory Board before it is submitted to the SUK/CUS.

³ Should the OAQ request that SUK/CUS reject an application for accreditation, the reasons for this decision will be given in a report.

Art. 26 Decisions

¹ The SUK/CUS decides on accreditation.

² The following decisions are possible:

- a. Preliminary accreditation;
- b. Accreditation is granted unconditionally;
- c. Accreditation is granted under conditions;
- d. Accreditation is refused.

³ The SUK/CUS decides on the rejection of applications for accreditation from private institutions which have not passed the preliminary examination.

Art. 27 Conditional accreditation

¹ If it appears that the shortcomings can be rectified within a reasonable period of time, conditional accreditation is granted.

² The institution requesting accreditation must prove that it is able to rectify the shortcomings by the end of the deadline.

³ The OAQ verifies the implementation within the set deadline.

⁴ If the conditions have not been met by the end of the deadline, the SUK/CUS decides, at the request of the OAQ, whether to extend the period, modify the conditions, or withdraw accreditation.

Art. 28 New application after refusal of preliminary accreditation or accreditation

¹ If a negative decision on accreditation or preliminary accreditation has been made, the applicant may reapply for accreditation at the earliest two years after the decision by SUK/CUS comes into legal force.

² The same time period is valid if an institution withdraws its request for accreditation after learning of the experts' report. In this case the time period begins when the request was withdrawn.

Art. 29 Accreditation certificate

If a positive accreditation decision is taken, either unconditionally or conditionally, a certificate is issued jointly by the OAQ and the SUK/CUS to confirm that the accredited unit meets the quality standards (seal of quality).

Art. 30 Period of validity of the accreditation

¹ Unconditional accreditation is granted for seven years.

² The same applies to conditional accreditation, provided the conditions are met within the stipulated time period.

Art. 31 Information concerning changes and withdrawal

¹ All fundamental changes within the accredited institution or programmes must be reported by the institution to the OAQ.

² The SUK/CUS may revoke the accreditation at the request of the OAQ, if after accreditation, the requirements for accreditation are no longer fulfilled and these shortcomings are despite all reminders not rectified.

VII. Fees, confidentiality and data protection, legal procedures

Art. 32 Costs and fee schedule

¹ The OAQ is responsible from its own budget for the costs of accreditation procedures for public institutions. This does not apply to the costs for the self-evaluation; these are the responsibility of the institution being accredited.

² According to Article 23, Para. 3 of the Cooperation Agreement from 14 December 2000 between the Federal Government and University Cantons, private institutions are required to pay the costs of accreditation. The fees are to cover all costs. The scale of fees provides detailed information.

³ At the beginning of the accreditation procedure, private institutions are to pay a pre-payment of 50% of the estimated costs. A further payment of 50% is to be remitted to the OAQ with the submission of the self-evaluation. If payment is not received on time, the OAQ will interrupt the procedure and will not permit an expert visit.

⁴ If the applicants cause additional work that go beyond the scope of a regular accreditation procedure through the provision of false or misleading information or by making motions for points that are not relevant to the decision-making process it is then responsible for the additional costs.

Art. 33 Confidentiality, information, and publications

¹ All individuals and groups involved in accreditation must treat information on the unit to be accredited confidentially.

² Those responsible for the unit requesting accreditation or which has been accredited receive the experts' report as well as the final report by the OAQ.

³ Positive accreditation decisions are published on the website of the SUK/CUS and the OAQ. Upon consultation with the head of the institutions, the OAQ also publishes the expert and final reports of the accreditation procedure.

Art. 34 Data protection

The Federal Law on Data Protection from 19 June 1992⁸ applies to the accreditation procedure.

Art. 35 Rights of appeal

The rights of appeal are covered by Article 9 of the Cooperation Agreement between the Federal Government and University Cantons on Matters Relating to Universities of 14 December 2000.

Art. 36 Administrative Procedures

Aspects not governed by the present Guidelines shall accordingly be subject to the conditions of the Federal Law on Administrative Procedures of 20 December 1968⁹.

⁸ SR 235.1

⁹ SR 172.021

VIII. Final provisions**Art. 37** Annulment of previous regulations

The Guidelines from SUK/CUS from 16 October 2003¹⁰ for the accreditation of academic institutions in Switzerland have been revoked.

Art. 38 Interim procedures

Procedures that are still pending for more than three months when these regulations enter into force are to be completed according to the previous regulations. With the approval of the applicants these procedures may also be completed according to the new regulations.

Art. 39 Entry into force

These Guidelines enter into force on 1 September 2007.

¹⁰ These Guidelines have not been published in the AS or SR. They can be consulted for an transitional period at www.cus.ch