



European Association for  
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Professor Dr. Rafael M. Rieger OFM  
Executive Board  
Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Programmes of Studies in Germany  
(AKAST)  
Auf der Schanz 49  
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Brussels, 6 November 2023

**Subject: Statement on validation of the external review report of AKAST**

Dear Professor Dr. Rafael M. Rieger OFM,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting on 25 October 2023, the ENQA Agency Review Committee validated the external review report of AKAST. The committee concluded that the report has been produced in accordance with the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews and can thus be used to apply for EQAR registration, as well as for any other purposes. This is in line with article 26, paragraph 2 of ENQA's Rules of Procedure, which states that the review report can be further used only once this statement of validation has been issued. The purpose of this statement is to set out the committee's views on the quality of the final report and consistency of the panel's evaluation on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The committee examined the provided review report and asked the panel for minor revisions on the following standards: ESG 3.4, and ESG 3.5.

On the ESG 3.4, the committee noted the contradictory information on the agency's ongoing work on the thematic analysis, thus it asked the panel for a further clarification. Secondly, the review report should be revised to include any additional information on the agency's understanding of the requirements of the standard.

Next, on the ESG 3.5 Resources, the committee wished for a more detailed elaboration on the agency's cooperation with ACQUIN, especially on how the agency assures that the cooperation between the two organisations follows the ESG. The review report already indicated that the agency uses the formalised agreement on cooperation to level out any irregular or high workload on the reviews, nevertheless, the committee required for further information on the operational aspects of such collaboration.



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The committee received the final review report that addressed the additional requirements. The final review report can thus be further used to apply for EQAR registration, as well as for any other purposes, as stipulated above.

This statement will be published on ENQA's website as an annex to the review report.

Thank you for your trust placed in ENQA to conduct this review. If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the ENQA Secretariat.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alastair Delaney'.

Mr. Alastair Delaney  
Chair of ENQA Agency Review Committee

Annex: Areas for development

### **Annex: Areas for development**

As outlined by the review panel and further discussed by the committee (where relevant), AKAST is recommended to take appropriate action, in 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 diversify the Executive Board by including a student member, as well as include a student representative in the Advisory Board and include the Association of Theology Students to the AKAST General Meeting.

#### **ESG 3.3 Independence**

The agency is recommended to consider a distribution of the formal positions that are currently held by the AKAST Chairperson, by introducing a separation of these positions in the Statutes, as well as consider the appointment of international members as the Chairperson of the Accreditation Committee and Advisory Board, thus further strengthening the independence of the agency, further safeguarding the independence of the universities under review and also bringing in valuable external, international perspectives into the discussions.

The agency is recommended to strengthen the independence from DBK in the governance of DBK, e.g., by defining the advisory role of the episcopal commissioner of the German Bishops' Conference in the Accreditation Commission more clearly and codifying this through adding the description of the advisory role in § 7 of the AKAST Statutes.

#### **ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis**

The agency is recommended to develop a plan for producing thematic analysis that would be based solely on the information and resources gathered by AKAST. Decide upon the type of thematic analysis that would be the most useful for AKAST and its stakeholders, taking into account that the thematic analysis has to be focused on the outcomes of external assessment procedures.

The agency is recommended to allocate sufficient human resources for performing the tasks related to thematic analysis. Plan for stable resources (human, financial) allocated to thematic analysis that do not solely rest on members of different bodies further volunteering in a role that is already voluntary.

The agency is recommended to adapt the methodology of the thematic analysis to the available human resources and context (small number of processes, dialogical culture of feedback) and appropriately take advantage of the opportunities offered by qualitative methodology with in-depth examination of individual cases.

### **ESG 3.5 Resources**

The agency is recommended to perform robust and forward-looking planning of human resources and financial resources in order to accommodate the foreseen transitions in the office as well as additional intellectual capacity needed to perform important internal quality assurance and developmental processes and processes/products stipulated by the relevant quality standards (ESG).

The agency is recommended to diversify the funding to prevent excessive financial dependency on one stream of funding.

### **ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct**

The agency is recommended to align the internal quality manual not only with the procedures of feedback collection already in place, but also in line with the qualitative methodological conventions (e.g., transcripts, minutes, interview notes, etc.).

The agency is recommended to analyse its operations in an aggregate rather than individual manner (annual, bi-annual) and present them in a single document/ report.

The agency is recommended to introduce tools and processes that would encompass operations beyond regular accreditation processes (e.g., satisfaction with the performance of different bodies, etc.).

The agency is recommended to codify the role of a rapporteur and the level (if at all) of his/her active intervention during the visit/ procedure.

### **ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose**

The role of the accompanying member/observer to the already large accreditation panel should be reconsidered due to the observers' presence throughout the accreditation process (site-visit, preparatory meetings) as well as their possibility to actively intervene.

### **ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts**

The agency is recommended to ensure that all potential review panel members receive consistent training before engaging in a review procedure.

The agency is recommended to publish an open call for experts on the AKAST website.

### **ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals**

The agency is recommended to clarify what happens if the complaint involves the work of the AKAST's office.



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The agency is recommended to publish both the latest version of the Complaints and Appeals Regulations and the Rules of Procedure of the Complaints and Appeals Committee on the website so that the right to lodge a complaint or appeal and the explanation for the procedure are as clear as possible.