



INDEPENDENT AGENCY FOR RECOGNITION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION

Self-Assessment Report for Review by ENQA

July 2022

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Development of the self-assessment report (SAR).....	3
3. Higher education and QA of higher education in the context of ARQA.....	5
3.1 General characteristics of the system of higher and postgraduate education in Kazakhstan.....	5
3.2 Analysis of the quality assurance system in Kazakhstan	8
4. History, profile and activities of ARQA.....	12
5. Profile, functioning and (EQA) activities of ARQA (compliance with Part 3 of the ESG)	18
5.1 ESG Standard 3.1 Activities, Policy and Processes for Quality Assurance	18
5.2 ESG Standard 3.2 Official Status.....	22
5.3 ESG Standard 3.3 Independence	22
5.4 ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic Analysis.....	26
5.5 ESG Standard 3.5 Resources	28
5.6 ESG Standard 3.6 Internal Quality Assurance and Professional Conduct.....	29
5.7 ESG Standard 3.7 Cyclical External Review of Agencies	32
6. Design and implementation of the agency’s EQA activities (compliance with Part 2 of the ESG).....	34
6.1 ESG Standard 2.1 Consideration of Internal Quality Assurance	34
6.2 ESG Standard 2.2 Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose	37
6.3 ESG Standard 2.3 Implementing Processes	39
6.4 ESG Standard 2.4 Peer-Review Experts	45
6.5 ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for Outcome.....	48
6.6 ESG Standard 2.6 Reporting	49
6.7 ESG Standard 2.7 Complaints and Appeals	50
7. Opinions of stakeholders.....	52
8. Recommendations and main findings from previous review(s) and agency’s resulting follow-up (for second and subsequent reviews only)	54
9. SWOT analysis	55
10. Key challenges and areas for future development.....	56
11. Glossary of Terms	57
12. Annexes.....	59

1. Introduction

The "ARQA" Independent Agency for Recognition and Quality Assurance in Education was established in 2015 to conduct institutional and programme accreditation procedures, produce rankings of educational organizations and independent assessment of the level of TVET specialists' qualification. ARQA's mission is to disseminate the quality culture ideology in the Agency's field of activity. The accreditation standards and procedures developed by the Agency are harmonized with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015), take into account the national context and, at the same time, retain their uniqueness.

The Agency is constantly trying to improve the quality of its services and overall performance by involving various groups of stakeholders, as well as by continuously monitoring and analyzing its activities.

In 2019, the Agency became an ENQA (The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) Affiliate. At the next stage, it plans to become the organization's member and get included in The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). [The Requirements for the inclusion of accreditation bodies in the Register 1 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan](#) adopted in 2021 oblige the accreditation bodies to be members of ENQA or be included in EQAR. However, the fact that ARQA set a goal to become an ENQA member 2 years prior to the approval of these rules indicates its genuine intention and readiness to become an accreditation body recognized in the EHEA.

ARQA believes that preparation of this self-assessment report and undergoing ENQA-coordinated review will provide many opportunities for the enhancement of the Agency's performance and will have significant impact on all its processes.

2. Development of the self-assessment report (SAR)

As indicated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews¹, the first main stage of the review process is the preparation of a self-assessment report. The issue of conducting self-assessment of the "ARQA" Independent Agency for Recognition and Quality Assurance in Education" Institution (hereafter referred to as ARQA or the Agency) was considered and discussed at working sessions, seminars, meetings of the Accreditation Council, meetings with stakeholders.

The objectives of the ARQA's self-assessment, which have been developed in accordance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), are as follows:

- to objectively assess the quality of the Agency's activities;
- to determine the areas where to focus the improvement activities;
- to facilitate the internal and external exchange of positive experiences.

Prior to the start of the self-assessment procedure, the following preparatory work was carried out at ARQA:

- the procedure for organizing and conducting a self-assessment of ARQA's activities in accordance with the Guidelines² was presented to each staff member and all heads of the Agency's structural divisions (including the Russian translation of this document).

- training seminars have been organized and conducted for the Agency staff to explain the procedure, methodology and technology of conducting an external visit procedure for the compliance with the ESG according to the ENQA membership criteria;

- plan for the organization and conduct of self-assessment has been developed and approved by the decree of the Agency's Director;

- a working group on self-assessment has been established and an "agency coordinator" has been appointed. The group included 4 staff members: advisor to director, deputy director, HEIs accreditation department coordinator and a manager for international cooperation;

- working group's schedule for the organization and conduct of self-assessment has been drawn up.

No	Activity	Date
1.	Approving the composition of the Agency's working group	September 2021
2.	Preparing and sending the translation of «Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews» and «Guide of content for the SAR» to the members of the working group	October 2021
3.	Development of draft SAR	November 2021
4.	Staff training seminars	December 2021

¹ Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews. (2021). Brussels, Belgium. Available at: <https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/ENQA-Guidelines-2021.pdf>

² Ibid.

5.	Holding a meeting with ENQA's coordinator to ask questions regarding SAR preparation	January 2022
6.	Further development of draft SAR (2 nd version); getting feedback from the Agency staff and member of the Accreditation Council	January-February 2022
7.	Sending SAR to external stakeholders (employers, representatives of MES RK, experts) for comments and suggestions	March 2022
8.	SAR formatting	April 2022
9.	Translation of SAR into English	April-May 2022
10.	Final revision of SAR	May 2022
11.	Submission of SAR for ENQA comments	10 June 2022
12.	Screening of SAR by ENQA Review Coordinator and making all the necessary changes	June 2022
13.	Final submission of SAR	July 2022
14.	Translation of the Agency's other documents that might be requested by the review panel when checking the agency's self-assessment report	July-August 2022

Table 1. SAR development timeline

The results of the work on the self-assessment of the activities, facilities and infrastructure allow us to conclude that ARQA's development has witnessed some positive changes over the past five years. According to the main indicators, the quality of the activities, the high potential of the staff, the level of scientific research, information and facility support are sufficient for the Agency's effective functioning.

In general, the preparation for the self-assessment of ARQA's activities facilitated a significant improvement of operations and facilities. Moreover, it had a positive impact on management processes, increased the responsibility of ARQA employees for the results of their work.

3. Higher education and QA of higher education in the context of ARQA

3.1 General characteristics of the system of higher and postgraduate education in Kazakhstan

The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "[On Education](#)" has set out the following principles of state policy in the field of education:

- equality of the rights of all to receive a quality education;
- priority of the education system development;
- accessibility of education of all levels to the population, taking into account the cognitive development, psychophysiological and individual characteristics of each person;
- secular, humanistic and developmental nature of education, the priority of civic and national values, human life and health, free personal development;
- respect for human rights and freedoms;
- stimulating the education of the individual and the development of giftedness;
- continuity of the education process, ensuring continuity between all levels of education;
- unity of education, upbringing and development;
- democratic nature of education management, transparency of the educational system;
- diversity of educational organizations in terms of ownership forms, forms of education and upbringing, areas of education.

On the basis of the principle of continuity between all levels of education, the education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan includes the following levels of education:

- 1) Preschool education and training;
- 2) Primary education;
- 3) Basic secondary education;
- 4) Secondary education (general secondary education, TVET);
- 5) Post-secondary education;
- 6) Higher education;
- 7) Postgraduate education.

Kazakhstan fulfills its social obligations to ensure equal access to higher education. The issue of ensuring access to quality education is raised at the level of the country's highest authority, which [assigns education the mission of the national security idea](#). Ensuring access and equality in higher education is a top priority for the next 5 years of the country's strategic development. This task is included in the [National Development Plan until 2025](#), which is aimed at "mitigating the consequences of the COVID crisis and developing factors that would accelerate economic growth for a more sustainable and inclusive economy".

At the level of higher education, this task includes the following: 1) support for socially vulnerable groups of citizens and young people from low-income families; 2)

lifelong education (introduction of alternative options for non-formal education, "silver universities", etc.).

In 2020, the number of Kazakhstani universities decreased to 128³. Most of the universities in Kazakhstan are private (see *Figure 1*). At the same time, the number of private universities shows a downward trend. The reduction in the number of universities in Kazakhstan is not an end in itself, but rather the result of the Ministry's work to improve the quality of higher education.

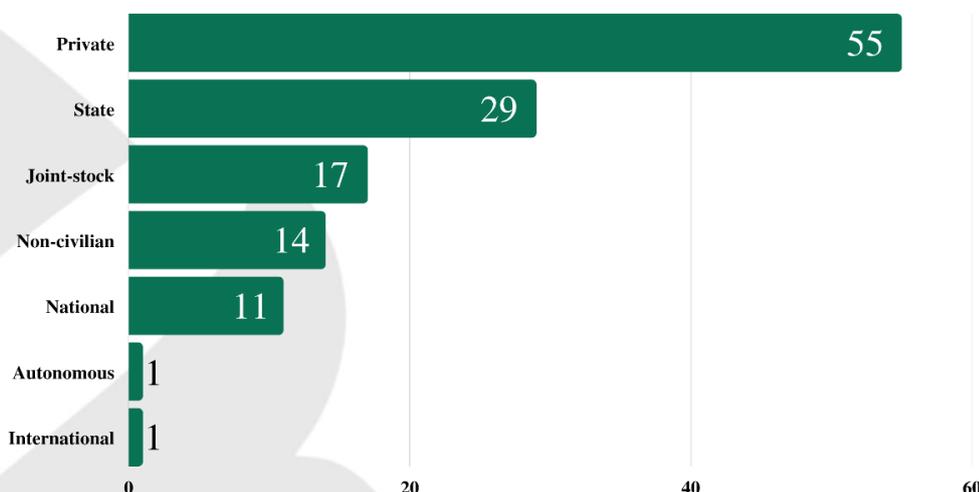


Figure 1. Organizations of higher and postgraduate education, 2020

The state educational order at three levels of higher education for the 2020-2021 academic year amounted to more than 68 thousand grants. Most of the state educational order has been allocated for bachelor's degree — 53 756 units, whereas for master's and doctoral degrees the figures were 12 504 and 1 888 units, respectively⁴.

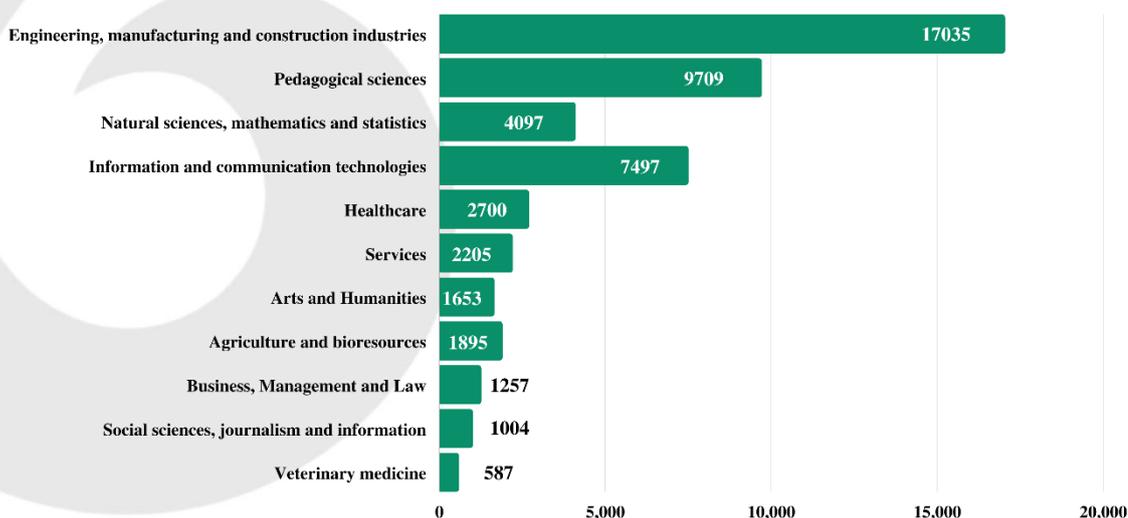


Figure 2. Distribution of state educational grants for bachelor's degree in the context of groups of educational programs

Over the past five years, for the first time, the number of university students has decreased. In 2020, the number of students decreased by more than 4% and amounted

³ National report on the state and development of the education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan (based on the 2020 results). - Nur-Sultan: Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "Information and Analytical Center" JSC, 2021. – 310 p.

⁴ Ibid.

to 576,557 people. 26.5% of the total number of students, or 152,789 people, are first-time applicants accepted on the basis of general secondary, technical and vocational, higher education. More than half of the enrolled students (63.3%, or 96,748 people) were accepted on the basis of general secondary education⁵.

The general contingent of students in Kazakhstan is characterized by gender equality. 53.2% of women and 46.8% of men study at universities. At the same time, in the context of training areas, feminization is observed in the following areas: "Social sciences, Journalism and Information" – 79.1%, "Pedagogical Sciences" – 69.8%, "Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics" – 68.1%, "Healthcare" – 63.4%. On the other hand, the predominance of male representatives is typical for educational programs related to national security and military affairs (80.5%), engineering, manufacturing and construction industries (71.3%), information and communication technologies (70%). Gender equality is observed in the following areas: "Business and Management", "Services", "Agriculture and bioresources"⁶.

The available data make it possible to deduce a profile of an average student of a Kazakhstani university:

- 1) **53.2%** female – **46.8%** male;
- 2) **54.7%** local (from the region of study) – **45.3%** from another region;
- 3) **31.3%** study at state universities – **67.9%** study at private universities – **0.8%** study at foreign universities;
- 4) **64.9%** in Kazakh – **29.6%** in Russian - **5.5%** in other languages;
- 5) **32.8%** governmentally funded (grant) – **67.2%** self-funded⁷.

According to the [UNESCO Institute for Statistics](#), the number of Kazakhstani students studying at foreign universities is 83,503 (making Kazakhstan one of the top ten countries with a highest number of local students studying abroad).

The number of Kazakhstani doctoral students is increasing against the background of a decrease in the number of master's students. Over the past three years, the number of master's students has decreased by 10.3% (see *Figure 3*). A potential reason for this may be the tougher admission requirements for master's programs. Since 2019, a unified comprehensive testing has been introduced (foreign language tests, tests on specialized subjects, training readiness tests) to ensure the transparency of the grant award procedure. The number of applicants for doctoral programs, on the other hand, increased by 20%.

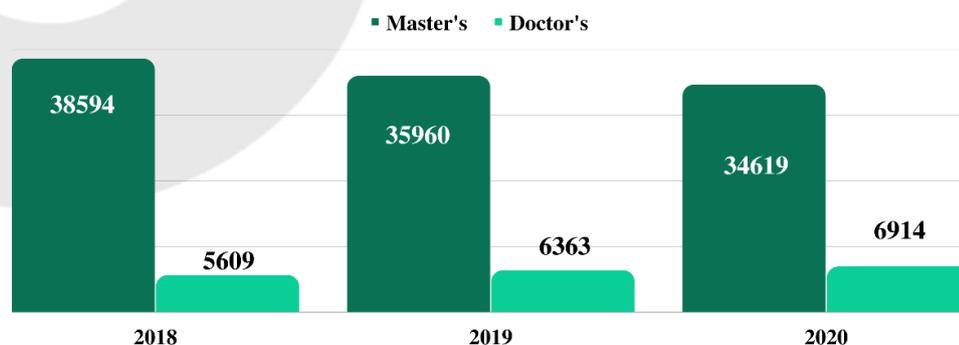


Figure 3. Number of students enrolled in postgraduate educational programs, 2018-2020

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Year	2019	2020
Number of full-time staff members	17578	13081
Have Master's Degree	6476	5132
Have PhD	1381	1223
Have Doctor's Degree	47	18
Doctor of Sciences	1578	993
Candidate of Sciences	5575	3803
Professor	1269	942
Associate Professor	2971	1917
Part-time staff	2578	1961

Table 2. Teaching staff dynamics at state universities, 2019-2020

Kazakhstan's digital infrastructure has undergone changes during the coronavirus pandemic. In 2020, the total number of computers used in the HEI educational process increased by 3,318 units compared with 2019 (2020 – 81,541 units, 2019 – 78,223 units), of which 76,350 units have the Internet access⁸.

[PIAAC results](#) highlight the need for the improvement of quality of Kazakhstan's higher education. Kazakhstan's adult population with higher education demonstrate the results in literacy and numeracy that are 35 points lower than those of adults of the OECD countries. In Kazakhstan, adults with higher education show a level of literacy comparable to the results of people who have received secondary education in some other countries participating in the study (for example, Germany, the USA and Estonia). Moreover, the results of Kazakhstan's younger generation happen to be worse than the older generation's ones.

[The Requirements for the inclusion of accreditation bodies in the Register 1 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan](#) approved in 2021 oblige the accreditation bodies to be members of ENQA or be included in EQAR, thereby contributing to the improvement of education quality through the accreditation mechanism.

3.2 Analysis of the quality assurance system in Kazakhstan

The analysis of the development of the education quality assurance system has shown that state regulation in the field of education in Kazakhstan is carried out through legal support, quality management of education, standardization, control⁹. Further development of the HEIs' internal quality assurance system that is based on international Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) will be facilitated by the decree of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 595 "[On approval of Standard Rules for the activities of educational organizations of respective types](#)" dated October 30, 2018, which systematized and defined all levels of education in the country.

⁸ Ibid (n. 3).

⁹ Analytical report on the implementation of the principles of the Bologna Process in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2018. – Astana: Bologna process and academic mobility center of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2018. 64 p.).

The quality assurance system in higher education in Kazakhstan has gone through the following stages of its formation:

- 2001-2005 – introduction of the state accreditation procedure;
- 2005 – the National Accreditation Center (NAC) was established, the standards of which almost completely repeated the standards of the previously used [certification](#). About 10 universities were accredited.
- 2006-2012 – the beginning of the transition from quality control to quality assurance; the transfer of state accreditation functions to an independent competitive environment;
- 2010 – signing of the Bologna Declaration and affirmation of the commitment to the ESG;
- 2012 – on the basis of the Decree No. 1118 of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (dated December 7, 2010) "On approval of the State Program for the Development of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020", the Bologna Process Centre was established on the basis of the National Accreditation Centre (August 31, 2012) in order to provide methodological, scientific, informational and analytical support for the implementation of the parameters of the Bologna process in the Republic of Kazakhstan at the national level.
- 2013-2017 – entry of two national agencies into the ENQA network and the EQAR register, revision of the standards of national accreditation bodies in accordance with the requirements of ESG-2015 (the requirements for national accreditation bodies were described in the [Rules for recognition of accreditation bodies](#) approved in 2016, they were later changed); participation of Kazakhstan as a government member in the EQAR Assembly; positioning of Kazakhstani universities in international rankings. Various stakeholders have become widely involved in the accreditation process, cancellation of the certification procedure for civil universities;
- 2018 – greater academic and managerial independence of universities, changes in legislative acts and regulatory documents governing the activities of the higher and postgraduate education system of the country.

Additional restrictions on the activities of accreditation bodies are established in the [Rules for the recognition of accreditation bodies adopted on 04.10.2021](#). In particular, this concerns an increase in their number since, according to these Rules, agencies that are not ENQA members cannot submit documents for recognition at the national level and are excluded from the Register.

Currently, there are [12 accreditation agencies operating in the country](#), including 6 national and 6 international ones.

To undergo an accreditation procedure, HEIs can either choose one of the accreditation agencies listed on the National register of recognized accreditation bodies (the link is provided above) and contact them directly or publish a tender via the governmental portal (in such a case, the one who offers the lowest price is awarded the contract).

In 2019, the Ministry of Education and Science has developed a project of the National Quality Assurance Model. The basis of the National Quality Assurance Model is formed by: [State Compulsory Education Standards](#); [National framework of Higher Education Qualifications](#); [Qualification requirements for educational activities](#)

(licensing). The project is included in the Quality Assurance Guidelines, which will be described below.

Apart from that, the Ministry of Education and Science plans the formation of an information database on quality, the introduction of adequate follow-up procedures and the consideration of the quality assurance system as a continuous process (which is important due to the absence of the concept of post-accreditation monitoring in the latest version of the Law "[On Education](#)"), the right to declare bankruptcy of the university's quality assurance system, etc. In other words, the national quality assurance model includes: internal quality assurance system, external quality assurance system, guidelines for external quality assurance agencies, a quality assurance system at the state level.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan has also developed the "[Quality Assurance Guidelines](#)" - a document that includes a set of standards regulating internal and external quality assurance systems in accordance with the ESG. Many provisions of the document are based on the guiding principles of quality assurance in the European higher education area (educational organizations' responsibility for the quality of education and quality assurance, trust, quality culture, etc.) and at the same time take into account the requirements of the current legislation in the field of education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In particular, it provides for the operation of a national database of external quality assurance results. However, the Guidelines are in conflict with the ESG (see Section 5.3 for details).

While observing the trends in the development of the quality assurance system of education in Kazakhstan, ARQA believes that in recent years there has been an increase in state regulation in the field of education: the so-called preventive control of the educational organisations' activities is being carried out, the validity period of the license has been limited to five years. The procedure for joining both the national register and ENQA has become more complicated for other Kazakhstani accreditation bodies. The [Rules for the recognition of accreditation bodies](#) adopted on 04.10.2021 not only strengthen the control over the activities of independent accreditation agencies but also eliminate the ways of increasing their number. According to these rules, agencies that are not full members of ENQA cannot submit documents for their recognition at the state level, which creates a vicious circle.

The replacement of the term "higher education institutions" with "organizations of higher and postgraduate education" in the Law "On Education" has created certain issues for the Agency, since this required making corresponding changes to a number of Agency documents.

To summarize, it can be concluded that the higher education system of the Republic is in the process of dynamic development. It responds in a timely manner to the challenges and trends of the global educational space's development, primarily in the EHEA. At the same time, there are a number of negative factors indicating the low quality of Kazakhstan's higher education and the inconsistency of state policy in the field of education:

- the procedure for joining both the national register and ENQA has become more complicated for other Kazakhstani accreditation bodies. The Rules for the recognition of accreditation bodies adopted on 04.10.2021 not only strengthen the control over the activities of independent accreditation agencies but also eliminate the ways of increasing their number;

– introduction of the quality assurance system at the state level, along with an external quality assurance system, which is represented by accreditation bodies, reduces the independence of the latter.



4. History, profile and activities of ARQA

The legal basis for the Agency's activities is its registration as a legal entity with the justice authorities and inclusion in the [Register of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan](#) in accordance with the requirements of the [Rules for the Recognition of Accreditation bodies](#) (see Annex 1). Since November 17, 2017, the "ARQA" Agency has been included in the register of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The "ARQA" Independent Agency for Recognition and Quality Assurance in Education was created in 2015 to carry out institutional and programme accreditation procedures, produce rankings of educational organizations and independent assessment of the level of TVET specialists' qualification. The ultimate goal of all this is the creation of an effective system for assessing the quality of technical and vocational education (TVE), higher and postgraduate education.

ARQA's first accreditation procedures were launched in the spring of 2018. From 2018 to 2021, ARQA carried out the institutional and programme accreditation procedures of 80 colleges and 225 educational programs of TVET, 17 universities and 314 educational programs of higher and postgraduate education.

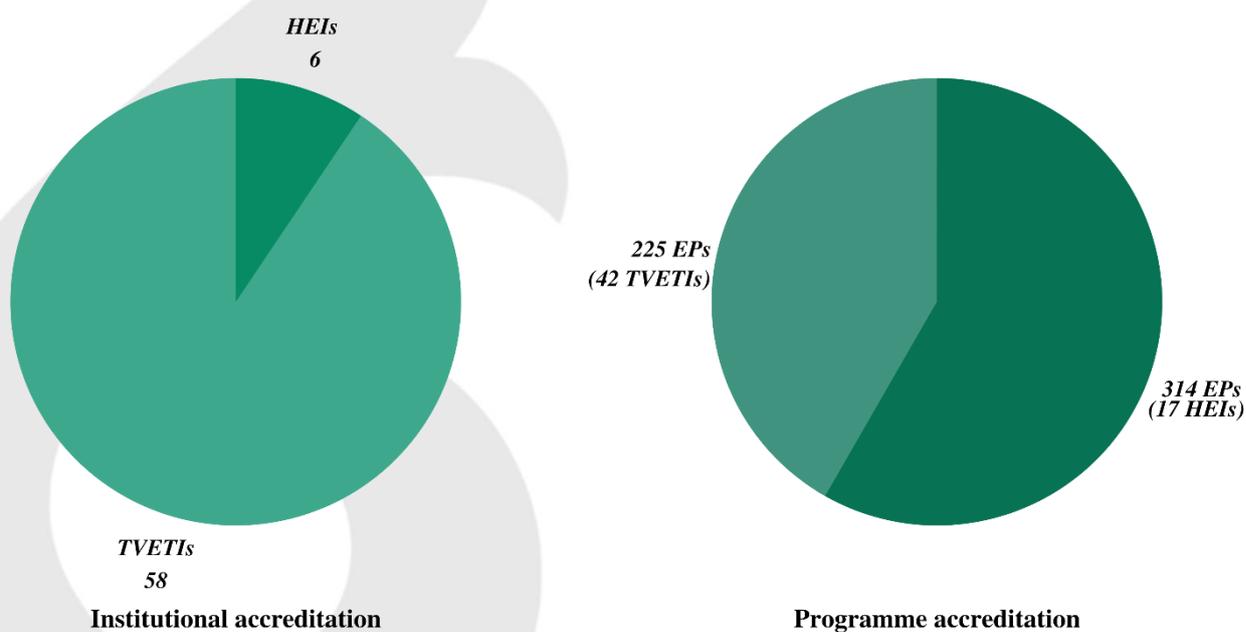


Figure 4. Accreditation procedures conducted by ARQA (2018-2022)

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Bachelor's	19	67	28	7	48
Master's	-	54	38	7	22
Doctor's	-	13	5	3	3
Total	19	134	71	17	73

Table 3. Breakdown of HEIs' programme accreditation by year and level of study (2018-2022)

The first post-accreditation monitoring procedures began in the spring of 2020. At the moment, reaccreditation procedures have not yet been carried out.

So far, the Agency only had 1 cross-border activity, which was an accreditation of a Kyrgyzstani TVET institution.

In organizational terms, ARQA has 4 departments and 8 full-time employees: the director, deputy director, adviser to the director, head of the HEIs accreditation department, manager for international cooperation, an accountant and a lawyer. Two employees have doctoral degree and there are 3 employees who have master's degree.

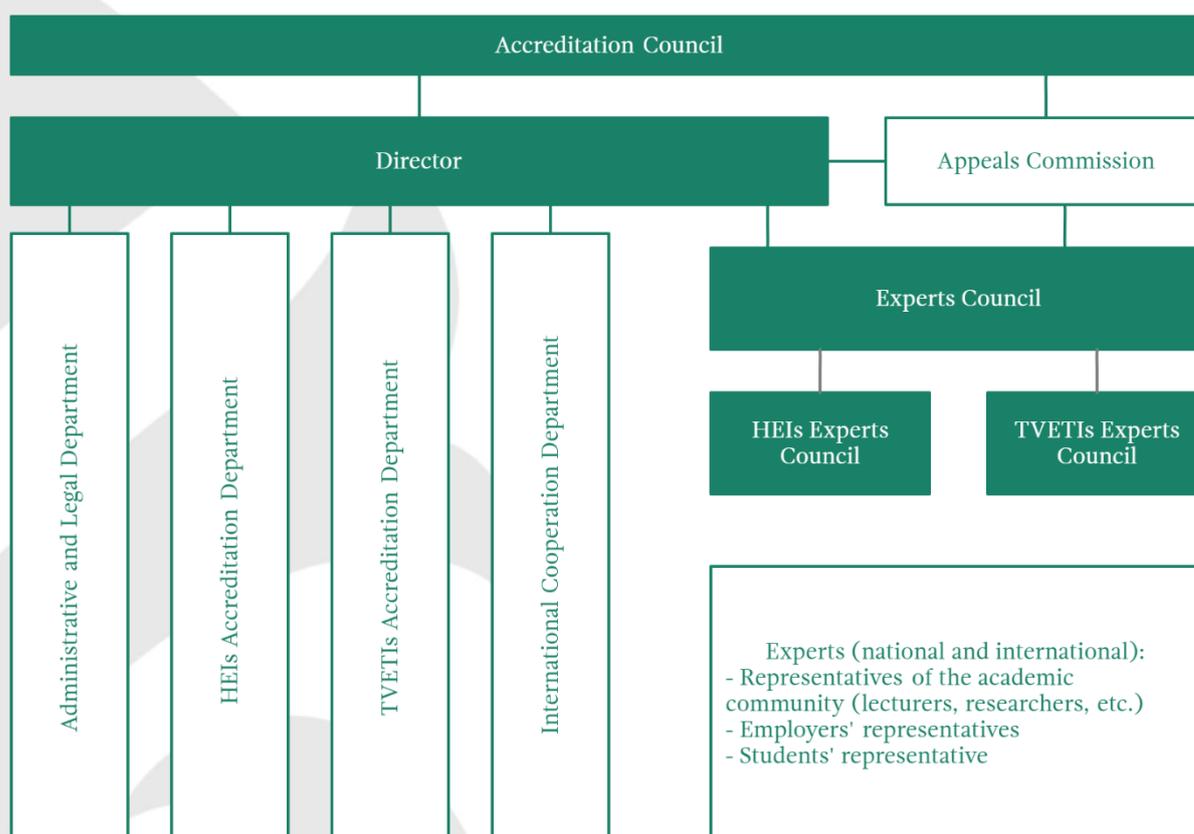


Figure 5: ARQA Organisational structure

The **Administrative and Legal Department** manages the Agency's day-to-day operations and recruitment, concludes contracts, as prepares accounting reports.

HEIs and TVETIs accreditation departments deal with the organization of the accreditation process (including self-assessment, site visits, preparation of materials for the Accreditation Council meetings, post-accreditation monitoring) of respective educational institutions.

The **International Cooperation Department** is responsible for maintaining contacts and correspondence with international networks / associations and partner agencies, as well as for establishing links with the new ones.

The **Accreditation Council** is an independent body that is responsible for making decisions on accreditation of educational organizations / educational programmes, decisions on the results of post-accreditation monitoring and re-accreditation.

The **Experts Council** was created to assist agency employees in organizing expert evaluation of external assessment reports prepared by experts, developing

recommendations for recruiting qualified agency experts, selecting a group of experts to conduct a site visit to an educational organization.

The EC's functions are:

1. to make conclusions on external assessment reports prepared by experts in order to ensure their compliance with the established requirements;
2. to form judgements on appeals made against the experts' recommendations;
3. to prepare explanatory comments on the return of insufficiently reasoned recommendations for their finalisation;
4. to participate in the preparation and consideration of proposals on improvement of institutional and programme accreditation procedures;
5. participate in the analysis and summarization of the Agency's work experience.

The Agency's mission from 2015 to 2021 was as follows: "ARQA, as an external partner, supports educational institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan in their desire to develop an internal quality assurance system through accreditation. By interacting with stakeholders, ARQA promotes the improvement of the quality culture in the educational environment and helps to strengthen confidence in the Kazakhstani education system. Through its activities, ARQA supports and implements the best international quality assurance practices, taking into account the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan".

As a result of understanding the experience of the Agency's activity in 2018-2022 and determining its focus, in 2022 the **mission** of ARQA was revised and formulated as follows: "Disseminating the quality culture ideology in the Agency's field of activity".

The above mission and goals are based on values that help ARQA manage its interactions with all stakeholders, including employees and EOs. These **values** are:

- **Trust** is the foundation of all social institutions, including education. The achievement of the goal contributes to the formation of trust in the HEIs' activities, therefore, the Agency perceives the EO's self-assessment report as proof of efficiency of the EO's internal quality assurance system. Thus, the Agency's activities comply with one of the principles on which ESG is based, in particular, the following one: "Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance".

- **Transparency** indicates the absence of secrecy, the presence of clarity, the availability of information. The Agency has posted all the information regarding accreditation on its website: standards, reports, decisions of the Accreditation Council, news and other necessary information. Thus, following the transparency requirement, the Agency conducts internal and external evaluations in an extremely honest and transparent manner, ensuring the availability of information for all participants in the ongoing accreditation process.

- **Diversity**. The Agency carries out the accreditation of public organizations of many levels of education, i.e. the objects of accreditation are diverse. The expert community is represented by university scientists, heads of organizations at the regional level, employers and students. International experts represent different countries.

- **Collaboration**. As a result of collaboration, i.e. joint activity and interaction, the Agency achieves success with minimal costs. For example, knowledge exchange and training provide an opportunity to learn from the experience of both partners and

individual experts. The participation of Agency employees as experts of other national or international agencies makes a certain contribution to the activities of these agencies.

- **Innovativeness.** The Agency, as an institution carrying out its activities in the social sphere, is constantly adapting to changing requirements. In the course of solving this problem, various innovations in the field of the Agency's activities are being developed and implemented. These innovations are called social innovations. However, there is a difference between innovation and innovativeness. In the Agency, innovativeness is defined as an implemented innovation. Therefore, there is an understanding that the implementation of social innovations is somewhat distant in time, their effect does not manifest itself so quickly. The Agency strives to assess the innovativeness of its activities in the near future.

The following table provides a comparative description of the main tasks and functions of the activity in accordance with the [ARQA's Charter](#) and their performance at the time of writing this SAR. As can be seen from the table, some tasks have not been completed at this stage, for example, No. 7. These are complex, costly activities, so their implementation is planned for the future. The tasks are not specified separately for institutional and programme accreditation since they represent additional functions.

