



Quality Agency for
Higher Education

FOLLOW-UP REPORT AFTER EXTERNAL REVIEW BY ENQA

ACADEMIC INFORMATION CENTRE QUALITY AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

2020

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INTRODUCTION

In 2018 the Academic Information Centre/ Quality Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter - Agency) underwent a review coordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) for the purpose of AIC full membership in ENQA and to support AIC application for registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). This was the first review of Agency against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The expert panel found Agency's performance fully compliant with 6 standards, substantially compliant with 7 standards and partially compliant with 1 standard as demonstrated in **Table 1**

Agency's compliance with ESG Table 1

Agency's compliance with ESG

Fully compliant	Substantially compliant	Partially compliant
3.2. Official status (S)	3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance (R, S)	2.7 Complaints and appeals (R, S)
3.5 Resources (S)	3.3 Independence (R)	
3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct (S)	3.4 Thematic analysis (R, S)	
3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies	2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance (R)	
2.3 Implementing processes (S)	2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose (R, S)	
2.4 Peer-review experts	2.5 Criteria for outcomes (R)	
	2.6 Reporting (R, S)	

R – a recommendation was formulated for fulfilling this standard by the ENQA experts
S – a suggestion related to this standard was formulated by the ENQA experts

Since June 2018 when the ENQA board took decision about ENQA membership of Agency, a number of developments have been taken place. Some were initiated already at the time of

the ENQA review, some were finalised soon after the review took place and some developments were the direct impact of recommendations of the ENQA review panel.

As it has been only one year since the ENQA review, some recommendations could not have been implemented fully yet but the Agency staff have taken them into careful consideration and have proposed certain activities to follow.

This report explains how the recommendations of ENQA experts have been taken into account. The report is structured according to the ESG standards. First, the standards with recommendations from the ENQA experts have been addressed. If there was an additional suggestion for the same standard, it has been added to the same section and addressed in the section "Implementation". Then, the rest of the standards with suggestions from the ENQA experts have been addressed.

ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Recommendation:

The panel recommends that AIKA continue to ensure that all quality evaluation processes (accreditation of study programmes, Licensing and institutional accreditation) evolve further to become fully compliant with the ESG. The high-level cabinet regulations still prescribe a quality control approach, which AIKA should continue to influence positively with the support of HEIs.

Suggestion for further improvement:

The panel recommends that AIKA should further enhance the quality improvement agenda by providing some core definitions for the higher education system. The definition of 'quality and "Quality Assurance" could be a useful place to commence this work by establishing a broader agency policy on quality assurance. This could also provide even further definition and explanation on the demarcation of responsibilities between internal and external quality assurance.

Implementation:

In line with amendments to the Law on Institutions of Higher Education on December 11, 2018, new Cabinet regulations were approved. New regulations are less prescriptive and allow Agency to develop methodologies and guidelines more independently in order to ensure better compliance with ESG.

Thus Cabinet regulations on the assessment of study directions (study programme groups) states that Agency develops assessment methodology and assessment criteria, has rights to select and approve assessment experts, diversify the number of experts and approve price-list for the assessments.

Taking into account changes to the Law and new Cabinet regulations, as well as the recommendations from ENQA experts, Agency elaborated and approved methodologies, criteria and guidelines for all assessment procedures.

In relation to transition to cyclical institutional review after 2023, it is planned to conduct a survey on the definition of quality and the purpose of quality assurance.

This definition would be used for developing the new system for institutional reviews but not detailed plan of activities has been developed yet.

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Recommendation:

The panel recommends the AIKA executive and the Ministry representatives to continue to support the concept of the new model for institutional review under the remit of AIC/AIKA. There is also a need to ensure that AIKA requires full independence in designing methodologies going forward.

Implementation:

Agency is looking forward to the model for cyclical institutional review under the remit of Agency fully.

