

Code of Good Practice for Site-Visits

INTRODUCTION

The code of good practice for site-visits were discussed and approved by the Austrian Accreditation Council (AAC) at its meeting on 26 February 2007. These principles are to ensure the quality of site-visits and are directed to all participants of site-visits. The following is to be considered:

The code of good practice for site-visits is based on experience gathered to date on site-visits. Additions are constantly being made and the principles are being further developed. The feedback of experts and applicants is systematically used for improvement.

The code of good practice for site-visits is formulated so that they can accommodate for a specific procedure.

The code of good practice for site-visits is to serve a guideline, allowing for a balanced and comprehensive collection of all facts relevant to the procedure.

The code of good practice for site-visits is to serve as the basis of a consistent and objective accreditation decision.

PRINCIPLES

1. Informing the Experts

1.1. As preparation the experts shall receive all application documents as well as all information necessary for the site-visit activities (guidelines for experts, code of good practice for site-visits, basic criteria, etc.) at the latest four weeks prior to the site-visit.

1.2. Experts, rapporteur and the representative of the office will have an opportunity to meet, generally as part of a preliminary discussion with dinner on the evening before the site-visit of the institution. This discussion offers a good open communication situation.

1.3. The experts are to be informed about the application and the applicant institution as well as the aspects of the application meriting special scrutiny to guarantee that the experts retain the greatest possible objectivity.

1.4. The experts shall receive additional information on the following points within context of the preliminary discussion:

- the application in question
- the institution submitting the application

- legal framework of the accreditation procedure
- the Austrian Accreditation Council
- the system of accreditation and the private university sector in Austria

2. Role of the Experts

2.1. The experts shall be clearly informed about their role during the site-visit. They assume sole responsibility for collecting all the necessary data for their report.

2.2. All contacts between experts and the applicant institution shall be arranged by the office. The expert shall be informed that his/her role as expert is irreconcilable with a possible consulting role vis-a-vis the institution.

2.3. The expert shall be informed of their tasks of the site-visit. This includes the following elements in particular:

- Compiling a report in compliance with the guidelines for experts of the AAC
- Preparing various separate expert reports
- No legal validation and no recommendation for final decision by the experts.

3. Role of the Member of the Accreditation Council (Rapporteur)

3.1. The rapporteur shall be in charge of the discussion during the site-visit and make sure that all issues relevant for the procedure are addressed with the corresponding groups of individuals during the site-visit.

3.2. The rapporteur shall structure the discussion so that the experts have sufficient opportunity to address all the issues relevant to them.

3.3. The rapporteur shall make sure that all issues are addressed which are relevant to the decision but do not fall within the competence of the experts.

4. Role of the Office

4.1. The office shall, as part of a preliminary discussion with the rapporteur, provide information on the latest developments in the procedure and discuss with him/her the planned schedule of the site-visit and still open questions.

4.2. The office contributes to obtaining all information relevant to the decision by asking additional questions.

4.3. The office is available for legal information and information regarding the procedure and decision of the Accreditation Council.

4.4. The office shall provide information about the procedure.

5. Role of the Observer

5.1. Under certain circumstances the Accreditation Council can decide to have observers participate in the site-visit if the institution to be accessed agrees.

5.2. The observer agrees to adhere to full confidentiality vis-à-vis third parties about all aspects of the procedure.

6. Site-Visit of Institution: Structure and Schedule

6.1. The site-visit shall be structured to meet the specific demands of the procedure (ex-ante accreditation, new academic programmes or re-accreditation) and coordinated with the applicant institution.

6.2. The expert team (rapporteur, experts, representative of office) and representatives of institution seeking accreditation shall participate in the visit. The representatives of the institution applying for accreditation are to be selected by the institution. It shall make sure that competent contact partners are present to discuss all subject areas. The students shall be selected by the representative body of the students, if such a body exists, and not by the university management.

6.3. The site-visit shall be structured to ensure that all relevant groups of the institution shall receive ample opportunity to present their positions and that there is enough time available to address all relevant questions.

6.4. The site-visit shall be structured so that the individual groups have ample opportunity to freely present their position without being influenced by the head of the university.

6.5. Normally the site-visit is structured to include the following items:

- Discussion with representatives of the head office of the university
 - Mission statement
 - Organisation, management, financing
 - Development plan
 - Quality management, follow-up to external evaluation
- Interim discussion of expert team (possibly as part of a lunch)
- Tour of the facilities and the infrastructure
- Discussion with those responsible for teaching and research
- Discussion with students or graduates (if available)

- Follow-up discussion of expert team (without representatives of the institution)
- Final discussion with the university management

7. Follow-up Discussion of the Expert Team

7.1. The follow-up discussion of the expert team shall take place without any representatives of the institution.

7.2. The follow-up discussion of the expert team shall seek to respect to the greatest possible extent the plurality of views of the inspectors and to not anticipate the results of the assessment and the decision of the Accreditation Council.

7.3. The follow-up discussion of the expert team serves primarily to deal with the following items:

- Clarifying open (legal) questions
- Determining whether further information is needed from the applicant institution
- Clarifying remaining open questions regarding the assessment (task of assessor, orientation framework, etc.)
- Clarifying time framework for jointly completing assessment (usually 2-3 weeks after the site-visit and/or handing over documents that were submitted later.)

8. Final Discussion with the University Management

8.1. In the final discussion with the university management the further procedure is to be clarified. The following items have to be dealt with:

- Documents that still need to be submitted
- Deadline for late submissions
- Approximate time framework for putting together assessment
- Approximate time framework for commenting on assessments
- Expected date of decision

8.2. The results of the assessment and the decision of the Accreditation Council shall not to be anticipated in the final discussion with the university management.