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- via email -

**Bonn, September
3, 2015**

Progress Report

Dear Mr. President,

As mentioned in your letter of November 28, 2013, the progress report of the German Accreditation Council (GAC) is now due. We are pleased to inform you of the steps we have taken in response to the recommendations of ENQA's review panel.

Let me begin with the two issues you highlighted in your letter and then address the other recommendations made by the review panel in Chapter V of its report dated July 31, 2013 (p. 38).

First, you mentioned that GAC's resources should be increased. We could not agree more, and we are pleased to inform you that the Conference of German Finance Ministers increased our annual grant from 330,000 euros to 397,000 euros in 2015 and 415,000 euros in 2016. They also increased our staffing quota, so that we are now authorized to employ 5.0 full-time equivalents (4.0 FTE previously).

Furthermore, we have revised our fee schedule. We expect our annual revenue from fees to rise from approximately 80,000 euros in 2013 to approximately 180,000 euros starting in 2016; in 2014, we were already able to generate approximately 120,000 euros.

Secondly, the ENQA board encouraged us to update our Mission Statement. The current one from 2007 is clearly outdated, and we agree on that. Nevertheless, we have postponed the update for the time being: This year, we have begun a process of a general revision of our rules and regulations. The timing is due to the new ESG, as we want to take them fully into account. Therefore, GAC established a working group for this general revision at its first meeting following the adoption of the new ESG in Yerevan earlier this year. Part of the terms of

reference for this working group is to update the Mission Statement. The entire process is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2016. As the next evaluation of GAC by ENQA is expected to take place in 2017/18, we will be able to present the new Mission Statement by then.

Now let me turn to the other panel's recommendations on page 38 of the report.

- Strategic Plan: On December 13, 2013, GAC adopted a strategic plan for its term of office from 2013 to 2017. This document is available in English¹ and covers, among other things, the areas of system development and internationalization.
- Evaluation of the development of system accreditation: In the aforementioned strategic plan, GAC stated that it would "recommend that the agencies and the system-accredited higher education institutions engage an external evaluator and jointly develop an assessment framework." When further considering how to proceed, questions arose regarding the appropriate timing.

In fact, the first two higher education institutions (HEIs) received their system accreditation only in 2011. Currently, there are over 30 (out of approximately 400) HEIs that are "system-accredited." Our main task today is to define how the first "re-accreditations" starting in 2017 will be carried out. To this end, we are closely monitoring the system accreditations and have already identified several areas requiring adjustments, as GAC's objectives have been largely—though not fully—achieved by now. For the time being, we will make a series of smaller observations regarding system accreditation but will not conduct a comprehensive general evaluation: In our opinion, more experience at a greater number of HEIs is needed to fully assess the impact of system accreditation. GAC's next term of office, 2017–2021, seems to us to be the more appropriate time to conduct a large-scale evaluation.

- We have discussed the desirability of including doctoral studies in GAC's portfolio and unanimously concluded that this would not be advisable for two reasons. First, doctoral studies in Germany are very closely linked to research, and doctoral candidates are viewed primarily as early-career researchers rather than as advanced students, whereas GAC has expertise in matters of study and teaching but not so much in research. Secondly, this leads to the fact that Germany is a country with shared responsibilities in higher education, and therefore there are several reputable institutions here that address the research aspects of higher education. In particular, the Council of Science and Humanities and the German Research Foundation (DFG) address quality issues related to doctoral studies.

¹ http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/AR/Beschluesse/en/AR_Strategische_Planung_2013-17_en.pdf

- We have increased our focus on our role, performance, and impact beyond Germany's borders. The international activities of German accreditation agencies accredited by GAC will (and already have) become much more important in our reviews of them. Regarding the value of our quality seal globally, we must keep in mind that foreign demand for our seal is very low. Only a few German-backed universities occasionally consider applying for our seal, and GAC addresses these requests on a case-by-case basis. After careful consideration, we have decided not to promote our seal outside Germany. Finally, our primary activity in this regard is currently our participation in the ENQA-led QACHE project, which has proven to be of the utmost interest.
- Balance between generic and subject-specific standards: A GAC working group recently addressed this issue and produced a report (German only²) suggesting that we should strive to establish a link between these types of standards. We will make decisions on this as part of the aforementioned revision of our rules and regulations.
- QA procedures for private HEIs: GAC is in regular contact with the Council of Science and Humanities, which is responsible for the so-called "institutional accreditation" of private HEIs. We work together to keep our separate processes as simple as possible, but it is a fact that most of the Higher Education Acts of the German states ("Länder") require both types of accreditation for private HEIs.
- Mission statement: see above.
- Adjustment of GAC's full name following the introduction of system accreditation: It must be noted that system accreditation also leads to accredited programs, so GAC's name remains quite accurate. Nevertheless, before the Federal Constitutional Court has reached its decision regarding the legal framework for accreditation in Germany (this pending case is mentioned in our panel's report on pp. 14, 27, 37), changes to our Foundation Law are generally unlikely.
- Further development of the Foundation's website and communication strategies: We noted that the panel was not enthusiastic about our English website, and we have put considerable effort into improving it. We are convinced that it is now of acceptable quality, but since the overwhelming majority of our statutory tasks lie within Germany, our resources for international communication are limited.
Regarding national communication, we would like to highlight that in early 2015, we organized the first "Forum on System Accreditation." Following this, we have established regular channels of communication with system-accredited HEIs, as we all

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http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/AR/Veroeffentlichungen/Berichte/AR_Abschlussbericht_AGFachlichkeit.pdf

agree that systematic exchange of information is crucial for a QA (and HE) system as complex as ours.

I hope our progress report meets ENQA's expectations. Please do not hesitate to contact us for any further information. Additionally, Olaf Bartz, our managing director, will attend ENQA's general assembly in October in Dublin, so there will be an opportunity to discuss any issues in person as well.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Reinhold R. Grimm'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'R'.

Professor Dr. Reinhold R. Grimm