

Substantive Change Report by Academic Information Centre (AIC)

Register Committee

Decision of:	2022-03-15
Report received on:	2022-01-18
Agency registered since:	2018-06-01
Last external review report:	June 2018
Registration until:	2023-06-30
Absented themselves from decision-making:	Anita Līce
Attachments:	1. Substantive Change Report (Jan 2022) 2. Decision on AIC's initial report (Oct 2021)

Ref. RC34/C76

Ver. 1.0

Date 2022-03-21

Page 1 / 2

1. The Register Committee considered the further Substantive Change Report by AIC of 2022-01-18, following up on the Register Committee's earlier decision of 2021-10-15 to take note of AIC's initial Substantive Change Report, while requesting a further report.

Accreditation of foreign study programmes

2. The guidelines and rules of procedure for the accreditation of foreign study programmes are now publicly available on AIC's website.
3. **The Register Committee thus concluded that the compliance issue with regard to ESG 2.3 has been resolved.**
4. AIC elaborated further on the modalities for potential appeals against accreditation decisions. The explanations, however, left open if a permanent appeals committee would be formed "when first needed" or whether an ad-hoc appeals committee would be formed for each appeal.
5. Moreover, the details provided in the report are not specifically communicated in the guidelines or on AIC's website; neither is the appeals committee for procedures abroad mentioned on the website.
6. Despite AIC underlining that there had been no cases of appeals so far, the standard requires that the conditions and modalities for institutions to appeal should be entirely clear and communicated beforehand. The uncertainty about the appeals committee does not give confidence that an appeals system is fully in place and ready.
7. **The Register Committee concluded that the compliance issue with regard to ESG 2.7 remains.**

8. The Committee considered that AIC remains partially compliant with ESG 2.7, as established in the decision of 6/12/2018 to include AIC on the Register.

Register Committee

Inclusion of a study programme on the accreditation form of a study field

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Ver. 1.0

Date 2022-03-21

Page 2 / 2

9. In the further report, AIC explained the role of this assessment procedure within the overall quality assurance framework in Latvia.
10. The Register Committee acknowledged that the procedure was created as a temporary and short-term solution, in order to close possible gaps in the accreditation periods of programmes until the next re-accreditation of the corresponding study field.
11. The requirement of standard 2.4 is clear that at least one expert should be a student if a procedure is based on peer review by experts.
12. The specific nature of this quality assurance procedure could have been a valid argument to design it as an entirely desk-based, administrative procedure without involving any experts at all. AIC, however, did decide to involve experts in the procedure.
13. The Register Committee concluded that the experts should include a student and that the compliance issue with regard to ESG 2.4 remains.
14. **As a result and different from the initial conclusion reached in the decision of 06/12/2018 to include AIC on the Register, the Register Committee considered that AIC now only partially complies with standard 2.4.**
15. The Committee expects that the two new activities and the specific concerns with regard to ESG 2.4 and 2.7 will be analysed in full when AIC undergoes its next external review for renewal of registration.



ACADEMIC INFORMATION CENTRE

Academic recognition in Latvia of academic degrees and education documents acquired in other countries
Information institution on recognition of professional qualifications in regulated professions
Latvian Quality Agency for Higher Education
National Europass Centre, ReferNet Latvia, National Coordination Point for EQF, Study in Latvia

Register Committee

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Riga, 18 January 2022

No. 2022/4.4-001

Subject: Further report on substantive changes

Following the request of the EQAR Register Committee from 15th October 2021, the Academic Information Centre (AIC) provides further clarifications.

After communication with EQAR AIC acknowledges the belated reporting of the changes taken place earlier. However, AIC follows the EQAR guide which states that “In general, changes should be reported as soon as they are sufficiently clearly defined to allow providing comprehensive information on their nature and impact.” Therefore, it was decided to report on the changes when the methodologies were approved. Probably, more clear formulation of the timing for reporting changes, namely, what stage of the design phase is sufficient for reporting, should be included in the EQAR guide for agencies.

