

Heidelberg University (UHD)

Concept Accreditation: Design and Implementation of a New Degree Programme (Including National and International Joint Programmes)

Concept

The impulse for the design of a new degree programme originates from a study unit and the responsible faculty: This is where the idea of a degree programme evolves, e.g., because the unit would like to further develop its teaching profile.

This idea is presented in the department committee (Fachrat, institute/seminar level) or in the faculty commission for study and teaching (Studienkommission). If the faculty council shows positive interest in the idea, the study unit contacts the Division of Student Affairs and Teaching involving the QM advisor. The Division appoints a person, who coordinates the entire process of the implementation. Once the contact with the coordinating person is made, a kick-off meeting will be arranged. The kick-off meeting takes place with the goal to present the entire process to the study unit, as well as the relevant services in this process, in order to maintain the quality-relevant standards right from the start. At the same time this first encounter allows all parties involved in the process to meet, as there are:

- responsible study unit representatives,
- QM Advisor of the faculty,
- Division of Student Affairs and Teaching: all relevant departments or persons, particularly the coordinating person of the entire process, a legal advisor to answer legal questions, a person in charge of the admission procedure to answer respective questions, a person from the Central Student Advisory Office in order to share experience from this point of view, one person for teaching capacity matters,
- heiSKILLS Department for Teaching and Learning (curriculum development, generic competencies, training of tutors, forms of teaching, learning and assessment, competence orientation), as well as Department for Advanced Scientific Training and Lifelong Learning (in continuing-education master's degree programmes),
- International Relations Division (only if an international degree programme is planned and if questions regarding the admission of international applicants might be relevant),
- heiQUALITY office (issues relevant for accreditation, module handbooks, external reviews).

Possible obstacles in the implementation process can be identified at an early stage during the kick-off meeting, and solutions can already be considered. A preliminary schedule is discussed, and the different steps of the process are agreed upon together.

After this meeting, the study unit will work on the concept of the degree programme. It should focus particularly on the following components: Overall objectives and explicit learning outcomes of the degree programme also as a demarcation to already existing degree programmes, level (Bachelor's/Master's) and contents of the degree programme, target group and intended cohort sizes, graduate profile and qualification objectives, planned modules, forms of teaching, learning and assessment, as well as financing and sustainability.

During the entire process, the study unit and the QM Advisor are advised and supported by the above-mentioned service facilities. The final concept is then presented in the Rectorate via the

head of the Division of Student Affairs and Teaching. In case of positive feedback, the implementation process goes into the second phase. The Rectorate may however also decline the concept because the planned degree programme does not fit into the overall strategy of the University or return the concept to the study unit for further elaboration. In that case, there is the opportunity to resubmit a revised concept to the Rectorate.

Already during this first phase (working on a concept), but also during the entire next phase (elaboration, see next section), the heiSKILLS Department for Teaching and Learning is available for advice on all issues regarding curriculum development or implementation of a competence-oriented, innovative concept. The study unit can decide if it wants to be advised personally or if it prefers to only use the numerous online sources e.g. guideline papers and workshops about course and curriculum planning¹. Furthermore, there are also online courses for the acquisition of generic skills available that can be used directly for the curriculum (e.g., introduction to scientific writing, study skills such as learning to learn, study in a motivated and independent manner and time management).

Elaboration

During the further elaboration of the new degree programme, external academic, vocational and student reviewers render a written report. Based on these expert reports the study unit creates and finalises the relevant documents (admissions regulations, examination rules and regulations, module handbook, teaching capacity analysis) in close collaboration with the above-mentioned involved parties.

An external academic reviewer as well as an external vocational and an external student reviewer render a written report on the degree programme concept approved by the Rectorate: The study unit may submit three suggestions for each external reviewer² adhering to defined criteria and giving a reason why these persons are suitable for the evaluation. The heiQUALITY checks the criteria based on the information available online and forwards the results to the Vice-Rector Quality Development, which decides on the ranking and, if necessary, the exclusion of reviewers. The heiQUALITY office contacts the reviewers in the determined order. They write their report based on a standardised set of questions via EvaSys online survey. As soon as the heiQUALITY office receives all three reports, they are sent to the study unit and the QM Advisor. The results of the reports are to be discussed in the department committee (Fachrat, if existing) or in the faculty commission for study and teaching (Studienkommission) where the weak points detected by the reviewers should also be analysed and if adequate be included in the further development of the degree programme. Additionally, the study unit issues an official statement on the expert reports that are later on presented to the Senate Commission Teaching (SAL).

At the same time, the responsible person in the study unit works on all the relevant regulations (rules and examination regulations, tuition fee regulations, admission regulations, if necessary further regulations) with the support of the QM Advisor and in consultation with the responsible legal expert of the Legal Service Student Affairs and Teaching. The module handbook is created with the support of the QM Advisor and in consultation with the responsible person at the heiQUALITY office. Therefore, a template for module handbooks can be used, which entails all

¹ <https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/slk/nutzbar/>

² When establishing and accrediting theological degree programmes or degree programmes related to teacher or psychotherapeutic trainings, the vocational reviewer to be involved is not designated by the university, but by the responsible regional church, the Ministry of Education and/or the regional council.

relevant and legal specifications. Regarding the contents of the Diploma Supplement and the Transcripts of Records, the heiQUALITY office informs on a regular basis the QM Advisors about the valid specifications, who forward them to the study units.

If the new degree programme is intended to be in cooperation with one or more national or international institutions of higher education, an additional cooperation agreement must be concluded, in which since 2016, the criteria for joint quality assurance and development are to be defined. It is the own responsibility of the study unit and/or faculty board, to stipulate and coordinate the cooperation with the partner university involving the Legal Service Student Affairs and Teaching and the International Relations Division.

Another important component of the elaboration phase is the teaching capacity analysis: In cooperation with the study unit, the capacity calculator of the University determines whether or not the teaching resources within the study unit are sufficient to ensure the required courses considering all degree programmes offered by the unit. The results of the analysis are presented to the SAL.

Prior to the approval of the documents by the university bodies, the coordinating person of the overall process in the Division of Student Affairs and Teaching checks if all documents reviewed by the different responsible departments are consistent and complete.

Approval by university bodies

After the checked documents are approved by the department committee (Fachrat, if existing), these are presented to the faculty commission for study and teaching (Studienkommission). Afterwards, they have to be approved by the faculty council. Every superordinate board can return the documents for further elaboration to the subordinate board. If there is a positive vote by the faculty bodies, the documents are sent via the QM Advisor of the Faculty with the vote results to the office of the Senate Commission Teaching (Senatsausschuss Lehre - SAL) in the Division of Student Affairs and Teaching.

The final versions of all relevant documents (the examination rules and regulations, the admission regulations, the module handbook and the external reviews including the statement of the study unit) are required for the presentation to the SAL. The tuition fee regulations and the cooperation agreement with a respective quality assurance clause are also required at that time if it is a degree programme that is subject to charges or a cooperation degree programme. The results of the Teaching Capacity Analysis are forwarded to the office of the SAL directly by the office within the Division of Student Affairs and Teaching that is responsible for the calculations of the capacity.

As soon as the new degree programme is approved by the SAL, the office of the SAL submits the required documents via the official channel to the Senate and then to the University Council. The coordinating person within the Division of Student Affairs and Teaching informs the persons involved in the procedure about the result of the decision taken in the Senate. After the University Council approved the new degree programme, the Division of Student Affairs and Teaching applies for the implementation approval of the Ministry of Science, Research and the Arts, Baden-Württemberg (MWK) and applies for approval of further institutions that possibly need to be involved: e.g., Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs or the protestant regional church (Oberlandeskirche).

Implementation

After receipt of the approval letter of the MWK, the coordinating person of the overall process within the Division of Student Affairs and Teaching forwards the required information to the responsible persons and further involved parties and ensures that the regulations of the new degree programme can be published in the bulletin of the Rector.

With the publication in the bulletin of the Rector, the quality-ensured implementation process is completed, and the new degree programme is legally valid. Subsequently, the degree programme receives a certificate of accreditation issued by the heiQUALITY office with the date of the publication. The concept accreditation is valid for eight years.

Parallel to this, all necessary university-internal steps are initiated by the Division of Student Affairs and Teaching, in order to conclude the implementation of the new degree programme (online publishing of the legally valid regulations, informing the University Computing Centre in order to set up a subject key, to incorporate the degree programme into the Campus Management System etc.).

Further Development and Re-Accreditation of a Degree Programme

The further development of degree programmes is a continuous process that is part of the permanent work of different faculty bodies, such as the department committee (Fachrat, if existing) and the faculty commission for study and teaching (Studienkommission), as well as for some study units additional working groups. Beyond these natural further developments, it also requires formalised processes for further development as described hereinafter. There are often operative improvements with regard to everyday university life and its organisation, that for instance are worked out and implemented during dialogues between teaching staff and students. If these improvements require formal decisions by the faculty bodies, they are made by the department committee (if existing) and in the faculty commission for study and teaching. Further developments pertaining to the formal rules and regulations of a degree programme are categorised as follows:

- simple and significant amendments: further development from within the study unit,
- first cohort Monitoring: first evaluation after implementation of a new degree programme,
- Q+Ampel-Verfahren: internal evaluation procedure for systematic quality assurance and development of degree programmes for re-accreditation/re-certification.

The internal evaluation procedure for quality development (Q+Ampel-Verfahren) is also applied for quality development and accreditation of national and international joint programmes. The question of responsibility for the accreditation process and joint quality development is regulated either in a framework agreement on quality assurance or in a quality clause, which is an essential part of every cooperation agreement of a newly implemented degree programme or to be incorporated into the cooperation agreement of already existing degree programmes, by the reaccreditation at the latest. If Heidelberg University is responsible for accreditation, representatives of the partner universities are always involved from the very beginning. Joint programmes with partner universities in the European Higher Education Area are also accredited within the framework of the Q+Ampel-Verfahren. Although the focus here lies on the parts Heidelberg University is responsible for, the joint quality assurance, and development of the entire degree programme is also subject to evaluation. Degree programmes offered by Heidelberg University outside of the European Higher Education Area alone or in cooperation, are also subject to the Q+Ampel-Verfahren.

Heidelberg University maintains cooperations and joint programmes with other system-accredited institutions of higher education. It does not, however, have a common QM system with another institution of higher education. If there are cooperations with other institutions of higher education, a quality assurance clause is integrated in the cooperation agreement both at the institution level and at the level of the respective degree programme. This clause includes joint perspectives of quality assurance and quality development and regulates how the joint QM processes, including (re)accreditation, are to be designed. However, the QM systems of the respective institutions of higher education always remain independent from one another.

Internal regulations or instructions, e.g. regarding the curriculum, mobility track, student's pathway or enrolment

According to German law (Studienakkreditierungsverordnung), the following is regulated:

A joint programme is either a Bachelor's or a Master's study programme that is coordinated and offered by a domestic higher education institution together with one or more higher education institutions from a foreign state or states in the European Higher Education Area and that has the following features:

- an integrated curriculum,
- usually at least 25 percent of the study programme completed at one or more foreign higher education institutions,
- contractually governed cooperation,
- coordinated admissions and examination system, and
- a joint quality assurance.

Depending on the form(at) of the study programme (joint degree or double/multiple degree), different legal regulations apply.

Timeline

The timeline for establishing a new joint programme varies between 1 and 2 years. There are no external deadlines. It depends on the efficient contribution and cooperation of the different university bodies. For each project, an individual timeline is agreed upon by the different stakeholders at the university.

The accreditation of study programmes is valid for 8 years.