
ENQA AGENCY REVIEW: AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT (AKKORK)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report results from an external review assessing the compliance of the Russian ‘Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Career Development ‘ (AKKORK) against the 2015 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). As this is the second review of this kind for AKKORK, it is important to realise that in 2015 the ESG were updated potentially requiring agencies to adjust some of their processes. AKKORK is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and has been listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 2014.

This external review report is based on the review process that used AKKORK’s self-assessment report (SAR), a site visit of the ENQA appointed review panel to Moscow, documents collected as part of this site visit, and published information available on AKKORK’s website to perform the review of the agency against the ESG 2015.

AKKORK is a private non-profit organisation that exclusively conducts voluntary evaluations of higher education institutions (HEIs) and study programmes in Russia, with a few exceptions beyond Russian borders. It is a self-funded agency that is primarily based on revenue from evaluations. AKKORK positions itself as a promoter of international QA standards and cooperates with different other European agencies. Its main QA activities are programme accreditations with respect to the agency’s own standards and those set by professional organizations. Accreditations by professional organizations are voluntary for HEIs in Russia, but are an established procedure in different programme areas. The agency also provides a variety of other evaluation procedures (independent accreditation on the institutional level, e-learning accreditation, internal quality assurance system audit and accreditation) that are part of this review.

AKKORK is an established agency that is well connected to its stakeholders and whose services are appreciated by HEIs and the state. This written, this review still shows that the agency struggles to comply with the ESG in some points. The panel notes that this is amplified by the diversity in design, documentation, and quality of the different offered procedures. While AKKORK has much practice with its main activity (i.e. the programme evaluations), the other offered procedures saw altogether four executions within the reviewed period from 2014 to 2019. The differences between the established processes became evident throughout this review and are described in detail in the presented report. Still, even the main activities of the agency lack transparency of set processes, the criteria used and the methodology being published and available to the agency’s stakeholders.

The international focus of the agency is acknowledged by the panel and is visible through the richness of documents published on the agency’s English website. Even more, the agency makes its decisions by an internationally composed accreditation body operating fully in English. This at times poses challenges for the agency as the agency does not always manage to keep different documents synchronized between Russian and English and published on both websites.

All in all, the panel in particular faced challenges to understand the content and requirements of the different offered procedures and therefore provides a detailed analysis that is mainly based on gathered documents during the review visit, rather than relying on the initially submitted SAR of the agency. In many instances, the panel found that the information gathered during the site-visit, in documentation, and on the agency’s website to deviate from the information presented in the SAR.

The panel found that the alignment of AKKORK with the ESG is the following:

- fully compliant for ESG 3.2, 3.7

- substantially compliant for ESG 3.3, 3.5, 2.4, 2.7
- partially compliant for ESG 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3
- not compliant for ESG 2.5, 2.6

The majority of recommendations as presented throughout the report show a need of the agency to update its documentation, make processes more consistent and coherent, and describe and present them explicitly to the stakeholders.

The panel hopes that the presented analyses and recommendations will support AKKORK in its mission to reach and promote international standards in QA, and thus provide valuable impact on internal quality assurance practices in HEIs in the RF.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Career Development (Агентство по контролю качества образования и развитию карьеры, AKKORK) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted from March to September 2019.

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is AKKORK's second review, the panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge progress from the previous review. The panel has adopted a developmental approach, as the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim at constant enhancement of the agencies.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2014 REVIEW

In its 2014 report, the panel concluded that AKKORK is in compliance with the ENQA Membership provisions. The panel therefore recommended to the Board of ENQA that AKKORK should have its membership in ENQA confirmed for a period of five years. The same report was the basis for listing AKKORK in EQAR.

The detailed findings and recommendations of the review, that followed the then relevant review methodology, were:

ESG 2.1 (Use of internal quality assurance procedures): substantial compliance

AKKORK should further elaborate its criteria in order to ensure that systematic assessments of study programmes are embedded in the review process and that all aspects of the ESG Part 1 are assessed.

ESG 2.2 (Development of external quality assurance processes): substantial compliance

AKKORK should systematically provide information about the aims and objectives for each of its activities. This information could also be offered in a comparative manner in order to better outline the differences between the assessment activities.

ESG 2.3 (Criteria for decisions): substantial compliance

AKKORK should fully publish its criteria on its website in a more easily accessible and clear manner.

ESG 2.4 (Processes fit for purpose): substantial compliance

AKKORK should ensure that students are part of the review team for each assessment.

ESG 2.5 (Reporting): substantial compliance

AKKORK should publish all of its review reports on its website, including those at institutional level and negative ones.

ESG 2.6 (Follow-up procedures): partial compliance

AKKORK should ensure that there is a structured follow-up mechanism for each of its reviews. This should be made part of the contract signed with the HEI.

ESG 2.7 (Periodic reviews): substantial compliance

AKKORK should consider extending the validity for all its accreditations to avoid accreditation fatigue in universities.

ESG 2.8 (System-wide analyses): substantial compliance

AKKORK should disseminate its analytical reports to HEIs and among stakeholders in a more efficient and consistent way.

ENQA membership criterion 1b / ESG 3.3 (Activities): substantial compliance

AKKORK should continue to ensure that consultancy services and external quality assurance are not offered at the same HEI within a reasonable timeframe.

ENQA membership criterion 2 / ESG 3.2 (Official status): full compliance

ENQA membership criterion 3 / ESG 3.4 (Resources): full compliance

ENQA membership criterion 4 / ESG 3.5 (Mission statement): full compliance

ENQA membership criterion 5 / ESG 3.6 (Independence): full compliance

ENQA membership criterion 6 / ESG 3.7 (External QA criteria and processes used by the agencies): substantial compliance

AKKORK should clearly determine its appeals procedure and make it available on its website.

AKKORK should ensure that there is a structured follow-up mechanism for each of its reviews. This should be made part of the contract signed with the HEI.

AKKORK should publish all of its review reports on its website, including those at institutional level and negative ones.

AKKORK should fully publish its criteria on its website in a more easily accessible and clear manner.

AKKORK should ensure that students are part of the review team for each assessment.

ENQA membership criterion 7 / ESG 3.8 (Mission statement): substantial compliance

AKKORK should officially adopt that it will undergo an external review at least every five years.

AKKORK should develop a mechanism to ensure that staff and members of AKKORK's bodies do not have any conflict of interest with regard to reviews they are involved in / decide about.

ENQA membership criterion 8 (Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims): substantial compliance

AKKORK should clearly determine its appeals procedure and make it available on its website.

To reference the recommendations listed above in this report, the panel followed the mapping between ESG 2005 and 2015 from the EQUIP project¹.

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2019 external review of AKKORK was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of AKKORK was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Heli Mattisen (Chair), Director of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education, Estonia (ENQA nominee)
- Hermann Blum (Secretary), PhD Student at ETH Zürich, Switzerland (ESU nominee)
- Tatjana Volkova, Professor at the BA School of Business and Finance, Latvia (EUA nominee)
- Paul Zevenbergen, Member of the Executive Board at the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders, The Netherlands (ENQA nominee)

Goran Dakovic coordinated the review on behalf of the ENQA Secretariat. The panel is thankful to his important support, which was a decisive factor in allowing the panel to process the review in a well-structured way and ensure consistency with other reports.

Self-assessment report

AKKORK started the compilation of the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) in October 2018. The self-assessment was organized by a core team of eight people comprising staff of the agency as well as stakeholders that serve in the agencies bodies, including representatives of students, employers and higher education institutions (HEIs). After general discussions, a first draft was created by three members of the senior management. The report was continuously discussed in weekly meetings. Based on the first draft, feedback was gathered from the AKKORK Advisory Board. The final report was approved by the Advisory Board and the International Accreditation Council.

The SAR was compiled to evaluate compliance with the ESG 2015 and the EQAR 'Use and Interpretation of the ESG'. The self-assessment was additionally used to analyse the compatibility of the ESG 2015 with recent changes in the Russian legal framework.

The SAR is structured following the ENQA Guidelines and contains an introduction to the agency and the legal framework, a description of the different QA activities within the ToR, an evaluation of compliance with the ESG, the content of the follow-up letter sent to ENQA as part of the previous review, and a SWOT analysis.

In April 2019, the panel received the final SAR on 86 pages and supported with 11 annexes.

Site visit

The site visit took place at the offices of AKKORK in Moscow on June 3-6 2019. The first day served for an internal meeting of the panel to discuss the SAR and prepare the panel's organisation for the following days, as well as to continue the preparation of the upcoming interviews. During this preparation there was also a meeting with the agency's resource person to clarify on broader questions, helping the panel to understand the system under which AKKORK works as well as to gain relevant background information regarding the organisational structure of AKKORK.

¹ http://www.equip-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/EQUIP_comparative-analysis-ESG-2015-ESG-2005.pdf

Between June 4 and 6, there were altogether 17 meetings with staff of the agency and different stakeholders. These meetings included talking to:

- AKKORK Director General
- the management team
- agency staff
- members of the Supervisory Board, the Advisory Council and the International Accreditation Council
- a representative from the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science (FS)
- heads of reviewed HEIs
- quality assurance officers of reviewed HEIs
- representatives of the pool of reviewers, including students, professionals and international experts
- a part-time project manager
- a representative of a student organisation
- representatives of employer organisations.

A full list of meetings including the names of interviewees can be found in Annex 1 to this report.

The atmosphere of the interviews was constructive and questions were raised and replied to openly. The panel appreciates the openness of interviewees also in presenting future-oriented ideas that underlie the potential of the organisation towards further enhancement. AKKORK supported the success of the site visit not only by inviting a diverse set of interviewees, but also by creating this positive atmosphere, for which the panel is grateful.

Some members of the interviewed groups required translation from English to Russian. Hence, translation was used in some interviews. Only a few interviews were conducted also via video conferencing. The panel was aware of this in advance and the overall timeline of the programme was planned accordingly. The interpreter was independent and ENQA agreed to include the selected interpreter prior to the site visit. The panel recognizes the important role of the interpreter for the efficient implementation of the site visit.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The basis for regulations regarding higher education and quality assurance in the Russian Federation (RF) is the law “On Education” from 1992, which has been amended several times. In 2013, an amendment to the law introduced some changes in the area of quality assurance through independent organisations, as independent accreditation had not been the subject of national laws previously. The latest amendment from 2018 split the responsibility for higher education and vocational education into two different ministries: The Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russia and the RF Ministry of Education. The state QA body “RF Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science” (FS) was put under direct jurisdiction of the RF Government.

The following levels of education as defined in RF law are of relevance to the agency:

- secondary vocational education
- NQF level 6: bachelor’s degree
- NQF level 7: master’s degree, specialist’s degree (for engineering)
- NQF level 8: PhD degree
- NQF level 9: Doctor of Science degree

Not defined explicitly by law or aligned with the NQF, but relevant to the agencies operations are also:

- Master of Business Administration (MBA)
- secondary professional education

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The law on education specifies four types of quality assurance:

- state accreditation
- professional-public accreditation
- public accreditation
- independent quality assessment

None of these types of quality assurance is compulsory, but a higher education institution (HEI) that does not have state accreditation enjoys only limited rights, e.g. not issuing state recognised diplomas, which are a requirement to be employed in the public service sector. It is, however, a requirement for any HEI to obtain licensing by the FS.

State accreditation is carried under the authority of the FS by the National Accreditation Agency (NAA). State accreditation is granted to the study programmes of HEIs that meet the Federal State Educational Standards.

Professional-public accreditation can be awarded by employers or employers' associations. Accreditation is granted on the basis of professional standards and requirements of the labour market in the areas of the profession. The necessary assessment work can be conducted by the awarding organization themselves or by an authorized agency, such as AKKORK. The professional-public accreditation is also exclusively granted at programme level.

Public accreditation can be awarded by any Russian or foreign organization. The HEIs obtaining public accreditation need to prove conformance with the standards set by organisation that accredits them. Educational institutions can acquire public accreditation in various Russian, foreign and international institutions. Public accreditation is the recognition of the level of educational institution's activities conforming to the criteria and requirements of Russian, foreign and international institutions. The procedure of public accreditation, ways and techniques of evaluation and also rights given to the accredited educational institution is set by the public institution to be executing public accreditation.

Independent quality assessments can be conducted and awarded by any organization. The assessment follows the form and criteria specified by the conducting organization. It aims to determine whether the HEI conforms with the set requirements.

State accreditation cannot be replaced by any of the other procedures. However, with recent changes in the law, results of independent assessment of student learning outcomes must be taken into account within the state accreditation (§95 RF Law 'On Education').

While there are no restrictions on which organizations can conduct assessments, in particular public accreditation and independent quality assessment, there is also no official register of organizations and agencies that operate in the sector and perform different kinds of evaluations, with the exception of professional-public accreditation. There is a state information system for monitoring professional-public accreditation which serves as a list of organizations conducting professional-public accreditation.

AKKORK

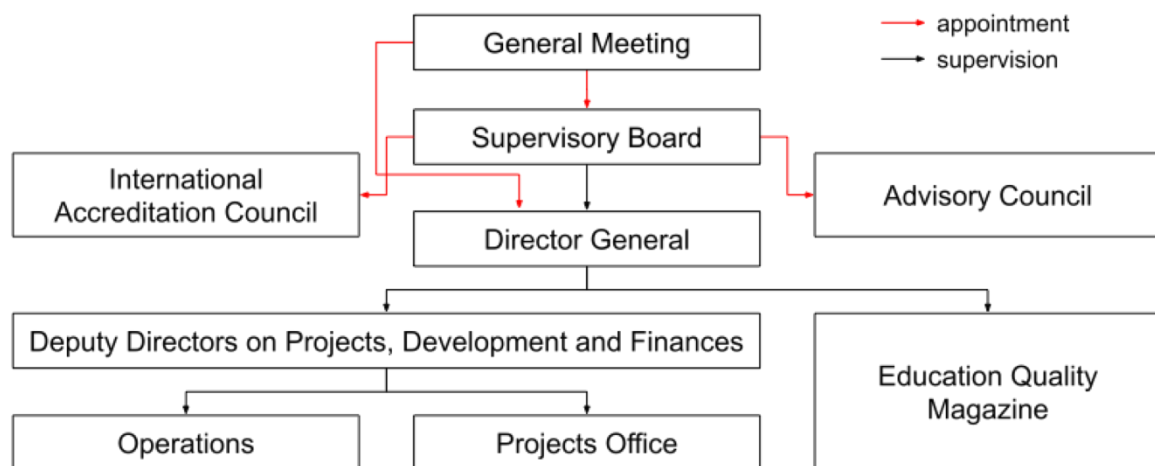
AKKORK was established in 2005 as an autonomous non-profit organisation in order to function as an independent quality assurance agency. The legal founders of AKKORK are two limited liability companies named “Obrazovanie cherez vsu zhizn” (Lifelong learning) and “Garantii kachestva” (Quality assurance). While they founded AKKORK and regularly supply financial support to the agency, they are not the proprietors of AKKORK.

The focus of AKKORK lays on the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms that are more in line with European, Bologna compatible, and international standards and therefore go beyond the assessments that are undertaken by FS. The idea is to support both public and private HEIs in Russia that want to reform themselves in line with international developments. AKKORK thus understands itself as an innovator within the Russian HE system. The knowledge of AKKORK has been recognised by public authorities which means that AKKORK is included in discussions and working groups dealing with system-wide reforms in the RF. In addition, the agency has influence in the discussions regarding the law on education. Since 2018, the Director-general of AKKORK is a member of the expert body of the States Duma Education Committee.

Between 2005 and 2018, AKKORK has assessed more than 150 HEIs in Russia, with a few examples of Russian HEIs outside of the RF borders.

AKKORK’S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

AKKORK is structured as indicated in the following organizational chart:



The General Meeting is the assembly of the founders of AKKORK. The founders are the two private companies ‘Life-Long Education’ and ‘Quality Assurance’ that are represented by one person each.

The Supervisory Board oversees the strategy and policies of AKKORK. It meets at least once every year with two meetings in 2018. The chair of this body is elected by the Supervisory Board itself. The board is responsible to evaluate activities of AKKORK and to set directions for the future development of the agency. The members of the supervisory board are representatives of employers’ organisations, but in some cases also academics. The Supervisory Board appoints the Advisory Council and the International Accreditation Council.

The International Accreditation Council carries out accreditation decisions for procedures where no other organization is responsible for this. It is composed of QA experts and academics, without student members.

The Advisory Council is responsible for the reviews, in particular the reports. All reports of evaluations carried out by AKKORK need approval of the Advisory Council. The council consists of academics, professionals, AKKORK reviewers and a student. Candidates for new council members are discussed in the Advisory Council. The Advisory Council elects its chair.

In practice, most of the members of the three above bodies are elected based on propositions by the Director General.

