



European Association for
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Mr. Andrei Chiciuc
President
National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC)
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Brussels, 22 April 2024

Subject: Membership of ANACEC in ENQA

Dear Mr. Andrei Chiciuc,

I am writing to inform you of the decision taken by the ENQA Board on 17 April 2024 regarding ANACEC's application to become a member of ENQA.

I regret to inform you that after thorough consideration and discussion of the final review report that was validated by the ENQA Agency Review Committee in October 2023, the ENQA Board came to the conclusion that the overall level of compliance with the ESG is not sufficient to grant ANACEC membership at this stage. The report and discussion highlighted several areas of concern as detailed in the Annex to this letter.

The Board was particularly concerned about the level of partial compliance reached on several standards: ESG 3.3 Independence, ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis, ESG 3.5 Resources, ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance, ESG 2.2 Designing Methodologies fit for purpose.

Regarding the findings on the standard ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct, the Board noted the view of the ENQA Agency Review Committee that stated the following: "the agency does not fully implement the PDCA cycle, does not have a formal mechanism in place for induction and onboarding of the Governing Board and the Profile Committee in Higher Education, and very importantly, does not ensure the closing of the feedback loop in relation to internal quality assurance tools in order to confirm that surveys results are acted upon and actions of improvement are monitored". Subsequently, the Board follows the committee's view that the agency is only partially compliant on this standard, and not compliant.

The Board is aware of the agency's limiting legislative framework when reaching compliance with the ESG and thus urges all key stakeholders, including the Ministry, to provide a supporting environment in this regard. Furthermore, the Board advises the agency to carefully follow up and implement the panel's key recommendations and come back for a review as soon as ready.

In addition, ANACEC can still avail of the voluntary progress visit – an enhancement-led feature in the review process. The visit will not have the objective of checking the agency's compliance with the ESG but might be helpful to determine if the agency has addressed the areas of concern. The visit would take place about two to three years after the validation of the final external review report. The ENQA Secretariat will be in touch with you in about a year's time to discuss this possibility. The costs of this visit have already been included as part of the review fee and are non-refundable except for the travel costs of the experts. More information about the progress visit can be found in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews.

I know that the outcomes of the Board's discussions will be disappointing for you, and I would encourage you to take advantage of the progress visit as you seek to address the matters raised. ANACEC's status as an ENQA affiliate remain unaffected and we look forward to continuing our collaboration.

If ANACEC is dissatisfied with the decision of the ENQA Board, it may file an appeal according to the procedures outlined in article 23 of ENQA's Rules of Procedure.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the ENQA Secretariat.

Yours sincerely,



Douglas Blackstock
President

Annex: Areas for development

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As outlined by the review panel, ANACEC is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, on the following issues:

ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

The agency is recommended to add more structure, clarity, and capacity building in the processes relating to strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, and reporting.

The agency is recommended to revisit the methodology for the representation of stakeholders on the GB in order to ensure their nomination by legitimate and recognised national bodies representing the state sector, private sector and/or the civil society.

ESG 3.3 Independence

The agency is recommended to revisit the relevant regulations so as to allow the GB to elect the President, Vice-President, and Secretary General by the GB members.

The agency is recommended to reconsider the current organisation structure in the sense of adding a permanent administrative structure to safeguard institutional memory.

The agency is recommended to ensure its financial sustainability and adjust the relevant legislation accordingly; this would ensure a more autonomous financial management in order to enable the agency to act independently.

The agency is recommended to enhance the agency efforts to trigger the relevant changes that would enable it to organise its own structure and work, including organisation chart and allocation of human resources.

The agency is recommended to drive changes in the relevant legislative framework so as to remove decision-making interference from the Ministry and enable ANACEC to make accreditation decisions.

The agency is recommended to ensure that GB members are acting in an individual capacity and not based on a mandate from the institution they are coming from.

ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

The agency is recommended to continue the practice of conducting and publishing thematic analysis, and give a strategic reconsideration of their scope and implementation.

The agency is recommended to formally define its commitment regarding the regularity of publication of thematic analysis.

ESG 3.5 Resources

The agency is recommended to reconsider and enlarge the human resource capacity to equip the agency for the upcoming work, including the institutional and doctoral school evaluations, as well as the developmental work in supporting quality culture at the HEI level.

The agency is recommended to ensure the funding to enable human resources that are stable and qualified to meet their roles, including language proficiency.

ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

The agency is recommended to revisit the internal quality assurance policy to align it with similar, best practice, documents of this kind and more clearly convey the commitment to implement the full PDCA cycle, while engaging with internal and external stakeholders.

The agency is recommended to formalise a mechanism for the training/induction/onboarding of the Governing Board, and the PCHE in order to ensure that they are equipped and act professionally in undertaking their roles.

The agency is recommended to remove conflicting distribution of powers between different roles and units, particularly on the individuals that sit both on the GB and EM.

The agency is recommended to conduct an evaluation process that addresses the effectiveness of the agency governance systems.

The agency is recommended to ensure the closing of the feedback loop in relation to internal quality assurance tools in order to confirm that surveys results are acted upon and actions of improvement are monitored.

ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

The agency is recommended to enhance the development of quality culture and support the institutional capacity and capability so that quality assurance at the HEI level is not an externally driven preoccupation, but an internally understood responsibility.

ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

The agency is recommended to ensure that the scope of activities assigned to the agency and the methodologies designed for them are supported by the capacity of ANACEC to implement it.

The agency is recommended to safeguard the contextualisation aspect in the development of upcoming procedures and in the revision of the existing ones in order to ensure the fitness for purpose of the regulatory framework the agency operates under.

The agency is recommended to revisit the spectrum of decision possibilities available for the Governing Board in order to ensure that they reflect the real quality levels across the study programmes.

The agency is recommended to ensure consideration for proportionality and adaptation in the case of positive decisions, identifying ways of reducing the workload of the agency, where possible, to correspond to its resources.

ESG 2.3 Implementing processes

The agency is recommended to ensure the cycles of evaluations are implemented as per the designed methodologies for all types of activities assigned to ANACEC.

The agency is recommended to revisit the current provisions for follow-up to external evaluation processes in order to ensure their fitness for purpose.

ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

The agency is recommended to remove any meritocracy in the selection criteria and demonstrate openness in co-opting student experts engaged in the external quality assurance processes.

ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

The agency is recommended to revisit and eliminate the gap in the percentages that lead to a formal decision, which currently leaves an empty room where decision-makers are pushed to an end of the range that might be less connected to reality.

ESG 2.6 Reporting

The agency is recommended to revisit the applicable regulatory framework in order to clarify the scope of the comments a HEI can submit in relation to the review reports and ensure that this stage provides an opportunity for the institution to point out errors of fact before the report is finalised, but not introduce additional evidence.



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ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals

The agency is recommended to revisit the applicable regulations to avoid contradictions in terms of the object for appeals.

The agency is recommended to clarify and formally regulate the specific grounds based on which an appeal can be submitted so that these are more articulated and enable ANACEC to ensure the consistent implementation of the rights to appeal and complain.

The agency is recommended to revisit the division of responsibilities in terms of the channel of approval for appeals to avoid a position of conflict of interest on behalf of the President.