AIC provides the following information regarding the ESG standards highlighted by EQAR.

ESG 2.3. Implementing processes

Since the introduction of “*accreditation of foreign study programmes*” the general information on all stages of the assessment process and criteria (abstracts from the guidelines) has been published

on the AIC website - <https://www.aika.lv/en/for-higher-education-institutions/accreditation-of-foreign-study-programmes/>

After the piloting phase the guidelines underwent initial revision (minor clarifications regarding the formulation of assessment criteria and formatting of the document).

Currently the guidelines are published on the AIC website (https://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/AIC_AFSP_guidelines_03032020.pdf; under *For Higher Education Institutions/ Accreditation of Foreign Study Programmes/ Preparation of Self-Evaluation Report and Writing Report*) and the Rules of Procedure of the Accreditation Commission for Foreign Study Programmes are also published on the AIC website (https://www.aika.lv/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/ASPAK_reglaments_30112020.pdf; under *Accreditation Commission for Foreign Study Programmes*).

There is a usual practice when all guidelines for assessment procedures undergo minor revisions on a regular basis following the feedback from the higher education institutions and experts. It will also be applied to the guidelines for accreditation of foreign study programmes.



ESG 2.4. Peer review experts

AIC is aware that the ESG 2.4 states that external quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s). However, AIC would like to refer back to the aim of this assessment procedure “*inclusion of licenced study programme on the accreditation form of a study field*” and the overall quality assurance framework in Latvia.

The two main quality assurance procedures are “*licensing of study programmes*” and “*assessment/ accreditation of study fields*”. These procedures are mandatory for all study programmes implemented in Latvia and the expert group for both procedures includes a student member. The “*inclusion of licenced study programme on the accreditation form of a study field*” was included in the legal framework in 2019 by the Cabinet of Ministers **as a short-term solution due to the fact that the accreditation term of all study fields was extensively prolonged** and there was a concern that newly licensed study programmes could prepare graduates without the study process being externally evaluated. The methodology for “*inclusion of licenced study programme on the accreditation form of a study field*” would only be applicable to those study programmes who do not manage to undergo assessment/accreditation within the study field.

The “*inclusion of licenced study programme on the accreditation form of a study field*” exists as a temporary solution, rather than a comprehensive and stand-alone quality assurance procedure, which is also confirmed by its methodology which has been designed in the way that it addresses only those issues that could not be covered by “*licensing of study programmes*” and would otherwise be covered by “*assessment/ accreditation of study fields*”.

The methodology for “*inclusion of licenced study programme on the accreditation form of a study field*” was designed in 2021 and the first application currently is in the process.

Licensing of new study programme		Assessment/accreditation of study field
a) inclusion of licenced study programme on the accreditation form of a study field (2 experts)		
b) substantial changes (technical without experts, in other cases 1 expert)		
3 national experts (student, labour market, academics)		at least 5 experts (student, labour market, academics, at least 2 foreign experts)

ESG 2.7. Complaints and appeals

The possibility for complaints and appeals within the “*accreditation of foreign study programmes*” is ensured through several means.

The written contract that is concluded between AIC and the higher education institution stipulates the possibilities for complaints about procedural issues (composition of the expert group, adhering to deadlines etc.) as well as the possibility to contest the final outcome.

The formal outcome of the assessment procedure enters into force on the meeting of the Accreditation Commission for Foreign Study Programmes when it is announced to the higher education institution. It can be contested by submitting an appeal to the AIC’s Chairperson of the Board within one month after the decision has entered into force.

In case an appeal is submitted, the Chairperson of the AIC Board would establish an Appeals Committee who will review the justification of appeal.

There have been no cases of appeals to the final outcome so far and the deadline for submitting an appeal has expired for all completed assessment procedures. Also, currently there are no ongoing assessment procedures where an appeal could be submitted.

AIC confirms its commitment and readiness to establish an Appeals Committee once an issue of appeal arises.

We are at your disposal if any further clarifications should be made.

Yours faithfully,

Baiba Ramaņa

Chairperson of the AIC Board