Nursing degree programs leading to primary and secondary qualifications in quality assurance and development.

A thematic analysis of program characteristics, requirements, and recommendations based on current accreditation documents.[1]

Magdalena Müller[2], Dr. Jennifer Grünewald[3], Dr. Solvejg Schulz[4], Dr. Margarete Neuhaus[4]

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2 AHPGS Akkreditierungsagentur gGmbH, Sedanstraße 22, 79098 Freiburg.

3 Formerly AHPGS, now the Secretariat of the German Science Council, Scheidtweilerstraße 4, 50933 Cologne. The evaluation was conducted as part of the author's work as a consultant for AHPGS.

4 Accreditation Council Foundation, Adenauerallee 73, 53113 Bonn.

1. Introduction

With the enactment of the Nursing Professions Act (Pflegeberufegesetz – PflBG) and the establishment of primary-qualifying nursing degree programs, two pathways to obtaining professional licensure as a registered nurse were established in Germany: vocational training and a university degree program. In addition to degree programs leading to initial professional qualification—in which professional licensure as a registered nurse is obtained—universities have also developed degree programs for continuing education aimed at already trained registered nurses who hold professional licensure. These programs enable participants to obtain an academic qualification upon graduation and, in this sense, serve as continuing education. This enables both registered nurses trained under the previous legal framework and those who have completed generalist nursing training since 2020 to earn a nursing-related degree. In addition to two pathways to obtaining professional licensure, two pathways to the academicization of nursing have thus emerged.

These two academic qualification pathways have given rise to target-group-oriented degree programs that, within the framework of accreditation procedures, must meet not only professional regulatory requirements but also those of academic program accreditation[5]. Through the peer reviews used in the accreditation process, degree programs also undergo an evaluation of their subject-specific content within their own discipline. Accreditation procedures can thus serve as forums for discussing professional trends and assessments and reveal which requirements are increasingly gaining acceptance within a field (in this case: nursing-related higher education). This analysis therefore examines the differences and similarities between Bachelor's degree programs in nursing that lead to primary and secondary qualifications, with regard to their program characteristics as well as the recommendations and requirements formulated in accreditation procedures. The evaluation aims to provide insights on disciplinary development trends as well as on key areas of evaluation within the framework of quality assurance and development.

The analysis of program characteristics can provide insights into functional differences between programs leading to primary and secondary qualifications, for example with regard to the mode of study and program titles. The analysis of peer reviews and accreditation

30 opens up further perspectives. It can provide insights into the disciplinary challenges and structural issues that shape nursing science, as well as the quality requirements placed on nursing-related degree programs. Which aspects

5 An overview of the state regulations on degree program accreditation, which are based on the Model Regulation (MRVO), is available at the following URL: https://akkreditierungsrat.de/akkreditierungssystem/rechtliche-grundlagen/musterrechts-und-landesrechtsverordnungen/ (last accessed on August 15, 2026).

are repeatedly identified by the panel of experts as areas requiring academic development and lead to recommendations, and which aspects are deemed so essential that they are included as conditions in the decision by the Accreditation Council?

While recommendations may serve to promote professional development and sharpen the institution's profile and reflect current quality requirements in nursing-related higher education, conditions are aimed at ensuring compliance with the respective state's normative Study Program Accreditation Ordinance, with the goal of ensuring, in particular, a coherent program concept, its implementation, and the feasibility of the program. This involves a two-phase process: First, proposed conditions are documented by a panel of experts in the accreditation reports and subsequently reviewed by the Accreditation Council before they can be formally adopted as requirements in a resolution. The consideration of both the experts' recommendations and the requirements adopted by the Accreditation Council is intended to do justice to the multi-stage nature of the accreditation process and to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible of the quality assurance

Correspondingly, the team of authors draws on experience from the institutional contexts of the AHPGS—the accreditation agency in the field of health and social services—and the secretariat of the Accreditation Council, supplemented by extensive experience in the evaluation and accreditation of nursing degree programs.

Degree program and accreditation documents were examined. The following publicly available documents were evaluated: database entries from the Accreditation Council's Electronic Information and Application System (ELIAS)[6], examination regulations, accreditation reports, and accreditation decisions. In accreditation documents, the evaluations of academic content are documented in a manner comparable to established administrative practice, based on standardized reporting and established administrative practices.

Section 2 below describes the data basis for the study and presents the analytical methods. Section 3 presents the results. Section 4 discusses these results and provides an outlook, also examining the connections between accreditation and disciplinary development.

6 https://akkreditierungsrat.de/elias-ar-datenanalyse/was-ist-elias/ (last accessed on August 15, 2026).

2. Data Set and Analytical Approach

2.1 Sample Description

The present sample consists exclusively of degree programs leading to a bachelor's degree in nursing whose accreditation was approved by the Accreditation Council by the Accreditation Council between 2020 and 2025.[7] This restriction is necessary to obtain all documents considered here in a comparable structure via the ELIAS database. The analysis included both primary-qualifying degree programs, which lead directly to professional licensure as a registered nurse, and secondary-qualifying degree programs, which, by their nature, are designed to provide continuing education are aimed at already trained nursing professionals. The latter were identified as secondary-qualifying programs primarily when, according to the examination regulations, admission to the program is possible only with completed vocational training and state recognition as a nursing professional. Advanced degree programs in related fields such as nursing management, nursing education, or comparable disciplines were deliberately excluded from this analysis in order to enable a meaningful comparison of program formats, requirements, and recommendations. Also excluded from the sample were degree programs whose most recent accreditation process, at the time of extraction from the ELIAS database (October 6, 2025), involved a significant change or an extension of the deadline, as well as internal accreditations by system-accredited accredited institutions. The aim of this restriction was to create a sample that was as homogeneous as possible, focusing on undergraduate nursing-related bachelor's degree programs.

2.2 Generation of Analysis Categories

To analyze the requirements and recommendations arising from the accreditation process, a deductive category definition was developed based on Mayring (2013)[8]. To ensure comparability of requirements and recommendations, a common procedure for forming analysis categories was selected. For the re-

7 This sample is a subsample from a preliminary study on degree programs in the core field of nursing from 2025, which is published at the following URL: https://akkreditierungsrat.de/wp-con-

tent/arda/pflege_bachelor.html (last accessed on August 15, 2026).

8 Mayring, P. (2013): Qualitative Content Analysis, in: Flick, U., von Kardoff, E., and Steinke, I. (Eds.): Qualitative Research: A Handbook, 10th ed. Reinbek near Hamburg: Rohwolt, pp. 468–475.

The decisions of the Accreditation Council made during the current program accreditation process for each degree program were used as a basis; for the recommendations, the accreditation reports from the corresponding proceedings were examined.[9]

The categories were established thematically and were largely based on the Model

5. A categorization of requirements existing in the ELIAS database—which assigns the requirements decided by the Accreditation Council to criteria of the MRVO—was not used in the present analysis.[10] Furthermore, no strict assignment of the requirements and recommendations to the MRVO criteria was made; instead, a thematic assignment to recurring subject areas

10 was carried out. This approach proved useful for the following reasons: First and foremost, a thematic categorization applicable to both requirements and recommendations was to be used with the aim of being able to unambiguously assign requirements and recommendations to a category. In line with its purpose, the categorization in the ELIAS database is tailored exclusively to requirements. For the purposes of this evaluation

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9 , recommendations are issued by the panel of evaluators and included in the accreditation report. There is no uniform formal procedure for this across all accreditation reports: Recommendations may either be mentioned in the evaluation text of the report or listed separately—in addition to or exclusively at the end of a criterion.

10 Excerpt from the categories of requirements in the ELIAS database, which are included in the Accreditation Council's evaluations (https://akkreditierungsrat.de/elias-ar-datenanalyse/ar-datenanalyse-arda/; last accessed on August 15, 2026):

11_ QP-Curriculum_Formulation of the Qualification Profile_General
11_ QP Curriculum_Formulation of the Qualification Profile_Areas of Competence 11_ QP Curriculum_Formulation of the Qualification Profile_Level
12, Section 1 Didactics_Didactic Concept
12(1) Didactics_Teaching and Learning Methods
12, Section 1 Mobility_Credit Transfer_Recognition
12, Section 1 Mobility_Structural Barriers to Mobility
12(1) QP_Curriculum_Curricular Implementation of the Qualification Profile
12(1) QP Curriculum_Inconsistency with Program Name and/or Degree Title 12(1) Admission Requirements_Alignment of Different Entry Qualifications 12(1) Admission Requirements_Consideration of Expected Entry Qualifications 12(2) Staff
12(3) Resources, Facilities, and Equipment 12(4) in conjunction with 4(3) Examinations_Thesis
12(4) Examinations—Competency-Based Approach; Examination Format(s)
12(4) Examinations_Level
12(5) Feasibility of Study_Workload at the Module Level
12(5) Feasibility of Study—Exam Frequency and Exam Organization
12, para. 5 Accessibility_Program Organization
12(6) Program Type_Part-time
12(6) Profile Type_Dual
12(6) Profile Type_Distance Learning Program
12(6) Profile Type_Intensive

12(6) Profile Type_Part-Time
12(6) Profile_Type_Virtual_Digital_Online

the categories proved not to be sufficiently distinct. Furthermore, a requirement in the ELIAS database is sometimes assigned to multiple criteria—for example, when a connection between two specifications is referenced—so that, within the scope of the present evaluation, duplicate counts of requirements could have occurred and the overall picture could have been distorted

5. The topics identified for category formation were systematized in accordance with the criteria specified in the MRVO. Topically related subjects and issues were grouped into categories. Care was taken to ensure that the categories were as objectively verifiable and consistent as possible. In some cases, the edition texts addressed various aspects of the MRVO that were logically justifiable, for example

10 the relationship between the curriculum and the feasibility of the program (which may have led to these being assigned to multiple categories in the ELIAS database). If a single requirement text addressed multiple issues, the requirement texts were divided based on the different issues for the purposes of categorization in this study. In the case of the recommendations, there was no need for such a

15 division, so each recommendation was assigned to a single analysis category. The categories for requirements and recommendations formed in this way are presented in Table 2 at the end of Section 3 (Results).

