SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

BASED ON THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

ASTANA, 2016
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1. FOREWORD

The Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA), established in 2008, is the first non-governmental and nonprofit organization in the field of quality assurance of educational institutions and study programmes in Kazakhstan. One of the IQAA’s main objectives is to assist educational institutions of Kazakhstan in providing high level of education meeting international standards and ensuring competitiveness in the age of globalization and knowledge economy.

IQAA conducts institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of Kazakh educational institutions of higher and postgraduate education, and technical and vocational education, according to the standards and criteria, designed in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), national legislation and international experience.

IQAA’s activities are based on close cooperation with all types of stakeholders, including higher education institutions (HEIs), Research Institutes and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions, students, employers, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MES RK) and others.

An external review of the Agency’s performance provides an opportunity to better assess IQAA’s current level and identify core priorities for future development of the Agency. And it allows to determine the degree of IQAA’s compliance with the revised ESG. The review is therefore critical for the Agency in contemplating about its activities, rethinking current procedures, looking for ways to improve and establishing a future perspective of its activities and processes based on input and recommendations from a panel of international experts.

In the process of preparation for the ENQA review, a lot of work has been done on modernization and enhancement of documentation, methodology and procedures. As a result, the activities of the Agency were significant improved.

Development of this self-assessment report involved collective participation of all IQAA’s staff members. Discussions of the draft report took place at the meetings of the Accreditation Council, meetings with members of the Accreditation Committees, students, employers, international experts, higher education institutions and other stakeholders, because only such a comprehensive analysis of IQAA’s activities could accomplish the task of moving forward with the Agency’s objectives and designing its future plans and tasks. Therefore, I would like to thank all of those involved in the development of this self-assessment report. Their cooperation, support and contribution played an integral role in IQAA’s self-assessment process.

Sholpan Kalanova
President of IQAA
2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT OF IQAA

One of the important incentives for IQAA to undergo an external review by ENQA is a possibility to analyze the evolvement of the Agency, as well as to assess its achievements and identify areas for improvement.

Each stage of IQAA’s preparation for the external review was a considered and collective process, which included planning, discussion, suggestions and recommendations from stakeholders and experts in the field of quality assurance.

The work on preparation to IQAA’s external review has been ongoing for two years and consisted of the following stages:

1. Analysis of normative documents regulating accreditation procedures, revision of existing documents and guidelines, as well as development of new internal documents.
2. Formation of IQAA’s working groups.
3. Analysis of internal normative documents, which regulate IQAA’s activities, and collecting of evidence.
4. Collecting and analysis of internal and external feedback of IQAA.
5. Analysis of stakeholders’ survey results conducted by the IQAA’s working groups.
6. Assessment of suggestions for improvement given by various stakeholders.
8. Submission of IQAA’s self-assessment report to ENQA.

The work on the self-assessment report was implemented by working groups according to the schedule plan set to meet defined objectives by the established deadlines. The schedule plan was considered and agreed at the general meeting of IQAA’s staff and approved by the President of IQAA.

Table 1. The schedule plan for preparation of the IQAA’s self-assessment report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Responsible persons</th>
<th>Due dates</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Analysis of normative documents regulating accreditation procedures, revision of existing documents and guidelines and development of new ones</td>
<td>President of IQAA, Department of Audit and Post-accreditation Monitoring of HEIs, Department of Analysis and Quality</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Giving suggestions for self-analysis process and writing the self-assessment report.</td>
<td>Departments of IQAA</td>
<td>September 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Planning of the self-assessment process of IQAA. Final approval of the schedule plan on writing the self-assessment report of IQAA. Formation and appointment of IQAA’s working groups.</td>
<td>President of IQAA</td>
<td>September 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comparative analysis of compliance of IQAA’s standards with ESG. Search for supporting information for the IQAA’s self-assessment report.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Department of Audit and Post-accreditation Monitoring of HEIs, Department of Audit and Post-accreditation Monitoring of TVET organizations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>October 2015</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Collecting of internal and external feedback. Consultations with stakeholders, survey of external experts, students and IQAA staff.</td>
<td>Department of Analysis and Quality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>November-December 2015</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Discussion of the draft of the self-assessment report at the general meeting of IQAA staff. Presentation of preliminary results, recommendations for improvement and additions to the self-assessment report.</td>
<td>President of IQAA IQAA staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>December 2015</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Additions and amendments of the self-assessment report. Review for accuracy and completeness of information in IQAA’s report.</td>
<td>Accreditation Council President of IQAA Department of Analysis and Quality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>January – February 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Review of the self-assessment report. Giving recommendations for improvement of the self-assessment report of IQAA.</td>
<td>External consultants: National experts from representatives of HEIs; International experts in the field of quality assurance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>February - March 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Discussion of the final version of the self-assessment report of IQAA at the general staff meeting.</td>
<td>President of IQAA IQAA staff</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>April 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Developing of the final version of the self-assessment report of IQAA. Amendments to the self-assessment report based on consultations with international experts and members of the Accreditation Council.</td>
<td>President of IQAA Department of Analysis and Quality</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>April 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Additional amendments to the self-assessment report suggested by stakeholders. Approval of the final version of the self-assessment report at the meeting of the Accreditation Council. Translation of the self-assessment report and its submission to ENQA Secretariat.</td>
<td>President of IQAA Department of Analysis and Quality Administrative and International Relations Department</td>
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<td></td>
<td>April-May 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Publication of the self-assessment report on the IQAA’s website.</td>
<td>Department of Analysis and Quality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>June-July 2016</td>
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</table>
The working group on the preparation of the self-assessment report consisted of the Agency’s following staff members:
Sholpan Kalanova – President, Professor, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences
Karlygash Jigitcheyeva – Head of Department of Audit and Post-Accreditation Monitoring of TVET Institutions, Associate Professor, Candidate of Chemical Sciences;
Zamira Toiganbayeva – Acting Head of Department of Analysis and Quality;
Aliya Assylbekova – Senior Expert of Department of Analysis and Quality;
Lyudmila Kovaleva – Senior Expert of Department of Analysis and Quality.

All IQAA employees played a role in the self-assessment process through their recommendations at the regular staff meetings on discussing the process of data collection and preparation of the self-assessment report.
3. HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

3.1 An overview of the education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The Republic of Kazakhstan is among the fast developing nations of the world, situated in Central Asia, also known as the heart of Eurasia. Most of the country’s territory is located in Asia, however the far western part beyond Ural River is located in Europe. As of February 2016, the population of Kazakhstan consists of 17.6 million people, the ethnic composition of which is as follows: Kazakhs – 66.01%, Russians – 21.05%, Uzbeks – 3.07%, Ukrainians – 1.7%, 8.17% are representatives of other more than 100 nationalities of the country. The government of Kazakhstan recognizes this as one of the major strengths of Kazakhstan and pays particular attention to fostering and maintaining interethnic cooperation and harmony. Islam is a religion of 70.2% of Kazakhstan’s population, followed by Orthodox Christianity (23.9%) and other religions. The country’s population is characterized by a relatively high proportion of young people aged between 15 and 24, which amounts to 4.6 million, 27% out of total number of population (Data of the Committee on Statistics, the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan).

Kazakhstan has always been a country situated in between various civilizations, between Europe and Asia. It has been on the route of the Great Silk Road, which has facilitated commerce and trade, as well as an exchange of ideas and cultures between the civilizations of the West and the East over centuries. As a result, the people of Kazakhstan have always maintained a distinct Eurasian mentality and culture.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan the state language is Kazakh, and Russian has the status of official language, and is considered a language of interethnic communication. More attention is being paid to increasing proficiency in English as an international language, and to forming a trilingual society.

Kazakhstan’s economy has been developing rapidly over the years of its independence. As of 2016, the country’s nominal GDP is 217.9 billion US dollars (47 out of 189), and nominal GDP per capita is 12,602 US dollars (55 out of 181), according to the World Bank. Kazakhstan is a country very rich in natural resources, which has contributed to the fast economic development of the country. However, the government of Kazakhstan has realized the necessity to diversify national economy and reduce reliance on mineral resources and has launched an Accelerated Industrial-Innovative Development Program since 2010. More and more attention is being paid to education, and to a realization that a successful and innovative education system is integral to the country’s economic and overall successful development.

The education system in Kazakhstan and accreditation procedures are regulated by the Law of the RK “On Education” 2007 with amendments and additions adopted in 2011 and 2015. The fundamental basis of the public policy on education is contained in state programmes, which set out the basic principles of education development, programme objectives and related key indicators.
The education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan is multi-level and is based on continuity. It includes the following levels of education:

0. Pre-school education and training – 1-6 years
1. Primary education (4 years); enrolment – 6-7 years.
2. Basic secondary education; enrolment – 10-11 years.
   - general secondary education;
   - technical and vocational education: qualifications of a worker and mid-level specialist, enrolment – 15-16 years
5. Incomplete higher education: applied Baccalaureate; enrolment – 17-18 years.
6. Higher education: a qualification of a Bachelor or specialist in medical programmes; enrolment – 17-18 years.
7. Postgraduate education: qualifications of a Master and PhD.

*Figure 1. The structure of the system of education in the Republic of Kazakhstan*
A vital step in the modernization of the education system was the development and implementation of the National Classification System (NCS), which was enacted in 2012 in the Labor Code of RK. The introduction of the NCS was aimed at solving the problem of skills shortage of HEIs’ graduates.

The NCS structure includes a national qualifications framework, sectoral qualifications frameworks, professional standards, a system of assessment and certification of the quality of qualifications.

The NCS is based on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), harmonized with the European Qualifications Framework through 8 levels of education. To this day more than 20 sectoral qualifications frameworks and 345 professional standards have been developed based on the NQF. The professional standards are being improved in conjunction with the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, work on creating independent centers assigning qualifications is being continued.

Further improvement of all elements of the National system will undoubtedly improve the quality of training and the effectiveness of the education system and the labor market.

### 3.2 Higher education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan

According to the Committee of Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of RK and the Department of Higher and Postgraduate Education and International Cooperation of the MES RK on October, 2015, there are 127 HEIs in Kazakhstan, including 9 national, 31 public, 13 non-civil, 16 joint-stock companies, 60 private, 1 international and an autonomous educational institution “Nazarbayev University”.

![Figure 2. Dynamics of the network of HEIs in the Republic of Kazakhstan (1991-2015)](image)

At the time Kazakhstan attained its independence in 1991, there were 55 public HEIs, regulated by the MES RK. With the introduction of private education the total number of HEIs has increased dramatically, reaching by 2001 its maximum value - 182.
In recent years, in order to improve the quality of higher education, the Government has cut the number of HEIs and has increased the qualification requirements for HEIs’ licensing. In addition, in 2010 a ban on the activities of HEIs’ branches was legislatively introduced. As a result, the number of HEIs has decreased due to their merger, consolidation and transformation into TVET organizations.

Today there are various types of HEIs in higher education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan: national research university, national university, research university, university, academy, institute (implements undergraduate programmes only) and equated to them HEIs (conservatory, higher school, higher college).

An important stage in the development of Kazakhstan’s system of higher education was the creation of the Nazarbayev University in Astana, working on the basis of latest achievements and technologies in higher education. The study process at the university is conducted in English and is based on international educational standards, with the involvement of foreign professors. Nazarbayev University became the first university in Kazakhstan, which was granted autonomy in governance, funding, and academic standards. Therefore, a special law on Nazarbayev University was adopted. Currently, the best practices of Nazarbayev University are actively transmitted to the leading HEIs of the country.

HEIs are located in all regional centers of Kazakhstan and cities to provide physical access to higher education and meet regional needs in specialists with higher education degrees. Currently, 459,369 students study in HEIs of Kazakhstan. Since 2003, the number of students has decreased by 30.2%.

As seen in Figure 3, the number of students in HEIs tends to decrease, while in 2003, the number of students rose from 658,106 up to 775,762 in 2005, and then declined to 459,369 in 2015.

Reduction of the number of students is primarily related to demographic processes, low fertility, the crisis during the period of gaining its sovereignty by Kazakhstan, as well as increased government grants to TVET organizations for implementation of industrial-innovative development programmes of the state.

According to the Law of the RK “On Education”, the educational services are provided in the form of full-time, part-time and evening studies. In the higher education system full-time enrollment is 75.4%, part-time is 20.2%, evening is 4.4% of the total number of students in HEIs.

Figure 3. The number of students in HEIs of the RK in 2003-2015, thousand
Currently, 48.3% of students study in public HEIs, 50.3% study in private HEIs, and 1.3% study in the affiliates of foreign HEIs.

Tuition fees at Kazakhstani HEIs are funded by the state or paid by students. In 2015, the share of students with the state funded grants was 139,330 persons (29.3%), while the share of self-funded students was 335,511 persons (70.7%). Over the last five years there is a tendency to a decrease in the total number of educational grants, allocated by the state for the undergraduates. If 35,681 grants were allocated for undergraduates in 2011, in 2015 this number was 28,509. There is an increase in the number of grants for postgraduates from 5,159 in 2011 to 6,682 in 2015. Annual admission to PhD programmes by state educational grants for the above mentioned period ranged from 500 to 600 persons, which is, of course, did not satisfy the needs of those wishing to enroll in a PhD programme. Therefore, in 2016 the MES RK decided to train PhD students for a fee, along with state educational grants.

In 2015, the number of teaching staff of HEIs in Kazakhstan was 38,087 persons, which is lower than 2003’s statistics by 7%. The reduction in the number of the teaching staff is related to optimization of HEIs, taken place since 2011, and the decrease in student enrollment. The proportion of the teaching staff with a research degree and title is 49.1%, the proportion of specialists with a research title is 23% (data from the National report, 2014). In the gender dimension there are predominantly women among the teaching staff of HEIs (63.9%).

3.3 Integration of the education system of Kazakhstan in the European Higher Education Area

In March 2010, Kazakhstan officially acceded to the Bologna Declaration and became the 47th member of the European Higher Education Area and the first state from Central Asia, recognized as a full member of the European Higher Education Area.

The transition to a multi-tier model of education was fully completed in accordance with the Bologna Process. According to the National report on the status and development of education system of the RK (2014 results) Master’s study programmes are offered in 118 HEIs, enrolling 32,527 persons, including 16,220 state-funded students. The share of Master students, who defended their dissertation theses, is 92%.

PhD study programmes are offered in 16 leading HEIs on the basis of state grants. In 2014, the number of students in PhD study programmes was 2,063. In the same year 38 HEIs offered double diploma degrees and 42 HEIs offered distance learning. Currently, there are ongoing academic discussions regarding the need to improve the quality of Master’s and PhD study programmes by strengthening their research component, by orienting research on concrete problems of innovational development and by increasing requirements for prospective students.

In conditions of crisis, the former plans of the MES RK on increasing grants for PhD studies are postponed. The number of government grants for PhD studies does not fully meet the needs of HEIs. Apart from government grants, there is a need to allow self-funded PhD studies for full-time teaching and research staff of HEIs (where the tuition will be covered by HEIs, teaching staff themselves, etc.), but this issue remains unresolved.
Currently, the Kazakhstani system of higher education, which includes the implemented American credit system, is changing due to the introduction of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the general European system of accounting for student’s work study progress in completing a study programme or course. The ECTS Users’ Guide, approved by the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in May 14-15, 2015, is currently being implemented. In recent years, academic mobility of teaching staff and students has been actively developed. Exchange programmes are funded by the state budget and HEIs’ own funds.

Kazakhstani HEIs are members of the European associations in education, in particular 15 of them have associate membership in the European University Association (EUA), 16 – in the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE).

International experience shows that modern management and strategic planning in HEIs define their success. Collegial management bodies, which include stakeholders, are the tool for ensuring transparency, accountability, fairness and responsibility of universities. In this regard, 10 large Kazakhstani HEIs have established supervisory boards: L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Al Farabi Kazakh National University, K.I. Satpayev Kazakh National Technical University and others.

This issue also deserved special attention in the new State Programme-2016. It is planned to implement principles of corporate governance through gradual extension of academic, administrative and financial autonomy of HEIs, as well as development of endowment funds in HEIs. The higher education system in Kazakhstan is presented in more details in the thematic analysis on the website of the Agency.

3.4 National system of quality assurance in education

Quality assurance in education is one of the most topical and significant issues in the Kazakhstani system of higher education. The formation of the national system of quality assurance started in the beginning of 2000s and it was impacted by two important factors. First is serious heritage of centralized state control over quality of training specialists, while second is emergence of a large number of private universities and introduction of paid education, which increased access to HEIs but negatively affected the quality of education.

The history of establishing accreditation procedures in Kazakhstan can be defined by two stages.

**Stage 1 - 1999-2009.** The first concept of accreditation of HEIs was introduced in the Law of the RK “On Education” in 1999, which along with the state attestation enacted accreditation.

Later, in 2001, the Law of the RK “On Education” introduced the procedure of state accreditation, which was mainly based on the assessment of quantitative indicators. Data on quantitative indicators was gathered and processed by the Department of State Inspection of the MES RK, which submitted information to the Accreditation Council. As a result of only three meetings of the Accreditation Council held under the chairmanship of the Minister of Education and Science of the RK, 59 (47 public and 12 private) out of 182 HEIs were accredited within a week. This hasty procedure of the Ministry, which did not comply with the process of
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

accreditation, was highly criticized by both public and private universities. Consequently, state accreditation has been suspended for almost 10 years.

In 2005 the National Accreditation Center was established under the umbrella of the MES RK with the aim of developing standards and procedures and conducting institutional and specialized accreditation. The National Accreditation Center launched the work on design of the methodology of accreditation procedure.

Democratization of social and economic processes in the state, growing demands of the public in obtaining good quality higher education, and studying of international tendencies in quality assurance led to the new edition of the Law of the RK “On Education” in 2007. This Law, in addition to the changes in different levels of education, provided for an accreditation procedure for HEIs this time in a separate article. As such, accreditation was a voluntary procedure, and did not involve any consequences for universities. Therefore, state control in form of state attestation remained the main source of external assessment.

