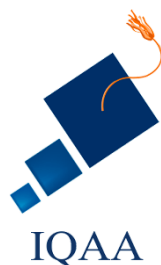


Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA)



FOLLOW-UP REPORT

Based on the ENQA External Review in 2021

Astana 2024

INTRODUCTION

The Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA) underwent the ENQA external review online on October 4-8, 2021. The preparatory online meeting was held on September 15, 2021. The external review significantly contributed to reevaluation and further improvement of IQAA's activities and procedures.

The external review panel formed by ENQA consisted of Tue Vinther-Jørgensen, Núria Comet Señal, Tatjana Volkova, and Maria-Giovanna Lotito. The external review was coordinated by Anna Gover from the ENQA Secretariat. The external review report was published by ENQA on April 27, 2022.

Based on the ENQA external review report, the panel made a number of recommendations aimed to enhance the Agency's standards and procedures. Some recommendations were immediately implemented by the Agency, while the implementation of other recommendations was carried out later on as they had required more time to be fulfilled.

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE – Substantially compliant

The panel recommends that IQAA develops a more guiding “Strategic development of IQAA” with goals and objectives defined in more detail, and supplemented by qualitative and quantitative indicators, which can be reflected in the annual work plans and translated into the daily work of the agency and be subject to periodical monitoring and assessment.

The panel also recommends that the annual follow-up of the “Strategic development of IQAA” and the annual work plans should be formally documented in internal reports with clear learning points.

In 2021, during the external evaluation, the Agency carried out its activities on the basis of the IQAA Strategy for 2019-2023. When designing a new IQAA Strategy for 2024-2030, the recommendations of the ENQA external review panel were taken into account. The IQAA Strategy for 2024-2030 was approved by the Supervisory Board on January 26, 2024, and contains five Strategic Priorities (<https://iqaa.kz/onas/iqaa>), each of which defines target indicators and evaluation indicators (where possible):

- Updating of manuals, documentation and methodological guidelines used in the work of the Agency (once every two years);
- Preparation and publication of thematic analyses on the Agency's website (two thematic analyses per year);
- Publication of the newsletter "Higher Education in the World" (two issues are published annually);

- Conducting annual hybrid training seminars for students and employers (once per year);
- Expert data is relevant and can be relied on when assembling expert panels to participate in external assessments (the annual update of the expert database is at least 5%);
- The Agency website is in demand by stakeholders as a source of useful and reliable information on the Agency's activities (at least 80,000 visits to the site per year).

Based on the IQAA Strategy, the Agency's annual activity plans and action plans of the Agency's divisions are developed. The Agency's annual and operational work plans, which are based on Strategic Priorities, are aimed at achieving specific goals set out in the Strategy. The Agency's annual reports display the extent of carrying out annual plans based on the Strategic Priorities. The analysis of target and quantitative indicators is carried out to determine the progress in IQAA's activities. IQAA reports twice a year to the Supervisory Board on the implementation of the IQAA Strategy in line with annual work plans.

However, there are certain limitations in place, as the Agency can only approximately plan how many universities will undergo institutional accreditation or how many educational programmes will undergo programme accreditation, as there is no way to determine it in advance for sure, as the Agency operates in competitive environment. In addition, state universities sometimes sign contracts based on public procurement procedures, which are based on public tenders.

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS – Partially compliant

IQAA should develop a strategic approach to identifying potential thematic subjects for analyses and establish a calendar in the future in order to publish thematic reports with regular intervals.

IQAA should distinguish more clearly between thematic analyses and other types of analyses that have to be considered as a part of the internal quality assurance of the agency.

In the IQAA Strategy for 2024-2030, according to the target indicator "The Agency creates, supports and transfers the acquired knowledge to educational institutions, experts and stakeholders" (Strategic priority 2. IQAA's activities are professional and effective), "Preparation and publication of thematic analyses on the Agency's website (two thematic analyses annually) is defined as an assessment indicator.

The following thematic analyses have been developed and published since the ENQA external review in 2021 (<https://iqaa.kz/o-nas/publikatsijj/tematicheskie-analizy>):

2022:

1) The activities of universities in Kazakhstan in the context of the implementation of standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area;

2) The process of implementing student-centered learning in universities: analysis of standards and evaluation of results.

2023:

1) An analytical review of the results of accreditation in the professional field of Pedagogy and Psychology;

2) The quality of educational IT programmes: evaluation and improvement.

2024:

1) Some aspects of ethics and academic integrity in universities in Kazakhstan: challenges and prospects;

2) Adaptation of Kazakh universities to new educational realities: challenges and prospects.

In line with the recommendations of the external review panel, IQAA has regularly published thematic analyses based on external review reports.

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT – Substantially compliant

The panel recommends developing the internal quality system. It is necessary that the agency ensures that the cycle of continuous improvement is complete. For example, with the incorporation of indicators that measure the processes, introducing measurable objectives of the Strategic development and annual plans, managing a plan of improvement actions.

The Agency functions based on the Internal Quality Assurance Manual. The Manual describes all elements of the IQAA internal quality assurance system. The 2024-2030 Strategy defines quantitative assessment indicators for target indicators (where possible).

Based on internal analysis of the work of employees (at workshops based on work reports), the results of external evaluations of educational institutions (based on feedback), changes in national legislation, individual proposals from experts and universities, the Agency regularly introduces updates and editorial revisions of internal methodological documents.

In accordance with the IQAA Strategy for 2024-2030, an evaluation indicator "Updating of manuals, documentation and methodical guidelines used in the Agency's work (once every two years)" was defined. In 2022 and 2023, amendments and additions were made to the following documents: Standards for Institutional Accreditation of Additional Education (04/09/2022); Regulations on Decision-Making of the Accreditation Council for Institutional and Programme Accreditation (07/05/2023).

The analysis of feedback monitoring on the Google Forms platform for 2022 and 2023 showed mostly positive results. The respondents of the online surveys, in particular, have noted the high level of professionalism and competence of the IQAA coordinators.

In 2023, feedback studies were conducted by the Agency employees on the level of satisfaction with the technical equipment in the office, including the functionality of hardware and software. Based on the results of this survey, two system units and three keyboards were replaced, and one monitor was fixed.

ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE – Substantially compliant

The panel recommends formally establishing the internal processes to develop, review and update standards and criteria, including defining the internal and external stakeholders involved in the processes.

The panel recommends to include the date of the approval to central documents and the date from which the document applies.

The panel recommends that IQAA define and approve separate standards and criteria for initial accreditation.

The IQAA Internal Quality Assurance Manual defines processes and procedures for the development and approval, revision and updating of internal regulatory documents governing all processes of the full cycle of accreditation. Internal and external stakeholders involved in these processes have been identified. All of the relevant dates are included in the documents.

New versions of the documents are approved by the Supervisory Board, the Accreditation Council, and the President, brought to the attention of the Agency employees by posting on the server or sending emails to corporate accounts, and also placed in open access on the IQAA website for all stakeholder parties. The adopted changes are being implemented in the work processes of the Agency's departments.

IQAA accepts and reviews applications for initial institutional accreditation of newly established educational institutions that have a state license for educational activities based on the pre-license control for compliance with the basic requirements of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for educational institutions of higher and postgraduate education. An application for primary programme accreditation is considered only if the submitted educational programme is included in the Register of Educational Programmes of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In this regard, the Agency imposes uniform requirements for initial accreditation, as well as for conventional institutional and programme accreditation.

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES – Substantially compliant

The panel recommends improving the Regulations on post-accreditation monitoring (follow up), in order to provide more clarity and information about the process, the annual reports, the site visit after two years, the role of the Accreditation Council, the consequences if the actions defined by the higher educational institutions are not well implemented.

Based on the recommendations of the ENQA review panel, a number of changes have been made in the Regulations on Post-Accreditation Monitoring of IQAA (<https://iqaa.kz/o-nas/dokumenty/dokumenty-iqaa>).

The Agency canceled mandatory site visits to higher education institutions as part of the post-accreditation monitoring in order to lessen the burden on higher education institutions. Based on the review of the post-accreditation monitoring procedures, the site visits were considered redundant. However, accredited educational institutions submit annual reports on the implementation of the recommendations based on external assessment reports to the Agency.

Accredited educational institutions work to implement recommendations based on external reports of external expert panels for the entire post-accreditation period. In cases where educational institutions fail to properly implement one or another recommendation, educational institutions indicate in post-accreditation monitoring reports why they were not able to implement the recommendations so far and present clear guidelines when they are going to be able to implement them.

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES – Substantially compliant

The panel considers that the documents Regulations on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council and Recommendations for external evaluation (audit) experts should be made public so that they are known by higher

educational institutions that have or are planning to undergone an accreditation process.

The Regulations on the Decision-Making of the IQAA Accreditation Council on Institutional and Programme Accreditation are posted on the Agency's website and are available to all stakeholders (<https://iqaa.kz/o-nas/dokumenty/dokumenty-iqaa>).

The recommendations for external assessment (audit) experts are considered a part of the intellectual property of the Agency and are available upon request to all stakeholders, as well as to experts involved in external reviews, as they receive them during trainings before external reviews. These measures are based on precautions taken by the Agency as there have been cases of plagiarism due to competitive environment of accreditation in Kazakhstan.

ESG 2.6 REPORTING – Substantially compliant

IQAA should publish reports from initial accreditations and from post accreditation monitoring (follow up).

IQAA should publish full reports for the research institutions accreditations.

Reports on the external assessment for institutional accreditation and accreditation of educational programmes for initial accreditation have been published on the Agency's website in the section "Register of Decisions and Reports" (<https://iqaa.kz/vysshee-i-poslevuzovskoe-obrazovanie/reestr-reshenij-i-otchetov>). The special category "Initial Accreditation" was introduced to make it easier to find external review reports for initial accreditation on the Agency website. As the site visits for post-accreditation monitoring are not being carried out anymore, the post-accreditation monitoring reports are not published.

Full reports on the external assessment for institutional accreditation and accreditation of educational programmes of research institutes (centres) are published on the Agency's website in the section "Register of Decisions and Reports" (<https://iqaa.kz/vysshee-i-poslevuzovskoe-obrazovanie/reestr-reshenij-i-otchetov>).

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS – Substantially compliant

The Appeals Regulations should include the possibility to appeal all elements in the decisions of the Accreditation Council.

Based on the recommendations of the ENQA external review panel, amendments to the Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the Appeals Procedure were

made to make it possible for educational institutions to appeal all elements of the decisions of the Accreditation Council (<https://iqaa.kz/onas/struktura/apellyatsionnaya-komissiya>), in particular:

- ✓ Based on the results of institutional or programme accreditation, the decision of the Accreditation Council "to accredit for 1 year", with the exception of the primary accreditation of newly established educational institutions;
- ✓ Based on the results of institutional or programme accreditation, the decision of the Accreditation Council "to accredit for 3 years".

Therefore, educational institutions now have full capacity to appeal all elements in the decisions of the Accreditation Council for both institutional and programme accreditation, not only the decision “not to accredit”, but also the length of an accreditation period. The only exception is made for the option to appeal the decision “to accredit for 5 years”, as the decision “to accredit for 7 years” is based on exceptional results of higher education institutions.

List of References in the Follow-Up Report

1. IQAA Strategy for 2024-2030.
2. Regulations on the IQAA Supervisory Board.
3. IQAA Internal Quality Assurance Guidelines.
4. IQAA Standards and Criteria for Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions.
5. IQAA Standards and Criteria for Accreditation of Educational Programmes of Higher and Postgraduate Education.
6. IQAA Regulations on Post-Accreditation Monitoring.
7. Regulations on the Decision-Making of the IQAA Accreditation Council on the Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions.
8. Regulations on the Decision-Making of the IQAA Accreditation Council on the Accreditation of Educational Programmes.
9. IQAA Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the Appeals Procedure.
10. IQAA Guidelines for the Organisation and Conduct of External Audits of Institutional and Programme Accreditation.
11. The Agency’s Website: <https://iqaa.kz/>.