



## **Application**

**For Renewal of Registration of ASIIN e.V. to  
EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register  
for Higher Education)**

**and**

**For Reconfirmation of Membership of ENQA  
(European Association for Quality Assurance  
in Higher Education)**

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this application is to renew ASIIN's registration by e.V.EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) and to reconfirm its membership to ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) as well. This application is structured according to the Guidelines for ENQA Agency reviews and parts 2 and 3 of the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)".<sup>1</sup>

### Scope of application

In accordance with the definition of the scope of application of the ESG, ASIIN considers all those of its activities whose focus is on the external quality assurance of higher education learning and teaching as the subject of the present procedure. This includes, in the parlance of the product and service portfolio just described, all those activities that focus on external quality assurance of learning and teaching:

- Accreditation / certification of study programmes (ASIIN and third party seal)
- Accreditation / certification of QM systems (ASIIN and third party seals)
- Certification of modules and courses
- Evaluations for quality assurance and improvement of studies and teaching (according to ESG)

Excluded are other product and service areas which do not count among the activities for quality assurance of learning and teaching within the framework of and under the ESG regime (processing certification procedures for third-party providers; workshops & training; externally funded/EU projects; evaluations of organisational development or research activities, effectiveness; consulting QM and organisational development).

With regard to the distinction between evaluations that fall under the ESG regime (type 1 evaluations) and evaluations that cannot be classified here (type 2 evaluations), ASIIN assumes the following typology:

	Type 1 evaluations for external quality assurance / enhancement in higher education	Type 2 evaluations for quality and organisational development / research activities
Focus & Purpose	external quality assurance and improvement of academic courses and/or educational institutions	consulting, development and optimisation, design and/or impact analysis
Subject	study programmes, modules and courses, QM systems, institutions (in the area of learning and teaching)	study programmes, modules and courses, QM systems, institutions (in the area of learning and teaching)

<sup>1</sup> Approved by the Ministerial Conference in May 2015.

<b>Approach</b>	accountability and comparison with other similar items, usually a sequence of predefined process components that cannot be changed by the client	goal and approach determined by the client, tailor-made evaluation projects, any combination of evaluation instruments (e.g. workshops, audits, surveys)
<b>Criteria and Evaluation Mandate</b>	comparison with pre-defined, external quality specifications or criteria for assessing against other tested objects; usually criteria cannot be changed by the client	research questions and criteria are specified and defined by the client or developed jointly with him
<b>Methods and Tools</b>	Self-assessment by the client on the basis of (externally) predefined sets of criteria, mixture of expert and stakeholder audit, external audit as quality check, reporting on predefined sets of criteria	tailored evaluation project in coordination with the client, any combination of evaluation instruments and consulting elements (e.g. workshops, audits, surveys)
<b>Reports</b>	evaluation reports intended for publication and accountability	expert reports for internal discussion and further development to be used at the sole discretion of the client

Both types are referenced to evaluations. The main difference is that in Type 1 predefined criteria are used while in Type 2 specific points to be evaluated are determined by the client. Subsequent to our review we analysis the situation and found out that the higher education community does not accept different terminology. For this type of procedure evaluation is the common term.

### **National Particularities**

As an international agency ASIIN e.V. awards its own seal for study programmes in more than 40 countries globally. Additionally, ASIIN is authorised to award different European field specific accreditation seals and holds formal licenses from organisations authorised by the state in Germany, Kazakhstan and Ukraine to perform recognised accreditation procedures.

The conduction of accreditation procedures for the ASIIN seal takes place according to the General Criteria and Procedural Guidelines for Programme Accreditation and System Accreditation of ASIIN. Specific national provisions are applied only in the country in question. E.g., the requirements of the German Accreditation Council (GAC) are applied only in Germany in the same way that its seal is only awarded to degree programmes / HEIs in its area of responsibility. The same applies to any national regulation, which may be considered within an accreditation procedure of ASIIN.

### **Language**

All procedures outside German-speaking countries are strictly conducted and documented in English language. The documents submitted for this application – as far as necessary for external communication – have to be translated and used in English language.

## **2. Development of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR)**

The Self-Assessment Report was drafted by the ASIIN Head office. Afterwards the 14 Technical Committees discussed the draft and the Accreditation Commissions and the Board of ASIIN e.V. authorised it finally.

All in all, around 200 representatives of German HEIs, companies, students, technical and scientific associations, professional organisations and umbrella organisations of the social partners were involved in the development and production of the SAR.

## **3. Higher education and QA of higher education in the context of the agency**

### Types of Institutions and Institutional Status in Germany

Higher education (HE) studies in Germany are offered at two types of Higher Education Institutions (HEI).

- Universitäten (Universities) including various specialised institutions, offer the whole range of academic disciplines. In the German tradition, universities focus in particular on basic research so that advanced stages of study have mainly theoretical orientation and research-oriented components.
- Fachhochschulen (FH)/Hochschulen für Angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW) (Universities of Applied Sciences, UAS) concentrate their study programmes in engineering and other technical disciplines, business-related studies, social work, and design areas. The common mission of applied research and development implies an application-oriented focus of studies, which includes integrated and supervised work assignments in industry, enterprises or other relevant institutions.

Higher Education Institutions are either state or state-recognised institutions. In their operations, including the organisation of studies and the designation and award of degrees, they are subjected to higher education legislation.

### Types of Programmes and Degrees Awarded

Studies in both types of institutions have traditionally been offered in integrated 'long' (one-tier) programmes leading to Diplom or Magister Artium degrees or completed by a Staatsprüfung (State Examination).

Within the framework of the Bologna-Process, one-tier study programmes have been successively replaced by a two-tier study system. Since 1998, two-tier degrees (Bachelor's and Master's) have been introduced in almost all study programmes. This change is designed to enlarge variety and flexibility for students in planning and pursuing educational objectives. It also enhances international compatibility of studies and thus academic mobility of students and graduates.

The German Qualifications Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (HQR) describes the qualification levels as well as the resulting qualifications and competences of the graduates. The three levels of the HQR correspond to the levels 6 (Bachelor), 7 (Master) and 8 (Doctorate/PhD) of the German and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

Bachelor's and Master's study programmes may be studied consecutively, at various higher education institutions, at different types of higher education institutions and with phases of professional work between the first and the second qualification. The organisation of the study programmes makes use of modular components and of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) with usually 30 credits corresponding to one semester.

Bachelor's degree programmes lay the academic foundations, provide methodological competences and include skills related to the securing professional employability. The Bachelor's degree is awarded after 3 to 4 years of study. The Bachelor's degree programme includes a thesis requirement.

Master is the second degree after another 1 to 2 years. Master's programmes may be differentiated by the profile types 'practice-oriented' and 'research-oriented'. HEIs define the profile. The Master's degree programme includes a thesis requirement.

Universities as well as specialised institutions of university standing, some of the FH/HAW/UAS and some Universities of Art/Music are doctorate-granting institutions. Formal prerequisite for admission to doctoral work is a qualified Master's degree (UAS and U), a Magister degree, a Diplom, a Staatsprüfung, or a foreign equivalent.

#### Quality assurance of higher education

To ensure quality and comparability of qualifications all programmes in Germany have to be accredited either by external organisations or by the HEI themselves (after an institutional accreditation). All programmes have to conform to the requirements defined in the 'Interstate Treaty on the organization of a joint accreditation system to ensure the quality of teaching and learning at German higher education institutions' (Interstate study accreditation treaty / Studienakkreditierungsstaatsvertrag). The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany decided the treaty on 8 December 2016 and it was enacted on 1 January 2018. All programmes have to be accredited under this scheme. After a successful accreditation, they receive the seal of the Accreditation Council.

It is important to notice that recently several German agencies have started their ENQA/EQAR reaccreditation procedures and that EQAR accepted the new German system in an assessment of substantial changes. We are happy to note that Fiona Crozier already was involved in one of these procedures.

## **4. History, profile and activities of the agency**

### **History**

ASIIN e.V. as organization has been founded in 1999 by a broad range of institutions out of the field of academia (HEIs) as well as industry and economy represented by the coordination

group of German Technical Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences, deans associations as well as multiple technical industrial associations (e.g. the Association of German Engineers (VDI), the Informatics' Association (GI) or the German Physical Society (DPG) and industrial networks and trade unions. The main purpose of ASIIN was and is until now to measure, to assure and to enhance the quality of academic education in engineering, computer science, natural sciences, mathematics, medicine and all interdisciplinary fields that include one of the above-mentioned subject families, as well as in teacher training.

In 2007 ASIIN Consult GmbH was founded as 100 % affiliate of ASIIN e.V. to complete the portfolio regarding certification of modules and courses in the field of further education, consulting in the field of quality assurance as well as implementation and organisation of trainings, workshops and conferences.

Since 2008 ASIIN e.V. has also been engaged in institutional accreditations, in Germany called system accreditation.

In 2018 the national accreditation system in Germany changed. Until then accreditation agencies, which were authorised by the German Accreditation Council (GAC), conducted accreditation procedures based on the regulations and requirements of the GAC. At the end of the procedures the agencies decided about the accreditation of the programmes or the institutions. Since 2018 ASIIN still conducts the accreditation procedures but at the end peers, Technical Committees and the Accreditation Commission give a recommendation about the accreditation decision to the GAC. The final decision is taken by the GAC itself.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the panels of ASIIN supported moving QA activities online to ensure that ASIIN could continue serving customers despite the pandemic-related travel restrictions.

**Mission and Vision**

The goals of objectives for all quality assurance procedures of ASIIN are summarized as our mission statement as follows:

<p>Our Commitment</p>	<p>The representatives from universities, business and administration active in ASIIN share the conviction that good academic education is the basis for sustainable development in modern societies.</p> <p>ASIIN understands 'education' as a development and learning process for the attainment of diverse competencies and as the result of this process. The educational outcome supports the successful shaping of personal, social and professional life.</p>
<p>Our Goals</p>	<p>That is why ASIIN pursues its goals nationally and internationally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to ensure and strengthen the quality of academic education.</li> <li>- to create transparency about achieved quality in academic education and continuing education, to promote academic and professional mobility.</li> </ul>

	We do this for the member companies of ASIIN in the non-profit Association, universities, teachers and students, professional practice, politics and interested third parties.
Our Paths	<p>ASIIN achieves its goals</p> <p>→ as a service provider for education institutions or education systems in academic education and further education nationally and internationally.</p> <p>→ in particular through accreditation and certification, through evaluation as well as consultation on system and organisational development and training.</p> <p>→ through the (voluntary) participation of external experts from science and professional practice.</p>

This self-image refers to all product/service areas of ASIIN e.V. and Consult <https://www.asiin.de/en/culture-of-quality.html>

In the understanding of ASIIN quality results from the functioning of the qualification process, the interaction of its elements and ultimately from the degree to which its objectives are achieved – e.g. the achievement of desired learning outcomes for the students.

The quality of programmes or institutions is determined by the formulation of their objectives by the university itself. In addition, there are external requirements from the scientific community and from the political-legal environment in which degree programmes or institutions are designed and implemented.

The quality of a course of study is also proven by the success that graduates achieve in their profession. It depends on the commitment of all those involved, both within and outside the university. Therefore, ASIIN considers it crucial for success that relevant stakeholders are involved in the planning, control and implementation of the qualification process within the university.

The ASIIN's accreditation and certification procedures check the logic and effectiveness of the qualification process. Central to the overall assessment is the effective achievement of the goals set by the university itself.

In the framework of an institutional accreditation ASIIN does not consider individual quality assurance activities but their systematic combination and control. This means that quality management at a university is required which at least covers the performance processes in the area of study and teaching. Accreditation requires not only the presentation and documentation of quality management in the area of study and teaching but also proof of its effectiveness.

This quality understanding is the basis for requirements and procedural principles laid down by ASIIN for the accreditation and evaluation of study programmes and institutions as well as

the certification of modules and courses in further education. As a full member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and as agency listed in EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education), ASIIN has committed itself to compliance with ESG.

