



European Association for
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Mr. Azamat Kassymkhanov
Director
Independent Agency for Recognition and Quality Assurance in Education (ARQA)
19A Bauyrzhan Momysuly Avenue
010000 Astana
Kazakhstan

Brussels, 29 September 2023

Subject: Membership of ARQA in ENQA

Dear Mr. Azamat Kassymkhanov,

I am writing to inform you of the decision taken by the ENQA Board on 21 September 2023 regarding ARQA's application to become a member of ENQA.

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

The Board was particularly concerned about the findings on the standard ESG 3.3 Independence, where the Board noted the view of the Agency Review Committee, as follows: "The committee noted that the agency's independence is not safeguarded since the agency's founder is deeply involved in the agency's various bodies and thus daily work. For a partial compliance on this standard to be reached, the agency should meet some aspects or parts of the standard, but equally important, the interpretation of the ESG standard should be correct, while the manner of implementation can be not effective enough (see ENQA's Guidelines on Agency Reviews, p. 25). Since the committee held no evidence that the agency's interpretation of the standard is correct, the committee found the agency to be non-compliant with the standard."

Should ARQA wish to re-apply for ENQA membership in the future, this can be done in two years' time from this decision. The ENQA Board advises the agency to carefully follow up and implement the panel's recommendations before re-applying.

In addition, ARQA 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 in



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about two to three years' time 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 follow-up report and progress visit as you seek to address the matters raised. ARQA's status as an ENQA affiliate remain unaffected and we look forward to continuing our collaboration.

If ARQA 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Douglas Blackstock', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Douglas Blackstock
President

Annex: Areas for development

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As outlined by the review panel, ARQA 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 consider greater involvement of students in its governance arrangements including membership of the Experts Council.

ESG 3.3 Independence

The agency is recommended to reconsider its governance structures to ensure that the organisational independence is formally secured by separating the roles of Founder and Director.

The agency is recommended to reconsider the remit of the Experts Council to secure its advisory role and organisational independence.

ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

The agency should take a more in-depth approach to analysing findings from its accreditation procedures and publish these thematic reports on its website.

The agency is recommended to plan for future regular publications and provide the necessary resources for conducting research and preparing thematic reports.

ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

The agency is recommended to ensure that all documents are updated according to the deadlines stated. The agency is recommended to implement developments to its IQA system. It is necessary that the agency ensures that the cycle of continuous quality improvement is completed. For example, with the incorporation of a plan of improvement actions.

ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

The agency is recommended to include the consideration of information management in its procedures for programme accreditation.

The agency is recommended to develop a standard for public information in the procedures for programme accreditation.

ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

The agency is recommended to formally establish the internal processes to develop, review and update standards and criteria, including defining the internal and external stakeholders involved in the processes.

ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

The agency is recommended to publish the list of experts for all the categories on their website.

The agency is recommended to provide more periodic training for each category of expert.

The agency is recommended to ensure that the procedure for applying to become an expert is more clearly displayed on its website.

The agency is recommended to assure that the international experts have an equal role in the panel and participate in all the procedures regarding each review.

ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

The agency is recommended to confirm alignment of the criteria for outcomes in the Regulation on procedure for conducting program/institutional accreditation and Regulation on Accreditation Council, as well on the website, to ensure the consistent application of the information for decisions on formal outcomes.

ESG 2.6 Reporting

The agency is recommended to improve the accessibility and readability of the accreditation reports on its website.

ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals

The agency is recommended to separate the decision-making of the accreditation and appeals processes by allowing the Appeals Commission to overturn the decisions made by the Accreditation Council.