

Annex I: Terms of Reference for a focused review of the Eurasian Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Health Care (ECAQA)

This document is to agree on the Terms of Reference (ToR) that address the request of the Eurasian Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Health Care (ECAQA), Kazakhstan, to undergo a focused review against the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The request follows EQAR Register Committee's decision to reject the application by ECAQA (Ref. RC38/A102, 3 March 2023, annex I to this document).

Chapter 1: Background and request of ECAQA for a focused review

ECAQA approached ENQA to coordinate a focused review addressing those issues that led to the rejection of the agency's application for inclusion on the Register. EQAR's 'Procedures for Applications' (§3.21) allow the agency to undergo such a focused review, and to reapply within 18 months based on this review.

Subsequently, on 22 March 2023 ECAQA officially approached ENQA to coordinate the abovementioned focused review and prepare a review report that will be considered for the purpose of EQAR-registration. On 6 April 2023, ENQA agreed to coordinate the focused review. The review follows ENQA methodology for partial reviews (see ENQA Rules of Procedure, article 7, and ENQA's policy on partial reviews of members under review) that is aligned with the requirements of a focused review for the purposes of EQAR-registration. In case of provisions not covered by ENQA's policy on partial reviews of members under review, the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews (for full reviews) are to be followed.

Chapter 2: Purpose and scope of the focused review

Chapter 2.1: Activities within the scope of the ESG

The focused review will address the above mentioned ESG standards through the following external QA activities of ECAQA:

1. Institutional accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (i.e., universities)
2. Specialized (programme) accreditation of Bachelor' Degree, Master's Degree Programmes, PhD programmes, Residency programmes, CPD programmes, CPD providers' programmes in medical, health care professions education in the Republic of Uzbekistan¹, and
3. Accreditation of the clinical skills centre (simulation-based healthcare education) of medical higher educational institutions.

The following activities are considered to be outside of the scope of the ESG as they do not cover provisions on EHEA QF level 6-8, unless the panel comes across new evidence that proves otherwise²:

1. Institutional accreditation of: (a) organisations for continuing professional development (CPD) (CPD providers); (b) higher nursing colleges;
2. Specialised (programme) accreditation of Vocational Professional Education and Training programmes, and Applied Bachelor's degree programmes in Nursing.

¹ As long as the programmes are offered at EHEA QF level 6 - 8

²Should this be the case, the coordinator is expected to inform EQAR at the earliest convenience and request an amendment of the terms of reference.

The following standards were judged as partially compliant by EQAR Register Committee (see EQAR Register Committee's decision not to include the agency on the Register, Ref. RC38/A102, 3 March 2023), and the following aspects are expected to be covered in the review:

- ESG 2.4 – Peer-review experts
 - (a) Whether ECAQA started involving students in a meaningful way in the panels (e.g. strengthening the training, providing further guidance, steering active participation).
 - (b) Whether the agency started remunerating the student panel members, just as the other panel members (this was announced, but not implemented the last time the Committee was deciding on agency's inclusion on the registry in 03/23)
- ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes
 - (a) Whether the agency covers all of its standards in the reviews and provide sufficient and coherent evidence for supporting the judgements in its recent reports?
 - (b) Whether the agency developed new tools for ensuring consistency in its decision making and whether they are effective?
- ESG 2.6 – Reporting
 - (a) Whether the agency publishes all of the reports from the ESG aligned activities on its website (including the negative ones)?
 - (b) What mechanisms does the agency have to ensure timely upload of reports on its website?
- ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance
 - (a) Whether the agency introduced mechanisms for ensuring prevention of conflict between the commercial (consultancy) activities of its founder (which sporadically involve higher education institutions) and agency's quality assurance? Here, not referring to the policy the agency has regarding preventing conflict of interest of individuals (e.g., panel members etc.)
 - (b) Whether these mechanisms are effective (to be explored to the extent possible at the time of the review)?
- ESG 3.3 – Independence
 - (a) Whether the agency found ways to ensure its independence from its founder and to distribute the power of governing of the agency in an equal manner among the stakeholders?

The report should also confirm whether the other findings (in regard of those standards not covered in depth now) of the full review report of June 2022 remain valid.

Chapter 2.2: Content and preparation of the review report

The agency is expected to produce a self-assessment report on the points raised above, indicating in particular changes that have taken place since the last full review. In addition, the agency will indicate any eventual changes and developments in the agency's activities beyond those listed under the criteria under scrutiny, and that might be relevant in view of the agency's ESG compliance. This requirement follows ENQA's policy on partial reviews of members under review, Content, p. 2, and EQAR's Procedures for Applications³.

³ <https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#procedures-for-applications>

The focused review foresees a site visit (in person) to the agency.

Following the site visit, a review report will be drafted in consultation with all review panel members and correspond to the purpose and scope of the review as defined above. In particular, the review report will concentrate on the same criteria as in a full review and assess how the compliance has evolved since this last review. Furthermore, it will provide a clear rationale for its findings concerning each ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should bear in mind the EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR. Finally, the report will also assess any eventual changes that have been brought to the attention of the panel in the self-assessment report.

Chapter 3: Panel composition

The ENQA Agency Review Committee will nominate three external reviewers to complete the task. The composition of the panel for the ECAQA full review in 2022 was as follows:

Patrick Van den Bosch	Chair (ENQA nominee), quality assurance professional
Ewa Kolanowska	Secretary (ENQA nominee), quality assurance professional
Danutė Rasimavičienė	Panel member (EURASHE nominee), academic
Simona Zamfir	Panel member (ESU nominee)

For the focused review, ENQA will use **one member** of the panel which carried out the last full review in order to ensure consistency, sufficient background knowledge on the agency, and the external trust in the outcomes (independent of the Agency Review Committee). The two other panel members will be selected so to complement the panel with altogether three viewpoints, that of a student, an academic and a quality assurance professional.

One of the panel members will be appointed as a Chair of the panel. The panel secretary will be appointed by the Chair, should the Chair not cover the secretary tasks.

The panel members will be asked whether they are willing and able to carry out the work within the timeline as listed in chapter 4 of the terms of reference.

Chapter 4: Timeline

	Deadline
Terms of Reference agreed with ECAQA and EQAR	July 2023
Completion of focused review SAR by ECAQA	31 July 2023
Appointment of focused review panel members and agreement on reviewer contracts, setting the date for the completion of the focused review report	July/August 2023
Site visit to ECAQA	End November/early December 2023
Delivery of draft report to ENQA Secretariat	January 2024
Draft report to ECAQA for a factual check	February 2024
Completion of report and submission to ENQA	February 2024
Report validation by ENQA Agency Review Committee	March 2024
EQAR Register Committee meeting and decision on the application	June 2024

Chapter 5: Costs

ITEM	COST
Expert fee - Chair	€ 2 000
Expert fee - panel member	€ 1 500
Expert fee - panel member	€ 1 500
Coordination fee ENQA	€ 2 500
Site visit (estimate, full actual cost to be covered by the agency) ⁴	€ 4 000
TOTAL	€ 11 500

Chapter 6: Annexes

Annex 1: EQAR Register Committee's decision not to include the agency on the Register, Ref. RC38/A102, 3 March 2023

⁴ Calculation is based on four return flights to Kazakhstan (three experts and a review coordinator), and two nights in a hotel as proposed by the agency under review.