

Resolution passed at the
20th General Meeting of the
HRK
on 10 May 2016
in Berlin

**Key points for the further
development of the
accreditation system**

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The German higher education institutions welcome the fact that the recent decision of the Federal Constitutional Court¹ paves the way for a nationwide and substantial modification of the accreditation system. Regardless of the experiences acquired and the partial success achieved thus far on the current basis through the collaboration of all participants, the existing system has failed to address certain basic aspects in a way that is satisfactory for the higher education institutions.

The HRK previously demanded a change to the system and called for the introduction of an Institutional Quality Audit in 2012². With respect to the necessary modification, the General Meeting of the HRK has noted the following key points:

- The decision of the Federal Constitutional Court does not call the existing system of external quality assurance into question in general terms. It underlines once again the difference between consultation and decision-making and requires directly or indirectly involved legislators in the federal states to introduce procedural and participative regulations. The legislators are to limit themselves to the embedding of essential principles in law and should not, through over-hasty lawmaking, create 'isolated solutions' limited to an individual federal state, which would hamper comparability and recognition at both national and international level.
- In accordance with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself. For this purpose, higher education institutions use internal quality assurance and quality development systems oriented to the needs and standards of the academic community. Within the framework of this autonomy, higher education institutions also give public account of themselves. Until now, accreditations of degree programmes or quality management systems only took the fulfilment of formal requirements into account.
- A national system of external quality assurance corresponding to the needs and standards of the academic community was addressed by the Federal Constitutional Court in its recent decision and outlined by the HRK in its recommendation in 2012: Higher education institutions decide on their own authority to carry out an Institutional Quality Audit, which promotes the implementation of continuous improvement processes to develop the quality of learning and teaching, or to review degree programmes through programme-specific quality assurance procedures.

¹ Federal Constitutional Court, decision of 17 February 2016, 1 BvL 8/10.

² "On the further development of the accreditation system - the Institutional Quality Audit model", resolution of the General Meeting on 24 April 2012.

- With respect to the tasks of the current Accreditation Council and the agencies, changed compositions and responsibilities should also be envisaged in the quality assurance process based on the principle of peer review. Here too, the academic community has decision-making powers and rights of participation, influence, information and supervision on a graded basis. The academic community must therefore be guaranteed a corresponding role in these institutions.
- The reform of the accreditation system should respond to the internationally visible and substantial movement towards institutional (auditing) processes in quality assurance and work towards the Institutional Quality Audit proposed by the HRK for the external quality assurance of higher education institutions. Insights gained so far through the further development of the system and experience acquired in projects within the 'experimentation clause' can be taken advantage of and the system appropriately linked to the European Higher Education Area.