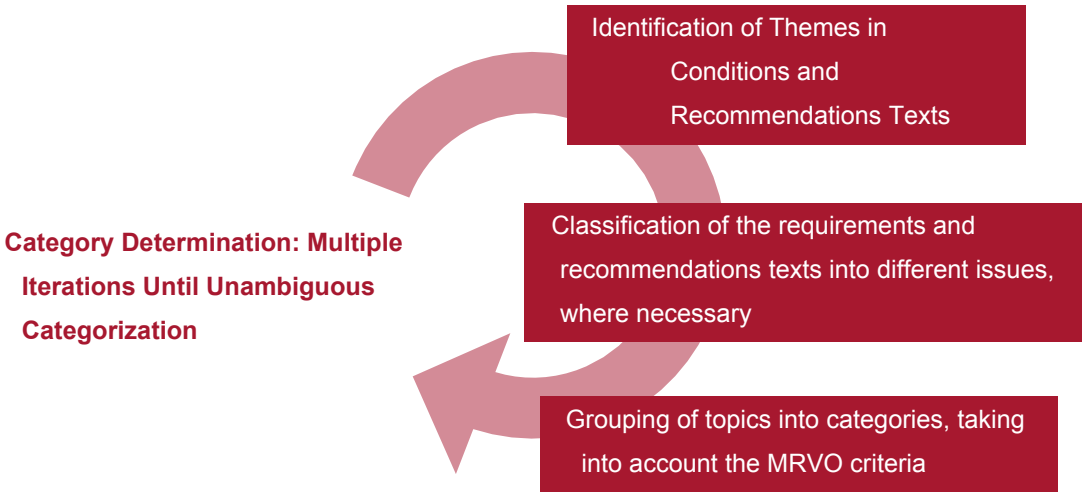


Fig. 1: Generation of the analysis criteria

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The significance of the analysis of conditions in the Accreditation Council's decisions must be understood in light of the following specific features: The conditions set forth in the decisions may differ from the proposed conditions formulated by the evaluators in the

(preliminary) accreditation report, for the following reasons:

1) First, many institutions have the opportunity, prior to submitting their application, to undergo a quality improvement cycle with the agency based on a preliminary accreditation report, thereby addressing deficiencies in advance. If these deficiencies are successfully addressed, the original proposed conditions are not included in the final accreditation and are therefore not available for analysis in the present study. Due to the sometimes tight timeframe for quality improvement, this process typically involves making quick corrections to specific issues, such as minor revisions to module handbooks, websites, or similar materials. As a result, only a limited number of such conditions are included in accreditation decisions ;

2) After reviewing the accreditation report—and possibly based on additional documents submitted by the institution or updated information provided at the time of application—the Accreditation Council may reach a different decision and may choose not to issue proposed conditions;

3) It is also possible for the Accreditation Council to reformulate, summarize, or divide the proposed conditions into several conditions in accordance with its own decision-making practice;

4) Finally, the Accreditation Council may deviate from the experts' proposed decision and impose additional conditions.

3. Results

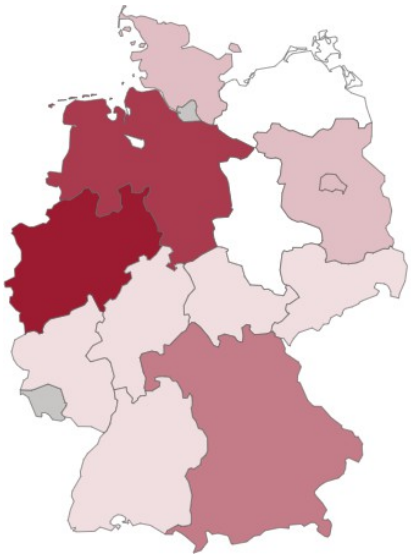
3.1 Evaluation of Program Characteristics

A total of 42 degree programs[11]were included in the evaluation, including 25 programs leading to primary qualifications and 17 programs leading to secondary qualifications for already trained nursing professionals.

The regional distribution of the degree programs across the individual federal states is shown in the following Figure 1. The degree programs are offered at a total of 42 higher education institutions, which differ in terms of their governing body and type of institution. The vast majority of the degree programs are located at public universities (n = 25). In addition, ten degree programs are offered by private institutions and seven by church-affiliated institutions. In terms of institution type, universities of applied sciences dominate

11 The degree programs were distributed across 42 accreditation applications, meaning that a total of 42 accreditation reports were included in the analysis. The reports were issued by six accreditation agencies: 17 reports from AHPGS, nine from ZEvA, six from ACQUIN, six from AQAS, three from EVALAG, and one from ASIIN.

Applied Sciences (HAW) with 32 degree programs. Another nine degree programs are located at universities, while one degree program is offered at a college of education.