The quality understanding of ASIIN is publicly documented in:

- the quality handbook for the work of the ASIIN (see Annex 1)
- the requirements and procedural principles for programme accreditation (see Annex 2 )
- the requirements and procedural principles for system accreditation (see Annex 3)
- the requirements and procedural principles for certification (see Annex 4)

All these documents are available on the ASIIN website.

### **Fields of Activities**

ASIIN offers national and international accreditation, evaluation, assessment and certification services targeting degree programmes, courses, single modules, governance and administrative processes and structures or organizations and their development. Furthermore, ASIIN is regularly involved in designing and implementing third party funded projects and evaluations with different focal points in higher education and competence development either for individual HEIs or for entire national higher education systems. In this field, ASIIN focuses specifically on the introduction of quality management and continuous improvement processes.

Besides the governmental authorization to be active in different national accreditation systems ASIIN offers its own subject-specific seal for study programmes which validates that a study programme fulfils the requirements of science and professional practice in a certain discipline to a high level. It further confirms the provision of a secure set of basic conditions for good teaching and successful learning. The award of the seal is based on learning outcome oriented subject standards and is in compliance with the European Qualifications Framework and the “European Standards and Guidelines”.

The ASIIN system seal confirms that an institution guarantees to fulfil the institutional, procedural and cultural basic requirements for good teaching and successful learning.

Additionally, ASIIN has been the frontrunner in the establishment of European quality standards in a series of subject specific competence frameworks and quality criteria in higher education on European scale. ASIIN is authorised to award the EUR-ACE® label for engineering programmes, the Euro-Inf® label of programmes in computer science, the Eurobachelor® and Euromaster® for study programmes in chemistry and the EQAS-Food label for programmes in the food sector. Furthermore it conducts procedures for the AMSE label for programmes in medicine. (see chapter 5).

Last but not least, ASIIN established a certification procedure to offer quality assurance of further educational services, which are not leading to an academic degree and provides an interface between academic and professional learning. For those courses or modules offered for individual further education, the achievement of the subject-specific goals is the focus of the ASIIN certification approach. The aim is to achieve independent validation for qualification

and competence of a certain module or course regarding the students themselves, their employers and professional associations and chambers as well as HEIs which wish to apply externally rendered services for further study. Such a certification should facilitate recognition when switching between educational sectors.

All activities of ASIIN are aimed at securing and further expanding high standards for the quality of higher education. ASIIN has developed assessment methods and quality standards for study programmes, for (further) education and training offers not leading to a formal Bachelor’s, Master’s, or PhD degrees, as well as – on systems level – criteria for the assessment of an institution’s organisational maturity.

The different activities are distributed to the two ASIIN organisations as follows:

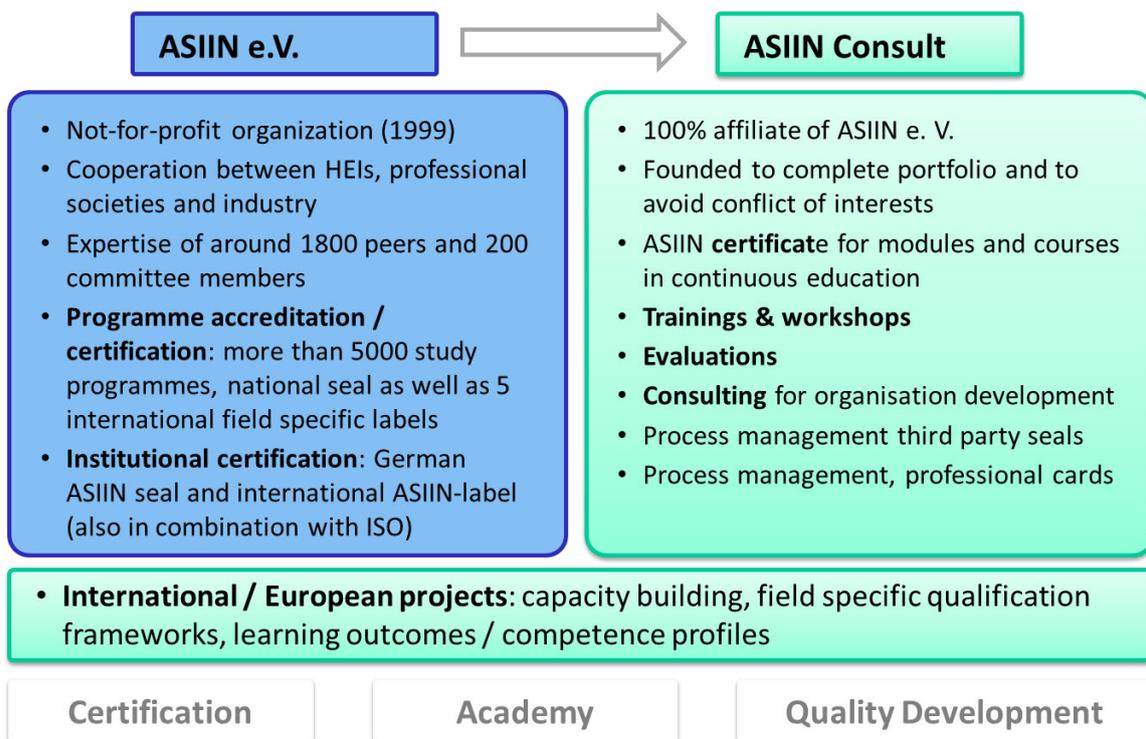


Fig.1: ASIIN e.V. and ASIIN Consult GmbH

### Position and status in the national context

As mentioned before, the national accreditation system in Germany changed in 2018. In the “new system”, ASIIN as other GAC authorised accreditation agencies continues to conduct the review procedures but does not take the accreditation decisions any longer. The final decision is in the hand of the GAC itself.

As in the former national accreditation system, the accreditation agencies do not have direct influence on the definition of the accreditation criteria prevailing in Germany – at least with respect to the award of the seal of the GAC. In the new system, the criteria have been bindingly defined based on an interstate treaty of the German federal states. Regarding the content of

the criteria, there have been no major changes compared to the national criteria in the former system and ESG-compliance is ensured.

The composition, selection and appointment of the review panels did not change either, although the German Rectors Conference (HRK) has developed general guidelines regarding the qualification of individual peers and the composition of the panel. These requirements are essentially identical with the criteria defined and applied by ASIIN for its own seals. As regards the process of selection and appointment of our review panels in the area of programme accreditation the 14 ASIIN Technical Committees nominate the auditors, who are confirmed by the ASIIN accreditation commission. For an institutional accreditation procedure, the accreditation commission appoints the auditors directly. Within each peer group representatives of the HEIs, the labour market and students are included as stakeholders.

The new accreditation system in Germany allows paper based accreditation procedures under certain conditions. However, the Accreditation and Certification Commissions of ASIIN confirmed their former decision that a site visit is a regular part of all ASIIN accreditation, certification and evaluation procedures. Due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Accreditation Commission of ASIIN opened the possibility to temporarily replace on-site visits by video conferences or to use hybrid solutions under certain conditions.

The virtual review can only be posted if peers do not see major problems. In remote audits the procedures need more time and preparation. That is why we have prolonged time schedules for online audits. The internal preliminary video conferences of the peer groups will be organized 2-4 weeks before the audit. Additional questions by the peers will have to be answered by the HEI before the audit. Videos of labs are handed in beforehand by the university and representative samples of exams and theses are handed out in prior to the review.

During the video conferences, the same discussion rounds are being organized with the head of the HEI, programme coordinators, students, alumni and teaching staff. In case the auditors do not receive all information required during the video conference or need to discuss certain points more intensively shortened on-site visits shall take place after ending of the restrictions.

In general, the structure of ASIIN procedures remains unchanged in the new German accreditation system. Besides the panels, our Technical Committees and our Accreditation Commission continue to be involved in all national accreditation procedures.

### **Internal Organisation**

Since its establishment, ASIIN has evolved into two organizations: **ASIIN e.V.** as a non-profit association and **ASIIN Consult GmbH** as an affiliate of ASIIN e.V., in which the profit-oriented activities are carried out:

**ASIIN e.V.** is supported by four groups of institutional members:

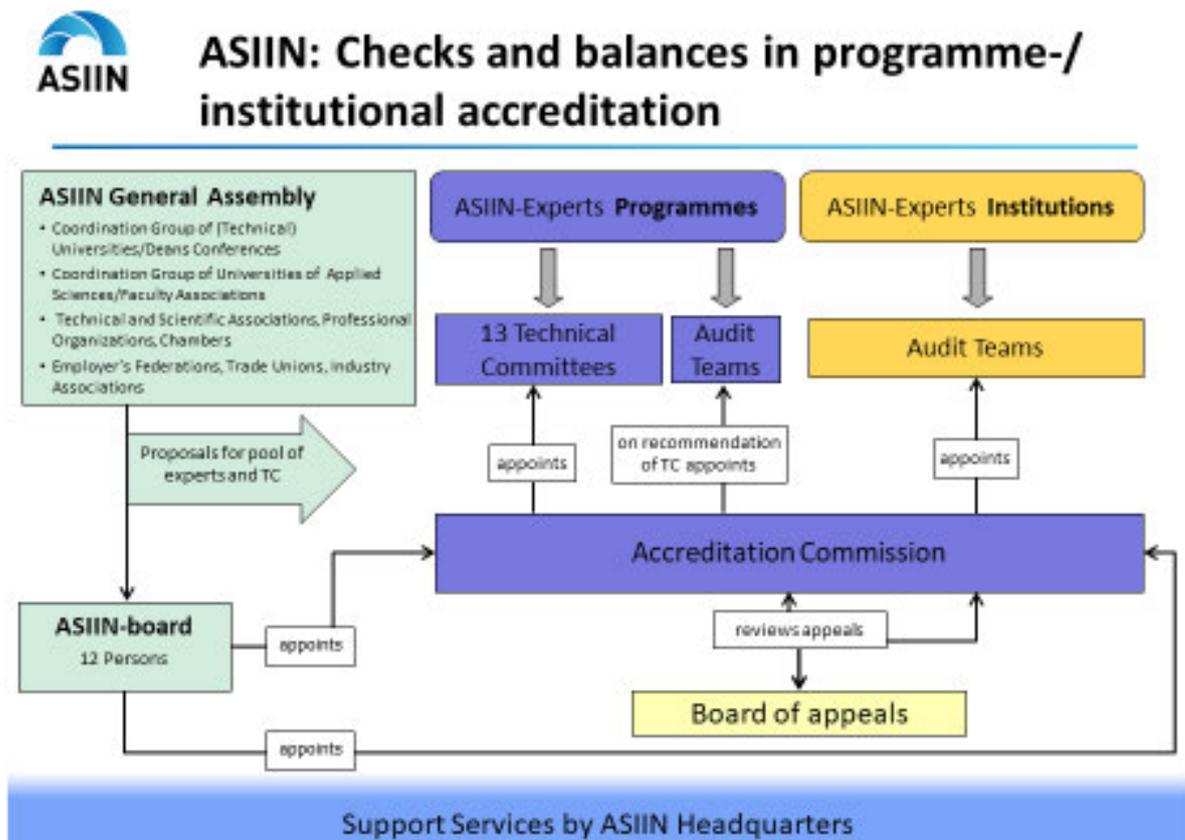
- Group 1: Technical and scientific associations and professional organizations
- Group 2: Business organisations and leading organisations of the social partners
- Group 3: Dean's conferences of universities

- Group 4. Coordination Group of universities for applied sciences (Heads of universities) and Dean’s conferences of universities of applied sciences

ASIIN membership rests on these 4 pillars, which is a unique set up in Germany and internationally. The organizational structure enables access to academic and professional expertise in specific areas as well as to the management of companies and public institutions. The member organisations of ASIIN e.V. nominate committee members and experts in an honorary capacity for the ASIIN panel and expert groups.

The independence of ASIIN is assured through a well-balanced system of checks and balances and multiple levels of decision making/review of decisions of different members and membership groups, which ensures that no single actor or group of actors is able to control the decision making process.

