
ENQA AGENCY REVIEW: INDEPENDENT AGENCY FOR ACCREDITATION AND RATING (IAAR)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the report of a review of the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating of the Republic of Kazakhstan (IAAR). IAAR carries out accreditation of both institutions and subject programmes across higher education in Kazakhstan. It also supports institutions in developing their internal quality assurance systems and in preparing for accreditation. Additionally and separately, the agency carries out work on the rating (ranking) of programmes so as to provide public information.

IAAR has been an affiliate agency of ENQA since its foundation in 2011 and is now applying for membership of ENQA. This review was therefore for the purpose of determining whether IAAR in its work as a quality assurance agency was compliant with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (the ESG). Substantial compliance with the ESG meets the criteria for membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and is a condition for registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The review was carried out by a review panel appointed by ENQA.

The panel's work was supported and informed by a self-assessment submitted by IAAR, together with extensive documentation made available by the agency. The panel conducted a site visit to the agency at its offices in Astana in June 2016.

The review panel commended IAAR on a number of aspects of its work: particularly notable are the agency's careful development of its own standards and criteria for accreditation in line with the ESG, and the use of a range of stakeholder experts in its accreditation activities, with students, employers and international experts all contributing.

The judgements of the panel with regard to compliance with the individual ESG standards are as follows:

ESG Part 3: Quality assurance agencies

ESG 3.1 Activities, policy, and processes for quality assurance

Substantially compliant

ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Fully compliant

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Fully compliant

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Substantially compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Fully compliant

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Substantially compliant

ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES
Fully compliant

ESG Part 2: External quality assurance

ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance
Substantially compliant

ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose
Substantially compliant

ESG 2.3 Implementing processes
Substantially compliant

ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts
Fully compliant

ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes
Fully compliant

ESG 2.6 Reporting
Fully compliant

ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals
Partially compliant

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating (IAAR), Republic of Kazakhstan (Независимое агентство аккредитации и рейтинга (НААР)) 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 October 2016.

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.

Since its establishment in 2011, IAAR has been an affiliate of ENQA and over the last five years has been working towards membership of ENQA and being listed on the European Quality Assurance Register.

As this is IAAR's first external review, the panel paid particular attention to the policies, procedures, and criteria in place, being aware that full evidence of concrete results in all areas may not be available at this stage.

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2016 external review of the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating (IAAR) 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 IAAR was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Peter Findlay (Chair), Independent Higher Education consultant, United Kingdom (ENQA nominee);
- Andrejs Rauhvargers (Secretary), Head of Latvian Higher Education Quality Agency, up to mid-2015 Secretary General of the Rectors' Council and Professor at University of Latvia (EUA nominee);
- Rositsa Doneva, Professor at the Department of Electronics, Communications and Information Technology, University of Plovdiv, Bulgaria (ENQA nominee);
- Janine Wulz, Chair of Austrian Students Union (2011-2013), Master's student in Public Management, University of Applied Science Campus Vienna, Austria (ESU nominee).

IAAR prepared a self-assessment report (SAR) which gave a full account of the agency's development and its current work. The SAR with its embedded links to agency documentation provided much of the evidence needed by the panel. The members of the review panel conducted a site visit at the IAAR offices in Astana from 12-14 June 2016. On the basis of the self-assessment, the documentation reviewed, and the meetings held during the site visit, the panel produced the present final report. Due to the indisposition of the panel secretary, the report was completed by the panel Chair. The report is the agreed conclusion of all members of the panel, and opportunity was provided for IAAR to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report. The review panel confirms that throughout the review it was given access to all documents and persons that it wished to consult in order to make its evaluation.

Self-assessment report

In March 2016 IAAR submitted a self-assessment report containing information to support the ENQA review process. The SAR covered 90 pages, including appendices. The report was prepared by a working group appointed by the agency in September 2015. In the development of the report, the working group consulted with all departments in the agency and analysed external and internal reviews and surveys of past accreditation activity. The working group also took into account advice given in an earlier report made to the agency by an independent external consultant. The SAR drew on many internal agency documents, covering the relevant policies and procedures, and contained hyperlinks to a significant number of these documents, which were accessible on the agency's website. It also included a reflective SWOT-analysis which identified strong and less well established areas of the agency's operation. The self-assessment identified the current challenges and main areas for future development. The main body of the SAR addressed in detail the agency's compliance with the standards and guidelines of the ESG.

The review panel learned that the SAR was initially drafted by the working group, then commented upon by the agency's expert council for higher education, and finally approved by the IAAR Accreditation Council. The involvement of agency stakeholders in the final version of the report was secured through the membership of the Council, which included student and employer representatives.

The panel found that the self-assessment was a comprehensive and thorough account of the work of the agency, mainly descriptive in character, but nonetheless generally helpful in informing the review process.

Site visit

The review panel spent three days in Astana, arriving on 12 June and leaving in the early morning of 15 June. A full programme of meetings was agreed in advance; the final schedule of the site visit is included at Appendix 1. On the first afternoon IAAR representatives met with the panel to give an initial briefing presentation, which provided relevant background information on the higher education system in the Republic of Kazakhstan, on national legislation, and on the founding of IAAR in 2011 and its subsequent development over the last five years. On the following days a succession of meetings were held at the agency, in which the panel discussed the work of the agency with: senior managers and staff of the agency; members of IAAR's main councils; members of the agency's expert pool; rectors of universities; student representatives; representatives of employer groups; and senior representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan. The visit was well planned and organised by IAAR and an interpreter was present at all meetings. The panel appreciated the professionalism and responsiveness of the agency's staff throughout the visit, during which all requested additional information and documentation providing evidence was made available rapidly and efficiently.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

To understand the work of IAAR it is particularly important to note the nature of landscape of higher education within which it operates. The Republic of Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world by area, its territory covering about 62% of the current total area of the European Union. Its higher education system is complex in terms of diversity and in the number and type of its institutions. Only one neighbouring country (the Russian Federation) is included in the signatories of the European Higher Education Area. Kazakhstan is in a stage of significant change and development in the post-Soviet period of its history. The capital, Astana, is nearly 3000 miles distant from Brussels.

These are all challenges in the task of developing quality assurance activities in line with European standards.

In 2002 Kazakhstan started work toward joining the Bologna process, a commitment realised formally in 2010 when it became the 47th member country to join the process. During this period a succession of new laws were passed creating a legal framework of higher education which constituted a major reform. Notable developments in this reform process have been the commitment to the Bologna framework three level model of higher education, the introduction of the European credit system and the Diploma Supplement; significant changes in approaches to learning and teaching, including the specification of learning outcomes in a more student-centred approach, and a commitment to mobility and internationalisation of education. The most important legal provisions for these changes were made in the national strategic plans, the State Programmes for Education Development and specifically the Law 'On Education' (2007) and the amendments to that Law, approved in 2011. These amendments to the Law 'On Education' are particularly significant as they provide the basis for the establishment of new independent agencies and frame the relationships between institutions and those agencies.

Higher education institutions in Kazakhstan are categorised as being an Institute, an Academy, or a University. Institutes and academies cater for specialised education in a limited number of subject areas, while universities have a broader range of subjects. There are 127 HEIs in Kazakhstan (2014 data), of which 44% are private institutions. As a part of a state programme of rationalisation and optimisation the number of private institutions has declined since 2012. Demographic trends have also led to a decline in the total number of students at higher education institutions and consequently a reduction in the number of academic staff employed in the sector. Students completing higher school studies have a right to enter higher education which is supported by state grants allocated on a quota system. In 2014 there were around 477000 students in higher education, of which around 32000 were studying at Masters level and around 16000 at postgraduate (PhD) level. Faculty numbers in higher education institutions number in total around 38000. There is a strong commitment within higher education policy to vocationally-related and technical subject areas, and the integration of education, science and industry is a state priority objective.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

With regard to external quality assurance, the changes in the 'Law on Education' were significant in that, in line with the national strategic plan for education, accreditation and the associated state approval of institutions were transferred from the state organisation to independent accreditation agencies. At the same time, a broad national framework (the national system for assessing the quality of education NSEQA) was developed and approved. This state policy provides a set of objectives and methods aiming to ensure educational quality and competitiveness across the education sector, including provisions for external evaluation at all levels, improvements to the teaching and learning process, greater transparency in public information, and benchmarking with international standards. Key instruments of this national quality assurance framework are: unified national testing; recognition of staff through state certification; the external evaluation of educational achievements, state approval of programme curricula, and quality assessment through rating and accreditation. The external evaluation includes a licensing system, which depends on a mixture of state control and direction on the one hand, and on the other decisions based on information provided from peer review through quality assessment. The trend is towards a reduction of state involvement and an increasing reliance on independent assessment to provide the necessary information for state licensing, an approach which will be fully implemented by 2017. Nevertheless it also needs to be emphasised that the higher education system in Kazakhstan is in a

process of rapid change. This is particularly the case with regard to the autonomy of institutions with regard to staff appointments and curriculum design. In many subject areas the curriculum remains prescribed in detail by the overseeing state authorities

Accreditation was initially (from 2005) carried out by the National Accreditation Center (NAC) under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science. From 2009 a second organisation, the Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency in Education (IQAA) took part in the accreditation of institutions, with both bodies working to regulations and common standards approved by the Ministry. In 2011, with the changes in the Law on Education, the NAC was dissolved and accreditation functions were transferred to an independent competitive environment. This permitted the establishment of other national agencies on a private independent basis (as is the case with IAAR) and also allowed institutions of higher education to choose to be accredited by recognised international quality assurance agencies. IAAR was established in part on the initiative of former experts engaged in accreditation procedures for the NAC, and in this way it can be seen as a successor agency.

These crucial changes are reflected primarily in a number of legal acts, starting with the amendments to the Law 'On education'. The regulatory document defining the *Rules and Requirements for maintaining National Registry of Accreditation Institutions, Accredited Education Institutions and Education Programs* came into force in 2011.

Agencies are now formally recognised following scrutiny of their operation by the Ministry of Education and Science and, once approved, their entry onto a national register is maintained by the Ministry. The register has three sections: Register 1 which includes recognized accreditation bodies; Register 2 which includes accredited educational organizations that have successfully passed accreditation carried out by the accreditation bodies listed in Register 1; and Register 3 – the accredited educational programmes that have passed accreditation by the accreditation bodies in Register 1. Thus for accreditation to be valid it must be carried out by a recognized national or international agency listed in Register 1. According to the Register 1 data, in June 2016 there were 10 accreditation agencies in Register 1, of which two (IQAA and IAAR) are Kazakh and eight are international.

A number of mechanisms have been put in place to stimulate higher education institutions to take part in accreditation processes: the state recognition of educational qualifications is limited to students in recognised institutions; educational grants to students are allocated to institutions accredited by a recognised agency; educational grants for academic staff development and training are similarly limited to accredited institutions. New amendments to the Law on Education will come into force in 1 January 2017. It is intended that institutions and programmes will then be included in the Register 2 and Register 3 only if they have a license and accreditation issued by an accreditation body from the Registry 1 list. State credentials/ documents on higher education will be issued only for those students who have completed studies in an HEI and programme that are included in Register 2 and Register 3. In addition, only educational institutions included in the Register will receive state educational grants.

Driven by these changes in the national framework for accreditation, the number of institutions and programmes undergoing an accreditation process has risen sharply over recent years. Thus 66 universities (57% of the total number) successfully underwent institutional accreditation in 2014. By the end of December 2015, 72 higher education institutions had been successfully accredited by national or international accreditation agencies (national and state institutions 37, business and corporate 14, private institutions 20, international institution 1).

In summary, the Kazakhstan higher education system has undergone very significant changes over the last five years, with a clearly defined emphasis on the modernisation of the higher education curriculum and on institutional quality assurance processes in line with the Bologna model. Associated with this has been the reform of the national arrangements for external quality assurance. This area has seen a relinquishing of state direction and control and the introduction of external evaluation based predominantly on peer review within a national framework, and organised by independent quality assurance agencies.

THE AGENCY

IAAR was established in 2011 as a non-profit private organisation. Its statutes state that its main activities are to undertake institutional and programme accreditation and to carry out ratings (rankings) of higher education study programmes. It also carries out consultancy and support work to assist institutions in the development of their internal quality assurance and prepare them for accreditation.

In contrast to more familiar models for agencies, IAAR was not established by a national government or founded by an association of institutions. It has an individual founder and owner, and as an organisation is in a way more comparable to a private business (although it is non profit). The positive feature of this situation is that the agency is clearly fully independent.

In 2012 the agency was recognised by the Ministry of Education and Science and included in Register 1. In that year it also developed its internal regulations and guidelines to support its accreditation work and its main councils were established.

Over the last four years IAAR has worked to consolidate its work. It has extended its development of standards and guidelines to include schools implementing international education, and to cover medical education programmes. In 2014-15 it developed new standards for MBA and DBA programmes and adult education programmes. In 2015-16, it reviewed all of its internal standards and criteria against the revised ESG guidelines with a view to full harmonisation and alignment.