In total, AKKORK has five full time staff members working on its QA activities: The Director General, the three Deputies and one project manager. Another team of three people is responsible for the Education Quality Magazine published by AKKORK four times per year. The rest of staff members support operations, such as Accounting and IT.

AKKORK'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

The terminology introduced in this chapter is defined by the panel in order to find names for the different procedures that are descriptive and not too long to be used in this report. They are based on terminology used in the interviews. For each procedure, we also refer to the name of the procedure in the SAR.

AKKORK has defined the following external QA procedures on the programme level

- independent accreditation (on the programme level)
- professional-public accreditation
- joint international accreditation of study programmes

and on the institutional level

- independent accreditation on the institutional level
- independent quality assurance system audit (IQAS)

There also exists e-learning accreditation, which can be granted to e-learning systems on the levels of faculties or institutions. In cases where there is only one e-learning programme at a faculty, this accreditation only includes this single programme.

All offered procedures are voluntary for HEIs.

Independent accreditation on the programme level

The “independent evaluation of education quality on the programme level” assesses the learning outcomes of a programme and the institutional conditions around this programme on the basis of the ‘AKKORK Criteria’. Under the terminology of Russian law it is an independent quality assessment. The review panel consists of five members, including a student, a project manager from AKKORK, usually an expert from the field of work, and sometimes an international expert. The accreditation is issued by the International Accreditation Council of AKKORK. The decision can be accreditation, conditional accreditation or no accreditation and the validity of the accreditation can vary between one and six years for Bachelor programmes and one and four years for Master programmes.

Professional-Public accreditation (of study programmes)

The “independent evaluation of education quality for professional-public programme accreditation” assesses the learning outcomes of a programme and the institutional conditions around this programme, based on parts of the ‘AKKORK Criteria’.

The review panel consists of five members, including a student, a project manager from AKKORK, an expert from the field of work, and sometimes an international expert. The accreditation is issued by a professional organization recognized by the state and the certification can be taken into account by the committee performing state accreditation. The accreditation decision by the professional organisation is based on the organisations own criteria, using a subset of the “AKKORK Criteria”.

Reports and accreditation decisions for this activity can be published in the State System of Monitoring of professional-public accreditations² (Автоматизированная информационная система мониторинга результатов профессионально-общественной аккредитации образовательных программ, also called the ‘central database’ in this report).

Joint international accreditation of study programmes

The “international accreditation of education programmes” is carried out in cooperation with one of AKKORK’s foreign partner agencies. The procedure follows the methodology of the partner agency. The panel of seven members (SAR p. 31) is composed jointly out of Russian experts from the AKKORK’s database and experts selected by the partner agency. The panel always includes a student. Two different accreditations can be issued: the foreign partner agency issues an accreditation, according to its own methodology; the AKKORK International Accreditation Council can also issue the AKKORK accreditation, if requested by the institution.

E-learning accreditation

The “international e-learning accreditation”, also called “european UNIQUE quality seal for e-learning” in the SAR, serves the particular needs of e-learning programmes and is based on the European project “UNIQUE”, which ended in 2014. The label itself does not exist anymore, but the methodology is used by the agency based on an agreement with the former project organisation. The review panel consists of four members including a student.

The accreditation is issued by the International Accreditation Council. The decision can be accreditation, conditional accreditation or no accreditation and the validity of the accreditation can vary based on the fulfilment of mandatory and additional criteria between three and five years.

Independent accreditation on the institutional level

The “independent evaluation of education quality on the institutional level” follows the same methodology as the independent accreditation of study programmes, however, only the part that looks at the institutional conditions around study programmes (i.e. the second part of the ‘AKKORK Criteria’).

The accreditation is issued by the International Accreditation Council. The decision can be accreditation, conditional accreditation or no accreditation and the validity of the accreditation can vary between three and five years.

IQAS

The “internal quality assurance system audit and accreditation” (IQAS) evaluates the internal QA system of a HEI. The methodology follows a multi-standard approach and includes criteria from ESG, EFQM, ISO-9001 2015 and UNIQUE.

² <https://accredpoa.ru/accreditors/index/view/id/1#collapse851>

The accreditation is issued by the International Accreditation Council. The decision can be accreditation, conditional accreditation or no accreditation and the validity of the accreditation can vary between three and five years.

When the agency conducts a procedure at a certain HEI to e.g. professional-public accreditation of a programme, this is called a 'project' both in the SAR and this report. Every project is a single procedure. In practice, the procedures on the programme level are often combined. The most common contract between AKKORK and a HEI includes many projects for the assessments of multiple programmes and may include both professional-public and independent accreditations for some of the programmes, based on the same expert panel's assessments.

AKKORK was entitled to conduct evaluations for state accreditations on request of the FS until 2016. Currently the agency is applying to be approved again to do this.

For professional-public accreditations, AKKORK has contracts with 15 different professional organizations that are officially recognized to grant such accreditations:

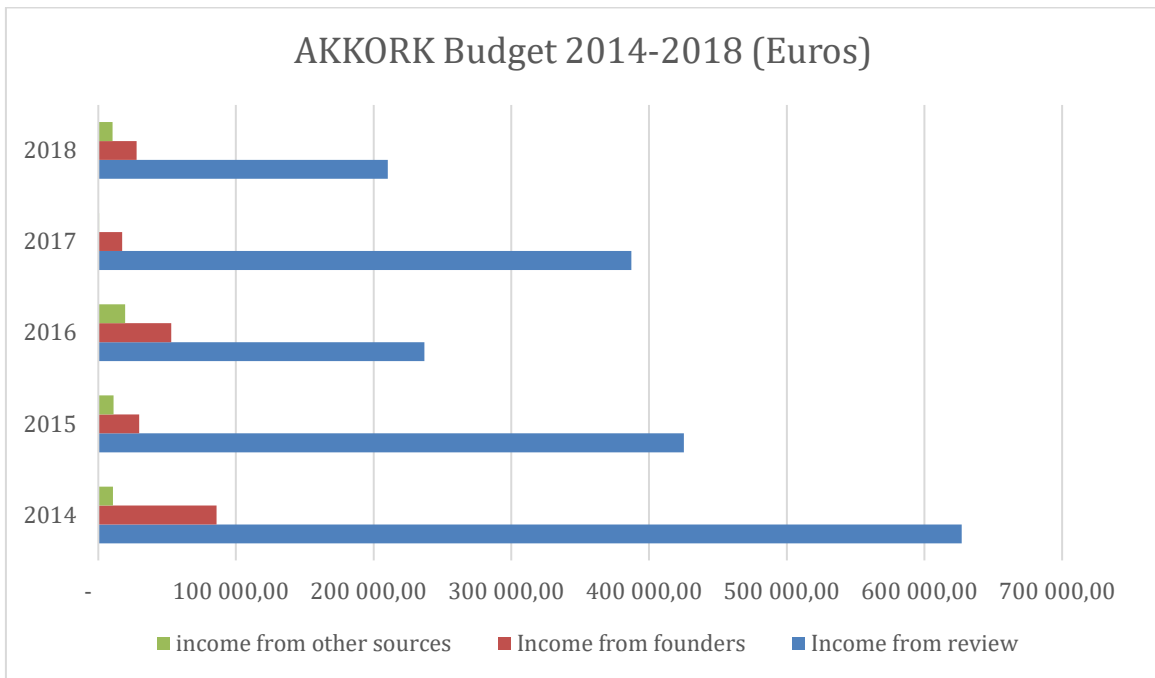
- Russian Engineering Union
- All-Russian Public Organization of Small and Medium Enterprises (OPORA ROSSII)
- Association of Russian Managers
- Russia association of employers 'Union of Machine Builders of Russia' (SoyuzMash)
- Association of Computer and Information Technologies (APKIT)
- Association of Geological Organizations (AGO)
- Association of Employers of Electrical Engineering (REAL)
- Council for Professional Qualifications of Financial Markets (SPKFR)
- NefteGazConsult
- Society of Social Sciences (OSS)
- Union of Russian Translators (SPR)
- The Russian Psychological Society
- Institute of Radioengineering and Electronics by the Russian Academy of Science
- Siberian Geotechnical Partnership
- International Consortium of Professional Communities

AKKORK produces and publishes the Russian magazine "Education Quality" with four editions per year. The magazine contains articles from the agency and stakeholders related to topics of QA in higher education.

The agency is active in a number of international organizations, such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), where AKKORK's Director General is a member of the board. In 2018, AKKORK was a co-organizer of a regional consultation meeting for Eastern Europe and Central Asia where the report of UNESCO and INQAAHE on the state of QA procedures in the region was presented. AKKORK will also be the host of the INQAAHE biennial Forum in 2020.

AKKORK'S FUNDING

The primary source of income of the agency are the voluntary QA procedures implemented at HEIs. One 'project contract' with a HEI contains a number of different procedures contracted with AKKORK, e.g. for different study programmes. In addition, subscriptions to the Education Quality magazine are an additional sources of income for the agency. In case of a deficit, the agency regularly signs contracts for loans with its two founding organizations.



The above graph from the SAR (p. 50) shows the development of the agency's financial situation between the years 2014 and 2018. A more detailed analysis of this situation is provided under ESG 3.5.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF AKKORK WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

2014 review recommendation

“AKKORK should continue to ensure that consultancy services and external quality assurance are not offered at the same HEI within a reasonable timeframe.”

Evidence

Between 2014 and 2018, AKKORK has conducted 340 QA procedures. The detailed number of the agency activities per year are presented in table 1 below, following the SAR (p. 24).

Procedure	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Independent accreditation (on the programme level)	5	21	5	20	11
Professional-public accreditation	58	51	42	53	16
Joint international accreditation	5	11	1	19	19
E-learning accreditation	1	0	1	0	0
Independent accreditation on the institutional level	0	0	0	0	0
IQAS	1	0	0	0	0

Table 1: External QA Procedures conducted by AKKORK between 2014 and 2018

AKKORK’s mission is defined on the landing page of AKKORK’s website and in the Internal Regulations as: “The mission of AKKORK is to form and develop in Russia an independent system of education quality assessment and assurance that corresponds to the principles of the Bologna declaration and the world best practices.” On the English website, there is a document on the agency’s goals and objectives available together with the mission. The document lists its last revision in 2013. When asked about the agency’s mission, the staff stated that the agency’s mission is to promote the ESG and the involvement of stakeholders in HEIs.

One of the goals listed in the document on the agency's goals and objectives is "consulting [the] leadership of education institutions". However, the agency staff explained in the SAR and confirmed during the site visit that AKKORK does not offer consultancy services since 2015 (SAR pp. 76f.).

The panel further learned that there is an ongoing pilot of an evaluation by AKKORK outside of Russia. The Director General informed the panel that AKKORK might change its mission based on this pilot activity.

The panel was also supplied with a strategic plan for 2018-2020 that outlines the strategic and financial goals of the agency within this period. According to the document, one major goal of the agency is the compilation of video material for promotion of external QA and in general of QA practices to HEIs. This finding did not match with the statements by representatives of the Supervisory Board, who described the future strategy of the agency being the promotion and evaluation of the involvement of stakeholders in the design of study programmes in Russian HEIs.

Projects (as called by the agency), are usually a combination of multiple QA procedures at one HEI, and are the primary source of income for the agency. The panel learned that the Deputy on Development is responsible for the planning of projects, and plans these one to two years ahead. This translates into more concrete financial planning and budgeting of the ongoing year, which, as the panel learned, is done in the senior management team under the responsibility of the Deputy on Finances.

When the panel investigated the strategic response of AKKORK on the decreasing number of evaluations, the panel found that this is not a concern neither of the Supervisory Board nor the agency staff. The panel learned that no specific strategic or financial plan exists in this regard at the agency. Nevertheless, the agency staff stated that statistics by year do not accurately show the development of projects, which usually last for more than one year, and that they do not identify a long-term decrease in project numbers. The panel further learned from the detailed budget that the financial goals as set by the agency for 2018 were met (Strategic Plan 2018-2020, Detailed Budget).

The panel was told during the interviews that stakeholders are involved in the agency's governance and work through the agency bodies. The Supervisory Board includes academics and representatives of professional organizations. The Advisory Council additionally includes a student member. Members of the Supervisory Board are proposed by the Director General to the General Meeting, which then selects the members. Members of the Advisory Council are proposed by the Director General to the Supervisory Board, which then selects members of the Advisory Council. The panel did not learn about any cases when members of the two bodies would be proposed by other stakeholders and not the Director General.

Analysis

AKKORK is regularly conducting activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG. The main activities are independent accreditation, professional-public accreditation of programmes and joint international accreditation. The other procedures are not conducted often or were even never conducted since 2014. The panel's analysis of Part 2 of the ESG (see this report) overall shows that this correlates with deficits of the procedures definition, documentation and published information for these activities that are not conducted often.

The mission statement of AKKORK is prominently placed on the website. However, the panel learned that the related goals and objectives are harder to access online. The only published version of the agency's goals is outdated (from 2013) and does not fully align with the agency's current activities, such as the point on consultancy. While the panel acknowledges that the staff identifies itself with the

mission, it could not find evidence on how the mission is translated into the strategic plans, aims or objectives of the agency.

The panel recognizes that the agency’s daily activities on conducting the external QA evaluations for Russian HEIs and offering a related magazine are evidently connected to the mission of AKKORK. However, it is unclear to the panel who in the agency is responsible for developing a strategy based on which the procedures are offered and how they are developed.

Stakeholders are part of multiple bodies of AKKORK. The Advisory Council counts academics, professionals and students as members and is an integral part of every QA procedure conducted by AKKORK. The Supervisory Board includes stakeholders in the strategic planning of AKKORK, to the extent that such strategic planning exists. The Supervisory Board does not include a student member. While formally the members of these bodies are appointed by other independent bodies, it is the Director General that has an important informal role in searching and proposing candidates for the respective bodies.

Panel recommendations

The agency should align its mission statement and connected goals and objectives with its current activities and the strategy.

The agency should develop a regular process of strategic planning that translates its mission into the comprehensive and targeted plans.

The existing cooperation with stakeholder organisations should be used to develop a system of proposing candidates to the AKKORK bodies by the stakeholders themselves.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

The consistency of the website can be improved by publishing information about the goals and objectives (which are part of the agency’s mission statement) also on the Russian website.

The involvement of stakeholders could be broadened to involve students in all bodies where the other representatives from professional organisations and HEIs are present.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

2014 review recommendation: None.

Evidence

AKKORK was founded as a non-profit private organisation (Federal Law from January 12, 1996, N 7-FL “On Non-Profit Organizations”)and is a legally independent entity.

The Russian Federation has no official register of agencies that work in the domain of voluntary accreditation or independent quality assessment as defined by law. Furthermore, AKKORK was officially recognized until 2016 to carry out state accreditations upon the invitation of the FS. However,

the agency did not reapply for this recognition in 2016 but only recently. During the site visit, the panel learned that the agency was now in the application process, which was confirmed by the FS.

Professional organisations that can grant professional-public accreditation need official recognition as they need to be part of the RF Presidential Council for Professional Qualifications. AKKORK has contracts with 15 such organisations to carry out assessment procedures on their behalf and provide reports as the basis for their decision making. According to the central database for professional-public accreditations, AKKORK has worked with 7 of these organisations between 2014 and 2018.

The panel learned in the interviews that reviewers for the state accreditation may ask for AKKORK reports from previous voluntary QA assessments of the HEI, but are not required to take them into account. According to both the FS and HEIs, this depends in practice on the specific reviewers.

The FS described to the panel a new law that is currently under development. According to this plan, the professional standards are more tightly linked into the criteria of state accreditation. In case such professional standards were already checked in a professional-public accreditation carried out e.g. by AKKORK, this result can be used in the state accreditation. The law is planned for the end of 2019.

The panel acknowledges that the agency is recognized as a partner in the RF higher education system by the stakeholders the panel met, in particular the FS.

In Addition, AKKORK is ongoing a pilot assessment at a HEI in Armenia. The panel further discusses the implications of this under ESG 2.3. Following the pilot procedure, the panel learned that the agency will consider whether to provide services in other legal systems in near future.

Analysis

The panel acknowledges that the agency has a clearly defined legal status. Its activities are explicitly defined by law as part of quality assurance for HEIs in RF. Given the nature of voluntary external QA activities of the agency, it is the formal legal recognition of the outcomes of the agency's activities by public authorities that prove the agency's official recognition. For the professional-public accreditations, it is additionally the professional organizations as competent public authorities that formally recognise the agency through contracts for performing evaluations as part of the accreditations granted by these professional organizations.

Panel commendation

AKKORK is recognized by professional organisations of different sectors to carry out professional-public accreditation procedures on their behalf.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

2014 review recommendation: None.