The organizational relation of the ASIIN administrative bodies is depicted in the following chart:



**Fig.2: Organisation ASIIN e.V.**

The *General Assembly* consists of representatives from all members. At the General Assembly, all member groups have the same number of votes. The General Assembly is convened once a year. It is among other things responsible for the formal approval of the members of the Board, resolutions on changes to the by-laws and resolutions on important matters relating to the association.

The *Board* has twelve members and is responsible for guidelines, for appointing the members of the Accreditation Commissions, completing bilateral and multilateral agreements with other accreditation agencies in Germany and abroad, recruiting the associations and institutions needed as members for accreditation as well as deciding resolutions on acceptance and exclusion of members. The Chairman of the Board is appointed in rotation by the first two and the last two member groups. The Deputy Chairman is always elected from one of the other groups.

Since January 2021 the former separated Accreditation Commissions for Degree Programmes and Quality management systems are combined into one *Accreditation Commission*. The members of the Accreditation Commission are professionally independent and are composed to one third of representatives from Technical Universities/Universities, one third from Universities of Applied Sciences and one third of representatives from industry. Members must not represent a specific lobby. Students from universities and universities of applied sciences are appointed as well. The duties of the Accreditation Commission include defining the ‘General Criteria’ for programme and system accreditation, the confirmation of the ‘Subject-specific criteria’ developed by the Technical Committees (only programme accreditation), the accreditation of the study programmes or institutions based on the accreditation reports of the peer groups (for the ASIIN seal), the recommendations of the Technical Committees (only programme accreditation), and the appointment of the expert groups for the individual accreditation procedures.

The 14 *Technical Committees* are nominated by the Accreditation Commission. They are involved only in programme accreditation procedures. Their duty is to develop and revise the subject-specific criteria, nominate the auditors for the study programmes to be accredited, participate in the training of the auditors, examine accreditation reports of the audit teams and assist in the creation of expert pools, which include a sufficient number of representatives from all stakeholder groups. The auditors are recommended and proposed by scientific associations and societies, the related faculties conferences and the member groups of trade organizations and umbrella organizations of the trade unions.

It is important to note that ASIIN has implemented an Ethics Committee to support all panels as a forum for the clarification of ethical questions which may arise in the course of ASIIN’s accreditation and certification procedures. Here, ethical questions and issues from all ASIIN committees, from the office and from experts are collected, discussed in a structured way and commented and provided with proposals so that the respective committees or the office can take measures or decisions which determine the further course of action for the agency. <https://www.asiin.de/en/ethics-advisory-board.html>

Additional ASIIN has implemented an Appeal Committee which is described in chapter 10.7 (page 43).

All panels include representatives from HEI, the labour market and student members as well. Students are involved in all steps and processes regarding accreditation, evaluation or certification. The members of all panels except the general assembly are appointed for three years, renewable once (see Annex 5), in the case of students the terms last for 2 years.

**ASIIN Consult GmbH** is for 100% an affiliate of ASIIN e.V. As in ASIIN e.V. responsibilities for strategic and financial decision are separated from the decisions regarding the award of the

certification seal. The owner (ASIIN e.V.), represented by the chair and the vice-chair of the board of ASIIN e.V. and the CEO of the company (ASIIN Consult GmbH) decide about the general strategy, financial belongings and human resources. All decisions regarding the certification procedures are taken by the certification commission, which has similar duties as the accreditation commissions within ASIIN e.V. The composition of the certification commission also is comparable with representatives from universities, universities of applied sciences, industry and student members as well. The term of membership in the certification commission also is three years and could be extended to one new term. The head office of ASIIN Consult GmbH give all support services needed by the panels of the company.

Regarding the separation of activities of ASIIN e.V. and Consult GmbH please take note of the decision by the ASIIN board, not to carry out any accreditation or certification procedures of objects in which ASIIN previously has acted in an advisory activity. This decision is published for applicants of ASIIN consulting services on our website <https://www.asiin.de/en/consultancy.html>

## **5. Higher education quality assurance activities of the agency**

In general, ASIIN external quality assurance activities can be differentiated as follows:

1. Programme accreditation (including third-party, cross-border accreditation)
2. Institutional or System accreditation/certification
3. Certification of modules/courses
4. Evaluation procedures covered by the ESG (type 1 evaluations).

On the programme level, ASIIN specializes in accrediting Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes in single or cluster procedures in the subject fields of engineering sciences, computer science, natural sciences, mathematics, business, medicine, in all interdisciplinary areas that involve one of the above-mentioned subject families, in international or European procedures ('double degree' or 'joint degree') involving one of the families of subjects mentioned, and in teacher training.

In the case of an ASIIN programme accreditation procedure, a university acquires the agency's own ASIIN seal for a study programme if the result is positive, regardless of the state in which the university is located. This is based on the requirements of the ASIIN for study programmes (see Annex 2), which in all cases correspond to the European Standards and Guidelines. Additionally, ASIIN takes into account any existing national requirements of the respective home country of a university.

As mentioned above, the accreditation process is divided in Germany in the new system commencing in 2018 into an assessment procedure organised and conducted by the accreditation agencies and the accreditation decision procedure conducted by the GAC. In the assessment procedure, ASIIN compiles the panel, conducts the on-site visit and writes the assessment report of the peers. The responsible Technical Committees and the Accreditation Commission comment the assessment report. By sending the final assessment report to the applying HEI the assessment procedure ends. Afterwards the HEIs send the assessment report and the self-assessment report to the GAC as basis for its accreditation decision. An award of an ASIIN Label – in addition to the seal of the GAC – is possible in a parallel procedure notwithstanding the decision of the GAC.

The object of *system or institutional accreditation* is the internal quality management at an university – depending on the national regulations – limited to the area of study and teaching. A positive system accreditation certifies that the university's quality management system (in the field of teaching and learning) is suitable to ensure certain quality standards for its organisation and study programmes.

In the case of an ASIIN system accreditation procedure a HEI acquires the agency's own ASIIN seal in the event of success, regardless of the state in which the HEI is located. This seal refers to the maturity of the audited quality management system, possibly with the restriction to the area of teaching and learning. The basis for this are the ASIIN "Requirements for Good Teaching and Successful Learning" (see Annex 3), which in all cases correspond to the ESG. Within the area of responsibility of the GAC and in case of an application for the GAC's national system seal, the rules and guidelines of the GAC are followed. Outside the competence of the GAC, ASIIN takes into account any existing national requirements of the respective home country of an HEI.

The *certification of modules/courses* follows essentially the same procedures as the programme accreditation for the ASIIN Seal. With an ASIIN certification for courses, modules and training courses at EQF levels 5 to 8, independent confirmation is provided, that the goals and learning outcomes aimed at by the provider can be achieved with the help of the content, resources and structures provided and thus the desired competence profile can be achieved. Additionally, it is provided at which level of the national or European Qualifications Framework these competences can be classified. The criteria and the processes to acquire the ASIIN certification label are defined in the 'Standards for the Certification of Further Education and Training' (see Annex 4)

*Evaluation procedures*, which are subject to the ESG (type 1 evaluations), also follow the same processes as programme accreditations/certifications, but are concluded with the submission of the evaluation report thus omitting any formal decision by ASIIN.

In addition to the national accreditation and its own Quality seals, ASIIN has been the front-runner in the establishment of quality standards in a series of subject specific competence frameworks on European scale and is authorised to award several international quality label in parallel to its own seals. In all of the below mentioned European disciplinary criteria, the ESG are fully integrated.

EUR-ACE<sup>®</sup>: In its capacity as a long-time full member of the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAAE), ASIIN has considerably contributed to the development of the 'EUR-ACE<sup>®</sup> Framework, Standards and Guidelines' (as of 31st March 2015 <https://www.enaee.eu/eur-ace-system/standards-and-guidelines/>). ASIIN is the only German accreditation agency being authorized to award the EUR-ACE<sup>®</sup> label for Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes in the different Engineering fields and thereby to contribute to the quality assurance of the engineering education within the European Higher Education Area and above. In this connection, ASIIN's subject-specific criteria (SSC) in the fields of engineering have been aligned to the ENAAE Standards.

Euro-Inf<sup>®</sup>: Since April 2011, ASIIN has been authorized to award the Euro-Inf Quality Label to Bachelor and Master degrees in the field of computer science on behalf of the European Quality Assurance Network for Informatics Education (EQANIE). As with the EUR-ACE-Label the SSC in the field of informatics have been aligned to the EQANIE Standards (as of 2016-10-14

<https://eqanie.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Euro-Inf-Framework-Standards-and-Accreditation-Criteria-V-2016-10-24.pdf> ).

Eurobachelor® and Euromaster®: ASIIN is authorised by the European Chemistry Thematic Network Association (ECTN), proprietor of the Eurobachelor® and the Euromaster® Labels, to award these labels for Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes in chemistry. In addition to the evaluation procedure according to the General Criteria of ASIIN, the auditors review the compliance with the criteria of ECTN (<http://ectn.eu/committees/label/labels/>).

AMSE: In 2018, the Association of Medical Schools in Europe (AMSE) and ASIIN have entered into a cooperation agreement. For this reason, ASIIN has founded the new Technical Committee 14 – Medicine. ASIIN has been commissioned by AMSE to conduct accreditation procedures in Europe, applying the standards of the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME). The rubrics of fulfilment of these standards foresee so-called "basic standards" as a minimum requirement as well as more challenging "quality development standards" signalling best practice. After completing the procedures, ASIIN hands over the accreditation reports to AMSE that decides on the award of the AMSE Label .

EQAS-Food: In July of 2019 the Accreditation Commission of the European ISEKI-Food Association (IFA) decided to authorize ASIIN e.V. to award the EQAS-Food Label. This is essentially done through applying the combined ASIIN General Criteria and Subject-Specific Criteria of the responsible Technical Committee 08 – Agriculture, Nutritional Sciences and Landscape Architecture (as of 2015 and 2011 respectively) on the one hand and the IFA EQAS-Food Procedures, Criteria and Standards (as of 2019-02-18 [https://www.iseki-food.net/sites/iseki-food.net/files/download/96/framework\\_doc\\_edit\\_rc\\_18.02.19.pdf](https://www.iseki-food.net/sites/iseki-food.net/files/download/96/framework_doc_edit_rc_18.02.19.pdf) ) on the other. Additionally, the two partner organisations agreed, that at least one of the peers in each accreditation procedure, where an EQAS-Food label stands to be awarded, shall be selected from the IFA pool of experts.

ASIIN uses a piggy-bagging approach for the simultaneous award of its own quality seal and the award of the European labels and/or national accreditation seals in one combined procedure. This means that HEIs could apply for the award of up to three seals / labels (ASIIN-Seal, European field specific labels, and national labels) in a combined accreditation/certification procedure and with a single set of documentation (self-assessment report and annexes).

Regardless of which seal is awarded at the end of a procedure, whether a joint procedure leads to several seals, or whether separate procedures must be organised for individual seals, the general requirements and procedural principles of ASIIN are at the basis for the accreditation/certification procedures. The involved panels are composed according to identical principals and the pertinent Accreditation/Certification Commissions of ASIIN act as decision-making bodies (with the sole exception of the national programme or system accreditation leading to the seal of the GAC).

## 6. Processes and their methodologies

### Overview of processes and methodologies applied for each QA activity

In general, all ESG related activities (accreditation/certification/evaluation) follow the same pattern. After ASIIN and the Higher Education Institution have agreed on the objects to be reviewed, accredited, certified or evaluated, and the criteria which should be applied, the client conducts a self-evaluation and writes a self-assessment report. The report and supporting evidence are reviewed by the assigned ASIIN project manager as well as a group of external experts specifically summoned by ASIIN for this purpose. Following the review of the documentation, the external experts and ASIIN project manager conduct a joint on-site visit including an inspection of infrastructure and discussions with different stakeholder groups, such as the HEI leadership, programme coordinators, teaching staff and students. After the visit, the findings of the external experts are summarized in a report. In certification and accreditation procedures, and review procedures for the seal of the GAC, the findings may additionally be reviewed by ASIIN's Technical Committees and Accreditation or Certification Commission. In certification or accreditation procedures, where the external experts or committees discover discrepancies between the agreed criteria and the object being evaluated, ASIIN may award a preliminary certification or accreditation, which ASIIN will only extend if the client remedies the discovered discrepancies within a specified time limit. In cases where the discovered discrepancies are severe, ASIIN may also deny a certification or accreditation.

As mentioned above, evaluation procedures in general follow the same processes as the accreditation or certification procedures but end with the finalisation of the evaluation report by the experts. All steps for evaluation procedures as well as the standards and criteria are published on the ASIIN website in both English and German.

The processes, process steps and methodologies pertaining to ASIIN's programme-, courses/module- and QM system accreditation and certification activities are thoroughly described in the agency's respective standards and criteria. These are also publicly available on the ASIIN website in both German and English (see Annexes 2-4).

An internal set of process data sheets supports all involved staff members of the head office when conducting procedures and other QA activities. Process data sheets list process steps and are oftentimes associated with specific templates and work instructions, thereby aiding staff members in the consistent and high-quality execution of their tasks. Process data sheets are explained in more detail in chapter 7 of this report (see below p. 23)

### Principles for the selection of peers

The selection process for external experts differs, albeit only slightly, depending on whether it is for programme-/module- or QM system accreditation / certification / evaluation. As a general rule, the peer group in all instances is always composed of representatives from higher education institutions (full-time professors), student bodies and industry.

For *programme accreditations* and *certifications of courses/modules* or for *evaluations*, ASIIN's Accreditation Commission or the Certification Commission respectively decide who

will be nominated for a given procedure (in programme accreditations based on the recommendation of the responsible Technical Committee), and appoint the peers. For *system accreditations* the peers are selected by the Accreditation Commission primarily based on their expertise / experience in quality management and accreditation (see for further details below, chapter 10.4 (ESG 2.4)).

For QA activities taking place in German-speaking countries, the peer group is generally composed of German speakers. For QA procedures outside D–A–CH, peer groups are generally composed of HEI representatives as well as local students and industry representatives. A typical composition of a peer group for a programme accreditation procedure in Indonesia for instance may involve 2-3 professors from Germany (or Europe), and one student- and one industry representative from Indonesia. This principle of peer group composition balances the local industry- and student perspective with expertise in European QA standards.

External experts which are linked in any way to the institution to be assessed are excluded from participating in the assessment proceedings. Also excluded are HEI representatives and students from HEIs in the same region as the institution being audited, as these may be rival organizations. Before participating in an audit, every peer must sign a confidentiality and impartiality declaration (see Annex 6). The applicants are informed of the composition of the auditing team. If bias is suspected, the higher education institution may request the substitution of peers. An exhaustive list of criteria for the selection of peer groups and auditors for each activity can be found below, in section 10.4 (ESG 2.4) of this report.

In order to ensure a sufficient supply of external experts for its QA activities, ASIIN continuously recruits new volunteers. Before they are admitted to ASIIN's volunteer pool, candidates must submit an overview of their expertise and experience. The Accreditation or Certification Commission (in programme accreditation the technical Committees) review the profile submissions to ensure a subject-specific fit. Finally, before any QA activity involving external experts takes place, their profiles must be approved by the responsible executive committee for each single procedure.

If, during a procedure, a peer acts in an unprofessional manner or manner unbecoming ASIIN's principles, this is earmarked (taking into account applicable data protection rules) so that he or she will be no longer asked to participate in further ASIIN activities. The processes and procedures for the management of external experts are formally documented in dedicated criteria for programme and institutional accreditation as well as in the certification criteria (see Annexes 2-4) and in the internal process data sheets. The experts of ASIIN are also regularly trained in workshops.

## **7. Agency's internal quality assurance**

ASIIN has implemented a large number of processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of ASIIN's activities. The review and improvement of ASIIN's activities are continuous so as to ensure that services to institutions and society are optimal. ASIIN's internal quality assurance system is extensively explained and detailed in the agency's QM Policy Manual. This manual, also published on the ASIIN website,

serves as a guide for both internal and external parties on how ASIIN ensures quality in all of its QM activities. (see Annex 1)

The logic of ASIIN's QM system is designed and documented on six levels and is illustrated in the following overview

Level 01	Conviction and mission statement
Level 02	Objectives and Strategy
Level 03	Policies (incl. QM-Policy manual)
Level 04	Processes
Level 05	Job instructions
Level 06	QM templates

### **Objectives and principles of the quality policy**

The objectives of the quality policy of ASIIN are derived from the objectives of the overall organisation. On behalf of the Board, ASIIN conducted an internal strategy development process in to guide the work of the agency. The result of this process has been a strategy that covers the entire organisation (e.V. and Consult GmbH) and sets out the following convictions, goals and paths:

The internal quality work in ASIIN follows the logic of the so-called TQM approach (Total Quality Management), according to which quality is not the goal, but an integral part of every activity, every process and every product of an organisation and its individual members.

Accordingly, the cyclical understanding from the so-called Deming cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle) is integrated into everyday processes as well as into organizational and product development projects. The instruments of quality work are easily and directly accessible to the employees in their respective tasks and functions.

The principles of objectivity, validity, confidentiality and transparency as guiding principles for action apply to the all mentioned ASIIN services:

- Accreditation of study programmes (ASIIN and third party seals)
- Accreditation of QM systems (ASIIN and third-party seals)
- Reviews for the Seal of the German Accreditation Council
- Certification of modules and courses (ASIIN seal)
- Evaluations for quality assurance of teaching and learning in the context of ESG (Type 1 evaluations).

The interpretation of each principle as well as quality expectations for each activity field are detailed in the QM Policy Manual (see Annex 1).

### **QM Instruments**

ASIIN integrates a number of mechanisms into its own process flows to support the achievement of quality expectations in the planning, review and further development of its activities in the various product and service fields.

These include:

#### A comprehensive System of Checks and Balances

The activities carried out by the ASIIN committees result in various system of checks and balances between and within the committees. These constitute a basic structural principle of the decision-making process behind the awarding of accreditation/certification seals, as well as behind the criteria and procedural principles that guide the procedures. A procedure is conducted over at least two structural levels, so that these levels check and balance each other.

#### Professional procedure execution:

A project manager of the head office manages all activities falling into the activity fields mentioned above. The role and function of the project manager is documented in the ASIIN criteria documents for the various seals (see Annexes 2-4) and includes, inter alia, the overall coordination of a procedure, the ongoing monitoring of the application of relevant specifications, schedules and necessary process steps, moderation of all parties involved in the procedure, support of the experts, preparation of draft reports, draft resolutions and procedural documentation etc. The project manager acts as a central information hub between applicants, experts and other involved committees.

New project managers follow a training plan, accompany experienced project managers on procedures and have their work reviewed and commented on.

#### **Routines for quality assurance, planning and continuous improvement:**

ASIIN has implemented a number of routines for quality assurance, planning and continuous improvement:

##### *Monthly internal meeting (Jour Fixe)*

The agency's monthly internal meeting of the head office (*Jour Fixe*) serves as a primary QM tool to discuss current and upcoming projects, organizational work flows, and issues / necessary changes. It is both an internal as well as an external feedback mechanism in that the participating staff members can voice their own opinions and suggestions as well as those of clients or other external parties that they have worked with. In order to ensure that all matters affecting the QM system are addressed, 'QM' has been added as a fixed bullet point to the meeting agenda.

If during the meeting a necessary change of processes is identified, the fact is discussed in the responsible committees and modifications are decided in the commissions. Finally, the process data sheet and, if necessary, other related documentation are updated. In the same manner, new processes can be established and outdated processes eliminated. All meeting results and to-dos pertaining to process changes are recorded in the meeting minutes, which is distributed to the staff members and archived.

##### *Client and peer satisfaction surveys*

Following the quarterly meetings of the ASIIN commissions for accreditation and certification, ASIIN sends out a client and peer satisfaction survey. The results are examined and pressing

issues discussed at the subsequent Jour Fixe, so that solutions can be rapidly implemented. On an annual basis, a more detailed analysis of the results is conducted, in order to identify annual and year-over-year changes and trends. Exemplary results and follow ups of the survey within the last year:

- In some cases, clients and peers have found ASIIN's subject-specific quality criteria too broad or not up-to-date. Those remarks have led to actualisations of the subject-specific criteria by six out of 14 technical committees since summer 2019.
- A number of peers criticised the sheer volume of the peer satisfaction survey. As a result, ASIIN staff reviewed the survey eliminating questions recognized to be of little value and thereby overall significantly shortened survey.
- In the past, some peers who had participated in QA activities abroad had expressed a desire for more information about those countries' higher education systems. For this purpose, ASIIN has established a portfolio of country profiles, which summarize important aspects of the respective higher education system. The relevant profile is made available to the involved peers whenever there is a QA activity abroad.

#### *Routine communication between ASIIN committees*

ASIIN committees and commissions are in regular exchange. This is supported by the project managers representing their technical committees in front of the accreditation commission, by volunteer staff participating in multiple committees (*Kümmerer*), and by the regular 'Committee Letter' (*Gremienbrief*), which is distributed to the members of all ASIIN panels and covers relevant news and changes. Finally, yet importantly, the heads of the technical committees discuss developments with the members of the accreditation commission in an annual meeting, usually coinciding with the year's final meeting of the accreditation commission. This exchange is also an important feature of ASIIN's system of checks and balances.

#### *Exchange with member organizations*

As a non-profit association, ASIIN e.V. exists to fulfil the objectives laid out by its members. Annual meetings between the ASIIN leadership and member organizations ensure that ASIIN activities are aligned with these objectives. These meetings also give members the opportunity to provide important impulses to ASIIN's work. During the 2020 meeting, which took place during the COVID-19 pandemic as video conference, the members for instance supported moving QA activities online to ensure that ASIIN could continue serving clients despite the pandemic-related travel restrictions. This decision represents a significant change in ASIIN practices. Whether it ultimately results in a new standard and a long-term reduction of the travel costs associated with QA procedures, however, remains to be seen.

#### *Impact Studies*

ASIIN conducts impact studies regarding its activities on regular bases (see chapter 9.4). The results of these studies are presented to all panels and used for upgrading our procedures and criteria within the internal quality assurance circles mentioned before.

*Standardisation of processes via process data sheets, work instructions, and templates*

ASIIN's processes and methodologies are generally defined in the published official criteria. Details of implementation of the defined processes are formally documented in so-called internal process data sheets, which cover all processes pertaining to the agency's QA activities. Following the organization's Conviction and Mission Statement (Level 1), Objectives and Strategy (Level 2), and Policies (Level 3), these data sheets compose the fourth level of the agency's QM system. Each internal process is allocated its own process data sheet. It provides important information such as process steps, scope of application, process quality expectations, etc. For each process there is one staff member (generally the person whose activities are most closely associated with the process) responsible for ensuring that related documentation is up-to-date.

Process data sheets are available for the following core activities:

- Programm Accreditation
- System Accreditation
- Certification of Modules and Study Programmes
- Evaluations for quality assurance and for improvement of teaching and learning (Type 1)
- Evaluations for quality & organisational development, effectiveness (Type 2)
- In-house Workshops and Trainings
- Third-party funded projects
- Execution of certification procedures for third parties

Furthermore, process data sheets cover supporting activity areas, including:

- Complaints management
- Involvement of the Ethics Committee
- Development of ASIIN criteria and procedures
- Provision of voluntary personnel (external experts)
- Provision of full-time personnel (staff members)
- Standards and procedures for committee management
- Management of ASIIN registrations and accreditations
- Data management
- Provision of working infrastructure
- Continuous improvement
- Communication

Each category has its own subfolder within the QM Processes folder, and each category subfolder contains further subfolders for each related process. These in turn contain the respective process data sheet and all related work instructions and templates, ensuring a transparent structure. Work instructions and templates ensure the standardisation of processes as well as clear and comprehensive communication between clients, ASIIN committees and staff members.