In 2013 IAAR extended its international links by signing memoranda of cooperation with three international agencies in Germany and Russia.

In 2014 and 2015 it piloted, implemented and published its research on ratings of programmes.

Most recently it has established its Commission for Appeals and Complaints, following the ESG guidance, and has worked to develop and approve its Strategic Plan 2016-20.

Throughout the five years, the agency, its councils and its staff have been deeply involved in its main accreditation business, completing and reporting on around 900 accreditations in total.

IAAR'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

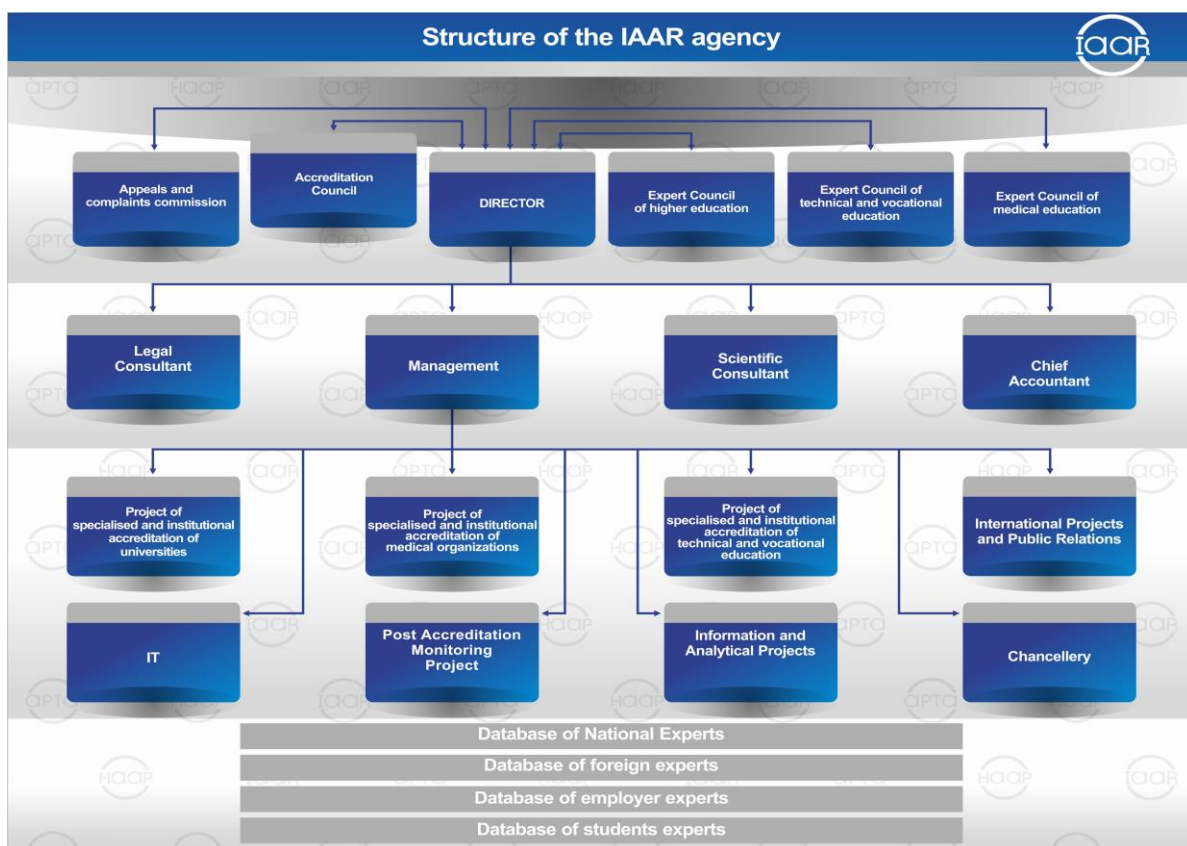
The organisational structure of the agency is shown in the diagram which follows. The governance of IAAR is laid down in its statutes. These state that the supreme governing body of the agency is the founder of the agency. The founder is also currently the Director, who effectively acts as Chief Executive and is responsible for the overall management of the organisation.

The statutes give separate powers to the Accreditation Council of the agency. The Council is described in the statutes as an 'advisory body' but the review panel learned that it has exclusive competence in the areas of evaluation and accreditation. According to the IAAR Statutes the Chair of the Accreditation Council is elected at the council meeting by a simple majority of its members (part

3, paragraph 12-2, IAAR Statutes). After the election, the Chair is approved by the order of the Director. These two persons together provide the leadership of the organisation.

The work of the agency is supported by its three expert councils. These councils may be consulted by the Director or the Accreditation Council on accreditation matters relating to their particular expert area (higher education, technical and vocational education, and medical education). They have an advisory role in relation to defining standards, regulations and procedures.

The main operational areas of the agency are defined as 'projects', with three of the project areas having a defined responsibility for a specific function of the agency relating to a given education sector. Among the agency's other project areas are post accreditation monitoring, international relations, and information and analysis, all of which undertake work relevant to compliance with the ESG standards. The remaining project areas are involved in administrative and support functions.



IAAR'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

IAAR's work ranges over a number of different activities.

The agency's central function is accreditation and in this field the agency carries out institutional and programme accreditations at school, further and higher education levels. The agency also has systematic follow up procedures (post accreditation monitoring) to monitor and support institutional development after accreditation.

A second main area is to carry out and publish ratings of institutions and their programmes against an established list of agreed performance indicators. IAAR also organises expert seminars in this field.

Thirdly, IAAR organises workshops and seminars and carries out training together with representatives, in support of its quality assurance work. This can include direct consultancy and support to institutions in preparing for accreditation. Such support functions are clearly separated from accreditation and review activities with institutions, to avoid conflict of interest.

With regard specifically to international activities, IAAR has senior management post (Manager of International Projects and Public Relations) with responsibility for developing this area. IAAR has membership of many international quality assurance networks, including:

- The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE);
- The US Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) International Quality Group;
- The Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA);
- The Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) – as an intermediate member;
- Association of Quality Assurance Agencies of the Islamic World (AQAAIW);
- International Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence (IREG).

IAAR has concluded agreements on bilateral cooperation with six international quality assurance bodies:

- The Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA, Germany);
- The Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics (ASIIN e.V., Germany);
- The Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP, USA);
- The National Center of Public Accreditation (Natsaccredcentr, Russia);
- The National Accreditation Agency (NAA, Russia);
- The Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN, Germany).

IAAR is committed to full involvement in networking at the international level, and provided evidence of the participation of its representatives in conferences and seminars organised by foreign partners and international networks.

IAAR'S FUNDING

IAAR is a non-profit private company. The agency receives no funding from the state. Its funding derives from the income received through the payments made by institutions and organisations for its activities. That is: the payments received for accreditation procedures and visits, for post-accreditation monitoring, for consultation and training, for the periodic ranking exercise and for the printing and issuing of certification.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF IAAR 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.

Evidence

Activities

IAAR carries out accreditation of higher education institutions both through institutional accreditation and programme accreditation. Accreditation reviews are planned and implemented consistently in line with well-developed policies and guidelines. The annual plans and the annual reports of the agency provide evidence that these activities are substantial and regular in character. A wide range of relevant documentation supporting the agency's accreditation function is available. More detail on the agency's implementation of the accreditation work is given under Standard 2.1, below.

Thus during the period 2012-2015 32 institutions and 848 study programmes were accredited (more than 380 in 2015 alone). The accreditation reports published by the agency give full details of each accreditation event and its outcomes.

As a distinctly separate area of activity, IAAR carries out research leading to rating (ranking) of institutions and programmes in the fields of higher, technical and vocational education in Kazakhstan. The outcomes of the research are published annually on the IAAR website and the ranking information covers programme quality and staff performance. The purpose of the ranking is to provide public information so as to inform stakeholders, parents and students. There is a clear distinction in place between this area of work and the agency's external quality assurance work. The statutes of IAAR are framed so as to make it clear that the ranking activity is completely independent from the accreditation work and that neither function affects the outcomes of the other area. Thus the section 2.10 of the statutes is titled 'The object and purposes of the Agency' and provides a detailed list of the various activities of the agency. Of these the first three relate to accreditation and the last listed and clearly separated activity is research into ratings. The two activities are carried out by separate groups of staff at separate office locations, and the gathering and analysis of data for the ranking exercise is mainly carried out by an outsourced service organisation. Other activities listed are supportive of the accreditation function (international networks, publication of reports, training of experts, policy development, etc.).

Mission, Goals and Objectives

The mission of IAAR (in English translation) is 'Ongoing support and promotion of a culture of quality in sphere of education to increase the competitiveness of Kazakhstan society and education through appropriate external quality assurance'. The mission statement is published prominently on the agency website. The implementation of the mission translates into its daily activities through clearly

visible planning processes: through the strategic plan, the linked operational plans, and the activity-related indicators set out in the IAAR *IQAS Manual* (see Standard 3.6 below).

Involvement of stakeholders

IAAR works with a range of stakeholders in the design, approval and implementation of its accreditation procedures. This is done mainly through stakeholder representation (from education, employers, and student groups) on its Accreditation Council and through its three expert councils. The agency has established a pool of international experts, reflecting its commitment to an international dimension in its work. International experts are represented on the agency's Accreditation Council, and on its three expert councils. All three stakeholder groups participate through representation on the expert commissions which carry out accreditation.

Where new policies or guidance documents are being developed, these are sent to stakeholders for comment; similar consultation is involved when IAAR reviews or amends its standards for accreditation. See also Standard 2.2 below.

IAAR uses a range of media to provide public information to stakeholders, including report publication, workshops and seminars, "Education KZ" magazine, newspapers, direct mailing and website portals.

Analysis

The review panel considered the statements in the agency's self assessment report regarding its range of activities. It read reports, policy documents and guidelines relating to accreditation activities and considered the evidence of the published accreditation reports. Strategic documents were also considered. The panel met and discussed with stakeholder representatives: higher education leaders, employer representatives, the Accreditation and Expert councils' representatives, student representatives and representatives of the Ministry of Education.

The panel found clear evidence that IAAR conducts accreditation work on a regular and systematic basis. With regard to the implementation of accreditation and its impact within institutions, the review panel found many strengths and also some areas which would benefit from revision or development. These are discussed in detail under Standard 2.1 below. As can be found there, the panel noted in particular the desirability of further attention to: student consultation and representation; 'cluster' programme accreditation outcomes and information; guidance on reports. Documentation and records showed that IAAR plans its work in a systematic manner, linking mission and strategy with operational decision-making and the implementation and evaluation of procedures, supported by action planning. Regular internal meetings are held to check progress and resolve day-to-day issues.

Concerning stakeholder involvement, the review panel was able to confirm that IAAR seeks the views of a range of stakeholders to inform its governance, its accreditation procedures and activities and their further development. The panel considered, however, that student representation on the agency's Accreditation Council should be strengthened. The Council is the central decision-making body with regard to IAAR policy and it is responsible for all accreditation decisions. While there is currently one student member on the Council, the panel considered that students were under-represented in that body relative to other stakeholder groups (see also Standard 2.2 below).

Panel commendation

The review panel commends IAAR on the commitment it has made to include international experts in its work, most particularly in its Accreditation Council and in its expert commissions.

Panel recommendations

In order to strengthen the contribution of students as a stakeholder group to IAAR's governance and work, the IAAR Accreditation Council would benefit by increasing the student representation in its membership.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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.

Evidence

After Kazakhstan joined the European Higher Education Area, a number of significant changes in the quality assurance of higher education were introduced. Most importantly for this particular ESG standard, the law "On Education" of the Republic of Kazakhstan was amended in 2011. This law abolished the former National Accreditation Centre (NAC) which had operated under the Ministry of Education; the new legal framework permitted the establishment of new agencies, and regulated their recognition. The new law stipulated that quality assurance agencies must be independent.

The 2011 amendments to the law also allowed for the establishment of more than one accreditation agency in Kazakhstan. It permitted Kazakhstani higher education institutions and/or their study programmes to be accredited by foreign accreditation agencies once those agencies are recognised and included in the *National Registry of Accreditation Institutions* (known as "Register 1").

Thus, to be officially recognised by the Kazakhstani Ministry of Education, an accreditation agency must have received a certificate issued by the ministry and must be included in the Register 1. The statement accompanying the issue of the formal certificate is prepared by the Republican Accreditation Council of the Ministry of Education (RAC) and signed by the minister. The RAC makes its decision upon the analysis of a set of an agency's documents, and that agency's standards and criteria for both institutional accreditation and for the accreditation of study programmes. IAAR has been recognised in this way through certification and inclusion in the Register.

Less formally, the official agency status of IAAR is also validated by its memoranda of cooperation with higher education bodies, professional associations, employer representative bodies and its membership of international higher education and quality assurance networks.

Analysis

The panel reviewed the statements made in the IAAR's self-assessment statement, and noted the availability of the state certificate of recognition and the inclusion of IAAR in the Kazakhstan national Register 1. The panel discussed the process of recognition and the resulting formal status with the Director of IAAR. The agency's official status was also fully confirmed in the meeting held with representatives of the Ministry of Education.