Stage 2 - 2010-2016 - formation of the independent (public) system of quality assurance through the development of independent accreditation.

During this time, the government programs and documents, public discussions devoted more and more attention to state-private partnership in different fields of economy of Kazakhstan and partial transfer of controlling functions in the field of education to non-governmental organizations. In March 2010, the Republic of Kazakhstan signed the Bologna Declaration, which specified quality assurance through accreditation as one of its main principles. ESG have made a powerful impact on the improvement of the national quality assurance system and changing the focus points in the policy document of the state.

This is why, not surprisingly, the State Programme on Education Development for 2011-2020 included the notion of independent accreditation, which was mainly based on ESG and international practice. The third adopted State Programme for 2011-2020 was a strong impetus in the development of the first Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, which was established in 2008.

In 2011, as a result of amendments to the then existing Law of the RK “On Education” the role of accreditation was significantly strengthened. While state attestation remained, the amendments legislatively provided for the allocation of state grants only to the universities that passed institutional and specialized accreditation. In the same year, Kazakhstan saw emergence of the second accreditation agency, IAAR. Modernization of the accreditation institute and the focus on ESG, including establishment of systems of internal quality assurance in educational organizations, learning outcomes, openness and transparency of decisions on accreditation encouraged the universities.

At the end of 2011, the MES RK developed the Order on the procedure of maintaining the National Register of accreditation bodies. This Register appeared on the basis and as a result of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) because development of the Order involved a review of the European documents and consultations with ENQA representatives, who together with IQAA held a seminar in 2011 for Central Asian countries in Astana, as well as consultations with EQAR.
At the end of 2011, the Order on the National Register of accreditation bodies was signed. In May 2012, a meeting of the Republican Accreditation Council took place and the Council decided to form the National Register of accreditation bodies, which at that time included six agencies. Director of EQAR, Mr Colin Tück, was an invited guest to the meeting of the Republican Accreditation Council.

At present, the National Register includes two national and eight foreign QA agencies. See Annex 1.

The agencies-members of the National Register have a certificate signed by the Minister of Education and Science of RK for a five-year period. Every five years agencies are subject to recertification. The European agencies listed in EQAR are recognized by the MES RK, however, they must register in Kazakhstan.

As of today (July 2016), 95 HEIs underwent institutional accreditation, which represents 83.3% out of all HEIs. The total number of accredited study programmes has reached 2,632. Out of this, 61 HEIs (63.5% from the total number of accredited HEIs) and 1,386 (52.7%) study programmes were accredited by IQAA, which demonstrates a high level of HEIs’ trust in the Agency, see Annex 2.

In the future, the number of HEIs and study programmes, participating in the accreditation procedure will be growing because a quality culture is gradually being formed in Kazakhstan, which culture serves as the base for HEIs’ aspiration to increase their competitiveness.

Moreover, the adoption of the Law of the RK “On Introducing Amendments to Some Legislative Acts in the Field of Education” No.398-V dated 13 November 2015 introduced additional incentives for the development of accreditation.

Firstly, it is the exemption from state attestation of study programmes that passed both institutional and specialized accreditation. In addition, starting from 1 January 2017 documents on completion of education of state format will be given to students, who successfully finish study programmes in HEIs that have passed international accreditation in foreign or national accreditation agencies listed in the National Register. As a result, private universities began to show more interest in accreditation to obtain a possibility of issuing a diploma of state format.

However, starting from 2021 all HEIs, regardless of their form of ownership, will issue diplomas of their own format.

“From 2017, there will be a complete transition from state attestation of HEIs to accreditation. It envisages the creation of an effective system of quality assurance in education, including both internal and external quality assurance”. – Excerpts from the State Programme of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016-2019.

At present, the national quality assurance system of higher education consists of two parts: functions of state control, exercised by the Committee of Control in the Fields of Education and Science of the MES RK, and accreditation procedures conducted by independent accreditation agencies included in the National Register.
Table 2. Distribution of powers in QA between the MES RK and accreditation agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State control by the MES RK</th>
<th>Independent assessment of quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Licensing and post-licensing control</td>
<td>Institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control over educational organizations’ compliance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan</td>
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<tr>
<td>External assessment of students’ learning outcomes (tests for final year students)</td>
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<tr>
<td>State attestation for military and specialized HEIs</td>
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</table>

Thus, to the modern stage, Kazakhstan has developed a multi-level national system of quality assessment in education, which represents a complex system of state control and independent quality assessment of education. Incentive mechanisms to support accreditation have been created and enacted in legislation. At the same time, taking into account that integration of the state into the European Higher Education Area sets objectives for accreditation agencies to join European structures, such as ENQA and EQAR, the national system of quality assurance continues to improve in order to comply with the ESG.

4. HISTORY, PROFILE AND ACTIVITIES OF IQAA

4.1 Establishment and development of IQAA

The growing role of education in increasing the competitiveness of the state and acceptance of best international practices in quality assurance prompted real mission for Kazakhstan – to implement a transfer to independent accreditation of educational organizations and study programmes.

In 2007, the Law of the RK “On Education” introduced an article “Accreditation of educational organizations” which specified the voluntary nature of the accreditation procedure and its completion at the expense of the educational institutions’ own funds. The Law included procedures on accreditation and gave sufficient freedom to accreditation agencies.

In 2008, IQAA was established as a non-governmental and non-profit organization in form of a non-state institution according to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Non-Profit Organizations”. For Agency to operate, the founder allocated necessary financial resources for the organization of IQAA, purchase of modern equipment and lease of the office, chosen in the new center of Astana city. IQAA employed a small number of staff. The extracts from the IQAA Statute are available on the website, while the full version is available in the office.

In the beginning of IQAA’s activities, along with institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of HEIs and TVET organizations, IQAA conducted academic ranking of HEIs as one of the main types of activity. Until 2015, the Agency implemented both accreditation procedures and ranking of HEIs. In 2015, the IQAA’s Statute was amended. The procedure of academic ranking of HEIs was transferred to another organization “IQAA Ranking”, with its
own website [www.nkaoko.kz](http://www.nkaoko.kz), but which continues to interact with the Agency. The survey of experts, who participated in external reviews of HEIs, is conducted in ranking of HEIs and their study programmes. In 2015, the number of founders of IQAA included a public organization “National Association “Expert”, which was established by a group of experts in 2013.

The establishment of the first Kazakhstan independent quality assurance agency was supported by the academic community of the state and became an impetus to the establishment and further development of the national system of independent accreditation in Kazakhstan.

In 2008-2009, IQAA studied international experience and best practices on accreditation, based on which IQAA developed standards and criteria of accreditation, guidelines for external review of educational organizations and study programmes, the Code of Honor for accreditation experts and other necessary documents.

The initial version of IQAA’s standards and criteria for institutional and specialized accreditation of HEIs was developed in accordance with the Law of the RK “On Education”, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2005), and extensive accreditation experience of American accreditation agencies, in consideration with remarks and suggestions from representatives of HEIs. The external expert review of the standards was conducted by the Republican State Enterprise “Uchebnik” under the MES RK and then by the National Association “Expert”. The final version of the standards was approved and enacted by the order of the President of IQAA.

First accreditation procedures took place only at the end of 2009. Due to the voluntary nature of accreditation and HEIs’ incentive to undergo it just for their prestige, only five universities underwent institutional accreditation procedure by the mid of 2011.

During this period, IQAA actively joined nationwide processes to promote accreditation procedures in the higher education system. In order to stimulate HEIs to apply for accreditation, IQAA suggested a series of legislative amendments. In this respect, the Agency worked closely with the MES RK, and carried out extensive outreach to inform the public about the importance and benefits of accreditation. As the result of this work, independent accreditation as a term was introduced into the State Programme of Education Development for 2011-2020 and the legislative transition from state attestation to independent accreditation from 2017 was ensured. The period 2014-2017 was declared as a transitional period, during which state attestation and independent accreditation would be conducted in parallel.

As a result of revision of ESG, adopted at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in 2015, the IQAA standards have been revised and brought in line with the amendments in ESG. Revised IQAA standards have been reviewed and discussed at forums, conferences and seminars, organized by the Agency (see 11.2 Standard ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose). At these events representatives of HEIs, experts and students had an opportunity to consider in details the revised standards and share their opinions on improvement of IQAA’s standards and the accreditation procedure in general. Therefore, a dialogue with the stakeholders significantly influenced improvement of the standards and public information.

While realizing the initiatives in the field of quality assurance in education, IQAA makes a big impact towards development of the quality assurance system and on continuously actively
participates in national discussions in this field. It was the close interaction with the Parliament of the RK and employers, members of the Accreditation Council of IQAA, that helped strengthen the accreditation procedure in the latest amendments of the Law of RK “On Education” 2015. Every year since 2011 the National Report on the Educational System of the RK makes a reference to IQAA’s activities. Three representatives of IQAA within the official delegation from Kazakhstan participated in the 2015 Yerevan Ministerial Conference. This demonstrates a high reputation of IQAA and recognition of its contribution to the development of the national system of education.

4.2 Organizational structure of IQAA

In accordance with the Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the RK No. 304 dated June 27, 2012, IQAA was included in the National Register of Accreditation Bodies, which grants the rights to conduct institutional and specialized accreditation for a term of five years (until June 2017).

In accordance with the IQAA’s Statute, the Agency is headed by the President, who conducts general management, strategic, financial and personnel planning, formation of aims, tasks, and perspectives of IQAA’s development, as well as represents the Agency in state and public bodies and international networks.

IQAA has 5 departments headed by Heads of departments. Chief accountant reports directly to the President. The overall number of staff amounts to 18 persons. The academic staff of the Agency is composed of 13 people working full-time, including two Professors, Doctors of Pedagogical Sciences; one Associate Professor, Doctor of Biological Sciences; four Associate Professors, Candidates of Sciences; five Masters of Sciences, and one specialist. The composition and provision on each department and management body of the Agency can be found in IQAA’s documents.

The organizational structure of IQAA includes the following departments:

**Administrative and International Relations Department**

The main aim of the department lies in the maintenance of accounting records, work on human resources and legal contracts, records management and international relations.  

*Head of the department* works on the development of international cooperation, represents IQAA in international networks, works with foreign quality assurance agencies and international experts, and is responsible for managing administrative tasks and duties.  

*Chief Accountant* is responsible for accounting and reporting, taxation in accordance with the legislation on accounting, and for maintenance of material and technical resources of IQAA.  

*Lawyer* is in charge of the development, preparation and signing of contracts with higher education institutions and experts, the maintenance the staff members’ personal profiles and documentation, registration of the day to day orders on the staff and business trips; works with government procurement procedures, tracks documentation by departments.  

*Administrator* is responsible for the documents’ management and keeping track of document records: registration, storage and organization of internal and external correspondence of IQAA.
Department of Audit and Post-accreditation Monitoring of HEIs
The Department organizes external reviews (audit) for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of HEIs and preparation of materials for accreditation: SARs, external review reports, conclusions and presentations to the Accreditation Council. This department is also responsible for organizing and conducting post-accreditation monitoring of accredited HEIs and study programmes.

Department of Audit and Post-accreditation Monitoring of TVET organizations
The Department organizes external reviews (audit) for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of TVET organizations and preparation of materials for accreditation: SARs, external review reports, conclusions and presentations to the Accreditation Council, and maintaining the database of experts for TVET organizations. This department is also responsible for organizing and conducting post-accreditation monitoring of accredited TVET organizations and study programmes.

Figure 4. Organizational structure of IQAA

Department of Expertise and Information Technologies
The main aim of the department lies in organizing the expertise of SARs, maintaining activities of Accreditation Committees, presenting of documents for payment of the expertise to the chief accountant, supporting function of IQAA as far as use of information technologies, operation and management of the server, technical works related to the update and maintenance of the IQAA’s website and other types of work.

Department of Analysis and Quality
The Department accumulates, processes, and analyzes data about the quality of activities in the area of accreditation of educational organizations and study programmes in Kazakhstan and
abroad. The staff of the department accumulates, analyzes, and translates information on the best international practices, and disseminates it to all personnel of the Agency. Members of this department carry out cross surveying of expert teams for their feedback after each external review, including the head of the group, the international expert, coordinator, representative of an HEI under accreditation through the online survey platform Survey Monkey. In order to maintain internal quality within the Agency, the department carries out surveying of the IQAA staff. Based on external review reports and analyses of information regarding events in Kazakhstan and abroad, the staff of the department, after research, prepares topical reports and an informational newsletter (bulletin) of IQAA. The department is also responsible for accumulating, updating and revising of the expert database for HEI accreditation.

The main collegial administrative and decision-making bodies of IQAA are the Accreditation Council, the Accreditation Committees, the Appeals Committee and the Complaints Commission.

**The Accreditation Council** is the main governing body of the Agency. It is an elected and collegial body, which includes representatives of the stakeholders: the academic community, an international expert, employers, and students. Term of appointment is five years with a possibility to be reappointed. The Accreditation Council is responsible for approval of the general strategy, governance documentation of IQAA, and decision-making on accreditation. Regulations on the Accreditation Council are presented on the IQAA’s website.

**Functions of the Accreditation Council:**
- Approval of the Regulations on the Accreditation Council.
- Approval of the Strategy of Development of the Agency.
- Decision-making on institutional accreditation of educational institutions.
- Decision-making on programme accreditation of educational institutions.
- Approval of the Regulations on Appeals Committee and appeal procedures.
- Approval of the Regulations on procedures of considering complaints.
- Approval of standards and criteria for accreditation of educational institutions and study programmes.
- Approval of standards for carrying out external reviews of educational institutions and study programmes.
- Approval of annual reports of IQAA.
- Approval of other documents requiring the competencies of the Accreditation Council.

**The Accreditation Committees** are collegial bodies, which include experts of institutional and specialized accreditation for a range of specialties (study programmes).

The main objectives of Accreditation Committees are to assist the Agency staff in the organization of peer reviews of SARs written by HEIs, to improve the existing IQAA database of qualified experts, and to coordinate accord on the composition of expert groups for carrying out the procedure of external visits to educational organizations.

IQAA has established **11 Accreditation Committees**:
- Committee for Institutional Accreditation
- Committee for Educational Specialties
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

- Committee for Humanitarian Specialties, Law and Business
- Committee for Scientific Education
- Committee for Medical Education
- Committee for Agricultural Programmes
- Committee for Specialties in Art and Service
- Committee for Technical Specialties
- Committee for Technological Specialties
- Committee for Specialties in Industry and Construction
- Committee for Information Technologies, Communications and Power Engineering

Each Committee includes 4-5 experts from Kazakhstani HEIs, who have qualifications in the specialties of the Committee. Regulations on the Accreditation Committees can be found on the IQAA website.

The Appeals Committee is a collegial body, which considers appeals from educational institutions against the decision on institutional and/or specialized accreditation, which was made by the Accreditation Council. The decision on the appeal is taken in accordance with the Regulations on the Appeals Committee and the Procedure of Appeal.

The Appeals Committee consists of five recognized experts with substantial experience in the sphere of education and quality assurance in education, two of whom have a legal qualification. The Appeals Committee considers appeals from educational institutions submitted in a written form in accordance with the Regulations.

If the appeal contains the issues falling within the procedure of considering complaints, the Appeals Committee sends these issues for the consideration of the Complaints Commission.

Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the Procedure of Appeal can be found on the IQAA’s website.

The Complaints Commission. IQAA operates in accordance with the principles of transparency and accountability, which are outlined in the IQAA’s Strategy of Development. It assumes the existence of clear and published procedures of response to complaints from educational institutions, which do not agree with remarks and recommendations made by external expert groups.

The Agency has a certain complaints procedure. Consideration of complaints from educational institutions helps to detect violations made during the external review and suggests recommendations for their elimination. Complaints procedure helps to control and evaluate the efficiency of applied procedures maintaining openness and responsibility of the Agency staff, and constitutes a part of the strategy aimed at improving quality of IQAA’s activities and its expert groups.

Regulations on the Procedure of Considering Complaints and composition of the Complaints Commission can be found on the IQAA’s website.
4.3 Activities of IQAA

The core work area of the Agency is to carry out the procedures of institutional and specialized accreditation of educational institutions.

IQAA commenced to conduct institutional and specialized accreditation of public and private HEIs on a regular basis since 2009, public and private TVET organizations – since 2013, scientific research institutions, which offer residency programmes – since 2015.

Table 3. Activities of IQAA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Activities of IQAA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Institutional accreditation of HEIs, including medical HEIs under the competence of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development of the RK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Specialized accreditation of HEIs, including medical HEIs under the competence of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development of the RK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Institutional accreditation of Scientific Research institutions’ units, including Scientific Research institutions under the competence of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development of the RK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Specialized accreditation of study programmes of Scientific Research institutions, delivering postgraduate programmes (Master’s degree, Residency), including Scientific Research institutions under the competence of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development of the RK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Institutional accreditation of TVET organizations, including medical colleges under the competence of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development of the RK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Specialized accreditation of study programmes of TVET organizations including medical colleges under the competence of the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development of the RK.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Institutional accreditation of professional development organizations and centers for additional education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Specialized accreditation of study programmes of professional development organizations and centers for additional education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional types of activities of IQAA:

- ✔ participation in preparation of regulatory legal acts on the evaluation of the quality of education and other related matters of the legal regulations, developed by legislative and competent authorities and professional organizations;
- ✔ organization and conducting of international, republican and regional conferences, symposiums and workshops in quality assurance;
- ✔ international cooperation with accreditation agencies and organizations, membership in international organizations in the main area of the Agency’s activities;
- ✔ interaction with the stakeholder organizations (employers, students’ unions) on quality assessment of educational institutions.