Bundesland (der Hochschule)	Anzahl
Baden-Württemberg	2
Bayern	5
Berlin	3
Brandenburg	3
Bremen	1
Hessen	2
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	1
Niedersachsen	7
Nordrhein-Westfalen	8
Rheinland-Pfalz	2
Sachsen	2
Sachsen-Anhalt	1
Schleswig-Holstein	3
Thüringen	2
Gesamt	**42**

Fig. 2: Regional distribution of degree programs across the individual federal states

A total of 120 study formats could be assigned to the 42 degree programs in the ELIAS database.[12] The analysis of study formats reveals differences between primary-qualifying and post-qualifying degree programs. Among primary-qualifying degree programs, full-time program is the most common format, accounting for about 30%. Approximately one-quarter of all programs are offered in a dual format. The comparatively small number of dual study programs must be understood in light of the legal framework. The Nursing Education Strengthening Act established that, in principle, a dual study model would be required for primary-qualifying nursing degree programs starting in 2024. At the time of the sample, not all primary-qualifying degree programs were offered in an accredited dual study format; consequently, the proportion of dual study programs is lower than would be expected now or in the future. In contrast, flexible study formats dominate among secondary-qualifying degree programs. Approximately 32% of the programs are

12 The study formats selectable in the ELIAS database are: Integrated with vocational training, part-time while working, integrated with work, dual, distance learning, intensive, international degree program,

joint program, cooperative degree program pursuant to § 19 MRVO, cooperative degree program pursuant to § 20 MRVO, online degree program, practice-integrated, on-campus degree program, part-time, and full-time.

24% are part-time, and another 24% are part-time while working. This result reflects the target group of already professionally qualified nursing professionals, for whom balancing studies and work plays a central role.

Noteworthy is the heterogeneity of the program names, which are listed in the following table—5 . In terms of naming conventions, the academic landscape is not characterized by nationwide standardization. Although the term "nursing" appears most frequently, the specific program names vary noticeably. The field of secondary-qualifying programs exhibits a less uniform naming pattern and sometimes includes specialization options for already trained nursing professionals in the program title. With regard to the academic degree awarded, the picture is more uniform.[13] With the exception of four programs leading to secondary qualifications, which confer the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree, all programs award the Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Program Titles

Program Title	primary qualification (n)	Secondary-qualifying (n)
Nursing	14 [1)]	3 [2)]
Applied Nursing Science	3 [3)]	4 [4)]
Nursing Science	3	2
Bachelor of Nursing	2	
Nursing and Health	2 [5)]	1
Evidence-Based Nursing	1	
Advanced Clinical Nursing		1
Gerontological Nursing and Therapy		1
Nursing Expertise		1
Practice-Oriented Nursing Science		1
Health Care		1
Psychiatric Nursing		2 [6)]

Notes on Table 1:

1. of which one each with the designation "primary qualification," "dual," "undergraduate,"
2. one of which has the designation "dual" and one "Focus: Practice Development,"
3. one of which includes the qualifier "in a practice network,"
4. of which one with the qualifier "part-time,"
5. of which one is the reverse: "Health and Nursing,"
6. one of which includes the extension "Psychiatric Health."

13 Since, according to § 6(2) MRVO, the degree title "Bachelor of Science" must be used in the subject group of medicine—to which nursing programs belong—the result is hardly surprising.

Differences are also evident in the scope of study between primary- and secondary-qualifying nursing degree programs. For primary-qualifying programs, the workload amounts to 180 credit points (CP) in six cases, 210 CP in ten cases, and nine cases, 240 credit points (CP). In contrast, the post-qualifying programs present a more homogeneous picture: 15 of the 17 programs comprise 180 CP, while only two programs are structured with 210 CP.

Another program characteristic examined is the structural provision in the program design for the recognition of previously acquired professional competencies. Depending on the regulations regulations of the respective federal state, up to half of a program's credit points may be credited for this purpose. In the majority of primary-qualifying programs (68%), the examination regulations do not provide for such structural recognition of competencies acquired outside of higher education and within the framework of vocational training. In eight cases where training content is credited, the program also provides a pathway for those who have already completed vocational training. As expected, the situation is different for degree programs leading to secondary qualifications, as these are specifically designed for nursing professionals who are already vocationally qualified and therefore incorporate vocational competencies to a greater extent into the program structures: In nine degree programs, up to 60 LP are credited, and in eight degree programs, up to 90 LP.[14]

The results suggest that primary- and secondary-qualifying degree programs differ in their organizational structure due to their distinct target groups. While primary-qualifying degree programs are geared toward obtaining professional licensure and are predominantly offered on a full-time basis or as dual programs, secondary-qualifying degree programs are aimed at already trained nursing professionals and are more frequently pursued on a part-time basis or while working. Furthermore, primary-qualifying degree programs exhibit greater variation in terms of total workload and standard duration of study, whereas secondary-qualifying programs are structured more uniformly and, in addition, professionally acquired competencies are more frequently credited toward the degree on a blanket basis. While the program titles vary mainly among secondary-qualifying programs, the degrees awarded differ only slightly and are predominantly awarded as a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.).

14 The standard duration of study also differs between the two groups of degree programs, but this analysis was not pursued further. The data on the standard duration of study in the Accreditation Council's database is unreliable, as universities report standard durations both with and without deducting the standard credit for professional competencies.

3.2 Analysis of the Conditions Imposed in the Decisions

A total of 34 conditions[15] were included in the analysis and divided into eleven categories. The categories are listed in Table 2 at the end of Section 3. The categories appeared with a frequency ranging from one to four mentions. The most common categories, each with four

requirements each. Two requirements in the "Regulatory Measures" category relate to degree programs leading to a primary qualification and concern the reporting of a relative grade and the inclusion of measures to compensate for disadvantages in a regulatory measure. Two additional requirements were imposed with regard to a degree program leading to a secondary qualification

One required the existence of a gender equity plan, while the other demanded changes to the Diploma Supplement regarding the nature of the program's secondary qualification.

In the category "Credit Transfer and Recognition," all conditions relate to degree programs leading to a primary qualification. Two of the conditions are of a general nature and criticize an approach that is not

approach to the credit transfer of competencies acquired outside of higher education or the recognition of competencies acquired in higher education that is not based on legal requirements. The two remaining requirements concern the credit transfer of competencies from health care professions or from vocational training that is not defined by a specific discipline; it is mandated that a transparent procedure be implemented to determine the equivalence of existing competencies with

the corresponding modules. The fact that the latter two requirements pertain to credit transfer in degree programs leading to a primary qualification indicates that the target group for these bachelor's degree programs sometimes extends beyond inexperienced entry-level professionals. This observation could also be related to the fact that the specific offering of degree programs leading to a secondary qualification is more limited, and state-recognized

nursing professionals may also (have to) rely on primary-qualifying degree programs for regional academic training.

The requirements in the category "Professional Licensing Procedure" mandate proof of successful completion of the professional licensing procedure with the competent authority. This is a typical requirement for degree programs that lead to the award of a state-recognized

15 As described in Section 2.2, requirements from accreditation decisions containing multiple substantive aspects were broken down into individual requirement units for the analysis. The following evaluations refer to these newly formed units and not to the number of original requirements in the accreditation decisions.

recognition; accordingly, the four cases in this category are found in primary-qualifying degree programs.[16] The reports examined also included two requirements in the category “commitment to career goals”: For one primary-qualifying degree program, there had to be transparent information regarding the prerequisites for access to a full-scope

5 teaching position at a nursing school in accordance with Section 9(1)(2) of the PflBG; in the case of a secondary-qualifying degree program, it had to be made clear that state recognition as a registered nurse is not obtained through the program.

In the “Competency Acquisition” category, the two requirements for degree programs leading to a secondary qualification relate to the general identification of competencies acquired in the program

10 and on ensuring practical competencies. The other two requirements relate to the development of evidence-based practical competence and scientific competence, as well as the integration of advanced medical competencies into the qualification profile and the curriculum; these were found in primary-qualifying degree programs.

Two of the requirements in the “Practicum” category call for quality assurance of the practicum period; one

15 another relates to the minimum academic qualification of the clinical supervisor, and the fourth requirement calls for the integration of university-provided clinical supervision into the teaching integration matrix. All four requirements were found in primary-qualifying degree programs that, in accordance with the PflBG and PflAPrV, include a practical training period, a specific number of hours of practical supervision, and a specified minimum qualification for practical supervisors.

20 must. Thematically related to this is the analysis category “Cooperation Agreements,” in which three requirements for degree programs leading to a primary qualification called for either the submission of valid cooperation agreements or more detailed provisions within those agreements.

Additional categories identified included “Pedagogical Concept,” “Evaluation,” “Staff,” and “Facility

25 resources,” each with two requirements, as well as “Admission Requirements” with one requirement.

16 The accreditation process and the process for professional recognition are two separate procedures whose respective conclusions are not coordinated with one another. In some federal states, the process for professional recognition typically takes place after the successful completion of the accreditation process. The procedure for determining professional suitability is regulated in § 38(2) of the Nursing Professions Act (PflBG), which verifies compliance with the requirements of the PflBG and the Nursing Professions Training and Examination Ordinance (PflAPrV).

3.3 Evaluation of the Recommendations from the Expert Panels

A total of 169 recommendations from 42 accreditation reports were evaluated; these were either listed as recommendations in the accreditation report in the designated section under the respective MRVO criterion or were expressed in the respective evaluation text by the panel of experts. The categories are listed in Table 2 below. The number of recommendations per accreditation report ranges from zero to 14. No recommendations were made in seven accreditation reports. The most common number of recommendations was three (in seven accreditation reports) and four (in seven accreditation reports).

The 169 recommendations were assigned to 18 categories. It is notable that most recommendations (approx. 21%) relate to the categories “Module Level” (34 recommendations), “Feasibility of Study” (20), and “Staff” (17). More than ten recommendations can be attributed to the categories “Physical and Material Resources” (16), “Practical Training” (13), “Competency Acquisition” (12), and “Examinations” (10). Recurring aspects in the recommendations for the “Module-*15”* of the curriculum include the revision of specific module content, the alignment of course content with the program’s learning outcomes, and the creation of additional module offerings for students in the nursing program. With regard to the *“Feasibility”* category, the reviewers address in particular the workload and stress levels of students, as well as an adjustment (extension) of the standard duration of study. The recommendations in the *“Staff”* category focus on staff expansion, subject-specific qualifications and faculty-led instruction, the suitability of instructors, and the adaptation of job postings. With regard to the category *“*Competency Acquisition*,”* the reviewers frequently recommend refining the qualification goals and competency profile, as well as implementing nursing-specific competencies. The recommendations for the *“Practicum”* category focus on the implementation of practicum phases, coordination among learning locations, and quality assurance for practicum placements. With regard to the category “Physical and Material *Resources,”* the evaluators particularly often recommend expanding the library collection and developing a concept for SkillsLabs. Regarding the category “Exams,” the evaluators recommend a review of the curriculum with regard to competency-based assessment, the mix of assessment methods, and the assessment workload for students.

The recommendations in categories that appear fewer than ten times pertain to the

“Distinctive Profile” of the degree programs (such as part-time study, in-person blocks, blended learning, etc.), “Diversity”—on the one hand as a governance issue for the institution, and on the other hand

35 as module content (e.g., culturally sensitive nursing, migration), “Evaluation”—and thus the

measurement of academic success and retention. Other categories with fewer than ten mentions include “Cooperation,” regarding the recruitment of new cooperation partners and potential compensation for students during their practical training phases, and “Mobility,” concerning the promotion of student mobility and internationalization. The recommendations in the “Program Concept” category relate to a critical reflection on the program title and admission requirements, as well as to an adjustment of the program structure and the number of credit hours. Other categories with fewer than four mentions are “Further Development,” “Regulatory Measures,” and “Transferability.”

Of the total of 169 recommendations, 115 were made by the reviewers for degree programs leading to a primary qualification degree programs, whereas 54 recommendations were made for secondary-qualifying degree programs. Most recommendations for primary-qualifying degree programs relate to the following categories: “Module Level” (22), “Feasibility of Study” (16), “Practical Experience” (13), and “Staff” (10). With regard to the primary-qualifying degree program, it can be assumed that the reviewers, based on their subject-matter expertise, possess a clear understanding of the relevant professional field and the possibilities for its regulation under professional law. This includes the technical requirements associated with the nursing profession as well as the professional fields of activity of future graduates.

Furthermore, the reviewers also make recommendations that go beyond the requirements of the MRVO. In evaluating the recommendations, three recommendations in the “Further Development” category were identified: one concerning the development of heat management plans to ensure in-person instruction can continue despite high temperatures, and others addressing academic issues such as the separation of two health-related departments and the establishment of an institute for nursing sciences.

Table 2: Categories and Frequencies

Categories (*alphabetical*)	Occurrences		Recommendations	
	No. (n)	Rel. (%)	No. (n)	Rel. (%)
Credit Transfer and Recognition	4	11.8	0	0
Transferability	0	0	1	0.6
Professional Disciplinary Proceedings	4	11.8	0	0.0
Career Goal Pledge	2	5.9	0	0.0
Special Profile	0	0	5	3.0
Teaching Concept	2	5.9	0	0.0
Diversity	0	0	5	3.0
Evaluation	2	5.9	8	4.7
Skill Acquisition	4	11.8	12	7.1
Cooperation	3	8.8	4	2.4
Mobility	0	0	8	4.7
Module level	0	0	34	20.1
Classifier	4	11.8	1	0.6
Personnel	2	5.9	17	10.1
Practice	4	11.8	13	7.7
Exams	0	0	10	5.9
Spatial and Material Resources	2	5.9	16	9.5
Program Concept	0	0	8	4.7
Feasibility of Study	0	0	20	11.8
Further Development	0	0	4	2.4
Admission Requirements	1	2.9	3	1.8
TOTAL	**34**	**100**	**169**	**100**

Note on Table 2: Due to rounding, the sum of the percentages differs slightly from 100%.

4. Discussion and Outlook

4.1 Comparison of Requirements and Recommendations, Taking into Account Primary and Secondary Qualifications

The decisions of the Accreditation Council are based on the accreditation report prepared by an accreditation agency

5, which in turn is based on the self-evaluation report—including the institution's documents subject to review—and the on-site evaluation, as well as on any additional documents submitted and a statement from the institution. The on-site visit serves to facilitate discussions with various groups of individuals at the institution in order to ensure an adequate assessment of the criteria set forth in the MRVO

10 . Thus, the focus is on topics of discussion that can be assigned to one or more criteria and, in the event of identified deficiencies or areas for improvement, are incorporated into proposed conditions and recommendations. Nevertheless, there are usually also topics that are not covered by the MRVO but are addressed within the panel of experts and/or in discussions with the institution in order to establish the context for the remaining

15 evaluations and to foster a comprehensive understanding of the degree program being accredited.

While the conditions imposed as part of the accreditation process indicate a deficiency that must be remedied within a specified timeframe, the panel's recommendations refer to identified areas for improvement. The ver-

20 The process of program accreditation thus not only ensures minimum standards but also serves as a means of quality improvement.

These two dimensions are reflected in their distinctiveness, both in the number and in the content of the requirements and recommendations examined. The procedures examined yielded 34 requirements and 169 recommendations. The following discussion compares

25 the frequency of categories for requirements and recommendations. A further differentiation between degree programs leading to primary and secondary qualifications is made where objectively warranted; however, due to only minor differences, this is not a focal point of the discussion.

The conditions focused for the most part on aspects prescribed by law, such as

30 professional regulatory procedures, recognition and credit transfer processes, as well as the correctness of disciplinary measures. The requirements in the categories

“Competency Acquisition” and “Practical Experience” also relate, at least in part, to the provisions enshrined in the PflBG. This demonstrates that a large portion of the requirements address an area clearly defined in the MRVO with no room

. Requirements that relate to the fulfillment of a criterion—which tends to be evaluated more qualitatively—are less common in number but nonetheless exist.

The five most common categories of requirements in the analysis system highlight the identified issues in nursing degree programs that could not be resolved within a time-limited quality

5. They provide insights into which specific topics are relevant in academic nursing education and still face obstacles. Of particular note here are clinical placement time, the transparent and structured establishment of standardized credit transfer processes, and the development of specific competencies. At the same time, it should be noted that the requirements are distributed across various thematic categories

10 and do not show any clear clustering. However, the available observations do not allow for a definitive conclusion as to the extent to which the identified shortcomings may be specific to particular degree programs. It is also not possible to draw reliable conclusions regarding the extent of shortcomings in nursing degree programs compared to other degree programs.

15 The evaluators see potential for improvement, in particular, in the curricula and staffing levels. In comparison to the requirements, it is notable that there are indeed recommendations regarding staffing levels. The evaluators specifically address the growth in staff numbers, the recruitment of professorships, and the suitability of faculty members. Since only two requirements regarding

20 staffing, it can be assumed that, from an accreditation perspective, staffing levels are sufficient in terms of both quality and quantity. The fact that recommendations in the "Staffing" category accounted for 10% of those in the analyzed accreditation reports could be related to the growth of the professorial ranks as well as the challenge of adequately filling these positions. Both the institutions under review

25 as well as the evaluators (see below).

In comparison to the two instances in the "Practical Training" category, it is striking that the 13 recommendations in the "Practical Training" category also pertain exclusively to degree programs leading to primary qualifications, which—as already mentioned in Section 3.2—must meet requirements for practical training phases as stipulated by professional law. It should be noted that these 13 recommendations relate to five degree programs or

30 accreditation reports. The accreditation decisions for these degree programs include, in two cases, conditions under the "Practical Training" category that require quality assurance for the practical training. The recommendations pertain to the reflection on

the job profiles of future graduates in coordination with the practical training institutions, the transfer of theory to practice, the planning and quality assurance of practical training placements, communication and coordination

35 coordination between the university and practice sites, student compensation, the qualifications of practice supervisors, and the development of practice concepts. These

On the one hand, these are degree programs whose clinical phases have not yet been adequately designed and quality-assured and have been subject to requirements. On the other hand, the clinical phases reveal potential for improvement, which the respective university should take into account in the further development of the degree program and for which reviewers make recommendations.

Similarly, the recommendations regarding the curriculum are not findings that call into question the coherence of the curriculum and the modules, but rather aspects that, in the evaluators' view, the institution should take into account as part of the program's further development during the upcoming accreditation period. The freedom of research and teaching affords institutions leeway in the design of their programs. Against this backdrop, recommendations—rather than requirements—predominate at the module level. These relate, for example, to a stronger nursing-specific focus in the technical terminology used in the module handbook, the systematic consideration of culturally sensitive nursing, and greater attention to pediatric contexts.

A similar pattern can be observed with regard to the feasibility of the program. No requirements were imposed regarding feasibility, but 20 recommendations were made. Of these, 16 recommendations concern programs leading to a primary qualification. The recommendations primarily address students' workload and the adjustment of the standard duration of study. For example, in the reviewers' view, the total student workload should be assessed, or the planning reliability and housing arrangements during block weekends be reviewed. It can therefore be concluded that, from the perspective of the evaluators and the Accreditation Council, the degree programs are feasible in accordance with the MRVO guidelines. However, the recommendations indicate that feasibility can be further enhanced. In addition, there are the previously mentioned recommendations that go beyond the MRVO criteria. There are no overlap between the requirements and the recommendations.

Based on practical experience in evaluating bachelor's degree programs in the field of nursing, the following specific topics for on-site visits can be derived to supplement the analyzed requirements of the Accreditation Council and recommendations of the panel of evaluators: A central topic of discussion is whether there is sufficient and adequately qualified staff is available to run a nursing degree program, particularly with regard to clinical supervision provided by the university. Another relevant question is whether the academic staff—especially professors—are academically trained nursing professionals or medical scientists. These qualifications are relevant because the academization of the

profession is also associated with an academic
professional identity—in the sense of a distinct professional self-image—

the development of specific competency profiles and the establishment of a distinguished academic discipline—which can only be achieved to a limited extent by teaching staff from outside the field. The necessary minimum qualifications for clinical instruction are also frequently discussed; from the reviewers' perspective, an academic qualification for clinical practical instruction should be pursued in order to adequately support the acquisition of academic competencies. At the same time, the qualification processes required for this are still being established in many places, meaning that appropriately qualified staff are often not yet available in the practical training facilities.

Although the issue of sufficiently qualified staff is enshrined in § 12(2) of the MRVO, the reports contain only a few proposed requirements, and the resolutions include even fewer. The reviewers are fully aware of the current shortage of qualified professionals for these positions as well as the associated difficulties in recruiting staff, and the recruitment of academically qualified teaching staff and the promotion of professional development are evident in the reviewers' recommendations, a significant portion of which focuses on personnel development: In particular, the reports address workforce growth and the recruitment of staff with subject-specific qualifications. For example, in one accreditation report, the evaluators point to the challenging labor market situation in the nursing sector and recommend additional strategies to ensure teaching, clinical coordination, and skills lab supervision. The availability of both nursing degree programs—both those leading to primary qualifications and, in particular, those leading to secondary qualifications—thus represent an important building block for generating skilled workers and contribute to the long-term development of the nursing profession.

Furthermore, it is evident that reviewers have a comprehensive understanding of the political and economic situation of academic nursing and its degree programs. The question regarding the cost-effectiveness of degree programs and career opportunities for academically trained nurses was a recurring theme in many discussions prior to the enactment of the Act to Strengthen Nursing Education. Since both topics pertain to the political structuring of state-regulated nursing education, they were included in the accreditation reports at most as a marginal note from the site visit. Other contentious issues include the distinction between nursing from nursing training, the reflection of the corresponding academic competencies in the curriculum, and the question of to what extent recognizing competencies from prior

vocational training makes sense in terms of promoting permeability within the education system, while simultaneously preserving the distinctions within the Qualifications Framework for German Higher Education Degrees (HQR).

4.2 Conclusion with Outlook

Degree programs are institutionally established and quality-assured educational offerings. Accreditation procedures represent a central mechanism for quality assurance and quality development. Accreditation reports ultimately document which requirements are considered by the reviewers to be, for example, academically desirable or mandatory. Program proposals, in turn, outline (in accordance with the relevant professional laws) which competencies are considered central to academic nursing qualifications and which curricular and organizational structures are established.

Against the backdrop of two academic qualification pathways—primary and secondary nursing degree programs—documents on quality assurance and quality development were analyzed. The analysis provides insights into professional discourse, as program characteristics, requirements, and recommendations offer indications of which trends and conceptions of nursing degree programs are viewed within the discipline as appropriate and desirable. If certain characteristics recur across many programs, a trend can be inferred that ideas are emerging within the discipline regarding what constitutes an appropriate nursing program.

Both academic qualification pathways are closely linked to professional practice. Legally mandated dual study formats in the primary qualification sector, as as the standard recognition of professional competencies in secondary-qualifying degree programs—demonstrate that vocational training and academic study are intertwined and that permeable educational formats are being designed. The comparatively low proportion of dual primary-qualifying degree programs in the present sample is likely a transitional phenomenon, as the Nursing Education Strengthening Act—which mandates the dual study format—has only been in effect since 2024

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The rising number and diversity of nursing degree programs suggest that the discipline is becoming increasingly established at universities. At the same time, the heterogeneity of program names points to an ongoing process of development. Recommendations also occasionally reflect institutional discourses, for example regarding the establishment nursing science institutes or health-related departments.

In review processes, discourses can be identified in the wake of the two academic qualification pathways regarding the question of which roles graduates assume in the

healthcare system and how their competency profiles differ. Recommendations regarding the alignment of program titles and admission requirements,

35 module content and program objectives, as well as on refining the program's profile—including in consultation with

participating practice-based institutions, can point to ideas about the field's potential for development.

For future research, further exploration of this topic appears particularly promising in light of new nursing-related master's programs, such as those in the field of Advanced Nursing Practice, appears promising. Furthermore, a comparative analysis with other health-related degree programs, such as the Physician Assistant program, could provide additional insights regarding academic profile development and professionalization processes.

In the context of further analyses of nursing degree programs, it would also be useful to include bachelor's degree programs in the fields of nursing education and nursing management would be useful in order to incorporate different academic career and development paths within nursing into the analysis. This could involve analyzing how program characteristics—such as program titles, degree levels, and modes of study—have changed over time and what trends can be derived from these changes.