The panel confirmed that following the required submission for approval, IAAR was recognised and included in national Register 1 in June 2012, covering a five year period to June 2017. IAAR is therefore formally and legally recognised in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

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.

Evidence

The statutes of the IAAR (Article 2) make clear that the agency was established as non-profit private foundation, and a separate legal entity, thus it is independent by definition and has no formal links to any government or other external authority. Furthermore, the Kazakhstan Ministry of Education does not support agencies financially, and therefore agencies, including IAAR are not dependent upon state funds. In the 2011 amendments to the Law on Education, quality assurances agencies in Kazakhstan are free to develop their own methodology, standards and criteria.

The statutes of the agency state:

[The] Agency is an independent body and has autonomous responsibility for its operations and the conclusions and recommendations made in its reports cannot be influenced by third parties (such as education institutions, ministries and other stakeholders).

In the course of the review visit, the interviews held with the representatives of the Ministry of Education as well as those with representatives of employers and students all testified that the IAAR is an independent authority. Representatives of the ministry stressed that the main cooperation between ministry and IAAR is that the ministry uses the outcomes of the accreditation to inform higher education policy.

With regard to the independence of formal accreditation outcomes, Article 12.3 of the IAAR Statutes defines exclusive decision-making competence with its Accreditation Council. The Council members may include representatives of government agencies alongside representatives from higher education, employers and student associations. Members act on an impartial personal basis and are required to sign to an Accreditation Council Code of Ethics, which covers conflict of interest and independence of judgement.

The selection and appointment of external experts is addressed in the agency's policy *Guidelines for the organisation and conduct of external expertise in the process of accreditation of educational organisations*. The agency selects expert reviewers to carry out its institutional and programme accreditations from its databases of national and international experts. Decisions on the appointment of experts are made independently by the agency. Appointments are made against published criteria for the selection of experts and each expert for a review commission signs the IAAR *Code of Ethics*, which includes sections relating to confidentiality, and on working within defined IAAR authority. Experts sign a separate formal statement relating to conflict of interest declaration.

In terms of its operational independence, IAAR has developed and implemented a wide range internal policy documents governing its accreditation activities. These are the agency's own policies and are not influenced by any external requirements. Examples particularly relevant to the question of agency independence are: the agency's regulations on training of external experts; on post-accreditation monitoring, on the control of the external expert activities, on the Accreditation Council, on the Commission on Appeals and Complaints considerations and on the Expert Groups; the Code of Ethics of the Accreditation Council and Code of Ethics for External Experts and Guidelines on conduct of external expertise.

Analysis

The review panel examined the documents referred to in the evidence above. It discussed the question of independence with the representatives of the Ministry of Education, members of the Accreditation Council, with university leaders, with experts who had participated in the agency's reviews, and with student representatives.

The evidence from documentation (the agency statutes) clearly showed that the formal establishment of the agency was as an independent organisation, both legally and financially. The agency has completed a large body of work to establish its own independent framework of policies and regulations for the conduct of external quality assurance. The key decision making power of the agency lies with its Accreditation Council, for which independence of judgement is securely safeguarded through its terms of reference and Code of Ethics. The Council takes its decisions by a majority vote of its members and on the basis of the evaluation reports received from the agency's external expert commissions, without any possibility for interference either on the part of the ministry (or of any other organs of political influence) or on the part of HEIs.

The panel noted that IAAR carries out a separate activity, institutional ranking, alongside its accreditation functions. The agency's statutes make it clear that these are unrelated and separate functions of the agency (see also section ESG 3.1, above). In discussion during the site visit the panel heard further evidence which assured it that the two areas of work were separate and independent and that there was no direct flow of information between the two areas. Different staff work in separate locations to carry out the two activities.

The review panel concluded that IAAR works as a fully independent agency, that independence of decision-making in its procedures is safeguarded, and that there is no inappropriate overlap between its separate areas of activity.

Panel commendation

IAAR has taken care to introduce well-framed regulations and codes of practice which provide appropriate guidance to secure the independence of its expert panels and of its Accreditation Council.

Panel conclusion: Fully 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.

Evidence

IAAR prepares and publishes several types of publication. A yearly activity report gives summary information on the results of accreditations of institutional and programmes. The report includes an analytical section which covers: generalised suggestions for HEIs with a view to improve quality, deriving from completed accreditations; a set of cases of best practice found in HEIs; suggestions for enhancing the internal quality of the IAAR including the reviewing the standards and criteria; an account of international cooperation of the IAAR. This report is received by the Ministry of Education and published on the ministry website as well as on that of the agency.

There are currently two other analytical IAAR reports: an analytical report on the results of the survey of agency experts and an analytical report on the results of the survey of educational institutions. Both of the surveys and the resulting reports are conducted on an annual basis, and are used, in particular, to inform revision and enhancement of the IAAR internal quality manual.

In addition to the above reports IAAR publishes each year the IAAR *Education.KZ* of which the first edition appeared in 2013. This IAAR Magazine has sections on four major areas: quality assurance, accreditation, innovation in education, and rankings. IAAR also staff contribute features and articles on quality assurance topics to publications in international compendiums or conference proceedings, to the IAAR Magazine and also to national newspapers on quality assurance.

Both the agency's self-assessment report and discussions in meetings during the visit suggested that the agency will in future give greater attention to the area of thematic analysis. IAAR plans to analyse all the processes of external evaluation of quality conducted so far in order to produce comprehensive structured analyses across the higher education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The strategic plan 2016-2020 envisages research and publication into mobility programmes and internationalisation, and into commercial research activity.

A separate branch of the agency's work is also relevant under this standard, as IAAR is carrying out ranking research into Kazakhstan higher education and the implementation of the Bologna process indicators. The outcomes of the ranking are published annually in national media and on the agency's website.

Analysis

The panel was able to view the annual reports of the agency and issues of its annual magazine. Panel members examined the agency's website, which was found to be well designed and maintained and offered a range of relevant information to the public regarding agency activities.

The panel considered that IAAR gives careful attention to the dissemination of information. This occurs through annual analytical reports, IAAR magazine, activities reports, workshops and publications. The panel found that the 2015 reports were more developed than those in previous years.

The review panel was interested to note that IAAR's SWOT analysis in its self assessment regarded this area of its work as potentially weak, considering that while the agency had some success in providing information to the public through its website and publications it had found it difficult to convince press and media that the information on quality assurance is important. The SWOT analysis also identified a threat in a potential failure or weakness at state policy level in fulfilling the function

to inform the public about the accredited institutions of education and educational programmes, in accordance with the new national policies and Register 1.

The panel nevertheless took the view that, taken overall, IAAR analyses and disseminates accreditation outcomes and other information in an effective and relatively comprehensive manner. Particularly noteworthy were the value of the annual report and its use as a reference point by the Ministry of Education, and the well designed annual IAAR magazine. The agency currently uses other information gathered through its surveys primarily for internal information, although this could also be of wider interest. There is rich information contained in the published accreditation reports of the agency which could be summarised with a view to communicating general trends in higher education.

The panel took into consideration that the resources available to the agency for work on thematic analysis were relatively limited and that in its early years of accreditation activity priority had to be given to establishing and implementing its core policies and procedures.

The commitment of IAAR to providing information is evident in the considerable amount of work carried out to translate reports, policies, guidelines and other matter into the English language so that these are available internationally. The agency website has a well-developed English version which provides all the main webpages and documents in that language.

The panel concluded that IAAR has made good progress with addressing the expectations of this standard with regard to thematic analysis, but further work remains to be done to realise the full potential of the information that it gathers in its accreditation work.

Panel commendations

The panel commends the agency for its ongoing commitment of to transparency and the publication of information, and for the quality of its three-language website.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that, in the medium term, the agency should consider how it can use the information contained in its accreditation reports so as to inform general developments in higher education policy and practice. In this context, it would be appropriate to consult with HEI's to seek their views on areas of information or guidance that would be most relevant and valuable to them.

The panel recommends that the agency further develops its current work to communicate to institutions and to the public more widely the significance of its quality assurance activities, and provides further guidance in understanding the significance of the outcomes of accreditation.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

Evidence

Human resources

IAAR currently has 14 full time members of staff. Many of these staff have higher degrees and their qualifications are appropriate and relevant. There are arrangements for induction, review and staff training. A number of the agency's staff have substantial experience from working with the previous state-led agency.

In addition the agency draws upon the work of the members of its four councils, that is 18 members of the Accreditation Council and 24 members in total of the other three expert councils. Participation in the agency's councils is voluntary and unpaid. Accreditation activities rely mainly on the contribution of experts appointed on a contract basis by the agency. Over the last five years the agency has drawn on the services of about 637 experts in this way.

Physical resources

In 2016 the IAAR moved to new, larger, office premises in Astana. The agency accommodation covers 172 square meters and provides for staff offices, meeting rooms, area for staff rest and relaxation, a kitchen, washrooms and space for record archives. There is potential for expansion should this be required in future.

The agency is equipped with the necessary modern equipment for efficient administration: networked computers, printers, tablets, digital cameras, video projector, smart board. The agency owns an executive multi-person vehicle for logistical transport purposes.

Financial

The agency relies primarily upon income from institutional and programme accreditation fees to support its resource expenditure. As a part of the agency's self assessment the review panel were presented with a table showing in detail IAAR patterns of expenditure and balance sheet. This showed an overall growth in both income and expenditure as between 2014 and 2015. There is an appropriate reserve balance of funds for development and international work. During discussions held during the site visit, it was confirmed by agency staff that funds were made available to invest in staff development and training and to support staff in gaining additional qualifications.

The overall management responsibility for resources lies with the Director, working closely with the agency's Chief Accountant. In the agency's SAR and in discussion with the Director confidence was expressed that organisational and technical support for its accreditation work was sufficient and fit for purpose.

Analysis

The review panel interviewed the agency staff involved with accreditation and with administration, members of the Accreditation Council, agency experts and the Director. It was generally confirmed that the income and resources available to the agency fully met the needs and requirements to support its activities. The panel observed that the voluntary and unpaid contribution by the Accreditation Council members might put their long-term commitment in question; in response expert members of the agency's councils were reassuring in their conviction that this contribution was valuable and important as part of their wider work in the higher education sector.

The panel found that the offices of the agency were modern, well furnished and equipped and entirely fit for purpose.

From the evidence available, the panel found every indication that the human and physical resources available to IAAR were appropriate and sufficient for it to deliver its activities effectively. The panel was able to confirm that the agency's financial position and financial planning allowed for future investment and development as necessary.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

Evidence

The evidence supporting compliance with this standard rests mainly on two of the agency's policy documents: its *Strategic Plan 2016-2020* and the *Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) Manual*, also titled *Guidelines on internal quality assurance systems*.

The strategic plan of the agency takes a broad overview of its work, including its mission, values and place in the education system of Kazakhstan. Key strategic goals are defined and these are then the basis for the preparation of annual action plans and strategy implementation plans. Consultation on the strategic plan has taken place in the Accreditation Council and internally amongst management. The strategic plan contributes to internal quality management by setting out clear development goals, which in turn relate to the annual analytical report considering the management of key processes.

Since 2012 IAAR has developed a range of measures and policies to support the internal quality assurance of its work with regard to detailed processes. The culmination of this development has been the production of its *IQAS Manual*. This document, completed and published in 2015, is made available on the agency website. It outlines a comprehensive system for the internal organisational quality management of the agency, summarising and making reference to 43 other policy documents so as to give a full overview of the agency's internal policies and systems. Amongst the quality-related aspects addressed are: documentation management, records management, internal communications, the organisation and servicing of the agency's councils, staff responsibilities and authority, resources management, workplace and environmental quality, process analysis, planning cycle, project management and research and development. The system includes attention to indicators for process measurement and evaluation linked to action planning. There is a commitment to a clear development strategy supporting constant improvement.

With regard to the specific aspects of quality management included in the ESG under this standard, the agency provided the following information:

- The competence and professionalism of the agency staff and appointed experts involved in its activities are addressed through staff contracts and training and through its *Codes of Ethics* for experts and council members. As regards conflict of interest, there is a form for experts to sign before a visit. The form specifies various cases in which possible conflict interests may arise. Training of experts is well developed. The agency's assessment of its experts includes their approach to the analysis of institutional documents submitted, the

skills of reviewing the institutional report on self-assessment and the skills of analysis shown in the expert reports.

- The agency uses feedback from surveys of institutions, experts and employers to inform its internal quality assurance and development planning. It uses the advice of its three expert councils to inform the development of its procedures.
- Communication with the state authorities is defined by the recognition of IAAR by the Ministry of Education and by the annual report of the agency to the Ministry.
- The agency does not sub-contract its accreditation activities or other areas of its work. The contract with experts on accreditation panels includes safeguarding clauses regarding the accountability and conflict of interest requirements.
- The external quality assurance (accreditation) work of IAAR involves a 'requirement analysis' which defines, identifies and analyses the requirements of educational organisations before proceeding to a form of contract for the accreditation. This includes assurance regarding state recognition of the relevant institution.

Analysis

The review panel examined the two key documents referred to above, and also read many of the contributing policy documents relating to internal quality assurance. During the site visit, the panel discussed the internal processes with staff of the agency. It was clear to the panel that the agency has developed and refined a range of processes which serve to support the quality of its activities and which have the potential to ensure professionalism and consistency in its work. The panel was not presented with information regarding the full implementation of some of the quality measures described in the *IQAS Manual* and in discussion it learned that a number of aspects still remained to be fully implemented, given that these were recently established policies. As an example, it was intended to gather feedback from agency experts on individual accreditation processes, rather than only on more general impressions of the expert's work, but this end-of-process evaluation was still to be introduced by the agency at the time of the review visit. Nevertheless the panel found that the agency's main accreditation activities are regulated by established systems and in particular the training and evaluation of experts used by the agency is systematic.

Regarding the internal work management of the agency, the panel learned that meetings were held on a weekly basis between the IAAR staff to discuss day-to-day matters relating to the effective management of accreditation, and that regular internal reviews were conducted.

The panel took the view that, while the *IQAS Manual* (in its English version) was a thorough and comprehensive document, the communication to the wider public of the agency's internal quality assurance arrangements might benefit from a shorter summary statement on the agency website.

Overall the review panel found that there is sufficient evidence to state that IAAR now has an internal quality system that is well defined and has been put in place, and that, when operating fully, this will be both formal and regular.

Panel commendations

The agency is commended on the preparation and publication of its comprehensive *IQAS Manual* which outlines and brings together all aspects of its internal quality assurance.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that IAAR, as it implements fully its internal quality assurance procedures, maintains regular internal reviews and reports concerning the level of performance against the measures that it has defined for internal quality assurance.

The panel recommends that the agency's periodic surveys of experts and institutions be reviewed with the aim of increasing their usefulness, and that the agency should consider ways in which the resulting information could be shared more widely. In addition, evaluative feedback and comment on individual accreditation events should be introduced.

The panel recommends that in the interest of public information, IAAR makes a more concise and accessible statement regarding its internal quality assurance available on its website, possibly in the form of an executive summary of the IQAS Manual.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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.

Evidence

IAAR applied for ENQA membership in December 2015 and initiated the ENQA coordinated review which is the subject of this report. If membership is confirmed, the agency will be subject to the established cycle of regular external review by ENQA.

The recognition of IAAR as a national agency in the Republic of Kazakhstan takes place every five years and this is a process which requires the examination of documentation and of the conduct and outcomes of its external quality assurance activities. The requirements for this recognition process are laid down in Ministry of Education and Science's *Rules and Requirements for maintaining a national register of accreditation institutions*. The next recognition procedure is expected in June 2017.

It was also noted that IAAR intends to apply for accreditation and recognition by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME), and has filed an application covering its work in the accreditation of medical programmes.

IAAR's internal quality assurance manual recognises the importance of external review as a part of measurement, analysis and improvement of the agency's work.

Analysis

The panel considered that the requirement to satisfy the regular and well-defined national recognition requirements, together with the likely cycle of future ENQA reviews, satisfactorily addressed the expectations of this standard.

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.

Evidence

In the course of 2015, IAAR carried out a review of its accreditation procedures, mapping its areas of enquiry against the 2015 ESG standards and modifying its procedures as required. The IAAR accreditation system covers both institutional and subject level accreditation and the standards and their expected application are differentiated accordingly. The mapping outcome for institutional and subject accreditation procedures, included in the SAR, is reproduced below; paragraph references relate to the IAAR standards and criteria for accreditation. The agency then revised its standards and criteria in line with the ESG 2015, the revised standards were approved by its Accreditation Council, and training events were organised to brief and prepare the agency's experts on the application of the revised standards.

The new agency standards have provided the basis for further development of the agency's *Guidelines* for institutional and subject accreditation. These are very comprehensive documents that include a clearly defined subheading for each area of evaluation, together with a list of relevant questions to guide enquiry by the expert commission. As an illustrative example, here is a description of the IAAR institutional accreditation, Standard 12, 'Faculty and teaching effectiveness'. This single standard has a total of 27 criteria based subheadings which cover a very full range of aspects relating to academic staff and teaching, each of which then has detailed accompanying question areas. One single subheading within this same standard, relating to 'academic mobility', then has 15 question areas which address both quantitative and qualitative features of mobility.

For IAAR institutional accreditation reviews there is a total of 163 of these separate criterion-based question areas in the report checklist, and for IAAR subject accreditation, 184 such questions. In its work, the IAAR external expert commission is required to evaluate the level of compliance with each individual question area through the use of a checklist which summarises the 'parameters of profile' for the institution or subject programme. The commission also comments more generally on each standard and its accompanying criteria within the evaluative narrative section of the report, with a conclusion giving strengths and weaknesses as judged by the external commission.

IAAR has published guidelines (2011) for the organisation and conduct of its accreditation reviews (see below) and these contain a relatively brief section on the preparation of the accreditation report. The expectations for the report laid down in the guidelines, and thus for the work of the external expert commission, include a detailed analysis of the standards and criteria.

From the IAAR self-assessment report: Interrelation between ESG Part 1 and IAAR Standards for institutional accreditation and for subject accreditation

ESG STANDARDS	EVALUATION CRITERIA OF THE INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION	EVALUATION CRITERIA OF THE SUBJECT ACCREDITATION
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	Standard 7 «Strategic development and quality assurance»: 7.2.15, 7.2.16, 7.2.17	Standard 7 «Educational program management»: 7.2.1, 7.2.2, 7.2.3, 7.2.4, 7.2.8, 7.2.15
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	Standard 9 «Development and approval of educational program»: 9.2.1, 9.2.2, 9.2.3, 9.2.5, 9.2.8, 9.2.9, 9.2.11, 9.2.22	Standard 8 «Development and approval of educational program»: 8.2.1, 8.2.2, 8.2.4, 8.2.5, 8.2.7, 8.2.12, 8.2.14, 8.2.16, 8.2.18, 8.2.19, 8.2.20
1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment	Standard 10 « Student-centered system of learning, teaching and assessment»: 10.2.1, 10.2.2, 10.2.3, 10.2.5, 10.2.7, 10.2.9, 10.2.10, 10.2.11	Standard 9 «Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment»: 10.2.1, 10.2.2, 10.2.3, 10.2.5, 10.2.7, 10.2.9, 10.2.10, 10.2.11
1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	Standard 11 «Students»: 11.2.1, 11.2.2, 11.2.4, 11.2.5, 11.2.6, 11.2.7, 11.2.9, 11.2.11, 11.2.12	Standard 10 «Students»: 11.2.1, 11.2.2, 11.2.4, 11.2.5, 11.2.6, 11.2.7, 11.2.9, 11.2.11, 11.2.12
1.5 Teaching staff	Standard 12 « Teaching staff and teaching efficiency»: 12.2.1, 12.2.3, 12.2.4, 12.2.5, 12.2.11, 12.2.15	Standard 11 « Teaching staff and teaching efficiency»: 11.2.1, 11.2.2, 11.2.3, 11.2.4, 11.2.8
1.6 Learning resources and student support	Standard 15 «Learning resources and student support system»: 15.2.1, 15.2.2, 15.2.3, 15.2.4, 15.2.5	Standard 12 «Educational resources and student support system»: 12.2.1, 12.2.2, 12.2.3, 12.2.5, 12.2.6
1.7 Information management	Standard 16 «Information administration and reporting»: 16.2.1, 16.2.3, 16.2.6, 16.2.7, 16.2.12, 16.2.16	Standard 13 «Information management»: 13.2.1, 13.2.2, 13.2.5, 13.2.6, 13.2.10
1.8 Public information	Standard 17 «Public information»: 17.2.1, 17.2.2	Standard 14 «Public information»: 14.2.1, 14.2.3
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	Standard 9 «Development and approval of educational program»: 9.2.14, 9.2.17, 9.2.18, 9.2.21	Standard 8 «Development and approval of educational program»: 8.2.6, 8.2.9, 8.2.12
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	Standard 7 «Strategic development and quality assurance»: 7.2.18; Standard 17 «Public informing»: 17.2.7	Standard 14 «Public informing»: 14.2.4

Analysis

The review panel read the documents outlining the revised IAAR standards in line with the 2015 ESG and it confirmed that these systematically addressed the ESG standards for internal quality assurance in institutions. The panel carefully examined the mapping exercise carried out and it was able to confirm the comprehensive inclusion of the internal quality assurance aspects specified in ESG Part 1, as outlined in the mapping document above.

In order to confirm that the criteria established by the agency were actually applied in the evaluations made in the course of accreditation events, the review panel examined samples of institutional and subject accreditation reports completed in 2015, using the revised IAAR standards. With regard to the ESG Part 1, the panel found within the reports good evidence of attention having been given to the individual standards, as set out in detail in the following sections.

In all reports reviewed by the panel, the accreditation report concludes with a checklist which requires the IAAR expert commission to make an evaluative judgement on the full list of criteria. The completed checklist with judgements of compliance levels therefore provided evidence that for all accreditation events, the ESG standards are addressed by the external panel at some point in the process and are then summarised in the conclusion of the report.

With regard to the main body of the report, discussion and evaluation of the standards was found to be more general. In some areas the report gave relatively little detailed information regarding the ESG standard, so that it was covered only by the checklist.

An analysis of the available 2015 reports under each ESG Part 1 Standard, for both the institution and subject level accreditation procedures of IAAR, now follows:

ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance

- IAAR Institutional accreditation

The reports contain a specific checklist criterion relating to the successful functioning of the quality assurance system. Discussion and evaluation of quality assurance is a focus in many parts of the institutional reports, in particular with regard to quality management in the governance and strategy aspects, and to programme management. Many of the IAAR criteria to be evaluated contain criteria relating to the operation of internal quality assurance (e.g. programme review and monitoring, student satisfaction surveys, staff updating and professional development).

- IAAR subject level accreditation

The criteria for evaluation of programmes include clear requirements for policy and practice of quality assurance at the programme level. These cover programme design, monitoring and review, reporting, data analysis, stakeholder consultation and risk assessment, amongst other aspects. Evaluative comments under the IAAR standard 'Educational programme management' include confirmation that a developed system of education quality assurance is in place and operating. The key criterion states: 'Supervisors ought to demonstrate successful functioning of internal quality assurance system of the educational programme, including its design, management and monitoring, their improvement and making decisions based on facts'.

The IAAR standards and procedures therefore address ESG 1.1 for both institutional and subject level accreditation.

ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes

- IAAR Institutional accreditation

Reports contain evaluation of the IAAR institutional 'educational programmes standard'. This considers: curriculum frameworks and definitions, methodical documentation, expectations for stakeholder contribution to design of programmes and scrutiny of approval-related documentation, including student involvement.

- IAAR subject level accreditation

IAAR criteria explicitly address these ESG expectations. Thus under the Standard 'Development and approval of the educational programme' the expert commission must comment on criteria requiring that the following aspects are demonstrated:

- the procedure for the approval, periodic review (the review) and monitoring of educational programs and documents regulating this process.
- stakeholder involvement, including students, and externality within the design and approval procedures.

Appropriate consideration of these criteria was evident in the programme reports seen by the review panel.

The IAAR standards and procedures therefore address ESG 1.2 for both institutional and subject level accreditation.

ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

- IAAR Institutional accreditation

Active learning, learning outcomes, innovative approaches to teaching, and effective assessment are all included in the checklist criteria under which institutions are evaluated. However, in the institutional reports considered by the panel, this was the least well-developed area in terms of the evaluative commentary. Discussion of teaching and learning was mainly staff-centred and delivery-based. Student issues were in the main focused on employability and support for vocational/technical qualification.

- IAAR subject level accreditation

IAAR has its standard for programmes, similarly phrased to this ESG standard. There are explicit criteria relating to the requirements in the ESG guidelines which must be covered by the expert commission in its report.

The evaluative commentary in the reports was found to include attention to active learning and innovative technologies, quality of teaching and updating of curricula. Assessment strategy and practice is also addressed.

For this standard, IAAR criteria clearly address the standard at both institutional and subject level. From the evidence found in accreditation reports, the practical application of the standard in the accreditation process is less well developed.

ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

- IAAR Institutional accreditation

The institutional reports provide evidence that the recruitment and admission of students is considered, together with documentation relating to subject choice, mobility opportunities and

practice placement. Financial support and grant systems are also covered. In one report the absence of certification for training is criticised by the expert commission.

- IAAR subject level accreditation

IAAR reports included detailed criteria and commentary relevant to this ESG standard.

The IAAR standards and procedures therefore address ESG 1.4 for both institutional and subject level accreditation.

ESG 1.5 Teaching staff

- IAAR Institutional accreditation

Institutional reports contain a wide ranging review of staffing, covering: recruitment, qualifications, staff numbers, salary and remuneration, performance in national teaching excellence competition, professional and personal development. A separate section reviews research policies and staffing, including an analysis of research performance within the institution.