Evidence

AKKORK is a legally independent non-profit organisation. It was founded by the two private companies 'Obrazovanie Cherez Vsyu Zhizn' ('Life-Long Education') (OGRN 1107746831390, VAT 772570522) and 'Garantii Kachestva' ('Quality Assurance') (OGRN 1107746831390, VAT 7743766581) (SAR p. 14).

Representatives of these two companies form the 'General Meeting', which by the agency's statutes appoints all governing bodies of the organisation as well as the Director General. While the SAR does not mention the General Meeting as the highest body of the agency, this was confirmed to the panel during the site visit. The appointment of the Supervisory Board members is performed based on proposals from the Director General.

By law 'On non-profit organizations' in the RF, that regulates AKKORK as a non-profit organization, the founders of an independent non-profit organisation shall not interfere with the operations of this organisation. The panel learned from meeting minutes and verbal confirmation during the site visit, that the only body of the agency that is appointed by the General Meeting (and therefore the founding companies) is the Supervisory Board and not the Advisory Council or the International Accreditation Council. The other two bodies are appointed by the Supervisory Board and not by the General Meeting. This stands in contradiction with the statutes of AKKORK, which say that all members of these three bodies are elected by the General Meeting (AKKORK Statutes, p. 6). However, the statutes document was last revised in 2013 and also does not mention the 'International Accreditation Council', but only the 'Accreditation Council', which was an accreditation body without international members and does not exist anymore.

QA operations are carried out by project managers and reviewers. Project managers are hired by the Director General or contracted as freelancers following special training. All reviewers and the composition of the panels need to be approved by the Advisory Council. In case that a project contains activities outside the scope of the ESG, such as the assessment of vocational education, the panels of these activities are completely separated from the activities under the scope of the ESG.

The Advisory Council approves reports and can mark reviewers as problematic in case their report does not supply sufficient evidence or that the evidence contradicts the reviewers ratings of compliance. Furthermore, AKKORK also has a system in place to publish reviewers on a blacklist in cases of severe interference with the agency's code of conduct, such as accepting bribery. However, the panel learned that this practice has not been used so far.

Outcome decisions are made by different bodies as described in this paragraph. For AKKORK, all decisions are taken by the International Accreditation Council. The respective certification carries AKKORK's name. For joint international accreditation, the foreign partner agency takes a decision in its respective body (SAR p. 32). For professional-public accreditation, the accreditation decision is taken by a body of the professional organisation (SAR p. 30). The reports for professional-public accreditation published in the central database for professional-public accreditation³(see ESG 2.6)

³ accredpoa.ru/accreditors/index/view/id/1#collapse851

however do not refer to AKKORK as the conducting agency. How decisions are made by the partner organisation is outlined in the contract between AKKORK and the professional organisation in question. The panel was shown one such contract.

The panel learned that AKKORK does not perform consultancy activities since the last ENQA review. Nevertheless, the agency does conduct activities named 'seminars'. These are:

- Information about AKKORK QA activities for HEIs. These seminars are also part of the introduction of an accreditation at a HEI.
- Training of review experts.

Agency staff also described plans to implement 'masterclasses'. These will be classes or video tutorials about quality in education given by reviewers to HEIs and paid for by HEIs. The reviewers tutoring such masterclasses would be different persons than the ones conducting AKKORK reviews at that same HEI. The masterclasses are planned to be developed by AKKORK in 2020 (AKKORK Strategic Plan 2018-2020).

Analysis

Organisational Independence

Concerning the agency's structure of bodies, the panel followed the evidence as gathered during the site visit, as the information in the SAR was insufficiently presented (e.g. SAR does not mention the General Meeting). In addition, the panel recognizes that the statutes formally give the General Meeting much more power over the activities of the agency than indicated by the various statements as gathered during the interviews. As the document containing the statutes was last revised in 2013 and the statements collected by the panel during the visit all supported a different structure than outlined by the statutes, the panel is convinced that the actual structure of and relations between the governing bodies differ from the ones presented in the statutes. This means for the organizational independence that the founding companies only have influence on the Supervisory Board and the Director General, not on the Advisory Council and International Accreditation Council, which are the bodies directly involved in QA activities.

Furthermore, the law 'On non-profit organizations' defines the founders as 'members' of the agency. They are therefore not third parties. The panel further concludes that there is no influence of third parties in the organisational structure of the agency.

Operational Independence

The agency is legally independent in its operations. As a formal non-for-profit body it is independent from both the state and HEIs. By law and in practice (as described above), the agency's activities are also out of influence of the founders and the agency holds the full responsibility for its operations.

Independence of Formal Outcomes

From the analysis of the organisational structure presented above the panel concludes that there is no direct influence of the founders on the bodies that are involved in QA activities and therefore also no direct influence on the QA procedures or their outcomes.

For the professional-public accreditations, it is the professional organisations that issue accreditations based on the agency's reports. The accreditation decision is not made by AKKORK. The only outcome of the activity in this case is the report delivered to the professional organisation. In order to take full responsibility for this outcome, the published report has to refer to the agency that produced it. The reports on professional-public accreditation that were produced by AKKORK and that were found by

the panel in the central database do not mention AKKORK. In addition, the panel notes that as a legally independent entity, the agency can always decide independently with which organisation it negotiates or ends contracts for professional-public accreditations.

Panel recommendations

All reports and other outcomes of AKKORK's external QA procedures should clearly indicate AKKORK as the conducting agency.

The statutes should reflect the actual structure of the agency, especially that the General Meeting does not elect any members of the Advisory Council or the International Accreditation Council.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

2014 review recommendation

"AKKORK should disseminate its analytical reports to HEIs and among stakeholders in a more efficient and consistent way."

Evidence

Since 2015, AKKORK's Internal Regulations demand that the agency publishes thematic analysis every three years (see Internal Regulations, point 1.10). Once a year, AKKORK will also publish an analytical report about its activities of the previous year (Internal Regulations, point 1.9). The drafting of such annual analytical report would be discussed in a long regular staff meeting in December and then published in January or February next year. As part of this discussion, general trends and themes interesting for thematic analyses would be identified. The panel learned that some of these themes have been used for the agency's previous thematic analyses.

The panel found the annual analytical reports for period 2014-2018 available on the agency's website (on the Russian version of it). However, the reports from 2015 on were published in Word format and did not indicate the title nor authors of the documents. The reports from 2015 on were also only published recently, after the panel received the SAR.

Since the 2014 ENQA review, the agency has produced two thematic analyses:

- Employers' participation in study programs realization
- Students' participation in study programs realization

The first report is based on common points of the recommendations given in the AKKORK reports and deals with the problem of correlating study programmes with the labour market demands. The second report deals with challenges of students not being acknowledged as equal participants in programme realization. According to the AKKORK's annual analytical report of 2018 and reports from the agency's activities also before 2018, student participation was marked by reviewers as a major area for improvement in many reports. This outlines the connection between findings from review reports, annual reports of the agency, and the produced thematic analysis.

Both thematic analyses are in Russian and are published on the English website of AKKORK (interestingly, the reports are not available on the Russian part of the agency's website). The reports were produced and published in 2018 (according to the SAR, p. 48), but the panel found the documents published only at the end of the site visit. The published documents lack information about the publication date and the authors. Nevertheless, the panel notes that the first thematic analysis was also published in the 2019 issue of the Education Quality magazine (volume 2019, no. 1). The agency staff explained to the panel that future thematic analyses will also be published in the same magazine.

The panel learned that the annual analytical reports or the thematic analyses are not used internally by the agency. The representatives of the Advisory Council were unaware of the existence of such analyses nor of the general trends in findings from reports presented through these documents. According to the agency staff, each thematic analysis is rather used as a tool of promotion and a resource for researchers in HE. HEIs and the FS welcomed the existence and content of the Education Quality magazine.

Reports that are resulting from joint international accreditations are not connected into the described process of thematic analysis.

Analysis

The panel found one piece of thematic analysis, i.e. the "Employers' participation in study programs realization", to match the expectation of the ESG to be an analysis that is based on general findings of the agency's activities and be published to reach the relevant stakeholders. This thematic analysis was published in the beginning of 2019. The agency therefore came close to its self-set goal from 2015 to publish a thematic analysis every three years. Given the explanation of the processes that lead to such analysis and the resources the agency has in this regard, the panel is positive that the agency can fulfil the goal of publishing one thematic analysis every three years also in future.

The panel found that the second piece of thematic analysis, only existing as a Word document in Russian without publication date or authors published only on the English website of the agency and only during the site visit did not match the expectation of the ESG. In particular, the panel notes the great qualitative difference in the publication of these documents, indicating a missing systematic approach to publication. Both documents were finalized in the same year (2018) according to the SAR (p. 48).

The panel also recognizes the value of the Education Quality magazine among the agency's stakeholders. Given the amount of work that is put into the thematic analysis on one side, and the relevance of the magazine on the other, it is therefore unclear to the panel why not all thematic analyses are published in this magazine.

The panel notes that there is no indication that the thematic analysis would be used internally by the agency staff. While the panel learned that the agency shares the processes of preparing the thematic analysis and revising the agency's accreditation methodologies, it remains unclear to the panel why these processes would not be further interlinked.

Following the panel's interpretation of the ESG 3.4, it is necessary for full compliance with the standard that the findings of all relevant types of the agency's external QA activities are analysed thematically. In particular, to make reliable conclusions about general trends in a system, all findings from similar activities (e.g. all kinds of programme accreditation) should be taken into account. However, the panel

found out that while the joint international accreditation is the second most conducted procedure in 2018, its outcomes are not used for thematic analysis.

In conclusion, the panel is convinced, based on the evidence collected, that the agency produces thematic analysis regularly. However, given the resources the agency allocates to publish a well-known magazine to the sector, the panel believes more can be done to use the available distribution channels and resources to their full potential. In particular, the two thematic analyses listed in the SAR were found very different in their quality of their publication, showing that a systematic approach is missing. In addition, it became evident that findings from joint international accreditations of programmes have not been included in the analysis.

Panel commendation

The panel commends the agency for publishing the Education Quality magazine that is perceived as a well-established publication in the higher education community of Russia.

Panel recommendations

All published documents of thematic analysis should clearly indicate the title, author, and date of publication.

The agency should establish a clear process to address all of its activities in thematic analyses (e.g. the joint international accreditations) and to distribute the outcomes of such analyses to its stakeholders in a coherent way.

Panel suggestion for further improvement

Contributing to the fulfilment of the agency's mission statement, thematic analyses can be published through more means of distribution. These could be for example the website, conferences, etc.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

2014 review recommendation: None.

Evidence

Out of 12 members of the agency staff listed in the SAR (p. 20), five work full time on the QA-related activities of AKKORK. Three other staff members are responsible for the magazine. The staff working on QA matters includes the senior management team (consisting of the Director General and three Deputies) and one project manager. Apart from agency staff, the team working on QA related activities is supported by freelance project managers covering two or three projects per year (the term project here refers to a collection of external QA activities). When asked about the opportunities for staff development, the panel was told that the staff is offered various possibilities to attend conferences, such as the European Quality Assurance Forum, and learn by shadowing the work of the Director General.

The Director General described the circumstances that the agency was able to hire English speaking

staff members in the most recent hires as a good sign of competitiveness of the agency on the labour market.

Related to the financial resources of the agency, the agency notes that the main income of the organisation are its external QA projects. The number of external QA activities of the agency has been steadily decreasing since 2014 (see table 1) and in 2018 the income from these activities was only a third of the income in 2014 (SAR, p. 50). During the site visit, the panel gathered a couple of explanations for such dramatic decrease. In general, the agency explained that the income from projects is subject to seasonal changes. The main contractors of AKKORK that have undergone the agency's accreditations in previous years are not yet due for re-accreditation. Once these accreditations expire, the agency is positive that these HEIs will come back for re-accreditations. Moreover, the legislation on spending public money in the RF has changed recently and universities are still adapting to the new rules. This means that while HEIs were learning to adapt to new legislation, public competitions where AKKORK would participate to win projects were delayed, and in turn less projects could start recently.

The income from projects is necessary to cross-fund other activities of the agency such as training for review experts, expenses of the magazine that cannot be covered by the subscription fees and basic operational costs. The agency's budget, which the panel checked for the years 2015-2018, does list higher total expenses than there exists revenue from projects. This deficit is always addressed by acquiring the loans from the founding organizations. The Director General stated that the agency can count of the founding organisations to provide such loans, if needed, for the next 10 to 20 years. The agency was not able to provide further written evidence on this during the site-visit that would formalize this (informal) agreement between the agency and its founding organisations.

According to the newest strategic document (AKKORK Strategic Plan 2018-2020), AKKORK set itself the goal to produce 8-10 million rub. net profit from QA procedures in every year between 2018 and 2020. The panel confirms with the provided financial documents (AKKORK Detailed Budget 2015-2018), that AKKORK did reach this goal in 2018.

In order to plan for and generate income, active advertising of its services is part of regular activity at the agency and the particular responsibility of the deputy on development. This is the particular responsibility of the Deputy on Development, who showed the panel concrete plans of projects that are on the way for the following years. There are also plans to potentially hire another staff member responsible for promotion in social media.

The panel learned that the agency sets a price for each project separately and after the negotiations with a HEI. This depends on the specific package of evaluations offered for the programmes of the HEI. HEIs that the panel met further explained that the agency's competitive advantage is in offering the full-cost package price for its EQA activities, entailing the travel costs for experts etc., which makes it easier for planning the costs related to EQA.

During the site-visit, the panel visited the agency's premises and observed that the staff members have sufficient and appropriate office equipment to carry out their work.

Analysis

The panel recognizes the effort of the agency to manage the ongoing projects and find future ones with the existing resources. The agency was in particular able to hire staff that brings sufficient language competencies for the high amount of translation tasks that come with the profile of

AKKORK's operations. In conclusion, the panel finds the agency's staff to be engaged and able to carry out the agency's activities.

The panel is further convinced that while the budget is changing, the senior management has a clear understanding of the budget of the ongoing year and the plan for the following year. However, given the decrease in the number of performed external QA activities and the generated income from projects (2014-2018), the panel is concerned about the long-term continuity and sustainability of the agency's financial resources. In addition, the agency's relying on the loans of the funders does not have a back-up plan in case such loans cannot be given at some point. The panel recognizes the challenge of financial planning with projects that are dependent on the outcome of public competitions and available resources at the university. However, potential changes in the law that would raise the status of professional-public accreditations (see ESG 3.2) could rather increase but decrease competition in AKKORK's core market. In conclusion, the panel sees a need for more long-term and strategic financial management in the agency to ensure the stability of operations.

Panel recommendation

The agency should establish processes for its financial management and strategic planning to ensure the sustainability of the agency's operations under the declining revenues (2014-2018), to achieve its mission, and to seize opportunities that the agency sees for itself.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

2014 review recommendation

"AKKORK should develop a mechanism to ensure that staff and members of AKKORK's bodies do not have any conflict of interest with regard to reviews they are involved in / decide about."

Evidence

The panel learned that the main tool of the agency for internal quality assurance of its activities are the regular staff meetings. The staff meetings are organised at least after every project concludes and additionally in a form of a 'big meeting' twice a year. During these meetings, feedback from the evaluated HEIs and the involved reviewers is discussed, with the potential follow-up actions agreed upon where and when relevant. The 'big meeting', usually organised in December, is additionally used to reflect upon the agency's activities of the preceding year and includes an input from the Advisory Council and International Accreditation Council (see ESG 2.2). The same meeting is used to discuss and select topics of future thematic analyses (see ESG 3.4). The general aims of the 'big meeting' and processes related to it are described in the 'Quality Policy'⁴ (see point 1.4 of the document). Furthermore, to assure quality of the agency's work in EQA, freelance project managers only work on parts of the agency's projects and never on the entire ones. The panel learned that one regular staff member is always involved in each project of the agency.

⁴http://akkork.ru/general//upload/docs/Quality_Policy_en.pdf

The responsibilities in internal quality assurance are defined in the 'AKKORK Internal Regulations' (SAR, Annex 4) according to a PDCA cycle as the following: senior management (plan), staff (do), Director General (check) and again the staff (act).

The above procedure applies to all of the agency's activities and the panel did not learn of any mechanism of internal QA cycles differentiated by individual activities.

When interviewed, staff members claimed to be satisfied with the opportunities that are provided to them to give a feedback on the ways the agency operates. One staff member explained that it was her suggestion to hire a person with project management skills to oversee the activities of all projects performed by the agency. The suggestion was implemented, and the result was employing the current Deputy on Projects.

To assure the quality of staff involved in AKKORK's operations, any new staff would start the new employment by undergoing a process of learning the agency's procedures as described in the 'AKKORK Internal Regulations' (SAR, Annex 4). Among others, this includes getting acquainted with the obligations of a new workplace by studying the ESG, discussing the ESG with the Director General, and engaging in the probation period. New staff members also participate as observers in an on-site visit before managing their own project.

Following the panel's question whether any challenge was identified by the agency when preparing the self-assessment report for this review, the Advisory Council could not think of any such challenge. However, the representative that was also involved in the SAR mentioned that the self-assessment was useful for those preparing the report to gain clarity over the structure of the internal quality assurance at AKKORK.

Analysis

The panel recognizes the existence of feedback cycles for the internal quality assurance of the agency's activities, built mostly around the general staff meetings. The panel managed to learn about the smaller, more frequent meetings and a 'big meeting', where general trends and challenges related to the external quality assurance activities of the agency are analysed. The panel also found examples of improvements of AKKORK's activities following the agency's internal QA (e.g. addressing the need for overseeing all AKKORK's project by one person).

Nevertheless, within the internal QA as set by AKKORK, the panel misses the monitoring function. The panel believes more emphasis should be put on tracking how the implemented adjustments to the agency's activities actually turned out to be.

There exist different deficits in the formalisation of the described process. The 'check' of the PDCA cycle is not executed by the Director General (as described in the 'AKKORK Internal Regulations'), but by the staff meeting. The 'Quality Policy' describes only the aims of the described system, the system itself was not documented in written form at the time of the review. A statement from the Advisory Council (as presented above) further indicates that an up-to-date overview about the internal processes and tools used for IQA of the agency is needed, especially how these processes and tools are functioning within AKKORK. While the panel recognizes that extensive formalization of IQA does not fit the agency's size (where the staff of five people is working on different EQA activities), the panel still advises more formal description of the existing processes and tools that support the consistent implementation of the agency's activities.

The panel notes various inconsistencies on the agency's website, e.g. when publishing the reports, providing information on external QA activities on the Russian and English parts of the website, and

overall organisation and presentation of information. Examples are further described in ESG 3.1, 3.4 and 2.3. The organizational chart from the 'AKKORK Internal Regulations' (SAR p. 20) further does not fit the correct structure outlined in the introduction of this report. The panel concludes from these examples that not all outcomes of the agency's work, especially not the production of documentation, are covered by the existing QA cycles that focus on the project execution.

The SAR does not correctly describe the structure of the agency (see ESG 3.1 and the introduction of this report) or the requirements used in procedures (see ESG 2.1), and misses any comment on the decreasing revenues (see ESG 3.5). This indicates to the panel that the self-assessment was not fully reflective and parts of an internal quality culture are missing.

Panel recommendation

The agency should consistently document and/or develop internal QA processes that are formal, explicit and close the loop. These processes should aim for the quality of the process outputs and for monitoring and critical reflection on the agency's activities while avoiding bureaucratic burden.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

Critical self-assessment of the agency's activities towards the ESG requirements and ENQA/ EQAR recommendations could be carried out and would support the implementation of the recommendations. Appointment of a person or group responsible for this would ensure that this activity is carried out.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

2014 review recommendation

"AKKORK should officially adopt that it will undergo an external review at least every five years."

Evidence

The 'AKKORK Internal Regulations' (SAR, Annex 4, see point 1.8 of the document) state that "Every five years, AKKORK is obliged to undergo an external independent assessment of the quality of work for compliance with ESG standards." The 2019 review conducted by this panel is the second AKKORK review of this kind.

Analysis

The panel confirms that the agency undergoes the periodic external review in order to assess its compliance with the ESG. The review and compliance with the ESG is prominently required in the internal regulations, based on the ENQA panel recommendation from 2014. Furthermore, this requirement is also strongly motivated through the agency's mission statement.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

2014 review recommendation

“AKKORK should further elaborate its criteria in order to ensure that systematic assessments of study programmes are embedded in the review process and that all aspects of the ESG Part 1 are assessed.”

Evidence

Methodologies based on the AKKORK criteria - independent accreditation of study programmes, professional-public accreditation, independent accreditation at the institutional level

The AKKORK criteria are part of methodology defined by the agency. According to SAR (p. 54), the agency is using these same criteria for all of the procedures listed above. For the independent accreditation at the institutional level, the activity that was never executed, the agency is using the second part of the AKKORK criteria, which is the part that relates to ESG Part 1.

The presented mapping (see table 2 below) was gathered by the panel through analysis of the following documents: “AKKORK Education Quality Criteria”, which lists the first part of the “AKKORK Criteria”, “AKKORK Quality Assurance of Education”, which lists the second part of the “AKKORK Criteria”, and “Guidelines for educational organizations” (SAR, Annex 10).

In the mapping presented in the SAR (pp. 54-63), the agency is referring only to the AKKORK Criteria. However, the AKKORK Criteria often do not set full requirements, therefore the panel needed to search for other documents that cover all the criteria AKKORK uses in its procedures. The second issue the panel struggled with is that some of the criteria as used by the agency are actually not formulated as criteria. For instance, the second part of the AKKORK Criteria consists of 12 topics that are elaborated with the help of:

- a) guiding questions, e.g. “How is the system of identification and attraction of the best prepared students to the training is organized. Whether the educational institution runs competitions, contests and other events?”,
- b) requests for statistical data, e.g. “The number of creative clubs, studios, clubs functioning on a permanent basis for the students of the program”,
- c) or requirements for descriptions, e.g. “Describe the system of work of the educational institution aimed at the formation of personal and social skills of students, the organization of leisure and recreation of the students.”

While some of the questions, e.g. “How students participate in program management (including through student government, participation in the monitoring, etc.)...” can be understood as requirements, only some of the sub-criteria include concrete expectations, such as “Prove that the educational process involves staff whose qualifications allows the implementation of the learning process through the use of approved methods and technologies of educational activities”. This is why the panel looked at other documents of the agency that more precisely define criteria for external quality assurance of the agency, for instance the ‘Guidelines for Educational Organizations’ (SAR, Annex 10), which include very strict requirements towards HEIs. One example from these Guidelines is the statement “Each student is provided with access to library resources, to the full-text databases

of scientific periodicals”. The panel was confirmed during the site visit that the requirements as laid out in the Guidelines for Educational Organizations are part of the experts’ training. These requirements are, however, not part of the ‘The Guidelines for Reviewer on Conducting on External Evaluation of Education Quality and Quality Assurance on Programme Level’ (SAR, Annex 6). The panel could not find further evidence concerning the requirements from the Guidelines for Educational Organizations are used in practice in the assessment procedures (see also ESG 2.5).

ESG	AKKORK Criteria ⁵	Panel analysis
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	Criterion 2.1 Strategy, aims and program management Guideline 2.2 Program strategy, objectives and management Guideline 2.11 Participation of students in determination of content and organization of the academic activities program	ESG 1.1 is covered by the referenced points when taking the Guidelines into account, which introduce a closed QA circle.
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	Criterion 2.1 Strategy, aims and program management Guideline 2.3 Program structure and content Guideline 2.9 Scientific-research activities and implementation of their results in academic activities	The criteria cover the programme design well, the qualifications are mainly referred to in terms of the labour market. ECTS and the outcome in terms of the NQF are not checked.
1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment	Criterion 1.3 Satisfaction with education results Criterion 2.2 Structure and contents of the program Criterion 2.10 Participation of students in determining the content of the program Criterion 2.11 Student services Guideline 2.3 Program structure and content Guideline 2.4 Teaching and learning aids Guideline 2.11 Participation of students in determination of content and organization of the academic activities program Guideline 2.12 Program level student services	The AKKORK criteria partially cover ESG 1.3, with a comprehensive list of criteria and sub-criteria. Student assessment is not covered sufficiently. Some reports handed to the panel only briefly describe participation of students through student councils and feedback forms (e.g. Economics Bachelor programme at Tambov State Technical University).

⁵ ‘Guideline’ refers to requirements laid out in the Guidelines for Educational Organizations and ‘Criterion’ refers to the AKKORK criteria.

1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	<p>Criterion 2.2 Structure and contents of the program</p> <p>Criterion 2.12 Career guidance. Assessment of the quality of preparation of enrolees (for bachelor degree programme)</p> <p>Guideline 2.13 Assessment of prospective students preparedness quality</p>	ESG 1.4 is mostly covered by the referenced points, where recognition is covered only implicitly.
1.5 Teaching staff	<p>Criterion 2.5 Academic teaching staff</p> <p>Guideline 2.6 Academic teaching staff</p>	The AKKORK criteria fully cover ESG 1.5 with a comprehensive list of criteria and sub-criteria.
1.6 Learning resources and student support	<p>Criterion 2.11 Student services</p> <p>Guideline 2.4 Teaching and learning aids</p> <p>Guideline 2.5 Technologies and methodologies of educational activities</p>	ESG 1.6 is fully covered by the referenced points.
1.7 Information management	<p>Criterion 2.1 Strategy, aims and program management</p> <p>Criterion 2.5 Academic teaching staff</p> <p>Guideline 2.8 Informational resources</p>	ESG 1.7 is covered by the referenced points only when taking the Guideline into account that introduces management aspects.
1.8 Public information	<p>Criterion 2.1 Strategy, aims and program management</p> <p>Criterion 2.6 Material, technical and financial resources of the program</p> <p>Guideline 2.8. Informational resources</p>	Public availability is only clearly mentioned with regard to financial information. Overall, ESG 1.8 is not covered.
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	<p>Criterion 2.1 Strategy, aims and program management</p> <p>Criterion 2.3 Teaching and learning aids</p> <p>Criterion 2.10 Participation of students in determining the content of the program</p> <p>Guideline 2.2 Program strategy, objectives and management</p> <p>Guideline 2.11 Participation of students in determination of content and organization of the academic activities program</p>	ESG 1.9 is partially covered by the referenced points, but they put a strong focus on attractiveness of the programme and effectiveness with regards to the labour market. Educational or academic aspects are not mentioned in the criteria.
1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance	<p>Criterion 2.1 Strategy, aims and program management</p>	There are no criteria or clear guidelines mentioning cyclical

	Guideline 2.2 Program strategy, objectives and management	external reviews. ESG 1.10 is not covered.
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Table 2: Mapping between ESG Part 1 and the AKKORK Criteria and Guidelines for Educational Organizations

In many of the ESG, the above table deviates from the one prepared by the agency and presented in the SAR (SAR pp. 54-63). Moreover, references to the AKKORK criteria as made in the SAR could not be found in the annexed documents that contain the AKKORK criteria as used by the panel for reference.

Next, the panel learned by studying the agency’s documents that the review reports handed to the panel generally do not describe evidence for all of the AKKORK criteria or the Guidelines but rather describe strong points and recommendations. As an example, one report lists a recommendation “To start using the University’s own educational standards to better reflect the features of the regional market in the programme” without supplying evidence that the regional market is not reflected well in that programme’s design (see the ‘Report on the Results of an External Review of the Study Programme “Finances and Credit” offered by the Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education “Rostov State University of Economics (RINKh)”, page 15).

Furthermore, the panel found that Reports published on the central database for professional-public accreditation only refer to parts of the AKKORK Criteria. For example, in the BA programme Business Informatics of the Sankt Petersburg State University from 2017, the criteria 2.4, 2.7, 2.10 and 2.11 are not analysed. The panel learned during the site visit that this situation occurs because the accreditation as issued by the professional organisation depends only on a subset of the AKKORK Criteria. The panel has been told that for simultaneous professional-public and independent accreditation of a programme, the full AKKORK criteria would be checked and then only the parts that are relevant to the professional organisations would be reported in a secondary (separate) report to this professional organisation. Nevertheless, the panel was not able to gather conclusive evidence about what criteria are checked by the expert panel in case that there is not an independent accreditation accompanying the professional-public accreditation. The panel notes that there are also no reports published for such cases.

Joint international accreditation

AKKORK adapts the full methodology from the respective partner agency when performing joint international accreditations. I.e., the panel notes that the mapping of these criteria with the first part of the ESG follows the respective methodology of the partner agency. The current partners of AKKORK for joint international accreditation are FIBAA, ZEvA, and DEVA-AAC. All these agencies are members of ENQA and registered in EQAR.

E-learning accreditation

The panel produced the following mapping (see table 3) for e-learning accreditation based on the information as provided in the SAR (see pp. 54ff.) and the “UNIQUE Self-Assessment Form”. The form was checked to supplement the analysis from the SAR and more comprehensively match the referenced criteria with the respective ESG standards.

ESG	UNIQUE Criteria	Analysis
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	1.1.3 Quality procedures [...] are in place, and are at least as stringent as those applied to 'traditional' learning	ESG 1.1 is covered by the referenced points.

	<p>1.1.7 Internal stakeholders are represented within decision-making structures of the institution, and particularly those related to ICT policy.</p> <p>1.1.9 The institution's accessibility (disability) policy also encompasses all of the institution's ICT offerings.</p> <p>1.2.2 The institution has a policy in place to ensure constant iterative curricular innovation.</p> <p>1.2.3 The institution has a policy in place whereby institution staff are kept up to date with technological developments and their impact on pedagogical approaches and course content.</p> <p>2.4.4 Course authoring and production tools are able to cover a variety of actual formats and also take fully into account the principles of reusability, accessibility, interoperability and durability, aimed at facilitating on-going applicability.</p>	
<p>1.2 Design and approval of programmes</p>	<p>1.3.2 Analysis and review of the potential needs [...] for technology supported learning are regularly carried out.</p> <p>1.3.3 Coherence between the Institutional objectives/mission and needs/demand of the community/market in which the institution operates is periodically checked by governing body</p> <p>1.3.7 Appropriate procedures are in place to ensure transparency and recognition of all the institution's credits and qualifications.</p> <p>2.3.1 Course Design and Delivery Guidelines are available for relevant staff</p>	<p>Specifications of “the qualification resulting from a programme” and “refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area” are missing. Therefore, ESG 1.2 is only covered partially.</p>
<p>1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment</p>	<p>2.2.5 Students evaluation on the learning experience is collected and used for improving the eLearning experience.</p> <p>3.1.6 Tools and procedures for evaluation of the outcomes of the learning process-including using data collected from stakeholders and graduates- are taken into consideration for improving the quality of the offer</p>	<p>ESG 1.3 is covered by the referenced points.</p>

	<p>3.2.1 Both formative and summative assessment are used.</p> <p>3.2.2 Continuous self-assessment opportunities are made available to students to allow them to reflect on their learning experience (promoting self-development initiatives).</p> <p>3.2.4 Fairness and transparency in assessment are ensured by allowing auditing of every step of the assessment process.</p> <p>3.2.7 An efficient and fair system for grievances from assessment results is in place.</p>	
<p>1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</p>	<p>1.3.4 eLearning offerings are covered by an equivalent credit/module system to the university's other offerings.</p> <p>1.3.7 Appropriate procedures are in place to ensure transparency and recognition of all the institution's credits and qualifications.</p> <p>2.2.4 Students' progress in eLearning is monitored (through continuous assessment) and made available to students.</p> <p>3.1.3 Learning opportunities include a clear statement/description of intended learning outcomes, learning content, expectations of learner activities, opportunities for interaction, and assessment methods</p>	<p>ESG 1.3 is partially covered by the referenced points. Certification and admission are missing.</p>
<p>1.5 Teaching staff</p>	<p>2.3.4 It is ensured that all faculty members are qualified in information technologies by providing continuous possibilities and incentives for further qualification and development</p> <p>2.3.5 All staff involved in course design and teaching hold regular academic titles/positions within the university structure.</p> <p>3.3.1 Teaching staff needs analysis are regularly implemented through staff competence reviews or self-assessment processes.</p> <p>3.3.2 Training services and materials (e.g. Guidelines) for the staff in charge of</p>	<p>ESG 1.5 is fully covered by the referenced points when regarding the requirements on qualification of the teaching staff in IT as requirements for a recruitment process into e-learning programmes.</p>

	<p>learner's services are available in order to support them (if required) in the process of moving from conventional teaching to (fully or partially) on-line teaching.</p> <p>3.3.4 All staff responsible for course design undergo processes of peer-learning and review, evidenced through academic resources for attendance to conferences and activity in academic publications.</p>	
1.6 Learning resources and student support	<p>2.1.1 All technology-based procedures are appropriately tested according to industry best-practice.</p> <p>2.1.2 The institution has an archiving policy for learning materials.</p> <p>2.1.3 Electronic databases are used to significantly expand the scope of a universities' collection, either through the inclusion of full-text electronic resources, or through the operation of an efficient library-loan system.</p> <p>2.1.5 Metrics on students' usage of learning resources are collected, and made available to quality and course review procedures.</p> <p>2.1.6 There is a specific budgetary allocation to further development of TEL and research into the same.</p>	ESG 1.5 is mostly covered by the referenced points, but there is no mention of funding for student support.
1.7 Information management	<p>2.1.5 Metrics on students' usage of learning resources are collected, and made available to quality and course review procedures.</p> <p>3.1.6 Tools and procedures for evaluation of the outcomes of the learning process- including using data collected from stakeholders and graduates- are taken into consideration for improving the quality of the offer</p>	ESG 1.7 is covered by the referenced points.
1.8 Public information	1.1.4 Institution has procedures in place to ensure the visibility and transparency of the provision, methods, tools and results of eLearning and TEL, both to students, as well as to the wider academic community.	The standard ESG 1.8. is covered by the referenced points.

	2.2.2 All relevant information and notifications are delivered to students through a web-portal. 3.1.2 Marketing of the offer is freely available and is credible, comprehensive and current.	
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	1.2.2 The institution has a policy in place to ensure constant iterative curricular innovation. 1.3.2 Analysis and review of the potential needs within the community and labour market for technology supported learning are regularly carried out. 2.3.1 Course Design and Delivery Guidelines are available for relevant staff	The standard ESG 1.9 is covered by the referenced points.
1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance	2.3.1 Course Design and Delivery Guidelines are available for relevant staff	The referenced point does not cover ESG 1.10.

Table 3: Mapping between ESG Part 1 and the criteria for e-learning accreditation

The UNIQUe criteria are the criteria that are solely used in AKKORK’s e-learning accreditation. According to the agency, there have been altogether two e-learning accreditations performed – one in 2014 and the second one in 2016 (SAR, p. 24). However, the panel learned that the report from 2016 is the report of an independent accreditation on the programme level and not an e-learning accreditation. The report from 2014 on the other side is stating that the accreditation of e-learning is based on UNIQUe criteria combined with ISO and EFQM standards. The title of the report is “Report on the results of the evaluation of the quality assurance system of the university’s e-learning system with conclusions and compliance of the university’s e-learning with the requirements of GEF RF, ESG ENQA, ISO19796, EFQUEL”. The standards of ISO, EFQM or ESG are not referred to in the report itself and the panel found no further evidence that these standards are part of the methodology for e-learning accreditation.

IQAS

The IQAS methodology is based on a multi-standard approach that also references part 1 of the ESG. Concerning the standards used for IQAS, the Russian and English versions of the agency’s website differ: the English website is referring to the standards from ESG, EFQM, UNIQUe and ISO 9001–2015; whereas the Russian website is referring only to different versions of ISO systems.

During the site visit, the review team was provided with a document called „Guidelines for experts conducting external evaluation of the educational quality at the institutional level“ (in Russian Руководство эксперта по проведению внешней оценки качества образования на институциональном уровне, hereafter called IQAS Guidelines) that describes the multi-standard approach of the internal quality assurance system audit and accreditation of AKKORK in a more detailed way (SAR, pp. 34-35). The IQAS Guidelines include four separate lists of standards/criteria: 1) ISO 9001–2015; 2) EFQM; 3) UNIQUe; and 4) ESG Part 1 without the ESG guidelines. The panel could not learn from the document how the standards are interlinked and/or which of the standards forms the basis for the self-evaluation of the institution. In addition to the lists of standards, on page 21 of

the IQAS Guidelines, there is a list of 10 topics that the experts are asked to evaluate, without any reference to the standards listed before. The same list of topics is also part of the methodology for AKKORK's independent accreditation at the programme level and there it is not part of the expert's evaluation. This list is also not referenced in any Reports. The panel found no further evidence how the list is used in the accreditation procedures and why the same list is referenced for for IQAS and for the methodology based on the AKKORK Criteria.

The latest published report on IQAS from 2012 includes an analysis of the full Part 1 of the ESG 2005. The only completed IQAS assessment since then was conducted in 2014 at the Zabaikal'skiy State University. The report is not published on the agency's website.

Analysis

The presented mappings as produced by the panel deviate in many parts from the mapping as presented on pages 54-63 of the SAR. The first reason for this is that the mapping presented in the SAR was incomplete. The panel learned about the deviations between the AKKORK criteria referenced in the SAR and those defined in other documents. Also, for some ESG standards more than the criteria referenced in the SAR were relevant, such as additional points found in the UNIQUE criteria and the requirements laid out in the Guidelines for Educational Institutions in case of the AKKORK Criteria . Secondly, the ESG Part 1 sets specific standards, whereas referenced points of AKKORK criteria as presented in the SAR are often not normative. The panel therefore needed to investigate more closely how the first part of the ESG is addressed by the review experts of the agency in a given procedure – for this purpose, the panel took the referenced additional documents into account.

According to the panel's analysis, the AKKORK criteria, combined with the requirements as set in the Guidelines for Educational Organizations, are covering most of the ESG standards for the independent accreditation on the programme level and the independent accreditation on the institutional level. However, the review reports that were checked by the panel show lack of analysis concerning student-centred learning and teaching. Student-centred learning and teaching is for example mainly understood as student feedback, including the system for consideration of students' appeals and complaints, which doesn't cover the whole meaning of the ESG standard 1.3. The cyclical external quality assurance (ESG 1.10) is not required for any methodology based on AKKORK Criteria.

For the independent accreditation on the institutional level, only the second part of the AKKORK Criteria is considered in the methodology. However, according to the panel's analysis, the first part of the AKKORK Criteria does only overlap with the ESG in AKKORK criterion 1.3, which was linked by the panel to ESG 1.3. This criterion 1.3 is not considered significant by the panel, because the ESG standard 1.3 is sufficiently covered by the other criteria and guidelines in the second part of the AKKORK criteria. Even though AKKORK Criterion 1.3 is not part of the independent accreditation on the institutional level, there is therefore no significant difference with regards to how the procedure addresses part 1 of the ESG.

In case of professional-public accreditations, the panel is concerned that not all AKKORK Criteria are relevant for the accreditation decision and the panel found no evidence that that all AKKORK Criteria are even checked and analysed in the review experts' report for those cases where a professional-public accreditation is not accompanied by an independent accreditation. According to table 1, in the majority of the cases professional-public accreditation is conducted alone.

The panel believes that the criteria and guiding questions for e-learning accreditation are indicating a good correspondence with ESG Part 1, except in regard to the standards 1.2, where there is missing reference to the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the

Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, and 1.4 (admission and certification of students). The cyclical external quality assurance (ESG 1.10) is not required for e-learning accreditation.

The ESG Part 1 are directly part of the IQAS methodology. However, there was no evidence found how the ESG Part 1 are checked and analysed by the review experts, as the latest published report is from 2012 and did not use the ESG 2015 Part 1. However, it did fully cover the ESG 2005 Part 1. Concerning the design of the IQAS methodology the panel recognizes the use of internationally established quality management models like EFQM or ISO, but misses the integration with the ESG into one methodology. Instead, in the 2012 report, all standards from the different frameworks were checked independently. In the mapping of the SAR (SAR pp. 54ff.) the connections between ESG Part 1 and EFQM criteria and ISO standards are indicated, but the guidelines for review experts do not create a connection of how these indicated connections are used in the evaluation. The outlined list of assessment tasks (IQAS Guidelines p.21) is neither fully covering ESG standards, nor EFQM criteria.

Finally, the panel learned that joint international accreditations are conducted based on the methodology of foreign agencies. All partner agencies are full members of ENQA and registered in EQAR.

To sum up, based on the presented mappings, the panel concludes that none of the procedures as offered by the AKKORK fully addresses the ESG part 1, but only partially.

Panel recommendations

The agency should define coherent and independent sets of criteria for each of its procedures that are aligned carefully with Part one of the ESG.

The IQAS methodology should be reconsidered to fully address the elements of ESG Part 1 based on a clear usage of the selected QM model(s).

The agency should ensure that the entire ESG part 1 are taken into account for professional-public accreditation.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

The agency may reflect critically about its understanding of some of the standards (especially ESG 1.3) and the way these are covered by the existing procedures.

The agency may reconsider the need for two different external QA procedures on the institutional level.

The agency may develop clear and independent sets of guidelines for reviewers for all its procedures, outlining the standards and requirements that should be checked in these procedures.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

2014 review recommendation

“AKKORK should systematically provide information about the aims and objectives for each of its activities. This information could also be offered in a comparative manner in order to better outline the differences between the assessment activities.”

Evidence

Aims and objectives for each activity under this review are defined and published on the agency's website. There are differences between the aims published on the Russian and on the English part of the website, e.g. in the case of independent accreditation on the programme level. The panel found that aims of the activities of AKKORK are formulated in a general way and can overlap between different activities, such as aims to increase competitiveness of programmes or quality of the education.

A summary of aims and objectives for each activity was verbally described to the panel by agency staff and the Advisory Council as follows:

- professional-public accreditation is meant to focus on the value of programmes to employers
- independent accreditation on the programme level is a wider, informative procedure for the HEI encompassing the learning outcomes of a study programme as well as the institutional conditions for conducting the programme
- independent accreditation on the institutional level focuses less on individual programmes and rather evaluates the overall institution
- e-learning accreditation focuses on the specific needs for e-learning
- IQAS provides an overview of the QA system in a HEI
- joint international accreditation aims to improve international recognition of the programme

The panel notes that some answers in interviews deviated from the above summary of the aims and objectives. Representatives of the Advisory Council for instance described the aim of the independent accreditation on the programme level to prepare HEIs for state accreditation. HEIs told the panel that no external QA procedure is used or useful in that regard. One representative of an HEI on the other hand stated that they perceived the independent accreditation on the programme level as a preparation for accreditation by a foreign agency.

All AKKORK procedures are designed to fit into the different categories of voluntary evaluations laid out in the laws of the RF (Federal Law of the RF of December 29, 2012 N 273-FL “On Education in the Russian Federation”, Chapter 12). The procedures also take official professional standards and state educational standards into account.

As required by law when universities spend public money in the RF, all of AKKORK's projects are won through public competition. HEIs expressed satisfaction with the fitness of the procedures and described a few examples of results that fitted the aims listed above, such as an increase of foreign students after joint international accreditation of a programme by AKKORK, or the usefulness of the independent accreditation by the agency to prepare for an international accreditation.

The panel additionally notes that at the time of the site visit to the agency there was an ongoing pilot of an IQAS evaluation in Armenia. The pilot is following the same methodology of the activity as it would if implemented in the RF. The panel further notes that some activities of the agency are not regularly requested. There has been no case of an independent accreditation on the institutional level in the observed review period and only one request for IQAS.

The panel learned during the site visit about the annual process of discussing and potentially revising the methodology of conducted AKKORK activities. This usually involves little changes in the content, but no change in the criteria themselves is made. The methodology is changed following the discussion held between all AKKORK staff that are working on QA activities, and by taking into account feedback as gathered from evaluated HEIs, reviewers, and the International Accreditation Council. HEIs expressed satisfaction regarding this process as their feedback has been taken into account to improve the clarity of criteria used in the activities compared to as compared to the 2015 version of the methodology. Members of the International Accreditation Council also expressed satisfaction regarding how the agency included the council's feedback. The Council additionally observed the improved clarity of final reports as a result of this process.

For the methodology for the e-learning accreditation, the panel notes that the methodology was developed in a European project called UNIQUe that ended in 2014. The methodology was not updated since then and while agency staff and HEIs expressed a need to update it, the agency has no concrete plans to do so.

The panel learned further that the agency is undergoing currently the redesign of the AKKORK methodology, which is the basis of the independent accreditation on programme or institutional level and the professional-public accreditation. Persons directly involved in this redesign were the Director General, the Deputy on Projects and the Deputy on Finances. As explained to the panel, the AKKORK bodies will be involved in the process in the upcoming months, but not external stakeholders. The panel notes that the professional organisations and student organisation were unaware of any engagement in the continuous improvement of AKKORK's activities.

Analysis

For all of the agency's activities, the activities' aims are published, but not consistently between different languages on the website. While the publication of aims can be seen as a follow-up of the 2014 review recommendation, the published aims of different activities are still overlapping and do not outline differences in methodologies. The panel believes that the published aims should assist a HEI in understanding which procedure serves which purpose. However, this panel was not able to understand the differences between the different available activities based on the aims available on the website and had to ask for further verbal description. Furthermore, the panel experienced inconsistencies between the responses of different interviewees when it comes to the perceived aims of different procedures. In this regard, the panel reiterates the second part of the ENQA recommendation from 2014.

For professional-public and independent accreditation, the panel acknowledges the satisfaction on the procedure's fitness expressed by HEIs and the success of the agency in winning public competitions for projects (i.e. accreditations). This indicates the fitness for purposes as sought by HEIs for the two activities, which are the ones regularly conducted by the agency (see table 1). Both procedures are based on the same methodology and use the AKKORK Criteria. The possibility to combine both procedures helps HEIs to reduce the workload of external QA. At the same time, the panel learned that in the majority of cases (see table 1), the HEIs have requested only professional-public

accreditation. From this, the panel infers that the sole independent accreditation provides less value to HEIs than the sole professional-public accreditation. Both of them are voluntary, but the latter one means recognition by professional associations and will be considered during state accreditation. On the other hand, the professional-public accreditation does not provide enough information to gain full understanding on the outcome, to support the improvement of quality, or to let the university demonstrate such improvement, because the reports from this activity are only published when conducted together with independent accreditation (see ESG 2.6). The panel concludes that the sole procedures are less fit for purpose than the combined activity.

Other activities are not conducted often and did therefore lack stakeholder feedback regarding the activities' fitness-for-purpose. In particular, the panel was faced with an expressed need by HEIs to improve the methodology for e-learning accreditation. A room for improvement was also mentioned by agency staff. The methodology was developed as part of the UNIQUE project that ended in 2014 and is outdated. While the methodology was developed to achieve the aims outlined by the agency, the above points indicate to the panel that fitness-for-purpose is not fully reached for e-learning accreditation.

The methodology of the independent accreditation on the institutional level is taken from the methodology for programme accreditation, while using only the part on the institutional conditions. Applying a methodology designed for programme accreditation to a whole institution without looking at any programme indicates that the methodology is not fit for purpose. The IQAS audit collects different methodologies into one procedure. There was no overall methodology developed, but rather all individual methodologies are applied separately. This contradicts fitness for purpose in the way that the self-assessment for all the methodologies is very demanding for HEIs, but the checking of two different quality management models (EFQM and ISO) that also partially overlap with the separately checked ESG Part 1 (see SAR p. 54-63 for the overlap) does not contribute specifically to an aim of the procedure.

The panel further states that it found evidence for feedback mechanisms within the agency to adapt the agency's methodologies. The agency is working with HEIs to continuously improve the clarity and consistency of operations for AKKORK's core activities. The panel also acknowledges the importance of AKKORK's bodies in the process of developing and improving the methodologies. However, while the representatives of HEIs and professional organisations are part of these bodies, the external stakeholders, apart from the representatives in AKKORK's bodies, are not involved in the development of methodologies.

Panel recommendations

If the agency is considering continuing to offer all of its procedures, it should set clearly differentiated aims and objectives for all offered procedures.

The agency should establish processes for the involvement of external stakeholders (apart from the representatives in its bodies) in the design and continuous improvement of the offered procedures.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

The information about the aims and objectives of different procedures could be offered in a comparative manner in order to better outline the differences and benefits between the agency's EQA activities.

In the agency projects (i.e. contracts for activities in HEIs) combining independent accreditation and professional-public accreditation, the combination and interplay of the different procedures could be

explained more clearly to HEIs, taking also into account the differences between the two activities as outlined in the law.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

2014 review recommendation

“AKKORK should ensure that there is a structured follow-up mechanism for each of its reviews. This should be made part of the contract signed with the HEI.”

Evidence

According to the SAR (pp. 26-36), all of AKKORK’s procedures include a self-assessment report, an external assessment by a panel of experts including a site-visit, and a report resulting from the external assessment. The panel saw evidence of such processes and confirmed them in interviews with the agency’s reviewers.

A follow-up, as also described in the SAR, is only conducted in a case of a conditional outcome of the programme or institutional accreditation (SAR p. 65). The procedure of a follow-up is described in the Guidelines for Educational Organizations: The HEI submits a plan for the implementation of the recommendations within three months. When the time given for the implementation of the conditions expires, the HEI submits a report on their implementation. The agency form a panel of experts that analyse the report and the submitted documents. Additionally, AKKORK staff may conduct video interviews with staff members of the HEI and has also the option to initiate a site-visit. The results of the analysis are presented to the accrediting body. The panel learned that in the last years the option of such a follow-up in case of conditions in the accreditation has been increasingly part of the contract between the agency and the HEIs. However, some HEIs are not willing to include this element into the contract. In any case has the accrediting body the power to revoke or suspend the accreditation when it does not see the conditions met by the HEI (Guidelines for Educational Organizations p 13).

HEIs and international reviewers that were interviewed by the panel expressed general satisfaction with the information received from AKKORK on the processes of the activities. In particular, HEIs found sufficient initial information about the processes on the agency’s website.

The panel describes and analyses below in detail the individual procedures of AKKORK:

Independent accreditation and professional-public accreditation (on the programme level)

The procedures of the two activities were described to the panel as clear, reliable and useful by HEIs. The panel confirms the existence of guidelines for HEIs and reviewers. The guidelines outline the procedures and include templates for self-assessment reports, an example programme of a site-visit,

and tables with questions for reviewers. The guidelines also provide place where the reviewers put down the findings and judgements (SAR, Annex 6 and 10). Both guidelines are not published, but are sent to HEIs and reviewers upon request or at the beginning of each review. Additionally, the panel received training material for these activities that outline the requirements for each of the standards used.

The agency's website lists procedural steps of the activities. The procedural steps are published together with the 'AKKORK Criteria' and the composition of the expert panel for each activity.

For professional-public accreditation, only a subset of the AKKORK Criteria is used for decision making (see ESG 2.1 and 2.6). The agency staff compiles a second version of the expert's report, called "independent education quality evaluation results" (SAR p. 30), that maps a subset of the criteria and judgements of the original reviewers' report into a table. The table, containing information on a subset of the AKKORK Criteria, is the basis of decision making for the professional organisation. The template of this table is agreed upon by the agency and the professional organisation which takes the accreditation decision (see also ESG 2.6). The panel did not have access to a report written by experts in case that professional-public accreditation was conducted without an independent accreditation. Therefore, no evidence could be gathered whether all AKKORK Criteria are evaluated by the experts even though only a subset is taken into account for the accreditation decision.

Joint international accreditation

The procedure was described to the panel as reliable and useful by HEIs. The implementation of the activity follows the methodology of the partner agencies, i.e. ZEvA, FIBAA, and DEVA-AAC, all of which are members of ENQA and registered in EQAR. However, the panel notes that the agency does not list the partner's names along the description of the general procedure of the activity, and also does not link the methodology in use nor guidelines with the partner agency.

The panel found one case where AKKORK drafted, together with an HEI, specific guidelines for joint international accreditation for execution at this specific HEI. This was done to streamline the assessment processes of a multitude of study programmes at that HEI.

E-learning accreditation

The procedure was described to the panel as reliable and useful by the HEI that has undergone such accreditation in 2016. The HEI confirmed that the methodology as followed was defined by the UNIQUE project. The panel found the accreditation criteria for e-learning accreditation published in the template for the self-assessment report on the agency's website, along with an outline of the overall procedure and the composition of the panel for this activity. Importantly, the panel notes that the links on the agency's website to the UNIQUE project and other resources related to this project (as used by the agency) are not working. This is because the UNIQUE project was concluded in 2014 and their website does not exist anymore.

Independent accreditation on the institutional level

The panel was unable to collect evidence about the processes related to this activity as the independent accreditation on the institutional level was not conducted by the agency since the last ENQA review in 2014. The procedures of the activity are not mentioned on the agency website. The panel also notes that members of AKKORK staff describe the processes of the activity differently. In particular, members of staff were unsure whether this procedure would only look at the institutional conditions or would also look at a sample of programmes as offered by that same institution. The Director General insisted that the procedure would not look at individual programmes.

IQAS

The panel learned that IQAS was carried out once by AKKORK since the last ENQA review in 2014. Since the panel did not have a chance to talk to the representative of this institution during the site visit, it could not gather evidence whether the processes of IQAS can be considered as useful or reliable. The panel found an outline of the procedure published on the agency's website as well as the related criteria. Nevertheless, as noted further under ESG 2.5, the list of applied criteria for IQAS deviate between the Russian and the English version of the website.

There is one ongoing IQAS procedure beyond the borders of the RF that the panel learned about during the site visit. The procedure is carried out in Armenia and follows the same steps as the activity would be carried out in the RF. As confirmed by the staff of AKKORK, this is a first IQAS for the agency outside the RF and the procedure does not follow the European Approach for Cross-Border Quality Assurance.

Analysis

The panel concludes that the processes of independent accreditation on the institutional level cannot be considered as reliable, useful or pre-defined as the activity implementation was unclear to the agency staff and it was never executed. For all other procedures, the panel found sufficient evidence to identify the procedures as useful in the sense that the steps of the procedures lead to the set outcomes. The panel also concludes, based on the findings from the SAR and the interviews, that the processes are reliable and pre-defined. Generally, the panel found more documentation existing for the two core procedures of the agency, i.e. the independent and professional-public accreditation of programmes. This documentation supports consistent implementation of these procedures. For joint international accreditation, the panel concludes on basis of sample reports that the consistency and pre-definition of processes is closely following the partner agencies' methodologies. While the web links to the UNIQUe project documents on the AKKORK website are not working, the methodology of this activity is following the pre-defined documents of the European project that were also supplied to the panel during the site visit. The panel saw two consistent implementations of the activity in 2014 and 2016. Last, but not least, due to the inconsistency on information on processes between the Russian and English websites of the agency, the missing IQAS report from 2014, and the un-clarity of the procedure as explained by the agency staff during the site visit, the panel is not convinced that the IQAS procedure is ensured to be implemented consistently.

All activities except for independent accreditation on the institutional level are listed on the agency's website with their procedures and panel compositions. For joint international organization, links to the partner agencies or their methodology are missing. For IQAS, there are inconsistencies in the publication.

Based on the procedural steps as presented on the agency's website, the reports supplied to the panel and the explanations gathered through the interviews, the panel is convinced that all procedures carried out by AKKORK consist of a self-assessment of a HEI, an external assessment with a site visit and a report resulting from the external assessment. The panel sees progress in AKKORK's efforts to include the follow-up part in the contracts with HEIs, but it is not yet part of all contracts. Follow up in general is only carried out after conditional accreditation. Suggestions for further improvement given by reviewers in case of unconditional accreditation are therefore not followed up on.

Panel recommendations

The agency should consistently publish the detailed procedures of the external QA processes it is offering.

If the agency is considering continuing to operate outside of the RF higher education system, it should follow the European Approach for Cross-Border Quality Assurance⁶.

The agency should ensure that there is a structured follow-up mechanism for each of its EQA activities, including those resulting in unconditional accreditation.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

2014 review recommendation

“AKKORK should ensure that students are part of the review team for each assessment.”

Evidence

All procedures conducted by AKKORK are carried out by a group of external experts. It was confirmed to the panel in multiple interviews that these groups always include a student member. The panel conducted interviews with two of these student experts. In case of professional-public accreditations, one member of the panel is always a professional from the respective field. The panel learned that this is also often the case in other procedures. For joint international accreditations, the panel is composed of experts both from the partner agency and AKKORK.

The ‘Regulations on work with reviewers’ (SAR, Annex 5) regulate AKKORK’s work with the reviewers as stipulated below. The document contains rules on the acquisition of new experts, the content of their trainings, and the composition of panels.

AKKORK publishes a form on the agency website where everybody can apply to be included in the database of potential reviewers. In addition, AKKORK project managers would also search for new experts on their own in order to find those experts that fit a specific profile for new projects (in case relevant). To find experts, AKKORK cooperates with universities, professional organisations and the student organisation “For Qualitative Education”. For all approaches to searching for new experts, the first contact with an expert would be through a phone interview with AKKORK staff and a questionnaire that is filled out by the candidate. The training of new experts is then usually conducted individually just before the expert’s first site visit. The project manager of the review will first send all relevant material for this review via e-mail to the expert. The training is then conducted directly before the first site visit and makes the expert familiar with the evaluation methodology, criteria and requirements used, interviewing techniques and the report writing for AKKORK (SAR, p.66). After the first review procedure is concluded, the Advisory Council approves the expert based on the review report that was prepared by the panel this expert was a part of. The new expert then receives a certificate by AKKORK proving that this person has undergone the agency’s training.

The panel learned during the site visit that the duration of the individual training can vary between few hours and two days. The interviewed experts and the agency’s staff explained that the length and

⁶<https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/key-considerations-for-cross-border-quality-assurance-in-the-ehea.pdf>

content of the training depend on the previous experience of the expert. Most of the experts that the panel met had only a short training of a few hours directly before the site visit.

For international reviewers, the agency's procedure for trainings is slightly different. In case these experts require a training, the agency staff would train the experts through distance educational technologies. The first interviewee explained to hold previous experience as a reviewer for another agency and did not receive any training from AKKORK. The second interviewee had only experience in self-assessment and got some introductory briefing from the agency.

AKKORK's database counts 300 external reviewers. For these reviewers, AKKORK has collected information on their educational background, professional experience and knowledge on QA (SAR, p. 66). To stay in the database, the reviewers have to either attend a 'refreshment training' every two years or take part in at least three projects over the same period of time. The last expert 'refreshment training' was held in 2017.

Panels of experts for all AKKORK's activities are composed following the methodology of any specific activity of the agency, and in addition of the overarching document named 'Regulations on work with reviewers' (SAR, Annex 5). A panel is always composed by the project manager and then needs an approval by the Director General. HEIs can reject the proposed panel composition and request a new set of experts. This can happen mostly following the identified conflict of interest, but also if a HEI finds the expertise of the proposed panel insufficient to understand the specificities of the study programme under accreditation.

For IQAS and the ongoing pilot in Armenia the panel found out that the HEI requested only Russian experts in the panel. This is in line with the agency's IQAS methodology, as this methodology does not specify how panels are composed.

The panel learned from the review reports available on the agency's website that the number of experts as listed in the published reports does not always match with the number of experts as specified in the methodology for the particular activity. For instance, the 2017 "Report on the Results of an Independent Educational Evaluation Higher Education Programs 39.03.01 "Sociology" (Bachelor's Degree), Implemented in FGAOU in 'North Caucasus Federal University'" lists three experts and the project manager instead of five reviewers as required by the agency's methodology for this activity. Even more worrisome is to the panel that many reports published to the state database for professional-public accreditation only list a single review expert as author of the report. The panel learned from agency staff that sometimes not all experts involved in a review were listed on the reports for professional-public accreditation.

The panel also took a note of the representatives of HEIs expressing their satisfaction (on several occasions) with the expertise and professional conduct of the evaluations by AKKORK panels.

Analysis

The panel notes student inclusion in all AKKORK's panels, which directly follows upon the recommendation from the previous ENQA review in 2014. The panel also recognizes that formal procedures are in place at AKKORK for expert selection, training and panel composition. While there exists an apparent mismatch between the comprehensive training requirements and the actual training time for most of the experts, the positive feedback from HEIs indicates the sufficient expertise of the AKKORK panels.

More worrisome to the panel is the inconsistency between the number of experts as listed in published reports and the methodology of the respective activity. The panel believes that every expert

that is involved in an activity shares the same responsibility for an evaluation outcome and therefore has to be listed on that report as an author.

The panel was, in particular, concerned about the single experts listed on the reports for professional-public accreditation. While the panel learned that sometimes not all experts were listed on the reports, the evidence indicates that some activities performed under the methodology of professional-public accreditation do not follow AKKORK's regulations and are not carried out by groups of external experts, as required by ESG 2.4.

Panel recommendations

All expert panels should be consistently composed following AKKORK's regulations.

All experts should be listed on any report that is an outcome of the panel's work.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

AKKORK may invite its international experts to share their experience in the so called refreshment trainings of the agency. Agency could also consider training its international experts in case this was not done before or was done long time ago.

Formalising the training content and length would benefit the consistency of the experts' readiness for implementing the agency's activities.

Consider involving experts with diverse international experience in all reviews to strengthen the agency's international profile.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

2014 review recommendation

"AKKORK should fully publish its criteria on its website in a more easily accessible and clear manner."

Evidence

Independent accreditation (on the programme level)

The panel learned that the AKKORK review experts evaluate a study programme under the methodology of the independent accreditation by following the 'AKKORK Criteria'. As described under ESG 2.1, some of the AKKORK criteria cannot be considered strictly as the 'criteria' but rather as topics that are covered by this accreditation. To distinguish more easily between the 'AKKORK Criteria' and the meaning of the word criteria as used in the ESG, the panel will refer to the ESG criteria as 'the requirements'. The requirements corresponding to the AKKORK methodology for independent accreditation on the programme level are described in the 'Guidelines for Educational Institutions' (SAR, Annex 10). The panel could not find the same requirements listed in 'The Guidelines for Reviewer on Conducting on External Evaluation of Education Quality and Quality Assurance on Programme Level' (SAR, Annex 6). In practice, the experts are asked to grade the findings on 'AKKORK Criteria' on

a scale from 2 (unsatisfactory) to 5 (excellent). The panel was told that experts are familiarised with the meaning and use of the scale during their training. An accreditation decision is then made by the International Accreditation Council with the support of the summary table (see table 4 below), specifying how the average grades of the 'AKKORK Criteria' from parts 1 and 2 translate into the overall grade of the study programme and therefore of the final outcome, including the length of accreditation, such as a conditional accreditation for 2 years.

AKKORK criteria Part 1	AKKORK Criteria Part 2	Accreditation decision
2	3 - 5	To refuse in accreditation
3 - 5	2	To refuse in accreditation
3	3	Accreditation with condition for 1 year
3	4	Accreditation with condition for 2 years
3	5	Accreditation with a condition for 2 years depending on conditions
4	3	Accreditation with a condition for 2 years depending on conditions
4	4	Full accreditation – for 3 years
4	5	Full accreditation – for 3 years

Table 4: Decision table for accreditation outcomes as specified on the agency's website⁷

A separate table in the SAR (p. 67, here table 5) in addition specifies different accreditation periods for Bachelor and Master programmes:

Accreditation decision	Bachelor	Master
Accreditation on high standards	6 years	4 years
Full accreditation	4 years	3 years
Accreditation with condition	1 year	1 year
Refusal in accreditation		

Table 5: Possible outcomes for programme accreditation according to SAR p. 67

The majority of accreditation decisions made by AKKORK since 2015 are 4-year accreditations for both Bachelor and Master programmes. This means in particular that many Master programmes have been accredited on high standards. Further investigation of the reports showed the following ratings within the reports for such programmes accredited on high standards:

- MA programme System analysis and management Dubna University (Системный анализ и управление ГБОУ ВО Московской области Государственный «Университет

⁷<http://akkork.ru/general//upload/Approximate%20variants%20of%20decision%20making%20concerning%20accreditation%20of%20the%20programmes.pdf>

«Дубна»), where one criterion has been rated 3/5 and five criteria were rated 4/5, in particular the important criteria on teaching staff (AKKORK Criterion 2.5), research (AKKORK Criterion 2.8) and involvement of students (AKKORK Criterion 2.10). 7 weaknesses and 12 recommendations are listed in the report.

- MA programme of the North Caucasus Federal University Sociology of social change (Социология социальных изменений» ФГАОУ ВО «СЕВЕРО-КАВКАЗСКИЙ ФЕДЕРАЛЬНЫЙ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ»), where criteria in the first part were rated with 4,5, and 3 out of 5 and four criteria in the second did not receive the highest grade, but 4 out of 5. The report lists 11 weaknesses and 9 recommendations in the general part.
- MA programme of the St Petersburg State University Geoinformation mapping Геоинформационное картографирование Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет), where criteria in the first part were rated with 4,5, and 5 out of 5 and six out of 11 assessed criteria were rated with 4 out of 5 in the second part. The report lists 5 weaknesses and 17 recommendations in the general part.
- MA programme of the St Petersburg State University Sociology (Социология (магистратура) Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет), where all criteria in the first part are rated with 4 out of 5 and six out of 11 assessed criteria were rated with 4 out of 5 in the second part. The report lists 11 weaknesses, but the recommendations are not formatted in a countable manner.

The above examples show inconsistencies between reports that list a lot of recommendations and where many standards did not receive the highest rating from the review panel, but the accreditation decision was given “on high standard”. The accreditation on high standard is not included in table 4, but a comparison between table 4 and 5 indicates that accreditation on high standards must have better overall ratings than 4 for both parts of the AKKORK Criteria. This stands in contradiction with e.g. the last example report listed, where none of the individual standards has the maximum rating for the first part of the AKKORK Criteria.

Professional-public accreditation (of study programmes)

Evaluations for professional-public accreditations of study programmes are in a few cases conducted jointly with independent accreditations on the programme level. The review experts evaluate the study programme based on the ‘AKKORK Criteria’. The panel found the requirements corresponding to these criteria described in the ‘Guidelines for educational institutions’ (SAR, Annex 10). As for the independent accreditations on a programme level, these requirements are not presented in ‘The Guidelines for Reviewer on Conducting on External Evaluation of Education Quality and Quality Assurance on Programme Level’ (SAR, Annex 6). The panel learned that it is the agency that compiles the final report for this activity by extracting the findings on a subset of ‘AKKORK Criteria’ into a separate report. This report then goes to the professional organisation that cooperates with AKKORK for the purpose of professional-public accreditation. The mapping between AKKORK Criteria into the template of the final report that extracts findings for the professional organisation is formally described as part of the contract between AKKORK and the professional organisation. The professional organisation finally decides on the accreditation based on the submitted (i.e. extracted) report. The panel notes that neither the subset of ‘AKKORK criteria’ used for professional-public accreditation nor the requirements for decision making are published.

Joint international accreditation

The review experts evaluate the study programme based on the partner agency’s methodology. An accreditation decision is made by the partner agency’s accreditation body. The HEI in question might additionally request an accreditation decision by the International Accreditation Council of AKKORK.

However, this has not been the case so far. The panel notes that the requirements for decision making for both of these options cannot be found on the website of AKKORK.

E-learning accreditation

The review experts evaluate e-learning systems of HEIs based on the UNIQUE methodology. The criteria of the methodology are published on AKKORK's website as part the UNIQUE self-assessment form for HEIs. An accreditation decision on e-learning accreditation is then made by the International Accreditation Council. The accreditation is granted for three years if only the mandatory requirements are compliant, and for five years if all requirements of the accreditation methodology are compliant (SAR, p. 67). The self-assessment form of the activity does indicate which of the requirements are mandatory and which not. There is however no indication on the website how the accreditation decision depends on mandatory and non-mandatory criteria.

Independent accreditation on the institutional level

The review panel learned that AKKORK experts evaluate the institutions taking into account the second part of the 'AKKORK Criteria' only (i.e. the part that refers to the institutional setting of a HEI). The criteria in question are handled in the same manner as for independent accreditation on the programme level. The International Accreditation Council makes an accreditation decision. As described under ESG 2.3, AKKORK publishes no information about this procedure on the agency's website.

IQAS

The review experts perform the IQAS evaluation based on the methodology of this activity that includes a set of requirements from the ESG, UNIQUE, EFQM, and ISO 9001-2015 (SAR, p. 68, see also ESG 2.1 for details). However, the panel notes that the description of the methodology on the Russian website differs from the methodology as presented to the panel through the SAR and the site visit (see also chapter on ESG 2.3). An accreditation decision for IQAS is made by the International Accreditation Council (SAR, p. 68). The accreditation is granted if the majority of the individual standards in all four sets of requirements (i.e. the ESG Part 1, UNIQUE, EFQM, and ISO 9001-2015) are fulfilled (SAR, p. 68). The criteria for decision-making are not published on the agency website. The panel was therefore additionally provided with the document during the review visit named the 'Guidelines for experts conducting external evaluation of the educational quality at the institutional level', which suggests that the agency uses the same assessment methodology for IQAS as it uses for the independent accreditation on the programme or institutional level. Equally important, the panel notes that there is no document describing the criteria for decisions made by the Accreditation Council. In this regard, the panel learned that no accreditation decisions have been made yet based on IQAS methodology. During the site-visit, members of the International Accreditation Council were unaware that there was an ongoing IQAS pilot in Armenia and could not describe what requirements would be used for the decision-making.

Regarding the overall usage of the 'AKKORK Criteria' by the agency experts, the panel learned that these experts in many cases rely on their personal experience in QA rather than following the guidance on methodology in use as presented through the AKKORK trainings. If the experts are unsure about the rating, the ratings are discussed with the project manager. The reviewers that the panel met indicated difficulties in deciding whether the AKKORK Criteria is met, especially if an expert is involved in the first evaluation with the agency. The agency staff further explained to the panel that the consistency of the ratings is considered by AKKORK through a series of steps for report checking that are described at ESG 2.6.

In regard to decision making processes, members of the International Accreditation Council informed the panel that their primary source of information for the accreditation decisions are the compliance ratings of the review panels. Some of the review experts of AKKORK may also sit in one of the accreditation bodies of professional organisations or AKKORK. The panel learned that in case that a member of AKKORK's International Accreditation Council was involved in the panel that wrote the report, this person does not vote in the decision of the Council. In case that a member of a decision-making body of a professional organisation was involved in the panel that did the site-visit, this person also votes in the decision-making body for the same activity.

Analysis

As explained above, for most of AKKORK's activities, the panel found evidence on explicitly defined criteria. These criteria are described above and in chapter ESG 2.1 and form the basis for judgements on the activities of AKKORK. For professional-public accreditation, the criteria are not set by AKKORK, but formulated within the contract between the agency and the professional body that issues the final professional-public accreditation. The contract between the two parties state what part of the 'AKKORK Criteria' should be used in a particular professional-public accreditation, but the basis for a final judgement is not defined nor published.

On the agency's website, the panel found published only the requirements for e-learning accreditation, again without the explanation on what basis the accreditation is then given. The requirements to meet the 'AKKORK Criteria' (relevant for professional-public accreditation and independent accreditation on the programme or institutional level) are also not published and the agency publishes no links to the requirements of partner agencies for joint international accreditations. For IQAS, the published criteria differ between Russian and English part of the website.

All in all, the panel notes that for none of the procedures as offered by AKKORK the full explanation is provided nor published on what is forming the basis for final judgements on a particular activity.

Based on the evidence gathered, the panel cannot conclude that the existing criteria are applied consistently for reaching judgements on the agency's activities. The panel notes that the agency experts can be easily found confused by the (lack of) proper formulation of the 'AKKORK Criteria' that are most widely used at the agency, leading the review experts to rely on their experience in QA rather than the requirements of the methodology as specified by AKKORK. While consistency in using the criteria by the panels is to be ensured by providing feedback from AKKORK staff and the Advisory Council to these panels, the panel found little evidence of the effectiveness of such practices. In particular, the panel found multiple examples where "accreditation on high standards" was issued to Master programmes that have received multiple recommendations in the experts' report and have not received full maximum rating by the review panel. In addition, tables 4 and 5 that define mappings between expert judgements and overall decisions did not fit together (table 5 lists possible accreditations for 4, 5 or 6 years which are not part of table 4) and were incomplete (table 4 does not define what happens in case of a 5 rating in both parts). The terms of accreditation found in example reports did not match the terms in the tables.

Following the presented evidence and analysis, the panel concludes that the agency also did not follow up on the recommendation from the ENQA review in 2014.

Panel recommendations

The requirements on how to meet the criteria and how to reach different accreditation decisions based on these criteria should be defined explicitly and clearly for each activity of AKKORK. This should be communicated to HEIs and experts in the same way, as well as published on the agency's website.

The agency should establish more effective processes to ensure consistency and transparency in the application of the criteria in the agency's decision-making processes.

Panel conclusion: not compliant

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

2014 review recommendation

"AKKORK should publish all of its review reports on its website, including those at institutional level and negative ones."

Evidence

The reports of AKKORK procedures are often translated back and forth between Russian and English in the following ways: In case both Russian and international reviewers are part of the panel, the international reviewers write their individual reports in English and then these reports are translated by the agency staff to Russian, such that they can be incorporated into the final, joint report of the panel in Russian. This is done for all activities except for the joint international accreditation, and only in case that the panel includes an international reviewer, which is possible for all of AKKORK's activities. Reports for joint international accreditation are written by the panel in English. To take a decision by the International Accreditation Council, all reports of AKKORK that were written by the panel in Russian are translated to English.

Before an accreditation decision can be taken, the panel learned that all reports go through the following steps aimed at ensuring their consistency. The agency staff checks the reports of the review panels and sends feedback. The HEIs can also send their feedback on factual errors in the reports. Finally, the Advisory Council approves every report before the report is sent to the accreditation body of a particular activity (SAR, pp. 39-40). The Advisory Council further informed the panel that they often send the reports back to the experts for improvement. None of the experts that the panel met could confirm this. The experts claimed to receive feedback only from the AKKORK staff. The reports for joint international accreditation exist only in English. However, the members of the Advisory Council that met with the panel required verbal translation between English and Russian. The panel could not understand how these members of the Advisory Council are able to check the quality of reports that are not written in Russian language.

In case of professional-public accreditations, the panel learned that the agency staff compiles a second report in a different format from the original report compiled by the panel. This is called "independent education quality evaluation results" in the SAR (p. 30) (from here on called secondary report). To produce these secondary reports, the agency staff maps the review panel's ratings of a subset of the

‘AKKORK Criteria’ into a table format for the purpose of the accreditation by the professional organisation. In one example of such reports provided to the panel, the panel saw that the AKKORK staff had left out the name of the international reviewer, who was part of the review panel. When asked about this case, the agency staff explained to the panel that the person in question did not contribute to the specified subset of criteria used for the secondary report. The review experts that met with the panel did not receive the secondary report for confirmation. However, the panel learned that it is sent to the HEI for check-up on factual error and to the Advisory Council for approval. The panel further notes that in case that professional-public accreditation is conducted together with an independent accreditation on the programme level, there is one report written by the panel. This is then the final report for the independent accreditation and also the basis on which the agency staff compiles the secondary report that is further used in the professional-public accreditation.

The general platform used for the publication of reports is the agency’s website. For professional-public accreditations, the panel learned about the existence of the State System of Monitoring of professional-public accreditations⁸ (Автоматизированная информационная система мониторинга результатов профессионально-общественной аккредитации образовательных программ, also called the ‘central database’ in this report). The ‘central database’ is a national platform where reports and decisions of professional-public accreditations in the RF can be published, but do not have to be published.

Following a close examination of the agency’s website, the panel found that the following reports (presented in table 6) have been found published on the Russian version of this website, or in case of professional-public accreditations, in the ‘central database’ instead of the agency’s website:

	reports published / procedures conducted ⁹		
Procedure	2016	2017	2018
Independent accreditation (on the programme level)	6 / 5	18 / 20	11 / 11
Professional-public accreditation	0 / 42	7 / 53	0 / 16
Joint international accreditation	1 / 1	4 / 19	19 / 19
E-learning accreditation	0 / 1	0 / 0	0 / 0
Independent accreditation on the institutional level	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0
IQAS	0 / 0	0 / 0	0 / 0

Table 6: Reports that the panel found published, compared to the number of activities conducted.

The panel further notes that most agency reports, in particular all reports from 2016 on, are only published on the Russian part of the agency’s website. Furthermore, some of these reports were published on the agency’s website only during the ENQA site-visit and therefore much later than when initially produced (e.g. the joint international accreditation reports, apart from 15 reports that came out as an outcome of the project in cooperation with ZEvA in Saint Petersburg University in 2018).

⁸ <https://accredpoa.ru/accreditors/index/view/id/1#collapse851>

⁹ Number of procedures according to SAR p. 24

Importantly, the panel notes that all published reports on the agency's website are accompanied by the duration of accreditation, but not any elaboration on the accreditation decision, such as providing an explanation of whether it is a conditional or a full accreditation and what the conditions are.

As it can be seen in table 6, in the majority of cases for professional-public accreditations, there are no reports available in the 'central database'. Those that are published in the central database are in all cases 'secondary' reports. On the agency's website, only the initial reports for the independent accreditation on the programme level, in case that the two activities were conducted jointly, are published. For all the seven programmes where the panel found reports on the professional-public accreditation published, the activity was conducted jointly with the independent accreditation. Therefore, the panel found no primary or secondary reports published for the case where the professional-public accreditation was conducted alone. Different to the reports published on the agency's website, all reports that were found in the central database were accompanied by the accreditation decision.

All in all, the reports handed to the panel followed the structure as it stands here:

- Introduction: listing the name of the reviewed institution or programme and the reviewers. Additionally, in some reports the context of the programme of the institution evaluated is described (e.g., the employment possibilities after finalising the study programme in question or a comparison to similar programmes in the geographic region of the HEI)
- Summary of strengths, weaknesses, recommendations and ratings by the expert panel
- Elaboration on all criteria: ratings, strengths, recommendations and in some cases additional information
- Information on the reviewers, e.g. their area of expertise, employment etc.

Importantly, the reports do not contain a description of the external QA process as performed by the agency. Furthermore, the (secondary) reports of professional-public accreditations listed in the 'central database' additionally miss the context description, a summary, and detailed information on the reviewers.

At the end of the site visit, the panel was presented with the demonstration of a new website concept of the agency. The initial plan was to finalise the website in 2018 (Strategic Plan 2018-2020), but the delivery date has now been moved to 2020, according to the statement of the Director General. The new website concept showed mock-reports published together with the accreditation decisions and made them searchable by region, study programme area, university, and partner organizations. The new website concept also includes links to reports published by partner organizations.

Analysis

While the panel recognizes the efforts that the agency has put into the new website and therefore in future publishing of all reports and accreditation decisions for all of the agency's activities, it also observed many gaps in the current publication of review reports.

The reports for joint international accreditations and the independent accreditations on the programme level are in most cases published, even though this was done only during or just before the site visit. For e-learning accreditations, out of the two procedures performed by the agency the panel found only one report from 2014 published, but not the report from 2016. The report from 2016 was handed to the panel during the site visit as an additional material.

However, the majority of procedures conducted by AKKORK are professional-public accreditations. For this activity, no reports are published or linked on the agency's website, and most could not be

found published in the 'central database'. This is worrisome to the panel. Even more, the panel is especially concerned about the compilation of reports for professional-public accreditations based on the reports of other activities of the agency and in the name of the review panels conducting those activities. These panels have not approved the secondary reports for professional-public accreditations. External review reports are produced by review panels as a whole and should be attributed to and approved by all experts.

The panel concludes that the majority of reports are not published and that the agency did not follow the ENQA panel recommendation from 2014.

Panel recommendations

AKKORK should publish all of its review reports on its website.

If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

All reports for professional-public accreditations should be published in the state system for professional-public accreditation.

All reports that are the outcome of panel's work should be referenced by, and approved by, those same panels. The reports should also always list all panel members.

Panel conclusion: not compliant

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

2014 review recommendation

"AKKORK should clearly determine its appeals procedure and make it available on its website."

Evidence

The panel learned that the possible complaints on any activity of AKKORK can be raised to the project manager of that particular activity in an oral form. The project manager would then handle these complaints, or in case the complaint lies outside of the area of responsibility of the project manager, the complaint would be handled by the AKKORK Director General.

Appeals on all of the agency's activities should be submitted in writing directly to the accrediting body, i.e. to the professional organisation's body in case of professional-public accreditation, to the partner agency's body in case of joint international accreditation and to the International Accreditation Council for all other activities. The appeals are then sent to and handled by the Appeals Committee, which is formed of members of the accrediting body in question and senior staff of the accrediting organization (see the Guidelines for Educational Organizations). In cases when an appeal is submitted against the decision of the AKKORK International Accreditation Council, the AKKORK Appeals Committee will consist of members of this same Council, the senior staff of the agency and members of the Supervisory Board.

The panel founds the details for the complaints and appeals procedure published together with every procedure on the agency's website, except for the independent accreditation on the institutional level, which is the activity that does not appear on the website. The appeals procedure is also explained in the Guidelines for Educational Organizations.

The panel met a representative of a HEI who told the panel that his HEI had issued an appeal to AKKORK. The HEI appealed against the accreditation decision of a professional organization, following the professional-public accreditation of a study programme. When asked about the details of this case, the agency staff explained the panel that the issue in question was not an appeal but rather a complaint, as the professional organization took too long to make an accreditation decision. The agency therefore states to have no appeals so far, which is in accordance with information as presented in the SAR (p. 69).

Analysis

The panel acknowledges the existence of processes for complaints and appeals for all of the agency's activities. The procedures for both, the complaints and appeals, are communicated to the HEIs via the agency website and/or the Guidelines of Educational Organizations.

While the panel acknowledges the progress the agency has made since the ENQA review in 2014, there is still a concern in place about the composition of the AKKORK Appeals Committee. The committee involves members of the International Accreditation Council, i.e. of the same body initially involved in the accreditation decision making. The committee also includes members of the Supervisory Board, the body that needs to be directly approved by the private companies, i.e. the founders of AKKORK. The panel believes that the Appeals Committee should be an independent body without any influence from the founding organizations and with no overlap with the decision-making body of AKKORK.

Panel recommendation

The appeals committee should be a completely independent body and should not include members of any other body of AKKORK.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.2

AKKORK is recognized by professional organisations of different sectors to carry out professional-public accreditation procedures on their behalf.

ESG 3.4

The panel commends the agency for publishing the Education Quality magazine that is perceived as a well-established publication in the higher education community of Russia.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The panel found the following compliance of AKKORK with the ESG:

- fully compliant for ESG 3.2, 3.7
- substantially compliant for ESG 3.3, 3.5, 2.4, 2.7
- partially compliant for ESG 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3
- not compliant for ESG 2.5, 2.6

The following recommendations by the panel are meant to support the agency to reach compliance with the individual standards:

ESG 3.1

The agency should align its mission statement and connected goals and objectives with its current activities and the strategy.

The agency should develop a regular process of strategic planning that translates its mission into the comprehensive and targeted plans.

The existing cooperation with stakeholder organisations should be used to develop a system of proposing candidates to the AKKORK bodies by the stakeholders themselves.

ESG 3.3

All reports and other outcomes of AKKORK's external QA procedures should clearly indicate AKKORK as the conducting agency.

The statutes should reflect the actual structure of the agency, especially that the General Meeting does not elect any members of the Advisory Council or the International Accreditation Council.

ESG 3.4

All published documents of thematic analysis should clearly indicate the title, author, and date of publication.

The agency should establish a clear process to address all of its activities in thematic analyses (e.g. the joint international accreditations) and to distribute the outcomes of such analyses to its stakeholders in a coherent way.

ESG 3.5

The agency should establish processes for its financial management and strategic planning to ensure the sustainability of the agency's operations under the declining revenues (2014-2018), to achieve its mission, and to seize opportunities that the agency sees for itself.

ESG 3.6

The agency should consistently document and/or develop internal QA processes that are formal, explicit and close the loop. These processes should aim for the quality of the process outputs and for monitoring and critical reflection on the agency's activities while avoiding bureaucratic burden.

ESG 2.1

The agency should define coherent and independent sets of criteria for each of its procedures that are aligned carefully with Part one of the ESG.

The IQAS methodology should be reconsidered to fully address the elements of ESG Part 1 based on a clear usage of the selected QM model(s).

The agency should ensure that the entire ESG part 1 are taken into account for professional-public accreditation.

ESG 2.2

If the agency is considering continuing to offer all of its procedures, it should clearly set the aims and objectives for all offered procedures.

The agency should establish processes for the involvement of external stakeholders (apart from the representatives in its bodies) in the design and continuous improvement of the offered procedures.

ESG 2.3

The agency should consistently publish the detailed procedures of the external QA processes it is offering.

If the agency is considering continuing to operate outside of the RF higher education system, it should follow the European Approach for Cross-Border Quality Assurance.

The agency should ensure that there is a structured follow-up mechanism for each of its EQA activities, including those resulting in unconditional accreditation.

ESG 2.4

All expert panels should be consistently composed following AKKORK's regulations.

All experts should be listed on any report that is an outcome of the panel's work.

ESG 2.5

The requirements on how to meet the criteria and how to reach different accreditation decisions based on these criteria should be defined explicitly and clearly for each activity of AKKORK. This should be communicated to HEIs and experts in the same way, as well as published on the agency's website.

The agency should establish more effective processes to ensure consistency and transparency in the application of the criteria in the agency's decision-making processes.

ESG 2.6

AKKORK should publish all of its review reports on its website.

If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

All reports for professional-public accreditations should be published in the state system for professional-public accreditation.

All reports that are the outcome of panel's work should be referenced by, and approved by, those same panels. The reports should also always list all panel members.

ESG 2.7

The appeals committee should be a completely independent body and should not include members of any other body of AKKORK.

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by the panel, the review panel concludes that AKKORK does not comply with the ESG.

The agency is recommended to take appropriate action to achieve at least substantial compliance in all standards at the agency's earliest opportunity.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

ESG 3.1

The information about the aims and objectives of different procedures could be offered in a comparative manner in order to better outline the differences and benefits between the agency's EQA activities.

In the agency projects (i.e. contracts for activities in HEIs) combining independent accreditation and professional-public accreditation, the combination and interplay of the different procedures could be explained more clearly to HEIs, taking also into account the differences between the two activities as outlined in the law.

ESG 3.4

Contributing to the fulfilment of the agency's mission statement, thematic analyses can be published through more means of distribution. These could be for example the website, conferences, etc.

ESG 3.6

Critical self-assessment of the agency's activities towards the ESG requirements and ENQA/ EQAR recommendations could be carried out and would support the implementation of the recommendations. Appointment of a person or group responsible for this would ensure that this activity is carried out.

ESG 2.1

The agency may reflect critically about its understanding of some of the standards (especially ESG 1.3) and the way these are covered by the existing procedures.

The agency may reconsider the need for two different external QA procedures on the institutional level.

The agency may develop clear and independent sets of guidelines for reviewers for all its procedures, outlining the standards and requirements that should be checked in these procedures.

ESG 2.2

The information about the aims and objectives of different procedures could be offered in a comparative manner in order to better outline the differences and benefits between the agency's EQA activities.

In the agency projects (i.e. contracts for activities in HEIs) combining independent accreditation and professional-public accreditation, the combination and interplay of the different procedures could be explained more clearly to HEIs, taking also into account the differences between the two activities as outlined in the law.

ESG 2.4

AKKORK may invite its international experts to share their experience in the so called refreshment trainings of the agency. Agency could also consider training its international experts in case this was not done before or was done long time ago.

Formalising the training content and length would benefit the consistency of the experts' readiness for implementing the agency's activities.

Consider involving experts with diverse international experience in all reviews to strengthen the agency's international profile.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

3 June 2019

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
17-18.30	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for day I	
18.30-19.30	A pre-visit meeting with Erika Soboleva AKKORK Director to clarify elements related to the overall system and context	Erika Soboleva, Director
20.00	Dinner (panel only)	

4 June 2019

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
09.00 - 09.30	Review panel's private meeting	
09.30 - 10.30	Meeting with the CEO and the chair of the Supervisory Board (translation)	Erika Soboleva, CEO (English) Vadim Kovalev (translation)
15 minutes		
10.45 - 11.30	Meeting with Representative of Federal Service for Supervision in Higher Education and Science (translation)	Sergei Rukavishnikov, Head of the Department on Supervision and Control of the HEI of the Federal Service for Supervision in Higher Education and Science
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
11.45 - 12.30	Meeting with representatives from the Senior Management Team	Anna Soloveva, Deputy on Projects (English) Marianna Rubina, Deputy on Finance (English)
12.30 - 13.45	Lunch (panel only)	
13.45 - 14.45	Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report (translation)	Liudmila Stepanchenko, Deputy on Development Larisa Danchenok, Representative of Advisory Council
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
15.00 - 15.45	Meeting with heads of some reviewed HEIs/HEI representatives (translation)	- Natalia Perekrestova, Executive Director, Top Manager programme, RANEPa, (international accreditation)

15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
16.00 - 16.45	Meeting with key staff of the agency/staff in charge of evaluations	Anna Soloveva, Deputy on Projects (English) Mariya Kulemina, Manager of the projects office (English)
As necessary	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day II	
	Dinner (panel only)	

5 June 2019

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
08.30 - 09.00	Review panel private meeting	
09.00 - 09.45	Meeting with AKKORK Advisory Council (translation)	Vladimir Zyryanov Vladimir Shadrikov (Chair)
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
10.00 - 11.00	Meeting with heads of some reviewed HEIs/HEI representatives (SKYPE + translation)	- Marina Lavrikova (Senior Vice Rector), Irina Grigorieva (deputy head in Educational Programmes Department), SPBU (3 types of accreditations) - Denis Fomenkov (dean), Olga Savinova (programme head), Higher School of Economics Nizhniy Novgorod Branch (professional public accreditation) - Natalia Gafurova SFU (e-learning accreditation)
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
11.15-12.00	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEIs- (translation)	- Olga Anisimova, (professional-public + independent eval) Dubna University - Alexandra Vorobieva, (international accreditation) RUDN
15 minutes	Review panel's private discussion	
12.15-13.00	Meeting with international representatives from the reviewers' pool (SKYPE)	Olaf Neitzsh- international reviewer (speak English) Eduard Petlenkov – international reviewer (speak English)
13.00-14.00	Lunch (panel only)	
14.00-15.00	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool (translation)	Yuri Sanberg – reviewer from employer side

		<p>Alexander Kotelnikov – academic reviewer</p> <p>Tatiana Ilyushina- academic reviewer</p> <p>Olga Muravieva – reviewer from employer side</p> <p>Alexander Drondin- part time manager</p> <p>Mikhail Asmankin</p> <p>Mariya Stupicheva</p>
15 minutes	Review panel’s private discussion	
15.15-16.00	Meeting with AKKORK partners- employers organizations...(translation)	<p>Olesya Zelenova-Director Neftegazconsalt (HR agency for Oil + Gas)</p> <p>Vladimir Zuykov- member of the Council for professional qualifications in the sphere of Electroenergetics</p> <p>Svetlana Volkova</p> <p>Arkady Zamoskovniy</p>
As necessary	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day III and provisional conclusions	
	Dinner (panel only)	

6 June 2019

TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
30-60 minutes	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify	
09.15 - 09.45	Meeting with CEO to clarify any pending issues	Erika Soboleva, CEO (English)
15 minutes	Review panel’s private discussion	
10.00 - 10.45	Meeting with International Accreditation Council of AKKORK (SKYPE)	<p>Patricia Georgieva (English)</p> <p>Karl Donert (English)</p> <p>Mikhail Soloviev (English)</p>
10.45 - 12.30	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings	
12.30 - 13.30	Lunch (panel only)	
13.30 - 14.30	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Council/Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

January 2019

1. Background and context

The Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Career Development (AKKORK) is an autonomous non-profit organization, founded in 2005, that contributes to the development of education institutions and improvement of quality of the higher education system in Russia. AKKORK helps Russian HEIs to optimize the management and internal control systems, as well as to discover HEIs potential and competitiveness.

The mission of AKKORK is to form and develop in Russia an independent system of education quality assessment and assurance that corresponds to the principles of the Bologna declaration and the world best practices.

AKKORK's objectives are to:

- Improve education quality;
- Increase of society satisfaction degree with the education quality;
- Increase of employers satisfaction degree with the education quality;
- Improve the HEI quality monitoring process;
- Increase HEI staff satisfaction degree with the conditions of their work;
- Engage the staff of HEI into the work on quality, increase of its quality idea adherence;
- Increase the compliance of HEI programmes with the requirements of European standards and guidelines.

AKKORK's key activities are:

- Independent evaluation of education quality (on programme or institutional level);
- Independent evaluation of education quality for professional - public programme accreditation;
- International accreditation (of education programmes or institutions);
- International e-learning accreditation;
- Internal quality assurance system audit and certification (IQAS).

AKKORK has been an ENQA member since March 2015 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

AKKORK has been registered on EQAR since November 2015 and is applying for renewal of EQAR registration.

2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This review will evaluate the way in which and to what extent AKKORK fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of AKKORK should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support AKKORK application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

2.1 Activities of AKKORK within the scope of the ESG

In order for AKKORK to re-apply for ENQA membership and for renewal of registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all AKKORK activities that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of AKKORK have to be addressed in the external review:

- Independent evaluation of education quality (on programme or institutional level);
- Independent evaluation of education quality for professional - public programme accreditation;
- International accreditation (of education programmes or institutions);
- International e-learning accreditation;
- Internal quality assurance system audit and certification (IQAS).

3. The review process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by AKKORK including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to AKKORK;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide AKKORK with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards AKKORK review.

3.2 Self-assessment by AKKORK, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

AKKORK is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which AKKORK fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 EUR will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A site visit by the review panel

AKKORK will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to AKKORK at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by AKKORK in arriving in Moscow, Russia.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on compliance or granting of ENQA membership.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to AKKORK within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If AKKORK chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by AKKORK, finalise the document and submit it to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

AKKORK is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which AKKORK expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

4. Follow-up process and publication of the report

AKKORK will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. AKKORK commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by AKKORK. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether AKKORK has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to AKKORK and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by AKKORK, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. AKKORK may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

6. Budget

AKKORK shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 2 other panel members	4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for progress visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses progress visit	1,600 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, AKKORK will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to AKKORK if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the progress visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

7. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on terms of reference	November 2018
Appointment of review panel members	January 2018
Self-assessment completed	1 March 2019
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	March 2019
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	April 2019
Briefing of review panel members	May 2019
Review panel site visit	By mid-June 2019
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	Late-July 2019
Draft of evaluation report to AKKORK	August 2019
Statement of AKKORK to review panel if necessary	September 2019
Submission of final report to ENQA	September 2019
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board	October 2019
Publication of the report	October 2019

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
FS	Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
QA	quality assurance
RF	Russian Federation
SAR	self-assessment report

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AKKORK

The following documents were supplementary material to the SAR:

SAR Annex 1: Statutes of the autonomous non-profit organization «The Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Career Development»

SAR Annex 2: AKKORK Budget 2014-2018

SAR Annex 3: Report Template

SAR Annex 4: AKKORK Internal Regulations

SAR Annex 5: Regulations on the work with AKKORK reviewers

SAR Annex 6: The Guidelines for Reviewer on Conducting on External Evaluation of Education Quality and Quality Assurance on Programme Level

SAR Annex 7: Regulations on International Accreditation Council of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Career Development.

SAR Annex 8: Regulations on the Advisory Council of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Career Development

SAR Annex 9: QUESTIONNAIRE «EVALUATION OF SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICES RENDERED BY THE ANO “AKKORK”

SAR Annex 10: Guidelines for educational organizations

SAR Annex 11: Agreement of Confidentiality

The following documents were supplied to the panel upon request before the site-visit:

Additional Document: Критерии и стандарты качества АККОРК на уровне образовательной программы высшего образования (Criteria and quality standards of AKKORK at the level of the educational programmes for higher education)

Additional Document: Criteria of Internal quality assurance system audit and accreditation (IQAS)

Additional Document: AKKORK CRITERIA FOR QUALITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE ASSESSMENT: QUALITY OF THE LEARNING OURCOMES

Additional Document: AKKORK CRITERIA FOR QUALITY AND QUALITY ASSURANCE ASSESSMENT: QUALITY ASSURANCE OF EDUCATION (INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS)

Additional Document: UNIQUe Self-Assessment Form

Additional Document: Стратегический план развития на 2018-2020 г. (Strategic Plan 2018-2020)

Additional Document: AKKORK detailed budget 2015-2018

Additional Document: REPORT on the results of a higher education main professional programme review “LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES” at the State Budgetary Educational Institution of the Higher Education “SAINT-PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY”

Additional Document: List of EQA Activities from 2016-2018

Additional Document: REPORT on the Results of External Assessment of the Programme “Applied Physics and Mathematics” (Bachelor’s Degree) Saint Petersburg State University

Additional Document: REPORT on the results of the external assessment of the Economics Bachelor programme Tambov State Technical University

Additional Document: REPORT on the results of an external review of the main professional educational programme of higher education “FINANCES AND CREDIT” offered in the Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education “ROSTOV STATE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS (RINKh)”

The following documents were supplied to the panel during the site-visit:

Additional Document: Stages of the implementation of (evaluation) projects (in RUS)

Additional Document: Agreement on joint activities and cooperation between the Federal Association of Employers in Electrical Engineering and AKKORK in RUS

Additional Document: Protocol from 30.01.2018 of the meeting of the AKKORK General Meeting (in RUS)

Additional Document: Protocol no 2018-0530 dated May 30, 2018: Meeting of the International Accreditation Council (adoption of three accreditation decisions) (in ENG)

Additional Document: Guidelines for Educational Organizations on Institutional Accreditation (based on AKKORK Criteria Part 2) (in RUS)

Additional Document: Correlation between the criteria of the Association of Managers (AMP) and those of AKKORK (in RUS)

Additional Document: UNIQUE: Application by Siberian Federal University. Report and Recommendations arising from the Review of Documentation and Onsite visit 14-16 September 2015 (in ENG)

Additional Document: Association of the Managers of RF. Expert Report on professional-public accreditation of the BA programme „Economics“ implemented by the Tambov State University of Technology (in RUS)

Additional Document: IQAS: Guidelines for experts on evaluation the quality of education at the institutional level (Moscow 2019) (in RUS)

Additional Document: Cooperation Agreement between the Association of Managers and AKKORK from 26.07.2013, with the duration of 5 years (in RUS)

Additional Document: Letter from the GD of AKKORK Anisimov to the vice director of the Association of the Mechanical Engineering reminding about the deadline for making accreditation decision by the association (connected with the complaint form 2015) (in RUS)

Additional Document: Protocol from the meeting of the Committee of Association of Aircraft Engineering 18.03.2015 (in RUS)

Additional Document: Regulation on AKKORK Supervisory Board (last amendments 31.01.2017) (in RUS)

Additional Document: 2 Certificates on professional-public accreditation issued by the Committee for Professional Qualifications in Electrical Engineering, signed by GD of AKKORK E. Soboleva and the Secretary of the Committee

OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

In addition to the supplied documents, the panel gathered evidence from the agency's website 'akkork.ru' and the central database for reports of the professional-public accreditation 'accredpoa.ru/accreditors/index/view/id/1#collapse851'.



THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Career Development (AKKORK), undertaken in 2019.



2019 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW