



Guidelines for academic accreditation in Switzerland

of 16 October 2003

Guidelines for academic accreditation in Switzerland

The Swiss University Conference (SUK/CUS)

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

has decided upon the following:

I. General provisions

Art. 1 Scope

These guidelines govern the requirements and procedure for the accreditation of academic institutions and their programs.

Art. 2 Candidates for accreditation

- ¹ Public and private academic institutions and their programs in Switzerland are candidates for accreditation. Clearly defined academic units are to be accredited. Programs qualify for accreditation if they lead to an academic or professional degree at university level.
- ² Several applications for accreditation of similar programs may be evaluated in the same procedure by the same group of experts.
- ³ An accreditation procedure in Switzerland may be combined with accreditation in another country or by another international accreditation body.

Art. 2a Preliminary accreditation

- ¹ Universities which have not started operating, or which started operating only recently, 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 way as accreditation. The quality standards are applied analogously.
- ⁴ Preliminary accreditation lapses after a period of three years.

¹ SR/RS 414.205

Art. 3 Activities to be evaluated

¹ Teaching and research will be evaluated in the accreditation procedure.

² Continuing education programs may also be accredited.

Art. 4 Principles

¹ The accreditation procedure in Switzerland and the associated quality standards are derived from the best international accreditation practices. The Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ) is responsible for ensuring that adjustments are made periodically as needed. Where this affects the Guidelines, the OAQ shall make the necessary application to the Swiss University Conference (SUK/CUS).

² The accreditation procedures must be organized in such a way that the burden on the academic institutions is minimal. The universities' own evaluations and the accreditation procedure must be tuned as far as possible.

II. Quality standards**Art. 5 Areas evaluated and standards**

Accreditation is based on an assessment of compliance with the standards detailed below for specified areas of activity. The standards represent a benchmark. The accreditation decision is based on an overall evaluation of the standards stated in the following.

Art. 6 Quality standards for institutions

Area of evaluation: Strategy, organization 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 determined. The academic staff participates in decision-making processes affecting teaching and research. The students participate in decision-making processes affecting their education and are able to state their opinions.

1.03 The institution has the human resources, structures and financial and material means enabling it to realize its stated goals and objectives according to its strategic plan.

1.04 The sources of the financial means and all the conditions attached to the financing are stated transparently and do not restrict the autonomy of the institution to take decisions in teaching and research.

1.05 The institution has a quality assurance system.

1.06 The institution has set up a committee dealing with questions relating to gender equality, or has arranged access to such a committee.

Area of evaluation: Range of programs

- 2.01 The institution offers a range of programs leading to academic or professional degrees with stated goals and objectives. They integrate with the existing range of programs of higher education offered by the universities or complement them in a meaningful way.
- 2.02 The institution participates in a national and international exchange of students, teaching staff and academic staff.
- 2.03 The institution has specified the conditions for attaining records of achievement and 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 keeping with its strategic plan and meet international standards.
- 3.02 The institution ensures that current scientific findings are made use of in its teaching.

Area of evaluation: Academic staff

- 4.01 The procedures for selecting, nominating 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.
- 4.03 The institution pursues a long-range policy of promoting upcoming young academics.
- 4.04 The institution ensures that their academic staff has access to advice on career development.

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 matriculation and admission to the institution's range of programs have been declared and justified.
- 6.02 Equality of men and women is assured.
- 6.03 The institution observes the development of study achievements and the duration of study.

6.04 The ratio of staff to students must be adequate to ensure that the educational goals and objectives of the institution and of its organizational units can be achieved.

6.05 The institution ensures that potential and current students have access to counselling services and guidance to the studies. The institution implements measures which allow the students to assess their progression through the program.

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 a national and international level. It promotes cooperation with other academic institutions, the working environment and relevant stakeholders in the society.

Art. 7 Quality standards for programs

Area of evaluation: Implementation and teaching objectives

1.01 The range of programs is carried out regularly.

1.02 The objectives of the program correspond to the institution's mission and strategic plan.

Area of evaluation: Internal organization and quality assurance measures

2.01 The decision-making processes, competencies and responsibilities have been determined and communicated to all those involved.

2.02 Measures are taken to ensure the active participation of the academic staff and of the students in decision-making processes affecting education and teaching.

2.03 Quality assurance measures exist for the programs. The institution makes use of the results to periodically revise the range of programs.

Area of evaluation: Curriculum and teaching methods

3.01 The program has a structured curriculum which corresponds to the coordinated implementation of the Bologna Declaration in Swiss higher education.

3.02 The range of programs covers the major aspects of the field in question. It allows students to acquire scientific working methods and ensures that scientific findings are integrated. The teaching and evaluation methods used are in line with the stated teaching goals and objectives.

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 faculty.
- 4.02 The workload assigned to teaching and to 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 into the program have been made public.
- 5.02 Equality of men and women is assured.
- 5.03 The mobility of students is possible and is promoted by mutual recognition of credits between universities and between disciplines.
- 5.04 Measures are taken to ensure adequate learning support and counselling to students.

Area of evaluation: Facilities and premises

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

Art. 8 Specific quality standards

The quality standards stated in Articles 6 and 7 may be supplemented by specific standards relating, for example, to a particular profession, discipline or academic degree. These specific standards must be submitted to the SUK/CUS for approval.

Art. 8^a Specific quality standards for Basic Medical Education at the Swiss universities²**Supplement to Art. 6***Area of evaluation: Strategy, organization 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 specialist areas.
- 1.02 The faculty ensures that adequate practical clinical training is provided.

Area of evaluation: Range of programs

- 2.01 The study programs encompass adequate training in both scientific aspects of medicine and in practical clinical areas; this training empowers students who have successfully completed it to take on clinical responsibility. The institution ensures that students have patient contact structured according to the stage of the study program.

² Decided by the SUK/CUS on 25 June 2004, entered into force on 1 July 2004

Area of evaluation: Academic staff

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

Area of evaluation: Students

- 4.01 Each phase of the program has a defined capacity for students.

Area of evaluation: Cooperation

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

Supplement to Art. 7*Area of evaluation: Curriculum and teaching methods*

- 6.01 The faculty establishes the content, scope and sequence of curriculum elements. It defines the weight given to health promotion, preventive medicine and rehabilitation and to the inclusion of complementary medicine. The programs teach both basic knowledge and clinical knowledge and skills.
- 6.02 The programs observe the objectives listed in the Swiss Catalogue of Learning Objectives for Undergraduate Medical Training.
- 6.03 All parts of the programs teach the principles of the scientific method and evidence-based medicine. They encourage analytical and critical thinking.
- 6.04 The programs have a defined relationship to the subsequent post graduate 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 the medical science are integrated into the programs.
- 6.07 The knowledge of behavioral, social and education sciences and the legal principles relevant to the health system that enable doctors to communicate effectively, reach clinical decisions and act ethically are integrated into the programs.
- 6.08 The use of information and communication technologies forms part of the training.
- 6.09 Assessment principles, methods and practices are compatible with the educational objectives and promote learning. The examinations contain various elements of the curriculum to encourage integrated learning.

Procedure

The accreditation procedure is otherwise guided, as stated in Article 4 para. 1 of the Accreditation Guidelines, by the quality standards and accreditation practice of the World Federation of Medical Education (Basic Medical Education, WFME Global Standards for Quality Improvement).

III. Procedure**Art. 9 Structure of the accreditation procedure**

Accreditation procedures are based on evaluations carried out in several steps.

- Step one:* Self-evaluation by the unit seeking accreditation.
- Step two:* External evaluation: On-site assessment of compliance with the quality standards by an independent group of experts (peer review).
- Step three:* Decision on accreditation.

Art. 10 Submission of applications

Applications for accreditation should be submitted to the OAQ.

Art. 11 Applications by public academic institutions

Applications may be submitted by:

- a. the bodies responsible for public universities and academic institutions;
- b. the leaderships of public universities and academic institutions;
- c. the Swiss University Conference;
- d. the Federal Government.

They may apply for accreditation of academic units or individual programs in accordance with Article 2 and Article 2a.

Art. 12 Applications by private academic institutions

- ¹ Applications by private institutions undergo preliminary assessment by the OAQ.
- ² The purpose of the preliminary examination is to establish the eligibility of the application for accreditation. The preliminary examination is based on the documentation submitted by the institution in line with a published list of criteria established by the OAQ.
- ³ The preliminary examination is considered to have been passed if the institution meets the following requirements:
 - a. It is a legal entity which offers educational opportunities at university level.
 - b. It pursues teaching and research activities.
 - c. It has the human resources, premises and material equipment necessary to pursue university-level teaching and research and these resources are appropriate.
- ⁴ If the institution passes the preliminary examination, the OAQ proceeds to the accreditation procedure as stipulated in Article 9.
- ⁵ The OAQ submits applications which have not passed the preliminary examination to the SUK/CUS with a request for such applications to be rejected.
- ⁶ Before accreditation activities begin, the OAQ and the unit requesting accreditation reach contractual agreement on the conditions governing accreditation. If no agreement is reached, these questions are settled by decision of the SUK/CUS.

Art. 13 Time limits

Applications for accreditation may be submitted to the OAQ at any time. The OAQ includes the application in its work schedule. A period of six months should be expected to elapse before the accreditation procedure begins.

IV. Self-evaluation

Art. 14 Self-evaluation

- ¹ The academic unit requesting accreditation carries out a self-evaluation on its own responsibility. It agrees on the procedure to be followed with the OAQ.
- ² The period within which the self-evaluation must be completed is agreed on with the OAQ. The self-evaluation report and the related documentation must reach the OAQ at least four weeks before the date announced for the external evaluation (on-site visit by a group of experts).
- ³ Article 20 regulates the conditions which have to be met by evaluations or accreditations that have been initiated by the academic unit and subsequently carried out by the unit itself or by third parties, in order to qualify as a basis for the accreditation.

V. Evaluation by independent experts

Art. 15 Group of experts

External evaluations are based on the self-evaluation. They are carried out by a group of experts generally comprising three to five people. This group is headed by an individual with great expertise in the field to be accredited who should preferably have prior experience with accreditation or evaluation procedures.

Art. 16 Selection of experts

- ¹ The experts are selected as soon as the decision has been taken to include the unit in the accreditation program.
- ² The unit to be accredited and further experts consulted by the OAQ in Switzerland and abroad propose experts for the group. The Scientific Council of the OAQ selects the members of the group from this list. The unit to be accredited may ask for individual experts to be excluded from the group if there are important reasons for this.
- ³ The selection is governed by the following criteria:
 - a. The majority of the experts in a group must be qualified academics with proven teaching experience (peers). They may be complemented by additional experts (e.g. in education science, quality assurance, the professional field in question, distance learning).
 - 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 education system. As a rule at least two members of the expert group should have a good knowledge of the teaching language used in the unit to be accredited.

- e. When programs 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 of managing an academic unit similar in size to the unit to be accredited.

Art. 17 Duties of the experts

Contractual agreements subject to civil law are concluded with the experts which detail what the OAQ expects of them. Experts are obliged, in particular, to carry out an on-site visit (Article 18) and contribute to producing the report (Article 19).

Art. 18 Visit by the expert group

- ¹ Before the visit, the experts review the self-evaluation report. The on-site visit generally lasts two days. During the visit the experts talk to all the individuals and groups who play an important role in the unit to be accredited.
- ² The external evaluation is accompanied by a member of the OAQ (status of an advisor).

Art. 19 Report by the expert group

- ¹ The head of the group is responsible for drawing up the report. He or she 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 enhancing quality 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 visit; the institution may express its opinion within two weeks. The expert group may revise its report in the light of the opinion 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. 20 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 no more than three years previously and comply with the methods and standards set out in these guidelines for academic accreditation in Switzerland. The same applies to accreditation procedures carried out by foreign/international accreditation agencies.

VI. Accreditation decisions

Art. 21 Preparation of the accreditation decision

- ¹ The OAQ evaluates the self-evaluation, the expert report and the opinion expressed by the applicant. On this basis the director draws up a report requesting the SUK/CUS to accredit or not to accredit the unit or the program concerned.
- ² He presents the report to the Scientific Advisory Board before it is submitted to the SUK/CUS.
- ³ Should the OAQ request the SUK/CUS to reject an application for accreditation, it will give the reasons for this decision in a report.

Art. 22 Decisions

- ¹ The SUK/CUS decides whether or not an institution should be accredited.
- ² It may decide in one of the following ways:
 - a. Preliminary accreditation;
 - b. Accreditation is granted unconditionally;
 - c. Accreditation is granted under certain conditions;
 - d. Accreditation is refused.
- ³ The SUK/CUS decides whether applications for accreditation from private institutions which have not passed the preliminary examination should be rejected.

Art. 23 Conditional accreditation

If it appears that the shortcomings observed can be rectified within a reasonable period, conditional accreditation is granted. The OAQ checks whether they have been rectified within a set period. If the conditions have not been met by then, the SUK/CUS decides at the request of the OAQ whether to extend the period, modify the conditions or withdraw accreditation.

Art. 24 Refusal of accreditation

If a negative accreditation decision is given, the applicant may reapply for accreditation after a period of at least two years.

Art. 25 Costs and schedule of fees

- ¹ The cost of the accreditation process is borne by the OAQ from its budget for public institutions. This does not apply to the costs involved in self-evaluation; these are the responsibility of the institution being accredited.
- ² According to Article 23 section 3 of the Cooperation Agreement between the Federal Government and University Cantons private institutions are required to pay the costs of accreditation. The fees charged cover all of the costs involved. The schedule of fees provides detailed information. Part-payment in advance of 30% of the estimated costs is required.

Art. 26 Accreditation certificate

If the decision is taken to grant accreditation, 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 requirements (seal of quality).

Art. 27 Information and publications

- ¹ All the individuals and groups involved in accreditation must treat information on the accredited unit confidentially. The responsible individuals of the unit requesting accreditation or which has been accredited are entitled to receive the expert report.
- ² The accreditation decisions and results of preliminary examinations are published on the website of the SUK/CUS and the OAQ. The OAQ also publishes the reports of the accreditation procedure.

Art. 28 Period of validity of accreditation

- ¹ Unconditional accreditation is granted for seven years.
- ² The same applies to conditional accreditation provided that the conditions are met within the stipulated period.

Art. 29 Revocation

- ¹ If serious quality problems develop in the evaluated areas after accreditation has been granted, and if these are not solved shortly after they have been drawn to the institution's attention, the SUK/CUS may revoke the accreditation at the request of the OAQ.
- ² All fundamental changes within the accredited unit must be reported by the unit to the OAQ.

Art. 30 Legal protection

Legal protection is covered by Article 9 of the Cooperation Agreement between the Federal Government and University Cantons on Matters Relating to Universities of 14 December 2000.

VII. Final provisions

Art. 31 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 1968³.

Art. 32 Data protection

The provisions of the Federal Law on Data Protection of 19 June 1992⁴ shall apply accordingly to the accreditation procedure.

Art. 33 Entry into force

These Guidelines shall enter into force on 1 January 2004.

Bern, 16 October 2003

On behalf of the
Swiss University Conference

The President: Annoni

The Secretary-General: Ischi

³ SR/RS 172.021

⁴ SR/RS 235.1

**Accreditation and Quality Assurance Body:
Fee regulations: Payments for services rendered by the OAQ to third parties**

Based on Art. 19 (5) of the *Cooperation Agreement between the Federal Government and University Cantons on Matters Relating to Universities* of 14.12.00,

the OAQ shall levy the following fees for services rendered to third parties:

Fees for external experts providing services relating to accreditation procedures

	Fee type	CHF
- Per diem fee for on-site visit by an expert group member, including time spent on preparatory and follow-up work	Gross	1'250.-
- Per diem fee for on-site visit by an expert group leader, including time spent on preparatory and follow-up work	Gross	1'450.-
- Flat-rate fee for drafting expert report	Flat-rate	600.-

Experts residing outside Switzerland will be debited with any social insurance contributions and taxes due (e.g. tax at source, VAT, etc.). Private applicants will be required to pay experts' travel and accommodation expenses.

Fees for OAQ staff (including payment towards use of the OAQ infrastructure and ordinary operating costs)

	Fee type	CHF
- Hourly salary for director and members of the scientific advisory board (excluding VAT)	Gross	200.-
- Hourly salary for professional staff of academic qualification (excluding VAT)	Gross	140.-
- Hourly salary for secretariat (excluding VAT)	Gross	80.-

Any extraordinary materials or project related costs will have to be paid by the third parties.

These fee regulations shall enter into force on 01.01.2003.

Bern, 24.10.2002

On behalf of the
Swiss University Conference
The President: Kleiber
The Secretary-General: Ischi