Objectives of IQAA:

- ✔ systematic improvement of the methodology, standards and criteria for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation on the basis of ESG and international projects;
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

✓ organization and carrying out institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of educational institutions;
✓ organization and conducting of the educational audit, review of educational institutions;
✓ provision of assistance and support to educational organizations in order to enhance efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability in different directions of educational activities;
✓ design and effectiveness improvement of the internal quality assurance systems of HEIs;
✓ promotion of a quality culture in educational institutions and in the public consciousness;
✓ account and protection of the society’s interests and the rights of consumers by providing reliable information on the quality of educational services;
✓ public dissemination of information on accredited educational institutions and study programmes.

4.4 Activities of IQAA on promoting students’ interests

IQAA pays a special attention to the active participation of students in the process of assessing educational organizations and protection of their rights on quality education. Having defined a student-centered approach as one of its key values in the Strategy of Development for 2015-2018, IQAA developed a plan aimed at the promotion of students’ interests and student-centered learning in Kazakhstani educational organizations.

Figure 5. Plan of IQAA on promoting students’ interests

This plan included three main directions of work with students: promotion of students’ awareness, training of students and their involvement in QA procedures. IQAA staff identified effective measures for the implementation of set aims and have been working hard on the improvement of its activities on cooperation with students. Full description of these measures can be found in the Annex 3.
4.5 National cooperation of IQAA

Activities of IQAA are based on the principles of social partnership with the MES RK, National Economic Chamber “Atameken”, National Industrial Chamber, National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Astana, JSC “Information-Analytic Center” under the MES RK, “National Testing Center” under the MES RK, Bologna Process and Academic Mobility Center, JSC “Center for International Programmes”, JSC “Financial Center” under the MES RK, HEIs, TVET organizations, associations of employers, and consumers of educational services.

Seminars and conferences of IQAA. IQAA carries out a considerable work on dissemination of information about innovations in quality assurance of higher education by means of holding seminars and conferences for heads of HEIs, experts, academia and IQAA’s staff. To conduct these events, IQAA invites recognized international researchers and experts in the field of quality assurance. In the framework of these seminars and conferences, all stakeholders and experts have an opportunity to discuss standards and criteria for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation, to ask relevant questions on the external review procedures, and to share their opinions and suggestions on improvement of IQAA activities and the process of accreditation as a whole. Information about conducted events is being regularly posted on IQAA website and social network pages. The list of selected seminars and conferences is presented in the Annex 4 of this report.

Events on sharing experiences and dissemination of information. Apart from organizing seminars and conferences with the involvement of international experts, IQAA also meets with different delegations, e.g., administrators of American universities (2011), shares experience with colleagues from the Former Soviet Union countries on ENQA seminar in Astana, organized in cooperation with IQAA (2011), presents detailed information on its accreditation procedures and documents to the delegation from the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan. In addition, IQAA conducts training workshops for Master students from Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, during which they discuss issues of quality assurance in higher education and the role of accreditation in the system of quality assurance in education. The list of the events is presented in the Annex 4.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS

In the process of self-assessment, the IQAA conducted a SWOT analysis of internal and external environment and activities of the Agency. This exercise has allowed to identify and structure strengths and weaknesses of IQAA, as well as favorable opportunities and potential threats for further development.

Strengths:

1. IQAA’s accreditation standards are based on the ESG, which allows the Agency to carry out institutional and specialized accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs based on integrity, transparency, involvement of stakeholders, openness and dedication to continuous improvement.
2. IQAA is an independent organization, which allows it to conduct accreditation procedures without undue interference from either government agencies, higher education institutions or other third parties.
3. Being a nongovernmental organisation, IQAA has higher flexibility and mobility to introduce new ideas, standards and procedures quickly and without bureaucracy.
4. IQAA’s activities are recognised by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Agency is listed on the National Register of Accreditation Agencies, which authorises and legitimises IQAA’s accreditation procedures on national level.
5. The Agency collaborates with the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan and other public authorities in order to promote and develop the procedure of independent accreditation in Kazakhstan.
6. IQAA studies, applies and disseminates European and international experience and trends on quality assurance, which helps it to continuously improve its activities and distribute them to educational institutions.
7. Since the very beginning of its work, IQAA has involved students, employers, and international experts in all of its peer reviews, which has allowed to involve all stakeholders in quality assurance procedures as well as bring experience from abroad.
8. IQAA has an established reputation and credibility among Kazakhstan’s educational organisations, as evidenced by the highest number of accreditation procedures carried out by the Agency in Kazakhstan, including the leading universities of Kazakhstan.
9. IQAA regularly organises conferences and seminars on quality assurance, innovation and management in higher education, delivered by leading national and international experts, for representatives of higher education institutions, members of the Accreditation Council, members of the Accreditation committees IQAA staff and other stakeholders.
10. IQAA is a member of a number of international networks of quality assurance agencies: an affiliate of ENQA, a full member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEENQA), the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the CHEA International Quality Group (CIQG), an intermediate member of the Asian-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). Membership in these networks helps to gather latest information and trends in quality assurance, exchange ideas and opinions with colleagues from Europe and around the world, which facilitates in introducing improvements in day-to-day work.
11. IQAA has partnerships and agreements on national and international levels: memoranda on cooperation with 12 foreign quality assurance agencies and cooperation agreements with national organizations involved in education, research and quality assurance.
12. IQAA regularly conducts meta-evaluation: surveys of national and international experts, representatives of educational organizations, students, employers, and coordinators, to gather appropriate feedback after each peer review.
13. IQAA has highly competent composition of the Accreditation Council consisting of nationally renowned and competent academics, students, employers and an international expert.
14. IQAA has highly qualified agency staff with extensive work experience in the system of education (three Professors, four Doctors of Sciences, four Candidates of Sciences, and five Masters of Sciences).
15. IQAA not only abides by the ESG in its activities, but actively promotes them on national level. The Agency strives to develop a national culture of quality among higher education institutions of Kazakhstan.
16. IQAA has its own office, which offers comfortable working conditions for the Agency staff and guests. Each department a room on its own, which allows the Agency staff to concentrate on their priority activities. The Agency has a modern conference hall, which is equipped with a videoconferencing system, which enables the Agency staff to conduct webinars with peer review panels on a regular basis. The conference hall is also used to host seminars, workshops and meetings.

17. The Agency has modern technical equipment, computers and software, which allows the Agency staff to effectively manage professional tasks.

18. IQAA has a website with extensive information for stakeholders, regulatory documents of the Agency, a register of accredited higher education institutions and study programmes. Information is regularly updated in three languages: Kazakh, Russian and English. Dissemination of information and news for stakeholders is also carried out by the means of social networks and websites, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Latest news, other useful information and educational videos are available for stakeholders and the public.

19. In addition to accreditation procedures, IQAA is involved in a number of projects in education and research, which helps to widen its outreach among higher education institutions of Kazakhstan.

**Weaknesses:**

1. Insufficient coverage of the different levels of education (pre-school, basic and secondary education, continuous education).
2. Absence of state funding, which means the Agency has to take care of funding on its own, which is not guaranteed.

**Opportunities:**

1. IQAA can expand its outreach in international associations and networks, particularly by gaining membership in ENQA and being listed on EQAR, which would facilitate broader recognition on international level.
2. Expansion and broader coverage of educational organizations (TVET institutions, continuous education) and extension to cover other segments of educational services.
3. Development and improvement of a quality culture among higher education institutions of Kazakhstan, providing assistance to emphasize student-centered learning by the means of implementing procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation, organizing conferences and seminars, and distribution latest information and news on quality assurance.
4. Competitive environment of accreditation agencies regulated by the Ministry of Education and Science provides incentives to continuously improve IQAA’s standards, guides and procedures.

**Threats:**

1. Unstable legislative accreditation environment due to frequent amendments in legal documents and many quality assurance procedures and rules described in sub-legislative orders.
2. Frequent restructuring and optimization of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan, which creates uncertainty in the national higher education system.
3. Competitiveness in the field of accreditation in Kazakhstan can lead to situations, when the choice of an accreditation agency by higher education institutions may depend not on the
best procedures and work ethics, but on the higher feasibility of being accredited more easily and quickly.

6. HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES OF IQAA

Analysis of the IQAA’s activities over the past six years shows the quantitative and qualitative improvements in this area. As it was stated earlier in subsection 3.5, IQAA has accredited the largest number of study programmes on the territory of Kazakhstan. In total, during the last four years the Agency accredited 61 HEIs, 6 research institutions, 1368 study programmes, including 14 medical residency programmes (see Annex 5). As accreditation in Kazakhstan is a voluntary procedure and an educational institution has the right to choose a national or foreign QA agency, the results show a sign of their trust and recognition of the quality of IQAA’s activities. For example, about 56% (5 out of 9) of national HEIs and 17 large regional HEIs in 11 out of 14 regions of Kazakhstan, top Almaty and Astana and their study programmes were accredited by IQAA. The status of accredited HEIs in details is given in the Table 4 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The status of an educational institution</th>
<th>Institutional accreditation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National HEIs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public HEIs</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSC HEIs with the public block of shares</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private HEIs</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International HEIs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the same time, 82 study programmes and 5 HEIs have been accredited with the condition or were not accredited (1 HEI and 3 study programmes) since they partially met or did not meet the standards and criteria of accreditation.

Since 2015 IQAA’s activities on quality assurance in higher education are conducted according to revised IQAA’s standards and criteria, which comply with ESG adopted in Yerevan in 2015. This refers to both institutional and specialized accreditation of HEIs and units of research institutions. In Kazakhstan, medical research institutions that have modern medical equipment and highly qualified teaching staff offer postgraduate training of residents. IQAA conducts accreditation of units of medical research institutions and medical residency programmes since 2015.

Institutional accreditation of HEIs is an assessment of activities of an institution in general. It includes 10 standards that reflect a system of internal quality assurance of the institution. As an example some standards can be mentioned. The first standard reviews the mission, strategic planning and a policy in the field of quality assurance, the second standard deals with general management and information management, the third standard addresses student-centred learning, teaching and assessment… the seventh standard considers research and development work, etc. The IQAA standards for institutional accreditation of HEIs are available on the website.

The Standards for Institutional Accreditation of Research Institutions (units of research institutions) are based on the standards for institutional accreditation of HEIs, which have been adapted for medical research institutions and also have 10 standards.
The standards and criteria for specialized accreditation of HEIs assess study programmes: Bachelor, Master’s, PhD and residency. There are 8 standards of specialized accreditation. The first standard covers aims of study programmes and a policy in the field of quality assurance, the second standard deals with the development and approval of study programmes and information management, the third standard considers student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, etc. The standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of HEIs are available on the website.

The standards and criteria for specialized accreditation of postgraduate education – training of doctors in residency programmes of research institutions – are based on standards for specialized accreditation of HEIs, which have been adapted to residency programmes taking into account a medical profile. Standards for Specialized (Programme) Accreditation of Research Institutions are available on the website.

According to the feedback results on the activities of the Agency, international and national experts - academia, students and employers, as well as accredited educational institutions positively assess the standards for institutional and specialized accreditation and activities of IQAA. The support system of experts, HEIs under review, and public information is appropriately provided by the Agency via sharing information on accreditation on the website of IQAA, delivering workshops for educational institutions, webinars and briefings for expert groups. The findings of the feedback demonstrate the need in strengthening the role of the chair of the expert group, giving more explanation on the purpose and significance of accreditation to HEIs, other educational organizations and all stakeholders. To improve the work of the experts, involved in the examination of the SARs of educational institutions, it is feasible to deliver trainings for them.

The results of the survey, conducted among accredited institutions in person of vice-rectors and heads of quality assurance units, show that they highly appreciate the activities of the Agency, particularly, in planning, management, assuring the quality of teaching staff and student support services. It should be noted, that HEIs believe that the activities of the Agency contributed to development of their internal quality assurance systems, public information mechanisms and student-centered learning and teaching.

IQAA does not conduct accreditation of educational institutions beyond the Kazakhstan’s borders.

7. IQAA’S QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES AND THEIR METHODOLOGIES

The methodology on procedures of quality assurance is aimed at the enhancement of the quality of HEIs’ activities and at the improvement of provided by educational organizations study programmes. Procedures implemented for institutional and specialized accreditation of HEIs and units of research institutions have been developed by the Agency in accordance with the ESG. The methodology of institutional and specialized accreditation of HEIs and units of research institutions is conducted consistently and the processes are basically similar to each other. All the processes include three stages of assessment. However, there are some differences:

- in nomination of experts. For institutional accreditation of HEIs and research institutions a head of an expert group along with professional competences should have
administrative experience at the level of a HEI or a research institution. In case of specialized accreditation the focus is on professional competences and work experience in the field of a study programme under review.

- in duration of an external review procedure. The site visit for institutional accreditation of HEIs lasts for 3 days, institutional accreditation of units of research institutions – 1,5 days, specialized accreditation of HEIs – 2 days, and specialized accreditation of units of research institutions – 1,5 days.

- in a programme of a site visit. The standards of institutional and specialized accreditation differ in scope, therefore the site visit programmes differ in considering the objects, resources and a number of interviews.

- in a template of an external review report, because the standards of institutional and specialized accreditation are different.

The main methodology of procedures of institutional and specialized accreditation of HEIs and research institutions include three stages. The concrete procedures are illustrated in Figure 6 below.

Stage 1

✓ An educational organization submits an application for accreditation with a brief description of its activities and copies of the general license and licenses on study programmes to the IQAA;

✓ IQAA concludes an agreement on carrying out the accreditation procedure with the educational organization concerned. The agreement specifies the rights and obligations of the parties, the cost and terms of the procedure, including the stages; In case of the state HEIs, the contract is concluded only after the completion of the public procurement procedures on the electronic portal;

✓ The IQAA appoints a coordinator, who visits the educational organization, if the Agency is not familiar with the institution. The coordinator holds a training seminar for the working groups of the institution explaining the accreditation procedure and preparation of the SAR. During these seminars, HEIs have an opportunity to get information on any questions related to the procedure of drafting a SAR. Moreover, representatives of a HEI can receive methodological support from the coordinator throughout the whole process of writing a report.

✓ The educational organization conducts a self-assessment procedure and writes a SAR in accordance with the IQAA’s standards and criteria of accreditation;

✓ The educational organization submits the first version of the SAR and IQAA organizes its expertise by independent experts, appointed by the relevant Accreditation Committee of IQAA. The expertise results are sent to the educational organization and if necessary, the SAR should be corrected by the institution;

✓ The educational organization submits the final version of the SAR with annexes to the Agency;

✓ IQAA holds a preliminary review in the framework of institutional accreditation.

The Stage 1 procedures are regulated by the following normative documents of IQAA: an application form for accreditation of HEIs; the Standards and criteria of institutional accreditation of HEIs; the Standards and criteria of specialized (programme) accreditation of HEIs; the Guidelines on organization and conduct of the self-assessment procedure in HEIs; the Guidelines for conducting a preliminary audit at HEIs.
Stage 2

✓ IQAA forms a competent group of experts (auditors), which includes representatives of Kazakhstani educational institutions, international experts, employers and students. The expert group is formed in parallel with the expertise of the SAR;
✓ IQAA informs the educational organization on the composition of the expert group in advance. In case of any suspicions of a conflict of interest, the educational organization has the right to request the Agency to replace an expert (auditor) by enclosing a written reasoned explanation. In the course of preparing the educational organization for the external review, IQAA maintains a constant dialogue with HEIs for providing clarifications or answering additional questions, which may arise.
✓ The IQAA coordinator sends self-assessment materials and documents on methodological support to the expert group members for their preparation a month before the external review;
✓ The IQAA coordinator conducts a preliminary webinar (online) with the expert group in order to train them and discuss organizational issues and preparation to the site visit; a briefing (at the university) is conducted before the commencement of the external review (site visit);
✓ The expert group and the IQAA coordinator conduct an external review of the educational organization (the site visit usually lasts three days for institutional accreditation and two days for specialized accreditation of a group of study programmes). The external review is aimed at assessment of correspondence of information presented in the SAR with the actual state of affairs in the educational organization;
✓ The expert group forms an external review report indicating fields for improvement, recommendations and good practice, and sends it to the IQAA coordinator;
✓ The IQAA coordinator sends the received external review report to the educational organization for elimination of factual inaccuracies, if any of such are present. The educational organization also has the right to submit its written commentary on the external review report, which should be reviewed together with other materials at the meeting of the Accreditation Council of IQAA on decision-making;
✓ Right after the external review is completed, a staff member from the Department of Analysis and Quality of IQAA sends all participants of the accreditation procedure a link to online survey asking them to assess the quality of work delivered by the experts for expertise of the SAR, the expert group for the external review, and the IQAA coordinator. The survey is made via Survey Monkey platform. The outcomes are analyzed, summarized and used for development of the IQAA’s internal quality assurance;
✓ If necessary, the educational organizations can use a complaints procedure.

The Stage 2 procedures are regulated by the following normative documents of IQAA: the Code of Honor for accreditation experts; the Code of Honor for IQAA employees; the Standards and criteria of institutional accreditation of HEIs, the Standards and criteria of specialized (programme) accreditation of HEIs; the Standards and guidelines on external quality assurance for institutional and programme accreditation; the Guidelines on organization and conduct of the external review procedure in HEIs; instruction for coordinators on organization and conducting of the external review in the framework of institutional and specialized accreditation; guidelines for student-experts participating in institutional and programme accreditation procedures; questionnaire forms for students and teaching staff; a template of the external review report; the Provision on survey procedure with the use of Survey Monkey; the Regulations on the procedure of considering complaints.
Stage 3
✓ Based on the SAR and the external review report, IQAA coordinator prepares a conclusion, which is first agreed with the Accreditation committee, and a presentation for the Accreditation Council;

*Figure 6. Stages of the accreditation procedure*
The accreditation process begins with a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) submitted by the educational organization or study programme. At its meeting, the Accreditation Council of IQAA reviews all necessary materials and makes a decision on accreditation based on the SAR and the external review report, a presentation, and a conclusion. However, additional information from members of the Accreditation Council can change the assessment. IQAA notifies the educational organization and the expert group members who conducted the external review. If necessary, the educational organizations can use the appeals procedure. IQAA publishes the external review report and the presentation on its website in the section “External review reports”. IQAA includes accredited educational organizations and study programmes in the Register of IQAA and publishes them on the website in the sections “List of accredited HEIs” and “List of accredited study programmes”. IQAA sends information on accredited educational organizations and study programmes to the Ministry of Education and Science of the RK for their inclusion in the National Registers. IQAA conducts a post-accreditation monitoring of accredited educational organizations and study programmes.

