

Approval of the Application
by Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
(IQAA)
for Inclusion on the Register

Register Committee

Ref. RC19/A36

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Application of:	19/01/2016
External review report of:	13/02/2017
Review coordinated by:	ENQA
Review panel members:	Oliver Vettori (chair) (academic), Ewa Kolanowska (secretary), Heli Mattisen, Dan Derricott (student)
Decision of:	20 June 2017
Registration until:	28 February 2022
Absented themselves from decision-making:	N/a
Attachments:	1. Confirmation of eligibility, 02/02/2016 2. External Review Report, February 2017 3. Applicant statement on the report, 10/03/2017

1. The application of Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA) adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 02/02/2016.
3. The Register Committee considered the external review report of February 2017 on the compliance of IQAA with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).
4. The Register Committee further considered IQAA's Statement on the External Review Report (of 10/03/2017).
5. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from the chair of the review panel.

Analysis:

6. In considering IQAA's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee only took into account: *institutional accreditation of higher education institutions; specialized accreditation of study programmes of higher*

education institutions; institutional accreditation of the educational departments of research organizations; specialized accreditation of study programmes of research organizations.

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7. *Accreditation of technical and vocational education and training organizations at programme and institutional level* are external quality assurance (EQA) activities within the scope of the ESG as long as the courses or degrees offered belong to the cycle of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).
8. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on IQAA's level of compliance with the ESG.
9. With regard to the specific European Standards and Guidelines, the Register Committee considered the following:

ESG 2.1: Consideration of internal quality assurance

The panel noted that the decision-making procedure of the Accreditation Council does not give any special consideration to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance process e.g. by linking the varying progress made by institutions in the development of IQA to the three possible final outcomes.

While the panel found that IQAA's approach reflects the early stages of its development, the panel recommended a stronger focus on the effectiveness of internal quality assurance in IQAA's accreditation methodology as well as a refining of accreditation standards on student-centred learning (ESG 1.3) so that they give more consideration to how the concept is translated into pedagogical approaches and assessment practices; and more consideration to the primary responsibility of institutions for quality in its interpretation (ESG 1.9).

Considering the agency's shortcomings in addressing the effectiveness of internal QA processes in its institutional and specialised accreditation procedure and the need for a refining of its standards, the Register Committee was unable to concur with the panel's conclusion of substantial compliance, but considered that IQAA complies only partially with standard 2.1.

ESG 2.2: Designing methodologies fit for purpose

Considering the fitness for purpose of the agency's methodology, the panel identified a number of shortcomings i.e. lack of a regular review of the agency's methodology, blurring of boundaries between the agency's different functions (such as the preliminary review processes and the post-accreditation monitoring process).

In the analysis the panel further underlined the need to shift the responsibility for quality from agency towards the institution and that the current procedures might be impeding such development.

While the Register Committee considered the agency's statement to the review report, noting the phasing out of preliminary reviews and the clarification regarding post-accreditation reviews, the Committee concluded that the achieved fitness for purpose of IQA's methodology needs to be externally reviewed.

The Committee underlined the panel's recommendation regarding the arrangements for regular collection of feedback from external stakeholders and concurred with the panel that IQAA complies only partially with standard 2.2.

ESG 2.5: Criteria for outcomes

The panel noted some inconsistencies between the provisions for programme accreditation and institutional accreditation, i.e. the IQAA Accreditation Council can only modify the points awarded for decisions in case of programme accreditation but not for institutional accreditation.

The panel further noted that it is not always clear how the number and weight of recommendations is linked to the compliance levels of each standard i.e. some reports may include recommendations or critical comments, while other reports do not although in both cases the standard is considered 'fully compliant'. The panel considered this was a result of the fact that the guidelines for experts are not sufficiently precise.

The panel recommended a revision of the agency's decision-making algorithm, in particular a clarification of the minimum requirements to be fulfilled by higher education institutions and the acceptable shortcomings for each of the four levels of compliance within IQAA's accreditation standards.

Considering the above, the Register Committee was unable to concur with the panel's conclusion of 'substantial compliance', but considered that IQAA is only partially compliant with standard 2.5.

ESG 2.6: Reporting

The panel noted that IQAA's regulations regarding the publication of results from accreditation reviews were not entirely clear and consistent. Whereas some provisions stated that all reports and decisions would be published, others stated that only reviews leading to a positive decision were being published.

The panel found that in case of a negative decision on accreditation, neither reports nor outcomes are published. In addition, the panel noted that discrepancies exist between the information available on the Russian and English languages websites.

In its statement on the review report, the agency announced that it had recently published all expert review reports and decisions of the

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Accreditation Council and that it had updated its regulations to explicitly outline that all review reports are published irrespective of their outcomes.

The Register Committee could, however, not verify the statement of the agency that also negative decisions would be published, using the link provided. The Register Committee therefore concurred with the conclusion of the panel that IQAA complies only partially with standard 2.6.

ESG 3.1: Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

The panel noted (p. 30, under ESG 2.2) that IQAA's efforts to support institutions throughout the assessment process have led to the blurring of boundaries between the agency's different functions i.e. consultancy-type support offered to individual institutions as part of its preliminary reviews and its regular external QA activities. In its statement to the review report the agency explained that IQAA's Accreditation Council has phased out preliminary reviews in December 2016.

Based on the understanding that the agency has ceased these activities, the Register Committee concluded that there is no further risk of conflicts of interest¹ and, therefore, the Committee was able to concur with the view of the panel that the agency is compliant with standard 3.1.

The Register Committee, however, underlined that agency is expected to make a substantive change report should IQAA resume the same or similar consultancy-type activities offered to higher education institutions.

ESG 3.4: Thematic analysis

While the panel welcomed the consistent publication of studies by IQAA addressing the Kazakh higher education and QA systems and the impact of IQAA's reviews on institutional enhancement the panel however noted that IQAA does not analyse in its publication the results from its institutional and programme reviews.

In its statement on the External Review Report, the agency explained that it did not interpret standard 3.4 to explicitly require analyses based on external review reports, but it nevertheless agreed on the importance of these findings and has published a number of studies based on expert panel review reports on institutional accreditation.

Considering the evidence provided the Register Committee found that IQAA has addressed its compliance with the standard. The Committee

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¹ See Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies, p. 8.
http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/RC_12_1_UseAndInterpretationOfTheESG_v1_0.pdf

therefore did not concur with the panel’s conclusion of partial compliance and concluded that IQAA is in fact compliant with standard 3.4.

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10. For the remaining standards, the Register Committee was able to concur with the review panel’s analysis and conclusion without further comments.

Conclusion:

11. Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that IQAA demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

Standard	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	Substantially compliant	Partial compliance
2.2	Partially compliant	Partial compliance
2.3	Fully compliant	Compliance
2.4	Fully compliant	Compliance
2.5	Substantially compliant	Partial compliance
2.6	Partially compliant	Partial compliance
2.7	Fully compliant	Compliance
3.1	Substantially compliant	Compliance
3.2	Fully compliant	Compliance
3.3	Fully compliant	Compliance
3.4	Partially compliant	Compliance
3.5	Fully compliant	Compliance
3.6	Substantially compliant	Compliance
3.7	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

12. The Register Committee considered that IQAA only achieved partial compliance with some standards. In its holistic judgement, the Register Committee concluded that these are specific and limited issues, but that IQAA complies substantially with the ESG as a whole.
13. The Register Committee therefore approved the application for inclusion on the Register. IQAA’s inclusion shall be valid until 28/02/2022².
14. The Register Committee further underlined that IQAA is expected to address the issues mentioned appropriately and to resolve them at the earliest opportunity as well as to inform EQAR through Substantive Change Reports where required.

² Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see §4.1 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA)

Sholpan Kalanova

Dostyk Str.20, Office 801

010000, Astana

Kazakhstan

Brussels, 02 February 2016

Confirmation of Eligibility: Application for Inclusion on the Register

Application no. A36 of IQAA 19/01/2016

Dear Ms Kalanova,

We hereby confirm that the application by IQAA for inclusion on the Register is eligible.

Based on the information and terms of reference provided, the external review coordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) fulfils the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

We confirm that the following activities of IQAA are within the scope of the ESG:

- Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions;
- Specialized accreditation of study programmes of higher education institutions;
- Institutional accreditation of the educational departments of research organizations;
- Specialized accreditation of study programmes of research organizations.

Please ensure that IQAA's self-evaluation report covers all the aforementioned activities.

We confirm that the following activities are not external quality assurance (EQA) activities within the scope of the ESG as long as the courses or degrees do not belong to any cycle of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area:

- Institutional accreditation of technical and vocational education and training organizations;
- Specialized accreditation of study programmes of technical and vocational education and training organizations;
- Institutional accreditation of career development organizations and centers for further education;

European Quality Assurance
Register for Higher Education
(EQAR) aisbl

Avenue d'Auderghem/
Oudergemselaan 36
1040 Brussels – Belgium

Phone: +32 2 234 39 12

Fax: +32 2 230 33 47

info@eqar.eu

www.eqar.eu

VAT BE 0897.690.557

- Specialized accreditation of study programmes of career development organizations and centers for further education.

While these activities are not relevant to your application, it is IQAA's choice – in agreement with the review coordinator – whether those activities should be commented upon by the review panel.

We kindly ask you to forward this letter to ENQA as the coordinator of the external review and request that ENQA inform the review panel, so as to ensure that all these activities are analysed by the panel.

This confirmation is made according to the relevant provisions of the EQAR Procedures for Applications. IQAA has the right to appeal this decision in accordance with the Appeals Procedure; any appeal must reach EQAR within 90 days from receipt of this decision.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Tück'.

Colin Tück
(Director)

Cc: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
(ENQA)

IQAA's Statement on the External Review Report

Astana, Kazakhstan

10 March 2017

IQAA would like to thank the panel for its diligent assessment of the agency's activities, professional and rigorous conduct as well as positive and kind attitude during the peer review. IQAA is grateful for the panel's conclusion that the agency is in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), and for its overall positive assessment of the agency's activities. The agency would like to commend the panel on producing a clearly structured external review report.

The agency is thankful to the panel for individual commendations on a number of standards, including for genuine and extensive engagement of representatives of the academic community and employers in its governance and external quality assurance activities, its openness to change and responsiveness to internal and external feedback, and its consistent efforts to ensure the involvement of students as equal members of external review panels among others.

The recommendations provided in the external review report are clear and their implementation is important for the agency's further development. IQAA would like to address some of the main recommendations of the panel and the work in progress on their implementation.

ESG 3.4 Thematic Analysis

External Review Report, pp. 21, 43:

The panel recommends that IQAA analyse the material available in its accreditation review reports and produce on this basis (a) thematic analysis (es) to support further development of quality assurance in higher education institutions and policy development on national level.

IQAA produced thematic analyses based on external review activities before, but not based on external review reports. The agency hasn't produced thematic

analyses based on external review reports in the past because there are no explicit requirements in either the standards or guidelines in the ESG 3.4 to produce thematic analyses based on external review reports. However, the agency agrees it is important to produce thematic analyses based on external review reports, and since the reception of the panel’s recommendation in the preliminary version of the external review report in November 2016, the agency has recently published [three thematic analyses based on external review reports](#). The first thematic analysis based on external review reports is on institutional accreditation and the two others are on “Education” and “Technical Sciences and Technology” fields of studies. IQAA intends to further strengthen in this sphere of its activities and continue the publication of thematic analyses based on external review reports to support quality assurance and policy development at national level.

ESG 3.6 Internal Quality Assurance and Professional Conduct

External Review Report, pp. 25, 43:

Put in place, as part of its internal quality assurance system, a formal mechanism for regular self-analysis and self-assessment and use of findings from the process of institutional enhancement.

IQAA amended its standards and guidelines several times since it was founded in 2008. IQAA’s standards and guidelines were amended in 2012, and then again in 2015, based on the updated ESG. The standards and guidelines were being reviewed and amended every several years in practice; however, this procedure was not formalised.

Based on the panel’s recommendation, IQAA formally instituted an annual review process for self-analysis and self-assessment to review its standards and guidelines on regular basis.

ESG 2.2 Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose

External Review Report, pp. 31, 44:

The panel recommends that in order to make its external quality assurance methodology better fit for purpose, IQAA (1) phase out its preliminary review process; redesign its post-accreditation monitoring process before the second cycle of accreditation reviews, so that it focuses on follow-up on action taken by institutions in response to findings from accreditation reviews (rather than on

progress they make towards meeting its accreditation standards, with a view of facilitating reaccreditation).

Preliminary reviews were carried out in higher education institutions undergoing institutional accreditation for the first time. They were not applied for programme accreditation, and they were not applied for higher education institutions undergoing institutional accreditation for the second and subsequent times. Preliminary reviews were not designed to provide consultancy-type support for higher education institutions. Rather they constituted an additional step in a review process before external reviews. There were no separate fees collected for preliminary reviews, they were part of a regular institutional accreditation process.

Preliminary reviews were instituted at a time when accreditation of higher education institutions was at its initial stage in Kazakhstan. Before accreditation, there was state attestation of higher education institutions carried out by the Committee of Control in the Fields of Education and Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which was an entirely different procedure. Therefore, preliminary reviews were instituted at the time to strengthen institutional accreditation process.

IQAA, with the approval of the Accreditation Council, phased out preliminary reviews in December 2016. Representatives of the IQAA's Accreditation Council concluded that while preliminary reviews might had been useful for institutional accreditation during an early stage of quality assurance in Kazakhstan, institutional accreditation process had since developed enough to phase them out.

Higher education institutions submit post-accreditation monitoring reports on annual basis. Post-accreditation monitoring was not established to provide consultancy-type support for higher education institutions. Post-accreditation monitoring was instituted to maintain regular communication with higher education institutions, to be informed of substantive changes taking place in them and to monitor their actions in response to recommendations from external reviews. The full description of post-accreditation monitoring process was published online in [the Regulations on Post-Accreditation Monitoring](#), and was available to the panel during the review process.

There were responses to post-accreditation monitoring reports from the agency, whereby comments on their approval and analysis had been provided. Based on the panel's recommendation, the regulations on responses from the agency to post-accreditation monitoring reports were adjusted to remove analysis, and retain only comments on their approval.

ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

External Review Report, pp. 36, 44:

The panel encourages IQAA to consider providing international experts with additional training and/or materials on the national higher education and quality assurance context.

While the agency aims to provide more materials on the national higher education system and quality assurance for international experts, the agency had already published a thematic report [“Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Higher Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan”](#) before the site visit, and it could be used by international experts participating in peer reviews of higher education institutions of Kazakhstan.

ESG 2.6 Reporting

External Review Report, p. 11:

‘Expertise’ assessments are conducted according to the standards for specialised (programme) accreditation of ongoing PhD programmes provided by HEIs (see below). The procedure is the same as for programme accreditation insofar as it comprises a self-evaluation, an external review, including a site visit (though without an interview with students as no are enrolled), and a report produced by an expert panel. Reports had not been available on the IQAA website by the time when the draft external review report was produced by the panel.

External Review Report, pp. 40, 44:

ESG 2.6: *(1) amend its regulations so that they state explicitly that accreditation review reports are published on its website regardless of the final outcome of a review; and (2) accordingly, publish all reports and related decisions of the Accreditation Council at least on its main website.*

IQAA did not have a policy, based on which it didn’t publish review reports on accreditation expertise and review reports of higher education institutions and educational programmes that were not accredited.

When notified of this recommendation by the panel in the preliminary version of the external review report, IQAA [published all remaining review reports](#), including on accreditation expertise and review reports of higher education institutions and educational programmes that were not accredited.

In addition, IQAA [published the Accreditation Council's decisions for all review reports](#) based on the panel's recommendation.

IQAA updated its regulations to explicitly outline that all review reports irrespective of their outcomes are published on the agency's website.

This statement was produced to explain the agency's position on some of the recommendations and describe those changes, which had already taken place at IQAA based on the external review report.

Increasing focus on internal quality assurance of higher education institutions and providing more attention to student-centred learning in the agency's standards and guidelines, among other recommendations, are important for the agency's further development, but they require more time to be addressed. IQAA is fully committed to consistent efforts to improve in this regard.

External review was productive and helpful experience for IQAA. The agency will continue to address recommendations in the external review report to improve its activities and strengthen quality assurance of higher education institutions.