- IAAR subject level accreditation

IAAR programme level reports include the standard 'Faculty and teaching effectiveness'.

The evaluation under this heading included consideration of staff numbers and qualifications, research areas and performance, the link between research and teaching and history of professional development. Comment is made on teaching plans, workload management, and staff mobility. Arrangements for the development and support of new and younger staff, including mentoring, are also covered.

Staff surveys are carried out in the course of subject level accreditation, to inform the expert commission.

The IAAR standards and procedures therefore address ESG 1.5 for both institutional and subject level accreditation.

ESG 1.6 Learning Resources and student support

- IAAR Institutional accreditation

This area is well covered in institutional reports under the IAAR standard 'Resources: material and information'. The standard defines the necessary elements of a supportive learning environment which are to be evaluated, including academic availability, counselling and vocational guidance. Details are given of: physical resources (classrooms and laboratories); information technology; hostel, sport and leisure facilities; health advice. The reports describe the library resources, internet access and information portals. An overall evaluation of the adequacy of institutional resources is made.

- IAAR subject level accreditation

IAAR programme accreditation reports showed a full consideration of resource-related issues and included coverage of: numbers, size and equipment of classrooms; library funding and resources; information technology support; learning resources and materials, including e-learning.

The IAAR standards and procedures therefore address ESG 1.6 for both institutional and subject level accreditation.

ESG 1.7 Information management

- IAAR Institutional accreditation

The institutional reports show, under the IAAR standard 'Administration and Management' that the gathering and analysis of data for institutional management purposes is considered in the accreditation process and is included in the detailed criteria to be evaluated.

- IAAR subject level accreditation

IAAR programme reports addressed this standard in some detail, covering information systems, document management, record management, assessment records, and development of information portals. Internal communication between staff and with students is also covered. The key areas in the ESG standard's guidelines are considered in the context of internal programme reporting.

The IAAR standards and procedures therefore address ESG 1.7 for both institutional and subject level accreditation.

ESG 1.8 Public information

- IAAR Institutional accreditation

A number of the IAAR checklist -criteria make reference to expectations for the publication of information on the institutional website and the desirability of public information. IAAR criteria include the expectation that details of the curriculum must be available to students. The review panel noted that, to an extent, the ESG standard relating to public information is not readily aligned with the practice in Kazakhstan, as for many programmes, textbooks and materials used in teaching in higher education are formally approved by the state Ministry of Education and recognised in that way, rather than being independently published by the institution.

- IAAR subject level accreditation

IAAR criteria for programme accreditation cover all the ESG guidelines on information under a standard 'Public Awareness'. Scrutiny by the review panel of IAAR programme reports confirmed that relevant criteria relating to public information were considered. Institutional website portals were reviewed by the expert commission with a view to its currency, validity and relevance regarding programme-level information. However, while useful public information aspects were mentioned in reports (including student support, staff numbers and qualifications, complaints management system) it was not always clear that the expert commission had addressed the key points regarding information about learning outcomes, and teaching, learning and assessment procedures.

IAAR criteria clearly address the standard at both institutional and subject level. From the evidence found in accreditation reports, the practical application of the standard by the expert panel in the accreditation process can be further strengthened.

ESG 1.9 Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

- IAAR Institutional accreditation

The review and reapproval of programmes, and the expectation of annual review involving stakeholder input, as a part of internal monitoring and reporting systems, are included in the agency's evaluation criteria and in the resulting reports.

- IAAR subject level accreditation

Periodic monitoring of programmes is specifically included in IAAR programme accreditation criteria. Implementation of internal monitoring and review and the use by the institution of programme performance data is commented up in reports examined by the review panel.

The IAAR standards and procedures therefore address ESG 1.9 for both institutional and subject level accreditation.

ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

For both institutional and programme accreditation, IAAR makes a decision on the period of accreditation according to the outcome of the accreditation procedure. During or at the conclusion of that period, post-accreditation monitoring takes place and eventually reaccreditation is scheduled. The preparation and review of action plans in response to accreditation reports further supports improvement and enhancement on a cyclical basis.

The IAAR standards and procedures therefore address ESG 1.10 for both institutional and subject level accreditation.

Analysis

From its consideration of the mapping exercise and the reading of accreditation reports the review panel concluded that IAAR had given careful attention within its procedures and documentation to the ESG standards for internal quality assurance (i.e. ESG Part 1). As demonstrated in the sections above, the evidence available from the limited number of 2015 reports showed that all relevant standards and guidelines were included and given attention within the checklist review of detailed criteria which formed the conclusion to accreditation reports. The panel found that the discussion of the compliance with ESG standards within the evaluative commentary in the reports was more variable, with some standards receiving full and detailed commentary while there was relatively less information on others. In general the reports were found to be stronger on quantitative detail than on qualitative aspects. This applied in particular to the ESG Standard 1.3 Student Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment. While the aspects of student-centred education and learning outcomes within this standard were by no means ignored, its discussion in reports tended to be more delivery-centred than student-centred.

The review panel considered that, while they are relevant and detailed, the very large number of criteria that have been developed under the IAAR standards means that there is a danger that the focus on the most important ESG standards might not always be sufficiently sharp. Any future internal agency review should therefore aim to give more explicit guidance on the extent to which the agency's accreditation reports should include evaluative comment on individual criteria under each of its standards. This might require a reduction in the number of criteria, or a combining of linked criteria, or an indicative prioritising of the more important criteria relating to the ESG standards.

In its meetings held during the site visit, the review panel discussed the standards and criteria for the consideration of internal institutional quality assurance with members of the Accreditation Council, with institutional representatives and with expert panel members and it was thus able further to confirm the use and application of the revised standards for internal quality assurance in the IAAR accreditation procedures.

From the agency's self-assessment, from the documentation available, from examining IAAR reports and from the discussions during the site visit the panel was able to confirm that for both areas of accreditation activity the IAAR accreditation process gives systematic attention to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance mechanisms of HEIs.

Panel commendations

The review panel commends the detailed attention given by IAAR in its accreditation procedures to the implementation of the 2015 ESG.

Panel recommendations

The agency may wish to review its checklists of criteria with a view to making them more manageable within the duration and scope of an accreditation event.

The review panel considered that to improve further the reporting on HEI's internal quality assurance it would be desirable for IAAR now to review its *2011 Guidelines for organising and conducting the external expertise in the educational expertise of the education organisations*. The review should aim to give the agency's experts more detailed guidance on how to use the IAAR 2015 standards and how to ensure that these were adequately covered in the main body of accreditation reports as well as in the concluding checklists.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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.

Evidence

IAAR's overall methodology is based on its standards and criteria and its guidance on the procedures for external expert commissions, the work of its Accreditation Council and internal expert councils, and in addition the many policy and procedural documents which provide a framework for the detailed aspects of its activities (e.g. *Codes of Ethics*). The agency's methodology covers all the main instruments of external quality assurance: clear evaluation criteria; definition of procedures; well informed formal decision-making; follow-up procedures. The main body of these policies were put in place in 2011-2012 at the establishment of the agency. Many of them have since been reviewed and updated, most particularly the standards and criteria for the various accreditation activities which were fully reviewed in 2015, as detailed above.

The agency's self assessment described a good example of its consultation processes in action when the 2015 review of standards took place. A draft of the new standards was first developed by a working group and discussed in the agency's expert council for higher education, then the draft was sent to Kazakhstani and international experts for comment and advice; the proposals were also discussed in seminars held with representatives of institutions to identify the views of stakeholders; finally the working group presented its proposal to the Accreditation Council for approval.

The agency's self-assessment also drew attention to the way in which particular detailed standards had been revised and amended to bring them in line with state planning, making changes to give more emphasis to national strategic aims for the vocational aspects of programmes, for research funding, student subject choice. Fitness for purpose was established at the outset by ensuring that the criteria and guidance conformed to national government frameworks, as required by the national register, and that they were aligned with the ESG.

The agency uses its three expert councils to discuss, comment and inform on the development of its methodology and procedures. A range of stakeholder interests (academics, ministry, employers, a student member) are then represented in the Accreditation Council, which gives final approval to the standards and the agreed procedures. In general, while IAAR has included the representation of students in its processes, students are under-represented in numbers relative to other stakeholder groups. While therefore students potentially have a voice in consultations, this was clearly only a limited one (see analysis below).

In addition to the regular and focused consultation through its councils, the agency seeks feedback on an annual basis from its main partners in the accreditation process – that is, from higher education institutions and from its appointed experts who carry out the accreditation reviews.

IAAR has supported institutions in presenting and developing their quality assurance systems in a number of ways: by laying out its standards and criteria with accompanying questions which can provide a framework for internal institutional checks; by providing advisory support through its officers regarding the accreditation procedures, by basing accreditation visits on an institutional self-assessment, by having a scale of accreditation decisions which allows if necessary for recommendations and rapid follow-up, and by having post-accreditation monitoring systems in place. In all these different ways, IAAR's processes take into account the need to support institutions in enhancing the quality of their activities and in demonstrating both effectiveness and improvement.

Analysis

The review panel took into account the examples provided in the agency's self-assessment. It discussed with the staff of the agency and members of the Accreditation Council the approaches taken to designing and reviewing standards and procedures. The panel also gained confirmation from the representatives of the Ministry and of higher education institutions that the agency was responsive to stakeholder policies and advice. The panel further considered the terms of reference and the work of the agency's expert councils in providing expert advice to inform the design of quality assurance methodology.

The review panel concluded that the standards, policies and procedures developed by IAAR had been designed appropriately to meet the agency's aims and objectives, and were fit for purpose.

The panel was able to confirm that a range of stakeholder consultation had contributed to the establishment and the ongoing review of the agency's methodology. However, the representation of students in the processes concerned with the design of methodologies was in practice limited. There was no evidence that student representative bodies had been formally consulted, and student representation on the relevant consultative and decision-making bodies was minimal. Students and employer representatives met by the review panel confirmed that they were not aware of the possibility of making a contribution. The panel believed, therefore, that the contribution of

stakeholder views could be strengthened further by a greater involvement of employer and especially of student representation in the processes.

As noted elsewhere in this report, the agency might also consider reviewing its periodic surveys of institutions and experts with a view to gaining a fuller picture of the response to accreditation activity.

Panel recommendation

The panel recommends that the contribution of student views to the design and review of the agency's quality assurance methodologies should be strengthened.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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

Evidence

In its self-assessment, IAAR outlined in detail the stages followed in the implementation of its accreditation processes. For both institutional and programme-level accreditation, the procedures start with a formal application to the agency, which is checked for compliance with defined threshold requirements. The IAAR and the HEI then complete a contractual agreement agreeing to carry out the relevant procedures; these include agreement on cost, visit duration, number of experts, timing, deadlines and follow-up requirements. An agency officer is appointed to coordinate the accreditation. HEIs have the right to reject, with suitable justification, one or several experts proposed by IAAR in order to avoid conflict of interest. The detailed aspects covered in the ESG Guideline are addressed as follows:

Pre-defined and published

IAAR has developed and published detailed accounts of its quality processes. Regarding the consultation, development, design and approval of processes, see Standard 2.2 above. A range of publications relating to the processes, including the IAAR Standards and Criteria and guidance on procedures to institutions, are available in Russian, Kazakh and in English in hard copy versions, and on the agency's website: <http://www.iaar.kz/en/>.

Self-assessment

A self-assessment is a central required element of the accreditation procedure. IAAR provides a workshop to support the institution in preparing its self-assessment. To avoid conflicts of interest, the *Regulations on the external expert commission* of IAAR stipulate that any experts who have participated in the training seminar on preparation of the self-assessment cannot be included in the evaluation expert group for the review in question. A preliminary version of the institutional or programme self-assessment is prepared and then reviewed by the agency with a view to its completeness. If this is satisfactory the institution is asked to prepare a final version.

External assessment including a site visit

Once the self-assessment has been finally submitted, an external expert commission is formed. This consists of the Chair, independent academic peer experts (both national and foreign), employer(s) and student(s). This pattern of membership is essentially the same for institution and programme accreditation, but with differences in the numbers of experts involved, with the expert commission varying in the number of members according to the requirements of the specific accreditation. Accreditation events for subject programmes may cover a wide range of programmes (a 'cluster accreditation') and therefore involve a large number of panel members (12 or more). A programme schedule and timetable for the site visit is agreed. The information for the visit is supported by a survey of staff and students in the institution. During the visit, the expert commission conducts meetings and discussions to complement and confirm the information received in the self-assessment. The duration of the visit is three days for an institutional accreditation, and up to four days for a study programme accreditation, depending on the number of programmes taken into the review.

Report

The expert commission prepares the accreditation report. The commission Chair is responsible for the report, but all other members may contribute and comment on the final agreed version of the report. The report follows a standard agency format, which requires an evaluation of each individual accreditation criterion with standard classifications of compliance ('strong', 'satisfactory' 'anticipates improvement', 'unsatisfactory'. On reporting, see also Standard 2.6 below.