The Stage 3 procedures are regulated by the following normative documents of IQAA: the Provision on Accreditation Committees; the Provision on the Accreditation Council; the Provision on decision-making of the Accreditation Council on institutional accreditation; the Provision on decision-making of the Accreditation Council on specialized (programme) accreditation; the Code of Honor for the Accreditation Council Members; the Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the procedure of appeal; the Regulations on post-accreditation monitoring.

Post-accreditation monitoring. IQAA commenced post-accreditation monitoring in November 2015 due to the revised standards of the Agency. Before that, HEIs submitted information to IQAA on elimination of remarks. Every year HEIs should submit their reports on achievements and changes made during the year to support their internal quality assurance in accordance with standards of institutional/specialized accreditation and the Regulations on post-accreditation monitoring. Post-accreditation monitoring is conducted on the basis of a bilateral agreement between IQAA and the educational organization concerned. HEIs show in the reports how they implement recommendations and eliminate remarks given in the course of the external review. These reports serve as not only a monitoring tool, but also a source of important information – they help IQAA to analyze the development and dynamics of internal quality assurance in HEIs.

8. IQAA’S INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

IQAA is a constantly developing, learning and progressing organization, which continuously acquires experience and critically assesses its activities. To achieve the aims of the Agency the administration and staff analyze their activities, take corrective measures, and periodically review the documents of IQAA: standards, guidelines, provisions, etc. IQAA attaches great importance to acquiring new knowledge, experience exchange and ongoing training of the staff.
In order to systemize and improve the internal quality assurance, the Agency developed the **Internal Quality Assurance Policy**, which states about the commitment of IQAA to quality as a prerequisite for ongoing improvement of our activities. The policy in the field of quality ensures a basis for quality assurance of all procedures implemented by IQAA.

The Internal Quality Assurance Policy determines the following procedures:
- Quality policy;
- Effective management;
- Document management;
- Professional staff;
- Competent experts;
- Equal treatment of all educational organizations;
- Mechanisms of external and internal communication.

**Quality policy.** In 2015, IQAA commenced the revision of its values, vision, strategy of the Agency due to the preparation of the SAR and external review. All key documents (mission, policy, vision, values, strategy and others) are described in the section 10.1 of this report. In order to achieve strategic objectives, which have been set by the government on enhancement of the quality in the field of higher education (see State Programme of Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016-2019, p. 61), IQAA focuses all its efforts to assure the high level of the quality for all its procedures on the provision of quality services to higher education institutions. The general responsibility for quality policy rests with the management of the agency.

**Effective management.** The Agency guarantees that all administrative processes are effective and comply with the Internal Quality Assurance Policy of IQAA. The management staff (President and Heads of departments) is responsible for operation of the internal system of quality assurance.

**Document management.** Regulatory documents related to the procedures of accreditation are approved by the Accreditation Council; all other documents are approved by the President of the Agency. The IQAA lawyer is in charge of preparing drafts of contracts with HEIs and the internal documentation: job descriptions of the staff members, regulations, Orders within the Agency and others.

**Professional staff.** The Agency establishes high professional standards to its staff and works with all actors (persons, organizations, authority bodies, etc.) with respect, dignity and courtesy. New members of staff are asked to study the Code of Honor for IQAA employees and sign it if they agree to follow it. IQAA staff works in compliance with ethical norms, high quality culture, principles of accountability and effectiveness. All employees of IQAA take responsibility for quality and timely implementation of their duties. The Agency values and appreciates mutual assistance and team work. IQAA regularly conducts training seminars and other types of work, which allow its employees to increase their qualification and competencies. Though, sometimes employees make mistakes in their operations, which are corrected.

**Competent experts.** IQAA guarantees that members of expert groups are competent and do not hold any conflicts of interests. This is assured by the procedures applied in order to form external
expert groups. Participation in workshops, webinars is obligatory for all expert group members, who take part in external reviews.

Selection of members for Accreditation committees is carried out by the IQAA Commission following the suggestions from HEIs. One of the main criteria for their selection is professionalism and absence of conflicts of interests.

**Equal treatment of all educational organizations.** IQAA ensures the equal treatment of all HEIs by consistent application of preliminary determined and published standards and criteria, guidelines for preparation of SARs, standards and guidelines for external quality assurance. The agency guarantees the attraction of competent experts, who possess appropriate knowledge applied to a HEI or a study programme.

**External and internal mechanisms of feedback.** In order to ensure ongoing internal quality assurance at the Agency, the IQAA regularly conducts an online survey of coordinators, representatives of educational organizations, national and international experts involved to conduct accreditation procedures and those experts, who are invited to write conclusions on SARs of HEIs under review.

The survey is conducted on a regular basis during a year taking into account the schedule of external reviews by means of the Survey Monkey platform.

The results of survey are formed in a form of analytical paper, which includes statistical data on different groups, conclusions and recommendations. The analysis of survey results is made for each external review.

The survey ensures systemic and consistent nature, anonymity of answers, confidentiality of data, awareness of respondents on the aim and significance of the survey, reliability and accessibility of presenting the results. Information received in the course of the survey is used for improvement of the IQAA’s activities.

At present, all employees on a regular basis participate in a survey to study their satisfaction with the conditions of work in the Agency. This survey is carried out to obtain objective information on working conditions and receive suggestions from employees. Earlier, when the number of staff was small, President of IQAA held individual conversations with employees concerning their satisfaction with the working conditions.

The Accreditation Council also plays a specific role in quality assurance of the Agency. It reviews and approves all regulatory documents of IQAA: standards and criteria for the system of internal quality assurance for institutional or specialized (programme) accreditation, standards and criteria for external quality assurance and other documents. The Accreditation Council regularly takes part in the development and quality assurance of accreditation procedures and also contributes to the ongoing development and transparency of the accreditation system.
Figure 7. IQAA’s internal quality assurance

**Internal quality assurance**

- **Quality policy**: Assurance of the high quality for all IQAA procedures on the provision of quality services to HEIs by the means of the constant monitoring and improvement of procedures, documents and the policy.

- **Effective management**: Administrative procedures of IQAA are effective and comply with the Guideline for internal quality assurance.

- **Document management**: Regulatory documents on accreditation are approved by the Accreditation council; all other documents are approved by the President of IQAA.

- **Professional staff and competent experts**: High professional standards to the staff; Compliance with the Code of honor by all staff members; Regular professional development of qualifications and competencies by the staff; Competent members of expert groups with no conflicts of interests; Obligatory training of all external experts.

- **Equal treatment of all educational organizations**: The equal treatment of all HEIs by consistent application of preliminary determined and published standards and criteria, guidelines and other necessary documents.

- **Mechanisms of external and internal communication**: Regular cross-check online surveys of coordinators, representatives of HEIs, national and international experts; Formation of analytical papers; Surveying of the agency staff.
9. INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF IQAA

Internationalization and raising public awareness about European and international innovations in the field of quality assurance is one of the key areas of IQAA activities aimed at the integration of Kazakhstani sector of higher education into the EHEA. Participation in international events and joint projects is considered as an important factor for support of the Agency’s activities at the high level in line with the international trends in the field of higher education and quality assurance.

By declaring its commitment to the general values of quality in the global educational area, IQAA strives to be a part of international networks for quality assurance in education. Representatives of IQAA participate in conferences and seminars conducted by international organizations.

IQAA is:
- an affiliate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA);
- a full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE);
- a full member of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA);
- a full member of the CHEA International Quality Group;
- an intermediate member of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN);
- a co-founder organization of the IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence.

IQAA is actively involved in bilateral cooperation. One of the areas of this activity is the invitation of international experts and their inclusion into external expert groups. To date, approximately 150 international experts from 23 European countries, the USA, Malaysia, and Turkey have participated in the IQAA external reviews. However, the main pool of international experts have been from Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Germany.

IQAA has signed 12 contracts and memoranda on cooperation with the following foreign QA agencies.

IQAA constantly analyzes the issues concerning the international experiences in conducting accreditation procedures, activities of foreign QA agencies, participates in international projects, contributes to the dissemination of good practices in the area of quality assurance in education. To do this, representatives of the Agency visited QA agencies EKKA (Estonia, 2014), SKVC (Lithuania, 2014) and ACPUA (Spain, 2015) and analyzed their experience in quality assurance activities.

IQAA actively works on the dissemination of information, documents and materials on the Bologna Process, quality assurance in higher education, and participates in international projects:
- in 2009, on the basis of the contract with the World Bank, IQAA translated, published and disseminated among Kazakhstani HEIs a book written by the international expert in tertiary education, Jamil Salmi, “The Challenge of Establishing World-Class Universities”;

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In 2010, on the basis of the contract with the Research Center for the Issues of Quality Training of Specialists under the National Research Technological University MISiS (Moscow, Russia) IQAA published a series of four books, which present translation of the Bologna Process materials:

- Bologna Process: Learning Outcomes and a Competence-based Approach (annex book No.1, 536 pages);
- Bologna Process: European and National Structures of Qualifications (annex book No.2, 220 pages);

In the same year, in agreement with the Research Center MISiS, IQAA published the book “Main Trends of Higher Education Development: Global and Bologna Measures” (352 pages). This edition reflects on information on tendencies of development of higher education, which was presented at World Conference UNESCO and the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in the Bologna Process signatory states. The book consists of two parts: an analytical report and annexes.

On the basis of the materials of the five books the Agency conducted a series of seminars for Kazakhstani HEIs. At the suggestion of the MES RK, IQAA disseminated books among Kazakhstani HEIs, and the books made a significant impact towards correct understanding and application of the Bologna Process official documents by the academic community.

- on the basis of the agreement on cooperation with the Boston College Center for International Higher Education (CIHE), in 2009-2013 IQAA translated, edited and published at its own funds the Russian edition of the journal “International Higher Education”. The Agency disseminated electronic form of the journal for academic community of CIS countries and Kazakhstan for free;
- IQAA participated in the project of the World Bank “Technical and Vocational Education Modernization”, the outcome of which was a publication of the collection of articles “Analytical review of methodologies and procedures on international and national accreditation of technical and vocational educational organizations” (2012);
- IQAA participated in the Tempus project 517340-TEMPUS-1-2011-1-IT-SMGR “Documentation for Quality Assurance of Study Programs – DoQuP” (2012-2015), which was coordinated by the University of Genoa.
- in the framework of the joint project of the European Union and Council of Europe “Supporting Education Policies in Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education in Kazakhstan” IQAA held seminars in Astana, Kyzylorda, Shymkent, and international conferences in Astana and Karaganda (2013 - 2014);
- In April 2014, IQAA was visited by the official delegation of the Nazarbayev University headed by Dr. Mary Canning, member of the Higher Education Authority and Royal Academy of Sciences, Ireland (a former lead specialist on education in the World Bank). Dr. Mary Canning was invited as an international expert on higher education to the Consultative Group of the project “Development of Strategic Directions of Education Reforming in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2015-2020”, realized by the Graduate School of Education, Nazarbayev University, under the instruction of the MES RK. The visit was made to learn about IQAA’s activities, in the course of which Dr. Mary Canning highly commended the work of the Agency and realization of independent accreditation in Kazakhstan as a whole.
IQAA translated ESG 2015 into Kazakh and Russian to promote them in Kazakhstan and CIS countries. Translated standards are available at ENQA website.

In cooperation with different educational organizations, IQAA has joined the consortiums on Tempus projects with the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, decision on which will be known in August 2016. These are the following projects:

1) “Promoting internationalization of research by means of creation and introducing of the cycle 3 quality assurance system (C3QA) in accordance with the European Programme of Integration” with the French University in Armenia (UFAR);
2) “Development of systematic evaluation procedures for quality assurance in Central Asia in the field of education – CAQAAE” with the University of Porto (IPP);
3) “Strengthening students’ potential in creating a quality culture in Kazakhstan – SCAN” with the University of International Business (UIB);
4) “Transcontinental bridge: transmission of European principles of external quality assurance to Central Asia” with the University of Algarve (UAig);
5) “Input: implementing the Bologna principles and providing standardization for Master programmes on global nature management” with the University of Koblenz-Landau (UKOLD).
10. COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 3)

10.1 ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

**Standard:**
Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

IQAA’s compliance with the standard

**Mission of IQAA** is to contribute to improvement of quality of education, to increase competitiveness of Kazakhstani educational institutions at national and international levels and to promote a quality culture in educational organizations and public consciousness.

**Policy of IQAA.** IQAA directs its activity at satisfying the needs of all stakeholders – students, their parents, academic staff, educational organizations, state bodies, the society and employers at large.

**The vision** is based on the values of IQAA and meets the political, legislative, economic, social and technological context of Kazakhstan.

IQAA strives to become an organization, acting and recognized not only at national level, but also at international level. The Agency works on development of new ideas and forms for quality assurance in educational institutions, on dissemination of good foreign practice for enhancement of activities of HEIs.

**The values of IQAA** present a complex of the key principles of work and position of the Agency towards internal and external procedures. The values of IQAA reflect the main interests and competencies of the IQAA staff and are the main guideline for the work of each employee.

**Figure 8. Values of IQAA**
In response to modern challenges in education, IQAA has developed the Strategy of Development for 2015-2018, which was reapproved at the meeting of the Accreditation Council on 28 May, 2016.

According to the Strategy of Development, the aims of IQAA are:

- Promotion of quality of activities of educational institutions through accreditation of HEIs, TVET organizations, centers of education and their study programmes in accordance with the State Programme on Education Development 2016-2019;
- Priority of the learners’ interests in the policy and activity of the Agency, and in relations with stakeholders;
- Compliance of the Agency’s activities with the main requirements of full membership in ENQA and its inclusion to EQAR;
- Provision of timely and reliable information to the public about the quality of education and professional train;
- Development and promotion of internal organizational culture for the successful activity of the Agency.

IQAA conducts regular activity on external quality assurance, which is evidenced with the decisions of the Accreditation Council that are available on the website of IQAA.

IQAA directs its activities at satisfying the needs of all stakeholders: students and their parents, academia representatives, educational institutions, state bodies, employers and society in accordance with the IQAA’s Strategy of Development for 2015-2018. Annual work plans of the Agency are developed on the basis of the Strategy of Development. Implementation of the work plans are made during a year on a quarterly basis. The results are summarized at the end of the year. Until 2015, implementation of 2013 and 2014 work plans was considered in summarizing the results to reward employees. Everyday activities of IQAA staff respond to stated mission, aims and values of the Agency. Each employee directs his/her efforts at achieving high common results.

According to para. 2.2 of the IQAA Statute, the Agency organizes and conducts institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of educational institutions on the basis of ESG. More details in IQAA Statute.

IQAA’s policy is aimed at constant improvement of quality of IQAA activities’ results through enhancement of standards and criteria of accreditation, external review procedures, the fullest and most effective use of all types of resources. Development of all activities of the Agency promotes the formation of the image of IQAA as a leading organization in the field of expert evaluation of educational activities. The following tools are used for this:

- development and dissemination of standards and criteria on quality assurance in education in line with the European and international standards;
- formation and development of a quality culture in the system of education.

Participation of stakeholders is implemented at all levels of the IQAA’s activities. Every expert group for an external review on a mandatory basis includes competent national academic experts, international experts, as well as representatives of employers and students. At the decision-making level, participation of stakeholders is realized through equal membership of an international expert, a student and employers in the Accreditation Council. During last two years
IQAA intensively worked on the process of self-analysis and improvement of all regulatory documents to correspond to revised ESG. IQAA has made methodological changes in the guidelines and instructions both for self-assessment of educational institutions/study programmes and documents of external quality assurance.

An important aspect of the IQAA’s activities is providing public information concerning the work of the Agency and processes taking place in quality assurance in Kazakhstan and abroad. IQAA pays a lot of attention to filling its website with useful information for members of the academic community and students. By means of the website and the Facebook page, IQAA spreads information on past, present and future events in the field of quality assurance in education in EHEA.

In addition, all stakeholders have a possibility to submit a request to the Agency and to receive an answer through the IQAA’s website. Technical staff of IQAA timely processes requests and publishes answers to possible questions that may arise from the website visitors. Currently, the website of IQAA and its representativeness in social media are important and useful sources of information for stakeholders.

Area for improvement
IQAA should broaden its activities in accreditation procedures of TVET organizations and other levels of education.

Main evidences
✓ Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education”
✓ IQAA Statute
✓ Certificate of registration of IQAA in the National Register of Accreditation Bodies of the MES RK
✓ IQAA’s Strategy of Development for 2015-2018
✓ Standards for institutional accreditation of HEIs
✓ Standards for Institutional Accreditation of Research Institutions
✓ Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

- Standards for Specialized (Programme) Accreditation of Research Institutions
- Working plans of IQAA
- Annual reports of IQAA on its activities 2014, 2015
- Composition of the IQAA Accreditation Council
- Guidelines on a self-assessment procedure of educational organizations within the framework of institutional/specialized accreditation
- Website of IQAA

10.2 ESG Standard 3.2 Official status

Standard:
Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

IQAA’s compliance with the standard

IQAA is a legal entity, which was officially registered in the Department of Justice of Astana city in December 2008. The IQAA’s Statute was adopted at the general meeting of its founders. The founders of IQAA are two organizations – “Innovations in Education” and National Association “Expert”.

Management of the Agency is implemented in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the IQAA’s Statute:
   a) by founders;
   b) by the Accreditation Council;
   c) by the President of IQAA.

The founders appoint the President of IQAA and do not interfere with the activities of the organization.

The Accreditation Council is created as a public elected representative collegial body, the activities of which are regulated by the IQAA’s Statute and the Provision on the Accreditation Council.

IQAA is officially recognized by the MES RK, which is evidenced by receipt of the certificate of the MES RK, signed by the Minister, and its inclusion to the National Register of Accreditation Bodies.

Accredited educational organizations and study programmes by submission of IQAA are included to the National Register No.2 and No.3. These Registers are lists of accredited educational organizations and study programmes, respectively, which are filled in by the MES RK according to the certificates and data of the recognized accreditation bodies.

Issue of a certificate on accreditation to HEIs and inclusion of accreditation results to the National Registers No.2 and No.3 of the MES RK ensure acceptance of accreditation results by the higher education system, state bodies, stakeholders and the public in general.
In 2013, IQAA was accredited by the MES RK as a subject of scientific and (or) research technical activities. The logo of IQAA was registered as a trade mark in the Intellectual Property Rights Committee of the Ministry of Justice of RK on 16 May 2016.

IQAA also complies with the requirements of a number of international networks (CEENQA, INQAAHE, CIQG, APQN, IREG), being their member, and thus, it is recognized at international level.

**Main evidences**
- The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education”
- Certificate of registration of IQAA in the National Register of Accreditation Bodies of the MES RK
- Certificate of accreditation of IQAA by the MES RK as a subject of scientific and (or) research technical activities (at the request)
- The IQAA Statute
- National Register No. 1 of the MES RK “Accreditation Bodies”
- National Register No. 2 of the MES RK “Accredited Educational Organizations”
- National Register No. 3 of the MES RK “Accredited Study Programmes”

**10.3 ESG Standard 3.3 Independence**

**Standard:**
Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

**IQAA’s compliance with the standard**

**Organizational independence**
The organizational independence of the Agency is regulated by the certificate of the state registration of a legal entity. As a non-governmental organization, IQAA is independent in its activities from the MES RK and educational organizations and functions autonomously. IQAA defines its structural organization and, if necessary, makes amendments to it.

According to the Law of the RK “On Education” 2011 the MES RK regulates activities of accreditation bodies (art.5, para 10) as it “establishes requirements and procedure of recognition of accreditation bodies, including foreign bodies, and forms a register of recognized accreditation agencies, accredited educational organizations and study programmes”. Accreditation agencies are legal entities, which “develop standards (reglaments) and conduct accreditation of educational organizations on the basis of the standards (reglaments) developed by them” (art.9-1, para 3).

Organizational independence is guaranteed by the official documents of the MES RK: the order of the Minister of Education and Science of the RK “On the Formation of the National Register...
of Accreditation Bodies of the MES RK” No.556 dated 30 December 2011, as well as Procedure and requirements on maintaining the National Registers of accreditation bodies, accredited educational organizations and study programmes. The National Register of accreditation bodies is formed by the MES RK on the basis of recommendations given by the Republican Accreditation Council. The objects of registration are accreditation bodies conducting institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation. Below is the extract from the Order of the MES RK “Procedure and requirements on maintaining the National Registers of accreditation bodies, accredited educational organizations and study programmes”.

**Table 5. Extract from the Order of the MES RK “Procedure and requirements…”, para.2, Requirements to accreditation bodies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11. The accreditation body receives recognition and registration in the National Register 1 if it has:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) legitimate recognition as a legal entity, in a form of non-profit organization and registration in the authorities of justice in the Republic of Kazakhstan or abroad;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) necessary material and informational resources to conduct activities in line with the stated mission and tasks:… not less than 4 full-time employees, office with necessary equipment (computers, copy machine, fax, telephone intercity line);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) databases of experts on external reviews, who conduct peer reviews of educational organizations in line with the stated mission;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Internet source for public access to the description of the processes and procedures used by the accreditation body, and outcomes of accreditation;</td>
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<tr>
<td>5)……</td>
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<tr>
<td>6)……</td>
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<tr>
<td>7)……</td>
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<tr>
<td>8) no affiliation with educational organizations: office of the accreditation body cannot be located on the territory of any educational organization.</td>
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</table>

Thus, one of the main requirements to accreditation bodies is no affiliation with educational organizations, which is followed by IQAA. All normative documents of IQAA show that it has full organizational independence. IQAA is a non-profit and non-state organization, which does not have in its composition any state bodies and does not have affiliation with any educational institutions.

**Functional independence**

IQAA takes autonomous responsibility for its operations without involvement of third parties. The methodology and procedures of the Agency are defined and developed by IQAA on the basis of ESG taking into account best international practice. IQAA’s standards of accreditation are registered in the Intellectual Property Rights Committee of the Ministry of Justice of RK.

The table below shows an extract from the Law of the RK “On Education”, which specifies main functions of the accreditation bodies and highlights autonomous nature of their operations.

External experts are selected and appointed by the Agency autonomously, without third party influence such as HEIs and state bodies, but are agreed with the relevant Accreditation Committee and are approved by the order of the President of IQAA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Art. 9-1. Accreditation of educational organizations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Accreditation of educational organizations is conducted on a voluntary basis. The educational organization is free to choose an accreditation body.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The positive decision on conducting an accreditation procedure or a rejection is made by the accreditation body after considering an application of the educational organization and supporting documents, the list of which is defined by each accreditation body. The terms and conditions of an accreditation procedure are defined in the agreement signed between the educational organization and the accreditation body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The accreditation body conducts institutional or specialized accreditation in accordance with its standards (reglaments) of accreditation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The accreditation procedure is conducted at the expense of the educational organization under review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Educational organizations have rights to undertake national and international institutional and specialized accreditation in the accreditation bodies, included to the Register of the competent authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Independence of the IQAA’s experts is realized through implementation of several steps. Firstly, at the stage of formation of an expert group for an external review, a coordinator from IQAA thoroughly considers the candidates’ CVs in order to avoid a conflict of interest. Secondly, the composition of the expert group is in advance sent to the HEI under review, which has the right to ask for exclusion of individual experts in case of an evidence-based conflict of interest. Thirdly, all experts of external reviews sign the Code of Honor for Accreditation Experts, which ensures their responsible and impartial attitude to carrying out their duties. The Code of Honor for Accreditation Experts regulates that the members of the expert group are independent in their operations, do not represent interests of the organizations, where they work/study, and do not allow any interference to their operations and/or lobbying for someone’s interests.

Table 7. Extract from the Code of Honor for Accreditation Experts of IQAA

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>IQAA does not appoint an applicant to be a member of the expert group, if there is even a slightest suspicion on a possible conflict of interest. According to this policy, an expert cannot be a person, who:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- works in the organization, which is part of the same system with the higher education institution under accreditation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- during the last year was a candidate for the vacant position in this institution;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- during the last five years was an employee of this higher education institution, or otherwise related to it;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- has joint business, advisory or other interests and relations with this higher education institution;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is a relative of any staff member of this higher education institution;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- expresses a personal opinion regarding the accreditation of this higher education institution;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- is a graduate of this higher education institution;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- refers to the administration of this higher education institution (the directorial board);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- presents any other personal arguments on a possible conflict of interest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Independence of official results

IQAA takes autonomous responsibility for its official decisions, which are taken without influence from third parties, educational organizations or governmental bodies. Independence is a guarantee of transparent and fair process of decision-making. It is not always easy to demonstrate independence of IQAA to all stakeholders.

The MES RK sometimes considers that IQAA is not rigorous enough in relation to HEIs, because state control of HEIs by the MES RK considers only quantitative indicators of activities of educational institutions. At the same time, HEIs blame the Agency in excessive strictness in following the accreditation procedures, particularly their time frames.

The Accreditation Council of IQAA is an independent body, which makes a decision on accreditation of educational organizations and/or their study programmes. HEIs, the MES RK or other third parties cannot influence the decisions of the Accreditation Council. Upon entry into their powers, all members of the Accreditation Council sign the Code of Honor, which declares their commitment to independence, impartiality, ethics, professionalism and confidentiality. The decision-making of the Accreditation Council is based on the Provisions on decision-making, available on the website.

IQAA has the Appeals Committee and the Complaints Commission, which cannot include employees or experts of the Agency and members of the Accreditation Council.

Main evidences

- The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education”
- The IQAA Statute
- The Regulations on IQAA (at the request)
- On the Formation of the National Register of Accreditation Bodies of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan"
- Certificate of registration of IQAA in the National Register of Accreditation Bodies of the MES RK
- Standards for institutional accreditation of HEIs
- Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
- Standards and Guidelines of external quality assurance for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
- The Code of Honor for Accreditation Experts
- The Code of Honor for the IQAA Accreditation Council’s members
- Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation of HEIs
- Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning accreditation of study programmes
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

10.4 ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic analysis

**Standard:**
Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

**IQAA’s compliance with the standard**

IQAA works on thematic analysis in three directions:
1) identification of best practices based on analysis and synthesis of data obtained during the accreditation of HEIs and study programmes;
2) dissemination of national and foreign experience in accreditation of HEIs and study programmes, as well as the good practice in the field of higher education;
3) public information on the main activities of the Agency.

As the IQAA’s activities are directly connected with the activities of HEIs and TVET organizations in the framework of quality assurance procedures, the Agency has an access to their SARs and other materials that include quantitative and qualitative data. IQAA also conducts ongoing work on explaining the policy and procedures of accreditation to a wide range of stakeholders and works on the formation of a quality culture in HEIs. Therefore, in addition to the information available on the website, the Agency publishes articles (thematic analysis) and a quarterly newsletter of IQAA about the leading national and foreign experience on accreditation and on the latest trends in higher education in general.

The Agency has made different thematic analysis, such as “Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Kazakhstan”, “Higher Education Institution with Students’ Eyes”, “What Does the Accreditation Give to Higher Education Institutions?”, “The External Review Feedback Results”, etc.

Gathering of information for the thematic analysis was carried out through search and analysis of the literature and conducting survey procedures. Links to an online questionnaire were sent to respondents. As a result, the Agency received answers to both open and closed questions. Since 2015 IQAA carries out regular feedback from stakeholders of different groups through an online questionnaire on Survey Monkey platform. The results of the survey are analyzed and summarized in a form of analytical reports and are published in open access.

To determine the effect of accreditation on the activities of HEIs, IQAA interviewed by the same method managers and heads of quality assurance departments of HEIs, accredited by the Agency between 2009 and 2016. The results of the study are presented in a thematic analysis.

To receive students’ opinions about accredited HEIs the Agency analyzed students’ questionnaires received during the external reviews in 2014-2015. The analysis results are presented in the thematic report “Higher Education Institution with Students' Eyes”. During the information collection the Agency ensured the respondents’ anonymity.

Apart from that, in order to ensure transparency and accountability, IQAA publishes annual reports on its activities on its website.
IQAA regularly organizes meetings and thematic seminars on different aspects of quality assurance, which are of interest for experts, members of the Accreditation Council, Accreditation Committees, HEIs and other stakeholders. Seminars form an open platform for discussion, exchange of opinions and ideas for improvement of the system of quality assurance in higher education.

However, due to the absence of funding from the MES RK, the research activities on thematic analyses is conducted not effectively enough, because the current number of staff does not allow to pay more attention to this question.

**Area for improvement**
IQAA should continue its work on analysis of the information gathered in the QA processes to define common trends in the higher education system and systems of internal quality assurance and to use best practices, which can effectively influence the quality of educational services at HEIs.

**Main evidences**

✔ “Higher Education Institution with Students’ Eyes”, 2015
✔ “What Does the Accreditation Give to Higher Education Institutions?”, 2016
✔ “The External Review Feedback Results”
✔ “The results of the IQAA employees’ survey on their satisfaction with the job conditions”
✔ A quarterly newsletter of IQAA
✔ Annual reports of IQAA 2015, 2014
✔ IQAA website

### 10.5 ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

**Standard:**
Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

**IQAA’s compliance with the standard**

**Human resources.** IQAA has 18 staff members. At the stage of selection, IQAA is guided by the following main requirements: work experience in the higher education system (academic and/or administrative and managerial), a scientific or academic degree, research activity in the field of education, adherence to professional ethics, and knowledge of English.

The HR policy of the Agency is aimed at ongoing professional and personal development of all employees. To develop the staff’s professional level, IQAA organizes regular seminars and trainings with the participation of leading foreign experts in the field of quality assurance in
education. Only in 2015, about 2.5% of turnover of financial assets of IQAA was spent on invitation of renowned foreign speakers. The qualification system, which includes the positions and categories of staff, as well as required competences, skills and knowledge are defined according to the staff structure, regulations and job descriptions. For personal development and strengthening the corporate spirit, IQAA periodically organizes teambuilding events and visits to cultural places, e.g., Astana Opera theatre.

One of the important aspects is studying and improving the level of English knowledge to broaden the possibilities of the IQAA staff and ensure a more effective way of acquiring new information. Unfortunately, only 28% of IQAA employees fluently speak English, 22% have average knowledge of English, the rest can translate from English only with a dictionary. This task needs to be addressed in the future.

The administration of the Agency cares about comfortable working conditions for the IQAA staff. Therefore, IQAA creates favorable and productive working space and controls emotional well-being of staff. To improve the working conditions and atmosphere within the staff members, IQAA periodically conducts a questionnaire on satisfaction of the Agency’s staff with their work and working conditions.

The results of questionnaire analysis show high satisfaction of IQAA staff with their working conditions, perspectives of professional and personal development that IQAA offers, and its prestige. For example, all staff members like working in IQAA. The same high results were received on organization of work, facilities, sanitary and epidemiological conditions, content and effectiveness of work, management policy, attention to the staff’s needs, internal communication and collaboration within the staff, corporate culture and organized events. The average salary of IQAA’s employees is higher compared to the same positions in universities. Full results of questionnaire are available in the Department of Analysis and Quality.

IQAA has a highly-qualified staff: 8 staff members with research degrees of Doctors or Candidates of Sciences and titles of Professors or Associate Professors, 3 graduates of foreign universities (1 awardee of international scholarship of the President of RK “Bolashak” and 1 awardee of British Government scholarship “Chevening”). More details are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Professional qualification of IQAA staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degrees and titles of IQAA staff</th>
<th>Professor, Doctor of Sciences</th>
<th>Associate Professor, Candidate of Sciences</th>
<th>Master</th>
<th>Specialist</th>
<th>Bachelor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of persons</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When hiring IQAA administration adheres to the principle of non-discrimination by age, ethnicity, gender or religion. The main requirements in hiring to IQAA are: high level of professional competencies, work experience in educational institutions, research degree is preferable, knowledge of at least two languages from Kazakh, Russian and English is preferable, the desire to learn, honesty and decency. Fluency in English and education abroad by exchange programme or by the “Bolashak” scholarship give an advantage.
**Material resources.** The IQAA office is located in the center of Astana city, Republic of Kazakhstan, on the eighth floor of the “Saint-Petersburg” Business Center on 20 Dostyk Str. According to the preliminary agreement with the administration of the Business Center, IQAA buys out the whole floor within three years (since 2014). The office premises extend to 520 sq. m. and include five working rooms, a small meeting room, a big conference room for 65 seats, a small conference room for 15 seats, a server room, an archive room, rest zones for the IQAA staff and utility rooms. The conference room is equipped with the modern video system “Polycom” for videoconferencing opportunities. The conference room is available for conducting meetings of the Accreditation Council, other collegial bodies of IQAA, general meetings of the IQAA staff, videoconferences with experts in the course of preparation to external reviews and conducting seminars and workshops.

As seen from the table 9, IQAA has modern computer and informational equipment and software (server, corporate e-mail, etc.). During last two years all staff members’ computer equipment was completely renewed. The IQAA office provides optical fiber Internet connection by the means of LAN and Wi-Fi, which ensure the high speed of data transmission.

To ensure working and household conditions, every staff room, along with the computer equipment, has a fridge, a microwave oven and a water dispenser. Every year IQAA carries out an inventory and replenishment of available material resources. According to the questionnaire results, all IQAA staff members are satisfied with technical equipment of their work places.

**Table 9. Technical equipment of IQAA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Desktop computers</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Server</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Notebooks</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Multifunctional printers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Printers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>EPSON projectors with motorized screens</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Televisions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Channel real time recorders</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Telephones</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Fax machines</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Video camera</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Digital camera</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Polycom videoconferencing equipment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Xeroxes and scanners</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Fridges</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Microwave ovens</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Coffeemachine</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Financial resources.** IQAA is funded by accreditation procedure fees, paid by HEIS, TVET organizations, scientific research institutions applying for accreditation. The external review of educational organizations and their study programmes is implemented based on a bilateral agreement between an educational organization under review and IQAA. The cost of the agreement covers expenses related to stages 1, 2 and 3 of the accreditation procedure: a preliminary site visit to the educational organization, delivering a training seminar on the methodology of conducting a self-assessment and formation of the report, methodological help.
on self-assessment, carrying out a distance expertise of the SAR, formation of the expert group and the programme for the external review, as well as the expenses for the experts’ remuneration, accommodation, meals and transportation.

IQAA’s budget, formed on the basis of accreditation of HEIs, was 468 528,1 thousand tenge in 2014 and 323 461,1 thousand tenge in 2015. Payment under the contracts with suppliers and contractors include purchase of equipment, furniture, payment of all communications (Internet, mail, telephone, etc.), payment for office maintenance, repair, utilities and organizational costs, purchase of office supplies and other materials, installments for the purchase of the office premises and other expenditure items.

