

Bremen Regulation on Academic Program Accreditation

Explanatory Statement:

I. General Provisions

On December 8, 2016, the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs reached an agreement on the draft of an inter-state treaty on the organization of a joint accreditation system for quality assurance in studies and teaching at German universities (Inter-State Treaty on Study Accreditation), which has since been signed by the heads of government of all federal states. With this State Treaty, the states have implemented the requirements of the Federal Constitutional Court, which, in its decision of February 17, 2016, defined the legal requirements for the accreditation system as a quality assurance instrument in the higher education sector. The State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation has now established the legal framework for accreditation as a binding, academically guided external procedure for quality assurance and development in teaching.

In addition to the standardization of substantive, procedural, and organizational requirements—which must be established by the legislature itself—the Federal Constitutional Court has also identified a need for formal regulations, particularly regarding the scientifically appropriate composition of the stakeholders and the procedures for establishing and revising the evaluation criteria. Resolutions by the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the Accreditation Council have been deemed insufficient as executive agreements.

Article 4 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation therefore contains an authorization for the states to issue statutory regulations governing the details of

- the formal criteria
- the technical and content-related criteria
- the procedures and processes
- the composition of the committees.

On this basis, this statutory regulation governs the requirements for the essential structural and qualitative standards for the accreditation of bachelor's and master's degree programs, which are necessary to ensure the obligations of the states arising from Article 1, paragraph

2 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, namely to ensure the equivalence of corresponding coursework, examinations, and degrees, as well as the possibility of transferring between institutions of higher education.

These regulations are based on the relevant resolutions of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs regarding the bachelor's and master's degree systems and quality assurance through accreditation, in particular the joint structural guidelines of the federal states, the existing rules for accreditation by the Accreditation Council, and the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). However, the opportunity was also taken to further streamline and optimize the procedures based on previous experience with accreditation, thereby contributing to cost reduction and the reduction of bureaucracy. In addition, the results of consultations with representatives of the German Rectors' Conference, the Accreditation Council, the agencies, the Association of Private Universities, students, and the school sector have been incorporated.

Regulations concerning the fees to be charged by the agencies, for which the State Treaty on Study Accreditation also provides a legal basis (Article 4, paragraph 5), are not covered by this regulation but are reserved—where necessary—for separate regulations. It is planned to evaluate cost trends after two years in order to decide, on that basis, whether cost limits are necessary.

The guiding principle of the statutory regulation is that ensuring and enhancing the quality of academic programs and teaching is primarily the responsibility of the universities. It is assumed that universities will take the initiative to prioritize the quality of academic programs across the board when designing their degree programs.

The individual explanatory notes provide clarifications and guidance on interpretation to ensure that a uniform approach is maintained across the states in the context of accreditation and that the objective of the State Treaty, as set forth in Article 1, paragraph 2, is not jeopardized by divergent practices. In this context, the principle—which has been strongly advocated to date—continues to apply that existing discretionary leeway, as expressed through a multitude of discretionary or mandatory provisions and restrictive formulations, must be utilized flexibly and productively. However, the exercise of this discretion requires a transparent justification by the universities, which must be presented and verified within the framework of program accreditation or in the corresponding internal quality assurance processes.

II. Details of the regulations:

Part 1 – General Provisions

Section 1 – Scope

Paragraph 1 defines the subject matter of the regulation, which, pursuant to Article 2, paragraphs 2 and 3, and Article 3, pertains to the formal criteria, the substantive criteria, and the procedure.

Section 2 – Forms of Accreditation

Section 2, in implementation of Article 3, Paragraph 1 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, defines the possible subjects of accreditation to which the subsequent provisions of this regulation apply.

Part 2 – Formal Criteria for Degree Programs

Part 2 primarily addresses the structural guidelines agreed upon by the federal states, through which the states have agreed on the core elements of the tiered degree system as the basis for mobility during studies and mutual recognition of degrees within Germany and the European Higher Education Area.

Section 3 – Program Structure and Duration

Paragraph 1 establishes the principle that, in a tiered degree system, the bachelor's degree is the standard degree. It must be characterized by an independent, professionally qualifying profile that enables graduates to enter the workforce in their respective fields. This does not preclude the possibility that, for certain activities, the requirements prescribed by professional regulations are only met at the master's level, as is particularly the case in all teacher education programs.

The master's degree is generally defined as a further professional qualification at the university level.

Paragraph 2 provides a framework for the planning and design of bachelor's and master's degree programs at universities; it does not regulate individual academic conduct.

The flexibility offered by 3-, 3.5-, and 4-year bachelor's programs and 1-, 1.5-, or 2-year master's programs on a full-time basis allows for program structures that are tailored to the requirements of the respective discipline and academic culture. Bachelor's programs with a standard duration of less than three years on a full-time basis are excluded. The total standard period of study to reach the master's level in consecutive degree programs is 10 semesters.

Exceptions are possible in the core artistic disciplines at art and music colleges. Subject to further provisions under state law, consecutive bachelor's and master's degree programs with a total duration of six years may also be established in these disciplines. Furthermore, state law may also provide

to adjust the standard periods of study, provided the program is organized accordingly. Currently, no such regulations exist.

§ 4 – Program Profiles

Paragraph 1 sets forth provisions regarding the profile of master's degree programs. Regardless of the type of institution, master's degree programs may be classified as either "application-oriented" or "research-oriented." Given the elimination of the distinction between programs at universities of applied sciences and traditional universities, this differentiation serves to enhance transparency for students and the labor market. If a profile type is specified, it must be clearly reflected in the structure of the program.

At art and music colleges, master's programs may have a special artistic profile.

Master's programs that provide the educational qualifications required for a teaching career, on the other hand, must have a specific teaching-oriented focus. To this end, the joint state-level subject-specific requirements for teacher training (standards in educational sciences as well as joint state-level content requirements for the subjects and their didactics) and any state-specific content and structural requirements must be applied as assessment criteria.

The respective profile must be verified during the accreditation process.

Paragraph 2: For master's programs, a distinction is made—regardless of the type of institution—between consecutive and continuing education programs, which are defined in more detail in § 11, paragraph 3.

Continuing education master's programs lead to the same level of qualification and the same entitlements as consecutive master's programs. Therefore, the same requirements regarding the standard period of study and the requirement for a thesis apply to them.

Paragraph 3 clarifies that the requirement for a thesis is an indispensable quality criterion for all degree programs. In artistic degree programs, the term "thesis" may also be understood to mean a "final project." The thesis serves as proof of the student's ability to independently address a problem within the respective field using scientific or artistic methods within a specified timeframe. Section 8(3) contains further provisions regarding the scope of final theses.

Section 5 – Admission Requirements and Transfers Between Programs

Paragraph 1: Admission to a master's program requires a first professional higher education degree. This takes into account the nature of the master's degree as a further professional higher education degree (see § 3, paragraph 1).

Under state law, an exception to the requirement of a first professional degree may be granted for professional and artistic master's programs if the first professional degree is replaced by an entrance examination. Sentence 3 stipulates, with regard to the profile of continuing education master's programs set forth in § 4(2), that admission requires qualified, i.e., professional practical experience relevant to the program's qualification objective, generally of not less than one year.

The first sentence of paragraph 2 takes into account the needs of art and music colleges, which primarily focus on specific artistic aptitude when admitting students to master's programs. For admission to advanced artistic master's programs—unlike other advanced master's programs—state law may also take into account professional practical experience gained during the course of study.

Paragraph 3: State law may provide for additional requirements for admission to master's degree programs.

§ 6 – Degrees and Degree Titles

Paragraph 1 establishes the principle that only one degree may be awarded for a successfully completed degree program. Exceptions are possible only in the context of international collaborations that result in a dual or multiple degree from the participating institutions. This precludes the simultaneous awarding of degrees under both the old and new degree systems. There is no differentiation of degrees based on the standard duration of study or the type of institution at which the degree was earned.

Paragraph 2 definitively establishes the degree titles for bachelor's and consecutive master's degree programs. Instead of the degree titles "Bachelor" and "Master," the Latin terms "Baccalaureus/Baccalaurea" and "Magister/Magistra" may also be used. For degree programs that cannot be clearly assigned to one of the subject groups listed in sentence 1, items 1 through 7, the degree title is determined by the program's academic focus. This applies to interdisciplinary and combined degree programs, but in particular also to polyvalent degree programs in the field of teacher education, for which degree titles may be awarded in accordance with items 1–7. For other—

For master's programs leading to a professional degree, alternative titles are still permitted. Specialized additions to degree titles and bilingual degree titles are not permitted, nor are bachelor's degrees with the designation "honors."

Paragraph 2, Item 7 governs the titles for bachelor's and consecutive master's degrees for degree programs that provide the educational prerequisites for admission to the preparatory service for teaching at public schools once the master's degree has been earned. The degree designation "Master of Education" (Section B 2 of the "Joint State Structural Guidelines for the Accreditation of Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programs," Resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of October 10, 2003, as amended) should, in any case, in the interest of transparency and to avoid false expectations regarding mobility, be reserved for those degrees that—as a rule, nationwide—provide access to a preparatory service for a teaching position in accordance with state law.

Paragraph 3 provides for the issuance of certificates of equivalence and thus serves to ensure transparency regarding the level of qualification of bachelor's and master's degrees in comparison to the diploma degree in the single-tier system. Certificates of equivalence are already in use at some universities.

Paragraph 4 stipulates that the Diploma Supplement is a mandatory component of every degree certificate. The Diploma Supplement is an additional document containing standardized information describing higher education degrees and associated qualifications, intended to facilitate and improve the evaluation and classification of these degrees for both academic and professional purposes. In this context, the version of the Diploma Supplement agreed upon by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the German Rectors' Conference must be used in its currently valid form.

Section 7 – Modularization

Paragraph 1 defines the requirements for modularization that must be demonstrated as part of the accreditation process. Modules consist of self-contained units of study that are thematically and temporally distinct and assigned credit hours. They may be composed of various forms of teaching and learning (e.g., lectures, seminars, internships, e-learning, educational research, etc.). A module may cover the content of a single semester or academic year, but in exceptional cases may also extend over several semesters. The basic time limit of two consecutive semesters serves two main purposes. On the one hand, modules are intended to provide a transparent internal structure for degree programs and should therefore not be too large. On the other hand, modules that extend over a longer period of time could hinder mobility—

have a restrictive effect. If the institution deviates from the prescribed limits, it must demonstrate that this will not have a detrimental effect on the intended objectives or that such effects will be offset by appropriate measures. Sentence 3 takes into account the specific characteristics of artistic degree programs.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 set forth the requirements for module descriptions. The module descriptions should provide students with reliable information regarding the course structure, content, qualitative and quantitative requirements, and how the module fits into the overall structure of the degree program, as well as its relationship to other modules offered. The description should also enable an assessment of the module with regard to its transferability or recognition when changing universities.

Paragraph 2 does not contain any rigid requirements that would prevent the flexible design of course offerings. Without prejudice to the universities' authority to design individual modules, the standards recommended in items 1 through 9 for the description of modules assume, however, that information on the following aspects will be provided:

1. Content and learning outcomes of the module
 - a) subject-specific, methodological, practical, and interdisciplinary content,
 - b) subject-specific, methodological, and interdisciplinary competencies, key qualifications,
 - c) Learning and qualification objectives aligned with an overall qualification (target credential) to be defined;

2. Teaching methods

Description of the individual teaching and learning methods (lectures, exercises, seminars, internships, project work, self-study);

3. Prerequisites for participation (in conjunction with paragraph 3)

Description of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for successful participation, as well as preparation options for participation (including literature references, references to multimedia-supported teaching and learning programs);

4. Applicability of the module (in conjunction with paragraph 3)

A description of how the module relates to other modules within the same degree program and to what extent it is suitable for use in other degree programs;

5. Requirements for the awarding of credit points

Description of the requirements for awarding credit points—in particular, examinations (type of examination, e.g., oral or written exam, presentation, term paper, as well as the scope and duration of the examination), proof of attendance, and opportunities for make-up work must be regulated in the examination regulations;

6. Credits and Grades

Separate reporting of credit hours and grades; in addition to the grade based on the German grading scale from 1 to 5, the final grade must also include a relative grade. It is recommended that this be calculated in accordance with the current version of the ECTS User Guide;

7. Frequency of module offerings

Specify whether the module is offered every semester, every academic year, or only at longer intervals;

8. Workload

Specification of the total workload and the number of credits to be earned for each module;

9. Duration of the modules

Determination of the duration of the modules due to their impact on the course of study, the examination load, and the frequency of offerings.

The term “ECTS credits” used in paragraph 3 and in § 8 corresponds to the term “credits” in § 61(5) of the Bremen Higher Education Act.

Section 8 – Credit Point System

Paragraph 1 concerns the awarding of credit points. They are a quantitative measure of the student’s overall workload and include both direct instruction and the time spent on preparing for and reviewing the course material (classroom and self-study), the effort required for examinations and exam preparation, including final projects and term papers, as well as internships, if applicable.

The awarding of credit points is based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), which is used throughout the European Higher Education Area as part of the Bologna Process and thus facilitates mutual recognition.

Sixty credit points are awarded per academic year, i.e., generally 30 per semester. One credit point corresponds to a workload of

It is assumed that students spend 25 to a maximum of 30 hours on in-person and self-directed study, so that the total workload for full-time students per semester, including both the lecture and non-lecture periods, amounts to 750 to 900 hours. This corresponds to 32 to 39 hours per week over 46 weeks per year. The specific determination of how many working hours within this range correspond to one ECTS credit is set forth in the study and examination regulations.

Credit hours are assigned to individual modules. They are awarded once the requirements specified in the examination regulations have been met; this does not necessarily require an exam, but rather the successful completion of the respective module.

Paragraph 2 stipulates that a minimum of 180 ECTS credits is required to earn a bachelor's degree, and a total of 300 ECTS credits is required to reach the master's level—that is, including prior studies up to the first professionally qualifying degree. No exceptions to these planning requirements for higher education institutions are provided for. The deviations from the standard period of study permitted under Section 3 relate exclusively to the time requirements and do not allow for any deviation from the ECTS credit requirements.

According to sentence 4, it is true that, in individual cases where students possess the appropriate qualifications, exceptions may be made to the 300 ECTS credit requirement for a master's degree. However, this exception applies exclusively to the individual student and not to the degree program. Accordingly, applicants may be admitted to Master's programs even if they have not earned a total of 300 ECTS credits from their Bachelor's studies. The prerequisite is proof of the qualifications required for admission.

In accordance with the maximum standard period of study of 6 years (Section 3, Paragraph 2), the master's level can be attained with 360 credit points in consecutive bachelor's and master's programs in the core artistic disciplines at universities of the arts and music conservatories. The option of large-scale modules in the core artistic subject during the bachelor's program takes into account the unique characteristics of artistic education, which, due to its holistic approach, is incompatible with a highly granular modular structure.

Paragraph 3 specifies the scope of the final theses. To ensure that the scope of the thesis is aligned with the educational objectives and level of the program and is proportionate to the total number of credit hours in the respective degree program, the scope of the bachelor's thesis may not exceed 6 ECTS credits.

not exceed 10 and 12 ECTS credits. For the master's thesis, the minimum is 15 and the maximum is 30 ECTS credits. These guidelines serve both to ensure quality and to protect students' interests by preventing programs from becoming overloaded in terms of content and time. These ranges allow for flexible program design while taking into account subject-specific characteristics.

In general, these guidelines also apply to art and music colleges. In justified exceptional cases, the scope of work for a bachelor's thesis in fine arts programs may be up to 20 ECTS credits, and for a master's thesis up to 40 ECTS credits.

Paragraph 4 stipulates that deviations from the requirements regarding the number of credit hours per semester are generally permitted for certain types of degree programs, such as intensive programs. The upper limit is set at 75 ECTS credit hours, based on 30 hours per credit hour. In such cases, special attention must be paid to the feasibility of the program. Through measures related to program organization, universities can help ensure the feasibility of such programs.

Paragraph 5 incorporates the recommendation of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the Conference of University Presidents regarding the awarding of a master's degree in teacher education, provided that achievements from the pre-service training period are included, dated June 12, 2007, and July 8, 2008. One option for incorporating the preparatory service into the master's program is the recognition of portions of the preparatory service. The "Standards for Teacher Education: Educational Sciences" (Conference of Ministers of Education resolution of December 16, 2004) serve as the benchmark for practical school training during the degree program and the preparatory service. On this basis, universities and institutions of the second phase of training agree on state-specific qualification frameworks, on the basis of which universities and institutions of the second phase of training jointly and by mutual agreement develop training-training formats and examination procedures worth up to 60 ECTS credits for a one-year training period, to serve as the basis for credit transfer toward the university degree program.

Section 9 – Specific Criteria for Collaborations with Non-Higher Education Partners

Section 9 establishes the specific formal criteria for non-higher-education collaborations pursuant to Section 19. Paragraph 1, sentence 1, stipulates—from the perspective of quality assurance and transparency—the requirement for a written collaboration agreement between the degree-granting institution and the collaborating educational provider regarding the nature, scope, and mutual obligations of the existing collaboration. Furthermore, for reasons of consumer protection, the transparent presentation of

Information regarding the scope and nature of the collaboration is available on the university's website.

Paragraph 1, sentence 2, emphasizes that, as guarantors of the quality of the academic degrees and qualifications they confer, higher education institutions are responsible for ensuring the quality of study programs as well as the procedures for recognizing competencies acquired outside of higher education. Only those competencies that are equivalent in content and level to the part of the degree program they are intended to replace may be recognized. Such knowledge and skills acquired outside the higher education system may replace no more than 50% of a degree program. The provisions of the Bremen Higher Education Act apply. This ensures that a substantial portion of the education underlying the higher education degree takes place under the direct responsibility of the awarding institution, i.e., through its own efforts.

Paragraph 2 makes it clear that program-specific collaborations with non-higher-education institutions can be considered of equivalent quality only if they generate verifiable additional benefits in terms of academic and educational policy for future students and for the degree-granting institution. This added value must be clearly demonstrated.

Section 10 – Special Provisions for Joint Degree Programs

This regulation is intended to implement the so-called European Approach to Quality Assurance in Joint Degree Programs, which was adopted at the Conference of Ministers of Education of the European Higher Education Area held in Yerevan in May 2015. This is intended to enable external quality assurance of degree programs jointly developed and administered by higher education institutions in different countries—particularly within the European Higher Education Area—based on uniform procedural rules and criteria aligned with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, which also underpin the European Higher Education Area. Corresponding provisions regarding the academic and content-related criteria and the procedural rules are set forth in Parts 3 and 4 of this Regulation (Sections 16 and 33). The provisions contained in Parts 2, 3, and 4 of this Regulation apply to joint degree programs only to the extent expressly provided for.

The regulations governing joint degree programs establish the legal framework for accreditation decisions based on different criteria and procedural rules. They thus provide the Foundation with the option, beyond the authority granted in Article 5(3)(2) of the State Treaty on Study Accreditation to establish the conditions for the recognition of accreditation decisions by foreign institutions, to make accreditation decisions that deviate from the criteria and procedural rules defined in this regulation

deviate. Article 5, paragraph 3, sentence 2 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation merely mandates the Foundation to establish the prerequisites for the conduct of corresponding recognition procedures, without permitting any deviation from these requirements. Authorizing the Foundation to independently define criteria and procedural rules in such proceedings that deviate from these requirements is, in view of the objectives set forth in Article 1, paragraphs 2 and 3, and Article 4, paragraph 6, of the State Treaty on Study Accreditation, but also in light of constitutional principles (in particular the principle of specificity and the theory of materiality).

Paragraph 1 defines the scope of application. Given the differing criteria associated with the—in particular, a master's degree, including the first degree, is not structurally required to be based on 300 ECTS credits—and in light of remaining questions regarding the scope of application that still need to be clarified, it is initially limited to degree programs leading to a joint degree. Accordingly, a joint-degree program is a degree program offered by a domestic higher education institution in collaboration with one or more foreign higher education institutions and leading to a degree awarded jointly by these institutions.

The participating institutions must be recognized as higher education institutions by the competent authorities in their respective countries. Their respective national legal frameworks must permit them to participate in joint degree programs and to award a joint degree.

Paragraphs 1 through 5 set forth the requirements for the structure of the study program and the cooperation that are essential for the scope of application to take effect.

Paragraph 1 stipulates that the degree program must be based on a jointly coordinated and systematically interrelated curriculum. This excludes models in which institutions of higher education cooperate only in the recognition of credits but do not maintain a common curriculum.

Paragraph 2 stipulates that each student must complete at least 25% of their coursework (measured in ECTS credits) at at least one of the partner universities abroad. This excludes the application of special provisions for joint degree programs in partnerships that include optional study abroad

or in collaborations where only international students are required to study abroad.

Paragraph 3 stipulates the requirement for a contractual cooperation agreement between the participating institutions of higher education in order to ensure the sustainability of the degree program, particularly in the interest of the students. The cooperation agreement concluded by the participating universities within the framework of their contractually regulated cooperation must, in particular, contain provisions regarding: the designation of the degree awarded in the program, coordination and responsibilities of the partners with regard to management and financial organization, admission and selection procedures for students, mobility of students and faculty, examination regulations, methods for assessing students, the recognition of credits and procedures for the awarding of degrees, and the involvement of all cooperating institutions in the design and implementation of the degree program.

Point 4 ensures, in the students' best interest, that the degree program has a coordinated admissions and examination system.

Section 5 stipulates that participating universities must have a common quality management system. This includes the participating universities applying common internal quality assurance processes. These encompass, in particular, the quality assurance strategy, standards for the design and approval of degree programs, adherence to the principles of student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment, transparent regulations regarding admission and the course of study, recognition and degree conferral, ensuring the competence of faculty, the provision of adequate resources to ensure the learning environment, sound information management, and ongoing monitoring and regular review of degree programs.

Paragraph 2 sets forth the formal criteria applicable to joint degree programs.

With regard to the participation of foreign higher education institutions and the political agreements reached within the European Higher Education Area, the first sentence expressly stipulates as an assessment criterion the application of the recognition principles of the so-called Lisbon Convention, which already apply to higher education institutions based in Germany under federal or state law. These include:

- a right to have competencies acquired as qualifications for or during a higher education program recognized, provided there are no significant differences between the competencies acquired and those required to be demonstrated. This is particularly

be assessed in particular against the qualification objective of the respective degree program,

- a reversal of the burden of proof in favor of the applicants,
- an obligation on the part of the institution to provide reasons for negative decisions,
- the right to a review of the decision.

Sentence 2 clarifies that the principles regarding modularization and the credit system set forth in Sections 7 and 8(1) also apply here, and that the allocation of credits must be clearly regulated.

Sentence 3 stipulates, in accordance with the political agreements within the European Higher Education Area, that a bachelor's degree program must comprise a minimum of 180 and a maximum of 240 credit points, and that a master's degree program must comprise a minimum of 60 credit points. Sentence 4 clarifies, particularly in the interest of internationally mobile students, that relevant information about the program—such as admission requirements and procedures, the course catalog, and examination and assessment procedures—must be published and accessible to students at all times.

Paragraph 3 extends the scope of application of the criteria and procedural rules set forth in Sections 10(1) and (2), 16(1), and 33(1)—known as the European approach to quality assurance—to joint-degree programs conducted in cooperation with higher education institutions outside the European Higher Education Area, provided that the non-European cooperation partners have committed to applying these principles in a cooperation agreement with the domestic higher education institution.

Part 3 Academic and Content-Related Criteria for Degree Programs and Quality Management Systems

This section serves to specify the academic and content-related criteria set forth in Article 2, paragraph 3, of the State Treaty on the Accreditation of Higher Education Programs.

Section 11 – Qualification Objectives and Degree Level

Section 11 sets forth the criteria according to which the consistency of the qualification objectives and the degree level of the respective program concept must be assessed within the framework of the accreditation procedure.

Paragraph 1 refers to Article 2(3)(1) of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, which defines the qualification objectives of a study program as those corresponding to the intended

the academic or artistic competence commensurate with the level of the degree, as well as the ability to engage in skilled employment and personal development. In view of the particular importance of the social relevance of study and teaching as part of the characteristic of personal development, this is explicitly mentioned in accordance with the definition provided by the German Science Council in its 2015 recommendations on the relationship between higher education and the labor market. As part of the accreditation process, it must be verified whether the qualification objectives and intended learning outcomes to be specifically defined by the institution for each degree program reflect these goals.

Paragraph 2: The aspects of the professional, academic, artistic, methodological, and personal development requirements described in paragraph 2 are based on the descriptors or competency dimensions of the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees in its current version, which was developed in collaboration between the German Rectors' Conference and the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, in consultation with the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, and adopted by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs on February 16, 2017. This framework implements the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area at the national level and encompasses the imparting of up-to-date subject-specific knowledge, interdisciplinary knowledge, and the generally recognized principles of good scientific practice, as well as the acquisition of methodological, personal, and social competencies and the assurance of employability and the ability to engage in lifelong learning. During the accreditation process, it must be verified whether the program concept encompasses these aspects and whether they correspond to the level of the degree awarded.

Paragraph 3 sets forth the requirements to be assessed during accreditation for bachelor's and master's programs within the tiered system and for various program profiles, based on relevant resolutions of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs that have proven effective in previous accreditation practices.

Sentence 1 highlights the role of the bachelor's degree as the first professionally qualifying degree; as an undergraduate degree, it must provide a broad-based education and thus ensure not only the ability to enter the workforce but also the foundation for further academic study and lifelong learning. In line with the differentiation of master's programs in accordance with

In § 4, paragraph 2, sentence 2, consecutive master's programs are defined as programs that provide in-depth, broad-based, interdisciplinary, or specialized training. Sentences 3 and 4 set forth the specific requirements for professional master's programs. Continuing education master's programs are characterized by their focus on professional qualification. Therefore, prior professional experience is a constitutive element, which must be reflected in both the duration and the nature of the work. Failure to meet the minimum duration of prior professional

A one-year period of professional experience, even if permitted under state law, therefore requires special justification. The professional experience builds upon the preceding first professional qualification and therefore cannot be replaced either by mandatory internships from the bachelor's phase or by professional experience prior to the start of the bachelor's program. In accordance with the educational objective, special attention must be paid during the accreditation process to the connection between professional qualification and the program concept, as demonstrated by the institution. The same applies to the review of the requirements, which—despite the predominantly professional orientation—must correspond to the qualification level defined for the master's level, both structurally and in terms of content. Sentence 5 specifies the qualification objectives for artistic bachelor's and master's degree programs.

Bachelor's and master's degree programs can be pursued at various institutions of higher education, including different types of institutions, and may include periods of professional work between the first and second degrees.

§ 12 - Coherent Program Design and Adequate Implementation

Section 12 specifies the criteria for evaluating the respective program concept based on the structural requirements set forth in Sections 3 et seq., and defines the framework conditions to be examined for adequate implementation. In doing so, particular emphasis is placed on the feasibility of completing the program within the standard period of study. The regulations are based on the standards adopted by the participating states of the European Higher Education Area at their ministerial conference in May 2015 regarding internal quality assurance at higher education institutions, particularly concerning the design of degree programs (Standard 1.2), student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment (Standard 1.3), admission, course of study, recognition, and degree completion (Standard 1.4), faculty (Standard 1.5), and requirements for the learning environment (Standard 1.6).

Paragraph 1, sentence 1, requires a coherent curriculum designed to ensure the achievement of qualification objectives, taking into account the students' prior qualifications (see Standard 1.2). Sentence 2 requires that qualification objectives, the program title, the degree level and title, and the module concept be aligned. Sentence 3 calls for diverse teaching and learning methods adapted to the respective disciplinary cultures and the chosen program format, as well as practical components where appropriate. Sentence 4 stipulates that the program must provide suitable conditions to promote student mobility, enabling students to spend time at other institutions without losing academic progress. This includes, in particular, the consideration of mobility windows in the program design and recognition procedures that consistently apply the principles of the Lisbon Convention not only during stays at universities abroad but also within the country.

The admission requirements for master's programs must also be designed to promote mobility and allow for transfers between institutions and types of higher education institutions. Sentence 5 ensures that students are encouraged to actively participate in shaping the teaching and learning process. This ensures student-centered learning, teaching, and assessment in accordance with the European Standards for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG).

Paragraphs 2 and 3: In addition to program-specific aspects, the institutional framework must also be taken into account in the evaluation, to the extent that it has direct relevance to the implementation of the program. This includes both the teaching staff and the allocation of resources. The wording allows for flexibility in the evaluation, which should be tailored to the specific program.

Paragraph 2, sentence 1, stipulates that the teaching staff must ensure, both in terms of quantity and quality, that the curriculum is implemented adequately. This also includes the teaching competence of the faculty. Sentence 2 requires that the link between research and teaching be ensured by a sufficient number of full-time professors who are regularly engaged in teaching. This applies to both undergraduate and graduate programs. Sentence 3 requires appropriate measures for staff selection and qualification as the foundation for teaching that is substantively and pedagogically sound in the respective program. These include, for example, structured processes for appointment procedures or a systematic offering of university-level teaching qualifications.

Paragraph 3 stipulates that the provision of resources must also be taken into account in the assessment, to the extent that it is relevant to the implementation of the program and the achievement of the educational objectives. The text in parentheses provides an illustrative list of possible resource characteristics; however, this list is not exhaustive and may be replaced or supplemented by others on a case-by-case basis.

Paragraph 4: The planned examinations and assessment methods must enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes. Examinations must be module-based—rather than course-based—and designed to assess competencies. To ensure this, the forms of assessment used must be subject to ongoing review and refinement.

Paragraph 5 ensures that the degree program is structured in such a way that a student can typically complete it successfully within the standard period of study, and to this end, the second sentence lists the components that must be assessed during the review. This list is not exhaustive. Depending on the specific program design (for example, in programs with a distinctive profile), additional factors may need to be taken into account here.

According to paragraph 1, one criterion for the feasibility of a degree program is that it be predictable and reliable. This includes, in particular, providing students with timely and comprehensive information on all organizational aspects of the program, as well as the transparent and reliable planning and conduct of courses and exams.

Furthermore, in accordance with Section 2, courses and exams must largely avoid overlap, provided that the subject combinations are legally permissible. This applies in particular to required modules, frequently chosen subject combinations, and required elective modules. If, however, a lack of overlap cannot be guaranteed, timely and transparent information must be provided to applicants and students.

Furthermore, in accordance with Section 3, the program concept must plausibly define the workload and examination load while taking into account the formal requirements set forth in Sections 7 and 8, and these definitions must be continuously reviewed—in particular through regular workload surveys—and adjusted as necessary. To ensure that students can actively shape the course of their studies, that there is sufficient flexibility—particularly with regard to changing universities—and that students can plan their studies effectively, the learning outcomes of a module must be designed such that they can generally be achieved within one semester, but no later than within one year.

Furthermore, according to Section 4, an appropriate frequency and organization of examinations are essential. Therefore, to reduce the examination burden, modules should generally be completed with only one examination and, where possible, be worth at least five ECTS credits. With 30 ECTS credits per semester in a full-time program, this generally means no more than six examinations per semester. In this context, an examination refers to legally valid proof that the module's learning objective has been achieved. This also includes prerequisite coursework, academic achievements, or other forms of evidence, such as the completion of an internship, conducting a laboratory experiment, or participating in field trips.

These are all guidelines, meaning that deviations are possible in justified exceptional cases. In such cases, the consistency of the respective module concepts and the consistency of the examination concept with respect to the qualification objectives of the respective module must be taken into account, as must the overall examination workload in the respective degree program.

Paragraph 6: The assessment must take into account the profile of the degree program as defined by the institution. If the institution advertises or characterizes a degree program as

If a degree program has specific characteristics (e.g., international, dual, part-time, virtual, work-integrated, or part-time), these characteristics are part of the program profile and are therefore also subject to evaluation.

In such cases, the criteria set forth in paragraphs 1 through 5 must be applied in light of the specific profile and from the relevant perspective, and must be assessed against the specific requirements to be defined by the respective institutions of higher education. These include, in particular, aspects such as the specific target group, a special program structure, different learning locations, and the involvement of industry partners—for example, in dual models—specific teaching and learning formats, or the existence of a sustainable quality management system that encompasses the various learning locations. A degree program may be designated and advertised as “dual” if the learning locations (at least the university/vocational academy and the company) are systematically interlinked in terms of content, organization, and contractual arrangements.

Section 13 – Academic and Content-Related Structure of Degree Programs

Section 13 defines the framework conditions for the academic and content-related evaluation of degree programs and specifies the special requirements for teacher education programs.

Paragraph 1: In light of Article 5, Paragraph 3 of the Basic Law, the provision is limited to reviewing compliance with procedural requirements designed to ensure a program concept grounded in academic expertise, and grants the reviewers broad discretion regarding the program’s content. According to the first sentence, this includes the existence of mechanisms or measures to verify the consistency of the academic and scientific requirements. According to the second sentence, it is also necessary to demonstrate regular monitoring and adjustment not only of the subject-specific content of the curriculum but also of the methodological and didactic approaches, in order to ensure that the breadth and diversity of current scientific theories in the respective subject are conveyed. According to the third sentence, this can only be ensured if the disciplinary discourse at the national and, where applicable, international level is systematically taken into account. This includes the critical reflection on different subject-specific reference systems as well as the continuous engagement with the latest state of research.

The use of modules from bachelor’s degree programs in master’s degree programs is permitted only in exceptional cases, provided that the partial learning objective achieved upon successful completion of the respective module adequately contributes to the achievement of the overall learning objective of the master’s degree program. This applies to both consecutive and professional master’s degree programs. However, the double use of modules in programs that build upon one another in terms of content must be excluded.

the core components of the degree program. Furthermore, it must be ensured that modules with substantially identical content cannot be taken both in the bachelor's program and again in the master's program.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 define the academic and content-related criteria for the review of degree programs that provide the educational prerequisites for a teaching career. In view of the need to ensure high-quality school instruction and thus to guarantee comparable educational opportunities (the state's responsibility for the school system), uniform guidelines are required here. The regulations are based on the standards adopted for this purpose by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs.

Paragraph 2 sets forth the requirement to verify that the curriculum complies with the joint state standards in the subject-specific sciences and didactics, as well as in educational sciences. These standards are derived from the joint state requirements and, where applicable, state-specific content requirements based on the current versions of the KMK resolutions.

Paragraph 3 specifies the structural and conceptual criteria to be reviewed during the accreditation process and incorporates the provisions set forth in the relevant KMK resolution. The exceptions permitted therein for the respective teaching profession in the subjects of art and music must be taken into account. Sentence 2 clarifies that exceptions to Sentence 1, Nos. 1 and 2, are also permissible for the teaching profession at vocational schools in accordance with the applicable resolutions of the Conference of Ministers of Education (Framework Agreement for the Teaching Profession 5).

Section 14 – Academic Performance

To ensure that degree programs are designed efficiently and thus lead to academic success, it is essential—in the interest of students and graduates, but also in the interest of the sustainable use of resources and time—to continuously monitor and adjust degree programs, taking into account the experiences of students and graduates. Section 14 specifies the criteria to be reviewed for this purpose. These include a closed-loop system with regular review (sentence 1), the implementation of measures based on the results of the review (sentence 2), and continuous monitoring of success as well as the use of the results for further development (sentence 3). Suitable monitoring measures include, in particular, course evaluations, workload surveys, or graduate surveys, as well as statistical analyses of the course of study and examinations and student/graduate statistics. The measures to be implemented can be of a diverse nature and include, in particular, those specified in the

the aspects referred to in Sections 11 and 12. To ensure efficient and sustainable implementation, the fourth sentence stipulates that the parties involved must be informed of the results and the measures taken, while ensuring compliance with data protection requirements.

Section 15 – Gender Equality and Compensation for Disadvantages

To ensure equal opportunity, it is essential that the university have sustainable and comprehensive policies on gender equality and support for students in special circumstances, and that these policies are also implemented in individual degree programs. In this regard, the statutory provisions of the Bremen Higher Education Act apply. Section 15 stipulates that this must be verified during the evaluation process.

Section 16 – Special Provisions for Joint Degree Programs

Section 16 contains special provisions regarding the academic and content-related criteria for joint degree programs.

Paragraph 1, sentence 1 governs the corresponding application of the academic and content-related criteria specified therein.

In accordance with Section 11, paragraphs 1 and 2, the intended learning outcomes for joint degree programs must be aligned with the corresponding level of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area, as well as with the applicable national qualifications frameworks. These must include knowledge, skills, and competencies in the respective discipline(s). In accordance with Section 12(1), sentences 1 and 3, the structure and content of the curriculum must be designed in such a way as to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The program's design and the teaching and learning methods employed must serve the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. In accordance with

Section 12, paragraph 2, sentence 1, and paragraph 3 require that the staffing levels be sufficient in terms of both quality and quantity (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the degree programs. The facilities provided must also be sufficient and appropriate in light of the intended learning outcomes. In accordance with § 12, paragraph 4, it must be ensured that the examination regulations and the assessment of the learning outcomes achieved correspond to the intended learning outcomes and that these are consistently applied by the partner universities. In accordance with § 14, the workload and the average time required to complete the program must be monitored.

Sentence 2 sets forth additional requirements arising from the political agreements of the European Approach.

Paragraph 1 further stipulates that the appropriateness of the admission requirements and the selection process must be assessed in light of the level and the academic discipline in which the program is situated. The term “selection process” refers here to tests, interviews, and similar procedures customary abroad, and not to a selection process in the legal sense of admission regulations.

Paragraph 2 stipulates that the achievement of the learning outcomes intended by the program can be demonstrated.

Paragraph 3 clarifies that relevant provisions of Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Council and the European Parliament of September 7, 2005, on the recognition of professional qualifications, as amended in 2013, must be taken into account in the design and implementation of the program, particularly with regard to regulated professions. This applies in particular with regard to specified minimum training requirements or common training frameworks.

Paragraph 4 stipulates that the program’s design, the teaching and learning methods employed, and the support provided to students must respect and take into account the diversity of the student body and their needs (particularly with regard to their potentially diverse cultural backgrounds) and must address the specific requirements of mobile students.

Paragraph 5 ensures that, when applying the European approach to quality assurance for joint degree programs at system-accredited higher education institutions, the formal and academic criteria applicable to joint degree programs are taken into account as part of the quality management system.

Paragraph 2 extends the scope of application of the criteria and procedural rules of the European approach set forth in § 10, paragraphs 1 and 2, 16(1), and § 33(1) to joint degree programs conducted in cooperation with higher education institutions outside the European Higher Education Area, provided that the non-European cooperation partners have committed to applying these principles in a cooperation agreement with the domestic higher education institution.

Section 17 – Quality Management System Concept (Objectives, Processes, Tools) and Section 18 – Measures for Implementing the Quality Management Concept):

Sections 17 and 18 contain special provisions for the procedures under Article 3, paragraph 1, items 1 and 3 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, insofar as their subject matter is the review of internal university quality management systems. In doing so, the central requirements for a functional quality management

The quality management system is defined in the curriculum. The specific implementation is left to the individual institution, depending on its particular circumstances.

§ 17 – Concept of the Quality Management System (Objectives, Processes, Instruments)

Paragraph 1 sets forth provisions regarding the review of the substantive requirements for a functioning quality management system in teaching. According to the first sentence, the existence of a mission statement for teaching that is reflected in the degree programs must be demonstrated. This refers to a description of a mission statement for teaching at the institution in which faculty, institutional leadership, faculties, program directors, and student representatives have agreed on the overarching educational goals in accordance with the institution's profile. It includes a fundamental clarification of the educational institution's self-image, interdisciplinary didactic guidelines, and, where applicable, fundamental qualification objectives. The mission statement must be reflected in the teaching profile of the individual degree programs, in terms of competency goals and levels. According to sentence 2, the quality management system is an integral part of the overall strategy for implementing the mission statement; it must therefore fit seamlessly into the university's relevant measures with the aim of further improving the quality of education through a structured and sustainable development process. According to sentence 3, evidence must be provided that the quality management system is structured and implemented in such a way that it ensures, on a permanent and sustainable basis and at regular intervals during the respective accreditation cycle, the implementation of the formal and subject-specific criteria for the individual degree programs as set forth in Part 2 and Part 3 (§§ 11 to 15). Sentence 4 lists the central elements of the quality management system for which decision-making processes, competences, and responsibilities must be defined and implemented within the system, namely

- Processes for establishing, reviewing, further developing, and discontinuing degree programs, and
- the procedure for the internal accreditation of degree programs in accordance with the formal and academic criteria set forth in Parts 2 and 3 (Sections 11 through 15).

All processes and procedures must be defined and communicated university-wide.

Paragraph 2 sets forth the formal requirements for the institution's quality management system and is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), as described above.

These include

- the development of the quality management system with the participation of all university constituencies, i.e., academic and non-academic staff and students, as well as the incorporation of external expertise, such as from professional practice, from (international) representatives of other universities, and from agencies with experience in quality management at universities in accordance with ESG Standard 1.1 for the development of the quality assurance strategy (sentence 1);
- Mechanisms to ensure the independence of quality assessments, particularly in the selection and appointment of reviewers and in internal university decision-making processes, in accordance with ESG Standard 2.4 on requirements for peer review experts (sentence 2, first clause);
- the definition of standard procedures for handling conflicts and the establishment of an internal complaints system, particularly for “internal” accreditation decisions in accordance with ESG Standard 2.7 on complaints and appeals (sentence 2, second clause);
- the existence of closed-loop control systems that ensure, in a structured, transparent, sustainable, and reliable manner, continuous improvement in the quality of academic programs, in accordance with 1.9 of the ESG regarding the ongoing monitoring and regular review of degree programs (sentence 3, first clause);
- the inclusion of all service areas directly relevant to studies and teaching (including academic advising, application, admission, and enrollment procedures), examination administration, teaching (including any collaborations), examination systems, student services, human resources development, and continuing education in higher education pedagogy) (sentence 3, second clause);
- adequate and sustainable resources for implementing the measures and processes outlined in the quality management system. This includes, in particular, sufficient staff for the design, implementation, and administration of the quality management system’s processes, as well as appropriate IT infrastructure, which is of particular importance for the necessary provision of meaningful data;
- regular review of the effectiveness of the quality management system with regard to the quality of studies and its own further development

based on a continuous evaluation of the processes established in the system and a data-driven review of the results (sentence 4).

§ 18 – Measures for Implementing the Quality Management Concept

Paragraph 1 sets forth the key components of the quality management system. According to the first sentence, this includes regular evaluations of degree programs and the areas of performance relevant to teaching and studies (see § 17, paragraph 2, sentence 3, second clause) by students from within and outside the institution, external academic experts, representatives from the professional field, and graduates. They ensure that evaluations within the framework of the internal quality management system are implemented in such a way that continuous impetus for quality improvement is provided. To this end, the regular involvement of external expertise is indispensable. In accordance with Standard 1.9 of the ESG (ongoing monitoring and regular review of degree programs), the following aspects in particular should be included in the evaluations: the relevance of the degree programs, changing societal needs, students' workload, study progress and degrees awarded, the effectiveness of examination procedures, students' expectations and needs, the learning environment, and support services. The results should be made available to the university community in an appropriate manner, while ensuring compliance with data protection regulations, in order to establish the necessary transparency and acceptance.

Sentence 2 requires that, where action is needed, appropriate measures be initiated and their implementation be reviewed.

Paragraph 2 clarifies that, in the internal accreditation of degree programs, the participation and approval requirements set forth in § 25, paragraph 1, sentence 3 must be observed in teacher education programs. If the internal procedures provide for audit reports, the approval requirement pursuant to § 24, paragraph 3 applies accordingly.

Paragraph 3 ensures that the data necessary for the development and implementation of the quality management system, as well as for measuring the status of implementation and the effects of the measures taken, is collected on a university-wide basis and on a regular basis. Applicable data protection laws must be observed. Within the limits of what is legally permissible, the following data may be particularly relevant, depending on the university's profile and the quality management system: performance indicators, student body profile, academic progress, completion and dropout rates, student satisfaction with degree programs, available facilities and support, and career paths of graduates. When collecting data, care must be taken to ensure that the respective data subjects (academic and non-academic staff and students) are informed of the collection—

be involved in the collection and analysis of data as well as in planning follow-up activities.

Paragraph 4, sentence 1 ensures that the institution comprehensively documents its internal accreditation procedures in accordance with the aforementioned requirements and regularly informs all relevant parties in an appropriate manner about the measures taken, in order to ensure the necessary transparency. In doing so, data protection requirements must be observed. Sentence 2 clarifies that the institution of higher education must not only inform the public in an appropriate manner about the results of its internal accreditation procedures, but must also provide the Accreditation Council with the information necessary for the documentation of the results as stipulated in § 29, sentence 3.

Section 19 – Collaborations with Non-Higher Education Institutions

Section 19 sets forth the conditions under which a higher education institution may enter into program-specific partnerships with non-higher-education institutions. A characteristic feature of such program-related collaborations is that degree programs or programs recognized as equivalent are conducted partially or even entirely outside the degree-granting institution, and that the collaborating educational institution is in an asymmetrical, subordinate relationship to the degree-granting institution. In the case of such a collaboration, the applicant is always the institution of higher education pursuant to § 22(1) of this Regulation. Collaborations with joint research institutions involving multiple institutions of higher education are not covered by the provisions of § 19. Sentence 1 makes it clear that the formal and subject-specific criteria set forth in Parts 2 and 3 of this Regulation also apply to such degree programs. Sentence 2 lists the decisions that, subject to the university's ultimate academic responsibility for the degree program, may not be delegated by the university to a cooperating educational institution. The criterion "procedure for selecting teaching staff" refers primarily to professorial teaching staff. The definition of the standardized criteria is based on the corresponding recommendation of the German Science Council, "Assessment and Recommendations on Program-Related Collaborations: Franchise, Validation, and Credit Transfer Models," from 2017. Sentence 2 does not apply to collaborations with state-run teacher training colleges in the second phase of teacher training programs or to school practicum phases in teacher training programs.

Section 20 – University Cooperation

Section 20 governs program-specific cooperation between universities, unless, upon request by the participating domestic university or universities,

the special provisions contained in §§ 10, 16, and 33 of this regulation apply to joint degree programs.

The list of conditions set forth in Section 19, sentence 2, which applies to non-higher-education cooperation partners, generally does not apply to cooperation between higher education institutions. However, the degree-granting institution or institutions are responsible for the implementation and quality of the program concept. The nature and scope of the cooperation must be documented in a cooperation agreement between the higher education institutions.

The degree-granting institution or institutions are the applicants within the meaning of Section 22(1) of this regulation.

If a system-accredited institution of higher education engages in such program-specific cooperation, it may award the Accreditation Council's seal to the program, provided that it itself confers a higher education degree and ensures the implementation and quality of the program concept.

It follows from paragraph 3 that universities may also cooperate at the level of their quality assurance systems to streamline procedures, and that the organizational linking of multiple procedures is permissible in this context; a coordinated application by the cooperating universities is required pursuant to paragraph 3, sentence 2. This option will be particularly relevant for smaller or, where applicable, private universities. Joint use, e.g., of quality assurance service facilities, is in principle conceivable for the purpose of optimizing the use of resources. However, a decision on system accreditation must be made for each cooperating institution of higher education. The Agency's proposed decision must be prepared accordingly.

Part 4: Procedural Rules for Program and System Accreditation

Section 22 – Decision of the Accreditation Council and Awarding of the

Seal

Paragraph 1 sets forth the essential procedural elements for program and system accreditation. In contrast to the previously practiced procedure of accreditation by the respective agency that made the accreditation decision, the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation provides for a two-part accreditation process: Pursuant to Article 3, Paragraph 2, Sentence 1, Item 1 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, accreditation requires an application by the higher education institution to the Accreditation Council, on the basis of which the Council, pursuant to Article 3, Paragraph 5, Sentence 4 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, decides on the accreditation by means of an administrative act.

accreditation. The administrative process therefore begins when the institution submits its application to the Accreditation Council.

Pursuant to Article 3(5) of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, the decision of the Accreditation Council involves determining compliance with the formal criteria set forth in Article 2(2) of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, on the one hand, and the academic and content-related criteria set forth in Article 2(3) of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, on the other. If these criteria are met, accreditation shall be granted. This constitutes an administrative act within the meaning of Section 35 of the Administrative Procedure Act (VwVfG).

The Accreditation Council reviews compliance with the formal criteria based on an audit report. The Accreditation Council reviews compliance with the substantive criteria based on an expert opinion. Since these are recommendations from the agency, the Accreditation Council is not bound by these assessments.

Paragraph 2 clarifies that the Accreditation Council's decision is made by means of a written notice. Pursuant to § 39 of the Administrative Procedure Act (VwVfG), administrative acts must generally be substantiated. The second sentence is therefore declaratory. In accordance with Article 3, Paragraph 4, Sentence 3 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, the reasoning for the decision must specifically address any deviations by the Accreditation Council from the recommendations of the expert report regarding the subject-specific and content-related criteria.

Paragraph 3 incorporates Article 3(4) of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, according to which the institution of higher education is given the opportunity to comment before a final decision is made. This is consistent with the general requirements for administrative proceedings. To avoid delays in the proceedings, the statement to be obtained by the Accreditation Council, in accordance with administrative procedure law, is limited to cases in which the Accreditation Council intends to deviate significantly from the recommendation in the expert opinion. The institution is free to attach a statement to the agency's report as part of its application. This takes into account the right to be heard, as expressed in Article 3, Paragraph 4 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation.

Sentence 2 also sets a one-month deadline for submitting the statement. This deadline is intended to expedite the process.

Paragraph 4 stipulates that, upon successful accreditation, the Accreditation Council shall award its seal to the accredited degree program or quality assurance system. This continues the previous practice. The seal serves to ensure transparency.

In the case of system accreditation, the institution is granted the right to award the Accreditation Council's seal to degree programs that it has evaluated on its own and that comply with the accreditation rules.

Accreditation with conditions does not result in a postponement of the awarding of the seal. This ensures that, in the case of conditions, a careful distinction is made between deficiencies that do not affect the accreditation decision itself and serious shortcomings that lead to a denial of accreditation.

Section 23 – Documents to Be Submitted

Paragraph 1: The application for accreditation must be accompanied by a self-report from the institution and an accreditation report commissioned by the institution from an agency accredited by the Accreditation Council, consisting of an audit report and an expert opinion. The self-report is the self-evaluation report required under Article 3, Paragraph 2, Item 2 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation.

In the case of initial system accreditation, the audit report refers to evidence that at least one degree program has undergone the quality management system (Section 3); in the case of reaccreditation, it refers to evidence that all bachelor's and master's degree programs have undergone the quality assurance system at least once (Section 4).

Paragraph 2: In accordance with Article 5, Paragraph 3, Item 5 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, foreign agencies may generally be admitted to the Accreditation Council. Accreditation reports commissioned from foreign agencies must be submitted to the Accreditation Council with a German translation, unless they are written in German. This serves to streamline proceedings at the Accreditation Council.

Paragraph 3 stipulates, in the interest of a swift and smooth process, the requirement to submit applications electronically as soon as the Accreditation Council has established the relevant conditions, including those pertaining to data protection.

§ 24 – Appointment of an Agency; Accreditation Report; Site Visit

Paragraph 1: Pursuant to Article 3, Paragraph 2, Sentence 1, Item 4 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, the basis for the Accreditation Council's decision is an accreditation report that the institution of higher education has previously commissioned from an agency accredited by the Accreditation Council.

The agency's appointment is of a private-law nature pursuant to Article 3, paragraph 2, sentence 2 of the State Treaty on Study Accreditation.

Paragraph 2: Program and system accreditation shall be conducted in accordance with Article 3, Paragraph 2, Sentence 1, Item 2 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, based on a self-evaluation report submitted by the institution of higher education, which must include, at a minimum, information on the institution's quality objectives and on the formal and academic criteria for accreditation. Student representatives must be involved in the preparation of the self-evaluation report. The report must be made available to the Agency—as has been customary under the previous procedure—and subsequently submitted to the Accreditation Council.

The formal and substantive criteria must be listed separately in the self-evaluation report. The report should not exceed 20 pages for program accreditation and 50 pages for system and cluster accreditation. This is intended to simplify the process and make it more efficient.

Paragraphs 3 and 4: Paragraph 3 stipulates that the review report is prepared by the commissioned agency. As a rule, this task is handled by the agency's administrative office. This relieves the experts on the review panel of the burden of assessing purely formal criteria. The review panel is responsible for preparing the review report on the technical and content-related criteria. To this end, it receives the examination report in advance. Since the formal and technical/content-related criteria may be interrelated, the examination report is not binding on the review panel.

For teacher education programs, the evaluation report must be approved by the relevant authorities. This takes into account the resolution of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of June 2, 2005

“Key Points for the Mutual Recognition of Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Programs that Provide the Educational Prerequisites for a Teaching Career” (Quedlinburg Resolution).

Both the audit report and the expert opinion contain recommendations regarding the determination of compliance with the relevant criteria for the Accreditation Council; however, these recommendations are not binding. The accreditation report thus serves as an expert opinion.

The provisions regarding the audit report and expert opinion do not include any requirements regarding potential conditions, as these are to be considered only in exceptional cases in the future. If, during the review of the formal criteria, the Agency determines that these criteria have not been met, the institution must be informed immediately so that it may terminate the accreditation process if a positive accreditation decision by the Accreditation Council is not expected. The expert opinion

may include recommendations for corrective measures regarding academic and content-related criteria, limited to deficiencies that do not justify a decision to deny accreditation and that can be remedied within a specified timeframe.

No further guidelines regarding the content of the reports are planned. This does not preclude the possibility that the report may, for example, include recommendations for the quality development of the degree program or the quality management system that are designed to improve quality beyond the standards used as a basis for accreditation by the Accreditation Council and therefore cannot serve as a basis for any conditions. In addition, the report may also identify best-practice models within the degree program. Through the publication of the reports—and, where applicable, monitoring by the Accreditation Council—these models can serve as examples for other institutions of higher education. Both can thus contribute to future quality development.

A prerequisite for the Accreditation Council to process applications promptly is that the documents submitted follow a specified template. The ordinance assigns the task of developing a uniform template for expert opinions and audit reports to the Accreditation Council. To minimize the workload for the agencies and the Accreditation Council, the scope of the expert opinion is limited, with differentiated requirements applying to program, bundle, and system accreditation.

Paragraph 5: As has been the practice to date, the evaluation process includes an on-site visit by the evaluation committee, during which the committee can form its own impression of the conditions surrounding the degree program to be accredited and engage in dialogue with the responsible faculty members, students, and university administration. In view of the mandatory spot checks required in system accreditation to verify the relevant characteristics of program design, program implementation, and quality assurance, as well as, where applicable, compliance with the criteria for the accreditation of regulated degree programs, two visits are generally necessary for system accreditation procedures.

For degree programs that are newly developed by the institution and are not yet offered, the review panel may, by mutual agreement, waive an on-site visit if such a visit would not add value to the assessment of the academic and content-related criteria based on the submitted documentation (concept accreditation). The same applies in the case of reaccreditation.

§ 25 Composition of the Review Panel and Requirements for Reviewers

Paragraph 1 specifies the minimum size of the review panel and its composition for program accreditation. This allows for larger review panels in complex procedures—such as

e.g., bundled accreditations—larger review panels are possible, provided that the proportional representation of the groups involved is maintained.

Pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 3, sentence 2 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, the majority of the members of the review panel are university faculty members. This implements the requirement of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation that university faculty members must hold the majority of votes on the panel responsible for the review. Furthermore, Article 3(2), sentence 1, item 3 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation is specified and implemented with regard to the parties to be involved in the accreditation process.

The first clause of sentence 3 specifies, in view of the particularities of degree programs that qualify students for admission to the preparatory service for a teaching career, that a representative of the highest state authority responsible for the school system—namely, the Senator for Children and Education of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen—shall replace a representative from the professional field. This preserves the committee's expertise without further expanding its size.

For religion teachers, a career in the civil service is generally the primary career path. As with all other teacher training programs, the professional practice component is therefore overseen by the highest state authority responsible for the school system—namely, the Senator for Children and Education of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen.

All reviewers must belong to a field of study closely related to the program to be accredited.

Sentence 5 stipulates that, for teacher training programs, the submission of the expert opinion requires the consent of the relevant representative. This takes into account the resolution of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs dated June 2, 2005, “Key Points for the Mutual Recognition of Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees in Programs that Provide the Educational Prerequisites for a Teaching Career” (Quedlinburg Resolution).

Paragraph 2: In system accreditation, the composition of the review panel generally corresponds to that of program accreditation. However, the minimum number of reviewers is higher due to the complexity and scope of system accreditation. The subject-specific requirements for evaluators do not apply because system accreditation does not evaluate degree programs, but rather the institution's own quality assurance system. Therefore, evaluators are not required to have subject-specific expertise in a particular field.

The first sentence of paragraph 3 is intended to ensure that, in expert committees exceeding the minimum size specified in paragraphs 1 and 2, university faculty members hold the majority of votes. This complies with Article 3, paragraph 2, item 5 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, which stipulates that accreditation procedures must be conducted with the participation of this group.

Paragraphs 2 and 3 stipulate that a majority of the members of the review panel must already have experience with the respective form of accreditation. This serves to ensure the efficiency of the process and enhances the quality and acceptance of the review.

Paragraph 4: The panel of experts shall be appointed by the designated agency. When appointing individual experts, the agencies are bound by the procedure to be developed by the German Rectors' Conference, in accordance with Article 3, Paragraph 3, Sentence 3 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation.

Paragraph 5: Article 3, paragraph 2, sentence 1, item 3 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation requires the use of external and independent evaluators. According to items 1 and 2, therefore, persons who work at or study at the institution whose degree programs or quality management system are to be evaluated are excluded from participating in an evaluation panel. Furthermore, pursuant to item 3, the rules on bias customary in academia apply to the evaluators, in particular those of the German Research Foundation (DFG).

Paragraph 6: Before the evaluators are appointed, the institution is informed by the agency of the composition of the evaluation panel and is given the opportunity to comment. This significantly increases acceptance of the evaluation panel and the evaluation process within the institution and the degree program to be accredited.

§ 26 – Validity Period of Accreditation; Extension

Paragraph 1: The validity period for initial accreditation is uniformly eight years. From a legal standpoint, this constitutes a time limit within the meaning of Section 36 of the Administrative Procedure Act (VwVfG) as an ancillary provision to the administrative act of the accreditation decision. This standardizes and significantly extends the previously customary accreditation periods of five years (program accreditation) and six years (system accreditation). This is intended to reduce the effort and costs associated with accreditation. In sentence 1, the start of the validity period is set to the beginning of the semester or trimester in which the accreditation decision is announced, in order to avoid disadvantages for students who complete their studies in the semester or trimester in which the accreditation decision is made. In addition, alignment between the semester or trimester and the accreditation periods is ensured.

Sentence 2 governs the case of program accreditation where the program has not yet been launched at the time the accreditation decision is announced. In the case of program accreditation, the accreditation period begins with the start of the semester or trimester in which the program is first offered, but no later than the start of the second semester or trimester following the announcement of the accreditation decision. This ensures that the accreditation decision remains current and that a delayed launch of a program does not result in a disproportionately long period for reaccreditation.

In the first sentence of paragraph 2, the term “reaccreditation” is defined as a subsequent accreditation that follows immediately and without interruption after the validity period of an initial accreditation. The validity period of reaccreditation is also set uniformly at eight years, as opposed to the previously standard periods of seven years for program accreditation and eight years for system accreditation. The elimination of different reaccreditation periods serves to simplify the process and takes into account both the universities’ interest in legal certainty and the goal of continuous and reliable quality assurance.

Paragraph 3, sentence 1, addresses the special situation in which a university does not intend to continue an accredited degree program beyond the accreditation period. Since reaccreditation for an expiring degree program would entail disproportionately high costs, the Accreditation Council may extend the validity period of the accreditation until the students have completed their studies.

Sentences 2 and 3 contain provisions for situations in which a higher education institution seeks institutional accreditation or transitions from program accreditation to system-

system accreditation. In such cases, the institution should be able to focus on preparing for the cluster or system accreditation and be exempted from program accreditation for degree programs that will be covered by the planned cluster or system accreditation. To this end, the Accreditation Council may extend the validity period of a program accreditation by up to two years if the institution can demonstrate that it is preparing a corresponding application for accreditation (sentence 2). If the accreditation period for an accredited degree program expires at a time when the institution has already submitted an application for accreditation to the Accreditation Council, the validity period may be extended for the duration of the administrative proceedings before the Accreditation Council plus one year (sentence 3). The option to extend the period by a further year is necessary to give the institution the time required for evaluation in the event of a transition to system accreditation of the relevant degree program in accordance with the quality management system it has developed, until the seal is awarded.

Furthermore, the previous option to extend the validity period of an initial accreditation because a reaccreditation report was not completed on time is no longer available. The validity periods of accreditations are standardized so that, provided an agency is commissioned in a timely manner, there is no longer a need for an exception. Furthermore, compliance with deadlines within the framework of quality assurance measures should be reasonable.

Section 27 – Conditions

Under the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, higher education institutions are entitled to accreditation if and to the extent that the subject of accreditation meets the formal and substantive accreditation criteria. Accreditation is therefore a mandatory administrative act without any discretionary authority. Pursuant to Article 9(1), second sentence, second clause of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation, accreditation may be subject to ancillary provisions (conditions, reservation of revocation, requirements, reservation of requirements) if these are intended to ensure that the legal requirements for accreditation are met.

Paragraph 1 stipulates that a deadline of generally twelve months must be set for the fulfillment of a requirement. This deadline takes into account the fact that changes to degree programs or quality management systems often take considerable time to implement. In special cases, such as those requiring the conduct of an appointment procedure, an extension of the deadline may be granted upon request by the institution (paragraph 2).

Paragraph 3 clarifies that compliance with the condition must be demonstrated to the Accreditation Council that imposed the condition, and not to the agency commissioned to prepare the

. Confirmation from the agency that the condition has been fulfilled is not required; rather, the Accreditation Council itself must verify this. This serves to reduce costs.

Section 28 – Obligation to Report Changes

Paragraph 1: Since accreditation is an administrative act with lasting effect within the meaning of § 43 of the Administrative Procedure Act (VwVfG), and since changes regarding formal or substantive criteria may arise during the period of validity of the accreditation, any significant changes must be reported to the Accreditation Council without delay. Significant changes may include, in particular, changes affecting the program name, standard duration of study, degrees awarded, program design, qualification objectives, profile, and content of the programs. A significant change may also occur when specializations are established that result in substantially different competencies among graduates, or when an identical curriculum is offered in different formats, at different locations, or by different partners.

The reporting requirement enables the Accreditation Council to verify that its accreditation decision remains current and, in the event of significant changes, to adapt it to the new circumstances as necessary (e.g., by imposing a subsequent condition or revoking the accreditation decision).

Paragraph 2 clarifies that a notification of change submitted by the institution obligates the Accreditation Council to examine whether the substantial change affects the accreditation decision. The Accreditation Council's subsequent decision constitutes a declaratory administrative act that may be challenged by the institution in isolation. If the accreditation decision is revoked, it is appropriate to submit an application for re-accreditation. This clarification serves to ensure legal certainty.

§ 29 – Publication

Article 3, paragraph 6, sentence 2 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation provides that the decisions of the Accreditation Council and the expert reports shall be published in an appropriate manner. This is further specified in Section 29, sentence 1, whereby, in light of the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines, the publication requirement explicitly includes not only the accreditation decision but also the accreditation report—and thus the expert opinions and audit report.

Publication on the Accreditation Council's website enables interested students, prospective students, university staff, and government agencies to access the information quickly and conveniently.

Sentence 2 governs the handling of personal data. This includes, in particular, the names of the reviewers.

Sentence 3 extends the publication requirement to the internal accreditation decisions of system-accredited higher education institutions. In this regard, the data protection regulations under sentence 2 apply accordingly.

§ 30 – Bundle Accreditation; Partial System Accreditation

Paragraph 1: The existing option to combine multiple degree programs into a single bundled accreditation during the program accreditation process remains in place. However, to ensure practicality and maintain the quality of the procedures, no more than ten degree programs should be reviewed by a single committee. If more than ten degree programs are scheduled for program accreditation and are closely related in terms of subject matter, multiple bundles must be formed. Since this is a guideline rather than a mandatory requirement, exceptions to larger bundles are possible only in atypical situations, provided that the quality of the evaluation is maintained. Reference is made to the possibility of adjusting the size of the review committee to the size of the accreditation bundle in accordance with Section 25(1).

The fact that several degree programs share structural features does not in itself constitute a substantive similarity.

Sentence 2 clarifies that each degree program must meet the academic and content-related criteria and that this must be assessed separately. This applies in any case to the formal criteria under Part 2 and the assessment report.

Paragraph 2: Since the composition of a portfolio is of considerable significance for the subsequent evaluation and for the composition of the evaluation panel, the Accreditation Council is granted the authority to approve the specific composition of the portfolio in advance. This serves to ensure legal certainty in the subsequent proceedings and is consistent with previous practice.

Paragraph 3 allows, in exceptional cases, for the system accreditation of an academic unit within a higher education institution (e.g., continuing education institutes or individual faculties). The requirements in the second sentence are cumulative. The option of subsystem accreditation is primarily intended to facilitate higher education institutions' transition to system accreditation. The regulation does not aim to allow for multiple permanent partial system accreditations within a single institution of higher education. For this reason, the quality management system of the subunit must be embedded within the institution (sentence 2, item 2).

§ 31 – Random Sampling

Paragraph 1: In system and subsystem accreditation, the panel of assessors conducts a random sample. This remains justified in view of the extension of the validity period of the system accreditation.

Paragraph 2: In accordance with paragraph 1, the sample must demonstrate, using a degree program to be specified by the review panel, that the quality management system ensures that all formal and academic criteria are taken into account during the institution's internal accreditation process. In addition, the sample referred to in paragraph 2 relates to formal and subject-specific criteria to be determined by the review panel, compliance with which must be ensured by the quality management system under review.

Paragraph 3: The rules on participation set forth in § 25, paragraph 1, apply *mutatis mutandis* to random samples. The explanations provided in the rationale for § 25, paragraph 1, apply accordingly.

Part 5 – Procedural Rules for Special Degree Programs

Section 32 Combined Degree Programs

Paragraph 1 defines the characteristics of a combined degree program. Such a program consists of two or more fields of study. Students and applicants may choose from several possible combinations. For the purposes of this regulation, the fields of study within a combined degree program are considered sub-programs.

Paragraph 2 clarifies that the subject of accreditation is, as far as possible, the combined degree program; exceptions must be justified. The criteria for accreditation (Parts 2 and 3 of this regulation) must then be applied to the combined degree program as such. This applies in particular to the requirements set forth in § 12. The institution must have a coherent concept for the entirety of the combined program offerings that integrates the qualification objectives of the individual degree programs. In principle, the feasibility of study must be ensured for all possible combinations that are legally permitted (e.g., in teacher education programs in accordance with the determination of mandatory subject combinations for a teacher education program).

Pursuant to paragraph 3, additional component programs may be retroactively included in the accreditation of a combined degree program. The aforementioned requirements apply *mutatis mutandis*. The accreditation period for the combined degree program remains unchanged.

Paragraph 4 governs the format of the accreditation certificate for combined degree programs. In all other respects, the procedural rules of Part 4 apply in accordance with paragraph 5.

§ 33 Joint Degree Programs

The regulation contains specific procedural provisions for joint degree programs. It is based on the policy agreements regarding the European Approach (EA). Accordingly, the Accreditation Council's accreditation decision in this context is structured as a decision to recognize an evaluation conducted by an agency registered with the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR). Such a decision is required only in proceedings under Article 3(1)(2) of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation (program accreditation), as the application of the criteria relevant to joint-degree programs at system-accredited institutions is ensured by Section 16(5) of this Regulation.

Paragraph 1, sentence 1, stipulates that an evaluation may be conducted by an agency registered with EQAR at the request of the cooperating institutions of higher education, and that this decision may serve as the basis for an accreditation decision at the request of the participating domestic institution or institutions. It is not necessary for this agency to have been approved by the Accreditation Council. To the extent that an agency accredited by the Accreditation Council is involved, this takes place outside the scope of the accreditation granted by the Accreditation Council. Furthermore, the scope of application is limited to study programs in which only domestic higher education institutions and higher education institutions from participating states of the European Higher Education Area cooperate.

Sentence 2 stipulates that proof of compliance with the criteria for joint-degree programs set forth in Parts 2 and 3 of this regulation is a prerequisite for a positive accreditation decision. It also specifies the requirements for the evaluation procedure in detail.

Paragraph 1 contains a requirement to notify the Accreditation Council prior to initiating a corresponding procedure. This is intended to ensure that, even before the procedure is opened, it is verified whether the scope of this regulation for accreditation decisions regarding joint degree programs applies.

Points 2 through 5 correspond to the requirements set forth in the EA regarding procedures for external quality assurance of joint degree programs. This includes a self-assessment report submitted jointly by the cooperating institutions. This report must contain comprehensive information demonstrating compliance with the requirements applicable to joint degree programs. In addition, the report must include the necessary information regarding the respective national framework

requirements of the partner institutions that foreign agencies and experts may need in order to assess the context, particularly with regard to the program's positioning within the national higher education system. The self-evaluation report explicitly focuses on the specific characteristics of the joint-degree program as a collaborative endeavor involving institutions from more than one national higher education system. The site visit enables the review panel to discuss the joint degree program based on the self-evaluation report and to assess whether the program meets the requirements for joint degree programs. The site visit therefore includes discussions with representatives of all cooperating institutions, in particular with institutional leadership and program coordinators, staff, students, and other relevant stakeholders such as alumni and representatives from professional practice. Although the site visit is generally limited to one location, the implementation of the program at all locations is taken into account in the evaluation. The review panel prepares a report containing relevant evidence, analyses, and conclusions with reference to the requirements for joint degree programs. The report also includes recommendations for the further development of the program. In addition, the review panel issues a recommendation for the decision. The conclusions and recommendations pay particular attention to the specific characteristics of the joint degree program. The universities are given the opportunity to comment on the draft version of the report, including to point out any factual errors. The review panel, consisting of at least four members, combines expertise in the relevant subjects or disciplines—including the labor market and professional world in the respective fields—with expertise in the area of quality assurance in higher education. Thanks to its international expertise and experience, the review panel is able to take into account the specific characteristics of the joint degree program. The review panel as a whole possesses knowledge of the higher education systems of the participating institutions, as well as the languages of instruction used. The review panel includes members from at least two countries participating in the consortium that offer the program. At least one student is represented in the review panel. The provisions in § 25, paragraph 3, sentence 1 (majority of university faculty members in the evaluation), paragraph 5 (exclusion of reviewers to avoid conflicts of interest), and paragraph 6 (right of the institution to comment) apply accordingly.

Paragraph 6 stipulates that a positive accreditation decision based on an evaluation may only be made if the evaluation has been substantiated, any conditions have been met, and the decision is final

Consequently, it is not the responsibility of the Accreditation Council, but rather of the agency entrusted with the evaluation, to ensure that the decision is transparent to the institutions of higher education and that the follow-up process—including, where applicable, the fulfillment of any conditions—is completed. The agency is also required to publish the evaluation on its website. If the evaluation was not conducted in English, at least the English summary of the report and an English version of the evaluation, including its rationale, must be published. In all other respects, Section 23(1) of the Administrative Procedure Act applies.

Sentence 3 clarifies that the Accreditation Council's decision on accreditation—which serves to recognize the evaluation—must also be issued in writing, must be substantiated, must give the institution an opportunity to comment within one month, and, in the event of a positive decision, must be accompanied by the Accreditation Council's seal (Section 22, paragraphs 2, 3, and 4(1)). The accreditation decision takes effect, in accordance with § 26(1), first sentence, at the beginning of the semester or trimester following the announcement. Reaccreditation must be initiated in a timely manner before the expiration of the accreditation (§ 26(2), first sentence). The same applies to accreditation decisions regarding joint-degree programs: the institution must notify the Accreditation Council of any significant changes (Section 28), and the decision, together with the expert opinion, must be published by the Accreditation Council. The same applies to internal accreditation decisions by system-accredited institutions regarding joint-degree programs. Sentence 4 stipulates that, in the case of accreditation and reaccreditation, the accreditation period is only 6 years, in accordance with the European approach and notwithstanding § 26(1) and (2), sentence 1. Sentence 5 ensures, in the interest of transparency, that accreditation decisions issued on the basis of the recognition of an evaluation of joint degree programs are identifiable as such upon publication. The same applies, according to sentence 6, to the information on the study program in the degree documents (in particular the Diploma Supplement).

Paragraph 2 extends the scope of application of the criteria and procedural rules of the so-called European Approach, as set forth in Sections 10(1) and (2), 16(1), and 33(1), to joint degree programs conducted in cooperation with higher education institutions outside the European Higher Education Area, provided that the non-European cooperation partners have committed to applying these principles in a cooperation agreement with the domestic higher education institution.

Part 6 – Alternative Accreditation Procedures Pursuant to Article 3(1)(3) of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation

Section 34 Alternative Accreditation Procedures

Paragraph 1: The provision in § 34 implements the option provided for in Article 4(4) in conjunction with Article 3(1)(3) of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation for alternative accreditation pathways as an alternative to system and program accreditation, which are also subject to the criteria set forth in Article 2.

Paragraph 2 also requires that alternative procedures comply with the formal and substantive criteria set forth in Parts 2 and 3. In addition, the requirements for appropriate academic participation—as stipulated in the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation (in particular in Article 3, Paragraph 2, Sentence 1) and implemented by this regulation—must be observed in accordance with the guidelines of the Federal Constitutional Court in its decision of February 17, 2016. If teacher education programs are also included in the alternative procedures, the participation and approval requirements set forth in this statutory order shall apply. There is no obligation for higher education institutions to use an agency.

Paragraph 3: If a higher education institution intends to implement an alternative procedure, it must obtain prior approval from both the Accreditation Council and the competent state science authority. This ensures that the state science authority is involved from the outset and that it also ensures compliance with the requirements for regulated professions. The basis for approval is a description of the proposed procedure; in assessing its suitability to meet the quality assurance requirements arising from the State Treaty on Study Accreditation and this statutory order, the Accreditation Council may consult external experts. The application to be submitted following approval must also be submitted to the Accreditation Council via the competent science authority.

In consultation with the state, the Accreditation Council may refuse to grant its approval only if the alternative procedure cannot ensure compliance with the requirements set forth in Article 2 of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation and the principles governing appropriate academic participation. Furthermore, the alternative procedure should also provide additional insights into quality assurance that go beyond program and system accreditation.

Paragraph 4: The specific details of the procedure are set forth in procedural regulations.

Paragraph 5: Decisions made under the alternative procedure are valid for a maximum of eight years, meaning that shorter validity periods may also be established in these cases. As with system accreditation, the institution is also granted the right under the alternative procedure to award the Accreditation Council's seal to the degree programs it has reviewed. The

The extension options provided for in § 26(3), sentence 3, apply mutatis mutandis. Even in the context of alternative procedures, care must be taken to ensure an unbroken chain of accreditation in the interest of the students.

The Accreditation Council shall oversee the alternative procedure, which must be evaluated by an independent, research-oriented institution in a timely manner prior to the expiration of the project period as a prerequisite for the continuation of the procedure.

Part 7 **Special Provisions and Entry into Force**

§35 Relationship to Procedures Concerning the Professional Licensing Suitability of a Degree Program

Paragraph 1 extends the existing option of coordinating accreditation procedures with procedures that determine a degree program's eligibility under professional licensing laws, even within the framework of the new accreditation system. The provision is intended as an invitation to the relevant state authorities to use accreditation procedures to assess, in the interest of students, the suitability of a degree program with regard to access to regulated professions. To date, this option has been utilized particularly in the fields of auditing and social work/social pedagogy. In the future, this option could play a role within the framework of the planned academic training for health professions. The linking of the procedures requires a corresponding application from the institution of higher education.

Paragraph 2 clarifies that the external experts consulted regarding professional suitability have merely an advisory role and do not influence the accreditation decision. The accreditation decision, on the one hand, and the decision regarding the determination of professional suitability based on professional regulations, on the other hand, are legally separate decisions. The latter is made by a separate notice issued by the relevant state authority to the institution of higher education.

This regulation applies only to programs that distinguish between academic and clinical phases (for example, to obtain state certification).

Single-phase models with integrated practical training periods remain unaffected.

§ 36 Evaluation

Paragraph 1 provides for an evaluation three years after the regulation takes effect to review its implementation and impact.

Paragraph 2: The results of the evaluation must be submitted to the Conference of Ministers of Education so that appropriate measures can be taken if necessary.

§ 37 Entry into Force

For all program or system accreditation procedures, including reaccreditation, that had already begun prior to the effective date of this regulation, the previous regulations—including those governing the validity period of accreditation—shall apply to the completion of such procedures, in accordance with the opening clause set forth in Article 16(1) of the State Treaty on Study Program Accreditation.