In order to find out the opinion of stakeholders on the cyclical institutional review model, on November 1, 2019, Agency organized a seminar “Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Latvia - Opportunities and Preconditions”. This seminar launched a discussion on the transition from accreditation of study directions to accreditation of higher education institutions. The seminar discussed the objectives of institutional accreditation, the responsibilities of the parties involved and the preparations to be made. The seminar was attended by 26 participants representing 10 institutions – Saeima (Latvian Parliament) Education, Culture and Science Commission Higher Education Science and Innovation Subcommittee, Ministry of Education and Science, Higher Education Council, Rectors' Council, Latvian College Association, State Education Quality Service, Latvian Employers' Confederation, Student Union of Latvia, European University Association. As a guest lecturer Tia Loukkola, the Director for Institutional Development of the European University Association, was invited, who gave an overview of European national practices and experiences in institutional accreditation, highlighting the challenges and opportunities of institutional accreditation, as well as the main factors influencing the quality assurance system in general. In the discussion, participants were invited to express their views on the criteria for institutional accreditation of higher education, the regulatory framework and its necessary amendments, evaluation experts and the possible involvement of international evaluation agencies in the evaluation process. The most important criteria were: the management of the goals of higher education institutions, strategic management, quality management system, implementation of

the study process and research, resources, internationalization and contribution of higher education institutions to society.

Next seminar was organised on November 14, 2019, in order to continue the discussion on institutional accreditation with all higher education institutions, together with all stakeholders to think about such quality assessment model that is effective and fit for purpose while reducing bureaucratic burdens. Representatives of Estonian Agency for Quality in Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) and Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) were invited to share their experience on institutional accreditation in higher education.

The seminar was attended by 93 participants from 42 higher education institutions, as well as the Ministry of Education and Science, the Council of Higher Education and the Rectors' Council. In addition Agency is involved as a partner in the project "Road Map for Implementation of Institutional Assessment" within the ERASMUS+ programme which is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science. The main objective of the project is to improve further the quality assurance system in Latvia and introduce a regular institutional accreditation as the main quality assurance procedure that will decrease the current overlap among the different quality assessment procedures and reduce the administrative burden as well as the costs of assessment procedures. The main outcome of the project is enhancement-led quality assurance system, by introducing regular institutional assessment that will increase the trust in higher education institutions as the providers of quality education, strengthen the internal mechanisms of the institutions and facilitate a quality culture. During the project several discussions, seminars and study visits are planned.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Science has developed conceptual report "On the change of the internal management model of higher education institutions" (approved by Cabinet of Ministers on March 4, 2020), where the gradual transition to the cyclical institutional accreditation of higher education institutions is indicated. In addition, the report states that the responsibility to make a decision on accreditation of higher education institutions should be transferred to the Study Quality Committee, whose operation is ensured by Agency. The report also emphasizes the task of the state to strengthen the capacity of Agency, including additional financial resources, in order to ensure the quality of higher education.

Taking into account the abovementioned, it is expected that after the completion of the accreditation cycle of study directions (due to the COVID-19 the schedule is prolonged till the end of June 2025), based on the analyses and results of study direction assessment and project results, transition to cyclical institutional accreditation will be implemented.

ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Recommendation:

The panel recommends the agency to consider developing a comprehensive thematic analysis track, which would evolve analysis driven by the general results of the external quality assurance with a focus on strategic improvement for the higher education system.

Suggestion:

The panel encourage the agency to continue work on the plan for thematic analysis and in particular, to articulate more clearly how all thematic analysis feeds back into the HE system in Latvia – the feedback loop.

Implementation:

The plan for preparing thematic analysis was approved in 2017 and Agency has executed it taking into account the actual number of assessment procedures performed. There have not been any significant changes to the plan since the ENQA review. Most of the activities included in the current plan have proven to be successful and valuable for the higher education society and some still have to be executed in order to assess their impact.

As stated in the plan – the analysis are prepared in three tracks - analysis based on the results of assessment procedures, analysis with the purpose to develop external quality assurance system and analysis based on the specific topics that are important for the higher education society in Latvia.

Most of the thematic analysis performed by Agency has based on the results of external quality assessment procedures.

The analysis of assessment procedures performed every year is based on the results of assessment of study directions, as this is the main assessment procedure and the only cyclical procedure.

The first workshop took place in spring 2018 and a document summarising the results of analysis was prepared. In 2019 thematic analysis was a part of Agency annual report. It was decided not to organise a workshop and not to prepare an extensive analysis because only four applications for accreditation of study directions were received on the year before and the assessment procedures were completed only in June 2019.

In early 2020 the emergency situation caused by the expansion of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the world had severe impact on many areas, including the quality assurance of higher education, and caused delays in the activities planned.

In the end of 2019 an intensive assessment period for Agency started. The assessment of the first four study directions had to be completed by the end of 2020 and afterwards an in-depth analysis of the assessment results was planned. In February 2020 all upcoming on-site expert visits were cancelled and later the accreditation terms for all study directions were postponed. It will be possible to prepare analysis only after the completion of all assessment procedures, provisionally in the second half of 2021.

In addition to that, Agency had planned to prepare an analysis on the full cycle of study direction assessment procedures in the second half of 2023, when the full cycle of assessment is concluded. This analysis has also been postponed due to the postponement of all assessment procedures.

Another section of the plan for thematic analysis was the analysis based on the assessment procedures performed in each academic year (feedback of experts).

The first analysis was prepared in 2018 for the year 2017 as a separate publication. In 2019 the analysis based on the feedback of experts was a part of AIKA annual report. In 2020 it is also a part of the annual report for 2019.

Thematic analysis with the purpose to develop the external quality assurance system in Latvia

In 2019 and 2020 two extensive analysis were prepared by Agency staff members who developed their master thesis. In 2019 Ilva Grigorjeva defended her master thesis "Development of Higher Education Quality Evaluation System and Possible Scenarios in Latvia" where she formulated suggestions for the development of the external quality evaluation system in Latvia in order to improve the quality and foster international recognition of higher education in Latvia.

In 2020 Agency lawyer Elīna Ļeonova defended her master thesis “Legal and practical aspects of external quality assessment in higher education in the Republic of Latvia”. In her thesis she analysed the legal framework for external quality assurance and its application, identified the deficiencies and proposed improvements.

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Recommendation:

The panel recommends that AIKA implements the new guidelines for self-evaluation reports and joint expert reports and in doing so are mindful of the need to ensure that:

- the standard for (ESG) 1.7 – information management extends to all three assessment procedures and to ensure they cover the rationale behind the ESG standard;
- the standard for public information ESG 1.8 and the clarity and objectivity of information about learning outcomes, admission criteria etc. is included for the QA procedure of licensing the study programme.

Implementation:

Agency has revised the guidelines for the preparation of self-evaluation reports and the guidelines for the preparation of joint report of expert groups. During the revision of the guidelines Agency took into account the recommendations provided by the higher education institutions, as well as the ESG. In addition, it was ensured that the guidelines for self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and the expert reports were consistent and higher education institutions not only provide data, but also facilitate the analysis and evaluation of their work.

Following the recommendation provided by ENQA experts, when reviewed the guidelines for the licensing of study programmes, special attention was paid to the inclusion of ESG 1.7 and ESG 1.8 in the guidelines.

Considering that the most important procedures are the licensing of study programmes and the assessment of study directions, the following **Table 2** shows how the ESG standards are integrated in the guidelines for licensing and **Table 3** shows how they are integrated for assessment of study directions.

Table 2

Mapping for the Licensing Procedure

Parts	The Guidelines for the Preparation of the Description of a Study Programme	ESG								
		1.1	1.2.	1.3.	1.4.	1.5.	1.6.	1.7.	1.8.	1.9.
I.	Compliance of the Study Programme with the Study Direction		1.2.							
II.	Resources and Provision of the Study Programme						2.1- 2.4			
III.	Study Content and the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Study Programme	3.4.	3.4.	3.2.	3.4			3.4.	3.4.	3.4.
IV.	Teaching Staff					4.1 4.3				

Standard 1.10 is not included separately as it is considered in the context of another external quality assessment procedures – assessment of study directions.

Table 3

Mapping for the Assessment of Study Directions

Parts	The Guidelines for the Preparation of the Self-Assessment Report of a Study Direction	ESG									
		1.1	1.2.	1.3.	1.4.	1.5.	1.6.	1.7.	1.8.	1.9.	1.10.
I. Information on the Higher Education Institution		1.3., 1.4.								1.4.	
II. Description of the Study Direction	1. Management of the Study Direction	1.7.		1.6.	1.5., 1.8.			2.4.	1.8.		
	2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System	2.1.	2.1.	2.3.	2.4.					2.1.	
	3. Resources and Provision of the Study Direction			3.5.		3.4., 3.5.	3.1., 3.2., 3.3., 3.7.				
	4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation					4.4., 4.6.					

	5. Cooperation and Internationalisation		5.3.							
	6. Implementation of the Recommendations Received During the Previous Assessment Procedures									6.1., 6.2.
III. Description of the Study programme	1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme		1.1., 1.3.				1.2			
	2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof			2.3., 2.4.			2.6			
	3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme					3.1., 3.2.				
	4. Teaching Staff									

It is important to point out that in the framework of the self-assessment report for the study direction, higher education institutions have to assess and indicate which of the ESG standards pose the most challenges for them, thus paying more attention to higher education institutions' efforts to integrate ESG requirements.

Following the new guidelines for licensing of study programmes, until May 2020 Agency has assessed 35 study programmes and 28 are under assessment at the moment. Following the feedback, received from the higher education institutions and experts, as well as the comments provided by the Study Quality Committee and observations by Agency staff, it is planned to review the guidelines for the licensing of study programmes (for higher education institutions and experts) and simplify them.

ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Recommendation:

The recently revised QA guidelines are a good improvement and well received. Improvement is a continuous cycle and the panel encourage AIKA to continue to evolve to ensure that all methodologies continue to be fit the purpose. In doing so AIKA should define each individual procedure more clearly including any potential relationship between them.

Suggestion for further improvement:

AIKA should continue to seek more independence from those aspects of the Cabinet Regulations that impact upon fitness for purpose.

Implementation:

The external quality assurance system in Latvia has been designed in a way that all quality assurance procedures together would form a cycle for continuous improvement that is applicable to every study programme.

New study programmes can only be developed in study directions defined by the national legislation. In order to launch a new study programme in a certain study direction, the programme needs to obtain a licence through a licensing (ex-ante assessment) procedure. Once the study programme is licensed, it can be implemented until the term of accreditation for the whole study direction comes to an end. The accreditation of a study direction is a cyclical procedure – it takes place every 2 or 6 years, depending on the previous decision. Between the cyclical assessments the higher education institutions can introduce changes to their study programmes. If the changes are not substantial, it is the remit of the higher education institution itself. If the changes are substantial (fall under one of the sections mentioned in the Cabinet Regulations) the higher education institution has to undergo an external procedure for assessing the changes.

In order to ensure that the study direction assessment procedure also takes into account the recommendations provided by experts within the study programme licensing and / or change evaluation procedure (if applicable), one of the criteria to be described by higher education institutions and analyzed by experts is the fulfillment of recommendations during these evaluation procedures.

Every higher education institution has to undergo an institutional accreditation soon after it has been established in order to confirm that the institution has sufficient capacity to implement study programmes.

A study programme is recognised as accredited if only both the higher education institution where it is implemented and the study direction to which it belongs are accredited.

It is important to point out that since January 1, 2019, the accreditation procedure of the study directions has been divided into two parts – assessment of study direction and accreditation of study direction. The duration of the assessment process is 6 months. Within the framework of this procedure, a group of experts evaluate the study direction in accordance with the guidelines and prepare a joint report - which is the outcome of this procedure. The duration of the accreditation procedure is 4 months. In this procedure the Study Quality Committee makes a decision on accreditation of a study direction for 6 years, 2 years or a refusal to accredit a study direction. In making a decision, the Study Quality Committee mainly takes into account the report of the expert group, as well as the application and self - assessment report provided by the higher education institution.

Another reason why the procedure for assessment and accreditation of study directions was separated in 2018 is that since 2019 the assessment of study directions of Latvian higher education institutions can be performed by any agency included in EQAR, however, the decision on accreditation of study directions is always made by the Study Quality Committee.

The purpose of the existing and implemented procedures and their link with other evaluation procedures is described in **Table 4** and the link between all procedures is shown in **Figure 1**.

Table 4

Assessment Procedures

Assessment procedure		Purpose of the procedure	Link with other procedures
Licensing		Granting rights to a higher education institution or the branches thereof to implement a specific study programme.	The fulfillment of the recommendations provided during the licensing procedure is reviewed while assessing the study direction
Procedures for Study	Assessment of study direction	To carry out an assessment of the study direction and respective study programmes, to provide recommendations and suggestions for further improvement.	The opinion and assessment of experts is considered by the Study Quality Committee in the decision making on accreditation of study direction
	Accreditation of study direction	An inspection with the purpose of determining the quality of the resources of a higher education institution and the ability to	This is the only cyclical procedure where study direction and respective study programmes, the recommendations given within the

	implement a study programme corresponding to a specific study direction in accordance with laws and regulations. The accreditation of the study direction gives the higher education institution the right to issue a state recognised diploma of higher education for successful acquisition of a study programme corresponding to the relevant study direction.	licensing and change procedure (if applicable) are assessed, that helps to monitor and identify programmes that need to be improved
Accreditation of higher education institutions	Assessment of the work organisation and quality of resources of a higher education institution as a result of which it is granted the status of a State recognised higher education institution	Accreditation of higher education institutions can be performed if at least half of the implemented study directions are accredited in the institution
Procedure for approval of changes within the study direction	Evaluation of substantial changes made within the study programme, as a result creating traceability of study programme variability at the national level	The fulfillment of the recommendations provided during the change procedure is reviewed while assessing the study direction

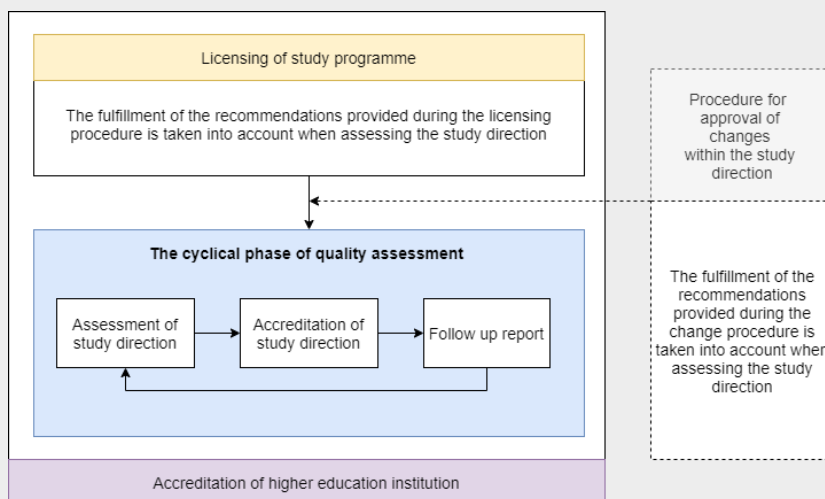


Figure 1 Link between Assessment Procedures

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Recommendation:

The methodologies and criteria applied to the decision-making processes in the CAS and CLSP and the external Council of Higher Education could benefit from additional clarity. The panel also consider that the decision-making process applied by the joint committee could benefit by referring the report back to the expert panels where additional information or clarification could be sought in cases where contradictions of discrepancies occur.

Implementation:

Since 2018 there have not been any cases where the opinion of the decision making bodies would differ from the one of experts.

However, the methodologies for licensing of study programmes and assessment and accreditation of study directions have been elaborated and stated that in cases where additional information is needed, the Study Quality Committee could request additional information to the experts and invite experts to the committee meeting.

In addition, according to the changes in Cabinet Regulations and the guidelines for the assessment of a study direction, during this procedure the experts are not required to suggest an accreditation term as it was before. Therefore the possibilities of discrepancies are limited only to the opinion on assessment criteria for specific study programmes but not the accreditation term.

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

Recommendation:

The panel encourages AIKA to provide more information in the final reports on the rationale or analytical side of the decision made and also to include the rich opinion on the professional regulatory context that was considered by the Committee making the final decision.

Suggestion for further improvement:

The panel recommends that the minutes of the committee (CAS/CSLP) deliberations may be published to provide more information on its deliberations and additional clarity and transparency.

Implementation:

For the assessment of study direction where Study Quality Committee has to make decision on the accreditation term of the study direction as a whole and also assess each study programme, a special summary will be created. The summary will show the conclusion of the expert group and the conclusion of the Study Quality Committee on study direction and each study programme, with justification in case the opinions differ. This summary will be published together with the joint report of the expert group.

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**Recommendation:**

The panel recommends that the agency AIC/AIKA considers revising those aspects of the appeals process and procedures which may potentially undermine the perception of an independent objective decision-making and describes in the respective document the impact of the appeal decision made by the Chairperson of AIC on the accreditation decision of CAS/CLSP. In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, AIC/AIKA is in compliance with the ESG.

Suggestion for further improvement:

The panel suggests that the agency considers sending draft reports on the licencing of study programmes to the higher education institutions for comments in order to ensure the factual accuracy of the final expert reports are correct and to prevent any possible mismatches between the content of the (published) expert report and the decision made by the CLSP.

Implementation:

On 21 June, 2018 the amendments to the Law on Institutions of Higher Education in Latvia were approved by the Parliament and are in force from 1st January 2019. These amendments include the establishment of independent decision making body Appeals Committee. The amendments state that a decision taken by the Study Quality Committee may be disputed in the Appeals Committee, and the decision by the Appeals Committee may be appealed to a court according to the procedures specified in the Administrative Procedure Law.

The amendments also state that the Appeals Committee shall consist of four experts, two of which shall be experts in higher education, and two shall be experts with obtained higher

education in law science and professional experience in administrative procedure. Higher Education Quality Assurance Council shall approve the composition, chairperson, and deputy of the Appeals Committee.

Agency shall ensure technical and organisational activities of the Appeals Committee. The Appeals Committee shall examine the applications for contesting the decisions of the Study Quality Committee and shall take a decision in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Administrative Procedure Law.

The approved amendments ensure full independence of the Appeals Committee and exclude the situations of conflict of interest.

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Suggestion for further improvement:

If it is the intension to further establish the AIKA brand as a separate function or quasi agency (under AIC) more effort is required on branding activities. The branding of AIKA still lives in the shadow of AIC. The panel suggests that AIKA is branded with more visibility of the agency supported by external communications; a plan or strategy with defined target groups both national and international. At the very least the panel would like to see more clarity over which agency is and should be referred to when representing Latvia abroad, communicating with international experts and general engagement. Although the local audience referred mostly to AIC the SER referred to AIKA so it was more confusing to an outside international audience.

Implementation:

In 2019 a new visual identity and communication strategy for AIKA was developed and launched. The visual identity included a renewed logo, website www.aika.lv, Youtube channel *Augstākās izglītības kvalitātes aģentūra* (AIKA), style guide and a number of unified tools (PowerPoint templates, business cards etc.)

When designing the communication strategy it was decided to use and promote the AIKA brand and use AIC only for legal purposes.

AIKA brand is already well known on the national level and the representatives of stakeholders tend to use AIKA instead of AIC.

When communicating AIKA to international audience, the combination of Quality Agency for Higher Education (AIKA)/ Academic Information Centre (AIC) is mostly used. This is due to the fact that AIC is the legal entity possessing the membership of different international networks and AIC's membership in these networks was active before a targeted promotion of the AIKA brand.

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Suggestion for further improvement:

The agency should monitor the fixed price list going forward and keep the channel of communication open with the Ministry to ensure all processes are realistic in the future and differences in scope planned are reflected in the costs or prices.

Implementation:

Agency carefully monitors and keeps communication with the Ministry of Education and Science to ensure adequate funding for all necessary activities.

Since December 2018 the new price-list for assessment procedures is in place. The price-list approved by the Cabinet includes fixed process for such procedures as accreditation of higher education institutions, licensing of new study programmes and assessment of changes in the study programmes. However Agency has rights to elaborate and approve price-list for the assessment of study directions (study programme groups). The prices in the Agency's approved price-list depend on the number of programmes in the study direction (group) and the number of experts in the procedure.

With regard to the increased workload of Agency (according to the schedule set in the Law all study programmes (study directions) shall be assessed and accredited till the end of June 2025 and number of new study programmes is increasing due to the planned activities within the scope of European Social Fund projects in higher education institutions) state funding for 2020 has increased about 30%. Furthermore, the dialogue with the Ministry of Education and Science is kept open and the ministry is aware on the necessity to strengthen Agency and keep stable funding with increasing possibilities.

In addition, Agency continues to work on the diversification of income. Thus, Agency has launched its activities in Russia and Ukraine. So far agreements are concluded on the assessment of study programme in the Peoples Friendship University in Moscow, Russian Federation, and on the assessment of study programmes in several Ukrainian universities.

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Suggestion for further improvement:

The agency should monitor the effectiveness of its internal quality system as it develops over time.

Implementation:

The effectiveness of internal quality system has been overlooked regularly and additional changes are implemented to assure that internal quality assurance processes helps to achieve Agency aims at the best possible level. Since last external assessment some changes have been made in line with changes in national regulatory framework. The information regarding Agency structure has been reviewed following the changes in Agency structure in 2020. The more detailed approach for new employees is adopted, including additional manuals for conducting of assessment procedures and questionnaires for new employees with a goal to better understand which approach works best for new employees to successfully carry out their duties as coordinators of assessment procedures.

An important part of Agency internal quality assurance system is the process and measurement system. A clear example of the need for the implemented system and data acquisition is the collected data on the number of applications for various assessment procedures (separately for each type of assessment procedure), data on the number of planned study directions accreditations and the number of issued accreditation certificates for study directions for 2 or 6 years. This information helped to prepare a schedule for the evaluation of study direction procedures for 2020. Evaluating the previous experience with the time and resources required for reviewing applications and stages of the evaluation procedure, it is planned to distribute submitted applications in several months next year, as well as perform other improvement works

for stages of assessment procedures, such as attracting experts. Data on applications for various evaluations also helps to plan the work of the Study Quality Committee.

Feedback from higher education institutions and experts on the progress of assessment procedures and Agency activities plays a key role in the organization and improvement of Agency work. This information helps to identify areas for improvement in the organization of procedures, the involvement of experts and the improvement of guidelines and methodologies developed by Agency.

The accumulated data on the number of evaluation experts and the directions represented by experts are important and helps to assess whether the number of experts included in Agency database is sufficient for further assessment procedures. Evaluating such data, in 2019 a call for experts was announced in order to ensure the sufficient number of experts for the evaluation of the study directions to be evaluated in 2020.

Data on the number of rejected experts is also collected, which, among other things, helps to identify the justification of higher education institutions for the rejection of experts. Admittedly, it has been found that in most cases experts are not rejected because of a conflict of interest, but rather because of opinion differences.

Considering that the mission of Agency, among other things, is to promote the improvement of the quality of Latvian higher education and contribute to the creation and maintenance of a quality culture in line with the ESG, as well as a reliable partner for higher education institutions, policy makers, etc. It is important to monitor data on the participants in seminars and trainings organized by Agency and to gather feedback afterwards, thus helping to identify topics for future seminars.

Considering that starting from January 1, 2019, higher education institutions sign agreements with Agency regarding the assessment of study directions, it is important to collect data on concluded agreements, number of violations of contract provisions, amendments to agreements and number of terminated agreements.

These and other measurements included in the process and measurement system help not only for planning day-to-day work, but also for making analysis, developing annual reports and

providing the public with information on the evaluation procedures carried out, as well as to plan Agency activities and workload and improve Agency`s performance.

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Suggestion for further improvement:

The panel recommend that AIKA consider the totality of burden on the follow required of HEIs by the Ministry and AIKA and try to ensure a more integrated follow up if appropriate. HEIs have to publish an annual report on their website describing the improvement activities they have made. AIKA should find a way to reduce the reporting burden of HEIs and avoid the duplication.

Implementation:

The follow-up requirements have been decreased and only a report about the implementation of recommendations is required, instead of a plan and a report.

Also, starting from 2019 the higher education institutions are not required to prepare annual reports about changes/improvements made to. This is a progress in decreasing burden comparing to previous legal requirements where the higher education institutions were first required to prepare reports and publish them on their homepages and later only required to prepare the reports for their internal use and not necessarily make them public.