The problem of financial sustainability of IQAA on the long-term perspective will be solved by additional funding coming from post-accreditation monitoring procedures on regular annual basis, which were introduced in November 2015. In addition, according to the recently adopted forth State Programme on Development of Education and Science of RK for 2016-2019 and the Law of RK “On Education” TVET organizations will actively undergo accreditation procedures. According to the action plan of the Government of RK not less than 60% of public TVET organizations should have undergone accreditation until 2019. Currently there are more than 800 TVET organizations in RK, including 420 public TVET organizations.

IQAA does not pay for office rent due to the purchase of 520 sq.m. office premises in the center of Astana. The Agency should pay only for community fees and service. To diversify its funding sources, IQAA will conduct accreditation of different types of educational organizations and participate in international projects.

Areas for improvement
To increase the number of staff members with fluent and average knowledge of English.
To conduct accreditation procedures in different types of educational organizations.

Main evidences
✓ The IQAA Statute
✓ The Regulation on IQAA(at the request)
✓ The regulations on the IQAA Departments (at the request)
✓ Job descriptions of IQAA staff (at the request)
✓ Labor agreements of IQAA staff (at the request)
✓ Contracts on rendering of services (at the request)
✓ Composition of IQAA academic staff
✓ Budget of IQAA (at the request)
✓ Protocols of inventory of material and technical base (at the request)

10.6 ESG Standard 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Standard:
Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

IQAA’s compliance with the standard

IQAA takes a responsibility to provide quality services. This is evidenced by the approach to internal quality assurance, which is focused at regular review and improvement of IQAA activities (procedures, guidelines, standards and other internal documents). To ensure transparency and accountability to the public, information of the IQAA’s activities and its internal normative documents are available at the website in three languages (Kazakh, Russian and English).

High professional standards of all persons participating in the operations of the Agency are ensured at all stages of the accreditation procedure.

IQAA has a mobile internal and external communication in the framework of its activities. The Agency systematically carries out a survey of coordinators, representatives of educational organizations, national and international experts involved to external reviews and expertise of SARs. The survey outcomes are used to improve the IQAA’s activities and its system of internal quality assurance.

The IQAA’s Strategy of Development, HR Policy and the Code of Honor for IQAA employees, accreditation experts and the Accreditation Council members ensure adherence to principles of independence, impartiality and professionalism, as well as protect them from any kind of intolerance and discrimination.

The IQAA standards and criteria for accreditation are applied consistently in regards to different types and forms of ownership of educational organizations/study programmes.

In 2015, IQAA developed and introduced its Internal Quality Assurance Policy, which is available on the website. Principles of internal quality assurance of IQAA:

- Awareness of every staff member of the personal responsibility for achievement of IQAA’s common goals;
- Application of effective incentive measures for all staff members;
- Study, analysis and consideration of stakeholders’ opinions to improve the Agency’s procedures;
- Equal treatment of all educational institutions – IQAA’s activities are based on the same principles, rules and procedures;
- Use of modern and effective management and information technologies for fulfillment of set tasks with the optimal use of time and material resources;
- High demand to the quality of professional competence of IQAA staff members and peer-review experts, required for implementation of their duties;
- Promoting a quality culture among the Agency’s staff, their training in the field of quality assurance in education;
- Accountability to the public, transparency of accreditation procedures and results;
- On-going modernization and enhancement of the current system of internal quality assurance.

Mechanisms of internal quality assurance of IQAA:

- Regular staff meetings for discussion of current and planned activities, outcomes of accreditation procedures, mutual assessment of staff;
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

- Thematic staff meetings on specific questions: adherence to ethical norms, external review procedure, results of internal quality assurance, etc.;
- Collection and analysis of feedback from all stakeholders (experts, HEIs, coordinators) to improve accreditation procedures of IQAA;
- Survey of IQAA staff on their satisfaction with the working conditions;
- Seminars and trainings for professional development of staff, experts and stakeholders;
- Provision of normative documentation and working materials of IQAA on the website and in the internal server;
- Monitoring of timely and effective realization of regulated accreditation procedures;
- Periodic review and enhancement of IQAA normative documents;
- Monitoring and update of the database of experts based on the feedback results;
- Study of leading international experience and good practice of foreign QA agencies.

IQAA’s Internal Quality Assurance Policy does not address quality assurance of activities carried out and materials produced by subcontractors since subcontractors are not used by the Agency. IQAA conducts accreditation procedures only in jurisdiction of the Republic of Kazakhstan, where appropriate communication with the relevant authorities, such as the MES RK, other state bodies and QA agencies, status and recognition of the institutions with which the Agency conducts external quality assurance, are clearly regulated by the national legislation. The results of internal quality assurance procedures are shown in analytical papers, reports and reviews and are used for effective decision-making, resulting in preventive and corrective measures. Internal quality assurance requires ongoing self-analysis and enhancement, on which the Agency works. In addition, see section 8. IQAA’s internal quality assurance.

Areas for improvement
Ongoing self-analysis, enhancement and study of innovations of other organizations on the basis of memoranda on cooperation with partners.
Development of effective software for maintaining a database of experts and quick search of necessary information.

Main evidences
- The IQAA’s Strategy of Development for 2015-2018
- The Internal Quality Assurance Policy of IQAA
- The Code of Honor for IQAA employees
- The Code of Honor for IQAA experts
- The Code of Honor for the IQAA Accreditation Council’s members
- Composition of IQAA academic staff

10.7 ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

**Standard:**
Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.
IQAA’s compliance with the standard

This report reflects almost eight years period of work of the Agency in the field of quality assurance in education in Kazakhstan. Within this period, IQAA has achieved significant success in development of documents necessary for accreditation, establishing consistent procedures for assessment of education in HEIs in line with a best practice applied in the EHEA. This report proves that our Agency can firmly apply for full membership in ENQA and listing in EQAR.

The aspiration of the Agency to become a full member of ENQA and to be registered in EQAR is driven by the new possibilities that shall open for IQAA both at national and international levels. Even now, the Agency does not rest on its laurels and continuously promotes the ENQA’s ideas and spreads good foreign practice on quality assurance in education and democratization of education through media resources, the IQAA’s website, seminars, workshops and conferences.

After receiving a full membership in ENQA, IQAA is willing to undergo periodic external review at least once every five years to renew its membership, demonstrate its compliance with the ESG and receive an independent assessment in order to enhance its activities and ensure its continuous development.

Main evidences

✔ The IQAA’s Strategy of Development for 2015-2018
✔ The website of IQAA, “Events” section
✔ The website of IQAA, “Publications” section
11. COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 2)

11.1 ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

**Standard:**
External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

**IQAA’s compliance with the standard**

In accordance with the paragraph 2.2 of the IQAA Statute, one of the key functions of IQAA is organization and conduct of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of educational organizations based on ESG. IQAA developed its standards and criteria for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of HEIs in 2010, then made amendments in 2012, and during 2015 the standards and criteria were revised in line with the revised ESG adopted in Yerevan in 2015. The standards and criteria of accreditation take into consideration the efficiency of procedures of internal quality assurance of education, which play an essential importance in course of the external evaluation. External procedures of quality assurance in education, standards and criteria of IQAA fully comply with procedures of internal quality assurance in Part 1 ESG, adopted by the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in May 2015.

In the course of developing the standards, criteria and guidelines for accreditation, IQAA took into consideration European standards, international experience, national normative documents, and internal quality assurance systems in HEIs. Therefore, IQAA considers the evidence obtained with the help of these systems in the process of the external reviews of HEIs for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation. Below is a table demonstrating the compliance of IQAA standards and criteria for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation with ESG.

**Table 12. Compliance of IQAA standards and criteria for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation with ESG**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESG 2015</th>
<th>IQAA assessment criteria, which take into account ESG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Policy for quality assurance</td>
<td>Standards for institutional accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the subparagraph 1.1.3 (General provisions of the standard), paragraph 1.3 (Criteria for assessment of the policy for quality assurance) Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for subparagraphs 1.1.3 (General provisions of the standard), 1.2.3-1.2.5, 1.2.9 (1.2 Assessment criteria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Design and approval of programmes</td>
<td>Standards for institutional accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for subparagraphs 5.1.1 (General provisions of the standard), 5.2.1 (5.2 Evaluation criteria for study)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</td>
<td>Standards for institutional accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 3. Students, student-centred learning, teaching and assessment of performance Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 3. Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment of performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</td>
<td>Standards for institutional accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 4. Admission of students, learning outcomes, recognition and qualifications Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 4. Admission of students, progression, recognition and certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Teaching staff</td>
<td>Standards for institutional accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 6. Teaching staff and teaching effectiveness Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 5. Teaching staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Learning resources and student support</td>
<td>Standards for institutional accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 8. Resources and student support services Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 6. Learning resources and student support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Information management</td>
<td>Standards for institutional accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for subparagraphs 2.1.3 (General provisions of the standard), 2.3 (Assessment criteria for information management) Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for subparagraphs 2.1.5 (General provisions of the standard), 2.2.16 (Assessment criteria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Public information</td>
<td>Standards for institutional accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 9. Public information Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 7. Public information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</td>
<td>Standards for institutional accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for subparagraphs 5.1.3 (General provisions of the standard), 5.2.18-5.2.20, 5.2.23 (Assessment criteria for study programmes) Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for subparagraphs 2.1.5 (General provisions of the standard), 2.2.15, 2.2.16 (Assessment criteria)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</td>
<td>Standards for institutional accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for the standard 10. Periodic external quality assurance and follow-up procedures Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of higher and post-graduate educational organizations, requirements for subparagraphs 8.1.4 (General criteria of the standard), 8.2.11 (Assessment criteria)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Main evidences**

- Standards for institutional accreditation of HEIs
- Standards for Institutional Accreditation of Research Institutions
- Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
- Standards for Specialized (Programme) Accreditation of Research Institutions
- Standards and Guidelines of external quality assurance for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
- Guidelines on organization and conducting an external review for procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
- Template form of the external review report on institutional accreditation of HEIs
- Template form of the external review report on specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
- IQAA website, “External review reports” section
- Guidelines on organization and conducting of a self-assessment procedure in organizations of higher and postgraduate education
- Guidelines on organization and conducting of a self-assessment procedure for study programmes of higher and postgraduate education
11.2 ESG Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

**Standard:**
External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

**IQAA’s compliance with the standard**

Documents and regulations for IQAA procedures of external quality assurance are developed on the basis of ESG, taking into account national normative regulations, and are aimed at achievement of aims and objectives defined in strategic documents of the Agency. The cost of accreditation procedures correspond to expenses of the Agency. The cost of accreditation procedure can be disclosed at the request, but it is significantly lower than the one of a foreign agency. The majority of Kazakhstani HEIs undergo national accreditation, because national agencies better understand external environment, where HEIs operate, and national legislation. There is no need for them to translate all documents in English. The cost of the procedure also affects the choice of the agency.

The methodology of quality assurance and its processes are discussed in details in section 7 of this report. It was important for IQAA to create a system that fits purpose of assessment. Therefore, in the guidelines on preparation of SAR educational institutions can use existing documents. These are key indicators of university’s activities, documents required by the Committee of Control of the MES RK for post licensing control, state obligatory standards, working study plans and other materials. The Agency requires HEIs to have their own internal quality assurance system. However, HEIs are responsible for development and use of this system, which assures quality.

When developing methodology fit for purpose, standards and documents of IQAA received practical approval and were discussed in working groups in the framework of seminars and conferences conducted with the participation of representatives from educational organizations, such as Rectors, Vice-rectors, Deans, Heads of departments, Heads of organizational units responsible for accreditation, and experts. In addition, the drafts of standards were sent to HEIs for obtaining their suggestions and remarks. In order to discuss standards and other documents, the Agency also attracted representatives of employers and students. After reviewing obtained information from stakeholders, the Agency analyzes suggestions and makes amendments in the documents. Final versions of documents are approved by the Accreditation Council of IQAA and are published on the IQAA’s website.

Choosing an audit route is one of the ways of ensuring methodology fit for purpose. For example, HEIs can suggest the Agency to review specified topics and objects within institutional accreditation or to pay more attention to key disciplines within the framework of specialized accreditation. In everyday procedures and in cooperation with HEIs, IQAA makes amendments to solve concrete questions, which HEIs suggest. For example, the Agency can change the time of interview for certain persons, indicated in the approved site visit programme, if the Rector or an employer is unexpectedly called to Akim or other government officials (Mayor of a city or
area to solve a difficult situation). To support quality enhancement of educational organizations IQAA realizes subsequent measures agreed with HEIs:

1. IQAA conducts training seminars for representatives of HEIs on preparation of a SAR in line with the developed guidelines, according to the standards and criteria of institutional and specialized accreditation of IQAA;
2. The Agency provides methodological assistance in the process of self-assessment by an educational institution and writing a self-assessment report of HEI and study programmes without additional fee;
3. Without charging additional fee IQAA conducts a preliminary audit by the Agency’s staff and an expert from HEI to assess the readiness of the university for an external review.

A preliminary audit is carried out by the Agency in HEIs, which undergo institutional accreditation for the first time. We know that as a rule accreditation agencies mostly do not conduct this procedure. However, we conduct a preliminary audit to help universities. This is because the majority of HEIs in Kazakhstan undergo accreditation for the first time and they need help for preparation to the external review and for correct understanding of the procedure. The preliminary audit is not carried out for study programmes and those HEIs, which undergo institutional accreditation for the second time.

During 25 years the Committee of Control in the Fields of Education and Science of the MES RK carried out state attestation of HEIs. The site visit programme was not known to the HEIs under attestation and the Committee checked only quantitative indicators and documents. Besides, the panel was concentrated on finding drawbacks.

The process of development of the methodology, which corresponds to the procedure of external quality assurance can be presented in the organization and holding of the following recent important events:

1. In the framework of the seminar “Accreditation: criteria, procedure and methodology of expert evaluation — international and national approaches” (2014), participants in focus groups discussed the following procedural documents: “Initial external review in the system of accreditation of HEIs”, “Requirements to the expert conclusion on a self-assessment report”, “Principles of the external review and techniques for writing external review report”, “Requirements to the IQAA external review report in compliance with ESG”.

2. Due to the introduction of revised ESG and revised IQAA standards, the documented procedures of IQAA were revised and discussed in focus groups in the framework of the following forums:
   - New approaches to accreditation procedures in light of the revised ESG (training seminar, 2015). The forum included presentations on the following topics: “Standards and criteria of institutional accreditation and standards of the external review of IQAA: in light of the revised ESG, developed by the Bologna Follow-up Group”, “On experiences of activities of the Accreditation Committee on medical specialties”, “About work of the Accreditation Council”, “Organization of the expertise on a SAR of HEI/study programme”, “Selection and training of experts for participation in accreditation procedures”, “Organization of the external review”, “Interview as a method to accumulate information and as a part of the external review”, “Preparation of the external review report by the expert group and classification of remarks, included by experts in the external review report in the course of accreditation”.

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Perspectives and challenges for HEIs and QA agencies in the framework of Yerevan communique of Ministers of education of the countries – members of Bologna process (2015): Standards of external quality assurance in light of revised ESG.

The IQAA’s procedures for evaluation and accreditation follow the traditional model applied in the EHEA and best international practice: conducting training seminars for HEIs, self-assessment, expertise of SAR, external review by an independent group of experts, external review reports, decision of the Accreditation Council, publication of results, post-accreditation monitoring. The stages of conducting the procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation are described in more details in the section 7. IQAA’s quality assurance processes and their methodologies and section 11.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes.

In conclusion, a formal dialogue with stakeholders, seminars, reviews and feedback are supplemented by a constant and valuable informal dialogue with HEIs. All sources are used for correction, improvement and optimization of IQAA’s methodology and to support the need of HEIs in quality enhancement.

Main evidences

✓ Standards for institutional accreditation of HEIs
✓ Standards for Institutional Accreditation of Research Institutions
✓ Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
✓ Standards for Specialized (Programme) Accreditation of Research Institutions
✓ Guidelines on organization and conducting of a self-assessment procedure in organizations of higher and postgraduate education
✓ Guidelines on organization and conducting of a self-assessment procedure for study programmes of higher and postgraduate education
✓ Materials from seminars and conferences (on the website)

11.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing processes

Standard:
External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

• a self-assessment or equivalent;
• an external assessment normally including a site visit;
• a report resulting from the external assessment;
• a consistent follow-up.

IQAA’s compliance with the standard

IQAA applies predefined processes of external quality assurance, which are present in standards of external quality assurance for procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation. The standards are applied consistently for all HEIs and outcomes of accreditation are published on the website of IQAA. All implementing processes are given in brief in section 7 of this report and are available on the website www.iqaa.kz.
**Self-assessment. Training seminar.** After submitting an application and signing a bilateral contract on conducting accreditation procedure between a HEI and IQAA, the staff of the Agency holds a training seminar for the working committee and working groups of HEI on techniques and methodology of carrying out a self-assessment and accreditation.

Writing a SAR by HEIs is conducted on the basis of standards and criteria for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation developed by IQAA. In order to facilitate the procedure of SAR preparation, the Agency developed guidelines on organization of the self-assessment procedure for institutional and specialized accreditation, which provide detailed recommendations on organization of the executive committee to involve the staff of HEI for the preparation of the sections in the SAR and its annexes.

The time, necessary for preparation of SAR, depends on the procedure of accreditation (institutional or programme) and on the readiness of the university. Representatives of HEIs take into account the fact that self-assessment gives them an opportunity to independently assess the position of their university, to implement a critical comprehensive analysis in all areas of activities and strategic planning, to contribute to the better understanding and development of the quality of education and management. After completing the procedure of self-assessment, the university has to write SAR with supporting data and send it to IQAA. Coordinators of the Agency carry out methodological support in the course of the self-assessment process and formation of SAR. The Agency’s staff provide methodological support of the self-assessment process, preparation of the SAR, and explanation on how to prepare and fill in the tables in the Annexes of the SAR.

**Expertise of SAR.** The expertise is carried out in regards to the initial version of SAR for determination of the quality of the report by means of a comprehensive, holistic and objective analysis of the compliance degree with the standards for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of IQAA. The work on preparation of the expertise on SAR is conducted by experts, who are coordinated by the Department of Expertise and Information Technologies and Accreditation committees in their areas of expertise. Expertise is conducted by professionals in certain study programme fields, who have a qualification in internal quality assurance of HEIs. Competencies and work experience of experts are carefully considered. To support experts, IQAA has developed the guidelines for conducting expertise of SAR.

**Preliminary audit.** IQAA conducts a preliminary audit for HEIs, which undergo the procedure of institutional accreditation for the first time. Preliminary audit does not apply to specialized (programme) accreditation. This is due to the fact that HEIs in Kazakhstan used to undergo only the state attestation, which was primarily focused on the quantitative indicators. In Kazakhstan the majority of HEIs undergo accreditation for the first time. Therefore, they might be not properly ready for the external review. The Agency conducts a preliminary audit to help HEIs and give them more time to correct and prepare missing documents, to make them understand their responsibilities for providing reliable data. At the same time, auditors provide methodological support. The role of the expert in preliminary audits is carried out by an employee of the Agency and an expert from the academic environment with experience in administrative and academic work at HEIs, who has necessary professional competencies and knowledge for conducting objective evaluation of activities implemented by HEI or a study programme. In order to select an expert for a preliminary audit, the Agency takes into
consideration the following key principles: absence of the conflict of interest, professional conduct and confidentiality of data. A preliminary audit is conducted according to the schedule. The outcomes are formed in the report, which shows assessment of the university’s readiness for the external review procedure.

**External reviews.** In institutional accreditation an external review lasts, as a rule, three days, excluding arrival and departure time, in specialized accreditation it lasts two days.

The external review is conducted by the group of experts formed by coordinators of IQAA. The group of experts for institutional accreditation, as a rule, includes three national experts from academic environment, an international expert with management experience in HEI or a representative of a foreign QA agency, an employer and a student. A chair of the expert group is usually a Vice-Rector of a Kazakhstani university. One more expert from academic environment can be added to the group, if the HEI is large. The expert group is coordinated by a coordinator from the Agency.

The group of experts for specialized (programme) accreditation, as a rule, includes two national experts from academic environment, an international expert by profile of the programme, an employer and a student. The experts are usually divided by groups of related study programmes for cost effectiveness of the procedure. The procedure of the external review includes the analysis of SAR, site visit to a HEI, and writing an external review report. The programme of the site visit is developed by a head of the expert group together with a coordinator. This programme is agreed with a HEI under review, especially on the subject of smooth logistics.

The aims of the external review:

- To confirm compliance of reliability between data in SAR and information obtained in the course of the external review.
- To check how resources, described in SAR, correspond to the needs.
- To assess to what extent the aims stated in SAR are met.
- To give an opinion on relevance and practicability of the suggested action plan.
- To give recommendations to improve the quality of teaching.

External reviews include interview meetings with administration at different organizational levels, teaching staff, students, graduates and employers. Along with oral interviews of students and teaching staff, IQAA conducts their anonymous surveys to ensure more coverage of the representatives of the university, the results of which are taken into account in determining the areas for improvement and formation of the recommendations in the external review report.

The Agency has a clear aim of using interview: to let the expert group establish the atmosphere of trust, to recheck the perceived reality, to promote discussion, and thus, to obtain more information for analysis and to form relevant recommendations. During the interview, the expert group does not allow external persons or administration in the interview room, especially during the interview with students. In addition, to cover larger number of interviewees, the expert group conducts anonymous questionnaire of students and teaching staff.

Typical programmes of the external review (institutional and specialized accreditation) are presented in Annexes 6 and 7.
**Videoconferences for an external expert group.** Prior to the initiation of the external review, an IQAA coordinator conducts a videoconference with the expert group, which has received documents of external review in advance: standards and criteria on internal quality assurance system, standards and guidelines on external review, SAR of the HEI or the study programme, template of the external review report, technology of conducting interview with different categories of participants (representatives of HEI, graduates and employers). During the videoconference, experts have briefing on standards of external quality assurance and discuss questions for interviews. The IQAA coordinator answers the experts’ questions. Each expert prepares a draft of external review report. In addition, a head of the expert group and the coordinator conduct a briefing for the expert group in HEI prior to the site visit activities. Along with interviews, IQAA conducts an anonymous questionnaire with students and teaching staff, the results of which are taken into account while defining the areas for improvement and formation of recommendations in the external review report. Every expert prepares a preliminary report on the external review. In addition to the videoconference, a head of the expert group and a coordinator of IQAA conduct a briefing before the start of the external review in the HEI for all the expert group members.

**Preparation of the external review report.** To support experts IQAA has developed a template of the external review report. The external review report has a clear structure and explicitly illustrates compliance or non-compliance of a HEI or a study programme with IQAA standards of accreditation, draws parallels with the SAR and indicates recommendations for improvement of the quality of education. In order to encourage HEIs for further development, the expert group makes comments on good practice of HEI/study programme. If a HEI has achieved substantial results and/or has initiatives in a particular sphere, IQAA suggests to use these achievements for dissemination of good practice. IQAA publishes external review reports on accredited HEIs and study programmes on its website.

**Feedback.** At the completion of the external review, IQAA Department of Analysis and Quality conducts a cross-check online survey of coordinators, representatives of HEIs, national and international external experts with the help of the online software Survey Monkey. Information received as a result of the online surveying is used for improvement of the external review procedures.

**Decision-making.** Decision on accreditation of HEIs and study programmes is made by the Accreditation Council of IQAA on the basis of SAR of HEI/study programme, final external review report, presentation of external review made by a coordinator, conclusion of IQAA, which is agreed with the subject-specific Accreditation Committee. Decision-making of the Accreditation Council is based on clear procedures. Decisions are collegial and well-substantiated.

**Follow-up procedures.** Follow-up procedures of IQAA are based on the principle that the main responsibility for quality and its assurance lies on educational organizations. Depending on the accreditation decision, IQAA carries out the following procedures:

- If a HEI receives a positive decision (full accreditation for a term of 5 years), it has to present a report on realization of recommendations of the expert group within a year.
- In case of accreditation with conditions (conditional accreditation for a term of 3 years) a HEI has to present a report on the elimination of remarks and undergo a second external review.
review by a fewer number of external experts before the expiration of the conditional accreditation validity period. After conducting the external review and verification of the elimination of remarks, the term of accreditation is extended to 5 years combined with the term of the given conditional accreditation. If a HEI does not eliminate remarks, IQAA does not extend the term of accreditation.

✔ In case of disagreement with the accreditation decision, an educational organization has the right to appeal against the decision of the Accreditation Council (the procedure of appeals is presented in the section 11.7 ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals).

Post-accreditation monitoring. In November 2015, IQAA launched a post-accreditation monitoring for institutional and specialized accreditation in accordance with the IQAA’s standards and criteria and developed Provision on post-accreditation monitoring, which was presented to all stakeholders. According to the given Provision, HEIs submit annual reports on achievements and changes made during a year to support their internal quality assurance. IQAA analyzes reports and gives recommendations on support of internal quality assurance of HEIs.

Area for improvement
IQAA should enhance support of accreditation procedure through process automation and information technologies.

Main evidences
✔ Standards for institutional accreditation of HEIs
✔ Standards for Institutional Accreditation of Research Institutions
✔ Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
✔ Standards for Specialized (Programme) Accreditation of Research Institutions
✔ Guidelines on organization and conducting of a self-assessment procedure in organizations of higher and postgraduate education
✔ Guidelines on organization and conducting of a self-assessment procedure for study programmes of higher and postgraduate education
✔ Requirements to an expertise on a self-assessment report by a higher education institution in the framework of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
✔ Guidelines on a preliminary review of HEI within the framework of institutional accreditation
✔ Standards and Guidelines of external quality assurance for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
✔ Guidelines on organization and conducting an external review for procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
✔ Guidelines for coordinators on the organization and conduct of the external evaluation (review) in the framework of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
✔ Guidelines for students-experts involved in the procedures of institutional and programme accreditation
✔ Template form of the external review report on institutional accreditation of HEIs
✔ Template form of the external review report on specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
✔ Regulations on the Accreditation Council
✔ Provisions on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation of HEIs
✔ Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning specialized accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
✔ Regulations on the Accreditation Committees
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

✔ Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the Procedure of Appeal
✔ Provision on post-accreditation monitoring

11.4 ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

**Standard:**
External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

IQAA’s compliance with the standard

In external quality assurance a huge role is given to experts, who have broad experience in professional fields and make impact to the work of the Agency, representing different points of view. These are academia, employers, international experts and students. To form a good expert group IQAA has developed a system of selection and training of experts.

Selection of experts is made on the basis of the IQAA expert database, where experts are recommended by HEIs, employers, associations and other organizations certified by IQAA for external assessment. Thorough selection of experts, possessing necessary knowledge, competencies and experience for fair and quality external review of HEIs and study programmes is conducted on the basis of the following requirements.

Experts from academia are involved in two types of work:
- Expertise of a SAR of HEI/study programme (distance work);
- External review of HEI/study programme (site visit).

To participate in external review within institutional accreditation academia representatives, apart from 10 years experience in HEIs, research degree and title, should have administrative experience on a management position, such as rector, vice-rector, dean or head of a structural unit in HEI.

To become an expert of external review within specialized accreditation of study programmes, candidates should satisfy definite criteria of their qualification: not less than 5 years of working in HEIs, research degree and title, activities in HEI on the position of a head of department, leading associate professor or professor, who are involved in design of study programmes and methodological support.

Such a careful selection of experts is associated with the fact that they do not only participate in the external reviews, conduct assessment, but also write external review reports. As a rule, the head of the expert group is responsible for the external review report, while each member of the group contributes to the writing of the report. A coordinator from the Agency receives a report from the head of the expert group, checks it and sends to the HEI, if there are any remarks from the HEI, the report is sent to the head of the expert group for consideration. After that, the external review report is sent to the chairperson of the subject-specific Accreditation Committee for checking before the meeting of the Accreditation Council. As a rule, coordinators of IQAA are employees with a research degree and title, who have necessary professional competencies to check an external review report.
International experts, who participate in external reviews of IQAA, as a rule, are nominated by foreign QA agencies in the framework of signed agreements and memoranda. Participation of IQAA staff in international conferences and forums allows the Agency to add experts to the database on the basis of direct contacts.

Besides that, IQAA nominates international experts on the basis of direct requests to the Rectorate, Faculties and Departments of European universities, which respond and send a list of candidates for international experts.

By requests of foreign QA agencies working in Kazakhstan, IQAA nominates Kazakhstani experts for AQ Austria, ACQUIN, FIBAA and ASIIN.

Representatives of employers are also full members of external review expert groups. They are nominated by different professional associations of employers. As a rule, employers are nominated by National Industrial Chamber, National Chamber of Entrepreneurs “Atameken” and business organizations.

As student unions at national level do not work, though formally exist, selection of student-experts is made by recommendations of HEIs, which suggest their best and active students. Since the beginning of its activities, IQAA has been training and including students to all expert groups for external reviews. Students are equal members of the expert groups. In 2014, IQAA developed the Guidelines for student-experts participating in the procedures of institutional and specialized accreditation, which was developed on the basis of ESU experience in QUEST Project.

Profile and competencies of each expert should correspond to the specific external review. The work of the expert group is coordinated by the IQAA coordinator, who is not a member of any expert group. Prior to every external review, a coordinator from IQAA conducts a webinar for the expert group, where they discuss preparation to the site visit, self-assessment materials and organizational questions. Technical support for the webinar is provided by the Department of Expertise and Information Technologies by means of the Polycom videoconferencing. Participation in the webinar gives experts an opportunity to get to know each other and discuss materials. Participation in training is obligatory for all experts. Special attention is given to training of student-experts and their information through website of IQAA and the Agency’s web-page on Facebook.

Every year IQAA periodically conducts training of experts both at the office and in universities. The Agency also organizes trainings in other cities, e.g., Almaty and Shymkent. On the seminars IQAA informs experts on their work in the expert groups, explains standards and criteria of internal quality assurance, guidelines of external review, a template of external review report and other training materials. Special attention is paid to separate training seminars for student-experts. Information on the past training events is available on the website of IQAA.

Currently the IQAA database of experts has 940 individuals, including 560 national certified experts, 148 international experts, 112 employers and 120 students. International experts represent 23 European countries, the majority of them come from Russia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Slovenia, Poland, Germany, etc. The database allows the Agency to search for
experts by different criteria (field of professional knowledge, position, etc.) and select experts according to the set task.

**Figure 10. Figures from the IQAA’s database of experts**

Accreditation Committees contribute to the improvement of the existing database of experts by field of the committee, as well as in the process of selecting experts for expertise of SARs of HEIs/study programmes and external review procedures. The expert database is constantly updated, reviewed and approved at the meetings of the Accreditation Council.

IQAA takes exclusive responsibility for nomination of experts. Formed by a coordinator groups of experts are agreed with the subject-specific Accreditation Committee and then appointed by the order of the President of IQAA.

After completion of the external review, IQAA conducts cross-check surveying of members of the expert group. The survey participants’ opinions (head of the expert group, experts, coordinator and representatives of HEI under review) are added as comments to the IQAA database of experts. Experts, who receive a “no-confidence vote”, are marked with the status of “not recommended experts”, though, it happens rarely - there were just a few cases during the period of IQAA’s activities. IQAA takes into consideration these comments when forming the compositions of the expert groups for future external reviews.

Since the establishement of the Agency, only once there was a complaint to the Complaints Commission of IQAA in 2015, in regards to the inappropriate behaviour of the expert, who had a conflict of interests, but did not inform IQAA about it. After considering the complaint, the Complaints Commission made appropriate actions and the conflict was resolved, while the expert was never involved in any other external reviews. The selection process of experts and their participation in external reviews is illustrated in **Figure 11**.
Figure 11. Selection of external experts and conducting an external review

Selection of external experts and holding of the external review

**Formation of the database of experts**

1) recommendations from HEIs
2) nomination by foreign quality assurance agencies
3) cooperation with foreign HEIs

**Thorough selection of the team members**

- Institutional accreditation
  - Head of the group of experts
  - Rector/Vice-rector/Dean from a HEI

- Specialized (programme) accreditation
  - Head of the group of experts
  - Dean/Head of the department

**The final composition of the group is approved by the Order of the President**

- Right for a justified and reasonable refusal against particular candidates

**Informing of the university about the composition of the group of experts**

- Training of experts on the accreditation procedure
- Signing of the Code of Honor by experts
- Holding of the external review, drafting a report

- Holding of training workshops, video-conferences, webinars, briefings for experts

At the end of the external review, the agency conducts a cross-check questioning of coordinators, representatives of universities and experts with the purpose to monitor the efficiency of the process.
Main evidences

- Database of international and national experts for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of HEIs
- The procedure for selection of experts for external review
- Regulation on the Accreditation Committees
- Guidelines for student-experts involved in the procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
- The Code of Honor for Accreditation Experts
- Guidelines on organization and conducting an external review for procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
- Template form of the external review report on institutional accreditation of HEIs
- Template form of the external review report on specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
- IQAA website - “External review reports” section
- Analytical reports on results of analyzing the feedback

11.5 ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

**Standard:**

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

**IQAA’s compliance with the standard**

All official decisions made as a result of external quality assessment are based on ESG, normative and legislative regulations in the area of higher and post-graduate education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, standards and criteria of IQAA, external and internal documents of IQAA and take into consideration expectations of stakeholders.

IQAA carries out a number of subsequent events in order to ensure a uniform application of its criteria:

1. Standards and criteria for internal and external systems of quality assurance are available to all HEIs and are presented on the website (www.iqaa.kz). The application of assessment criteria for SARs is conducted consistently.

2. The selection and training of experts for external reviews for all HEIs are conducted consistently. Prior to each external review, IQAA conducts videoconferences for experts in order to clarify procedures of assessment and decision-making in respect to the level of compliance of the SAR with the actual state of affairs in the educational organization.

3. In all external reviews in the framework of the institutional and programme accreditation, experts apply a four-point grading scale (fully complies, complies with minor remarks, complies with remarks, does not comply). The accreditation system in the Agency has been considerably improved for the last two years. This improvement relates to the fact that in order to apply assessment criteria consistently, IQAA developed the additional instruction for experts, in particular, the instruction on how to determine the level of assessment with minor remarks or remarks.
4. IQAA provides all HEIs with the project (preliminary draft) of an external review report. Within one week, HEIs are able to present their factual remarks, if any. If a HEI presents its remarks, IQAA either takes them into account when writing the final report or gives a justified disproof on comments from HEIs.

5. The Accreditation Council makes a decision on accreditation of HEI/study programme on the basis of the final external review report, the SAR, IQAA conclusion on the external review and comments from HEI (if any). The appropriate decision is documented in a form of the protocol, which is signed by all members of the Accreditation Council, who participate in the meeting;

6. The procedure of decision-making by the Accreditation Council is presented in details in the Provisions on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation of HEIs or specialized accreditation of study programmes.

The Accreditation Council of IQAA is a collegial body in charge of decision-making on accreditation. The Accreditation Council of IQAA has 11 members:
- representatives of the academia (5 members);
- an international expert (1 member) – Director of Development and International Cooperation at Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA), Director of the Board at the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE);
- representatives of employers (4 members) – members of the National Industrial Chamber of Kazakhstan, the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the RK, and the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Astana city;
- a representative of students (1 member).

However, in the process of preparing a SAR, IQAA made a decision to increase the composition of the Accreditation Council to 13 members by increasing the number of students to 2 persons (suggestion of the student member of the Accreditation Council), and representatives of academia to 6 persons (a professor of technical university).

The composition of the Accreditation Council of IQAA was formed on basis of suggestions from stakeholders: HEIs, TVET organizations, research institutions, employers, and ministries. It reflects multidimensional public interests in quality of HEIs’ activities and ensures representation of opinions of different stakeholders within the educational process. The selection of members to the Accreditation Council is carried out by the commision of the Agency. The key requirements in selection of members for the Accreditation Council are their competencies in the system of education quality and their interest. More detailed information about the Accreditation Council is presented in the Regulations on the Accreditation Council.

Meetings of the Accreditation Council are held in accordance with strategic and working plans of the Agency. The meetings are considered competent in the presence of a quorum. Correspondence participation in a videoconference regime is considered the same as a physical presence at the meeting.
The Accreditation Council at its meeting reviews and discusses the following materials: a SAR of the educational organization/study programme, an external review report, conclusion of IQAA, written statement (commentary) of the educational organization on the external review report (if applicable), and a presentation on the outcomes of the external review.

In 2015, in addition to qualitative indicators, IQAA introduced quantitative indicators of decision-making of the Accreditation Council. This step was aimed at ensuring the consistent approach for objective assessment. The decision-making process is conducted in accordance with the algorithm for evaluative judgments in points (points are given to each standard). However, on the basis of the additional information, the Accreditation Council can choose not to follow the recommendations from experts and to make another decision. The Accreditation Council have authority to fully accredit a HEI or a study programme for 5 years, to accredit it with conditions for 3 years or deny accreditation to any HEI or a study programme. All normative documents are available on the IQAA’s website in the section “Documents of IQAA”, which gives participants of the accreditation procedures an opportunity to refer to them any time they need.

IQAA takes full responsibility for all decisions made on its accreditation procedures. Outcomes of accreditation procedures are published on the IQAA’s website in the list of accredited HEIs and accredited study programmes with the obligatory statement of validity period of accreditation. The results are also sent to the MES RK for inclusion of accredited HEIs and study programmes to the relevant National Registers.

IQAA sends official letters to the educational organizations concerned, indicating fields for improvement and recommendations, and issues documental confirmation of passing the accreditation procedure – a certificate of institutional and/or specialized accreditation in three languages (Kazakh, Russian, English).

Main evidences
✔ Regulations on the Accreditation Council of IQAA
✔ Provision on decision-making of the Accreditation Council of IQAA concerning institutional accreditation of higher education institutions
✔ Provision on decision-making of the Accreditation Council of IQAA concerning accreditation of study programmes
✔ Protocols of the Accreditation Council of IQAA (at the request)
✔ IQAA website, List of accredited HEIs
✔ IQAA website, List of accredited study programmes
✔ Guidelines on organization and conducting an external review for procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
✔ Standards and Guidelines of external quality assurance for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

11.6 ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting

**Standard:**
Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

**IQAA’s compliance with the standard**

IQAA has developed and applies standard forms and procedures for evaluation and reporting. To ensure completeness of the material and consistency, experts use the template for the external review report, which they receive before the site visit.

The external review report has a clear structure and explicitly illustrates the compliance (or non-compliance) of HEIs or study programmes with IQAA standards and criteria. This report is presented by the head of the group of experts in the electronic version. The structure of the external review report is provided in the Guidelines on organization and conducting an external review for procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation.

The structure of the external review report contains the context and aims of the site visit, main characteristics of the HEI, assessment of each standard with mandatory description of achievements, evidence, good practice and areas for improvement, programme of the external review, list of interviewees and attended classes. The average volume of the report usually constitutes 40-50 pages with annexes.

The style of writing of the report has to comply with the aim of conducting the external review and to demonstrate the result of work executed by the external group of experts. IQAA coordinator checks the external review report on its compliance with the IQAA’s requirements.

In order to ensure transparency of accreditation procedure, a preliminary version of the external review report is sent to the HEI under review within two weeks after the site visit for correction of factual inaccuracies (if any). The HEI also has the right to give written commentaries on the report. The expert group may correct their final report based on the received commentaries and correction of factual inaccuracies.

External review reports form the basis for preparation of the IQAA’s presentation and statement on accreditation of HEIs and study programmes. The statement is considered by the subject-specific Accreditation Committee, which gives its suggestion to the Accreditation Council for decision-making.

HEIs develop action plans in the areas for improvement and publish them in the open access on their websites.

IQAA regularly improves the forms and procedures of the external evaluation on the basis of feedback from experts and HEIs during discussions in focus groups in the framework of seminars and trainings.
IQAA maintains registers of accredited HEIs and study programmes and publishes them on its website.

IQAA makes a report on activities of quality assurance in education for the MES RK, which includes accredited HEIs and study programmes to the relevant National Registers.

**Publication of reports.** External review reports written by IQAA expert groups are published on the official website of the Agency. Full external review reports and presentations of coordinators made on the conducted accreditation procedures are published in Russian. Selective full reports are published in Kazakh and English. Summary external review reports are published in English.

All external review reports are checked on reliability of facts and clarity and readability of the text for all stakeholders, including academic environment and students.

**Main evidences**
- Guidelines on organization and conducting an external review for procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
- Standards and Guidelines of external quality assurance for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation procedures
- Template form of the external review report on institutional accreditation of HEIs
- Template form of the external review report on specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
- IQAA website - List of accredited HEIs
- IQAA website - List of accredited study programmes
- IQAA website - External review reports

**11.7 ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and appeals**

**Standard:**
Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

**IQAA’s compliance with the standard**

In order to assure the objectivity and justification of the decision-making for accreditation of HEIs and study programmes, IQAA has developed the procedures of complaints and appeals. IQAA considers these procedures as an integral part of the quality assurance process and publishes corresponding regulations in the open access on its website.

IQAA considers possible complaints and appeals from educational organizations as a part of the strategy aimed at improvement of the quality of its activities, which allows:
- to control and evaluate the efficiency of employed procedures;
- to maintain transparency and responsibility in activities of IQAA staff and experts, involved in procedures of external reviews;
- to identify possible violations made in the course of external reviews and to find the ways of their prevention in the subsequent evaluation procedures.
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

IQAA differentiates the definition of the complaint and appeal in the following way. A complaint can be made in the following cases:

- complaints about the work and behavior of the head of the group, external experts or IQAA coordinator;
- complaints about the inaccuracy of information presented by IQAA;
- complaints on “factual inaccuracies”, which means that information presented by the educational organization was used by the external expert groups incorrectly, thus leading to the negative conclusion made by the expert group;
- dishonesty of the expert group, violation of the Code of Honor or fraud.

A complaint is not accepted, if the incorrect information was presented by the educational organization itself.

The appeal can be filed in the following cases:

- violation of the accreditation procedure;
- “factual inaccuracies”, which means that information presented by the educational organization was used by the external expert group and the Accreditation Council incorrectly, thus leading to the negative decision on accreditation.

The Appeals Committee consists of 5 members: 4 representatives of the academic environment (2 of them are Professors of Law), 1 member – representative of employers. Members of the Appeals Committee are selected on the basis of suggestions from HEIs, employers, and IQAA. The members of the Appeals Committee are selected for a term of three years. The meeting of the Appeals Committee is private and participation of its members can be carried out in a videoconference regime.

During the whole operation of the Agency only once, in 2013, for consideration of the Appeals Committee was submitted an appeal from a HEI accredited with conditions (protocol of the Accreditation Council’s meeting dated 21.12.2013), and not accredited after the second external review (protocol of the Accreditation Council’s meeting dated 28.03.2015). The appeal said about the existence of factual inaccuracies in the external review report made by the group of experts. Having analyzed all presented materials of the case, the Appeals Committee concluded that the external experts evaluated information presented by a HEI correctly during the second external review. As a result, the appeal was dismissed (protocol of the Appeals Committee’s meeting dated 01.06.2015). After considering the decision of the Appeals Committee, the Accreditation Council left its previous decision on accreditation without changes (protocol of the Accreditation Council’s meeting dated 20.06.2015).

The Complaints Commission is represented by members from the academic environment and consists of 3 main and 5 ad-hoc members to ensure unbiased consideration of complaints by members, who have not participated in certain institutional or specialized (programme) accreditation or in any other activities related to the evaluation of HEIs or study programmes. During the period of its operation, the Complaints Commision has considered one complaint from a HEI on the issue of “biased attitude” and “incorrect statements” of the head of the expert group.

As a result, the Complaints Commission supported a complaint from the HEI and made a decision to exclude this expert from the IQAA database of external experts (protocol of the
Complaints Commission’s meeting dated 25.04.2015) and the Accreditation Council took into account the results of considering the complaint and the study programmes were accredited with a condition for 3 years.

For additional information on functioning of the Appeals Committee and Complaints Commission see section 4.2 Organizational structure of IQAA and section 11.5 ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for outcomes.

Main evidences
✓ Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the Procedure of Appeal
✓ Regulations on the Procedure of Considering Complaints
✓ Meeting protocol of the Accreditation Council dated 21.12.2013 (at the request)
✓ Meeting protocol of the Accreditation Council dated 28.03.2015 (at the request)
✓ Meeting protocol of the Appeals Commission dated 01.06.2015 (at the request)
✓ Meeting protocol of the Accreditation Council dated 20.06.2015 (at the request)
✓ Meeting protocol of the Complaints Commission dated 25.04.2015 (at the request)
12. INFORMATION AND OPINIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

IQAA constantly works on gathering opinions and feedback of all internal and external stakeholders to enhance its activities, and quality of educational institutions and study programmes on the whole. This is accomplished by the means of:

- Receiving stakeholders’ feedback and opinions in the design of standards and criteria of institutional and programme accreditation, the strategic plan of development and the self-assessment report of the Agency;
- Coordination on the composition of peer review panels with members of the Accreditation Committees;
- Appointing independent experts from academic environment for expert evaluation of self-assessment reports submitted by higher education institutions;
- Surveys of external experts, coordinators and educational institutions after peer reviews;
- Collecting of information through an online feedback form on the website of the Agency, where members of the public can share their views on accreditation procedures, write their remarks or recommendations;
- Surveys of students on their assessment of the support provided by the Agency and their assessment of the consideration of their work and recommendations during peer reviews;
- Surveys of representatives of higher education institutions on the impact of accreditation on their quality enhancement and activities.

In the course of working on the self-assessment report, IQAA has actively involved stakeholders to discuss and improve the report. The Agency suggested stakeholders to provide comments and recommendations in a free form or by answering a special questionnaire form for their convenience.

The IQAA’s self-assessment report’s draft was provided for comments to several international experts from foreign QA agencies and a number of representatives of national academia (external experts, representatives of higher education institutions and research institutes, members of the Accreditation Council of IQAA, chairs of the Accreditation Committees of IQAA). As a result, IQAA received answers from nine respondents with positive feedback and recommendations, many of which were presented in the final version of the self-assessment report. The results of the feedback are provided in Annex 8.
13. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

As a result of the self-assessment process, IQAA reinstates its support for the ESG as an effective tool for producing improvements and positive changes in the activities of the Agency. The outcomes of introducing the ESG in IQAA’s activities are the following:

1) IQAA works in accordance with ESG 2015, analyzes best international experience in the field of quality assurance, applies it in its procedures, and promotes a culture of quality and self-enhancement in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan.

2) IQAA actively cooperates with European and international associations and QA agencies, involves international experts, students and employers to participate in its peer reviews and decision-making on accreditation of educational organizations and study programmes.

3) IQAA has professional and competent staff and works on the improvement of their qualifications and experience in quality assurance. In particular, the Agency works on enhancement of the professional qualities and skills of the staff and external experts by conducting regular conferences and seminars with the participation of recognized international experts in higher education, who share best practice with them.

The current challenges for IQAA are presented in the relatively unstable regulatory and normative legal environment in the laws concerning higher education and quality assurance. The inclusion of an additional number of national and foreign agencies to the National Register of the MES RK may have a downside. The competition between the agencies included in the National Register of the MES RK may lead to situations when the selection of agencies by educational organizations will be made not on the basis of the best standards and procedures, but on the basis of the relative easiness and quick positive results on accreditation. The additional issue for IQAA is that the absence of the state funding may limit or complicate the work on thematic analyses and other research projects.

In order to fulfill the requirements of the State Programme of Education and Science Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016-2019, comply with the ESG and implement the IQAA’s Strategy of Development, the Agency will concentrate its work on the following areas for improvement:

1. More attention will be provided to student-centered learning, to provide more information and advice of the ways of achieving it, including by the means of organizing conferences and seminars with leading national and international experts for teaching staff and representatives of higher education institutions;
2. Together with the Ministry of Education and Science, higher education institutions and employers, IQAA will be involved in the process of developing and revising Sectoral Qualification Frameworks, in accordance with which higher education institutions will develop study programmes on the basis of professional standards;
3. In the assessment of study programmes, IQAA will take into account disciplines, which reflect innovative technologies of related industries and assist in ensuring qualifications on demand in the labor market;
4. In the course of conducting accreditation, IQAA should pay a special attention to the further introduction of the credit system of education in line with ECTS, academic and credit mobility, as well as the involvement of students in the design of study programmes;
5. To expand and improve the work on the development of a culture of quality in educational organizations;
6. To enhance research on thematic analyses and other forms of research;
7. To conduct accreditation of educational institutions in other levels of education, including continuous education;
8. To enhance information technologies in using the databases of external experts and other quality assurance procedures.

IQAA will aspire to become an organization, operating and recognized on both national and international levels. IQAA will work on the development and realization of new ideas and procedures in quality assurance of educational institutions. IQAA will continue its activities on research and distribution of best international practice in quality assurance of higher education.
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

APQN – The Asia-Pacific Quality Network

AC – Accreditation Council

CEENQA – Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

CIQG – CHEA International Quality Group

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

ENQA – The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

ESG – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

HE – Higher Education

HEI – Higher Education Institution

HR – Human Resources

INQAAHE – International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

IQAA – Independent Kazakh Agency for Quality Assurance in Education

IREG – Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence

MES RK – Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan

NCS – National Classification System

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

QA – Quality Assurance

RK – Republic of Kazakhstan

SAR – Self-Assessment Report

TVET – Technical and Vocational Education and Training
LIST OF EVIDENCES

✓ Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Education”
✓ The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Non-profit Organizations”
✓ IQAA Statute
✓ The Regulations on IQAA (at the request)
✓ IQAA’s Strategy of Development for 2015-2018
✓ Website of IQAA
✓ Composition of IQAA academic staff
✓ National Register No. 1 of the MES RK “Accreditation Bodies”
✓ National Register No. 2 of the MES RK “Accredited Educational Organizations”
✓ National Register No. 3 of the MES RK “Accredited Study Programmes”
✓ Certificate of registration of IQAA in the National Register of Accreditation Bodies of the MES RK
✓ Certificate of accreditation of IQAA by the MES RK as a subject of scientific and (or) research technical activities
✓ Standards for Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions
✓ Standards for Institutional Accreditation of Research Institutions
✓ Standards for specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
✓ Standards for Specialized (Programme) Accreditation of Research Institutions
✓ Regulations on the IQAA Departments (at the request)
✓ Job descriptions of IQAA staff (at the request)
✓ Labor agreements of IQAA staff (at the request)
✓ Budget of IQAA (at the request)
✓ Protocols of inventory of material and technical base (at the request)
✓ Contracts for rendering accreditation procedure services between educational organizations and IQAA (at the request)
✓ Internal Quality Assurance Policy of IQAA
✓ Standards and Guidelines of external quality assurance for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
✓ The Code of Honor for IQAA experts
✓ The Code of Honor for the IQAA Accreditation Council’s members
✓ The Code of Honor for IQAA employees
✓ Regulations on the Accreditation Council of IQAA
✓ Composition of the IQAA Accreditation Council
✓ Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning institutional accreditation of HEIs
✓ Provision on decision-making of the IQAA Accreditation Council concerning accreditation of study programmes
✓ Protocols of the Accreditation Council of IQAA (at the request)
✓ Regulation on the Accreditation Committees
✓ Regulations on the Appeals Commission and the Procedure of Appeal
✓ Regulations on the Procedure of Considering Complaints
✓ Regulations on Post-accreditation Monitoring
✓ Guidelines on organization and conducting of a self-assessment procedure in organizations of higher and postgraduate education (at the request)
✓ Guidelines on organization and conducting of a self-assessment procedure for study programmes of higher and postgraduate education (at the request)
IQAA’s Self-Assessment Report

- Guidelines on organization and conducting an external review for procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
- Template form of the external review report on institutional accreditation of HEIs
- Template form of the external review report on specialized (programme) accreditation of study programmes of HEIs
- IQAA website - External review reports
- Working plans of IQAA (at the request)
- Annual reports of IQAA’s activities 2015, 2014
- “Higher Education Institution with Students’ Eyes”, 2016
- “Employers’ Participation in Higher Education”, 2015
- A quarterly newsletter of IQAA
- Participation of IQAA staff in research projects of higher education organized by the JSC “Information-Analytic center” – “Operation of Board of Trustees in educational organizations”, 2011
- The website of IQAA, “Events” section
- The website of IQAA, “Publications” section
- Materials from seminars and conferences (at the request)
- Requirements to an expertise on a self-assessment report by a higher education institution in the framework of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation (at the request)
- Guidelines on a preliminary review of HEI within the framework of institutional accreditation
- Instruction for coordinators to organize and conduct external review in the framework of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation (at the request)
- Database of international and national experts for institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation of HEIs
- The procedure for selection of experts for external review (at the request)
- Guidelines for student-experts involved in the procedures of institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation
- Analytical reports on results of analyzing the feedback (at the request)
- IQAA website, List of accredited HEIs
- IQAA website, List of accredited study programmes
- Meeting protocol of the Accreditation Council dated 21.12.2013 (at the request)
- Meeting protocol of the Accreditation Council dated 28.03.2015 (at the request)
- Meeting protocol of the Appeals Commission dated 01.06.2015 (at the request)
- Meeting protocol of the Accreditation Council dated 20.06.2015 (at the request)