Follow-up procedures

IAAR has well-defined procedures for the follow-up after accreditation has taken place. These are set out formally in its policy: *Regulation on post-accreditation monitoring of the educational institutions and educational programs*. A project section of IAAR deals exclusively with the business of follow-up monitoring.

The IAAR Accreditation Council makes its decisions on accreditation with specified conditions and recommendations for monitoring, according to the strength of the outcome. These will include the requirement for an institutional action plan and a timetable for post-accreditation monitoring. The dates for post-accreditation monitoring are published on the agency website. Two months before a monitoring deadline, the institution sends an interim report to IAAR, which includes an action plan for meeting recommendations during the full period of the accreditation certificate. IAAR nominates an expert to review and comment on the interim report. The agency may if required send a small group of experts to the institution to discuss the interim report and confirm actions taken. The interim report and the expert comments upon it are then submitted to the Accreditation Council for consideration and decision. In cases of an unsatisfactory response to the initial accreditation recommendations, the Council may suspend or withdraw accreditation.

In the course of the site visit the review panel had the opportunity to hear from many independent sources (rectors and heads of HEIs, members of external expert commissions, representatives of students and external stakeholders) testifying that IAAR is seen as a trustworthy agency with transparent procedures. Moreover, many interviewees expressed their appreciation of the effective implementation of external quality assurance processes. The panel were given examples of positive and negative accreditation decisions, and of supportive recommendations made in reports.

Analysis

The review panel read the agency documents which outlined the overall procedure for accreditation, and also examined a number of expert commission accreditation reports and post-monitoring reports. In its meetings, the panel was able to discuss the implementation of procedures with members of the Accreditation Council, with agency staff and experts responsible for carrying out accreditation visits and producing reports, as well as with representatives of institutions.

The review panel was able to confirm fully the account provided in the agency's self-assessment, which demonstrated that all of the expected stages for external quality assurance are in place, as outlined in the evidence above. IAAR uses an approach to all its accreditation activities involving an institutional self-assessment, an external expert commission carrying out a site visit, a resulting report which is considered formally by a second expert body (the Accreditation Council), and a fully specified follow-up procedure.

The review panel considered that the overall documentation supporting the procedures was sound and the arrangements for planning and conducting site visits were well designed. In particular, the post-accreditation follow-up procedures are clearly designed and systematic. In meetings with those who had experienced the implementation of the IAAR accreditation processes (experts, institutional Rectors) the panel heard only entirely positive comments concerning the management and delivery of the processes.

The panel did, however, note some details of the implementation which raised questions.

The panel found examples where the period between the site visit and the meeting of the Accreditation Council which made a decision on accreditation was very short, and therefore scarcely allowed time for the preparation of a full report and consultation on it between members of the expert commission. No doubt this could be explained by deadlines, time pressures and institutional interest, but the panel was not convinced that this was a satisfactory practice.

The review panel found that for some study programme accreditations a large 'cluster' of programmes was the subject of the accreditation, and the expert commission consisted of a large number of external experts, in some cases more than ten persons, who might be reviewing a significant number of programmes over a range of different subject areas. This could lead to difficulties in coordination and in ensuring an appropriate level of input from individual representatives. Thus, student and employer and international experts would have only one representative on the panel to cover a large number of programmes and may therefore not be able to participate fully in the examination of individual programmes. Bearing in mind the intentions of the ESG regarding the inclusion of students in quality assurance, this was an unfortunate omission.

This situation also had implications for the character of the accreditation report on such 'cluster' events, as the panel found that reports on the 'cluster' accreditation had conclusions under the checklist of standards which were general for all the programmes reviewed, and thus did not identify the level of compliance of individual study areas. This in turn meant that there might be little information from the report available to students and other stakeholders, with regard to compliance with standards for a specific programme within the cluster.

The review panel found it understandable that the agency may have had to work with a 'cluster' approach to accreditation for reasons of economy and efficiency at a time when a large volume of

subject level accreditations were being sought by institutions. The panel nevertheless considered that the procedures now needed review and adaptation so as to ensure that the weaknesses identified with regard to expert participation and reports in the context of 'cluster accreditation' were addressed and mitigated as far as was possible.

Panel commendations

The panel commends the agency for its arrangements in supporting institutions in their preparation for accreditation

The panel commends the agency on its systematic procedures for post-accreditation monitoring.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that the agency ensures that its planning ensures that there is sufficient time for the proper preparation and confirmation of accreditation reports before their consideration by the Accreditation Council.

The panel recommends that IAAR review its use of 'cluster' accreditation events. The review should define the maximum practical size of a cluster, taking into consideration the effect of such arrangements on the participation of single stakeholder experts, and the adequacy of the information on subject programmes contained in the resulting reports. In particular, the agency should ensure that in designing 'cluster' accreditations, a student panel member is able to participate and contribute fully to the procedures with regard to individual subject programmes.

Panel conclusion: substantially 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).

Evidence

IAAR uses a variety of experts in its accreditation activities: academic experts, student representatives, employers and for many of its accreditations also international experts. Experts may be nominated by institutions or may apply directly to the agency through its website. The agency has established clear criteria for the selection and appointment of its peer-review experts. These take into consideration academic or other qualifications, the type of nomination, experience in higher education and knowledge of the legal framework for higher education in Kazakhstan. More detailed criteria apply to different areas of accreditation (institutional, subject/programme, medical). The selection criteria and requirements are published in the *Regulation on the control of the external expert activities*. This is a comprehensive document that also addresses the requirements of confidentiality and avoidance of conflict of interest. On appointment, an agency expert formally signs a *Code of Ethics* that acknowledges and agrees to these requirements and receives a certificate from the agency. Since 2012 the agency has appointed more than 500 certificated experts, the large majority of these being appointed in 2015.

International experts are involved in accreditation so as to transfer good practice and ensure the transparency of procedures. They are nominated and validated by international quality assurance

agencies. The foreign experts involved in the IAAR reviews have come from ten EU countries, and from Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and USA.

Considering more specifically the question of conflict of interest, according to the IAAR *Code of ethics of the external expert on accreditation*, the experts must observe independence of the review process and should not be affiliated to the institution in question. In order to avoid any conflict of interest, experts nominated for a review of a particular HEI are asked to sign a statement on the absence of conflict of interest covering several aspects. If it transpires that nonetheless there is a conflict of interest, the expert is replaced. According to the agency's self assessment, failure to observe the above *Code of ethics* may lead to exclusion from the expert pool, and as a consequence two local and one foreign expert were removed in this way in 2013.

The agency keeps a careful record of its experts, their qualifications and experience and the number of accreditations carried out. There are two databases, for national and international experts. The duration and validity of the certification is tracked, and experts are classified according the level of accreditation experience shown.

The requirements and procedures for the training of the agency's experts are laid out in detail in the document *Regulation for the training, retraining and advanced training of external experts*. The agency trains its experts in two stages: the first seminars are on a theoretical level and cover the IAAR requirements, the ESG, and the procedural regulations for a review. The second part is a practical workshop that simulates the tasks of experts in a typical external review visit. Both parts of the training must be completed before the expert participates in a review. Ongoing training is also provided, so that for instance the agency has run a number of seminars to discuss with its experts the revised 2015 ESG and the changes made to agency criteria to reflect the ESG. Since 2015 IAAR has introduced training for its employer expert members recommended by regional chambers of commerce. 114 such employer experts have completed training and received the agency certificate. Student expert panel members will be advanced level undergraduates, postgraduate students nominated by HEIs, or else are nominated by student organisations. Students are nominally full members of the panels.

IAAR establishes appropriately constituted panels of peer review experts (external expert commissions) to carry out its accreditations. The inclusion of a student member and an employer representative on the panel is mandatory. Commissions will also have an international expert member. The *IAAR Guidelines for the organization and conduct of external expertise in the process of accreditation of educational organizations* (2011), lays out the requirements for the membership of the expert commissions for institutional and programme level accreditation. These state that normally a commission will consist of 6-7 experts. Out of these, there are 2-3 experts from the academic community, 1-2 foreign experts, 1 employer, 1 student and 1 agency coordinator. To balance the expert panels, IAAR divide the experts into 3 categories according to the review experience (having participated in at least 7 reviews, 3 reviews and less than 3 reviews). This is also taken into account in establishing agency commissions. The membership of an external expert commission is formally approved by the IAAR Accreditation Council on the recommendation of the accreditation department (project section).

Analysis

The review panel read and considered the various documents, referred to above, which govern the selection, appointment and the work of the agency's peer review experts. The panel met with

members of the agency involved with the appointment and training of experts and with groups of academic experts, and student and employer expert commission members. The panel read reports of accreditation visits and checked the membership of the agency's accrediting group. The panel noted some variation over time in the membership of expert commissions, although the evidence available from reading reports showed that there was greater consistency in more recent accreditations.

The review panel found the IAAR regulations regarding agency experts, and their implementation, to be comprehensive and thorough in approach. (*IAAR Guidelines for organising and conducting the external expertise in the accreditation process of the education organisations*). Discussions held with experts during the site visit confirmed the agency's careful approach to the training of experts and to the testimonies regarding conflict of interest. The evidence showed that the agency uses a wide range of peer perspectives in its work, with a commitment to the systematic inclusion of students and employer representatives and a valuable use of international experts. However, the panel noted that due to the organisation and procedures of some reviews, student and employer expert commission members may not in every case be in a position to make a full contribution to the review visit or the subsequent report, especially as some 'cluster' review commissions might have up to 13 or more expert members (on this question see Standard 2.3 above). More positively, a meeting with student representatives confirmed that they contributed as full members of the external expert commission to decision making on accreditation and were able to read and comment on the draft accreditation report.

The panel concluded that IAAR now has very well-established procedures for the appointment and training of its experts and for the constitution of its accreditation external commissions. There is a good range of expertise included in the accreditation work. Conflict of interest aspects are properly addressed.

Panel commendations

The review panel commends IAAR on its systematic and well regulated processes for the recruitment and training of its experts.

The review panel finds the consistent inclusion of employer representatives in the accreditation work of the agency, together with the training programme for them, to be a particularly notable strength.

The review panel also commends the agency on establishing the pool of international experts and on the substantial level of representation of these experts in its accreditation processes.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

Evidence

Published criteria

IAAR has developed full and detailed standards and criteria for each of the different accreditation areas of work in which it is involved (institutional, programme, vocational and technical education, medical education). The standards and criteria concerning those IAAR activities within the scope of the ESG (institutional and subject level accreditation) have been developed by its expert councils, approved by its Accreditation Council, and are published on its website. Timely updating of the standards is carried out by the expert councils, taking into account the legislative and regulatory basis in the given field of education, the expectations of the ESG standards, and the input of stakeholders.

Consistent decision-making

In the implementation of the agency's procedures in the course of its accreditation activity, consistency of operation is supported by a number of measures: the clarity of the criteria and the guidance on how to apply them; the training of experts and commission chairs; the role of the IAAR coordinator in managing and monitoring the procedures; and the pre-screening of reports carried out by the coordinator.

Regarding the consistency of outcomes, final judgements and decisions on accreditation are made by the agency's Accreditation Council on the basis of an institution's self assessment, the recommendations of the external expert commission conducting an accreditation review, and any response or commentary from the institution to the expert commission report. The report is presented formally to the Accreditation Council by the chair of the expert commission and discussed in depth. In making its decision, the Council may take into account qualifying information concerning the regional characteristics of the institution, its reputation, the demand for graduates and the views of employers. The receiving and reviewing of all accreditation reports by the Accreditation Council is an important safeguard which can allow the comparison of reports and thus identify any inconsistency, omission, or variation in quality.

The IAAR Accreditation Council then has the authority to take following decisions on accreditation:

- accreditation for 1 year at compliance with the criteria in general, but in the presence of some shortcomings and opportunities for improvement;
- accreditation for 3 years at positive results in general, but with some minor shortcomings and opportunities for improvement;
- accreditation for 5 years at positive results in general
- accreditation for 7 years at positive results in the case of re-accreditation;
- denial of accreditation for non-compliance with standards and criteria.

This decision-making has the value of providing a closer assessment and a fine-grain evaluation of the outcomes of an accreditation.

Analysis

The review panel read the agency's published documents and guidelines relating to its standards and criteria. It found these to be clear, comprehensive and detailed, and publicly available.

The panel considered the agency's guidelines to its external expert commissions, the terms of reference of its Accreditation Council, the guidance and training given to its experts and the procedures for the deliberations of the Council. The panel discussed the accreditation procedures and judgements with experts, members of the Council, and representative of institutions. The panel concluded that taken together the regulations and practice provided a sufficient and reliable basis to ensure a high level of consistency in the application of criteria. The basis for decision-making by the

Accreditation Council is clearly laid down and allows for a sensible differentiation in accreditation decisions, with associated follow-up requirements.

The panel concluded that the agency has well-defined and secure arrangements for the consistent application of agreed criteria in arriving at the outcomes of its accreditation processes.

Panel commendation

The review panel commends the agency on the quality of the documentation defining the standards and criteria that upon which its accreditation processes are based.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

Evidence

The IAAR self-assessment report explained that the confirmed report of the external expert commission was the basis for the decision on accreditation by the Accreditation Council. The report is drawn up by the members of the expert commission in the course of the site visit, and edited by the Chair of the commission. All members of the commission contribute to the draft report and agree on its conclusions and recommendations. The draft report is then checked by an officer of the agency for conformity to the agency's specification contained in the *Guidelines for the organisation and conduct of external expertise in the process of accreditation of educational organisations*. Once agreed, the report is sent to the institution for checking for factual accuracy and comment. The institution responds in a formal letter. Members of the commission consider the response of the institution and make amendments to the final version of the report as appropriate. IAAR has final responsibility for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the final report.

The agency's guidelines for reports conform closely to the guidelines under this ESG standard. Accordingly, reports are expected to contain: information on the character and structure of the institution; details of the membership of the expert commission and the arrangements for the site visit; a systematic analysis of the level of compliance with the IAAR standards relevant to the type and level of accreditation; recommendations and good practice points; and a concluding decision on compliance; and, if successful, a recommendation to the Accreditation Council on the status and duration of the accreditation.

In reporting on the IAAR standards, each individual standard must have a judgement rating the level of compliance (strong, satisfactory, anticipates improvement, unsatisfactory), so that for each major area of internal quality assurance a clear evaluation is made. The recommendations made follow logically on the level of compliance and are again associated with individual standards. The procedure is closely similar for programme and institutional accreditation, although necessarily the criteria, while addressing similar areas, differ in their level of focus.

The final version of the report is submitted to a meeting of the agency's Accreditation Council for approval and decision. The report is presented at the Council meeting by the Chair of the external

expert commission. Once the Council's decision is made, the agency publishes the full report together with the decision on accreditation, either institutional or programme-level, on its website, against the list of accredited institutions. IAAR accreditation reports are published in the Russian and English languages. The information is therefore readily accessible to the public.

Analysis

The review panel read the agency's guidelines relating to reports, and also read a cross section of recent reports on accreditation at institutional and programme level. During the site visit, the panel was able to discuss reports with representatives of institutions, members of external expert commissions, and with the staff of the agency responsible for managing the report process.

Members of the panel were at first puzzled to find that there was considerable variation as between the two language versions in English and Russian, with the Russian version being much longer. The agency explained that the Russian version of the report contained more pages because of the inclusion of appendices showing institutional documentation, while the English version was limited to the main report only. To avoid any confusion, the agency may find it appropriate to make a clear statement regarding the differences between the two versions. It might also consider moving towards publishing an executive summary version in English rather than the full report, but this would depend on the aims and intentions of publishing in English.

The reports read by the panel were in general thorough and extensive; the discussion of individual standards and the judgements and recommendations of the panel were clear. The panel noted that there had been some development in the format and content of the reports over time, and that more recent (2015) reports were more consistent in their presentation (for more detail on reports, see also ESG 2.1 above).

The review panel examined reports published on the website and were able to confirm that the agency's reports are accessible there. The reports (as read by the panel in English versions) were informative and gave a full account of the level of compliance with IAAR standards. As already noted (2.1 above), reports did not in all cases address in detail the individual criteria and the questions under the criteria, but this was understandable given the very full definition of the agency's standards. Nevertheless the agency may wish in its guidelines to give more precise advice on the extent to which individual criteria should be included in the report. The panel did not see any agency template for the standard format of reports, but it believed that this might be helpful in ensuring greater consistency in presentation. All reports had recommendations and conclusions, but the identification of good practice, while present in some reports, was not consistently featured. The reports were lengthy and the panel believed that they could benefit from a brief executive summary in order to provide concise information to the public.

As already noted (see ESG 2.3 above) some IAAR accreditation reports concerned with large 'clusters' of study programmes gave only broad generic conclusions on the whole package of programmes, and it was not always possible to find detailed information relating to the compliance with standards in individual subject areas. This tended to limit the usefulness of the information relating to individual study programmes in some reports. It would benefit the transparency of these reports if a summary could be provided for all individual programmes that had been reviewed by the expert commission.

The review panel concluded that, notwithstanding the areas for improvement recommended above, the IAAR accreditation reports seen by the panel met fully the expectations of the ESG standard and its guidelines. The reports generally conform to the structure recommended in the ESG guidelines; Institutions have the opportunity to comment on the draft report; and full reports are published, together with the decision of the Accreditation Council relating to them.

Panel commendations

The review panel commends IAAR on the publication of its reports in English translation.

Panel recommendations

The review panel recommends that IAAR review its guidelines with a view to providing a more developed specification of the format of the report, perhaps including a standard template for different types of accreditation.

In this context, the panel further recommends that reports on 'clusters' of programmes be redesigned so as to provide a detailed statement on each individual programme.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

Evidence

Following a report and recommendations by an independent external consultant, IAAR established a formal Commission for the Consideration of Appeals and Complaints late in 2015. The commission currently consists of a number of members representing national representatives of employer bodies and it is chaired by a member of the Accreditation Council. The Commission reports to the Accreditation Council, and changes to an accreditation decision can be made by the Council following the recommendations of the Commission.

The agency has also developed and approved (again through its Accreditation Council) the relevant regulations for the submission of appeals and complaints. These set out the necessary procedures together with a timetable and deadlines for making an appeal, and for considering and responding to it. The basis for appeal can be disagreement with the accreditation decision or inappropriate procedural behaviour by agency officers or experts involved in a review. Appeals and complaints may be submitted anonymously. Should the recommendations by the Commission relating to an appeal not be accepted, an institution or individual retains the final right of redress through the Kazakhstan legal system.

The agency has also amended its procedures so that following the introduction of the appeals and complaints procedure, institutions are advised of the right of appeal and the relevant procedures, at the time of concluding the initial contractual agreement for accreditation. Details of the membership of the Commission and the information relating to the procedure are published on the IAAR website.

Analysis

The review panel noted that, since the introduction of the appeals and complaints procedure was relatively recent, there was as yet no record of an appeal or complaint which could provide an example of the implementation of the process, or any outcome from it. The panel examined the terms of reference of the Commission and the agency's regulations relating to appeals and complaints. It met with members of the Accreditation Council and the Commission, including the current chairperson.

The review panel found the procedures for the submission and consideration of appeals and complaints to be clearly set out, appropriate, and accessible through the agency's website. The panel strongly supported the agency's decision to establish the Commission for the consideration of appeals and complaints. The panel believed that the work of the Commission will be of considerable importance, both as a necessary step in IAAR procedures and as a contribution to the development to the 'culture of accountability and appeal' that will be established in the context of Kazakhstan higher education through the work of the agency.

However, the review panel formed the view that unfortunately the membership of the Commission was not well aligned with its role and purpose. Since the decisions on accreditation are made by the agency's Accreditation Council, any overlapping membership as between that body and that of the Commission for the Consideration of Appeals would involve a potential conflict of interest, especially with regard to the chairperson role. Members of the Accreditation Council would necessarily be associated with the original decision on accreditation, which might be the subject of an appeal. Furthermore, the panel was not convinced that a membership of the Commission focussing almost exclusively on employer representation would in every case provide the necessary experience and expertise to reach an appropriately informed judgement on an appeal or complaint.

Panel recommendation

IAAR is recommended to review the constitution and membership of its Commission for the Consideration of Appeals and Complaints. The review panel advises that the membership of the Commission should not include members of the Accreditation Council, and that the membership should be broadened to include appropriately experienced members of the academic community.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

The review panel commends IAAR on the commitment it has made to include international experts in its work, most particularly in its Accreditation Council and in its expert commissions.

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

The review panel found that IAAR has taken care to introduce well-framed regulations and codes of practice which provide appropriate guidance to secure the independence of its expert panels and of its Accreditation Council.

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The review panel commends the agency for its ongoing commitment of to transparency and the publication of information, and for the quality of its three-language website.

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

The review panel commends that agency on the preparation and publication of its comprehensive IQAS Manual which outlines and brings together all aspects of its internal quality assurance.

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

The review panel commends the detailed attention give by IAAR in its accreditation procedures and in its standards and criteria to the implementation of the 2015 ESG.

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

The review panel commends the agency for its arrangements in supporting institutions in developing a self-assessment.

The review panel commends the agency on its systematic and thorough procedures for post-accreditation monitoring.

ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

The review panel commends IAAR on its systematic and well regulated processes for the recruitment and training of its experts.

The review panel finds the consistent inclusion of employer representatives in the accreditation work of the agency, together with the training programme for them, to be a particularly notable strength.

The review panel commends the agency on establishing the pool of international experts and on the substantial level of representation of these experts in its accreditation processes.

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

The review panel commends the agency on the quality of the documentation defining the standards and criteria that upon which its accreditation processes are based.

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

The review panel commends IAAR on the publication of its reports in English translation.

OVERALL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel recommendation

In order to strengthen the contribution of students to as a stakeholder group to IAAR's governance and work, the panel believed that the IAAR Accreditation Council would benefit by increasing the student representation in its membership.

Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that, in the medium term, the agency should consider how it can use the information contained in its accreditation reports so as to inform general developments in higher education policy and practice. In this context, it would be appropriate to consult with HEI's to seek their views on areas of information or guidance that would be most relevant and valuable to them. The panel recommends that the agency further develops its current work to communicate to institutions and to the public more widely the significance of its quality assurance activities, and provides further guidance in understanding the significance of the outcomes of accreditation.

Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that IAAR, as it implements fully its internal quality assurance procedures, maintains regular internal reviews and reports concerning the level of performance against the measures that it has defined for internal quality assurance.

The panel recommends that the agency's periodic surveys of experts and institutions be reviewed with the aim of increasing their usefulness, and that the agency should consider ways in which the resulting information could be shared more widely. In addition, evaluative feedback and comment on individual accreditation events should be introduced.

The panel recommends that in the interest of public information, IAAR makes a more concise and accessible statement regarding its internal quality assurance available on its website, possibly in the form of an executive summary of the IQAS Manual.

Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant

ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Panel recommendations

The agency may wish to review its checklists of criteria with a view to making them more manageable within the duration and scope of an accreditation event.

The review panel considered that to improve further the reporting on HEI's internal quality assurance it would be desirable for IAAR now to review its *2011 Guidelines for organising and conducting the external expertise in the educational expertise of the education organisations*. The review should aim to give the agency's experts more detailed guidance on how to use the IAAR 2015 standards and how to ensure that these were adequately covered in the main body of accreditation reports as well as in the concluding checklists.

Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant

ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Panel recommendation

The panel recommends that the contribution of student views to the design and review of the agency's quality assurance methodologies should be strengthened.

Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that the agency ensures that its planning ensures that there is sufficient time for the proper preparation and confirmation of accreditation reports before their consideration by the Accreditation Council.

The panel recommends that IAAR review its use of 'cluster' accreditation events. The review should define the maximum practical size of a cluster, taking into consideration the effect of such arrangements on the participation of single stakeholder experts, and the adequacy of the information on subject programmes contained in the resulting reports. In particular, the agency should ensure that in designing 'cluster' accreditations, a student panel member is able to participate and contribute fully to the procedures with regard to individual subject programmes.

Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant

ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

Panel recommendations

The review panel recommends that IAAR review its guidelines with a view to providing a more developed specification of the format of the report, perhaps including a standard template for different types of accreditation.

In this context, the panel further recommends that reports on 'clusters' of programmes be redesigned so as to provide a detailed statement on each individual programme

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Panel recommendation

IAAR is recommended to review the constitution and membership of its Commission for the Consideration of Appeals and Complaints. The review panel advises that its membership should not include members of the Accreditation Council, and that the membership should be broadened to include appropriately experienced members of the academic community.

Panel conclusion: Partially compliant

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The review panel would like to make some general suggestions, extending beyond strictly interpreted ESG which IAAR may wish to consider when reflecting on its further development.

Regarding its governance and management structures, IAAR may wish in the medium term to review its Statutes. Such a review should seek to make completely transparent the separate responsibility and authority of the Accreditation Council for all academic-related matters in the accreditation activity of the agency. There should be a clear differentiation between the role of the Accreditation Council and the role, responsibilities and authority of the Founder Director of the agency.

The agency might also wish to consider the value of appointing a new overarching governance body, which can advise IAAR on the broader policies, management, and strategic direction of the agency, thus freeing the Accreditation Council to concern itself primarily with accreditation matters.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

12.06.2016					
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW (NAMES)	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER	NO OF SESSION
14:00-16:30	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for day I (<i>review panel only</i>)				
16:30-17:30	Presentation about the higher education system	Rimma Seidakhmetova , Scientific Consultant, Chair of the Accreditation Council	Education system; the three registers (for agencies, institutions and programmes); Law on Education, legislation review in 2011 coming in force in 2017,	Peter Findlay	1
18:00	<i>Dinner (review panel only)</i>				
13.06.2016					
8:30-09:00	Review panel's private meeting	<i>review panel only</i>			2
09:00-09:45	Meeting with the team responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report,	Inara Mukhtarova , Project Manager of Institutional and Specialized Accreditation of HEIs; Timur Kanapyanov , Manager of International Projects and Public Relations; Rinat Gassimov , Project Manager for Accreditation of Organisations of Technical/ Vocational Education; Aigerim Aimurziyeva , Manager of Medical Projects; Zhanzira Shalabayeva , Manager of Post- Accreditation Monitoring; Shinar Smagulova , Chief accountant	Clarification the text of self-assessment report; Role of stakeholders in SAR; Approval procedure of SAR, Outcomes of SWOT analysis	Peter Findlay	3
09:45-10:00	Review panel's private discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
10:00-10:15	Coffee break with internal review panel discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
10:30-11:15	Meeting with top management Director and Chair of Council	Alina Zhumagulova , Director and Rimma Seidakhmetova , Accreditation	History of IAAR establishment; role of IAAR Accreditation Council;	Peter Findlay	4

		Council Chair, Scientific Consultant Timur Kanapyanov , Manager of International Projects and Public Relations	IAAR Governance; Ensuring the commitment of all members of External Expert Committees		
11:15-11:30	Review panel's private discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
11:30-12:15	Meeting with the agency: department leaders	Inara Mukhtarova , Project Manager of Institutional and Specialized Accreditation of HEIs; Aigerim Aimurziyeva , Manager of Medical Projects; Rinat Gassimov , Project Manager for Accreditation of Organisations of Technical/ Vocational Education; Zanzira Shalabayeva , Manager of Post- Accreditation Monitoring; Aiman Nurakhmetova , Manager of Information and Analytical Project	Role of each of the department leaders in ensuring the ESG requirements; Challenges in implementing ESG 2015; IAAR Internal quality assurance and strategy	Peter Findlay	5
12:15-12:30	Review panel's private discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
12:30-13:15	Meeting with the agency departments: department staff	Timur Kanapyanov , Manager of International Projects and Public Relations; Bagdat Medetov , Legal Consultant; Botagoz Atygayeva , Office-manager; Saltanat Ordabayeva , Office-referent; Karim Zhumazhanov , System Administrator; Baurzhan Ospanov , IT-manager	Analytical work; The channels of providing information to public, role of electronic media; IAAR resources; Involvement in of staff in IAAR internal quality assurance QA.	Peter Findlay	6
13:15-13:30	Review panel's private discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
13:30-14:45	Lunch break with internal review panel discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
14:45-15:30	Meeting with representative of the expert pool	2 from Expert Council for HE members: Marina Skiba Marina Pogrebetskaya 2 from on HE not Council members: Larissa Shkutina Saule Sagintayeva 1 from Expert Council on Medical	Appointment of External Expert Committee (EEC); Training of experts; Roles of the EEC Chairmen and Supervisor; Responsibility for producing the accreditation report	Peter Findlay	7

		Education: Almagul Kuzgibekova			
		1 Expert Council on VET: Sanzhar Tattibekov			
15:15-15:30	Review panel's private discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
15:30-15:45	Coffee break with internal review panel discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
15:45-16:30	Meeting with representatives of students	5-6 representatives from the student unions Symbat Abilnassirova Yerlan Kashkinbayev Aigerim Moldiyarova-Kadirbayeva Akadil Belgara Dastan Audanov Dinara Sakenova	How student experts are nominated? How are they involved in the IAAR activities; How the communication between the student experts and the IAAR is organised	Janine Wulz	8
16:30-17:30	Meeting with representatives of Accreditation Council and Appeals and Complaints Commission	Serik T. Seidumanov , Mazhilis Deputy, Member of the Council Olga A. Yanovskaya , Academician of the International Academy of Economics "Eurasia", Member of the Council Zarema K. Shaukenova , Director of the Institute for Philosophy, Political Science and Religion Studies, Member of the Council Nadezhda M. Petukhova , Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the National Blood Center, Member of the Council Gabit M. Kusainov , Senior Manager of Educational Programs, "Center for Pedagogical Measurements" under the AEO "Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools", Member of the Council Lyazat Z. Shonaeva , Director of Human Resources Development of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs "Atameken" (NCE) of Kazakhstan, Chair of the Appeals and Complaints Commission	How Accreditation Council members are appointed; Decision making process; Student participation in the work of AC; Are there any appeals? Functioning of the Complaints Commission; Relations of Appeals and Complaints Commission and AC.	Peter Findlay	8A

17:30-18:30	Wrapping session of the day (<i>review panel only</i>)
19:00	Dinner (<i>review panel only</i>)

14.06.2016					
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW (NAMES)	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER	NO OF SESSION
8:30-09:00	Review panel private meeting (<i>review panel only</i>)				
09:00-09:45	Meeting with Ministry	<p>Gulzat Kobenova, a representative of the Higher and Post-Higher Education and International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan</p> <p>Amantay Nurmagambetov, Director of Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Center of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan</p>	<p>Bologna process and the role of the IAAR;</p> <p>The consequences of the new law of Higher Education, in force from 2017</p> <p>Independence of IAAR;</p> <p>Communication between the Ministry and IAAR</p>	Peter Findlay	9
09:45-10:00	Review panel's private discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
10:00-10:15	Coffee break with internal review panel discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
10:30-11:15	Meeting with heads of HEIs	<p>Yerlan Sydykov, Rector of the Eurasian National University named after L.N. Gumilyev</p> <p>Sarsengali Abdimanapov, Rector of the Kazakh University of Economics, Finance and International Trade</p> <p>Mukhtar Baizhumanov, Rector of Kazakhstan's Civil Aviation Academy</p> <p>Rahman Alshanov, Rector of the University "Turan"</p> <p>Akhylbek Kurishbayev, Rector of the S.Seifullin Kazakh Agro Technical University</p> <p>Bibigul Nusipzhanova, Rector of the Kazakh National Academy of Arts named after T.Zhurgenov</p>	<p>HEIs opinions of accreditation</p> <p>HEIs influence on the IAAR</p> <p>Usefulness of reports</p>	Peter Findlay	10

11:15-11:30	Review panel's private discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
11:30-12:15	Meeting with employers	<p>Kuatzhan Ualiev, Executive Secretary of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan</p> <p>Aikyn Duisembayev, Director of the Center for Psychology «Kasiet»</p> <p>Gennady Gamarnik, Adviser of Chairman of the Holding "Kasipkor" Non-commercial Joint Stock Company</p> <p>Zaure Sadikova, Director of the secondary school №48 in Astana</p> <p>Zheksenbi Kairzhanov, LLP «Shchelkovo Agrochem-KZ»</p> <p>Adelsha Ermuhanov, National Association of the Construction Industry of Kazakhstan</p>	<p>Role of employers in accreditation;</p> <p>Experience of employers as stakeholders relations with the IAAR;</p> <p>Level of participation in IAAR expert training</p>	Peter Findlay	11
12:15-13:15	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day II and provisional conclusions (<i>review panel only</i>)				
13:15-14:30	Lunch (<i>review panel only</i>)				
14:30-15:15	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify (<i>review panel only</i>)				
15:15-16:00	Meeting with Director to clarify any pending issues	Alina Zhumagulova , Director of the Agency	Clarification of remaining issues	Peter Findlay	-
16:00-16:15	Coffee break with internal review panel discussion (<i>review panel only</i>)				
16:15-17:00	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings (<i>review panel only</i>)				
17:00-17:30	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Council/Board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	Alina Zhumagulova , Director of the Agency	General feedback on the outcomes of the visit	Peter Findlay	
18:30	Dinner (<i>review panel only</i>)				

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

1. Background and Context

IAAR is a nonprofit organization which has a status of a legal body, created to improve the competitiveness of higher education institutions, also technical and professional organizations of the Republic of Kazakhstan on national and international levels by conducting the procedures of accreditation and academic rankings.

The Agency is nongovernmental and nonprofit organization. The purpose of the Agency's activity is to provide organizational and technical maintenance of the conducting procedures of institutional and specialized accreditation of educational institution, to elaborate standards and criteria for accreditation, to carry out the rankings of higher education institutions, technical and professional organizations.

IAAR has been an affiliate of ENQA since 2011 and is applying for the first time for ENQA membership.

IAAR is applying for registration on EQAR.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent IAAR 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 IAAR should be granted and to EQAR to support IAAR application to the register.

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

2.1 Activities of IAAR within the scope of the ESG

In order for IAAR to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of IAAR 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 IAAR have to be addressed in the external review:

- Institutional accreditation of educational institutions
- Specialised (program) accreditation of study programmes

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 IAAR including the preparation of a self-assessment report;

- A site visit by the review panel to IAAR;
- 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 follow-up 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.

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 IAAR 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 IAAR review.

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

IAAR 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 IAAR 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 € 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

IAAR 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 IAAR at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by IAAR in arriving in Astana, Kazakhstan.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and IAAR.

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 IAAR within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If IAAR 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 IAAR, finalise the document and submit it to IAAR and 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.

IAAR is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which IAAR 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

IAAR 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. IAAR 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 IAAR. 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 IAAR has met the ESG and can be thus admitted 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 IAAR and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by IAAR, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. IAAR 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

IAAR 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 follow-up 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 follow-up 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, IAAR 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 IAAR if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the follow-up 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	January 2016
Appointment of review panel members	February/March 2016
Self-assessment completed	February/March 2016
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	March 2016
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	April 2016
Briefing of review panel members	May 2016
Review panel site visit	Late June/Early July 2016
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	September 2016
Draft of evaluation report to IAAR	October 2016
Statement of IAAR to review panel if necessary	October/November 2016
Submission of final report to ENQA	December 2016
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of IAAR	February 2017
Publication of the report	February/March 2017

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
IAAR	Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating, Kazakhstan
IQAA	Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency in Education
IQAS	Internal Quality Assurance System
MES RK	Ministry of Education and Science of Republic of Kazakhstan
NAC	National Accreditation Centre
NSEQA	National System of Educational Quality Assessment, Kazakhstan
QA	Quality assurance
RAC	Republican Accreditation Council of the Ministry of Education
SAR	Self-assessment report

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY IAAR

Self-Assessment Report for the External Review for Confirmation of Full Membership of ENQA

The hyperlinks and appendices to the self-assessment report included the following documents referred to by the review panel:

National reports and documents

Law of RK "On Education"

State Program of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020

Strategic Plan of the MES RK for 2011-2015

Strategy for internationalization and academic mobility in Kazakhstan till 2020

Higher and Postgraduate Education Organizations Model Regulations

Rules and Requirements for maintaining National Registry of Accreditation Institutions, Accredited Education Institutions and Education Programs

Regulations on the Republican Accreditation Council of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan

National report on the status and development of education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan

IAAR regulations and internal documents

IAAR organizational structure

Job Descriptions

Certificate for inclusion in the National Register 1

IAAR Strategic Plan for 2016-2020

IAAR Annual Action Plans and Strategy Implementation Plans (2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012)

IAAR Annual Reports

List of AC Members

List of Accredited Educational Organizations

List of Accredited Programs

Regulation for training, retraining and advanced training of external experts

Regulation on post-accreditation monitoring of the educational institutions and educational programs

Regulation on the control of the external expert activities

Regulations on the Accreditation Council

Accreditation Council Members' Code of Ethics

Accreditation Council Decisions

Regulations on the Commission on Appeals and Complaints Consideration

Regulations on the Expert Councils

Expert Council for Higher Education – membership and terms of reference

Expert Council on Medical Education - membership and terms of reference

Expert Council on TVE - membership and terms of reference

Minutes of the Accreditation Council meetings

Minutes of the Expert Council meetings

Standards for specialized accreditation of educational programs of higher education institutions (ESG 2015)

Standards of institutional accreditation for institutions of higher education implementing higher and postgraduate educational programs (ESG 2015)

Schedule of post-accreditation monitoring

Guidelines for the organization and conduct of external expertise in the process of accreditation of educational organizations (2011)

Regulation for training, retraining and advanced training of external experts

Regulations on the external expert commission of IAAR

Code of Ethics of the External Expert on Accreditation

A sample of an expert paid service agreement

Statement of IAAR Expert on the Absence of Conflict of Interest

Reports of external expert commissions

The guide to carrying out a self-assessment for institutional accreditation of higher education implementing higher and postgraduate educational programs

The guide to carrying out a self-assessment for specialized accreditation of educational programs of higher educational institutions

Threshold requirements for the HEIs to undergo the procedure of the institutional accreditation

Guidelines on internal quality assurance system (IQAS Manual)

A sample questionnaire for accredited educational organization

A sample questionnaire for certified IAAR external experts

Analytical Report on the Results of Experts Survey

Analytical Report on the Results of the Educational Institutions Survey

Analysis of the IAAR against the ENQA membership criteria, and thereby the ESG (report by Josep Grifoll)

IAAR Publications

IAAR magazines

OTHER REFERENCE SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA 2015)

Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews (ENQA 2015)

Use and interpretation of the ESG (EQAR 2015)

Comparative analysis of the ESG 2015 and ESG 2005 (EQUIP 2016)



THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating (IAAR) undertaken in 2016.



Independent agency for
accreditation and rating

2016 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW