
ENQA AGENCY REVIEW:
INDEPENDENT KAZAKH AGENCY FOR
QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION (IQAA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the extent to which the Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA) complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). It is based on an external review managed by ENQA and initiated by IQAA, an ENQA affiliate since 2008, as part of its application for ENQA membership and registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The review was conducted between January 2016 and January 2017. The site visit to Astana, Kazakhstan, took place on 11-13 October 2016.

Accreditation is voluntary in Kazakhstan. IQAA is one of ten accreditation agencies currently registered in the country and the leading one in terms of the number of reviews conducted. It carries out institutional and programme reviews, mainly in higher education institutions, but also in research and post-secondary institutions. IQAA is a quite young agency; though established in 2008, it has been expanding its activities only since the end of 2011. This has taken place in the context of gradual changes in the national framework which now provides for a transition, to be completed in 2017, from a system which combines state attestation and accreditation reviews conducted by registered independent agencies to one based only on independent accreditation. The agency itself has recently been in transition insofar as it has revised its strategy, core processes, and accreditation methodologies in line with the revised ESG, and put in place an internal quality assurance system.

IQAA is considered a trustworthy organisation, has clear and published aims and clear legal status. It carries out its accreditation activities on a regular basis. It has adequate resources to do so, though they are not yet used to produce thematic analyses based on external review reports, which could guide further development of quality assurance in Kazakhstan. While representatives of the academic community and employers are involved in IQAA's governance and activities, both national law and its own internal regulations safeguard properly its independence. Its Strategy can, in principle, guide its further development and is indeed being implemented as planned; however, the responsibility for overseeing its implementation is not explicitly assigned to any governing body, and there is no mechanism for measuring progress towards strategic objectives. The agency is responsive to feedback and open to change, and has in place an internal quality assurance system which works well; it could still benefit, though, from a mechanism for regular self-analysis and use of findings for institutional enhancement.

External stakeholders were engaged in the recent review and revision of IQAA's accreditation methodology; hence, its high legitimacy in higher education. However, a mechanism for regular review is not yet in place. Fitness-for-purpose of the methodology is an issue as processes shift the responsibility for quality and its assurance from institutions to(wards) the agency itself. IQAA has integrated fully most of Part 1 ESG into its standards; the interpretation of two ESG (1.3 and 1.9) would need to be reconsidered and more attention paid to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance. While some regulations could have clearer provisions, accreditation processes are implemented in line with the ESG and involve competent national and international experts, the former representing all relevant stakeholders. The criteria for accreditation decisions are clear, published and applied consistently by the relevant IQAA body, but more precise guidelines are needed to ensure full consistency in judgments made at the stage of external reviews. Decisions and reports should be published for all reviews, including those that lead to non-accreditation. Arrangements are in place to inform institutions of their right to file appeals and complaints, and to ensure transparency and efficiency in handling them.

The agency has been found to comply fully with ESG 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.7, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.7, comply substantially with ESG 3.1, 3.6, 2.1 and 2.5, and comply partially with ESG 3.4, 2.2 and 2.6. Considering all the evidence collected, the panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, IQAA is in compliance with the ESG.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA) (*Независимое казахстанское агентство по обеспечению качества в образовании*) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted in a period of twelve months from January 2016 to January 2017.

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.

IQAA has been an affiliate of ENQA since September 2008. It initiated this external review in 2015 as part of its application for ENQA membership and registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The agency's application was also prompted by recent changes in the legislative and policy framework for higher education and quality assurance (QA) in Kazakhstan. These involve a gradual transition, planned for the years 2014-2017, from a system where state attestation has existed alongside accreditation reviews conducted by independent organisations to one based only on independent accreditation. As one of ten independent accreditation bodies now officially registered in Kazakhstan, IQAA is seeking to enhance further its reputation among higher education institutions (HEIs) and strengthen its competitive position in the redesigned QA landscape.

In line with its Terms of Reference (ToRs), the review was conducted to evaluate the extent of IQAA's compliance with the ESG. It aimed to provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership should be granted to IQAA, and to EQAR to support IQAA's application to the register.

IQAA's activities cover higher education, postgraduate education provided by research institutions, and technical and vocational education and training. The review addressed, in particular, the following activities in higher education which fall within the scope of the ESG and are listed in the ToRs:

1. Institutional accreditation of HEIs
2. Accreditation of programmes provided by HEIs (referred to as 'specialised accreditation' in national legislation and IQAA's documents)
3. Institutional accreditation of educational departments in research institutions
4. Accreditation of programmes provided by research institutions (referred to as 'specialised accreditation' in national legislation and IQAA's documents)

It also addressed an activity which is referred to in IQAA's documents as 'preliminary reviews' and described in its self-assessment report (SAR) as related to institutional accreditation.

As this was IQAA's first external review, the panel was expected to pay particular attention to the policies, procedures, and criteria in place, being aware that full evidence of concrete results in all areas might not be available at this stage.

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2016 external review of IQAA 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 IQAA was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Oliver Vettori (Chair, EUA nominee), Dean, Accreditation and Quality Management/Director, Programme Management and Teaching and Learning Affairs, Research associate and lecturer, Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU), Austria;

- Ewa Kolanowska (Secretary, ENQA nominee), independent higher education consultant, secretary to ENQA and SKVC (Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, Lithuania) panels, Poland;
- Heli Mattisen (ENQA nominee), Director of the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA), Estonia;
- Dan Derricott (Student, ESU nominee), Master's student (Public Policy and Management), University of York; Operations Manager, School of Education, University of Leicester, United Kingdom.

IQAA produced a SAR which provided a substantial portion of the evidence that the panel used to draw its conclusions. At the preparatory stage, the panel also received additional documents, including a full text of the IQAA Statutes, and written evidence in response to two sets of preliminary questions on the national legislative framework and the agency's methodologies (hereafter referred to as Addenda 1 and 2 to the SAR). The panel conducted a site visit to validate fully the self-assessment and clarify points at issue. All decisions of the panel were taken by consensus. The panel produced a draft report based on IQAA's SAR and findings from the site visit. It was sent to the ENQA review coordinator for pre-screening and, subsequently, to IQAA for comments on its factual accuracy. The final report was submitted to ENQA. The review panel confirms that it had access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review process. Administrative support, including in the visa application process, was provided by the ENQA coordinator and the IQAA liaison person.

Self-assessment report

The self-assessment was a collective process involving both internal and external stakeholders of the agency. It included an internal analysis of IQAA's activities against the ESG, review and revision of accreditation standards, revision of existing or the development of new internal regulations and related documents, and an analysis of internal and external feedback. A draft of the SAR was produced by a working group composed of the IQAA President and Heads and senior staff of departments in collaboration with the IQAA Accreditation Council, the body approving accreditation methodologies and taking accreditation decisions. It was consulted with all staff and national and international experts. The final SAR was approved by the Accreditation Council.

The panel received the SAR at the end of July 2016. Following the structure recommended by ENQA, it contained information on the national higher education and QA framework; a description of IQAA's structure, activities and methodologies; a SWOT analysis; a detailed analysis of the agency's compliance with Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG as the main part of the report; and a brief overview of current challenges and areas for improvement. It provided links to key documents published on the agency's website, including its strategy, quality policy and codes of honour, documents related to accreditation reviews, and thematic analyses. The annexes to the SAR included additional information such as statistical data on the agency's activities, typical agendas of accreditation reviews, activities undertaken to encourage and support student participation, and events organised by the agency.

The SAR Working Group had clearly invested a great deal of time and energy to prepare a report which was comprehensive and, in general, gave a good insight into the context of IQAA's activities and its operational framework, main functions and accreditation methodologies. It is not an easy task to explain the entire spectrum of activities of an agency within the limited space available in a SAR, and remain focused on most relevant aspects. This might explain why the SAR left a few questions open, in particular as regards appointments to various bodies or units and accreditation methodologies, and did not succeed in avoiding repetition and redundancy in some sections. Overall, the authors argued their case well and compiled plenty of evidence to demonstrate how IQAA's activities were complying with the ESG. At the same time, the SAR would have benefitted from a more in-depth analysis, in particular with regard to potential shortcomings of, and risks faced by, the agency.

Site visit

The programme of the site visit was prepared by the panel in collaboration with the IQAA liaison person. The visit was preceded by an on-site preparatory meeting of the panel to discuss in detail the lines of enquiry and divide tasks. The visit to the agency took place between 11 and 13 October 2016. During the visit, the panel had meetings with all key stakeholders, including the SAR Working Group, the governing bodies and management team of the agency, its units involved in accreditation reviews, staff, experts and representatives of HEIs, students, employers and national authorities. The programme also included a tour of the agency's facilities. The visit was well organised, and though interpreting was needed to interview all stakeholder groups, all meetings were held as scheduled. At the end of the visit, the panel met to discuss findings and agree the main conclusions and recommendations, and had a final session with representatives of IQAA to brief them on the general findings of the review. For the detailed programme of the site visit, see Annex 1.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The higher education system in Kazakhstan operates on the basis of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the 2007 Law on Education amended in 2011 and 2015, and state programmes which set basic principles and strategic objectives for the development of education, together with key indicators. The State Programme on Education Development 2011-2020, as an overarching strategy, aims to increase the competitiveness of education and develop human capital by ensuring access to quality education for sustainable economic growth. Aside from specific measures for education below the higher education level, this is to be achieved through, among other things, the development of new funding mechanisms to increase the availability of quality education; improvement of education management and monitoring; the training of highly qualified research and teaching staff to provide higher education programmes responding to economic needs; integration of the education, research and industry sectors; and integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Kazakhstan has a National Classification System which consists of a national qualifications framework (NQF) referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (with the self-certification process underway), sectoral qualifications frameworks, professional standards, and a system of assessment and certification of the quality of qualifications. It was adopted in 2012 to modernise the education system, enhance its effectiveness, adapt it to labour market needs and, in particular, address skills shortages at the higher education level. As a full member of the Bologna Process since 2010, the country has introduced a three-cycle degree structure. It comprises programmes leading to: (1) a Bachelor's degree or a specialist's degree in medical fields (4 to 5 years), classified as 'higher education' in national legislation; and (2) a Master's degree (1 to 2 years) and (3) a PhD degree (3 years), classified as 'postgraduate education'. Programmes are offered in full-time, part-time and evening study modes. In accordance with the Law on Education, programmes should comply with national standards which define, among other things, their structure and core contents, while HEIs are free to determine 55%, 70% and 90% of contents at the Bachelor, Master and PhD level respectively. Until recently, programmes have been based on an US credit system; it is now being replaced with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

Currently (2016), there are 128 HEIs, including 10 national, 31 state and 13 'non-civil' (i.e. military and government service such as fire or police service) institutions, 16 joint stock companies, 56 private institutions, 1 international and 1 autonomous institution (Nazarbayev University). Only few leading HEIs (16, i.e. 13%) offer PhD programmes. With the establishment of private HEIs, the total number of HEIs increased from 55 in 1991, when Kazakhstan gained independence, to 182 in 2001 as the peak year. Since then, it has been decreasing as a result of stricter requirements set for the licensing of HEIs as part of the Government's policy to improve the quality of education, and of new regulations

whereby HEIs are no longer allowed to operate branch campuses. This has led to mergers of HEIs or their transformation into technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions.

The number of students grew from 658 106 in 2003 to 775 762 in 2005 and fell to 459 369 in 2015. This results mainly from the crisis in the years when the country was gaining independence, demographic processes, low birth rates, and State funding re-allocated from higher education to TVET institutions for national industrial and innovation development programmes. Currently, 48.3% of students are registered in public HEIs, 50.3% in private HEIs and 1.3% in branch campuses of international HEIs. Overall, more than two-thirds (335 511, i.e. 70.7%) of all students are self-funded; tuition fees for less than one-third (139 330, i.e. 29.3%) are covered by State-funded grants, with priority given to engineering and technology programmes. The proportion of State-funded students varies from 26% and 41% in Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes, respectively, to 100% in PhD programmes. The number of teaching staff fell from 40 972 in 2003 to 38 087 in 2015. This reflects measures taken recently to ensure efficient use of resources in higher education, and a decline in student enrolments.

In line with the 2011-2020 State Programme on Education Development, efforts have been taken to internationalise higher education and integrate HEIs into the EHEA. Student and staff exchanges are funded by the State and HEIs, with, for example, almost 5 000 students studying at international institutions and nearly 7 000 international academic staff and consultants attracted in recent years. Currently, 38 HEIs offer double degree programmes jointly with international institutions; while only 0.1% of students are now enrolled on these programmes, their number has recently been growing. Some HEIs have joined the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) as associate or full members.

The plans for the coming years highlight strategic planning and management of HEIs as a key issue and envisage the introduction of a corporate governance system through gradual extension of autonomy of HEIs and the development of an endowment mechanism. In recent years, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) has also sought to strengthen the newly established three-cycle structure and, in particular, develop PhD education through State-funded doctoral programmes in leading HEIs. While the number of State grants is still too limited to meet current needs and the economic crisis has thwarted the plans to increase funding, PhD programmes have been offered on a self-financing basis since September 2016. Debates are also ongoing in the academic community on the need to improve the quality of Master's degree and PhD programmes by establishing more demanding requirements for student applicants, strengthening the research component of programmes and orienting research towards innovation development.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The process of establishing a national QA system in Kazakhstan began in the early 2000s. First initiatives were undertaken to address the legacy of centralised state control over the quality of education and concerns over the quality of education in the context of the establishment of tuition-based education and a rapidly growing number of private HEIs. The history of the QA system can be divided into two phases: Phase I, 1999-2009, establishing accreditation as a concept in national legislation, and Phase II, 2010-2016, establishing a public QA system through the development of independent accreditation, i.e. accreditation reviews conducted by independent institutions.

In the first phase, between 1999 and 2001, the Law on Education introduced state attestation together with accreditation, and a procedure for state accreditation based mainly on quantitative indicators and involving MES and its Accreditation Council. As the procedure was heavily criticised by HEIs for failing to meet proper standards (and allowing almost one-third of HEIs to be accredited within a week), accreditation was suspended for nearly a decade. However, the National Accreditation Centre, established by MES in 2005, initiated the work to develop a methodology for accreditation. In 2007,

in the context of democratisation processes, internal pressures and international developments in QA, a new Law on Education established voluntary accreditation, with no legal consequences for HEIs, in addition to mandatory state attestation.

Changes in the second phase were driven, on the one hand, by growing awareness in the Government and society of the need to delegate some monitoring responsibilities in education to non-governmental organisations and, on the other hand, by the Bologna Declaration, signed by Kazakhstan in 2010, and the ESG which led to a shift towards independent accreditation. This is reflected in legislation adopted in 2011 and in the 2016-2019 State Programme on Education Development. While maintaining mandatory state attestation, the 2011 amendments to the Law on Education introduced institutional and specialised (programme) accreditation as a prerequisite for HEIs to be awarded State grants for students. On the basis of a 2011 MES Order, the National Register of Accreditation Bodies, modelled after EQAR, and the National Registers of Accredited Institutions and Accredited Study Programmes were established in 2012. They are all kept by MES. The role of independent accreditation has been further strengthened by the 2015 Law amending some legislative acts in the field of education whereby programmes which have successfully passed both institutional and specialised accreditation are now exempt from state attestation. Moreover, as from 2017, HEIs will award State diplomas to students completing programmes which have been accredited by a registered agency (though all HEIs will award their own diplomas as from 2021). The 2016-2019 State Programme provides for the transition from state attestation to independent accreditation between 2014 and 2017, with the former to be abolished as from 2017 for all HEIs except 'non-civil' (i.e. military and other government service) ones.

Currently, responsibilities within the national external quality assurance (EQA) system are shared between MES and accreditation bodies included in the National Register. MES is responsible for: licensing (granting permissions to HEIs and programmes to operate) and post-licensing monitoring; state attestation (monitoring compliance with national standards); external assessment of learning outcomes (monitoring selectively the implementation of programmes by field of study); and monitoring compliance with national legislation. Accreditation agencies conduct institutional and/or specialised (programme) accreditation reviews based on applications submitted by institutions on a voluntary basis; full costs of an accreditation process are covered by applicant institutions.

Ten agencies, two national and eight international ones, are now entered on the National Register of Accreditation Bodies. The national agencies are IQAA and the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating (IAAR), operating since 2008 and 2011 respectively. The international agencies are based in Austria, Germany, the UK and the US. The agencies on the Register, except those included in EQAR, are subject to 're-certification', based on an external review, every five years. European agencies included in EQAR are recognised by MES but should be entered in the National Register to operate in Kazakhstan. HEIs are free to choose any of the registered agencies.

A total of 95 (i.e. 74%) of all 128 HEIs and 2 632 (i.e. 55%) of all 4 800 programmes licensed by MES were accredited in Kazakhstan by mid-2016. This includes 61 HEIs (48% of all, and 64% of accredited ones) accredited by IQAA (SAR). Comparative data on accredited programmes shows that the two national agencies, IQAA and IAAR, have a huge lead over the other registered accreditation bodies, though some of the latter are sectoral agencies specialised in specific subject areas (e.g. business or engineering). Between 2009 and 2016, IQAA and IAAR accredited 1 368 (29% of all licensed programmes, and 53% of all accredited ones) and 848 programmes respectively, as compared to 173 and 121 accredited by two international agencies ranking third and fourth and much smaller numbers accredited by the other ones. (SAR; IQAA's 'Higher Education and Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan', 2016; Presentation given by IQAA during the site visit).

The national legislation has introduced several elements of internal quality assurance (IQA) in HEIs such as procedures for monitoring academic achievements and self-assessment or performance appraisal for academic staff, but there are no regulations specifically addressing this issue. Accreditation reviews conducted by independent agencies are the main mechanism for assessing the effectiveness of IQA.

INDEPENDENT KAZAKH AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION

IQAA was established in 2008, following the adoption of the 2007 Law on Education which introduced voluntary accreditation in Kazakhstan. Its owners are two organisations: 'Innovations in Education', IQAA's founder, with the IQAA President being the sole founder of 'Innovations in Education' and the majority owner of IQAA; and the National Association 'Expert', a minority owner since 2015. The agency operates as a non-governmental organisation on the basis of the Law on Non-Profit Organisations. It was entered on the National Register of Accreditation Bodies (see above) in 2012. According to its Statutes and mission statement, its main aim is to contribute to improving the quality of education in Kazakhstani educational institutions and increasing their competitiveness at national and international levels. Its core activity is institutional and specialised (programme) accreditation.

Between 2008 and 2009, IQAA developed its accreditation methodology based on the Law on Education, the 2005 ESG, experience of international QA agencies and feedback provided by HEIs. It conducted its first accreditation reviews at the end of 2009. Between 2009 and 2015, its main activities included accreditation and creating academic rankings of HEIs; in 2015, the latter was handed over to another organisation, IQAA Ranking (for details, see ESG 3.1). As the national QA framework did not provide any incentives to HEIs to apply for accreditation, IQAA carried out only five institutional reviews between the end of 2009 and the middle of 2011. During that period, it was extensively engaged in promoting accreditation in Kazakhstan. In collaboration with the Parliament and MES, HEIs and employers, the agency ran public awareness campaigns and contributed to the 2011-2020 State Programme on Education Development and amendments to national legislation which provided the basis for the transition from state attestation to independent accreditation. In 2013, it carried out its first specialised (programme) accreditation reviews. Recently, IQAA has expanded its accreditation activities, conducting, for example, 28 institutional and 784 programme accreditation reviews in 2014 and 12 institutional and 413 programme reviews in 2015 (with the numbers varying between years as accreditation is voluntary). In total, since 2013, it has conducted 68 institutional and 1 371 programme reviews. In 2015, the agency revised its accreditation standards and procedures to align them with the revised ESG approved at the Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in May 2015.

IQAA'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

Pursuant to its Statutes, IQAA's governing bodies are the General Meeting of Shareholders (GMS), the Accreditation Council and the President. The GMS is currently composed of one representative of each co-owner. Its main responsibilities include adopting and amending the agency's Statutes, appointing and dismissing its President, approving its annual financial plans and statements, and taking decisions on its restructuring, liquidation and property. The Accreditation Council is currently composed of 13 members, including the IQAA President, representatives of HEIs, students and employers, and an international expert. The Council, among other things, approves the strategy of the agency, accreditation procedures, standards and criteria, appeals and complaints procedures, and takes accreditation decisions. The President manages the agency as its head, is responsible for the implementation of its strategic plans, and represents it in external relations.

The agency has five departments, with a total number of 18 staff members, including 13 full-time academic staff. The Departments of Audit and Post-Accreditation Monitoring of HEIs and of Audit and Post-Accreditation Monitoring of TVET Organisations are responsible for the organisation of accreditation reviews, from the self-assessment stage to the submission of documents to the Accreditation Council, and for the post-accreditation monitoring of accredited institutions and programmes. The

Department of Analysis and Quality collects and analyses information on QA in Kazakhstan and abroad and internal and external feedback on the agency's activities; produces IQAA's thematic reports and newsletter; and maintains and updates its database of experts. Aside from providing IT services, the Department of Expertise and Information Technologies organises reviews of SARs submitted by institutions and supports Accreditation Committees (see below). The Administrative and International Relations Department provides financial, legal, administrative and clerical services, and is responsible for international cooperation.

Further, there are 11 Accreditation Committees, one for institutional accreditation and ten for broad subject areas, each composed of 4 to 5 specialists from HEIs. They help IQAA develop its database of experts and organise the assessment of SARs, and are consulted about experts to be selected for reviews and outcomes of accreditation reviews proposed by the agency to the Accreditation Council.

Finally, IQAA has established the Appeals and Complaints Commissions as separate bodies. The Appeals Commission, composed of four representatives of HEIs and an employer, considers appeals against decisions taken by the Accreditation Council in cases of breach of accreditation procedures and/or factual inaccuracy leading to the refusal of accreditation. The Complaints Commission, which consists of eight representatives of HEIs, handles complaints filed in cases of inappropriate or unethical conduct of IQAA coordinators and accreditation panels, factual inaccuracy leading to a panel's negative conclusion, and inaccurate information provided by IQAA. (For further details, see ESG 2.7).

IQAA'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

Activities

IQAA's main activities include:

1. Institutional accreditation of HEIs, including medical HEIs supervised by the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development
2. Specialised accreditation of higher education and postgraduate (Bachelor's and Master's degree and PhD) programmes, provided by HEIs, including medical HEIs supervised by the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development
3. Institutional accreditation of units of research institutions which provide postgraduate (Master's degree and residency) programmes, including those supervised by the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development
4. Specialised accreditation of postgraduate (Master's degree and residency) programmes provided by research institutions, including those supervised by the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development
5. Institutional accreditation of TVET organisations, including medical colleges supervised by the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development
6. Specialised accreditation of programmes provided by TVET organisations, including medical colleges supervised by the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development
7. Institutional accreditation of professional development and other training organisations
8. Specialised accreditation of programmes provided by professional development and other training organisations

IQAA also conducts 'preliminary reviews' at institutions which intend to apply for institutional accreditation for the first time. Such a review aims to assess the readiness of an institution to undergo an institutional accreditation review (for further details, see below).

Additionally, the agency carries out what may be called an initial assessment (referred to as 'expertise') of PhD programmes where no students have been enrolled yet. (The panel learned about 'expertise' at a later stage of the review process. It is not covered by the ToRs for this external review or IQAA's SAR and, thus, is not addressed further in the report.) This is a temporary arrangement put in place to address a gap in national legislation: while PhD programmes may be provided only as based

on State grants, these are awarded only to accredited programmes, and programmes with no students enrolled are not eligible to undergo an accreditation process. 'Expertise' assessments are conducted according to the standards for specialised (programme) accreditation of ongoing PhD programmes provided by HEIs (see below). The procedure is the same as for programme accreditation insofar as it comprises a self-evaluation, an external review, including a site visit (though without an interview with students as no are enrolled), and a report prepared by an expert panel. Reports had not been available on the IQAA website by the time when the draft external review report was produced by the panel. Where the outcome of an 'expertise' is positive, IQAA awards a certificate which is recognised by MES and, thus, enables a given programme to apply for State funding. Where students are subsequently enrolled, programmes may undergo accreditation reviews as all other ones.

The agency has been involved in accreditation in higher education since 2009 (institutional reviews since the end of 2009 and programme reviews since 2013), in TVET since 2013, and in the accreditation of education units of research institutions and their programmes since 2015.

Aside from its main activities, IQAA participates in the development of national strategies and legislation, working closely with the Parliament and MES (see also above). It disseminates QA-related information and provides methodological support to HEIs, and organises training events, seminars and conferences devoted to education and QA in education.

IQAA is an affiliate of ENQA; a full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA), and the CHEA International Quality Group; an intermediate member of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN); and a co-founder of the IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence. It has signed cooperation agreements with 12 QA agencies in Armenia, Austria, Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Spain and the US, including some of those which are also registered in Kazakhstan. As part of several World Bank, EU-funded and bilateral projects, it has produced or translated and disseminated in Kazakhstan several publications on international and European higher education, and has organised international seminars, with speakers coming from ENQA and European QA agencies.

Procedures

The processes addressed in this external review report are: institutional accreditation of HEIs and of units of research institutions, and accreditation of programmes offered by HEIs and by research institutions (Activities 1 to 4 above), and preliminary reviews as related to institutional accreditation.

A preliminary review is based on the standards for institutional accreditation. The procedure for such reviews includes a self-assessment report; a site visit to the institution to assess compliance with the standards, undertaken by at least one external expert and an IQAA Coordinator; and a report, provided to the institution concerned, with a judgment on whether it is ready to undergo an accreditation review or should suspend the accreditation process. (For further details, see ESG 2.1 and 2.2)

IQAA has basically the same procedures for institutional accreditation of HEIs and units of research institutions and specialised accreditation of programmes provided by HEIs and research institutions. The procedures for all four types of accreditation processes comprise a self-evaluation; an external review, including a site visit, conducted by an expert panel; a report produced by the panel; the publication of the report and the final outcome; and a follow-up (referred to as 'post-accreditation monitoring'). They differ only in respect of the profile of the chair and members of an expert panel, the duration of a site visit and its scope as reflecting accreditation standards and criteria. There are only slight differences between the criteria for institutional accreditation of HEIs and research institutions, and between those for programmes provided by HEIs and research institutions. IQAA has

in place two types of post-accreditation monitoring processes. In the case of conditional accreditation (see the three possible outcomes of an accreditation review below), IQAA conducts a follow-up review which focuses on the shortcomings identified earlier, and includes a report prepared by the institution concerned and a site visit. Post-accreditation monitoring in the case of full accreditation, introduced only at the end of 2015, involves analysis of annual reports on changes and achievements, prepared by institutions according to IQAA's accreditation standards. (For further details, see Part 2 of the ESG).

The final outcome of an institutional and programme accreditation process can be full accreditation for 5 years, conditional accreditation for 1 to 3 years or refusal of accreditation. Institutions and programmes which have been awarded full accreditation receive an accreditation certificate, are entered in the above-mentioned National Register of Accredited Institutions or Programmes and, thus, are recognised by the public authorities. A follow-up review in the case of conditional accreditation may lead to full accreditation, with the initial validity period of accreditation extended to 5 years, or refusal of accreditation. Where accreditation has been refused, a new application can be submitted not earlier than one year after the negative decision.

As accreditation is voluntary in Kazakhstan, accreditation reviews are initiated by HEIs and research institutions submitting applications to IQAA. Applicant institutions cover all costs of an accreditation process. IQAA's non-accreditation decisions have no legal consequences. However, as mentioned earlier, accreditation awarded by a registered agency is now required for HEIs to obtain State grants for students, and programmes accredited as a result of an institutional and programme review are exempt from state attestation.

IQAA'S FUNDING

IQAA's income comes mainly from fees paid by applicant institutions for accreditation reviews (97% in 2014 and 2015) and post-accreditation monitoring (0.5% in 2015). In the coming years, income from accreditation in higher education is expected to grow in view of the transition from state attestation to independent accreditation and incentives for accreditation in the national legislation (see above). The agency also plans to diversify its income streams by expanding accreditation activities in TVET and applying for international project grants. (See also ESG 3.5.)

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF IQAA 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

The overall aims of IQAA are defined in its Statutes and integrated into its mission statement which is part of its 2015-2018 Strategy of Development; excerpts from the Statutes and the Strategy are published on its website. In its mission, IQAA seeks to contribute to improvement of the quality of education, increase competitiveness of Kazakhstani educational institutions at national and international levels, and promote a quality culture in educational institutions and to the general public.

Aside from defining the mission, vision and values of the agency, the Strategy sets five objectives together with implementation measures and related indicators. The objectives include: promoting quality in educational institutions through accreditation processes; providing training and timely and reliable information on the quality of education to the public; giving priority to students' interests in the agency's policy and activities and in its relations with stakeholders; ensuring compliance with the requirements of ENQA full membership and the registration in EQAR; developing the organisational culture of the agency. The Strategy is made operational through the 2015-2018 Implementation Plan and annual plans. Plans and annual reports are published on the IQAA website.

Pursuant to the Statutes, the Accreditation Council approves IQAA's strategy and the President is responsible for its implementation. In discussing its role in overseeing the implementation of the Strategy during the site visit, the Council stated that all important decisions were brought to its attention, and that joining ENQA was a key priority. Explaining arrangements for monitoring progress towards the objectives of the Strategy, the President and Heads of Departments referred to indicators in the Strategy and indirect indicators such as requests for additional information from external stakeholders. For the IQAA staff interviewed, the main priorities are: reaching all stakeholders and enhancing their awareness of the importance of quality; expanding international activities; hiring more staff in view of increasing workload; and upgrading the agency's website as a tool for communication, and its database of experts to facilitate daily work.

Until 2015, IQAA conducted accreditation reviews and produced rankings of HEIs. The responsibility for rankings was then transferred to another organisation, IQAA Ranking, with amendments made to IQAA's Statutes (SAR; Statutes). The two organisations now share resources as fees for rankings do not cover their actual costs, and two IQAA staff members work part-time for IQAA Ranking for several months a year. The websites of the two organisations were separated in 2015. (Meeting with the IQAA Founders). The representatives of HEIs interviewed considered IQAA rankings to be 'transparent'; this was, in fact, mentioned as a factor that had contributed to a good reputation of IQAA as an accreditation agency and encouraged HEIs to apply for accreditation to the agency.

Currently, EQA is IQAA's core activity. General information on its main activities and detailed internal regulations on its EQA processes are available on its website. Between 2013 and mid-2016, IQAA conducted in total 68 institutional reviews and 1 371 programme reviews (SAR; Addendum 1 to the SAR).

The number of reviews per year varied from 10 in 2013 to 28 in 2014 and 12 in 2015 in the case of institutional accreditation and 6 in 2013 to 784 in 2014 and 413 in 2015 in the case of programme accreditation (SAR, Annex 5). Pursuant to its Statutes, the agency may also carry out activities such as dissemination of information, organisation of training courses and events, and support for HEIs related to QA. In recent years, it has organised more than ten seminars on higher education and QA, including the revised ESG, for its stakeholders. It also disseminates QA-related information through its website, quarterly bulletin, Facebook and Twitter pages, and YouTube. It has created a special section for students on its website, developed special guidelines for students-experts, and organises additional training for them. (SAR, Annexes 3 & 4; IQAA's website; meeting with students).

The agency identifies a number of risks to its activities. These include a lack of State funding; the unstable legislative framework for QA resulting in uncertainty among HEIs; and competition among QA agencies which may encourage HEIs to choose those which have set lower standards. IQAA's accreditation fees are five times lower than those charged by international agencies registered in Kazakhstan. (SAR; meeting with the Founders) In the last two years, IQAA's income exceeded its expenditure, and it has a plan for increasing income in the coming years (SAR; 2014 & 2015 budgets provided during the visit; meeting with the Founders) (see also ESG 3.5). As explained by IQAA and the representatives of the national authorities interviewed, recent years have still seen debates on the division of roles in EQA between MES and QA agencies. At the same time, as the panel learned from the representatives of the national authorities, a survey among HEIs had clearly shown that they were very much in favour of keeping independent accreditation as the main EQA mechanism. Agencies are now expected by MES to demonstrate that their activities do indeed contribute to quality improvement. As MES pursues an 'open market policy', the number of registered agencies may grow soon. The representatives of the national authorities and HEIs pointed to a high reputation of the agency, its 'competent people', including the President, in particular, and the Accreditation Council and experts, transparent methodology, thorough reviews, the impact of its activities on quality improvement and its ENQA affiliate status as major strengths which gave IQAA a competitive advantage over other agencies. For all stakeholders, the President is an invaluable asset of the agency, widely known and held in high esteem for her expertise, commitment and pioneering efforts to introduce independent accreditation in Kazakhstan.

In 2015, the National Association 'Expert', which brings together 200 experts, joined IQAA as a minority owner. This was done to 'give voice to experts', widen the stakeholder base and increase transparency of activities carried out by the agency as a private organisation. (Statutes; Meeting with the Founders) Aside from the IQAA President, the Accreditation Council, which takes accreditation decisions, brings together representatives of academic staff, students and employers, and an international expert. The Appeals Commission is composed of representatives of academic staff and an employer, and academic staff are members of the Complaints Commission. The Accreditation Committees, supporting accreditation processes, consist of academic staff from HEIs. (For details, see ESG 3.3, 2.5 & 2.7) The pool of experts includes national academic experts, international experts, students and employers (see ESG 2.3 & 2.4). HEIs, experts and employers were consulted about accreditation procedures and standards of the agency when these were being revised in 2015 (see ESG 2.2). (SAR; Addendum 1 to the SAR; IQAA's internal regulations; meetings with the IQAA Founders, Accreditation Council, Appeals and Complaints Commissions, experts, students and employers).

Analysis

The panel considers that IQAA's mission statement sets clear overall aims for its activity and confirms that it is publicly available. These aims are consistently carried forward through the agency's daily work – both EQA and awareness-raising and training activities. Its methodologies for the EQA processes are published and perceived as transparent. It is also evident to the panel from all its meetings that the agency takes care to hold onto its values, as defined in the Strategy, in its EQA processes. In

combination with a fine reputation of individuals involved in the governance and EQA processes of the agency, all this makes IQAA a trustworthy agency for all of its external stakeholders.

The Strategy has clear objectives and, in principle, can guide further development of the agency. However, some of its objectives are hardly measurable (e.g. promoting quality in educational institutions, and developing the organisational culture of the agency). There are no milestones and the target indicators defined in the Strategy are not quantified; thus, progress towards the objectives can hardly be measured. While the responsibility for approving and implementing the Strategy is clearly divided between the Accreditation Council and the President, that for overseeing its implementation is not explicitly assigned in the Statutes to any of the governing bodies. Thus, there is no body to which the President is accountable in this respect. Further, in the meetings with the Council and President and Heads of Departments and staff, the panel did not find evidence that clear mechanisms were in place for translating the objectives of the Strategy into daily work of the agency, and for monitoring progress towards achieving them. As the Council has explicitly defined accreditation-related responsibilities but has no explicit role in monitoring the implementation of the Strategy, it naturally focuses on the former. Despite this, the 2015 Annual Report and other evidence collected throughout the visit clearly show that the arrangements in place work in practice insofar as the agency does indeed carry out activities in line with its the Strategy. The panel's comments are intended to highlight existing *gaps* and related potential *risks* to effective implementation of the Strategy.

To mitigate the risk, the agency may consider separating 'strategic' and 'accreditation' responsibilities, for example, so that a board representing stakeholders approves the agency's strategy and oversees its implementation, and the Council retains its responsibility for accreditation matters. Such a board might also balance the powerful position of the President who is also the majority owner of the agency (considered here solely in terms of institutional governance and accountability, and regardless of her unquestionable personal qualities). This would enhance even further the transparency of activities, which IQAA sought to address by inviting the National Association 'Expert' to join it as a co-owner.

The panel considers that IQAA's Statutes define clearly the scope of its activities, and it is also clear from its website that EQA is its core business. While IQAA and IQAA Ranking are still interlinked in terms of resources and personnel, the panel found no evidence that this allows one activity to influence the other. IQAA is fully aware that there should be a clear distinction between EQA and other activities, and the panel's discussions with external stakeholders show that the current arrangement does not undermine public trust in the agency. (For further comments, see ESG 3.3).

The panel confirms that the agency carries out its EQA activities on a regular basis. Though the number of reviews has varied quite significantly over the years, this is understandable as accreditation is voluntary and the national framework has only recently provided incentives for institutions to apply for accreditation. The number of applications is likely to grow after 2017 when the transition to a national system based on independent accreditation is completed (see QA in Kazakhstan). While the risks to its regular activities identified by IQAA itself are largely beyond its control, it does have several assets that it can rely on to attract new institutions and keep accredited ones in its 'pool'. It has a leading position in terms of the number of reviews conducted so far (see QA in Kazakhstan), a good reputation and competitive fees. Institutions accredited by IQAA are unlikely to choose another agency in the future as IQAA's standards introduce an obligation for them to undergo post-accreditation monitoring (see ESG 2.3). IQAA is financially stable now, and likely to have more funding soon (see ESG 3.5), which it can allocate for its further development and, thus, further enhance its reputation.

It is evident to the panel that representatives of the academic community, including both academic staff and students, and employers are extensively involved both in IQAA's governance and in its EQA

processes. While thus they contribute to policy and practice, the panel found no evidence that this limits in any way the independence of the agency (for further comments, see ESG 3.3).

IQAA has an international outlook as its distinctive feature. This is evidenced by high priority given to ENQA membership in the Strategy and by the Accreditation Council; efforts taken to integrate the ESG into the agency's EQA standards (see ESG 2.1); international events organised in recent years; and the involvement of an international expert in the Accreditation Council and of international experts in review panels (see ESG 2.4). A board which could be established, as an option suggested above, may also benefit from the expertise of international members.

Detailed evidence related to each Part 2 ESG is presented and analysed under the relevant ESG.

Panel commendation

The panel commends IQAA for ensuring genuine and extensive engagement of representatives of the academic community and employers in its governing and other bodies and its external quality assurance activities.

Panel recommendation

The panel recommends that IQAA amend its Statutes to explicitly assign the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of its strategy to a governing body, and put in place formal mechanisms for translating its strategic objectives into its daily activities and for measuring progress towards its strategic objectives.

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

IQAA was established as a non-governmental organisation and registered by the Department of Justice of Astana City in 2008. It operates on the basis of the 2001 Law on Non-Profit Organisations and the Statutes adopted by the General Meeting of its founders (SAR; Statutes). The agency is included in the MES National Register of Accreditation Bodies which are authorised to conduct accreditation reviews in the Republic of Kazakhstan. It was entered on the Register by Order No. 304 of the Acting Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 27 June 2012. Institutions and programmes accredited by the agency are listed in the MES Registers of Accredited Educational Institutions and of Accredited Study Programmes. (SAR; MES Order and Registers) In accordance with the national legislation, registered accreditation bodies, except those included in EQAR, are subject to re-certification five years after their entry into the Register.

Analysis

It is evident to the panel that IQAA has a clear legal basis for its EQA activities and final outcomes of its accreditation processes are fully recognised by the relevant national authorities. The panel had access to the MES Registers during the review and confirms that IQAA is one of ten agencies currently included in the National Register of Accreditation Bodies, and that institutions and programmes accredited by the agency are entered on the National Registers of Accredited Educational Institutions and of Accredited Study Programmes. The panel's discussion with representatives of the national authorities confirms that IQAA is highly valued for its professional standards in accreditation activities (see ESG 3.1), and for its contribution to the 2011-2020 State Programme on Education Development,

which paved the way for independent accreditation in Kazakhstan, and to national legislation on an ongoing basis. In combination with MES' 'open market policy' towards accreditation agencies (see ESG 3.1.), this also makes it likely that IQAA will be 're-certified' and have its registration period extended for another five years in case it is not entered on EQAR in 2017.

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

National legislation regulates activities of agencies insofar as it lays down the procedure and requirements for their registration. As stipulated in the MES Order on the National Register of Accreditation Bodies, an agency to be registered may not be affiliated with any educational institution (with its seat not to be located within premises of any institution). The Law on Education states explicitly that agencies conduct reviews according to their own standards, take accreditation decisions on the basis of applications and a list of documents defined by them, and that terms and conditions of reviews are laid down in agreements between the agency and applicant institutions.

The agency operates as a non-governmental organisation, and its owners are two non-governmental organisations (see general information on IQAA). Its income comes from fees paid by institutions for accreditation reviews and post-accreditation monitoring (see ESG 3.5). IQAA shares some staff and resources with IQAA Ranking, an organisation producing academic rankings (see ESG 3.1).

IQAA's basic organisational and operational arrangements and the powers of its governing bodies are defined in the Statutes adopted by its founders/owners. Its President is appointed by the founders. Its accreditation methodologies and decision-making arrangements are laid down in internal regulations approved by the IQAA Accreditation Council. As stated in the Regulations on the Accreditation Council, it is composed of 7 to 15 members (currently, 13), including representatives of academic staff, students and employers, an international expert, and the IQAA President. Candidates are proposed by HEIs, employers' organisations, student organisations and IQAA (in practice, though, as explained in the SAR and confirmed by students, students are proposed by their HEIs as student organisations exist 'only formally'). Council members are selected, from among the candidates proposed, by the IQAA Commission, which consists of Heads of Departments, and approved by the President. They may sit on the Council for a maximum of two five-year terms. As the panel learned from the President and Heads, current Council members are also involved in selecting members for the next term. Pursuant to the Regulations, members may be dismissed by the Council's decision in the case of non-attendance at three consecutive meetings. Each member signs the Code of Honour for the Council. It defines, among other things, the principles of no-conflict-of-interest, fair treatment, impartiality and independent judgment to be observed, and the sanction of exclusion by IQAA in the case of breach of the Code. (SAR; Code of Honour; meeting with the Accreditation Council)

In accordance with the Procedure for selection of experts for an external review, experts are selected by the relevant unit of the agency, in agreement with the relevant Accreditation Committee, which ensures that there is no conflict of interest; a list of an expert panel members is consulted with the institution / unit under review and approved by the IQAA President (for details, see ESG 2.4). IQAA staff, Accreditation Committee members and experts sign the Code of Honour for Staff / Accreditation Experts (SAR; Procedure for selection; meetings with the SAR Group and experts). The two Codes specify the rights and responsibilities as the one for the Council, and sanctions for breach, including

an individual case reviewed by the IQAA Disciplinary Committee and the termination of an employment contract in the case of serious or repeated breaches for staff, and the exclusion of an expert.

Pursuant to the Statutes, accreditation decisions are taken by the Accreditation Council. The procedure for accreditation decision-making is laid down in the Regulations on the Accreditation Council, the Provisions on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation of HEIs, and on the decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning specialised (programme) accreditation of study programmes. Decisions are taken by open and simple majority vote, with more than half of Council members voting as a quorum required. A member who has a conflict of interest is not present at the time of voting. (For further details, see ESG 2.5).

Appeals against decisions taken by the Accreditation Council and complaints are considered by the Appeals Commission and the Complaints Commission respectively. In accordance with the Regulations on the Appeals Commission and procedure of appeal, the former consists of five members selected by the IQAA Commission (see above) from among candidates put forward by HEIs, employers' organisations and IQAA, and appointed by the IQAA President for a three-year term. It takes decisions by a simple majority vote, with more than half of its members present; a member who has a conflict of interest does not vote. As laid down in the Regulations on the procedure of considering complaints, candidates for the Complaints Commission are proposed by HEIs and IQAA, selected by the IQAA Commission and appointed by the IQAA President. Decisions are made by a simple majority vote. (For further details, see ESG 2.7) Members of the two Committees sign the Code of Honour (Meetings with the SAR Group and the Accreditation Council and Appeals and Complaints Commissions).

As explained by the representatives of the national authorities that the panel met, MES monitors agencies, primarily through their activity reports, as it is responsible for the Register of Accreditation Bodies, and MES and other authorities consult agencies on legislation but are not involved in their EQA processes. They also stated that IQAA was 'totally transparent' in its activities and 'would not put its business reputation at risk' by taking a lenient approach towards institutions under review. The representatives of HEIs and employers interviewed considered that the agency was fully autonomous; the former also appreciated the arrangement that they could refuse to approve external review panel members whose impartiality might be questionable. Experts assured the panel that they adhered strictly to the Code of Honour whereby they were required to act as independent individuals. In its meetings with representatives of HEIs and experts, the panel also discussed a meeting held by an expert panel at the end of each review with representatives of an institution or programme under review. This is perceived by HEIs as a 'debate' on findings and recommendations, and by experts as a session where they share and explain their comments and recommendations. Members of the Accreditation Council considered themselves to be 'a decisive voice' as regards final outcomes of accreditation processes.

As a result of IQAA's 68 institutional reviews and 1 371 programme reviews conducted between 2013 and mid-2016, 62 (91%) institutions and 1 268 (92%) programmes were fully accredited, 5 institutions (7%) and 83 programmes (6%) were conditionally accredited, and 1 institution (2%) and 3 programmes (<1%) were not accredited (SAR, Annex 5; Addendum 1 to the SAR). A high proportion of fully accredited institutions and programmes was explained by representatives of international experts, HEIs and employers by voluntary status of accreditation and, hence, applications submitted mainly by strong institutions.

Analysis

The panel considers that IQAA has full organisational independence. In legal terms, this is ensured by its status as a non-governmental organisation or a private body established and owned by non-governmental organisations, and the requirement of no affiliation with HEIs laid down in national

legislation. While, in practical terms, IQAA shares some staff and resources with IQAA Ranking, the panel sees no room for the latter's interference in the former's EQA processes considering that staff do not take any decisions, there is collective decision-making in the agency and the Code of Honour is obligatorily signed by all staff members. Moreover, IQAA is not financially dependent on IQAA Ranking as it generates sufficient income to finance its activities (see ESG 3.1 & 3.5).

Operational independence of the agency is guaranteed by explicit provisions in national law about agencies conducting reviews on their own terms and conditions. It is also clear to the panel that IQAA takes responsibility for both defining and adopting its EQA procedures and standards, and appointing all bodies or units and individuals involved in its EQA processes, including the Accreditation Council, the Appeals and Complaints Commissions, the Accreditation Committees and experts (and, obviously, Heads of Departments and staff). The President is appointed autonomously by IQAA founders (and, as noted earlier, the current one is, actually, the main founder). There is a reasonable balance between the academic community and employers who propose candidates for the Accreditation Council and the Appeals and Complaints Commissions on the one hand, and IQAA itself which also proposes candidates, Heads of Departments pre-selecting them and the President who takes final decisions on appointment on the other hand. The panel notes, though, that consultations with current members of the Council on those for its next term are not explicitly addressed in the relevant procedure and are not necessary to ensure the transparency of appointment arrangements. Academic staff working at HEIs are involved in the selection of experts for individual reviews as members of the Accreditation Committees. However, this is done together with IQAA staff and here again final decisions are taken by the President; and the arrangement where institutions under review may raise well-reasoned objections to including a review panel member (e.g. a conflict of interest) further mitigates the risk of experts' impartiality. Further, all those involved sign the Code of Honour; in the panel's opinion, each Code defines clearly what IQAA means by independent judgment and what sanctions it applies for breach of the Code. Together with the fixed terms of office for the Accreditation Council and the Appeals and Complaints, the sanctions strengthen the system of 'checks and balances' between IQAA and the external stakeholders involved in the various bodies.

Both national legislation and IQAA's internal regulations provide guarantees for independence of final outcomes as the former explicitly refer to agencies taking accreditation decisions and the latter explicitly assign the responsibility for accreditation decisions to the IQAA Accreditation Council and, where applicable, to the Appeals and Complaints Commissions. Within these bodies, collective decision-making, in combination with the Code of Honour and, additionally, an algorithm used by the Accreditation Council in decision-making (see ESG 2.5), prevents, in the panel's view, any third party from influencing final outcomes of the agency's accreditation processes.

A private body funded by fees from applicant institutions could theoretically be more vulnerable to influence from them than from other external stakeholders. In this context, the panel notes that any discussion on conclusions or recommendations in a meeting ending a review, even if not actually leading to change of an expert panel's opinion, could not be considered an example of good practice (this is discussed further under ESG 2.2 and 2.3). However, this does not seem to have any noticeable impact on review reports prepared by panels. The reports that the panel examined do indeed contain many critical comments and recommendations; where these are not fully reflected in expert panels' final judgements, this appears to point to a lack of clear guidelines rather than to favourably biased judgments (see ESG 2.5). Further, any possible bias can be addressed at 'a higher level' as the Accreditation Council evaluates evidence collected by panels on its own and takes autonomous decisions. The small proportion of conditionally accredited and non-accredited institutions and programmes could raise questions in a national context where assessment based on qualitative rather than quantitative standards has only recently been introduced. However, the panel found no evidence that this might have anything to do with HEIs influencing outcomes of IQAA's accreditation processes.

The panel agrees with representatives of HEIs and employers that strongest institutions are most likely to be the first to apply for accreditation. Moreover, insofar as the panel can judge from older review reports, the standards applied by the agency until recently were much less demanding than the current ones. In the case of programme accreditation, this is also confirmed by the recently increasing proportion of conditional accreditation decisions (0% in 2013, 4.3% in 2014, 7.5% in 2015, and 9.6% till mid-2016). The high proportion of fully accredited institutions can be explained, first of all, by preliminary reviews conducted by the agency, as a result of which institutions which are not 'ready' are advised not to undergo an accreditation review (see ESG 2.2).

Overall, the panel considers that IQAA is an independent institution and this view is shared by the external stakeholders that it met. The agency safeguards its autonomy through its organisational, operational and decision-making arrangements. This is also helped by the national legislation currently in force, allowing accreditation agencies to operate independently of MES. The panel notes, though, that the national QA framework is not yet stable: the QA system is in a period of transition, independent accreditation is not yet firmly embedded and debates on the role of agencies are ongoing (see ESG 3.1).

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

The agency publishes annual reports and reports or studies entitled 'thematic analyses' (SAR; IQAA website). The 2015 Annual Report provides information on IQAA's activities together with statistical data. A series of thematic analyses produced so far includes: (1) 'Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Kazakhstan' (2016); (2) 'What does accreditation give to higher education institutions?' (2016); and (3) 'Higher Education Institution with Students' Eyes' (2015). (For other publications referred to as 'thematic analyses', see ESG 3.5 & 3.6 where they fit better in terms of their topics). The first publication presents basic information about the higher education and QA systems. The second one is based on a survey conducted among accredited HEIs to identify the impact of IQAA's reviews on institutional enhancement. It contains detailed quantitative data on impact areas such as performance, competitiveness and development, teaching and learning, the development of academic staff, student support services and IQA. The third publication provides an overview of European developments in the Bologna Process and student participation in QA, and findings from a survey on 'Satisfaction of students with learning outcomes', conducted as part of accreditation reviews and addressing satisfaction with the quality of services, resources and teaching staff.

As stated in the SAR, IQAA's research activities to produce thematic analyses are not yet sufficiently developed due to a lack of funding from MES and the limited human resources of the agency. In their meeting with the panel, representatives of HEIs acknowledged that HEIs still had much to learn about, and needed more guidance on, QA. National authorities are, naturally, following developments in higher education and QA with keen interest and, as stated by representatives of MES, recommendations made by IQAA expert panels are useful in designing reforms, in particular now when MES is planning to increase the autonomy of HEIs. Similarly, the employers interviewed emphasised that panels' conclusions did help to push forward changes, and that not only HEIs but also the general public would need to know more about findings from accreditation processes.

Analysis

The 2015 Annual Report provides a useful insight into the agency's activities; it focuses on facts and figures and, understandably, does not analyse findings from accreditation review as this not the purpose of the document. Evidently, IQAA has taken considerable effort, especially in view of its limited human resources, to collect and analyse quantitative data for the two survey-based publications. The study 'What does accreditation give to higher education institutions?' is a welcome first step towards thematic analyses insofar as it identifies areas where IQAA's accreditation processes have had impact. However, there is no publication which would analyse the wealth of information available in 68 institutional review and 1 371 programme review reports prepared by expert panels since 2013 and 'show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty' (as this is phrased in ESG 3.4). There is, obviously, both demand for, and the need to produce, such analyses to guide the development of QA in HEIs and policy development at national level. Findings would also be useful for the agency in reviewing and revising its EQA methodologies (see ESG 2.2).

At the same time, the panel notes that expectations under this ESG for relatively young agencies undergoing their first ENQA review are not as high as for ENQA members. The panel is also confident that IQAA will engage more extensively in research activities as, on the one hand, it is aware that this is an area for improvement and, on the other hand, providing information on the quality of education to the public is one of its 2015-2018 strategic objectives. There are good prospects for such activities insofar as a large proportion of IQAA staff have a research background, and the agency is likely to have more funding for this purpose in the coming years (see ESG 3.5). Given its limited human resources, the agency may consider focusing initially on selected issues in its thematic analyses, such as IQA or fields of study which are given priority in national strategies or where reports may provide a representative sample of strengths and weaknesses of Bachelor's, Master's and / or PhD programmes.

Panel recommendation

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

Panel conclusion: Partially compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

Evidence

IQAA is funded primarily from fees paid by applicant institutions, mainly HEIs, for accreditation reviews (97% of income in 2014 and 2015) and for post-accreditation monitoring of HEIs (0.5% in 2015) (2014 & 2015 budgets provided during the visit). The agency expects to secure further its financial sustainability by increasing income from post-accreditation monitoring, introduced at the end of 2015, and from accreditation in TVET as, according to a recent action plan of the Government, at least 60% of all 420 public TVET providers should undergo accreditation by 2019. It also plans to diversify its income streams by applying for international project grants. In total, 30 reviews in TVET colleges have already been completed, and more than 30 are underway; this is reflected in the increasing income from TVET accreditation as a share of the recent budgets. The budgets show a 4 to 5% reserve / contingency fund. As the agency is a non-profit organisation, no real profit is expected and any 'profit' earned is invested in development activities. The pricing policy for accreditation reviews is based on actual costs incurred by the agency and for post-accreditation monitoring on the number of students or programmes in an HEI. (SAR; Addendum 2 to the SAR; budgets; meeting with the Founders)

As stated in the SAR, the agency has 18 staff members, including 8 with a research degree, and is supported by 11 Accreditation Committees, each with 4 to 5 specialists from HEIs, and 940 experts (see ESG 2.4). In hiring staff, it applies the following criteria: a scientific or academic degree, work experience in higher education, research activity in the field of education, English language skills, and professional ethics. The agency organises regular training sessions and seminars for staff, some involving international experts, and team-building events (e.g. joint participation in cultural events). Foreign language skills are an area where the agency seeks to improve as roughly one-fourth of staff are fluent English speakers, and less than one-fourth have an 'average' knowledge of the language.

IQAA conducts satisfaction surveys among its staff. The report 'The Results of the IQAA employees' survey on satisfaction with the job conditions' shows that 77% of staff are overall fully satisfied and 24% satisfied with their work at the agency. Ratings for aspects such as work management, remuneration, content of work and working relationships are very high (4.6 to 5 on a scale of 1 to 5) and only slightly lower (4.3) for career development prospects. The staff that the panel met are satisfied with their salaries, which are 'decently high' and higher than in HEIs. They appreciate very much the spirit of collegiality, an atmosphere of friendliness and openness, and easy access to the management team, including the President, and their responsiveness to feedback and new ideas. The panel also learned that training needs of staff were assessed on an individual basis, and development opportunities were indeed available, though English language courses were not yet offered.

The agency has an office of 520 sq. metres located in the centre of Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, which it will own fully by 2017 (instalments paid between 2014 and 2017). The premises comprise offices for staff, conference and meeting rooms, break rooms, an IT room and archives. They are equipped with all necessary office and IT facilities, including a high-speed Internet connection and a video conferencing system in the main conference room. (SAR; meeting with the Founders; tour of facilities) The agency's database of experts would need to be upgraded to facilitate daily work and this is currently being addressed (Meeting with IQAA staff).

The SAR mentions insufficient resources available for thematic analyses (see ESG 3.4). As the panel learned from staff, more staff would need to be hired to cope with the increasing workload as more institutions are now applying for accreditation; this is expected to be addressed in 2017.

Analysis

IQAA's 2015-2018 Strategy does not address financial aspects. Aside from the pricing policy which is considered a competitive advantage factor, the panel found no evidence for long-term financial planning during the visit, for example, in the context of expected increase in income from accreditation in TVET and post-accreditation monitoring of HEIs on the one hand, and the need to hire more staff, develop the agency's research activities (thematic analyses) or provide language training to staff on the other hand. This is, however, a planning rather than resource issue. Despite this, the evidence collected indicates that the agency's financial situation is stable, and it has adequate funding for its core activities, which reflects a reasonable pricing policy for its services. The expectations to increase income appear realistic in view of the Government action plan concerning TVET and the agency's past and ongoing activities in the sector. It will also have more funding in its reserve as from 2018, when the final instalment for its premises has been paid (currently, related costs are a big item in the budget). It may be used for the development activities mentioned above.

Well-educated, highly motivated and committed staff and good working relationships are, evidently, big assets of the agency. The team is small and the workload likely to increase but there is no evidence that IQAA could not afford hiring additional staff. The pool of experts is obviously big enough for the agency to handle more applications for accreditation. The panel also confirms that the agency's

premises are very well-equipped and provide excellent working conditions for staff, and there are more than adequate facilities for both face-to-face and virtual meetings with stakeholders, and for receiving other visitors.

Panel commendation

The panel commends IQAA for creating working conditions which ensure high motivation and commitment of staff and foster a sense of collective engagement and responsibility.

Panel recommendation

The panel encourages IQAA to consider allocating some resources specifically for English language training of staff in the coming years.

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

IQAA has an Internal Quality Assurance Policy which is published on its website. It defines the agency's principles and covers eight areas, together with related mechanisms: (1) Human resources management; (2) Experts; (3) Core processes; (4) Internal and external communication; (5) Documentation management; (6) Management of material resources; (7) Cooperation with international QA agencies; and (8) Public accountability (referring to the publication of accreditation-related documentation and regular provision of information to MES). The President and Heads of Departments take overall responsibility for IQA, and data is collected and analysed by the Department of Analysis and Quality.

To ensure professional and ethical conduct, IQAA has in place Codes of Honour signed by all individuals involved in its EQA processes, as discussed under ESG 3.3. One staff member has been dismissed for an attempt to take advantage of his position to gain personal benefit (Addendum 2 to the SAR).

As stated in the SAR, IQAA regularly conducts a number of surveys to collect internal and external feedback on its activities. Six online surveys are carried out after each accreditation review; HEIs assess the organisation of reviews and the competence and performance of IQAA coordinators, chairs of expert panels and experts, and coordinators and experts provide feedback on a mutual assessment basis. Findings are analysed after each review and discussed at general staff meetings where also follow-up measures are agreed. Students-experts are canvassed through a survey for their views on the support provided by the agency and on how they perceive their role in expert panels and their influence on final conclusions. Regular meetings with experts are held to collect their feedback. Feedback on the impact of IQAA's accreditation activities is collected either in 'a free format' through consultations or through an online survey (see a thematic analysis under ESG 3.4). Internally, a survey is conducted among staff on their satisfaction with work at the agency (see ESG 3.5). Other main mechanisms for internal feedback collection are regular staff meetings, which also serve the purpose of peer assessment, and thematic staff meetings focusing on specific issues (e.g. accreditation procedures, ethics). All stakeholders can also anonymously make suggestions or complaints via a feedback form on the IQAA website. The panel's meetings with the SAR Group, IQAA staff, experts and representatives of HEIs confirmed that all of these mechanisms were indeed in place. In its meeting with staff, the panel also learned that their performance was assessed every week through written reports and individual discussions with immediate superiors or the President.

The only 'sub-contractors' hired by the agency for its EQA activities are external experts. Arrangements are in place for the selection and training of experts. For details, see ESG 2.4.

The self-assessment as part of this external review involved an overall self-evaluation of activities and a review of EQA methodologies, using feedback collected from internal and external stakeholders, materials available on European and US QA agencies' websites and experience of two European agencies shared with IQAA staff during study visits. As a result, the agency revised its Strategy, core processes, and accreditation procedures and standards, put in place an IQA system based on the IQA Policy mentioned above, and created new 'channels' for external communication (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube). Drawing on best European practice, high priority was given to student involvement (see also ESG 3.1) and issues particularly relevant to students in accreditation processes. (SAR; Meeting with the SAR Group) The SAR was distributed for comments among both internal and external stakeholders. The following are identified as areas for improvement: ongoing self-analysis; studying innovations introduced by other organisations on the basis of cooperation agreements; and developing effective software for the database of experts with a quick search function (see ESG 3.5). (SAR; external comments on the SAR in Annex 8; meeting with the SAR Group)

As the panel learned from the SAR Group, findings from post-review surveys are published every three months on IQAA's website. Aggregate data is presented in IQAA's thematic analysis 'The External Review Feedback Results' (2016), also available on its website. It shows that the level of satisfaction with the agency's accreditation processes is high, with two highest ratings given for various aspects by the vast majority of all respondent groups. As follow-up action taken in response to feedback from surveys, IQAA introduced a mechanism for monitoring timely distribution of review documents to HEIs and experts; several experts no longer participate in reviews due to poor performance or inappropriate conduct (see ESG 2.4); panel chairs who did not demonstrate leadership skills participate only as experts; and the agency makes sure that the composition of a panel changes for each review (rather than frequently inviting the same experts) (SAR; meeting with the SAR Group).

As noted under ESG 3.1. and 3.3, IQAA is highly regarded by HEIs and employers for its professional standards, competent people and well-organised accreditation reviews. In their meetings with the panel, both groups, as well as national and international experts, also emphasised the agency's openness and responsiveness to feedback. As regards possible improvements, they suggested that IQAA could provide more guidance on QA to HEIs and engage more extensively in promoting its own activities. Students would appreciate a possibility of participating first in reviews as observers to gain some experience before they formally join an expert panel.

Analysis

The agency's IQA policy is comprehensive insofar as it addresses all of its core and supporting activities (though with public accountability confusingly presented as narrowed down to provision of information), including communication with stakeholders. However, it does not make explicit provision for self-evaluation, and the panel found no evidence that a mechanism was in place for overall and regular self-analysis, which would also integrate feedback collected through various existing mechanisms. While informal discussions are held, a systematic approach would be needed. A thorough self-analysis undertaken as part of this external review can provide a solid basis for this. Aside from this, a wide range of formal mechanisms are in place to collect internal and external feedback. Overall, they enable the agency to collect a lot of data which can be used for improvement.

The evidence indicates that the IQA system works well at the operational level. The mechanisms in place appear to be effective as a number of shortcomings have been identified, feedback is thoroughly analysed, and action is taken on the basis of available data, as also confirmed by the stakeholders interviewed. A major 'overhaul' of the agency undertaken as a result of the self-assessment is,

evidently, indicative of its openness to change, and international benchmarking is also worth noting in this context. High satisfaction of external stakeholders with IQAA's accreditation activities also suggests that the arrangements for the selection and training of experts are adequate (see also ESG 2.4). The agency's decisions to dismiss a staff member and remove several experts from the pool of reviewers demonstrate, in turn, that the Codes of Honour work in practice. The publication of findings from the surveys conducted (including the one on the satisfaction of staff; see ESG 3.5) is another indication that IQAA does a lot to prove that it is accountable to its external and internal stakeholders. In various contexts, its external stakeholders highlighted the transparency of the agency as its great strength, marking a significant cultural change in Kazakhstani higher education.

Very few improvements in IQAA's activities were suggested by stakeholders in their meetings with the panel. This may be, at least to some extent, explained by the early stage of development of independent accreditation based on qualitative standards in the country. Some of the students interviewed also pointed to a culture of 'positive feedback'. As the panel found in its meetings with IQAA staff and students, critical – while still constructive – feedback would be very helpful in enhancing further the performance of the agency and pushing forward reforms in HEIs. This seems to be an area where IQAA could help induce further cultural change in higher education.

Panel commendation

The panel commends IQAA for its openness to change and responsiveness to internal and external feedback collected through a number of effective internal quality assurance mechanisms in place.

Panel recommendation

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

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

IQAA has been an affiliate of ENQA since 2008. This is the first review for the agency to assess its compliance with the ESG, conducted as part of its application for ENQA membership and registration in EQAR. There is no provision on periodic external review of the agency in its internal documents. However, like other accreditation bodies registered in Kazakhstan, IQAA is subject to a national external review every five years as, pursuant to the 2011 MES Order on the National Registers mentioned earlier, this is required to renew registration unless an agency is entered in EQAR. There is a written declaration in the SAR that once the agency is admitted as a member of ENQA, it will be willing to undergo an external review at least every five years to renew its membership.

Analysis

National law offers some 'incentive', related to EQAR, for registered agencies to undergo regularly an external ESG-based review, and this reflects high priority given by the national authorities to internationalisation and integration in the EHEA (see the Higher Education System in Kazakhstan above). It is evident to the panel from the agency's 2015-2018 Strategy (see ESG 3.1) and all its discussions during the visit that equally high priority is given by the agency to its ENQA membership. The meetings with IQAA's internal stakeholders also confirmed its commitment to fulfil all obligations of an ENQA member.

If granted membership as a result of this review, IQAA may consider amending its Statutes so as to include explicit provisions that it is subject to an external ESG-based review at least every five years.

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

IQAA revised its accreditation standards and criteria in 2015 to align them with the revised ESG. They are laid down in IQAA's internal regulations on standards for institutional accreditation of HEIs and for research institutions, and for specialised (programme) accreditation in HEIs and of postgraduate medical education provided by research institutions. There are only minor differences between the criteria for HEIs and research institutions, reflecting the specificity of the latter and their medical programmes; they concern, for example, practical training, final theses, etc. Similarly, the criteria for programmes in HEIs and research institutions differ only slightly, for example, with regard to national regulations applicable to programmes, criteria for practical training, etc.

Part 1 ESG are addressed in IQAA's standards and criteria in the following way:

ESG	IQAA standards for institutional accreditation	IQAA standards for programme (specialised) accreditation
1.1. Policy for QA	Standard 1, Mission, strategic planning and QA policy	Standard 1, Aims of programmes and QA policy
1.2. Design and approval of programmes	Standard 5, Design, effectiveness, continuous monitoring and periodic review of programmes	Standard 2, Development and approval of programmes, information management
1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	Standard 3, Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	Standard 3, Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	Standard 4, Student admission, learning outcomes, recognition and qualifications	Standard 4, Student admission, learning outcomes, recognition and qualifications
1.5. Teaching staff	Standard 6, Teaching staff and teaching effectiveness	Standard 5, Teaching staff
1.6. Learning resources and student support	Standard 8, Resources and student support services	Standard 6, Learning resource and student support
1.7. Information management	Standard 2, General management and information management	Standard 2 (see above)
1.8. Public information	Standard 9, Public Information	Standard 7, Public information
1.9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	Standard 5 (see above)	Standard 2 (see above) & Standard 8, Continuous monitoring and periodic review of programmes, periodic accreditation
1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance	Standard 10, Periodic external quality assurance and follow-up procedures	Standard 8 (see above)

Discussions on student-centred learning (SCL) (ESG 1.3) during the visit drifted towards aspects such as student involvement in decision-making and programme development, and greater autonomy of students in selecting courses (Meetings with the President and Heads of Departments, national

experts, including a student representative, and students). Some of the international experts interviewed acknowledged that the concept of SCL could still need to be better understood. IQAA's standards concerning programme monitoring and review (ESG 1.9) state explicitly that institutions should have in place effective mechanisms for monitoring and review of programmes.

To see how the agency addresses Part 1 of the ESG, and IQA in general, in its processes, the panel also analysed: templates for accreditation review reports and post-accreditation monitoring reports; the Guidelines for experts on the classification of remarks, a document intended to help experts arrive at one of four levels of compliance with the standards ('fully complies', 'complies, with minor remarks', 'complies, with significant remarks', and 'does not comply') in their reports; six review reports produced by expert panels; and the procedure for decision-making by the Accreditation Council.

Analysis

IQAA's regulations laying down the standards explicitly refer to the ESG as their basis. It is also evident to the panel that the standards are built on the ESG. In its view, most of them reflect accurately the corresponding ESG, and report templates strictly follow the standards. Judging from the sample of review reports examined, most of the standards are also interpreted by experts in line with the ESG.

IQAA Standard 1 for both institutional and programme accreditation fully addresses ESG 1.1; this includes a QA policy which takes into consideration national and institutional contexts and a linkage with the institution's strategy; organisational aspects of the IQA system, its mechanisms, and its implementation; stakeholder involvement; and values and measures such as academic integrity and freedom, tolerance and anti-discrimination measures, and anti-fraud measures. There is, however, no explicit reference in the Standard to the QA policy being publicly available. Standards 5 and 2 for institutional and programme accreditation, respectively, cover programme design and approval procedures; stakeholder involvement in programme design; focus on programme aims and intended learning outcomes in the design process; and qualifications awarded and their position in the NQF, as recommended under ESG 1.2.

ESG 1.3 (SCL) is translated into IQAA's Standard 3 insofar as the latter gives much consideration to, for example, the autonomy of students and their individual needs, individual learning paths, information on assessment methods, arrangements to ensure objectivity in examinations, and those for student appeals and complaints. While active participation of students in the learning process is mentioned in the criteria, pedagogical approaches, which are at the core of SCL, are, overall, given much less consideration (e.g. use of various teaching methods if / where necessary). Further, it is not clear from the criteria whether or how SCL is embraced in assessment practices (for example, through self-assessment, peer assessment, more formative assessment). The panel understands that IQAA's standards are adjusted to the national context and much still needs to be done in institutions to introduce SCL. The approach taken leads, however, to a situation where many institutions and programmes appear to be fully compliant with this standard, whereas many European HEIs are still seeking ways to apply SCL in teaching and learning and assessment.

All aspects of ESG 1.4, related to student admission, progression, recognition and certification, are captured by IQAA Standard 4 for both types of accreditation. Arrangements for the recruitment, professional development (as well as performance appraisal) of teaching staff, and incentives to conduct research and use research findings in, and introduce innovations into, education are integrated into IQAA Standards 6 and 5 for institutional and programme reviews, respectively, in line with ESG 1.5. ESG 1.6 is, overall, accurately reflected in IQAA Standards 8 and 6 for institutional and programme accreditation respectively, though there is no explicit reference to implications of SCL for resource allocation. Standard 2 for both types of accreditation embraces ESG 1.7 in terms of both collection, analysis and use of relevant data, and the involvement of students and staff in these processes. Public

information under IQAA Standards 9 and 7 for institutional and programme accreditation, respectively, covers all elements as recommended under [ESG 1.8](#), except no explicit reference to pass rates.

The panel confirms that IQAA's standards emphasise the responsibility of institutions for quality, and those corresponding to [ESG 1.9](#) do indeed address explicitly effective mechanisms for monitoring and review of programmes, together with other elements recommended under this ESG. However, IQAA's post-accreditation monitoring (PAM) process seems to shift the responsibility for quality from institutions towards the agency insofar as the former are required to report annually on changes and achievements, including in IQA, according to the latter's accreditation standards, and the agency provides feedback on developments (for further details, see [ESG 2.2](#) & [2.3](#)). Thus, IQAA is, in fact, the prime 'driver' of programme monitoring and reviews, whereas in [ESG 1.9](#) institutions are expected to develop processes fit for them rather than following a monitoring report template or guidance from an EQA agency. The panel understands that stronger support and 'incentives' are needed given the early stage of development of IQA, but there is a risk that institutions will become dependent on this, in particular after many years of extensive state control.

Finally, IQAA Standards 10 and 8 for institutional and programme accreditation respectively provide for cyclical external quality assurance in line with [ESG 1.10](#), though this is more explicitly stated in the standard for institutional than for programme reviews (for further comments, see [ESG 2.3](#)). (Related comments on the effectiveness of IQA and follow-up under [ESG 1.9](#) above and [2.2](#) below).

The Guidelines for experts on the classification of remarks list a number of shortcomings related to IQA which justify a 'complies, with significant remarks' or 'complies, with minor remarks' judgment in external review reports (no mechanism for internal quality assessment of programmes, limited involvement of students or employers in programme development, etc.). Accordingly, judging from the sample examined, reports, which provide the basis for the Accreditation Council's decisions, do indeed contain some recommendations on selected aspects of IQA which may help in designing fully-fledged IQA systems. However, both the examples given in the Guidelines and review reports focus on the (non-)existence of selected IQA mechanisms rather than on the effectiveness of mechanisms in place or of the IQA system as a whole. The decision-making procedure for the Accreditation Council does not give any special consideration to IQA or its effectiveness (e.g. by linking the varying progress made by institutions in the development of IQA to the three possible final outcomes). Again, IQAA's approach can be explained by the early stage of development of IQA, but its further development would, obviously, be supported by a stricter one.

Overall, IQAA has managed to translate much of what is expected under Part 1 of the ESG into its accreditation processes, while taking into consideration the national context. Its methodology, though, is not yet fully geared towards encouraging HEIs to develop effective IQA systems. There seems to be no reason why a stronger focus on the effectiveness of IQA could not be immediately integrated into the accreditation methodology, while, realistically, the agency may need more time to address the 'responsibility for quality' issue as part of its PAM process.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that IQAA: (1) focus more strongly on the effectiveness of internal quality assurance in its accreditation methodology, while allowing for the varying progress made by institutions in the development of their internal quality assurance systems; (2) refine its accreditation standards concerning student-centred learning (corresponding to [ESG 1.3](#)) so that they give more consideration to how the concept is translated into pedagogical approaches and assessment practices; and (3) give more consideration to the primary responsibility of institutions for quality in its interpretation of [ESG 1.9](#). (For a related recommendation on PAM, see [ESG 2.2](#)).

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

National legislation sets a framework for IQAA's processes only insofar as it distinguishes institutional and specialised (programme) accreditation. Accreditation agencies develop their own methodologies (see ESG 3.3.). As stated in IQAA's Statutes and mission statement, the main aims of its EQA processes are to contribute to quality improvement of education and enhance competitiveness of Kazakhstani institutions (see also ESG 3.1). Its SAR and IQA Policy explain that in developing its methodologies, IQAA takes into account national law and policies, the ESG, experience of international QA agencies, and feedback from its stakeholders. Relevant national regulations, programmes and documents are listed in the agency's documents laying down accreditation procedures and standards.

The documents available to the panel do not predefine any specific mechanism for consultations on newly developed or revised methodologies. As the panel learned in the meeting with the President and Heads, the agency does not have in place any mechanism for regular (for example, annual) review of its accreditation processes, procedures or standards. Feedback on ongoing processes is gathered via six surveys conducted after each accreditation review (see ESG 3.6).

IQAA's accreditation procedures and standards were revised in 2015 to adjust them to the revised ESG. At the development stage, consultations were held with HEIs and experts, including students and employers, during a series of seminars and conferences and, additionally, with experts and students. Draft standards and review documents were also sent to HEIs for feedback. (SAR; meetings with the President and Heads of Departments, representatives of HEIs, experts, students and employers). The representatives of HEIs interviewed gave examples of changes suggested in draft standards which had been integrated by the agency. They felt that 'all documents were jointly developed with HEIs'. As regards PAM for accredited institutions and programmes, IQAA sent a letter to HEIs informing them of the new process (Meeting with the IQAA Peer Coordinators Team).

As mentioned earlier, aside from accreditation review processes (which include training on the accreditation procedure for institutions, and feedback on their draft SARs), the agency conducts 'preliminary reviews' at institutions which intend to undergo an institutional accreditation review for the first time. The Guidelines on a preliminary review state that such a review aims to assess compliance with IQAA's accreditation standards and concludes with a judgment on 'the readiness of the university to undergo the external review or [...] the need to suspend the accreditation procedure'. It is also stated that a preliminary review is of 'informative and consultative nature' and the information collected does not affect results of an external review. As explained in the SAR, a preliminary review is intended to help institutions understand better accreditation procedures and give them more time to revise existing or prepare missing documents. The agency is aware that such reviews are not a common practice, but this is done as most institutions have never undergone an external review and are familiar only with state attestation which focuses on quantitative indicators. This view was shared by the representatives of HEIs interviewed who also emphasised that HEIs still had much to learn about quality, and preliminary reviews were very useful as they enabled institutions to address many shortcomings and, subsequently, pass successfully an accreditation review.

Representatives of HEIs, Accreditation Council members and national experts all agreed that there was an added value in conducting both institutional and programme accreditation reviews as each process has a different focus and only both help HEIs see how institutional and programme levels are interrelated. Institutional reviews address, in particular, the mission and its implementation, resources, interactions between processes and relations with employers. Programme reviews focus on how the mission is implemented through programmes and on their relevance to labour market needs, and enable identifying various weaknesses in programmes. Moreover, while accreditation is voluntary in Kazakhstan, it is required by law in order to obtain State grants for students (see QA in Kazakhstan and IQAA's functions, activities, procedures).

As part of its EQA processes, IQAA conducts PAM which, as noted earlier, involves assessment of annual reports where accredited institutions or programmes describe changes and achievements according to the agency's report template, based on its accreditation standards. IQAA considers that PAM helps HEIs develop their IQA systems and be better prepared for reaccreditation (Addenda 1 & 2 to the SAR). As the panel learned from their representatives, HEIs appreciate the agency's feedback on the accreditation criteria where they have improved and where improvement is still necessary.

IQAA's thematic analysis 'What does the accreditation give to higher education institutions' (see ESG 3.4) shows that over 90% of HEIs see at least some or substantial impact (ratings 2 and 3 on a scale of 0 to 3) of the agency's reviews on, for example, the development of IQA systems and a quality culture. In their meeting with the panel, representatives of HEIs emphasised strongly that, as opposed to state attestation, IQAA's processes did indeed have impact on both institutions and programmes and 'set the right direction' for their further development, and that this could also be seen in attitudes of the society and employers. The IQAA Peer Review Coordinators Team and representatives of the national authorities also pointed to changes in national rankings as a result of the agency's reviews.

Analysis

It is evident to the panel that IQAA has designed its processes so that they fit perfectly into the national context. This means that aside from being aligned with national legislation, all of its processes are geared towards addressing needs in Kazakhstani higher education where IQA systems are only now emerging, there is limited expertise in IQA at institutional level and, in cultural terms, institutions are still struggling with the legacy of many years of extensive state control and limited autonomy and accountability. Both the 'hard' and 'soft' evidence for impact also shows that the processes are designed so that they achieve the objective of quality improvement. This is much appreciated by HEIs as a great benefit in itself and as compared to state attestation processes.

At the same time, the efforts to support institutions throughout the assessment process and beyond (feedback on SARs, a preliminary review, an accreditation review, and PAM) have led to the blurring of the boundaries between the different functions (consulting, review and monitoring) and also, to some extent, between EQA and IQA. A preliminary review combines an eligibility assessment (checking whether an institution is ready for an accreditation review) with consultancy services and a mock review (training for an accreditation review, and assessing an institution against the accreditation standards). This also explains why only one HEI has been refused institutional accreditation so far. Similarly, in giving feedback, including recommendations / suggestions, on annual PAM reports which are structured according to the accreditation standards, IQAA guides institutions towards successful re-accreditation. As signalled under ESG 2.1, this also seems to shift the primary responsibility for IQA from institutions towards an EQA agency. While the panel appreciates the challenges associated with the fundamental changes in QA now taking place in the country, these issues would need to be addressed to ensure that IQAA's methodology is fully fit for the purpose of EQA. Instead of providing consultancy-type support to individual institutions at the preliminary review and PAM stages, IQAA could engage more extensively in QA training activities for all institutions (as also suggested by HEIs;

see ESG 3.6). The panel is also aware that taking the primary responsibility for quality and its assurance involves a quite dramatic cultural change in higher education, and a transition phase may be needed. Thus, the approach to PAM could be revised for the second cycle of accreditation reviews, based on the assessment of impact of IQAA's accreditation and PAM processes.

The standards for institutional and programme accreditation initially seemed to be largely overlapping to the panel. However, the discussions during the visit clarified that each type of review had its added value, in particular considering the early stage of development of IQA. The panel found no evidence that the burden of undergoing both types of reviews was too heavy for institutions, and it is obviously balanced by benefits for HEIs in terms of quality improvement (and in terms of meeting requirements in legislation).

In the context of independence (ESG 3.3), the panel referred to a meeting at the end of each accreditation review which is seen by HEIs as an opportunity to discuss review findings and by experts as a session to present findings. The panel confirms that IQAA's procedures clearly describe it as a *presentation* of preliminary outcomes; it may, nonetheless, be useful to explain even more explicitly in the procedures that it is *not intended as a discussion* on findings.

HEIs and employers were extensively engaged in the development of IQAA's new standards. It is clear to the panel that its processes have high legitimacy in higher education and there is a strong sense of co-ownership among HEIs. While MES as a key external stakeholder was not consulted, the panel found no indication in its meeting with representatives of the national authorities that they saw any role for themselves in co-designing the agency's processes. This is also understandable considering the division of EQA roles between MES and agencies; further, in the context of the legacy of state control, the involvement of national authorities might have been perceived as interference in independent accreditation. Though HEIs were not consulted about, but only informed of, the recently introduced PAM process, this does not seem to undermine its legitimacy, as the panel gathers from HEIs' positive feedback on related benefits. However, IQAA does not yet have in place a mechanism for review and revision of its methodologies. While feedback from institutions is collected after each review, the surveys conducted focus on organisational aspects and the competence and performance of IQAA coordinators and experts. There is no need to canvass HEIs for their views on IQAA methodologies after each review, but there should be a mechanism to do that on a regular basis.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that in order to make its external quality assurance methodology better fit for purpose, IQAA (1) phase out its preliminary review process; and (2) redesign its post-accreditation monitoring process before the second cycle of accreditation reviews, so that it focuses on follow-up on action taken by institutions in response to findings from accreditation reviews (rather than on progress they make towards meeting its accreditation standards, with a view to facilitating reaccreditation). To balance this, the panel recommends that IQAA expand its QA capacity building activities for institutions, in particular on IQA, so that they are better prepared to undergo an accreditation review and take primary responsibility for quality and its assurance.

The panel also recommends that IQAA should put in place a mechanism for regular review of its methodology, including arrangements for regular collection of feedback on its fitness for purpose from external stakeholders.

Panel conclusion: Partially compliant

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

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

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

Evidence

The procedures for IQAA's reviews outlined below are laid down in the Guidelines on a preliminary review; Guidelines on Organisation and Conducting an External Review for Procedures of Institutional and Specialised (Programme) Accreditation; Standards and Guidelines of External Quality Assurance for Institutional and Specialised (Programme) Accreditation Procedures; the four documents laying down standards for each review type, mentioned earlier; and Regulations on post-accreditation monitoring. All of the documents are published on the agency's website.

Pursuant to the above-mentioned Regulations, a preliminary review includes a self-assessment and a site visit by an expert (panel) and an IQAA coordinator. It ends with a report which confirms the readiness of an institution for an accreditation review or recommends its suspension (see also ESG 2.2).

The procedures, as laid down in the documents listed above, are essentially the same for institutional accreditation reviews of HEIs and research institutions and for programme (specialised) accreditation reviews in HEIs and research institutions. Their main stages are: a self-assessment; an external review conducted by an expert panel, including a site visit and ending with an external review report; and PAM. They differ only in terms of the size and profile of an expert panel (see ESG 2.4) and the duration of a site visit (3 days or 1.5 day in an institutional review of an HEI or research institution respectively, and 2 days or 1.5 day in a programme review in an HEI or research institution respectively). There are also minor differences between site visit agendas for institutional and programme reviews, reflecting a different focus in the accreditation standards (e.g. inspection of research facilities as an additional item in an agenda for an institutional review). The initial stage of a review includes training on the accreditation procedure provided by IQAA, and a self-assessment of an institution or programme, followed by the submission of a draft SAR, reviewed by IQAA, and of the final SAR. Each visit as part of both institutional and programme reviews includes meetings with the management team, staff, students and employers, class observation, examination of documents, and a tour of facilities.

There are two types of PAM: for conditionally accredited institutions and programmes, and for those awarded full accreditation (for details on final outcomes, see ESG 2.5), the latter introduced at the end of 2015. In the case of conditional accreditation, the institution concerned submits a remedial action plan to eliminate the shortcomings identified and (an) annual report(s) on the implementation of recommendations made during the review. PAM involves an analysis of (a) report(s) and a site visit undertaken by an expert panel before the expiry of the validity period of conditional accreditation. A follow-up review focuses on the shortcomings identified during the previous review. In the case of full accreditation, as noted under ESG 2.2, institutions submit annual reports on achievements and developments, structured according to the IQAA accreditation standards. An institution is informed about the approval of its report or requested to make changes. PAM is considered compulsory for fully accredited institutions as IQAA's Standard 10 for institutional accreditation states that institutions submit annual reports on achievements and changes, and should they fail to do so, the agency has the right to suspend temporarily the accreditation awarded. According to Standard 8 for programme accreditation, institutions should undergo PAM to assess changes in their IQA systems. As the panel

learned from the IQAA Peer Coordinators Team, PAM for programmes is considered obligatory and the 'sanction' of suspension is applicable in this case as well.

To ensure consistency in its processes, IQAA has put in place: guidelines on self-assessment for HEIs, on the organisation and conduct of external reviews for IQAA coordinators and for experts, additional guidelines and video materials for students-experts, and guidelines for experts to determine levels of compliance with the standards (see ESG 2.5); and templates for a SAR, review reports and site visit agendas as part of institutional and programme reviews. It organises regular training sessions for experts and briefings preceding a site visit as part of each review (see ESG 2.4). Each report produced by an expert panel is checked for consistency against the accreditation standards by an IQAA coordinator before it is sent to the institution concerned for comments on factual accuracy, and by the relevant Accreditation Committee before the final version is submitted to the Accreditation Council. The representatives of HEIs interviewed did not see any inconsistencies in accreditation review or PAM processes (though the 'sample' for the latter is small as roughly 30 PAM reports in total have been submitted so far). (SAR; meetings with the IQAA Peer Review Coordinators Team, experts, students and representatives of HEIs, and final meeting with the Management Team)

Analysis

Preliminary and accreditation reviews are all predefined and published processes, and details of each are clearly presented in IQAA's regulations. The documents describing reviews are overall consistent. There is, though, some discrepancy between Standard 8 for programme accreditation, which does not refer explicitly to the suspension of accreditation for failure to submit a PAM report, and IQAA's interpretation that it may do so in this case. Further, the standard is not very precise as it may suggest that PAM covers only changes in IQA, while PAM reports actually address all of the agency's accreditation standards. Some adjustments to the relevant document would be needed to make the scope of PAM and implications of failure to submit reports totally clear to prospective applicant institutions.

Accreditation reviews follow all of the phases recommended under this ESG; no follow-up phase in preliminary reviews is, obviously, justified as this is a one-off process, not designed specifically for continuous quality improvement. By providing training and feedback on a draft SAR at the initial stage of an accreditation review, IQAA does much more for institutions than many other agencies. This is a very sensible approach as accreditation is a recent development in Kazakhstan. With regard to site visits as part of external reviews, further to the comments under ESG 3.3 and 2.2, the panel would only like to draw IQAA's attention to the need to ensure that the meeting at the end of each review is understood by institutions as a presentation of preliminary outcomes by the expert panel, as stated in the agency's Guidelines, rather than a discussion on outcomes with the institution under review. Further to the comments under ESG 2.1 and 2.2, it should be emphasised that the guidelines for ESG 2.3 refer to follow-up on action taken by institutions in response to findings in external review reports. This is another indication that IQAA's PAM goes too far in guiding further improvement in institutions and programmes; this is addressed by a recommendation under ESG 2.2.

Detailed regulations in combination with all the guidelines and templates developed by the agency, the training provided to experts and the checking of reports by IQAA coordinators and institutions / programmes under review provide a solid basis for a consistent and professional approach to review processes. This is also confirmed by the representatives of HEIs interviewed, and by high levels of HEIs' satisfaction with the organisation of reviews and the performance of expert panels and IQAA coordinators in the surveys conducted by IQAA (see ESG 3.6). The panel believes that the guidelines for experts to determine levels of compliance with the standards could be refined, but this is discussed under ESG 2.5 as related more to decision-making.

Panel commendations

The panel commends IQAA for providing extensive guidance to institutions at the preparatory and self-assessment stages of accreditation reviews, which is particularly valuable in the early years of accreditation based on qualitative standards in the country.

Panel recommendation

The panel recommends that, for greater clarity, IQAA amend its regulations on programme accreditation so that they refer more explicitly to the compulsory status of post-accreditation monitoring and define more precisely its scope. (For a related recommendation on PAM, see ESG 2.2)

Panel conclusion: Fully 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

IQAA processes involve national academic experts, international experts, students-experts and employers-experts. Currently, 940 experts are registered in the agency's database, including 560 national academic experts, 148 international experts, 120 students and 112 employers. International experts come from more than 20 European countries, and mainly from Russia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Slovenia, Poland and Germany. The pool of experts is reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis. (SAR; meeting with the IQAA Peer Review Coordinators Team) National academic experts are proposed by HEIs and employers-experts by employers' and business organisations. Since national student organisations exist only formally, candidates for students-experts are best and most active students proposed by HEIs. International experts are recommended by QA agencies with which IQAA has signed a cooperation agreement or recruited through other international links or in response to enquiries sent to European universities. (SAR; meetings with experts, students and employers) Moreover, an application form for interested experts is available on the agency's website.

National academic experts and international experts for institutional reviews should have a research degree and at least 5 years of management experience in an HEI; external QA experience in Kazakhstan is desirable. Experts for programme reviews have a research degree, at least 3 years of teaching experience in a given field, and a good understanding of the relevant national legislation. Students-experts are recruited from among Bachelor, Master and PhD students. The main requirements include high academic achievements, experience in QA or in a student or youth organisation, and good knowledge of programmes to be reviewed. Employers-experts are required to have, in particular, at least 5 years of work experience and social engagement experience. Additionally, chairs of institutional review panels should have management experience. (SAR; Procedure for selection of experts for an external review; meetings with the IQAA Peer Review Coordinators Team, experts, students and employers)

Pre-selected experts are included in the pool upon completion of training (Procedure for selection of experts). IQAA organises training for experts each year. It covers experts' roles and responsibilities, IQAA's accreditation methodology and its internal quality standards (SAR). The experts interviewed confirmed that participation in regular training was a major criterion in the selection for reviews. Each site visit as part of a review is preceded by a webinar where the panel is briefed on the accreditation methodology and discusses questions for interviews, and a briefing immediately before the visit (SAR; Guidelines on organisation and conducting an external review; meeting with experts, students and employers). There are also detailed guidelines and templates for experts (see ESG 2.3). As the panel

learned from the Peer Review Coordinators Team and international experts, the latter receive documents in Russian or English, as appropriate, and, where necessary, are assisted by an interpreter; the experts assured the panel that they had no problem with understanding the national context.

The selection of experts for the assessment of SARs and reviews is based on the profile of experts and a no-conflict-of-interest principle. Candidates are agreed with the relevant Accreditation Committee (see IQAA's Organisation/Structure) and approved by the President. Experts sign the Code of Honour whereby they confirm to have no conflict of interest, and undertake to observe the principles of professional conduct and ethics set out in the Code (see also ESG 3.3 and 3.6). (SAR; Procedure for selection; Code of Honour; meetings with the IQAA Peer Review Coordinators Team and experts)

An institutional review panel includes three national academic experts, an international expert, a student and an employer. An additional expert can be involved in a review of a big HEI. A programme review panel is composed of two national academic experts, an international expert, a student and an employer. Aside from contributing to a review as a whole, students hold interviews with students during a site visit, which, as they emphasised, ensures open and frank discussion, and employers focus on the relevance of graduates' knowledge and skills to labour market needs and have a lead role in interviewing employers. The involvement of international experts does increase costs of reviews, but even much higher costs are in some cases outweighed by the expertise which they share with national experts and contribute to reviews. This way of peer learning is much appreciated by national experts. (SAR; meetings with the Peer Review Coordinators Team, experts, students and employers)

In line with its Strategy, IQAA gives high priority to student involvement. As mentioned earlier, special materials have been developed for students-experts, and additional training seminars are organised (e.g. three in 2016, as the panel learned from the Peer Review Coordinators Team). The Guidelines for students-experts present QA terms and concepts, the agency's accreditation methodology, standards which are particularly relevant to students together with guiding questions, and tips such as on giving feedback. Students 'learn a lot' during the training and from the materials provided, even though, as noted earlier, it would be helpful for them to participate first as observers. They feel that they are full members of expert panels, though they could take greater advantage of opportunities offered to voice student rights, and this is a cultural challenge (Meetings with experts and students).

Experts' competence is highly valued by the representatives of HEIs interviewed, as noted earlier. IQAA collects feedback on experts from the institution concerned through a survey after each review (see also ESG 3.6). According to 'The External review feedback results', 76% of representatives of institutions and IQAA coordinators gave positive feedback on experts conducting reviews in 2015; this is an improvement over 2014, explained by experts gradually gaining experience. Few experts (4%) were not recommended for further collaboration for a lack of understanding of the agency's accreditation methodology and their own role and / or a lack of team-work skills. Aside from this, there has been one formal complaint (2015) about inappropriate conduct of an expert who did not report their conflict of interest. This expert and those who are marked in the database as not recommended, based on the post-review survey, are no longer considered as candidates for reviews (SAR).

Analysis

IQAA has a clear procedure for the selection of experts, and the criteria give due consideration to the specific experience which is relevant to a given type of review. Brief self-presentations of the experts interviewed confirmed that the criteria were strictly applied by the agency in the selection process. There is also evidence that the Code of Honour works in practice, ensuring adherence to the principle of no-conflict-of-interest.

In general, the combination of initial training, regular training events and briefings before a review appears to be adequate for experts to know what they are expected to do and how; the time and effort invested by IQAA in training students is particularly worth noting. Although those interviewed did not point to any problem with understanding the national context, additional briefing or materials could be helpful for international experts, in particular those coming from Western Europe as, obviously, they are likely to be less familiar with ‘legacy-of-the-past’ challenges in Kazakhstani higher education. The panel also believes that, ideally, the scope of training could be extended in the future to cover an overview of findings from the reviews conducted (trends, strengths and weaknesses, good practice examples, etc.) so that individual reviews are set in a broader context. It may also be particularly useful for international experts and employers. This could be considered when findings from a representative sample of review reports are analysed by the agency (see a related recommendation on thematic analyses under ESG 3.4). Experts could also be provided with more precise guidelines on levels of compliance with the accreditation standards, but this is addressed under ESG 2.5. Regardless of this, experts are evidently perceived by HEIs as properly selected and well prepared for their tasks. The experts interviewed by the panel were fully competent to discuss in greater depth various aspects of IQAA’s methodology and national experts had a clear idea of what changes were needed in Kazakhstani higher education.

Students, international experts and employers are fully involved in accreditation reviews and each group brings an evident added value. A large proportion of international experts are either from Russia or Russian speakers. On the one hand, obviously, this may limit a ‘European dimension’ of reviews. On the other hand, this is a realistic approach which takes into account costs to be borne by institutions and the need for the agency to keep its prices at a competitive level.

Panel commendation

The panel commends IQAA for its consistent efforts to ensure the involvement of students as equal members of external review panels and develop their competence as quality assurance experts, which may also help to encourage greater participation of students in internal quality assurance in higher education institutions.

Panel recommendation

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

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

IQAA’s accreditation reviews lead to full accreditation (5 years), conditional accreditation (1 to 3 years) or refusal of accreditation. Institutions and programmes which have been awarded full accreditation are entered in the National Registers of Accredited Institutions and of Study Programmes kept by MES (SAR; Registers). As mentioned earlier, while accreditation is voluntary, it is a pre-condition for HEIs to be eligible for State grants for students, and programmes accredited as a result of an institutional and programme review are exempt from state attestation (see also QA in Kazakhstan). (Preliminary reviews are not considered here as they do not lead to ‘proper’ accreditation decisions but end with a recommendation to proceed to, or suspend, the accreditation process; see also ESG 2.2.)

Pursuant to IQAA's Statutes, accreditation decisions are taken by the Accreditation Council. The procedure is laid down in the Regulations on the Accreditation Council; the Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation of higher education institutions (also applicable to research institutions); and the Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning specialised accreditation of study programmes (also applicable to programmes provided by research institutions). All three documents are published on IQAA's website.

As stated in the Provisions for both institutional and programme accreditation, the Council takes into consideration: a SAR; an external review report produced by an expert panel; a conclusion proposed by the agency; a 'protocol of agreement' with the relevant Accreditation Committee (where the Committee agrees or disagrees with the agency's conclusion); and a presentation on the institution or programme prepared by IQAA. Decisions are primarily based on the evaluation of findings from an external review according to the accreditation standards. To standardise its decision-making, the Council uses an algorithm which allocates a certain number of points to each of the four levels of compliance with the standards as determined by an expert panel in its review report (see below), and a range of points for each of the three possible outcomes mentioned above. The Provision for programme accreditation also states that the number of points can be changed taking into account opinions of Council members, additional information about a programme, and evaluation of evidence.

In assessing the compliance of an institution or programme with the IQAA standards, expert panels use a four-level scale: 'fully complies', 'complies, with minor remarks', 'complies, with significant remarks', and 'does not comply'. To support experts, IQAA has developed guidelines for experts, including the Guidelines for experts on the classification of remarks by level (an English-language version provided to the panel at its request before the visit); more detailed guidelines are available in Russian. The panel examined three recent institutional and three programme review reports to see how the guidelines were applied by experts.

As the panel learned from national experts, they do not have any problems with classifying minor and major shortcomings found as the criteria for each accreditation standard are clear to them and the Guidelines from the agency help to 'group remarks'. They did not find any discrepancies between their recommendations and decisions taken by the Council. There have been few cases where the conclusion proposed by the agency differed from the position of the relevant Accreditation Committee (e.g. on conditional accreditation for one year) (final meeting with the IQAA Management Team). As stated by members of the Accreditation Council, consistency in their decision-making is ensured by adhering to the clear standards, applying the same rules and equal treatment. In three or four cases, the Council adjusted the number of algorithm-based points and / or rephrased or added recommendations as it was its task to highlight changes necessary to improve higher education. While aware that the Council's position differed from that of expert panels in several cases, the representatives of HEIs did not see any inconsistencies in decisions taken by the Council.

Analysis

Outcomes of IQAA's accreditation processes have a quite substantial impact as they bring various 'entitlements', where the outcome is positive and, as noted earlier, are beginning to influence how society and employers look at institutions and their graduates. The panel confirms that the agency's procedures for decision-making are pre-defined and publicly available. The Guidelines for experts and the algorithm for the Accreditation Council clearly show that IQAA has made a genuine effort to ensure consistency and transparency in its decision-making. The review reports that the panel examined contain evidence which may serve as a sound basis for panels' conclusions and recommendations and for evaluation by the Council. Also, as noted under ESG 2.3, it is, obviously, a good practice that accuracy of evidence is checked by the institutions concerned and reports are checked for consistency

by IQAA. Further, the Council's decisions are based on full documentation for a given review, aided by proposals from the agency and the Accreditation Committees, and taken collectively (as discussed under ESG 3.3), all this also helping to provide consistency. Judging from the few cases where the Council did not fully agree with the conclusions in review reports, it uses its right to make adjustments in a consistent way. The decision-making arrangements for the Council are overall clear. There is, however, some inconsistency between the Provisions for programme accreditation and institutional accreditation insofar as only the former explicitly authorises the Council to change the number of points awarded according to the algorithm (though the Council is authorised to do so in its institutional accreditation decisions by IQAA's internal Normative-Methodological Documents, available only in Russian and not published on its website).

Consistency in external review reports is a key element as the algorithm for the Council is based on the four levels of compliance determined by expert panels. Where the shortcomings identified in the six reports examined by the panel are listed among examples in the above-mentioned Guidelines for experts, this is indeed reflected in the levels of compliance indicated in the reports. However, it is not always clear how the number and weight of recommendations is linked to the compliance levels. For example, some reports include no critical comments or recommendations for a standard where the 'fully complies' level is indicated. In other reports, however, an institution or programme is considered fully compliant with a given standard and, at the same time, recommended, for example, to pursue its QA policy through the IQA system and identify specific targets and indicators in its strategy and its implementation plan (an institutional review); or to extend the range of assessment methods, improve mechanisms to monitor graduate careers and collect feedback from graduates, and improve the organisation of targeted training of students for specific employers (a programme review). This may result from the fact that the guidelines for experts are not yet sufficiently precise. While this issue can be to some extent addressed by the Council adjusting the number of algorithm-based points, it would be advisable to ensure full consistency at the external review stage. It would be very useful to translate each standard into more precise guidelines for each of the four compliance levels, in particular, considering that the revised standards have only recently been introduced. The few cases where the conclusion proposed by IQAA differed from that of the relevant Accreditation Committee might also indicate the need to have an agreed interpretation of major and minor shortcomings which may be identified as a result of reviews. This can be further clarified as part of discussions on more precise guidelines for experts.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that IQAA (1) amend its Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation to explicitly authorise the Council to adjust algorithm-based ratings in justified cases (as is currently the case for programme accreditation); and (2) revise its guidelines for experts so that they define more precisely minimum requirements to be fulfilled or acceptable shortcomings for each of the four levels of compliance with its accreditation standards.

Panel conclusion: Substantially 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

A preliminary review report includes information on the purpose of the review, general information about the institution under review, an assessment of compliance with the accreditation standards and a conclusion (Guidelines on a Preliminary Review). General requirements concerning the structure, content, consistency and style of institutional and programme accreditation review reports produced by expert panels are set out in the Guidelines on organisation and conducting an external review for procedures of institutional and specialised (programme) accreditation. Reports are based on templates. The structure of report templates for both institutional and programme reviews includes: a summary table indicating levels of compliance with each accreditation standard; a section on the context and aims of the site visit, including an overview of the review process and information about the institution under review; detailed sections on compliance with each standard, including evidence followed by good practice examples, shortcomings ('remarks') and recommendations; a conclusion section, with a list of recommendations made under each standard; and a site visit agenda and a list of interviewees as annexes.

Preliminary reviews usually involve one expert, aside from an IQAA coordinator; thus, a report is prepared by the expert. Accreditation review reports are drafted by the chair of a panel in the case of institutional reviews and by an expert, most often the chair, who specialises in a given field of study in the case of programme reviews. All other panel members contribute to the report in both cases. Reports are checked by an IQAA coordinator of a given review and sent to the institution concerned for comments on factual accuracy. (SAR; Guidelines on a preliminary review; Guidelines on organisation and conducting of an external review)

Preliminary review reports are only sent to the institutions concerned. Institutional and programme accreditation decisions are communicated to the institution concerned and the MES, and accredited institutions and programmes are entered on the National Registers, publicly available on the MES website (SAR; Standards for institutional and programme accreditation; Registers). The above-mentioned Guidelines state that full external review reports are published on IQAA's website. The Standards for institutional accreditation of HEIs and of research institutions and the Standards for specialised (programme) accreditation of HEIs and of research institutions refer to a positive accreditation decision being published on the agency's website. During the review, the panel found information on the validity period of accreditation decisions, full reports in Russian together with summaries in English, selected full reports in English and Kazakh, and presentations on the institutions or programmes reviewed on the IQAA English-language website. All this was available on the English-language website only for fully accredited institutions and programmes. As demonstrated to the panel by the IQAA Peer Review Coordinators Team, reports on conditionally accredited institutions and programmes, together with validity periods of decisions and other materials, were published on the IQAA Russian language website. The Team acknowledged that where accreditation was refused, the agency did not publish reports or any information on outcomes.

Members of the Accreditation Council find external review reports produced by expert panels to be 'well-structured, clear and easy to work with'. They are very helpful for HEIs and contain clear recommendations which guide their further development, and this view is shared by employers. The representatives of the national authorities interviewed who have read individual reports consider that they are well-elaborated and reflect thorough analysis. (Meetings with the four stakeholder groups)

Analysis

The structure of preliminary review reports is evidently adequate for the purpose of such reviews. IQAA's templates for institutional and programme accreditation review reports include all elements as recommended under this ESG. The panel confirms that all of them are addressed in the six accreditation review reports examined (even if there is a mix of evidence and analysis in the Evidence,

Good Practice and Remarks sections in some reports). The reports are definitely clear and easy to read. They contain a good amount of evidence, as noted under ESG 2.5, and the recommendations made by expert panels are entirely clear, though institutional review reports appear, overall, to analyse compliance with each accreditation standard more thoroughly than programme review reports. A factual accuracy check done by the institutions concerned was mentioned earlier as a good arrangement. It is also a good arrangement that all panel members contribute to a report, and the reports examined do indeed contain findings reflecting the specific interests of all stakeholder groups represented on expert panels, including academic staff, students and employers.

Preliminary review reports are not published. This is fully justified given the aims of a preliminary review and, in any case, the panel recommends phasing out this process (see ESG 2.2).

IQAA's regulations concerning accreditation reviews appear to be inconsistent or not entirely clear as some would suggest that all decisions and reports should be published and other that this concerns only reviews leading to a positive outcome. Another issue which would need to be addressed is that neither reports nor outcomes are published for reviews leading to refusal of accreditation; thus, there is no publicly available information on the reviews that have resulted so far in non-accreditation of one institution and three programmes (except brief references in Annual Reports on the agency's activities). Ideally, at least summaries of reports in English where conditional accreditation has been awarded would be available on the English-language website as this could be useful, for example, to international students and staff considering a mobility period in Kazakhstan. Finally, while the Accreditation Council is the decision-making body, its accreditation decisions are not published together with reports and other materials. This is particularly important as the Council may and does – even if only occasionally – adjust the scores based on the algorithm for decision-making and makes stronger recommendations.

Panel recommendations

The panel recommends that IQAA (1) amend its regulations so that they state explicitly that accreditation review reports are published on its website regardless of the final outcome of a review; and (2) accordingly, publish all review reports and related decisions of the Accreditation Council at least on its main website. IQAA may also consider the value of publishing summaries in English of all accreditation review reports, including those leading to conditional accreditation and non-accreditation, on its English-language website.

Panel conclusion: Partially 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

Arrangements for complaints and appeals are laid down in the Regulations on the procedure for considering complaints and the Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the procedure of appeal, both published on the agency's website. The Standards and guidelines of external quality assurance for institutional and specialised (programme) accreditation procedures, also available on IQAA's website, state explicitly that institutions undergoing a review have the right to lodge a complaint or an appeal. Accreditation review agreements signed between the agency and applicant institutions contain a provision on the right to file an appeal and complaint, and institutions are also informed about their rights during a training workshop before the self-assessment stage (Addendum 2 to SAR; samples of agreements provided; meeting with representatives of HEIs).

A complaint may be lodged about inaccurate information provided by IQAA; factual errors, where evidence provided by the institution concerned was used incorrectly by the expert panel, leading to its negative conclusion; the performance and conduct of the chair of an expert panel, members of an expert panel or an IQAA review coordinator; dishonesty of an expert panel; a breach of the Code of Honour; and fraud. An appeal may be filed in the cases of breach of the accreditation procedure; and factual errors, where evidence provided by the institution concerned was used incorrectly by an expert panel and the Accreditation Council, leading to refusal of accreditation.

Complaints are investigated by the Complaints Commission. As stated in the Regulations, it is composed of three permanent and of five ad-hoc members who are not involved in any activities related to the review addressed by the complaint. Members are appointed by IQAA for a three-year term from among candidates proposed by HEIs and the agency. All members are academic staff. One of three permanent members can be replaced with an ad-hoc member at the request of the institution concerned or the IQAA coordinator of a given review. A decision is taken by a majority vote. Where a complaint is found justified, another expert panel is appointed to conduct a review and / or the expert concerned is struck off the list of experts. If a complaint is rejected, the decision of the Commission is considered final. An institution filing a complaint is notified of whether it is accepted for consideration within 1 week, of a final decision or ongoing proceedings with 3 weeks; where necessary, another review is conducted within 6 weeks, and its outcome communicated to the institution within 8 weeks (a longer period only in exceptional cases). Until now, as stated in the SAR, the Commission has considered one complaint (2015) from an HEI, which concerned 'a biased attitude' and 'incorrect statements' of an expert panel chair. It was resolved by striking the expert off the list and awarding conditional accreditation to study programmes upon reconsideration of the matter.

Pursuant to the Regulations, the Appeals Commission has five members, appointed by IQAA for a three-year term from among candidates put forward by HEIs, employers' organisations and the agency. Currently, as stated in the SAR, four members are academic staff and one is an employer. Appeals are considered within a month. Decisions are taken by a majority vote, with more than half of members present; a member who has a conflict of interest does not participate in decision-making. Where an appeal is considered favourably, the Commission may either recommend that the Council change its decision or appoint an additional expert panel for another site visit (in cases of breach of procedure) or to re-examine documents (factual errors). The only appeal to date was lodged (2013) on the grounds of factual inaccuracy, by an HEI which had been originally awarded conditional accreditation and had not been accredited as a result of a follow-up review. The appeal was dismissed by the Commission after re-examining the documents, and the Accreditation Council upheld its previous decision as no factual error had been found. (SAR; meeting with the Accreditation Council and Appeals and Complaints Commissions)

Analysis

The panel considers that IQAA's appeals and complaints procedures address all possible major flaws in its accreditation processes that could undermine the legitimacy and transparency of its processes and decisions. It is also evident that institutions applying for accreditation are properly informed of their right to file a complaint or appeal and how they can do that. The procedures for appeals and complaints are, overall, clear and transparent. While, as the panel learned in the meeting with the Accreditation Council and the Appeals and Complaints Commissions, the procedure for appeals is clear to them and works well in practice, the relevant Regulations could more explicitly state that decisions of the Appeals Commission are binding on the Accreditation Council. Since only one appeal and one complaint have been made so far, there is no basis to judge whether the procedures are applied consistently. The decision taken in response to the complaint filed suggests that requests from institutions are considered impartially. The negative decision on the only appeal considered so far,

discussed during the visit, appears to be fully justified. As noted earlier, the Code of Honour is in place to 'reinforce' impartiality. External stakeholders proposed by HEIs and – in the case of the Appeals Commission – employers, obviously enhance the transparency of the arrangements in place. Ideally, students could have their representative in the Appeals Commission, also in line with one of the agency's strategic objectives (see ESG 3.1). However, the panel understands that increasing student participation needs to be a gradual process, and the students interviewed seemed to be fully satisfied with how they were represented in the agency's bodies. The timeframes set show that IQAA gives due consideration to efficient handling of both appeals and complaints. The representatives of HEIs that the panel met appeared to be fully satisfied with both appeals and complaints processes.

Panel commendation

The panel commends IQAA for putting in place procedures which ensure transparency and professional and efficient handling of appeals and complaints and involve representatives of external stakeholders.

Panel conclusion: Fully compliant

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

The panel commends IQAA for:

- **ESG 3.1:** ensuring genuine and extensive engagement of representatives of the academic community and employers in its governing and other bodies and in its external quality assurance activities;
- **ESG 3.5:** creating working conditions which ensure high motivation and commitment of staff and foster a sense of collective engagement and responsibility;
- **ESG 3.6:** its openness to change and responsiveness to internal and external feedback collected through a number of effective internal quality assurance mechanisms in place;
- **ESG 2.3:** providing extensive guidance to institutions at the preparatory and self-assessment stages of accreditation reviews, which is particularly valuable in the early years of accreditation based on qualitative standards in the country;
- **ESG 2.4:** its consistent efforts to ensure the involvement of students as equal members of external review panels and develop their competence as quality assurance experts, which may also help to encourage greater participation of students in internal quality assurance in higher education institutions;
- **ESG 2.7:** putting in place procedures which ensure transparency and professional and efficient handling of appeals and complaints and involve representatives of external stakeholders.

OVERALL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, IQAA is in compliance with the ESG.

The ESG where full compliance has been achieved are: 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.7, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.7 (with minor recommendations made under ESG 3.5, 2.3 and 2.4). The ESG where full compliance has not been achieved are: 3.1, 3.6, 2.1 and 2.5 (substantially compliant) and 3.4, 2.2 and 2.6 (partially compliant). The agency is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, to achieve full compliance with these standards at the earliest opportunity.

The panel recommends that IQAA:

- **ESG 3.1:** amend its Statutes to explicitly assign the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of its strategy to a governing body, and put in place formal mechanisms for translating its strategic objectives into its daily activities and for measuring progress towards its strategic objectives;
- **ESG 3.4:** analyse the material available in its accreditation review reports and produce on this basis (a) thematic analysis(es) to support further development of quality assurance in higher education institutions and policy development at national level;
- **ESG 3.5:** consider allocating some resources specifically for English language training of staff in the coming years;
- **ESG 3.6:** put in place, as part of its internal quality assurance system, a formal mechanism for regular self-analysis and self-assessment and use of findings from the process for institutional enhancement;
- **ESG 2.1:** (1) focus more strongly on the effectiveness of internal quality assurance in its accreditation methodology, while allowing for the varying progress made by institutions in the development of their internal quality assurance systems; (2) refine its accreditation standards concerning student-centred learning (corresponding to ESG 1.3) so that they give more consideration to how the concept is translated into pedagogical approaches and assessment

- practices; and (3) give more consideration to the primary responsibility of institutions for quality in its interpretation of ESG 1.9;
- **ESG 2.2:** in order to make its external quality assurance methodology better fit for purpose, (1) phase out its preliminary review process; and (2) redesign its post-accreditation monitoring process before the second cycle of accreditation reviews, so that it focuses on follow-up on action taken by institutions in response to findings from accreditation reviews (rather than on progress they make towards meeting its accreditation standards, with a view to facilitating reaccreditation); and to balance this, (3) expand its QA capacity building activities for institutions, in particular on IQA, so that they are better prepared to undergo an accreditation review and take primary responsibility for quality and its assurance;
 - put in place a mechanism for regular review of its methodology, including arrangements for regular collection of feedback on its fitness for purpose from its external stakeholders;
 - **ESG 2.3:** for greater clarity, amend its regulations on programme accreditation so that they refer more explicitly to the compulsory status of post-accreditation monitoring and define more precisely its scope;
 - **ESG 2.4:** consider providing international experts with additional training and/or materials on the national higher education and quality assurance context;
 - **ESG 2.5:** (1) amend its Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation to explicitly authorise the Council to adjust algorithm-based ratings in justified cases (as is currently the case for programme accreditation); and (2) revise its guidelines for experts so that they define more precisely minimum requirements to be fulfilled or acceptable shortcomings for each of the four levels of compliance with its accreditation standards;
 - **ESG 2.6:** (1) amend its regulations so that they state explicitly that accreditation review reports are published on its website regardless of the final outcome of a review; and (2) accordingly, publish all reports and related decisions of the Accreditation Council at least on its main website. IQAA may also consider the value of publishing summaries in English of all accreditation review reports, including those leading to conditional accreditation and non-accreditation, on its English-language website.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The panel would like to make some general suggestions which extend beyond strictly interpreted ESG but draw on the comments made in the previous sections.

IQAA was established and is managed by its President who is widely recognised and highly regarded as a pathfinder in the Kazakhstani QA landscape and can definitely take much credit for IQAA's leading position among QA agencies in the country. At the same time, this makes the agency very much reliant on its President, in terms of both its governance and its 'brand identity', though there is evidently a strong culture of collective engagement. As the agency is maturing now, it is encouraged to continue its efforts to evolve internally so as to reduce this dependence, and develop further and promote its brand name as *an institution* among its external stakeholders.

With its experience, competent people and fine reputation, IQAA is well-placed to support HEIs in developing IQA on the one hand and encourage a quite radical cultural shift towards their greater self-reliance and accountability on the other hand. Thus, it will need to find the right balance between its great and genuine commitment to help HEIs, the support offered, and its status as an EQA agency which poses some limits on such well-intended support efforts. This was highlighted under some of the ESG above, but in broader terms this is also a question of how IQAA defines its own identity.

Moving, as the panel recommends, from consultancy-type support now provided to individual HEIs (as part of preliminary reviews and PAM) to (I)QA capacity building for HEIs in general may result in some disappointment, especially where HEIs are struggling with the legacy of the past. To explain the shift and maintain its 'attractiveness' to HEIs, IQAA may need a well-planned external communication campaign and a revised marketing strategy engaging all its internal and external stakeholders.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

10.10.2016				
15.00-18.00	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for Day I			
11.10.2016				
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
08.15-08.45	Review panel's private meeting (at the hotel)			Oliver Vettori
09.20-09.30	Welcome and practical arrangements (at the agency)			
09.30-10.15	Presentation about the higher education system in Kazakhstan	Prof. Sholpan Kalanova, IQAA President	Legislative and policy context, types of HEIs and programmes, QA system (20 minutes for questions and answers)	
10.15-11.15	Meeting with the IQAA working group responsible for the preparation of the self-assessment report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr Karlygash Dzhigitcheyeva, Head of the Department of Audit and Post-Accreditation Monitoring of TVET Institutions - Zamira Toiganbayeva, MSc, Acting Head of the Department of Analysis and Quality - Aliya Assylbekova, MSc, Senior Expert of the Department of Analysis and Quality - Lyudmila Kovaleva, MSc, Senior Expert of the Department of Analysis and Quality 	Preparation for the review process; internal quality assurance; internal and external feedback collection mechanisms; accountability (ESG 3.6, 3.7); thematic analyses (ESG 3.4)	Oliver Vettori
11.15-11.30	Review panel's private discussion			Oliver Vettori
11.30-12.15	Meeting with the IQAA Founders / Shareholders (IQAA President as the owner of the founding body, and a representative of the 'Expert' Association as the other shareholder as of 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Sholpan Kalanova, IQAA President - Dr Rakhym Kudiyarov, Board Secretary of the National Association "Expert", Expert of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan 	Powers and responsibilities of the Founders; official status (ESG 3.2); Independence (ESG 3.3); resources (ESG 3.5); cyclical reviews (ESG 3.7)	Oliver Vettori
12.15-13.15	Lunch (panel only)			
13.15-14.15	Meeting with the IQAA President and Heads of Departments (Management Team)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Sholpan Kalanova, IQAA President - Dr Zhanna Akhmediyeva, Head of the Department of Audit and Post-Accreditation Monitoring of HEIs - Prof. Gainelgazy Adilgazinov, Head of the Department of Expertise and Information Technologies - Dr Karlygash Dzhigitcheyeva, Head of the Department of Audit and Post-Accreditation Monitoring of TVET Institutions - Daulet Kalanov, Head of the Administrative and International Relations Department - Zamira Toiganbayeva, MSc, Acting Head of the Department of Analysis and Quality 	Strategic and annual planning, enhancement activities (ESG 3.6); independence (ESG 3.3); resources (ESG 3.5); designing methodologies (ESG 2.2); implementation monitoring (ESG 3.1 & 2.3); research function / thematic analyses (ESG 3.4);	Heli Mattisen
14.15-15.30	Meeting with representatives of the IQAA Accreditation Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Sergey Udarcev, Chairman of the Accreditation Council, Director of the Research Institute of Law Policy 	Review methodologies, processes and procedures, criteria for decisions; complaints and appeals (ESG 2)	Dan Derricott

	and of the Appeals and Complaints Committee <i>[incl. representatives of students and employers in the AC)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - and Constitutional Legislation at Kazakh Humanitarian Law University - Prof. Zhaksybek Kulekeyev, Member of the Accreditation Council – employer representative; Advisor to the Director-General of the Research Institute of Mining and Drilling Technologies of the National Oil and Gas Company “KazMunaiGaz” - Prof. Gennady Gamarnik, Member of the Accreditation Council; Member of the Public Council under the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan - Madiyar Tukpatov, Member of the Accreditation Council – student representative; MSc student, "Turan-Astana" University - Prof. Darkhan Sabyrkhanov, Chairman of the Complaints Commission; Vice-Rector at Auezov South-Kazakhstan State University - Prof. Sholpan Tlepina, Chairman of the Appeals Committee; Deputy Head of the Department of International Law at Gumilyov Eurasian National University 	& 3.1); independence (ESG 3.3); professional conduct (ESG 3.6)	
15.30-15.45	Review panel’s private discussion			Oliver Vettori
15.45-17.00	Meeting with the IQAA Peer Review Coordinators Team and Accreditation Committees (representatives of units involved in review processes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr Zhanna Akhmediyeva, Head of the Department of Audit and Post-Accreditation Monitoring of HEIs - Prof. Gainelgazy Adilgazinov, Head of the Department of Expertise and Information Technologies - Prof. Bagdat Imasheva, Chief Coordinator of the Department of Audit and Post-Accreditation Monitoring of HEIs - Prof. Nurgul Khamzina, Head of the Accreditation Committee for Medical Education; Acting Rector of Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University - Dr Saule Abimuldina, Head of the Institutional Accreditation Committee; Director of the Department of Strategic Development and Quality Assessment at Toraigyrov Pavlodar State University - Dr Gulnar Zhaksybayeva, Head of the Accreditation Committee for Industry and Construction Educational Programs - PhD, Vice-Rector at Karaganda State Industrial University 	Review processes and procedures, experts, reporting (ESG 2 & 3.1); independence (ESG 3.3); professional conduct (ESG 3.6)	Oliver Vettori
17.00-17.15	Review panel’s private discussion			Oliver Vettori
17.15-17.45	Tour of facilities			
	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for Day II			Oliver Vettori
	Dinner (panel only)			

12.10.2016				
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
08.15-08.45	Review panel private meeting (at the hotel)			Oliver Vettori
09.30-10.15	Meeting with IQAA staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr Ainur Karzhaubayeva, Chief Coordinator of the Department of Audit and Post-accreditation Monitoring of HEIs - Aliya Assylbekova, MSc, Senior expert of the Department of Analysis and Quality - Lyudmila Kovaleva, MSc, Senior expert of the Department of Analysis and Quality - Dinmukhamed Omirbayuly, MSc, Expert of the Department of Expertise and IT - Nazerke Kairollina, Expert of the Department of Expertise and IT - Dana Kalmurzayeva, Lawyer 	Working conditions, staff development (ESG 3.5); ethics, internal reflection and feedback collection mechanisms (ESG 3.6); independence (ESG 3.3)	Heli Mattisen
10.15-11.30	Meeting with representatives of higher education institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Makhmetgali Sarybekov, Rector of Dulati Taraz State University (state university) (wide range of reviews, incl. programme reviews leading to conditional accreditation) - Prof. Kylyshbay Bisenov, Rector of Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda State University (state university) (wide range of reviews, incl. programme reviews leading to conditional accreditation) - Prof. Damir Shynybekov, Rector of the International Information Technology University (Joint-Stock private university) (institutional and programme reviews leading to full accreditation) - Dr Erkin Zhumankulova, Vice-Rector for Research at Kazakh National University of Arts (state university) (institutional and programme reviews leading to full accreditation) - Prof. Kadyrgali Dzhamanbalin, Rector of Aldamjar Kostanay Social Technical University (private university), Deputy of the Kostanay Province Maslikhat (Regional Legislature) (wide range of reviews, incl. programme reviews leading to conditional accreditation and non-accreditation) - Dr Serik Dayirbekov, Rector of Syrdariya University (private university) (conditional institutional accreditation) 	HEIs' participation in IQAA governance (ESG 3.1.); review methodologies, processes and procedures, criteria for decisions; experts; reporting; complaints and appeals (ESG 2 & 3.1); external feedback collection (ESG 3.6); independence of the Agency (ESG 3.3); thematic analyses (ESG 3.4)	Oliver Vettori
11.30-11.45	Review panel's private discussion			Oliver Vettori
11.45-12.45	Meeting with IQAA's national experts (incl. employers and students)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Bakhyt Zhautikov, First Vice-Rector of Dosmukhamedov Atyrau State University - Prof. Lazzat Erkinbayeva, First Vice-Rector – Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, Zhansugurov Zhetysu State University 	Review methodologies, processes and procedures, criteria for decisions; selection and training of, and support for, experts; reporting (ESG 2); professional conduct, and feedback collection (ESG 3.6); independence (ESG 3.3)	Dan Derricott

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Nadezhda Zavalko, Department of Pedagogical Education and Management, Amanzholov East Kazakhstan State University - Dr Bakhytgul Abdizhaparova, Head of the Department of Accreditation at Auezov South Kazakhstan State University - Nikolay Fomin, Employer representative, Executive Director at the Almaty Branch of the National Industrial Charter of Kazakhstan - Akmaral Mukhambetkali, Student representative, MSc student, Satpayev Kazakh National Research Technical University 		
12.45-13.45	Lunch (panel only)			
13.45-14.45	Meeting with IQAA's international experts (via a video-conferencing system)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Marko Marhl (Slovenia), Head of the Continuing Education Centre at the Faculty of Education, University of Maribor - Prof. Peeter Järvelaid (Estonia), University of Tallinn - Prof. Leonid Grebnev (Russia), National Research University "Higher School of Economics" - Prof. Antonio Serrano Gonzalez (Spain), Director of Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ACPUA) - Prof. Janis Zalkalns (Latvia), Riga Stradins University, Head of the Gerontology Clinics of the Riga East Clinical University Hospital (Latvia) 	Review methodologies, processes and procedures, criteria for decisions; selection and training of, and support for, experts; reporting (ESG 2); professional conduct, and feedback collection (ESG 3.6); independence (ESG 3.3)	Dan Derricott
14.45-15.30	Meeting with student representatives (student representative in the IQAA Accreditation Council and students involved in IQAA reviews)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Askhat Oralov, Member of the IQAA Accreditation Council – student representative, PhD student, Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Deputy of the Astana Maslikhat (City Legislature) - Sherkhan Shorabek, MSc student, Kazakh Humanitarian Law University, - Aneliya Kaliyeva, MSc student, Kazakh Academy of Labour and Social Relations, specialty, Almaty - Dastan Demeugazyev, BSc student, University of International Business - Assel Pazyzbekova, MSc student, Gumilyov Eurasian National University - Olga Zhivayeva, MSc student, Almaty University of Power Engineering and Telecommunications 	Students' participation in IQAA governance (ESG 3.1.); review methodologies, processes and procedures, criteria for decisions; selection and training of, and support for, experts; reporting (ESG 2); professional conduct, and feedback collection (ESG 3.6); independence of the Agency (ESG 3.3)	Heli Mattisen
15.30-15.45	Review panel's private discussion			Oliver Vettori
15.45-16.45	Meeting with representatives of the national authorities, incl. the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development, and of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr Ekaterina Nikitinskaya, Secretary of the Committee on Finance and Budget of the Mazhilis (Lower House) of the Parliament, Deputy Head of the Democratic Party «Ak Zhol» - Prof. Beibit Mamrayev, Secretary of the Committee on Social and Cultural Development of the Mazhilis (Lower House) of the Parliament 	Role of accreditation agencies in developing IQA in the national legislative and policy context (ESG 3.1); funding for QA (ESG 3.4 & 3.5); official status and independence of the Agency (ESG 3.2 & 3.3)	Oliver Vettori

	Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Gulzat Kobenova, Deputy Director of the Department of Higher, Postgraduate Education and International Cooperation of the Ministry of Education and Science - Prof. Amantay Nurmagambetov, Director of the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Center at the Ministry of Education and Science - Dr Arman Kusainova, Deputy Director of Department of Science and Human Resources of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development 		
16.45-17.30	Meeting with employer representatives (employers' representatives in the IQAA Accreditation Council and Appals Commission, and employer-experts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aigul Zhumabayeva, Member of the Accreditation Council, Deputy Chair of the National Industrial Chamber of Kazakhstan - Gani Tasmaganbetov, Member of the Accreditation Council, Director of the Chamber of Entrepreneurs in Astana - Prof. Bolat Kenzhin, Member of the Appeals Commission, Director of LLP «Karaganda Machine-Building Consortium», President of the Association "Machine-Building and Metals Production in Central Asia", Deputy of the Karagandy Maslikhat (City Legislature) - Mars Gabassov, Director of the IT Company of System Research "Factor" - Rysty Karabayeva, President of the Capital's Association of Tourism - Erzhan Kemali, Advisor to the Rector in the Academy of the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan 	Employers' participation in IQAA governance (ESG 3.1.); employment and employability in review criteria, and review methodologies; role of employers in external reviews (ESG 3.1, 2.1, 2.2 & 2.4); independence of the Agency (ESG 3.3.); external feedback collection (ESG 3.6)	Heli Mattisen
17.30-17.45	Review panel's private discussion			Oliver Vettori
	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for Day III and provisional conclusions			Oliver Vettori
	Dinner (panel only)			
13.10.2016				
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
08.00-08.45	Review panel's private meeting to agree final issues to be clarified (at the hotel)			Oliver Vettori
09.30-10.30	Meeting with the IQAA Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Sholpan Kalanova, IQAA President - Dr Zhanna Akhmadiyeva, Head of the Department of Audit and Post-accreditation Monitoring of HEIs - Prof. Gainelgazy Adilgazinov, Head of the Department of Expertise and Information Technologies - Dr Karlygash Dzhigitcheyeva, Head of the Department of Audit and Post-Accreditation Monitoring of TVET Institutions - Daulet Kalanov, Head of the Administrative and International Relations Department - Zamira Toiganbayeva, MSc, Acting Head of the Department of Analysis and Quality 	Outstanding issues	Oliver Vettori

10.30-12.30	Review panel's private meeting to agree the main findings			Oliver Vettori
12.30-13.30	Lunch (panel only)			
13.30-14.30	Final de-briefing meeting with the management and staff of the Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prof. Sholpan Kalanova, IQAA President - Prof. Sergey Udarcev, Chairman of the IQAA Accreditation Council, Director of the Research Institute of Law Policy and Constitutional Legislation at Kazakh Humanitarian Law University 	Preliminary findings of the review	Oliver Vettori

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

Including a description of the main stages and timescale of the review

External review of the Independent Kazakh Quality Assurance Agency for Education (IQAA) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

December 2015

1. Background and Context

The Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education was established in 2008 in form of the non-governmental, non-profit organization created for the enhancement of the quality of education and competitiveness of Kazakhstani educational institutions; provision of information about educational institutions operating in good faith to all stakeholders in Kazakhstan and abroad.

IQAA is a non-profit organization, which does not have any intentions in obtaining profit and distributing the income among the founders of the agency.

In accordance with the requirements for quality assurance agencies (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan №556, «The procedure and the requirements for maintaining national registries of accreditation bodies, accredited educational institutions and study programs” dated by 31.12.2011), in June 2012, IQAA was included in the National Register of accreditation bodies recognized by the Ministry of Education and Science of RK, and received a certificate №1 (BFM -001) for a period of 5 years until 12/12/2017.

The mission of the agency is to assist in the improvement of the quality of education in Kazakhstani educational institutions and the enhancement of their competitiveness on national and international levels.

Methods

- Informational and methodical support of Kazakhstani universities on the issues regarding the quality of education in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area;
- Organization and holding of the institutional and programme accreditation of educational organizations in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area both in Kazakhstan and abroad;
- Development of standards and criteria of institutional and programme accreditation in the field of higher education, technical and vocational education;
- Arrangement and holding of training courses, seminars, workshops, round tables in the field of quality assurance in education, management and administration of educational institutions;
- Training of experts and their certification (including attraction and involvement of foreign experts).

In the work with higher education institutions, the experts of IQAA use:

- Normative legal documents of the government and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, issued in form of statutes and orders respectively;
- Standards and criteria for institutional and programme accreditation developed by IQAA for the internal quality assurance system in higher education institutions;

- Standards and criteria for the external quality assurance of education developed by IQAA;
- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ENQA);
- Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance (INQAAHE);
- Recommendations of ENQA;

Additional services provided by IQAA

- Participation in the preparation of normative legal acts on the assessment of the quality of education and other related issues of legal regulation, which are developed and authorized by the legislative and competent authorities and professional organizations;
- Arrangement and holding of international, national and regional conferences, symposia and seminars in the field of education;
- International cooperation with quality assurance agencies and organizations, membership in international organizations in the areas of activities of IQAA;
- Interaction with stakeholders (partners - employers, student organizations) on the quality assessment of educational organizations.

The Agency performs its functions objectively and impartially in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education" with introduced amendments and additions dated by 24.10.2011 and 11.13.2015.

IQAA values:

- Independence, integrity, objectivity and professionalism.
- Focus on the improvement and capability to changes.
- Collaboration with all stakeholders (educational institutions, employers, professional associations of employers and experts).
- Student participation in the procedures of quality assurance.
- Cooperation with quality assurance agencies and international networks in the field of higher education.
- Commitment to the performance of high-quality activities related to professionalism and honesty on the part of the staff of the agency.

At the end of 2015, the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan prepared amendments and additions to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education", which was approved by the Decree of the President of the country on 11/13/2015. The crucial role in suggesting these changes and amendments regarding the strengthening of the importance of independent accreditation, the elimination of the state attestation of universities from January 1, 2017 is granted to the ex-members of the Accreditation Council, members of Parliament and representatives of employers, who are also the members of the Accreditation Council of IQAA.

Since the procedure of accreditation in Kazakhstan is voluntary and payable by universities, it was important to consider the mechanisms of stimulation for universities to undergo this procedure.

IQAA has been an affiliate of ENQA since September 2008 and is applying for ENQA membership.

IQAA 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 IQAA fulfills 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 IQAA should be granted and to EQAR to support IQAA application to the register.

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

2.1 Activities of IQAA within the scope of the ESG

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

1. Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions;
2. Specialized accreditation of study programs of higher education institutions;
3. Institutional accreditation of the educational departments of research organizations;
4. Specialized accreditation of study programs of research organizations.

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 IQAA including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to IQAA;
- 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. Two of the reviewers are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the member national agencies. The third external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member comes from the European Students' Union (ESU).

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

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

ENQA will provide IQAA 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 IQAA review.

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

IQAA 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 IQAA 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

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

The review panel will be assisted by IQAA 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 IQAA.

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

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

IQAA 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. IQAA 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 IQAA. 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 IQAA 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 IQAA and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by IQAA,

the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. IQAA 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

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

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQA	External quality assurance
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for higher education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015
HEI	higher education institution
IQA	Internal quality assurance
IQAA	Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PAM	post-accreditation monitoring
QA	quality assurance
SAR	self-assessment report
ToRs	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY IQAA

- Self-Assessment Report
- IQAA’s Statutes (full text in English)
- Addenda 1 and 2 to the SAR (clarifications provided in response to the panel’s preliminary queries)

National legislation and IQAA’s internal documents (links to the documents provided in the SAR)

- 2007 Law on Education
- 2012 Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the formation of the National Register of Accreditation Bodies
- 2011 Rules and Requirements for National Registers of Accreditation Institutions, Accredited Education Institutions and Education Programmes approved by the Minister of Education and Science
- National Registers of Accreditation Bodies, Accredited Educational Organisations and Accredited Study Programmes, Ministry of Education and Science (available on the MES website)
- Certificate of registration of IQAA in the Ministry of Education and Science’s National Register of Accreditation Bodies
- IQAA’s Strategy of Development 2015-2018
- Implementation Plan of IQAA’s Strategy for Development 2015-2018
- Internal Quality Assurance Policy of IQAA
- Procedure for selection of experts for an external review
- Guidelines on a preliminary review of HEI within the framework of institutional accreditation
- Standards and guidelines of external quality assurance for institutional and specialised (programme) accreditation
- Guidelines on organisation and conducting an external review for procedures of institutional and specialised (programme) accreditation
- Standards for institutional accreditation of HEIs
- Standards for institutional accreditation of research institutions
- Standards for specialised (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
- Standards for specialised (programme) accreditation of research institutions
- Regulations on post-accreditation monitoring
- Templates for external review reports for institutional and specialised (programme) accreditation
- Guidelines for student-experts involved in the procedures of institutional and specialised (programme) accreditation
- Guidelines for experts on the classification of remarks by their degree made under an expert assessment in the process of an external review in the framework of institutional and / or specialised (programme) accreditation
- Regulations on the Accreditation Council of IQAA
- Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation of HEIs
- Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning accreditation of study programmes
- Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the Procedure of Appeal
- Regulations on the Procedure of Considering Complaints
- Regulation on the Accreditation Committees
- The Code of Honour for IQAA experts

- The Code of Honour for the IQAA Accreditation Council's members
- The Code of Honour for IQAA employees
- IQAA's 2015 Annual Report
- IQAA's thematic analyses: 'Higher education and quality assurance of higher education in the Republic of Kazakhstan', 'What does accreditation give to higher education institutions?', and 'Higher education institution with student's eyes'
- IQAA's website



THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA), undertaken in 2016.


ENQA



2017 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW