

# Peer Consultations

## At a glance



Image credit: Michael Fahrig

### Goals and Purpose

A Peer Consultation provides a structured setting for an objective evaluation of individual degree programs that integrates input from external specialists in the area, external students, and professionals working outside academia.<sup>1</sup>

Depending on the specific case, the process aims either to guarantee that quality standards are met when creating a new degree program or to assess existing programs at regular intervals and identify potential areas for development.

A Peer Consultation for existing degree programs is held at least once during the accreditation period, and beyond that at least every eight years.

The process entails a self-critique by departments that takes place before the actual consultation. For existing degree programs the findings from other quality assessments should be taken into account when reviewing the current degree program design. Departments should collect topics and questions in advance that should be addressed during the consultation with outside experts.

The external reviewers' evaluation and recommendations serve as a basis for creating new degree programs or for reshaping and improving an existing one.

### The Focus

Proper qualification objectives and appropriate content

Is the curriculum content relevant and up-to-date with current standards in the subject area?

Do the skills and knowledge students gain during their studies correspond to the established qualification goals?

Do both practical applications and research get enough attention?

Is the curriculum coherent and logical?

Does the course of study prepare students for their future professional duties and their further career path?

How well positioned is the degree program compared to other programs offered in the region and beyond?

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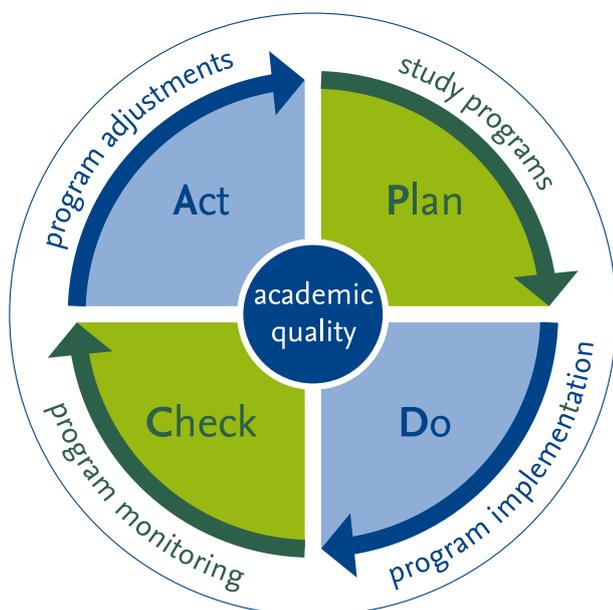
<sup>1</sup> For teacher-training degree programs, consultations also involve representatives from the relevant state education offices.

## Steps

Peer Consultations		
Planning and organizing the consultation	Preparing the supporting paperwork	Internal review, identifying key issues
Preliminary report by external experts (optional)		
The Peer Consultation takes place		
Compiling and fine-tuning of the minutes from the consultation (by the department)		
Debriefing and preserving the results (Creating an action plan if necessary)		
Responding to the results in the form of a departmental statement and determining the next steps		

## Peer Consultations – One of Many Quality Assurance Instruments

As part of Freie Universität's quality management system, Peer Consultations incorporate external expertise into the conceptual development of new degree programs (**Plan**) as well as into the regularly scheduled evaluations of existing programs (**Check**).



The PDCA cycle for degree programs

The Peer Consultation focuses in particular on the evaluation of subject-specific and content-related aspects of the degree programs. Other quality assurance instruments help to round out the process:

- Compliance inspection of current requirements: focus on the formal criteria for elements of degree program design
- Student feedback (survey): focus on, for example, structure of the degree program, workload, specialized knowledge and other skills acquired, the learning environment and support (advising, mentoring, equipment), and the quality of teaching
- Key indicators analysis: for example, student success (dropout rates, time to degree), workload, test scores, cohort analyses

## The Principle of Decentralization and Incremental Innovation

If areas of improvement or problems become apparent during the regular review process, it is the responsibility of individual departments to take action to improve conditions for students and further develop their degree programs (**Act**).

Since the people involved in the Peer Consultations are also responsible for developing and running degree programs, they can combine their experience with the results of the consultation in order to draw appropriate conclusions and make relevant suggestions for concrete measures.

The university's internal accreditation procedure for degree programs requires that departments demonstrate that they have fulfilled their responsibilities.

## Further Information

- [www.fu-berlin.de/qm/verfahren/qualitaetssicherungsverfahren/fachgesprach](http://www.fu-berlin.de/qm/verfahren/qualitaetssicherungsverfahren/fachgesprach)
- [www.fu-berlin.de/prozessmanagement](http://www.fu-berlin.de/prozessmanagement)

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