## **8. Agency's international activities**

Beside the authorisation for the award of different European qualification labels as mentioned above, ASIIN is heavily involved in international networks for quality assurance in higher education and has manifold memberships. To become and stay a member, ASIIN has been reviewed frequently by different organisations in the recent past. For example, there has been several reviews for renewing the membership in the European Quality Assurance Register EQAR as well as a review against the Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Further on, ASIIN passes through regular authorisation processes every five years by the GAC for the admission to the German accreditation system and by the owners of the European field specific labels to award their seals (ENAAE for the EUR-ACE label, EQANIE for the Euro-Inf label, ECTNA for the label in Chemistry or ISEKI-Food for the EQAS-Food label).

In addition, ASIIN is a founding member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). CEENQA is a non-governmental and non-profit organization with the purpose of promoting the cooperation between the member organisations in the development and harmonisation of their activities, in the field of quality assurance and quality improvement in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe, thereby contributing towards the development and implementation of the European Higher Education Area.

It is worth mentioning that ASIIN has agreed to a proposal emanating from the AQU Catalunya, to jointly accredit degree programmes at universities in Catalunya, with ASIIN providing the 'EUR-ACE' label to engineering programmes if the requirements are fulfilled.

On October 27th 2019, a similar agreement was signed with the French university network FIGURE (with the consent and on recommendation of the Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur (CTI)). In the coming years, FIGURE and ASIIN will cooperate in accrediting engineering programmes at the around 30 member universities of FIGURE.

For the award of the ASIIN seal, the ASIIN General Criteria (and for programme accreditation the respective Subject-Specific Criteria) are the only guiding documents in all accreditation procedures, independently of the type of higher education institution and its location. When ASIIN is accrediting internationally however, usually the student expert and the representative from industry are recruited within the country, where the accreditation procedure takes place. In addition, in international procedures mandatory meetings with alumni and employers have been included, in order to find out about the job perspectives and qualification of the graduates, the employers involvement in the quality assurance processes and the students' opportunities for internships or final projects outside the HEI.

## **9. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 3)**

### **9.1 ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance**

The overall goals of objectives for all quality assurance procedures of ASIIN are summarized in our mission statement which is also published on our website under <https://www.asiin.de/en/culture-of-quality.html> (see above, chapter 4)

ASIIN's active membership organisations, its honorary experts as well as its main staff all share this commitment: High quality in academic education is the foundation for sustainable development in modern societies. ASIIN views 'education' as a development and learning process to obtain diverse competences as well as its outcome. The educational outcome supports successful development of a personal, social and professional life.

ASIIN pursues the following national and international objectives: to secure and strengthen the quality of higher education to establish transparency about achieved quality in higher education to promote academic and professional mobility.

ASIIN achieves these objectives as a service provider for educational institutions and systems of higher and further education nationally as well as internationally. especially through accreditation and certification, evaluations, consulting as well as training in quality and organisational development through the contribution of external experts from science and industry.

ASIIN entertains a comprehensive internal quality assurance system in the framework of around 100 QA processes are thoroughly described and analysed. In the first half of 2020 these data sheets were completely revised. Details are further elaborated in other sections of this SAR (see chapter 7) but described in a nutshell, it provides a systematic overview about all the measures and instruments used in order to achieve the ASIIN quality expectations.

In the Quality Management Handbook (see Annex 1) the introduction describes the purpose of the manual and the areas of activity of the ASIIN covered by the manual. The 'Organisation and Responsibilities' section describes the organisational structure of the ASIIN and explains the basic functioning of the QM system. The third part 'Principles: Quality Policy and Objectives' outlines the objectives and principles of the quality policy and gives a detailed overview of the quality expectations in the individual fields of activity. The section 'Quality Management: Instruments' deals in more detail with the mechanisms and concrete activities used to achieve the quality expectations. Part 5 gives a summary of the ASIIN processes and distinguishes between product/service areas with standardised procedures and non-standardised procedures. In line with the recommendation of the last accreditation the QM Handbook contains all internal Quality Management procedures all ASIIN activities.

Concerning the responsibility and contributions of the ASIIN headquarters, each external QA procedure is coordinated by a so called 'project manager' belonging to the permanent head office staff of the agency. For programme accreditation the procedure manager for a single procedure is at the same time the responsible person ('secretary') for supporting the Technical Committee to whose subject area a study programme under review would belong. The role of the project manager is laid down in the ASIIN criteria for accreditation and certification and in the Quality Management Handbook (see Annexes 1-4). He/she has the task to control

the comparability of procedures and monitors that the process steps, methods and instruments prescribed are respected by all actors in the procedure and all relevant criteria and standards are known and respected throughout the procedure.

Recommendations for all external QA procedures are formulated by the contracted experts. Depending on the nature of the EQA procedure, the follow up differs to a certain degree:

In the area of program accreditation, it is the responsible Technical Committee which comments on the findings of the peers as it is responsible to assure consistency across all procedures and to interpret the subject specific quality requirements of the respective discipline. The final accreditation decision for program accreditation is then made by the interdisciplinary Accreditation Commission for Degree Programmes, which through its composition and the regular involvement of its members with accreditation over a longer period of time also ensures that accreditation decisions are reached in a consistent manner. The AC accomplishes this goal on the basis of the legal framework, the ASIIN General Criteria and established accreditation practice. Decisions of general principle are regularly compiled and made available to the Technical Committees and peers to ensure that already on these levels of decision-making judgements and decisions are reached in a consistent manner.

In case of institutional accreditation there is no intermediary level. The report of the peers is directly introduced into the accreditation commission.

In case of certification of continuous education courses, the general procedures are similar. The project managers of ASIIN head office have the same function as in the programme accreditation. The main difference again is that there are no Technical Committees involved into the certification procedure. After the assessment of the peers the Certification Commission of ASIIN directly takes the final decision.

All panels of ASIIN involved into accreditation and certification procedures are made up of one third each of representatives of the universities/technical colleges, the universities of applied sciences and the economy/professional practice for the various engineering and natural science fields as well as for computer science and mathematics. Additionally, student representatives are included in each panel. This structure ensures that the body deciding on accreditation represents all stakeholders and has the technical competence to assess the procedures not only from a purely formal point of view but also from a content point of view. Experience to date has shown that the quality of the decision-making body's technical competence has a major influence on the acceptance of accreditation decisions by the applicant universities. The individual contacts of the members of the commissions ensure the ongoing involvement of the commissions in the technical and political discussions in the university environment, which is essential for the continuous development of the accreditation criteria.

## **9.2 ESG Standard 3.2 Official status**

ASIIN e.V. is organised as a non-profit, registered association (eingetragener Verein e.V.) and is entered in the German register of associations (Vereinsregister) under the name 'Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik'. The entry is recorded in the register of associations at

Duesseldorf Local Court (Amtsgericht Düsseldorf) under number 8814 (see Annex 7). The respective legal representatives of the association - the chairman and the deputy chairman of the executive board - are also recorded in the register of associations.

As is described in other parts of this report, ASIIN is authorized to operate as agency in Germany by the German Accreditation Council, is part of the EQAR, full member of ENQA and other international bodies.

**ASIIN Consult GmbH** is a for-profit company and has been founded in the year 2007 as a 100% affiliate of the non-profit association ASIIN e.V. ASIIN Consult GmbH is registered in the German commercial register under number HB 58050 (see Annex 8).

### 9.3 ESG Standard 3.3 Independence

All ASIIN panels that are concerned with accreditation and certification are independent according to their self-understanding and also according to the statutes (see Annex 5). Member of the accreditation and certification commissions as well the members of the 14 technical committees explicitly are not appointed as representatives of specific interest groups, but as independent experts.

It is equally important to note, that members of the committees who have acted as experts in a procedure to be discussed do not take part in the vote on this procedure. This is equally anchored in the internal rules of procedure of the technical committees and the Accreditation Commissions.

As regards the external experts, prior to their participation in any external review procedure, they will be required to submit a declaration of impartiality, confidentiality and publication (see Annex 6). With the declaration peers sign as well to act in an independent manner based on their personal expertise and not as representatives of our member organisations. This ensures that they are not biased with regard to the programme to be evaluated and the institution supporting it and undertake to treat all information relating to the accreditation procedure as confidential. Also the declaration ensures that peers do not act as representatives of other organisations but as independent experts as it was recommended in the last accreditation procedure of ASIIN. The applying university in addition has the formal right to reject reviewers if there is a suspicion of bias or lack of professional competence.

Inclusion in the list of experts shall take place after the criteria laid down in the requirements and procedural principles and therefore never exclusively on the basis of a proposal by the member organisations or a self-application, but always after discussion in the relevant body of ASIIN.

As mentioned before, the decision making in all matters concerning the award of the ASIIN seal for study programmes, single modules / courses or QM systems is exclusively the right of the respective accreditation/certification commissions, which take into account the comments of the experts and, in the case of programme accreditation, of the technical commit-

tees. This is defined within the criteria for accreditation and certification as well as in the statutes of ASIIN e.V. (see Annexes 2-5). The accreditation commission has the authorisation to deviate from the opinion of the experts or technical committees in order to ensure the conformity of the decisions with the requirements and procedural principles as well as the uniformity of the decisions across the various subject-specific areas.

It is important to note that in Germany according to the new legal accreditation framework as of 2018, ASIIN no longer accredits programmes itself in national accreditation procedures with the seal of the German Accreditation Council. The procedure is now executed in two phases: in phase 1, a contract is concluded between ASIIN and the HEIs requesting an accreditation. Experts of ASIIN with the assistance of an ASIIN program manager are writing the accreditation report that is handed over to the HEIs. In a second step the HEI then must hand in this accreditation report to the German Accreditation Council which is then issuing the accreditation decision as a formal administrative act. The technical committees of ASIIN as well as its accreditation commissions however still discuss the procedure, their independent decision is included fully in the report.

For international procedures and all procedures in which the ASIIN quality seal/its European quality labels are requested, the status quo ante remains unchanged.

The independence of the accrediting bodies and their members is also guaranteed by the organisational structure of ASIIN, which is based on the clear separation between (a) the bodies that decide on general matters of the association such as the board of directors and the membership assembly and (b) the bodies that deal with the implementation of and decisions on accreditation procedures.

The influence of third parties - including the member organisations - on ongoing accreditation procedures, on the assessment, evaluation procedures, and reports of the experts, technical committees, and accreditation commissions is excluded according to the statutes (see Annex 5).

This in summary ensures that the accreditation process of ASIIN and the work of the involved panels is carried out independently.

#### **9.4 ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis**

As an accreditation agency, ASIIN pursues the objective of securing and strengthening the quality of academic education both nationally and internationally. To resume responsibility for its ways of operating, ASIIN has established a comprehensive system of internal and external quality management procedures in the past that serve to critically reflect upon its own practices.

#### **ASIIN Newsletter**

The ASIIN newsletter is usually published once per year and is dedicated to a main topic relating to quality assurance and development in the field of academic education.

The following newsletters are available for the reporting period 2016-2020

Nr. 16 / March 2019	Focus Point: Trends and Developments in International Quality Assurance
Nr. 15 / March 2018	Focus Point: New Beginnings for the Accreditation System
Nr. 14 / March 2017	Focus Point: Future of the Accreditation System

The newsletter archive is accessible on ASIIN's website. An electronic version is sent to all persons listed in the ASIIN's expert pool, while a print copy is sent to about 1,000 addressees, including universities, agencies, associations and societies from science and professional practice as well as public administrations. The editorial concept for the newsletters is to stimulate a broad discussion on the main topics and to prepare experiences and observations on challenges, advantages and disadvantages associated with the respective topic from ASIIN and also from guest authors. The 'chief editor' for the newsletter is an experienced process and committee supervisor of the ASIIN.

### **Report to Members and Committees**

In addition to the newsletter, ASIIN regularly publishes reports to its stakeholders informing them about ASIIN's current work as well as issues concerning quality assurance in general. These reports are a joint effort by ASIIN's full-time staff, thus ensuring an in-depth coverage of ASIIN's quality assurance activities. As such, each report usually covers the following topics:

- Report of the CEO
- News from ASIIN's office
- Information about upcoming events
- News from the ASIIN Committees
- Information about ASIIN's international activities

In addition, each report generally covers one or two thematic issues. The following letters are available for the reporting period 2016-2020

June 2020	Special Focus: Update of ASIIN's expert pool
March 2020	Special Focus: News from the Accreditation Council
December 2019	Special Focus: Joint Meeting of the Technical Committees and Accreditation Commission for Degree Programmes
July 2019	Special Focus: ASIIN celebrates its 20th anniversary

September 2018	Special Focus: Status of Realignment of the German Accreditation System – Changes of ASIIN’s structural and institutional instruments
February 2018	Special Focus: Reorientation of the German Accreditation System and Purport of Committee Structures within the New System
October 2017	Special Focus: Musterrechtsverordnung (Model Ordinance) on the Implementation of the Interstate Treaty on the Organisation of a Joint Accreditation System for Quality Assurance at German Universities
March 2017	Special Focus: Current Status of Higher Education and Accreditation Policy Following the Decision of the Federal Constitutional Court of 17.02.2016
July 2016	Special Focus: Current Status of the Discussion on Higher Education and Accreditation Policy Following the Ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court of 17.02.2016
March 2016	Special Focus: High Professional Standards in Accreditations

### Impact Studies

ASIIN regularly publishes studies evaluating the overall impact ASIIN’s accreditation procedures have on higher education institutions and analysing whether ASIIN fulfils its objective of securing and advancing the quality of academic education nationally and internationally, which are anchored in its articles of association.

In 2018, ASIIN launched a comprehensive impact analysis in order to identify what aspects are in which frequency subject to ASIIN’s requirements and recommendations. An evaluation of a sample of 222 programmes that were accredited in 2017 has already been carried out and is online accessible under <https://www.asiin.de/en/culture-of-quality.html>. This impact study was designed to evaluate the overall impact ASIIN’s accreditation procedures have on higher educational institutions and whether ASIIN fulfils its self-imposed objectives of securing and advancing the quality of academic education.

In addition, impact studies have been conceptualized and conducted by focusing on a variety of themes and angles, thus attempting to encompass the entirety of ASIIN’s working areas, including, but not limited to: accreditation of systems and institutions, (re)accreditation of degree programmes, analysis of external feedback and country reports. All impact studies are published on ASIIN’s website and additionally are sent directly to ASIIN’s members, experts and committees for further discussion.

November 2020	Study on the Impact of ASIIN’s Programme Accreditation in the Field of Mechanical Engineering (2009-2019)
October 2020	International Accreditation in Higher Education in Mongolia

September 2020	Study on the Impact of ASIIN's Programme Accreditation in the Field of Engineering and Management (2009-2019)
August 2020	Analysis of ASIIN's Accreditation of Institutes and Systems
June 2020	Analysis of Surveys from Experts and Customers
June 2020	Annual Report on Accreditation (2018-2019)
May 2020	International Accreditation in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia
September 2018	Study on the Impact of ASIIN's Programme Accreditations in 2017

### 9.5 ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

**ASIIN e.V.** is set up as a non-profit association, in which a group of around 10 staff members assists a significant number of volunteers and supports them in performing their duties. Outside the ASIIN head office, all other functions are performed in an honorary capacity.

ASIIN e.V. is exclusively and directly a non-profit organization as defined by the section "Tax-privileged purposes" of the German revenue code. Through this organizational form, ASIIN receives a special status under German law and is exempt from paying most taxes (excluding VAT). To achieve this status, ASIIN must not engage in promoting its own commercial success nor primarily pursue its own profitability. The association's funds are used only for the purposes outlined in its by-laws, and members receive no remuneration from association funds.

The funds of ASIIN derive from two sources:

- Revenue from Accreditation procedures. With this income the expenditures for staff, allowances and travel expenditures for the peers, meetings of Technical Committees and Accreditation Commissions etc.) are entirely covered.
- Other activities of ASIIN are not cross-subsidised by its accreditation activities nor does the association receive any funding or direct subsidies from public funds. Instead, activities such as participation of ASIIN representatives in conferences or representation of ASIIN on the international level, contributions to international projects etc. are financed through mandatory contributions by its members or by respective project funds of the European Union and similar organisations.

ASIIN's internal organization is straight forward – a Managing Director heads the agency which currently employs six project managers for its core business of accreditation and evaluation. Additional staff includes an IT and facilities manager, a secretary and two members of staff in the organisational support team.

ASIIN's accreditation activities are largely implemented by its voluntary members: the peers (currently about 800 in the ASIIN expert pool for programme accreditation) as well as the around 200 members of the ASIIN Board, the Accreditation Commission, the Certification

Commission and the Technical Committees. The pool of experts for institutional accreditation consist of around 100 experts. As mentioned international experts were included since many years. While in the past these experts were recruited individually now ASIIN implemented as well a pool of international experts. To enlarge the international pool ASIIN established trainings for international peers especially for programme accreditation on a regular base.

In all panels the diversity regarding gender and age structure is under permanent discussion and review. As result of these discussions several potential peers who were retired already were sorted out during a reassessment of our expert pool. ASIIN was successful to engage younger professors for the different panels. Regarding the balance of gender within the panels ASIIN made progresses as well. In nearly all panels women are involved in the meantime. Two of the technical committees and the accreditation commission have female chairs and in one technical committee half of the members are women. Beside these progresses comparing to our last accreditation ASIIN will continue to monitor the situation.

ASIIN has rented office space as well as additional archive rooms at a local rent. The IT infrastructure is managed by an external service provider - THOLD-IT GmbH. The IT and communication equipment is at a current standard with regard to the performance level, availability and security of data and business processes. Each employee has a computer workstation with Internet connection and access to office standard peripherals.

All core processes of ASIIN are handled electronically, including archiving. For the monitoring of procedures and the storage and archiving of data, both relevant rules and sufficient technical equipment are available. Meeting and conference rooms are available inhouse or are rented flexibly and as required throughout Germany for committee meetings, workshops or training courses.

**As regards ASIIN Consult GmbH**, the for-profit company and 100% affiliate of the non-profit association ASIIN e.V., employs two full time staff. ASIIN Consult is in charge of all activities apart from the accreditation of Bachelor, Master and Ph.D study programmes nationally as well as internationally. It equally disposes of sufficient resources to execute its tasks.

As mentioned and exemplified in the last standard, ASIIN has ample resources to improve and reflect on its QA practices and to inform the public about our activities.

### **9.6 ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct**

ASIIN has a very strong focus on internal quality and professional conduct. The backbone for our formalised internal quality management system is set out in the quality management handbook (see Annex 1).

This quality management handbook of ASIIN is intended to provide a systematic overview of all the measures and instruments that we use in the execution of our daily work. It organizes the management and optimisation of the core process of the ASIIN e.V. - the implementation of accreditation procedures - and the internal processes that support this endeavour.

The handbook is regularly updated based on the experiences gained in implementing quality management. In the version approved by the ASIIN Board, it represents a guideline for the

internal quality management of the agency. The ASIIN office is responsible for updating the manual.

The instruments used and the process documentation attached to the manual are updated on an ongoing basis and are oriented towards the qualitative further development of the processes in line with the results from quality assurance. This process was again implemented in the first six months of 2020 for descriptions of more than 100 processes on internal data sheets which are appendices to the handbook.

The quality management handbook of the ASIIN is - without the process documentation, which serves exclusively internal management purposes - published on the ASIIN website <https://www.asiin.de/en/culture-of-quality.html>.

The ASIIN QM is structured as follows: starting from the overall organizational goals of the ASIIN e.V., a number of fields of activity are defined on which the quality assurance instruments of the agency are focused, the overarching goal being that our accreditation approach and procedures comply with the principles of objectivity, validity, confidentiality and transparency.

Our QM instruments and methods are geared to the following four fields of activity:

1. Experts and committee members: The quality of the pool of experts.
2. Accreditation requirements: The quality of accreditation requirements and procedural principles.
3. Process performance: Quality in the application of accreditation requirements and principles of procedure.
4. Recognition: The recognition of the process and work results of ASIIN e.V. by third parties.

For each field of activity, concrete quality expectations are specified. These quality expectations are at the same time result expectations for the ASIIN processes in the area of program and system accreditation. Each activity field is systematically assigned measures and instruments that are to be used to meet the respective result expectations and, at the same time, to make it transparent whether they have been met (quality inspection).

In principle, the instruments geared to quality assessment, quality assurance and quality improvement should be integrated into the processes in such a way that their use means as little additional effort as possible for the respective responsible actors.

Process descriptions in the appendix of the quality management handbook serve as a working basis for process control, which ideally outline various processes in varying degrees of detail. These process descriptions are subject to constant adaptation and serve solely for internal control, which is carried out by the office.

If process descriptions (e.g. the process description of an accreditation procedure) are relevant for the work of universities and committees of the ASIIN, these processes are also - in a less complex form - separately documented in the respective requirements and procedural principles for programme and system accreditation (see Annexes 2 and 3) and on the website of ASIIN e.V.

Internal quality assurance plays a central role when preparing the annual planning meeting of the ASIIN office that usually takes place in January and involves all full-time employees of ASIIN. It also plays a role in the monthly meeting of the ASIIN headquarters staff (Jour Fix), where the experience of the staff in managing the accreditation procedures and discussion points from previous committee meetings, are discussed. All of the bodies (all technical committees, the accreditation commissions, the board of directors, the membership assembly) discuss the information obtained by regular surveys among a) our experts b) our customers to draw appropriate conclusions on how to structure our work.

In addition, at the end of each year, the chairs of all technical committees within ASIIN meet with their colleagues from the accreditation commission to systematically discuss areas of improvement for the operations and services of ASIIN. These meetings are minuted and it is the task of the ASIIN head office to follow up on these suggestions.

Last but not least, it is important to mention that ASIIN disposes of an ethics committee, which any member or customer of ASIIN can appeal to, if ethical standards are deemed to have been violated.

### **9.7 ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies**

ASIIN has been and continues to undergo multiple external reviews on a cyclical basis. The accreditation system and organizational processes in Germany are regulated and surveyed by the German Accreditation Council which was set up in accordance with the resolution (adopted on 3 December 1998) of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German Federal States (Kultusministerkonferenz – KMK). As per law from 15 February 2005 the accreditation council was transformed into a ‘Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany’.

ASIIN since its creation has been subjected to periodic re-accreditations by the German Accreditation Council in the process of which its procedures, practices and by-laws were checked. In between the accreditation procedures, the GAC regularly carried out observations of accreditation procedures and inspections of accreditation results with regard to its seal. This was the prerequisite for obtaining its ‘licence’ to granting them for a set period of time the authorisation to accredit study programmes concluding with degrees under German law with the seal of the Accreditation Council. The last review took place in 2015. ASIIN was found to fulfil the requirements of the GAC and has been consequently accredited by the Council until 2022.

It is interesting to note that the external review by GAC in the past also was the first step to ensure the listing of ASIIN in EQAR and full membership in ENQA. As the review criteria of the GAC included parts 2 and 3 of the European Standards and Guidelines, EQAR and ENQA used the report to make its own independent decisions, as ASIIN for more than a decade has been a full member of ENQA and one of the first agencies to be listed in the EQAR. As of the 1st of January 2018, this sequence of authorization/recognition decisions was reversed. It is now the GAC which no longer does external reviews of ASIIN itself but recognises the listing in the EQAR as prerequisite for its own authorization decision in Germany.

ASIIN also belongs to the few agencies which have commissioned INQAAHE, the International Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education, to be reviewed against its ‘Guidelines of Good Practise’.

For the authorisation to award the different European field specific labels, ASIIN additionally has to run through regular reviews by the label owning organisations. Currently, ASIIN is e.g. up for review by the ENAEE (European Network for the Accreditation of Engineering Education) and has been reviewed by EQANIE (European Quality Assurance Network for Informatics Education).

## **10. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 2)**

### **10.1 ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance**

The standards embedded in Part 1 of the ESG are reviewed as a standard procedure in every programme and system accreditation as well as certification procedures of ASIIN. The logic and efficacy of the qualification process within a degree programme are a core part of the review. Central to the total assessment is the effective achievement of the goals set by the HEI itself. HEIs are provided with new opportunities to assume the steering responsibility for internal and external quality evaluation and their results themselves and to incorporate them in a targeted manner into their strategic planning.

The QM instruments and processes for an HEI are consciously not predefined, but each institution must select and employ them according to their own quality objectives.

The same holds true for the conduct of system accreditations in Germany. Degree programmes that are established after the system accreditation or have already been object of internal quality assurance according to the provisions of the accredited systems. This is the *conditio sine qua non* for the award of the seal of programme accreditation by the HEI itself.

### **10.2 ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose**

The development, updating and publication of ASIIN’s accreditation standards and procedures forms part of its internal quality assurance system as documented in our quality management handbook (see Annex 1). The handbook is published on our website at <https://www.asiin.de/en/culture-of-quality.html> – apart from the detailed process descriptions that are for internal use only – and stipulates the quality expectations for all accreditation procedures by identifying the expectations, responsibilities planning and implementation as well as quality indicators for all accreditation activities.

With regard to the development, updating and publication of ASIIN’s accreditation and certification standards and procedures, the following is of particular note: ASIIN staff and its committee members are regularly requested to submit feedback on and suggest possible improvements of the accreditation and certification processes and criteria. In addition to feedback sessions on an individual basis, regular consultations take place between the various elements and panels of ASIIN:

- Once a year the chairpersons of all Technical Committees meet with the Accreditation Commission for Degree Programmes to discuss current issues and their experiences from the accreditation procedures carried out. Their advice and feedback is taken into consideration by the Accreditation Commission for any decision on how processes and standards might be adapted to recent developments. Also, before the Accreditation Commission decides on amendments to the ASIIN standards and criteria for accreditation, the Technical Committees are consulted.
- The chairpersons of the Accreditation Commission are regularly invited to the meetings of the ASIIN Board where they report on the decisions taken by the Commission. Their report places a special emphasis on critical issues that may have come up and on possible amendments to standards and processes that may be required to address these issues.
- Peers are requested to fill out feedback-surveys after each procedure, the results of which are used as input for the internal quality assurance process of ASIIN. The typical follow up is analysis of feedbacks within the ASIIN headquarters (especially as input for monthly quality jour fixe) and input for the Accreditation Commissions that decides about changes in the standards and criteria. Since ASIIN relies on the voluntary support of its expert peers, all proposals for improvement of its processes, standards and criteria are thoroughly evaluated.
- ASIIN staff participates in the meetings of all ASIIN panels and takes note of the points discussed in order to find out whether the agency's procedures and criteria require improvements. For all meetings, minutes are produced in which all decisions and recommendations for amendments to the processes and standards applied by ASIIN are documented. Based on these minutes, panels regularly ask the ASIIN staff members to report on the implementation of these decisions and recommendations.
- After completion of an accreditation process, the contact persons of the HEIs regularly receive a questionnaire on the accreditation process and the standards and criteria adopted. They are asked to evaluate the work of ASIIN and of its peers and to indicate where the quality of ASIIN's processes or standards and criteria should be improved (applicability, comprehensibility, up-to-datedness etc.). These questionnaires may be submitted to the ASIIN office anonymously and are evaluated by ASIIN staff. The results of this evaluation are included in reports to the ASIIN accreditation commissions in order to document the quality of processes and their continuous improvement.

On frequent occasions, there are conferences and meetings in which representatives of HEIs and peers will report publicly about their experiences with regard to the ASIIN accreditations and in which stakeholders will formulate their recommendations for accreditation standards and procedures. ASIIN representatives participate in these meetings whenever possible and take note of the points discussed in order to find out whether the agency's processes and policies require improvements.

### **10.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes**

The accreditation certification and evaluation procedures applied by the ASIIN use all of the processes asked for and can be roughly divided in three distinct phases (see Annexes 2-4):

The first phase begins with the submission of request form by the HEI – for the programme accreditation and certification combined with a brief overview of the programme or courses/module contents. The request form can be downloaded from our Website and sent electronically to the ASIIN office. In the programme accreditation the applicant is asked to indicate the Technical Committee to be responsible for the process, to provide suggestions for the subject areas of the auditors. Upon the reception of the inquiry follows a formal examination: the preliminary information is reviewed both at the ASIIN office and the Accreditation Commission or the Certification Commission, in the programme accreditation by the Technical Committees involved, regarding responsibility, number of auditors required, etc. On the basis of this information the head office prepares an offer for the accreditation/certification procedure (time-frame and costs), together with a request for a statement that the costs of the accreditation/certification/evaluation are paid for on the part of the applicant/university administration. Upon acceptance of the offer, the contract for the accreditation procedure is concluded.

The second phase starts with the submission of an application for accreditation/certification/evaluation by the HEI in the form of a self-assessment report in accordance with the guidelines set out by ASIIN. Before the final version self-assessment report is handed in, ASIIN offers a preliminary check of the report for formal completeness and, if desired, a discussion with the persons responsible for the application.

Then, the commissions set up an adequate audit team (peer review panel) - in the programme accreditation on the suggestion of involved Technical Committees. The audit team is at minimum composed of four members including two members representing professors in the respective academic field(s) from universities or universities of applied sciences, a representative from the professional field, and a student representative. Each member of the audit team must sign a statement of impartiality and confidentiality. The applicant HEI is informed about the composition of the peer group. After receiving the self-assessment report, the peer group conducts firstly a paper-based review and submits substantial questions and comments that warrant further documentation or explanation in advance of the on-site visit.

The expert panel subsequently carries out an on-site visit to the department in question which usually lasts in programme accreditation and certification one and a half day, including a preliminary meeting of the peer group on the first day to prepare the on-site visit. At this preliminary meeting, no representative of the HEI will be present. For a larger number of study programmes to be accredited or courses to be certificated, the duration of the visit and the number of peers forming the peer group will be extended accordingly. The visit of the peer group includes meetings with representatives of the directorate of the institution and of the departments; a visit of the institution, especially of teaching facilities and laboratories; a review of examination papers and final theses; and separate meetings with academic teachers and students, graduates and prospective employers, each of the latter without representatives of the HEI administration being present.

The results of the peer-assessment (desk review plus findings from the on-site-visit) are documented in an audit report that serves as basis for the next steps in the procedure and for the final decision of the accreditation and certification commissions. A first draft of the written audit report is produced by the project manager from the ASIIN headquarter accompanying the audit team on site, amended and signed off by the auditors, then submitted to the university applying for accreditation/certification/evaluation to check for any omissions or errors. If necessary, the HEI corrects any factual errors and/or makes comments to the rough draft of the auditors. Evaluation procedures end at this point. In accreditation and certification procedures the report, supplemented with the recommendations on the accreditation/certification decision by the peers, is then submitted to the respectively responsible commission (in the programme accreditation the report is first examined and assessed by the Technical Committee responsible, which gives also a recommendation for the accreditation decision).

**In the third phase** the report of the peer group is then submitted to the responsible ASIIN commission which decides about accreditation/certification. The commission diversifies the decisions along the different seals that might have been requested and about requirements or recommendations attached to the accreditation per seal and or label. The ASIIN office then informs the HEI applying for accreditation and, if applicable, the respective owner of the seal / label awarded. The complete final report is published on the ASIIN website.

ASIIN awards accreditation for a limited period of time (5 years for accreditation, 7 for reaccreditation). In defining the full accreditation period ASIIN has to adopt the durations prescribed by the German Accreditation Council for its own seal. In line with the piggy-backing procedure described above, any other duration would complicate the procedure and thus effectively hinder HEIs to apply for several seals and labels especially if under compulsory regime of a national seal.

The accreditation/certification procedures can have the following results:

1. Unconditional accreditation/certification for the full period.
2. Accreditation/certification with reservations, i.e. with requirements and thus for a shorter period of validity than the maximum permitted by the procedure. In this case, there are certain requirements that must be met by a due date. If the requirements are met on time, the accreditation/certification is extended to cover the full period allowed. The fulfilment of the requirements is checked and evaluated by the review team (in programme accreditation the responsible Technical Committee(s) as well) and ascertained by the responsible accreditation or certification commission. The rules of the respective owner of a seal relating to the imposition of requirements are also applied. If necessary, the ASIIN office will provide detailed information on the conditions to be applied.
3. The procedure is suspended ('procedure-loop'): the commissions may suspend an accreditation/certification procedure once if the procedure revealed that requirements remain unfulfilled by the applicant institution which nevertheless can be expected to

resolve the issues during the suspension period. When deciding to suspend the procedure, the responsible commission also stipulates the conditions to be met for resumption. The decision to suspend the procedure may be taken at the request of the institution or on the initiative of ASIIN. If the resumption of a procedure requires an additional visit, the applicant may have to meet extra costs. The rules of the respective owner of a seal relating to the suspension of a procedure are also applied. If necessary, the ASIIN office will provide detailed information on the conditions to be applied.

4. Accreditation/certification may be refused if the requirements for the award of a seal are not sufficiently met. The rules of the respective owner of a seal relating to the refusal of accreditation are also applied. If necessary, the ASIIN office will provide detailed information on the conditions to be applied.

#### **10.4 ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts**

External quality assurance procedures are carried out by the honorary members of the audit teams - i.e. the auditors – who are appointed on a case-by-case basis according to professional aspects from the ASIIN pool of assessors and with participation of international peers in all procedures outside of Germany.

As a rule, proposals of persons from our member organisations and from third organisations in Germany and Europe - e.g. from universities, professional organisations and umbrella organisations of the social partners - are processed for inclusion in the ASIIN pool of experts and for membership in the technical committees. For filling positions for student representatives, proposals from student associations (i.e. in Germany the Student Accreditation Pool or federal student council conferences) are requested.

When selecting the experts, ASIIN follows the principle of access to an existing pool of experts in the area of programme accreditation, system accreditation or certification, i.e. potential experts are included in a list on the basis of certain criteria, independent of a concrete procedure, so that they can be accessed directly if necessary. This has the advantage that the reviewers can be trained and informed about current developments (e.g. by invitation to information events, newsletters) via central distribution lists even independently of a procedure. The principles for the nomination of reviewers are published in the respective requirements and procedural principles (see Annexes 2-4). In the case of programme accreditation, the responsible technical committee decides on the inclusion in the pool of experts, in the case of system accreditation, the Accreditation Commission for Quality Management Systems and in certification procedures the Certification Commission. The decision is made on the basis of a presentation form to be filled in by the potential assessor.

In concrete procedures, the experts are selected as follows:

The Accreditation or Certification Commission (in programme accreditation the participating Technical Committees) determine how many experts from which subject area are to be involved in the procedure when preparing the proposal. From a technical point of view, this is

particularly important in interdisciplinary or cluster procedures in order to have all necessary competencies represented in the team of experts during the subsequent evaluation. In addition to the technical fit, the following criteria must also be taken into account in the selection (see Annex 2-4):

The expert groups in programme accreditation and certification or evaluation procedures should:

- due to its composition, be able to overview the concerns of the stakeholders affected by a specific training offer and include them in its evaluation,
- if possible, be composed of experts already experienced in accreditation and new experts.

The final expert team must be appointed by the Appointment Committee of the Accreditation Commission or the Certification Commission and thus finally confirmed. The Appointment Committee is a permanent working group that has been set up by the commission. It is composed of the chairpersons of the accreditation and certification commissions as well as of the persons in charge of the expert committees involved in an accreditation procedure.

The 'Requirements and Procedural Principles for System Accreditation' formulate the expectations of the expert groups in system accreditation. This expert group should:

- due to its composition, be able to oversee questions of higher education management, quality assurance of studies and teaching as well as methods and design of learning processes (study programmes);
- due to its composition, be in a position to oversee the concerns of the stakeholders affected by a specific training provision and to include them in its evaluation;
- be able, due to its composition, to include experience from foreign systems and with international or European standards in the evaluation. Suitable assessors from abroad may also be used for this purpose.

Each audit team consists of at least two professors from HEIs, one representative of the labour market and one student representative. In case of need the audit teams are enlarged by additional experts out of the named groups. This depends mainly on the number of programmes, courses or modules which should be accredited, certified or evaluated.

To prepare the persons involved in the procedures, ASIIN has developed a concept for the preparation of reviewers and committee members. The concept is based on an applied double procedure and includes

- the provision of specific, periodically recurring training courses for the persons stored in the pool of experts, and
- 'learning on the job', in which experts are trained in the concrete procedure by means of assistance for targeted preparation and by accompanying persons who are experienced in comparable quality assurance procedures. Special emphasis is placed on this element in concrete appointment procedures.

It is important to note that ASIIN regularly involves experts from the countries in which we accredit. We are currently building a formal international expert pool to further strengthen our resources.

Regarding the recommendation of experts in the last EQAR accreditation it is important to notice that no more accreditation procedures based on former evaluations were conducted since then. In case of accreditation procedures based on a former evaluation procedure not more than one member of the evaluation team will be involved into the accreditation process.

### **10.5 ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes**

For programme accreditation, the ASIIN has developed the 'General Requirements and Principles for Programme Accreditation' (see Annex 2), for system accreditation the 'General Requirements and Procedural Principles for System Accreditation' (see Annex 3) and for certification procedures the 'Standards for the Certification of Further Education and Training' (see Annex 4). These documents define the criteria and procedures on which the accreditation and certification decisions are based on. They are published on the website of ASIIN.

On the one hand, the ASIIN considers itself obliged to continuously develop and improve its requirements and procedural documents on the basis of knowledge and experience gained. On the other hand, in order to provide the universities with a certain degree of consistency, the change requirements fed from internal quality management are usually collected for some time and implemented in combination with change requirements based on external specifications.

In case of a revision of the criteria, a working group from the middle of the respective accreditation or certification commission is usually appointed, supported by staff members of the ASIIN office. It has the task of preparing a draft. The final decision on the introduction of the new version will be taken exclusively by the responsible commission.

The accreditation and certification commissions also assess any national criteria for the award of national accreditation seals whether they meet the ESG. Only after a verification of the accordance with ESG by the commissions ASIIN operates with those criteria.

The relationship between the ASIIN and the university is regulated under private law by contract on the implementation of an accreditation procedure. The conclusion of the contract shall be concluded when the university places the order or accepts the offer by the ASIIN. Part of the offer and the contract based on it are the General Terms and Conditions (AGB) of the ASIIN, which regulate the details of the relationship and also quote the relevant requirements and procedural principles (see Annex 9). If a university also wishes to have an additional contract document signed by both parties, the applicable wording of the ASIIN's General Terms and Conditions will be incorporated into this agreement in the same wording.

### **10.6 ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting**

All final accreditation, certification and evaluation reports are published on the ASIIN website. The final reports include the decision about the accreditation or certification. All these decisions are also listed on the European Database of External Quality Assurance results and in addition on all the websites of the European Umbrella organizations which authorize us to deliver international quality assurance seals (e.g. the European Network for the Accreditation of Engineering Education etc.).

After the implementation of the new German accreditation system ASIIN publishes the assessment reports as well. As the decision for the award of the national accreditation seal is taken no longer by the accreditation agencies the assessment reports do not include the accreditation decisions. These are published separately by the German Accreditation Council.

### **10.7 ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals**

ASIIN ensures that this criterion is met by establishing an Appeals Committee in 2007 for complaints from universities concerning decisions of the competent accreditation and certification commission of the ASIIN or any points in evaluation procedures. The ASIIN statutes establish the Appeal Committee as an organ of the association and define the subject of the complaints procedure (see Annex 5). In accordance with the association's statutes, the Appeals Committee has adopted rules of procedure that regulate the appeal procedure in detail. According to these rules of procedure, the members of the Complaints Committee are 'technically independent and not bound by instructions' This is guaranteed by the composition of the committee, which comprises, according to the statutes

- two members from the accreditation commission, at their suggestion;
- one representative from a member organisation of the ASIIN, at their suggestion, who is not a member of one of the other bodies of the Association;
- one representative from another accreditation agency in Germany or abroad; and
- a student

An overview of the current composition of the committee <https://www.asiin.de/en/board-of-appeals.html> is published on the ASIIN website.

The possibility to appeal against a decision of the Accreditation or Certification Commissions is pointed out to universities and stakeholders in the general criteria for accreditation and certification (see Annexes 2-4), which are also publicly accessible on the ASIIN website.

For appeals against accreditation/certification decisions, evaluations and any other decision burdening a HEI the process is defined as follows. The appeal is submitted to the ASIIN headquarters which checks the material, eventually requests additional information from the HEI and prepares an input for the relevant Accreditation/Certification Commissions. The commissions will decide the case based on the additional arguments submitted by the HEI. If the commission do not follow the arguments of the HEI or cannot reach a decision, it transfers the appeal to the Appeals Committee.

If the Appeals Committee accepts the argumentation of the HEI, it remits the appeal to the Accreditation Commission issuing a detailed justification and asking them for a new decision. Consequently, the Accreditation Commission either follows the Appeals Committee by adjusting its decision or overrides the Committee's suggestions by confirming and possibly better explaining its former decision. If the Appeal Committee does not accept the argumentation of the HEI, it confirms the decision of the Accreditation Commission and the appeal is thus rejected.

In case of any appeals in evaluation procedures the complaint is given directly to the Appeals Committee for a decision.

### **11. Information and opinions of stakeholders**

The main stakeholders are universities, students and representatives of the labour market. The representation of the relevant stakeholders in the ASIIN bodies is a basic principle of its organisational structure. This ensures, through the strict separation between the two areas of responsibility 'association business' and 'accreditation/certification' as well as through the composition of the bodies dealing with accreditation/certification issues and their mutual control, that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the design of accreditation criteria and procedures. However, neither individual actors nor interest groups can exercise significant influence on the work of the ASIIN and on accreditation decisions. This is due to the extensive system of checks and balances which ASIIN has established since its creation 20 years ago.

In order to capture the opinions and the acceptance of the accreditation and certification procedures ASIIN conducts regular online surveys among the peers and HEIs after finishing the accreditation/certification procedures. Participation in the surveys can be anonymous or by naming the specific procedure. Through various measures, the feedback rate has been increased significantly in recent years. For the year 2019, almost half of asked universities and peers have answered the survey in full. For self-reflection, the feedback received is directly made available to the ASIIN project managers.

In addition, an extensive evaluation of the feedback received in the previous year is carried out. The results of the surveys are discussed within the Head Office and all panels of ASIIN (all commissions and committees, as well as in the General Assembly and the Board). In case of structural issues the commissions develop improvement measures and adapt the procedures in use.

The quantitative part of the evaluations shows that the positive feedback regularly highly outweighs the negative ones. In the current evaluation for the year 2019, the aspects of the questions with respect to process support, process flow, reporting, and expert group, for example, were positively evaluated by more than 90% of the involved universities surveyed in each case.

In retrospect, 95% of the questioned universities were satisfied or very satisfied with the work of ASIIN. The experts evaluated the questions with respect to procedural aspects, timing of the procedure, agenda of the audits, and evaluation of the expert group positively by more than 95% in each case. The final decision / decision recommendation of ASIIN is considered justified by 90% of the experts (see Annexes 10, 11).

The German Accreditation Council also is highly satisfied with the quality of ASIIN's reports. It practically never happens that these reports are rejected or given back for further clarifications.

## **12. Recommendations and main findings from previous review(s) and agency's resulting follow-up (for second and subsequent reviews only)**

The last accreditation procedure regarding the membership of ASIIN in ENQA and the listing of EQAR was conducted by the German Accreditation Council in 2016. The experts of the GAC gave the following main recommendations:

1) It should be ensured that in all review panels student representatives are included.

Since starting its operations students were part of ASIIN review panels. In the past it was however at times an issue to recruit student experts for the review panels in some of the countries ASIIN conducted accreditation procedures. Especially in Saudi Arabia it was difficult to find female students for review panels at the female campi of Saudi Arabian universities. Meanwhile ASIIN has implemented procedures to recruit student experts in all countries we are active.

2) The expert pool should be enlarged by persons with international experience in accreditation.

In all its international accreditation procedures, ASIIN systematically engages experts from the country in which we are providing our services. This is in our self-interest and these experts are familiar with the relevant higher education system, speak the respective language etc. In addition to involving these experts ASIIN is currently engaged in building and training a formal experts pools for our main countries of operation.

It is also worth mentioning in this context that ASIIN has developed 'country reports' for many countries in order to support our experts in international QA procedures. In these country reports, vital background information about the educational system with its strengths, weaknesses and peculiarities is given and a systematic overview regarding the decisions of ASIIN in the past is given.

## **13. SWOT analysis**

The main strength of ASIIN is the representation of a wide range of stakeholders by its member organisations. From the coordination group of German Technical Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences, dean's associations as well as from the multiple technical and industrial associations views of all stakeholders regarding quality assurance are represented in ASIIN panels. Therefore, the criteria and procedures defined by ASIIN consider the needs of the involved stakeholders intensively. This view is confirmed by results of the procedure evaluation of the HEIs and the review experts involved. As mentioned above, the evaluation results show a high acceptance of the assessments and decisions as well as of the criteria defined by ASIIN.

The second main strength is the internal quality process of ASIIN. In the different panels of the Agency more than 200 persons discuss and evaluate continuously in defined processes the accreditation/certification procedures and the internal processes. In this structure issues are determined really fast and short way implementation of any improvements are ensured.

An issue in the last years has been the fluctuation of staff members in the head office. Unfortunately, an unforeseeable high fluctuation of staff also showed some negative impacts in particular accreditation procedures. Meanwhile the situation in human resources is stabilised again with a reasonable number of experienced project managers.

#### **14. Current challenges and areas for future development**

The main challenge in 2020 and estimated also in 2021 are the effects of the covid-19 pandemic. Due to global travel restrictions and national quarantine regulations it is nearly impossible to organise on-site visits in a regular way. While for Europe it could be expected that restrictions will be withdrawn until the end of the year the international development is not foreseeable.

In this context the implementation of online procedures shows positive results in reaccreditation procedures and were helpful to support those universities which need accreditation decisions for legal reasons. For accreditation procedures at institutions which are applying for the first time for an ASIIN accreditation the benefit of this instrument is really limited. While in Germany in the meantime nearly all study programmes apply for reaccreditations programmes at international universities would go through the accreditation process for the first time. For these programmes ASIIN is discussing a mixed procedure with video conferences and an on-site visit of only one or two peers to assess the equipment of laboratories and the general circumstances for learning and teaching.

The main long term challenge is to increase the international demand of ASIIN accreditations for engineering programmes. While in Germany and in Europe ASIIN is known for the accreditation of study programmes in technical disciplines international universities mostly apply the accreditation of programmes in natural sciences and in the informatics field.

**Annexes**

<b>Annex</b>	<b>1</b>	Quality Management Handbook
<b>Annex</b>	<b>2</b>	Criteria for the Accreditation of Degree Programmes - ASIIN Quality Seal 2015-12-10
<b>Annex</b>	<b>3</b>	Institutional Accreditation / Certification / Evaluation Criteria for the ASIIN System Seal 2016-06-20
<b>Annex</b>	<b>4</b>	Standards for the Certification of (Further) Education and Training 2020-06-26
<b>Annex</b>	<b>5</b>	ASIIN e.V. Statutes 2012-05-10
<b>Annex</b>	<b>6</b>	Agreement for peers 2017-03-21
<b>Annex</b>	<b>7</b>	ASIIN e.V. Register of Associations 2020-07-06
<b>Annex</b>	<b>8</b>	ASIIN Consult GmbH German Commercial Register 2019-10-22
<b>Annex</b>	<b>9</b>	General Terms and Conditions 2019-09-12
<b>Annex</b>	<b>10</b>	Results peer survey 2019
<b>Annex</b>	<b>11</b>	Results client survey 2019
<b>Annex</b>	<b>12</b>	Impact Study ASIIN Accreditation Procedures 2018-09