Main tasks	Performance information
1. Assistance in the implementation of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education", other program and strategic documents of the Republic of Kazakhstan	The Agency regularly participates in the discussion of draft amendments to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Education" and other documents related to quality assurance in education
2. To promote the development of the quality system of education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, including technical and vocational education, higher and postgraduate education and its harmonization with the requirements of the world educational services market, through the introduction of standards, requirements and criteria for accreditation, rankings of educational organizations and certification systems for the specialists' qualifications	The Agency has developed standards and guidelines for accreditation
3. Promoting the improvement of the quality of all levels of education within the framework of an integrated approach	The accreditation of organizations of technical and vocational education, higher and postgraduate education contributes to the improvement of the quality of these levels of education
4. Assessment of professional readiness of graduates of educational organizations,	Currently, the Agency does not assess the professional readiness of graduates of educational institutions, which deliver

which deliver educational programs of technical and vocational education	educational programs of technical and vocational education
5. Participation in the development of criteria for evaluation of the activities of educational organizations, including TVET, higher and postgraduate education	The Agency submitted proposals to the Republican Accreditation Council on improving the criteria for evaluation of the activities of educational organizations
6. Participation in the development of legal acts that regulate the activities of educational organizations, including TVET, higher and postgraduate education, as well as development of program and strategic documents on the development of the education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan	The Agency made proposals to the draft of the "Rules for the recognition of accreditation bodies, including foreign ones, and the formation of the register of recognized accreditation bodies, accredited educational organizations and educational programs" (No. 510 dated 10/15/2020), and to the draft of the "Guidelines for Quality Assurance" developed by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (No. 73 dated 03/19/2021)
7. Organizing and holding international conferences, congresses, symposiums, seminars	At this stage, the Agency does not organize or hold international congresses, symposiums, seminars, this work is present in the development plans for the future.
8. Participation in international programs for accreditation (programs developed by EHEA participating member states, for example, Erasmus+), ranking of educational organizations	The Agency does not participate in international programs for accreditation, ranking of educational organizations, but the Agency's representative - adviser to the Director participates in the "Ensuring quality assurance and accreditation of online programs in Kyrgyzstan" project, which is carried out with the support of INQAAHE
9. Systematic improvement of the accreditation, ranking and certification procedures in accordance with international experience	In order to improve the accreditation procedure, the Agency is revising the standards and guidelines for self-assessment of the EO's activities, the rules for developing an expert conclusion report, a report on the results of an external assessment of the EO's activities
10. Participation in international quality assurance programs	At this stage, the Agency does not participate in international programs for quality assurance in education
11. Developing an internal self-assessment culture	The Agency has developed an internal quality management system, including a

	Quality Manual, a Quality Policy, Quality Objectives, and Documented procedures
12. Study, summarization and dissemination of advanced national and international experience in the field of quality assurance	The Agency participates in the work of the ENQA General Assembly, online seminars hosted by CEENQA, INQAAHE, IREG, as well as some international forums (Bologna Process, IAAR, KazSEE)
13. Conducting scientific research, participating in international programs and projects, including scholarships	Since 2017, the Agency's employees have published 27 scientific articles on the development of a quality assurance system (see Annex 2)

Table 4. ARQA's main tasks and their performance

Thus, it can be concluded that the activities of ARQA generally correspond to the profile of the Agency and are aimed at fulfilling the main goal, although, at this stage, ARQA does not produce rankings of educational organizations and does not carry out independent assessments of the level of specialists' qualification. However, it should be noted that the Agency produces an EP ranking (see Section 5.4). ARQA will also continue working on the development of educational organizations rankings methodology.

5. Profile, functioning and (EQA) activities of ARQA (compliance with Part 3 of the ESG)

5.1 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.

The Agency conducts external quality assurance activities on a regular basis in accordance with Part 2 of the ESG. The Agency's external quality assurance procedures address the effectiveness of internal quality assurance processes. All external quality assurance procedures are developed in accordance with defined goals and objectives and take into account the relevant regulatory documents. The goals and objectives are defined in the [Agency's Charter](#). All documents developed as a supplement to the Charter take into account legal and regulatory documents in the field of education (the Law on Education, State Compulsory Education Standard, decrees of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan).

The Agency did not immediately come to the realization of the need to implement the methodology of quality culture. In the beginning, ARQA conducted accreditation in accordance with approved procedures: internal and external assessments with the involvement of experts, publication of reports, dissemination of best practices, etc. However, at this stage, the quality culture has been fully embraced only by the Agency's staff. In this regard, the Agency has revised its mission and plans to focus on the dissemination of quality culture in all areas of its activity. It is known that the quality culture is characterized by reflexivity and sustainability.

Reflection implies the action of looking back. The principle of reflexivity is to rethink the experience of individual being. The professional development of a person occurs simultaneously with the maturation of their personality. It is personal growth that gives impetus to professional growth through deeper understanding and acquired experience. The Agency's management annually draws up a report on the work done, identifying shortcomings and analyzing the experience gained.

Cultural sustainability refers to the preservation of cultural beliefs, cultural heritage developed by a collective or an individual, since sustainability is defined as the ability to maintain or continue. 4 members of the ARQA's staff, who have been working since the Agency's inclusion in the Register 1 of MES RK, have developed a belief that constant attention should be paid to quality assurance issues of the Agency's activities. Therefore, they constantly engage new employees in promoting the quality culture ideology in their work. At this stage, due to the change in ARQA's mission, the staff is working on spreading this concept among experts and Agency's services recipients.

To fulfill its mission the Agency carries out the following activities:

– Institutional accreditation is a quality assessment of an educational institution by the accreditation body for its compliance with the declared status and established [accreditation standards](#).

– Programme accreditation is quality assessment of individual educational programs delivered by an educational organization for their compliance with the declared status and established [accreditation standards](#).

Both procedures include the following stages:

1. Preparatory stage;
2. Self-assessment;
3. External assessment (site visit);
4. Decision;
5. Informing;
6. Follow-up procedures. Post-accreditation monitoring;
7. Reaccreditation.

In addition to activities related to the accreditation procedure in accordance with the Agency's methodology (seminars, consultations on writing a self-assessment report, experts' conclusion reports, site visits, site visit reports), ARQA:

- analyzes its activities (submits reports to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan right after receiving the results of the Accreditation Council's meetings [at the moment, there have been 19], as well as annual reports on the agency's activities until July 15);
- participates in the discussion of documents in the field of accreditation developed by MES RK. For example, "Rules for the recognition of accreditation bodies, including foreign ones, and the formation of registers of recognized accreditation bodies, accredited educational organizations and educational programs" (No. 510 dated 15.10.2020, as well as participation in a round table on this issue on 10.03.2021); "Quality Assurance Guidelines" (No. 73 dated March 19, 2021).

Apart from that, the Agency conducts seminars that are not directly related to the accreditation process. For example, in 2018, at the request of the Kazakh Humanitarian and Legal Innovation University, the Agency conducted a series of seminars on the development of modular educational programs. The seminars on the same topic were held in 2019 at the Atyrau Engineering and Humanitarian Institute. Such consulting activities are carried in order to study and disseminate best national practices in the field of quality improvement of HEIs' educational process.

Striving to meet high international standards in the field of quality assurance is impossible without a systematic exchange of experience between stakeholders. ARQA ensures participation of national and international experts, students and employers in all external assessment procedures, as well as work of the Accreditation Council. Extensive involvement of stakeholders in the Agency's activities facilitates continuous improvement of its processes. For example, at the experts' level, during training seminars, some shortcomings are identified; they are then immediately eliminated. The Accreditation Council, which is comprised of high-level professionals, might put forward proposals relating to enhancement of procedures, methodological approaches, appeals reviews. The experience gained at the meetings of the MES RK's Republican Accreditation Council (RAC) is also of great significance since best practices are identified in the process of hearing the reports of accreditation bodies.

Since 2022, ARQA has supported the initiative of the [Committee for Quality Assurance in Education and Science of MES RK](#) to jointly organize and conduct seminars in the field of quality assurance. ARQA also cooperates with public organizations such as "Kazakhstan Students' Alliance". The purpose of this cooperation is to involve more representatives of the student community in the Agency's activities. Organization's representatives are involved in reviewing and improving the Agency's standards. The Students' Alliance also nominates members of expert groups and the Accreditation Council.

In accordance with the [overall strategy](#), ARQA's work in the field of international recognition and cooperation is as follows. In 2017-2019, the Agency examined the criteria for applying for membership in international quality assurance networks. Today, ARQA is a full member of such organizations as INQAAHE (The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), CEENQA (The Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence and is also an affiliate of ENQA (The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education). Agency representatives take an active part in the work of all general assemblies of international quality assurance networks, of which it is a member.

In 2020-2021, the agency began to actively participate in training seminars of international quality assurance associations. It also focused on establishing cooperation ties with other accreditation agencies.

In order to develop the cross-border activities, in the fall of 2021, ARQA submitted documents to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic for its inclusion in the Republic's National Register of Accreditation Bodies.

Cross-border activities are aimed at carrying out institutional/program accreditation outside the Republic of Kazakhstan. The first experience of accreditation in the Kyrgyz Republic (TVET institution) has shown that the ARQA methodology is applicable in this country. This is due to the uniqueness of the education system of Kyrgyzstan, which consists in the fact that without officially entering the Bologna process, the country has introduced an academic credit system.

The application of the ARQA's methodology in other countries will depend on the characteristics of their education systems. Conducting joint activities with accreditation bodies of those countries appears to be the most promising option. This will make it possible to fully take into account the specifics of the education system and at the same time introduce ARQA's methodology. Gaining such experience will allow ARQA to improve its methodology and procedures for external quality assurance.

The Agency has established close relations with the Agency for Quality Assurance in the Field of Education "EdNet" (Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic): ARQA's advisor to the director is an expert of the agency. In addition to that, EdNet's executive director and ARQA's representative co-authored scientific research on the convergence of the content of standards and criteria of the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani accreditation agencies¹⁰. The Agency has also signed a memorandum of cooperation with another Kyrgyzstani

¹⁰ Nabi, I., Umankulova, O. & Seitov, I. ESG-2015 as the basis for criteria and standards of accreditation agencies of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan // International Conference on Evolving Trends in Interdisciplinary Research & Practices/ August 19-23, 2019, Manhattan, New York City ISBN-978-605-7695-83-3 İKSAD PUBLICATION pp.80-87

accreditation agency «Sapattuu Bilim». Apart from that, ARQA is currently in the process of signing a memorandum of cooperation with two more accreditation agencies of Kyrgyz Republic (AAEPO - «Agency for the Accreditation of Educational Programs and Organizations» and «Independent Accreditation Agency «Bilim-Standard» Public Foundation).

ARQA has also concluded a contract for accreditation with the Medical and Pharmaceutical College (Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic). In March 2022, the external assessment of this EO has been carried out; in May of this year, a decision has been made at a meeting of the Accreditation Council. As noted above, the Agency applied the same methodology to this procedure. The Agency encountered no difficulties with its application, as there is a strong likeness between the legislation of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the field of education. For that reason, no partner agencies have been invited to conduct the procedure.

Thus, ARQA's methodology is applicable in other countries. It has been developed using scientific research and the experience of other agencies. However, when conducting the EQA activities, it is still necessary to take into account national legislation, in particular the implementation of the principles of the Bologna Process and ESG. Therefore, in addition to Kyrgyzstan, the Agency plans cross-border activities in Tajikistan. The academic credit system is partially introduced in the country. However, practical implementation of the idea of closer cooperation with Central Asian countries¹¹ is still insufficient at this stage.

At the moment, due to recent events, the procedure for concluding a memorandum of cooperation with NAQA accreditation agency (Ukraine) is being delayed.

On the basis of the above, it can be concluded that conditions have been created for the Agency's cross-border activities. ARQA plans to further expand its activities in this regard. In 2022, the deadlines for the implementation of the tasks and activities set out in the [Strategic Development Plan of the "ARQA" Independent Agency for Recognition and Quality Assurance in Education for 2018-2022](#) (QMS PI 01-06-001-2018) are expiring. Thus, specific timeframes for cross-border activities will be indicated in the strategic plan for the next 5 years.

Conclusions:

1) ARQA, in accordance with Part 2 of the ESG, conducts external quality assurance activities on a regular basis. Taking into account the effectiveness of internal procedures when conducting an external assessment of EOs facilitates the process, since it is not possible to examine in depth all aspects of the EOs' activities during the accreditation procedure period. Therefore, the Agency determines only the compliance of activities with its standards;

2) The revised mission indicates new directions for the Agency's activities;

3) The standards and procedures for accreditation of educational organizations developed by ARQA are of key importance. They are harmonized with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015), which allows us to assume that an accredited EO is formally included in the EHEA. At the

¹¹ Nabi I., Umankulova O. & Seitov I. Harmonization of Accreditation Standards in Education of Central Asian Countries: Theoretical Aspect. //World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology//International Journal of Economics and Management Engineering. Vol:15, No:10, 2021

same time, the Agency's Standards retain their uniqueness and take into account the national context;

4) Active involvement of experts, AC members, and external stakeholders in the Agency's activities contributes to the improvement of standards, procedures, and methodologies;

5) Implementation of activities not related to the accreditation procedure enables ARQA to improve and facilitate the exchange of feedback with accredited EOs and the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan;

6) A comprehensive analysis of ARQA's activities revealed certain shortcomings, which provided opportunities for the improvement of the Agency's performance and processes.

5.2 ESG Standard 3.2 Official Status

Standard:

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

The "ARQA" Independent Agency for Recognition and Quality Assurance in Education was established to carry out institutional and programme accreditation procedures, produce rankings of educational organizations and independent assessment of the level of specialists' qualification, as well as perform other functions aimed at creation of an effective system of assessment of TVET, higher and postgraduate education.

In 2015, the ARQA Agency was registered as a legal entity. ARQA was included in the Register of Recognized Accreditation Bodies (Register 1) by the decision of the Republican Accreditation Council (the Council). On the basis of the decision of the Council, the decree of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 482 "[On recognition of accreditation bodies and inclusion in the Register](#)" dated September 27, 2017 has been issued. The [Decree dated 04.10.2021](#) introduced additional restrictions, the essence of which is described in Section 3.2.

Conclusion: ARQA's inclusion in the Register of Recognized Accreditation Bodies entitles it to carry out activities in accordance with the Charter and contribute to quality assurance in education. At the same time, the Agency's dependence on the governmental body (MES RK) imposes certain restrictions (see Section 3.2).

5.3 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.

The ESG highlight three aspects of independence, which are organizational independence, operational independence, and independence of formal outcomes.

In Kazakhstan, *organizational independence* is guaranteed by the Law on Education, which states that "Accreditation of an educational organization is carried out on a voluntary basis; an educational organization is independent when choosing an accreditation body". There is no mention in the [Agency's Charter](#) that any third parties can influence the organization of its activities. The structure, formation procedure and competence of the Agency's management bodies confirm this statement:

The management bodies of the Agency are:

- 1) supreme body is the Founder, which has the right to make decisions on any issues of the Institution's activities;
- 2) executive management body – the Director who carries out the management of the Institution's current activities.

The exclusive competence of the Agency's supreme governing body includes the following:

- adoption, introduction of amendments and additions to the Agency's constituent documents;
- voluntary reorganization and liquidation of the Agency;
- determining the competence, organizational structure, formation procedure and procedure for terminating the powers of the management bodies.

The director:

- represents the Agency in relations with all legal entities and individuals, including state authorities;
- approves internal regulations adopted by the Agency;
- performs any transactions and other legal acts stipulated by the legislation and the Charter, manages the Agency's assets;
- recruits and dismisses employees, and distributes responsibilities between employees, defining their powers;
- issues decrees, gives instructions that are mandatory for the Agency's employees;
- makes decisions on filing claims and lawsuits against individuals and legal entities.

The sole founder of the Agency is Mr. A.Kassymkhanov. He is also the Agency's director. The powers of the director listed above are supplemented in the Job Description.

When speaking of independence, it should also be noted that the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan establishes the requirements and procedure for recognizing the accreditation bodies, including foreign ones, and forms registers of recognized accreditation bodies, accredited educational organizations and educational programs. The Law on Education has only 1 article on accreditation. All requirements for accreditation bodies, and other provisions are included in the [Decree](#) of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan:

1. Have a legal entity status.
2. Be included in the registries and (or) be a member associations of accreditation bodies of the OECD (the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) member states: the European Quality Assurance Register or the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
3. Have the resources necessary to fulfill its obligations to accredit educational organizations, educational programs.

4. Have at least one international expert, students' and employers' representatives, experts holding a degree of Candidate of Science (or Doctor of Science) or PhD, and who have at least 5-year experience in the field of accreditation of educational programs.

5. Have accreditation standards that establish requirements for the accreditation procedure.

6. Have a development program and (or) an organization's strategy that takes into account strategic and program documents in the field of education.

The Agency is independent when performing its activities and making decisions, however, it complies with the requirements mentioned above. At the same time, the imposition of the obligations (set out in [the Rules](#)) on accreditation bodies indicate their semi-autonomous status; since the imposed obligations reduce the Agencies' autonomy.

As noted earlier, the Director alone makes decisions on all matters of the Agency's activities. The most important collegial decision-making body is the Accreditation Council. In accordance with the [Regulation on the Accreditation Council](#) (QMS R 01-06-009-2018), the main tasks of the AS are as follows:

- to review and make decisions on accreditation (rejection of accreditation) of EOs/EPs;

- to review and make decisions on the results of post-accreditation monitoring and re-accreditation.

The Accreditation Council is created to consider and make decisions on accreditation (rejection of accreditation) of EOs/EPs, decisions on the results of post-accreditation monitoring and re-accreditation. The Accreditation Council's activities are guided by the Agency's Charter, the standards for institutional and programme accreditation and the Regulation on the Accreditation Council.

Matters regulating the activities of councils of various levels are described in the relevant documentation: Regulation on the Accreditation Council (QMS R 01-06-009-2018), [Regulation on the Supreme Expert Council](#) (QMS R 01-06-003-2018).

Operational independence lies in the fact that the accreditation bodies have their own accreditation standards and methodological developments for their implementation, as well as independently determine the timing, procedure and duration of the external visit, the rules of the PAM, etc. The Agency is independent when hiring staff, developing its own procedures and methodologies. In particular, it has its own accreditation standards and guidelines, regulations on structural divisions, job descriptions (the director, deputy director, department heads, coordinators). External quality assurance is carried out by an external expert group, which includes an international expert, employers' and students' representatives. In order to ensure the relevance, accuracy and precision of the experts' work, a careful selection process is carried out based on the criteria set out in the [Regulation on Experts](#) (QMS R 01-06-007-2018). Apart from that, experts are given rigorous training and briefing. The Agency ensures the independence and absence of conflicts of interest among experts. To do this, first of all, the CV of the candidate for an expert's position is examined to reveal if they previously worked at the EO being accredited, as well as to identify their personal qualities. The Agency takes up references for the candidate from the EOs' heads (vice-rectors, deans, heads of departments, etc.). Once the candidate has been approved by the director, the Agency requests upper management's (rector or vice-rector) consent in writing to finish the expert's recruitment.

The *independence of the formal outcomes* is also defined by the Law “[On Education](#)”: "The decision to carry out accreditation or to refuse to carry out accreditation is made by the accreditation body on the basis of the results of consideration of EOs' applications and submitted documents," i.e. the accreditation body is responsible for the final results of the accreditation procedures. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan has certain levers of influence on accreditation bodies ([the Rules](#)), but it cannot influence in any way the internal decision-making processes (the director or Accreditation Council). HEIs undergoing accreditation procedures also cannot have undue influence on the experts groups' recommendations, since they (HEIs) only get notified of the decision after the meeting of the AC. It should, however, be noted that HEIs have an option to appeal against the decision of the AC. If this happens, an Appeals Commission is created; it consists of an odd number of members (with a minimum of 3 members). The Commission's composition is approved by the director's decree, which should indicate its chairperson (see Section 6.7).

However, the independence of Kazakhstani accreditation agencies and even their existence are under threat:

1) There is a risk that the public and professional accreditation will be replaced by certification, as is currently done for organizations of secondary and technical & vocational education. This was previously stated by the former Minister of Education and Science in one of his speeches. Such a decision would force all accreditation bodies to cease their activities. However, since the new Minister of Education and Science has been appointed, the risk might no longer exist.

2) The “[Quality Assurance Guidelines](#)” developed by the Ministry of Education and Science introduces the concept of “joint and several liability for the results of accreditation”. In other words, an accreditation body, along with a HEI, is responsible for the bankruptcy of an accredited university’s quality assurance system. This contradicts Section 7 of the same document: “Educational organizations bear the primary responsibility for the quality and quality assurance of their activities by creating an internal quality assurance system”. The joint and several liability of accreditation bodies and HEIs is not stipulated in the ESG, which clearly state that "Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance."

Conclusions:

1) An analysis of the Law “on Education” in terms of accreditation shows that the Agency has three aspects of independence: organizational, operational and independence of formal outcomes. However, in accordance with the MES's Rules, it has a semi-autonomous status, since the obligations imposed on accreditation bodies in accordance with the above-mentioned Rules reduce their autonomy;

2) Certain points introduced in the Guidelines contradict the basic principles of the ESG.

5.4 ESG Standard 3.4 Thematic Analysis

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyze the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

Thematic analysis involves the search for significant topics, which contributes to the systematization of qualitative research data. ARQA has chosen the following as such topics:

- reporting on results of Agency’s activities;
- identification of "best practices" examples;
- analysis of systemic deficiencies in the EOs' activities;
- analysis of the comments and suggestions received from EOs;
- producing EPs rankings.

The first 4 analysis topics derive from the following paragraph of the [Strategic Plan](#): "In order to ensure continuous improvement of the quality of the Agency's services, the management undertakes to provide detailed, timely and reliable information and advice on issues related to the quality of the activities of HEIs and TVET organizations, educational programs," whereas the "EPs rankings" topic was the initiative of the Agency's director. The Agency annually, until July 1 of the year following the reporting one, submits information on the accreditation of educational organizations and educational programs for the past period to the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan.

In order to disseminate the achievements of the Kazakhstani universities, the external experts have identified the examples of best practices. Some examples are given in Annex 3. Table 5 below demonstrates the explanation (the explanation is given in order to justify the need to spread this example; the other examples do not require explanations) of one of them:

Example of best practice	Explanation: why this example should be spread
3) Participation of foreign partner universities in the development of most of the EPs (90% of the total number), transmitting the experience of the world's best universities	The experience of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University's best practice supports MES RK's efforts to facilitate the internationalization of higher education

Table 5. HEIs’ best practice example

The university accreditation procedures conducted by the ARQA agency showed that the activities of universities/the delivery of educational programs mostly comply with the Agency’s standards. Meanwhile, they also revealed the presence of certain shortcomings of the organization of the educational process, research conduct, teaching staff’s further training, etc. The experts gave specific recommendations for their (shortcomings’) elimination in accordance with the conditions of a specific university. A

separate report is not compiled since all external review reports are posted on the Agency's website. Annex 4 presents the recommendations for the improvement of the EOs' activities of the EOs/ delivery of EPs on the systemic shortcomings only (with an indication of cause-and-effect relationships).

For example, "the content of the modules and measurement tools should be brought in line with the planned learning outcomes." The expert deduces this recommendation from the following comment: "In most modular educational programs, there is no clear formulation of what a student should achieve and how this achievement will be demonstrated through the use of various forms of control (such as written exams, project works, portfolios, assessment system with rubrics" and indicates a causal relationship: "as a result, the expected learning outcomes do not fulfil their intended purpose of being a measure of assessment of the competencies being formed".

In the course of close cooperation with the Agency for Quality Assurance in the Field of Education "EdNet" (Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic), ARQA's representative conducted scientific research aimed at the convergence of the content of standards and criteria of the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani accreditation agencies¹².

The results of this study revealed that there was a complete match of 30% and a semantic match of 10% between the Kyrgyzstani agency's criteria and ESG-2015 standards, whereas for the Kazakhstani agency, the numbers were 90% and 10%, respectively (Annex 5, Figure 6). Moreover, the research also revealed the frequency of mentioning key terms of ESG-2015 (such terms included the ones that were considered the most important [see Annex 5, Table 11]). For example, EdNet pays little attention to the connection between learning and research & innovation and to student-centered learning, while ARQA does not focus universities on the importance of formulating and demonstrating learning outcomes. The practical implication of this study was that by taking into account this gap, the ARQA agency developed a new version of the standards (Annex 5, Figure 7).

In order to make the thematic analysis more meaningful, the Agency also conducts a questionnaire survey of HEIs. The survey is aimed assessing the quality of standards, guidelines, rules and other documents related to carrying out Agency's activities. All comments and suggestions received are used to improve ARQA's procedures and processes both methodically and organizationally.

A special questionnaire has been developed in order to study the uniqueness of EPs accredited by the Agency. The results are used to produce an EPs ranking.

ARQA is aware that more thorough and systematic work is needed on the use of thematic analysis' results for continuous improvement of activities. The regularity of the thematic analysis is determined by the MES RK's requirement to submit annual reports, as well as by the constant collection of data for producing EPs ranking.

Conclusion: The above facts indicate that the Agency's activities contribute to improving the quality of education, but ARQA should strive to collect and analyze facts and data for an in-depth and systematic thematic analysis.

¹² Ibid (n. 11).

5.5 ESG Standard 3.5 Resources

Standard:

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

To achieve its goals, the Agency must have certain resources. The resources of an organization are the means available to ensure the implementation of activities. They are used to achieve the set goals. This term is also understood as all those means and favorable opportunities that an organization has the right to use for development as a whole or to solve a specific issue. Therefore, resources include all the tools owned by the organization. Thus, ARQA believes that human, informational, and research resources should also be mentioned.

Human resources play key role in carrying out the Agency's activities. The ARQA team currently has 8 full-time employees: the director, deputy director, adviser to the director, head of the HEIs accreditation department, manager for international cooperation, an accountant and a lawyer. The director, his deputy, heads of departments and the adviser to the director all have work experience in the education system, managerial experience in the structural divisions of universities and the Ministry of Education and Science, 2 employees have doctoral degree, 3 employees have master's degree. The Agency's employees actively participate in research on the education system (see Annex 2).

The members of the Agency's [Accreditation Council](#) are experienced managers of the education system, scientists and practitioners, active students. The Council currently has 11 members. They do not receive remuneration, but do actively work when preparing for and during the meetings of the Accreditation Council, participate in the development of new procedures and strategies for quality assurance (discussion of draft documents, finalizing experts' recommendations, etc.).

The Agency receives no governmental funding. Fees for HEIs and TVETIs accreditation procedures are the Agency's main revenue streams. Post-accreditation procedures are an additional source of the Agency's revenue. The procedures are conducted on the basis of bilateral contracts between ARQA and EOs. The abovementioned financial resources are sufficient to provide accreditation services.

The Agency's office is located at 19A Momysuly Ave., Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. A comfortable work environment has been created for ARQA's employees and members of the Accreditation Council: the Agency has its own office space with an area of 420 square meters, including 5 rooms, a separate conference room to hold meetings of the Accreditation Council and video conferences with other stakeholders, as well as a spacious hall. All rooms are equipped with office equipment, Internet and telecommunications. Apart from that, there is a relaxation room where employees can take a break before getting back to work. ARQA's website: www.arqa.agency.

It is also worth noting that ARQA employees are satisfied with the agency's technical equipment necessary to provide organizational and technical support for accreditation procedures.

Conclusion: The above facts indicate the sufficiency of all necessary resources to achieve the mission, goals of the Agency and ensure quality performance of ARQA's functions.

5.6 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.

The quality management system (QMS) is implemented at the Agency in order to form the goals and policies of its activities in the field of product/service quality, as well as to achieve the set tasks. The main task of the QMS is to ensure the high quality of the goods or services sold by adapting it (the quality) to the expectations of customers. The ISO 9000 standard reflects the ideology of quality management as a whole. The standard can serve as a full-fledged basis for the creation and development of the QMS. The Agency's QMS is based on the Kazakhstani standard ST ISO 9001-2016¹³.

The QMS as a system consists of the following main elements: organization, processes, documentation. The QMS of the Agency (as an organization) describes the main business processes, methods of carrying out activities or processes in the form of Procedures and Documentation in the form of information (soft and hard copies). It also describes other organizational and administrative documents related to the quality system documentation ("Regulations on structural divisions", "Job descriptions", guidelines, etc.). Regulations on structural divisions regulate the activities of each structural unit and determines the status of this unit, its position in the management system, shows its internal organization Job descriptions specify the duties of a certain employee in a specific position: powers; what they are responsible for; what rights they have; requirements for their qualifications; for what specific actions they can be penalized or encouraged for.

Internal quality management at ARQA is performed on the basis of the following documents:

- The [Quality Manual](#) sets out the quality policy and describes the quality system. Annex 6 provides a list of Quality System Procedures and Quality System Documentation as well as other related documents. As can be seen in the Annex, some documents have been replaced and some have been amended (these amendments can be found in the "Change Log" section of the relevant document).

- The [Quality policy](#) defines the main directions and goals of the Agency (in the field of quality), which are officially formulated by the management and approved in accordance with the established procedure.

- [Quality objectives](#);

- Documented procedures: Documentation management (QMS DP 01-17-007-2018), Records management (QMS DP 01-17-008-2018), Internal audit (QMS DP 01-17-

¹³ ISO 9001:2015 Quality management system - Requirements, IDT

009-2018), Nonconforming products management (QMS DP 01-17-010-2018), Corrective and preventive actions (QMS DP 01-17-011-2018). The "Documentation management" procedure is the main document that establishes the documentation management rules at ARQA and regulates the management of the documents' preparation and control processes. The "Records management" procedure includes records identified as necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the quality management system. The "Internal Audit" procedure states that ARQA should conduct internal audits at scheduled intervals to ensure that the quality management system meets the organization's own quality management system requirements. The "Nonconforming products management" is procedure for identifying and managing the processes' outputs that do not meet the requirements. The "Corrective and preventive actions" procedure is the main document that establishes the rules for managing corrective and preventive actions at the Agency.

ARQA has developed and approved 6 *standards* that regulate documentation development (General requirements for the structuring, presentation and formatting of QMS documentation; Development of quality objectives and QMS improvement planning; The procedure for developing, registering, approving and using Regulations on Structural Divisions; The procedure for developing and approving Job Descriptions; Design and development of services; Analysis of QMS by management), *Regulations on structural divisions, Job descriptions, 12 ARQA accreditation standards* (7 of them were replaced due to the introduction of new legal acts) and *16 ARQA Procedures* (some have been replaced).

In 2018, the Agency developed accreditation standards (institutional and programme) in the national and Russian languages for all levels of education: secondary, technical and vocational, higher and postgraduate. Accordingly, guidelines for writing a self-assessment report have been developed for all levels of education and both types of accreditation. An analysis conducted by the Agency's director revealed that the use of these documents in practice demonstrated their imperfection: the accreditation procedure was described in each standard, the difference between institutional and programme accreditation standards was minor. In addition, the experts discovered some shortcomings and made respective suggestions for improvement to methodological documents. As a result, the need for the Rules and Guidelines to be supplemented with templates and examples of writing conclusions and reports has been revealed.

In this regard, in 2019-2020, standards and guidelines were revised; in particular, the accreditation procedure was presented in a special document, the difference between the standards for two types of accreditation became more evident and obvious (for example, in the standards for institutional accreditation, Standard 1 is now called "Quality assurance Policy", whereas in the programme accreditation standards, it is called "Implementation of quality assurance policy"; "Standard 6. Research work" of institutional accreditation standards is absent in the standards for programme accreditation). Accordingly, the guidelines have also been replaced: "[Self-assessment Guidelines for university accreditation](#) (QMS G 01-06-007-2018)".

In some documents that did not require significant amendments, the terms were replaced. For example, due to the [changes made to the Law on Education](#), the term "higher education institutions" have been replaced by "organizations of higher and postgraduate education". All changes and additions were discussed along the way or at

seminars; after adoption, they were necessarily approved by the Agency's director. Practice has shown that it is also necessary to constantly improve other documents: the [rules for developing expert conclusion reports](#), [reports on the results of external assessment](#), the form and content of the certificates, etc.

The Agency has an approved agency employee ethics set out in the [Regulation on Personnel Policy](#) (QMS R 01-06-008-2018). Prior to interviewing candidates for employment, the applicant studies this document, and if some disagreement with its provisions is revealed during the interview, they will be refused employment. However, a few times the Agency had to terminate contracts with some employees, because over time, these employees realized the difficulty and responsibility of the work. Of course, during the interview, the applicants were informed of the overtime and responsibility for the deadlines, but the Agency cannot foresee the volume of overtime and how often the accredited organizations will violate the deadlines, which causes the missed deadlines for the execution of documents by employees. Some employees could not handle such a rhythm of work, which resulted in them quitting the job. This has led to an increase in staff turnover, as a result of which there was a temporary work imbalance and department directors were overloaded as they had to retrain the newly hired employees.

Considerable attention is paid to the procedure for receiving feedback from stakeholders, although there are certain shortcomings. Feedback is received on a regular basis from both experts (members of review panels) and EOs. This is facilitated by the fact that, as the pool of experts increases, the Agency forms expert groups from among the experts who have already participated in the Agency's accreditation procedures, as well as by the fact that the EOs express gratitude to the Agency for the benefits of undergoing accreditation procedure (see Annex 8).

The feedback process **between ARQA and EOs**, which have undergone the accreditation procedure, is maintained in the following ways:

- 1) informal exchange between employees of two organizations (EO and the Agency) during the process of EO's assessment;
- 2) informal exchange between the heads of the two organizations (EO and the Agency) after the announcement of the Accreditation Council's decision on accreditation (or accreditation rejection);
- 3) an official free-form appeal sent in writing to the Agency's email address (office@arqa.kz) at the EO's discretion;

In general, it should be noted that the feedback analysis showed that the feedback from EOs was not effective enough (for example, on the quality of the site visit procedure). In particular, feedback was collected and received on paper, which led to the process's ineffectiveness and inefficiency. In December 2021, ARQA found one of the ways to solve this problem. "[Customer Questionnaire on Satisfaction with Agency's services](#)" is freely available on ARQA's new website with the possibility of downloading and sending it to the agency's specified e-mail and/or physical addresses. The Agency's partners have been informed about the introduction.

At the same time, the quality of sufficiency and diversity of feedback being received should be taken into account. Today, according to the instructions listed on the website, any expert can give their feedback on the Agency's work. It is planned to expand the variety of feedback received through the site over time. In addition, since the autumn of 2021, a new form of feedback form experts-members of the review panels has been

introduced. It is a questionnaire on the relevance of accredited EPs that is completed during the site visit of the EO. Apart from that, the feedback process **between ARQA and experts** is maintained in the following ways:

- 1) an informal exchange between an Agency representative and an expert during the process of EO's assessment;
- 2) an official free-form appeal sent in writing to the Agency's email address (office@arqa.kz) at the expert's discretion;
- 3) informal exchange about reviewing the Agency's standards in question on a consistent basis;
- 4) interpretation of individual standards and criteria and their explanation to a wide range of experts;
- 5) informal feedback on the quality of recommendations of some individual reports.

After each site visit, the heads of experts groups inform the Agency about the observations that have been identified during the visit and interviews, but were not included in the official reports. Such information is usually mentioned at the meetings of the Accreditation Council, however, at the moment, the Agency has not found a format of summarizing this information so that it could be displayed on the website. In addition, there was no corresponding section on the Agency's website until 2021, but updating the site allowed adding a separate "[Feedback](#)" tab. This should contribute to improving the efficiency of both the experts group and the Agency itself.

At the same time, the Agency notes that there are no discussions on its own initiative, with the greater involvement of stakeholders, for example, on the mechanisms for implementing programs and decrees of the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan. The Agency will put more effort into the work on that front. This will contribute to the achievement of the goal and fulfillment of the tasks set in the mission.

Conclusions:

- 1) Internal quality management at ARQA is carried out on the basis of documents developed in accordance with the standards of the Republic of Kazakhstan. It ensures high quality of the services being provided;
- 2) The professional behavior of the staff plays a crucial role in fulfilling the task of ensuring the high quality of the services provided. For that reason, a relatively high level of staff turnover poses a challenge to the Agency.

5.7 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.

In the education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan, a cyclic external review of agencies is not carried out. However, it will be conducted as a result of the implementation of the National Quality Assurance Model, which is a part of the [Quality Assurance Guidelines](#). At this stage, in accordance with the Rules for the Recognition of accreditation bodies and the formation of registers of recognized accreditation bodies, accredited educational organizations and educational programs (Annex 1), the Agency submits an annual report on its activities. The Report structure is as follows:

1) Full name of the accreditation body, location, registered address, structure and staff.

2) The name of the accredited educational organizations, accredited educational programs, the accreditation status validity period, compliance with accreditation standards (regulations), recommendations.

3) Links to the accreditation body's Internet source, where it publishes the reports on the external audit of educational organizations or educational programs.

The Agency's Cyclical external review will be conducted in accordance with Parts II and III of the ESG. The Agency, as an ENQA affiliate, has applied for an ENQA-coordinated review to become the organization's member and get included in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). This will be ARQA's first external assessment. It will contribute to the achievement of the goal set by the Agency: to get an assessment and recognition of the quality of its activities, to receive recommendations for their improvement. The present self-assessment report has been prepared as part of the external review process. As for the site visit, it is expected to take place at the beginning of October 2022.

Conclusion: ENQA-coordinated review will be ARQA's first external review. This review will help ARQA ensure the high quality of the services it provides to its various groups of stakeholders.

6. Design and implementation of the agency's EQA activities (compliance with Part 2 of the ESG)

6.1 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.

According to the decree of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 595 "[On approval of Standard Rules for the activities of educational organizations of respective types](#)" dated October 30, 2018, in order to improve the quality of educational activities, HEIs are instructed to create an internal quality assurance system based on the international Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

In this regard, the use of the Agency's standards (for [institutional](#) and [programme](#) accreditation), which are harmonized with ESG, helps EOs rebuild their internal quality assurance systems. Table 6 below provides a comparison between the Agency's standards and ESG. It should also be noted that the Agency's standards take into account the national context (implementation of the State Compulsory Education Standard (SCES), meeting qualification requirements, careers guidance) and the specifics of the EOs (contingent, opportunities for external academic mobility of teaching staff and students, opportunities for the commercialization of scientific research, etc.).

The agency's standards retain their uniqueness, which consists in the following:

1) 7 standards for programme accreditation of higher and postgraduate education are the same for all three levels of education, whereas the 8th standard takes into account the specifics of each level of education (bachelor's, master's, doctoral);

2) the standards for programme accreditation do not repeat the standards for institutional accreditation and are more detailed in nature (for example, the standard for institutional accreditation is called "Quality Assurance Policy", whereas for programme accreditation it is called "Implementation of quality assurance policy");

3) most of the criteria have sub-criteria, which allows you to fully develop the criterion and helps in assessing compliance with the criterion.

ARQA Institutional Accreditation Standards	ESG-2015
Standard 1. Quality assurance policy	1.1 Policy for quality assurance
Standard 2. Educational programs: design, constant monitoring and periodic evaluation	1.2 Design and approval of programmes
Standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment of academic performance	1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Standard 4. Students: admission, academic performance, recognition and certification	1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
Standard 5. Teaching staff	1.5 Teaching staff
Standard 6. Educational resources and student support system	1.6 Learning resources and student support
Standard 7. Information analysis and management	1.7 Information management
Standard 8. Public information	1.8 Public information
Standard 9. Scientific activities management	1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
	1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

ARQA Programme Accreditation Standards	ESG-2015
Standard 1. Quality assurance policy implementation	1.1 Policy for quality assurance
Standard 2. Educational programs: development and approval	1.2 Design and approval of programmes
Standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment of academic performance	1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
Standard 4. Students: admission, support of academic achievements, certification	1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
Standard 5. Teaching staff	1.5 Teaching staff
Standard 6. Creative and personal development of students	1.6 Learning resources and student support
Standard 7. On-going monitoring and periodic evaluation of educational programs	1.7 Information management
Standard 8-1. Specifics of the educational program for the undergraduate level	1.8 Public information
Standard 8-2. Specifics of the educational program for the master's level	1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
Standard 8-3. Specifics of the educational program for the doctor's level	1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Table 6. Comparison between ARQA's standards and ESG-2015

Standard 1.10 "Cyclical external quality assurance" of the ESG is concise and states the following: "Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis". The developers of ARQA standards could not break it down into

criteria like other standards. Up until 2019, ARQA standards did include this standard. However, HEI reports only had 1 of the following phrases under that section: either "University is undergoing the external quality assurance procedure for the first time" or "University has undergone the external quality assurance procedure at "name of the other agency". It therefore had no effect on a situation.

As noted above, the Agency's external quality assurance procedures address the effectiveness of internal quality assurance processes. The Agency's Standard 1 for Institutional accreditation states that "An organisation of higher and postgraduate education must have a published quality assurance policy that complies with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the field of education and is freely available to all stakeholders. The quality assurance policy should be implemented at the level of organisation of higher and postgraduate education and be focused on the development of a quality culture in which all internal stakeholders take responsibility for quality at all levels of functioning of the organisation of higher and postgraduate education. In order to improve the quality of educational activities, the organisation of higher and postgraduate education creates an internal quality assurance system based on international Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)." Standard 1 for programme accreditation has a similar statement, which indicates that the quality policy should be implemented at faculty / institute / department levels.

Below is a grid (it is the same for both institutional and programme accreditation procedures), which summarizes how each EQA activity complies with the standards of Part I of the ESG:

EQA activities	Standards of Part I of the ESG									
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.10
1) Development of an expert conclusion report on self-assessment reports	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
2) External assessment (site visit)										
- Visual inspection						+				
- Interviews with a rector and heads of structural divisions	+	+		+			+			
- Interviews with EP directors		+		+		+		+	+	
- Interviews with teaching staff and students			+		+					
- Interviews with graduates and employers		+						+	+	
- Practice base visits						+				
- Class visits			+		+					
3) Writing a report and making a decision	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
4) Post-accreditation monitoring										+

Table 7. EQA activities' compliance with Part I of the ESG

Conclusions:

1) The grid analysis shows that ARQA's EQA activities are in full compliance with the standards of Part 1 of the ESG;

2) Problems may arise with cross-border EQA activities if an academic credit system is not introduced in the country where these activities will be conducted. The Central Asian countries where the Agency's cross-border activities are planned (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) have introduced such systems despite not participating in the Bologna Process. Hence it makes it easier to understand and follow the principles of the ESG. ARQA's methodology is applicable in other countries. It has been developed using scientific research and the experience of other agencies. At the same time, conducting joint activities with accreditation bodies of other countries appears to be the most promising option.

6.2 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.

Reliance on methodological approaches made it possible to scientifically substantiate the goals, forms, content and results of designing a system of methodological support for the Agency's activities. Designing the Agency's activities ensures the objectivity of all procedures. This is achieved through having clearly defined goals that take into account a variety of factors.

For example, in order to reduce the level of HEIs' load, the external assessment can be spread over a period of time (for example, in 2020, a large number of EPs of "Shakarim University of Semey" was distributed between 2 separate site visit procedures). The procedures costs for HEIs fluctuate, since there is a tendering system, in which the one who offers the lowest price wins.

The methodology of the EQA design for both institutional and programme accreditation is based on methodological approaches to quality assurance systems in the EHEA, which are the quality culture, the four-stage model (self-assessment, external assessment by peers, publication of a report and follow-up procedure), the good practice methodology and continuous improvement. Their development involved the following recognized methodological approaches:

1) Dynamic, in which the control object is considered in the context of dialectical development, causal relationships and hierarchy; retrospective and prospective (forecast) analyses are carried out. On the basis of this approach, the 2018 standards for programme and institutional accreditation were revised in 2019-2020. This was done due to an introduction of a number of editorial changes to the Law "On Education" (the term "HEI" was replaced by "organization of higher and postgraduate education") in accordance with a [ministerial decree No. 595 dated October 30, 2018](#); instead of standards for programme accreditation of three levels of education, one standard that takes into account the specifics of each level has been developed. The old standards were replaced by the new ones in the QMS documentation; respective records of that have been added.

2) Normative, i.e. the establishment of management standards for all subsystems of the system. The more substantiated standards, the better the organization of the processes for assessing the quality of education. This approach structures and develops processes, but at the same time, can hinder their development in case of incorrectly drawn up documentation. ARQA standards take into account the regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan (SCES, qualification requirements, educational aspect, effectiveness of careers guidance). Due to the adoption of the [Quality Assurance Guidelines](#), ARQA will develop external quality assurance standards. Since the Guidelines were only published on 06/27/2022, the information on these standards cannot be provided in this report, however, the standards will be ready before the ENQA visit;

3) Systemic, i.e. taking into account the totality of a multitude of interrelated elements that form a certain integrity and imply the interaction of elements. The system approach is one of the general scientific methods of theoretical and empirical research;

4) Comparative, derives from the definition that comparative studies is a comparative field of knowledge that forms contextual interdisciplinary thinking and a multidimensional vision of the subject, interdisciplinarity, etc. The use of this approach revealed the correspondence between the standards of ARQA and the Kyrgyz Agency; also allowed to identify some weaknesses in the Agency's standards;

5) Objectivist, which involves quality analysis related to the characteristics of the "input" and "output" of the educational system. The "input" of the educational system is the teaching staff qualifications, the educational environment, the level of students' pre-entry knowledge, etc., the "output" is the learning outcomes. Between the "input" and the "output" is the educational process. All its characteristics are the objects of assessment from a quality assurance standpoint.

Among the Agency's documents, its standards are the core ones. The development of accreditation standards on the basis of systemic approach and relevant research creates the confidence that these standards are harmonized with ESG-2015.

The Agency has developed the Standards and procedures for accreditation of educational organizations that comply with the Kazakhstan's current legislation in the field of education and the basic principles of the Bologna process. The Agency's standards are also harmonized with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG-2015).

Methodology of scientific research (systematic and activity approaches, comparative analysis, etc.) has been the core pillar of the Standards development. ARQA's standards are developed on the basis of methodological approaches in order to define general rules, principles and requirements for organizing and conducting EO accreditation, irrespective of its status, organizational legal form, form of ownership, etc. The standards also reflect and include global trends and experience in the field of EO accreditation when assessing the quality of education and creating internal quality assurance systems. The development of accreditation standards on the basis of relevant research creates the confidence that these standards are harmonized with ESG-2015 and at the same time take into account the regulatory acts of Kazakhstan's legislation in the field of education¹⁴.

¹⁴ Kassymkhanov, A.M., Nabi, I. A. Development of programme accreditation standards in the context of a systematic approach / Collection of abstracts of the "Modernization of engineering and technical education in the Central Asian region in the context of digitalization. International accreditation" international conference. Almaty, February 14, 2020. -Almaty: Kazakh University, 2020. -107 p

The procedure for amending and/or making changes to the existing standards includes the following stages:

- Proposals by EOs, stakeholders on amendments and (or) additions (hereinafter referred to as proposals) are drawn up free-form and should indicate justification for making such amendments and (or) additions.
- Proposals are sent to ARQA's e-mail address: office@arqa.kz.
- ARQA carefully examines appeals for their feasibility.
- ARQA makes amendments and (or) additions to the Standards.

After appraisal, the new edition of the Standards is approved by ARQA's director's decree and posted on the website.

The development of methodologies involves senior agency employees – deputy director, heads of departments and advisor to the Director. Proposals are put forward either as an employee's personal initiative in accordance with their job description or during scheduled discussions / training seminars for employees.

These methodological approaches and concepts are the basis of the ESG. In this regard, ARQA strives to ensure that the developed EQA documents are fit for to the set goals and objectives and at the same time take into account the national context of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Conclusions:

- 1) Methodological approaches to quality assurance systems in the EHEA are taken into account in the ESG, therefore they are automatically applied in the Agency's activities;
- 2) The Agency's standards are developed on the basis of proven methodological approaches and have been field tested;
- 3) The changes made to the Agency's Standards and other guiding documents take into account the changing national context, accumulated experience and upcoming tasks. In particular, the dynamic approach (that involves the perspective analysis (forecast)) makes it possible to respond to the National QA Model, QA Guidelines, and the widespread distance learning;
- 4) Agency employees, in accordance with their job descriptions, participate in the improvement of methodologies;
- 5) The above-mentioned facts contribute to the improvement of the Agency's activities and the achievement of corresponding goals.

6.3 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.

The processes carried out by the Agency in accordance with the purpose are described in the [Regulation on the Procedure for Conducting Institutional/Programme Accreditation](#) (QMS R 01-06-011-2018). Documents describing the processes of external quality assurance are predefined and published on the Agency's website. Nonetheless, after the conclusion of the contract for the provision of accreditation services, their electronic versions are sent to an EO. Both parties have the right to terminate the contract in case of impossibility of carrying out the accreditation procedure or delay in its conduct.

The Regulation on the Procedure for Conducting Institutional/Programme Accreditation includes the following stages:

1. *Preparatory stage* – EO's submission of the application for institutional / programme accreditation; processing of the EO's application by ARQA; conclusion of a bilateral agreement between ARQA and the EO on the conduct of institutional/programme accreditation. The agreement indicates the timing, cost and conditions of the institutional/programme accreditation procedure.

2. *Self-assessment* – Since the EO is responsible for quality assurance, the EO's self-assessment report is of great importance. The requirements for the self-assessment report include:

A) the main principles of preparing the report:

Structuredness: a clear correspondence between the presented information and the sections of the document.

Readability: the textual material should be easy to understand in terms of both formatting and stylistics.

Analyticity: analysis of strengths and weaknesses, analysis of the developmental trends over the past 3 years.

Criticality: objectivity in the assessment. At this stage, attention is paid to evaluating the effectiveness of EO's internal procedures during external evaluation.

Evidential basis: presentation of facts, information, references as an argument for conclusions. Extensive supporting documentation is not required, it is enough to provide data explaining or supplementing the text in the appendices to the report in tabular form.

B) the main provisions and conclusions of the self-assessment report should be brought to the attention of all parties involved in the self-assessment process and be presented to the general public through publication on the EO's official website.

In order to provide methodological assistance in writing a self-assessment report, a detailed [Self-assessment guidelines for institutional / programme accreditation of organizations of higher and postgraduate education](#) (QMS ON P 01-06-033-2020) has been developed, and a self-assessment report template has been presented. The Guidelines provide recommendations on the organization of the self-assessment process, identify the purpose and main tasks of the self-assessment procedure:

- provide EO with an opportunity to assess its own activities;
- involve as many key stakeholders as possible in the self-assessment process to agree on the main conclusions and recommendations;

- provide each employee with an opportunity to get a general idea of the EO's situation based on the results of the self-assessment;

- provide a reasonable and comprehensive assessment of the current strengths and weaknesses of the educational organization and the existing issues;

- present a historical reference – to explain the history of the EO’s development, to show the EO’s current situation and the prospects for its development;
- maintain objectivity and balance during the process of conducting self-assessment;
- comprehensively assess the compliance of EO’s activities with ARQA’s Standards for institutional/programme accreditation;
- identify the main strengths and weaknesses of activities (areas of improvement);
- assess the adequacy of resources and identify the main limiting factors. To this end, it is important to use SWOT analysis approaches (in terms of identifying achievements and areas of improvement).

ARQA also undertakes to organize and conduct training seminars for the EO’s internal stakeholders to explain the procedure, methodology and technology of undergoing an institutional / programme accreditation procedure; the training seminars held at EOs are mainly aimed at how the EOs can prove that the internal quality assurance system meets the ARQA's standards when writing a self-assessment report. During the period after the seminar and before sending the report to the Agency, those responsible for conducting the seminar provide oral and written consultations to the EO staff. There is no additional fee for consultations since they are viewed as a continuation of the training seminar, the cost of which is included in the total cost of accreditation procedures.

Preparation and submission of the first edition of the self-assessment report (in the national or Russian languages) to ARQA in electronic format. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, the national language is Kazakh. In the case of cross-border activities, that would be the national language of EO's location country. However, the first experience of accreditation in the Kyrgyz Republic (TVET) showed that the EO's report in Kyrgyz language is needed not as much by the Agency as by the EO itself, since the report needed to be posted in Kyrgyz language on EO's website. For that reason, the Russian version of the report is sufficient for the Agency. The version in English is only needed for the final version of the report.

After the report's submission, the experts carefully examine it for completeness, informativeness, criticality, as well as to establish whether the content of the report meets the criteria of the standards for institutional/programme accreditation. At this point, the experts only verify the report's compliance with the [Agency’s Self-assessment Guidelines](#), i.e. the presence of a description for each standards' criterion. Some content-related comments can be made, for example, about the irrelevance of including generally known information from MES RK's official documents in the report, or moving information from one part of the report to another where it fits better. At this stage, the expert does not evaluate either the evidence base itself or its reliability.

Preparation of expert conclusion report includes a comprehensive analysis of the EO’s self-assessment report (in a differentiated way for each standard), recommendations, comments on the content of the self-assessment report. The Agency strives for expert conclusion reports to be objective, critical, and expert recommendations to be specific, with an indication of the timing of implementation and take into account the HEI's potential. This contributes to the further improvement of its activities.

On the basis of the expert analysis, one of the following decisions is made:

a) EO needs to finalize the report;
b) to conduct an external assessment (site visit);
c) rejection to organize and conduct an external (assessment) in case of the EO's non-compliance with the standards of institutional/programme accreditation. In this case, non-compliance refers to a very low quality of the report: the lack of a description of the HEI's activities for most criteria; failure to meet the requirements for the minimum number of pages; the presence of a large number of stylistic and grammatical errors that make it difficult to understand the text.

After receiving the expert conclusion reports on SAR, the EO has at least 30 days to finalize the report in accordance with the experts' recommendations for the elimination of non-compliances with the guidelines. After that, SAR is being finalized by the EO in order to supplement the descriptions, place parts of the report under correct sections, eliminate grammatical errors.

Lastly, EO sends ARQA hard and soft copies of the final version of the self-assessment report (in the national, Russian and English languages) – one copy in each of the languages (at least 1 month prior to the expected external assessment (visit) of the EO). The report should also be posted on the EO's website in the three languages mentioned above.

If the report is found to be compliant with ARQA requirements, the Agency sends experts for an external evaluation (site visit). As a rule, the experts writing the conclusion reports are the same ones who participate in the external assessment. However, there were cases when, for reasons beyond experts' control, they refused to participate in site visits. The Agency then had to look for a replacement.

3. External assessment (site visit) – finalization of the external assessment (site visit) dates with EO; formation of ARQA's experts group; preparation and finalization of the site visit schedule experts group's timetable; conducting an external assessment procedure – site visit to the EO by an experts group (3-4 days). Usually, the site visit program includes a visual inspection of HEI's facilities, interviews with all groups of stakeholders, visits to classes and practice bases, questionnaire surveys of stakeholders. The questionnaires have been developed by the Agency in order to obtain objective information from teaching staff and students (questionnaires are can be found at the end of the Self-assessment Guidelines). During the site visit, EOs provide presentations, necessary documents, organize visits to laboratories, campuses, libraries, etc.

Development of recommendations and comments on the results of the external assessment (site visit) by experts group; preparation of the report on the results of the external assessment and its submission to the Agency. Sending a report on the results of the external assessment (site visit) to the EO. In case of detection of technical or factual inaccuracies within one week after receiving the report, the EO can send its comments to ARQA.

4. Decision – On the basis of the analysis of the self-assessment report and report on the results of the external assessment (visit), ARQA prepares materials for the meeting of the Accreditation Council, where a decision on accreditation (or accreditation rejection) is made.

5. Informing – the Decree on the Decision of the Accreditation Council is sent to the educational organization. ARQA sends the EO the Accreditation Council's decision on its accreditation and the accreditation validity period (1 year, 3 years or 5 years) or on the

accreditation rejection.

In case of disagreement with the decision made, the EO contacts the Agency in accordance with the [Rules for the Review of Complaints and Appeals](#) (QMS Ru 01-06-010-2018). Appeal procedures, which are clearly defined in the above-mentioned Rules, form part of the regulations for quality assurance procedures and are brought to the attention of educational institutions (also specified in the contract for the provision of services).

6. *Follow-up procedures (post-accreditation monitoring)* – ARQA conducts post-accreditation monitoring throughout the entire period of validity of EO's accreditation. The cooperation of the accredited EO and the Agency does not end with the decision on the EO's accreditation. Before proceeding to the description of the mechanism, it is necessary to define the terms and conduct a terminological analysis. This type of analysis is one of the theoretical research methods aimed at revealing the essence of the studying phenomena by detecting and clarifying the meanings of the terms (concepts) that denote them¹⁵.

In this case, an essential feature of the term is that accreditation does not end with the issuance of a certificate: the prefix “post” indicates “after”, i.e. “after accreditation”. In this regard, it is necessary to abstract from such a concept and highlight such a feature as “actions during the accreditation validity period”. It is therefore appropriate to use the term “follow-up actions” (or procedures). However, the Agency's documents use the term “post-accreditation monitoring” (hereafter “PAM”) since it was put into effect due to the presence of such a concept in the Law “On Education”.

According to the ARQA's “[Regulation on post-accreditation monitoring](#)” (QMS R 01-06-018-2020) and contracts concluded with EOs, the tasks of the post-accreditation monitoring are to review the implementation of the experts' recommendations based on the results of the EO's institutional/programme accreditation; to involve the EO in the process of continuous feedback and development of its activities aimed at overcoming its strategic challenges; as well as to further facilitate the improvement of the EOs' quality of education. Once granted an accredited status, the EO / EP develops a detailed plan for the implementation of recommendations, continuous improvement and assurance of quality of education within 1 month after receiving the AC's decision on accreditation.

The Agency attaches the plan to the accreditation case and, if necessary, can make its comments. If the EO agrees with the Agency's comments, it then amends the plan (within 1 month) and publishes it on its official website.

Having received clear information on the existing shortcomings and recommendations for their elimination, the EO, during the follow-up period (after the approval of the final version of the plan), takes measures to implement the plan using the potential of its internal quality assurance system. The EO also submits interim reports on the plan implementation progress to the Agency: if the organization has been accredited for 3 years – in two years, if the organization has been accredited for 5 years – every two years. Information on the implementation of the plan must be supported by evidence (decrees, regulations, reports, etc.). If interim reports are not submitted or the report does not correspond to the approved plan, the Agency has the right to suspend the accreditation certificate.

¹⁵ Titova, E. V. Terminological analysis as a method and task of research. The Emissia. Offline Letters: Electronic scientific publication (scientific and pedagogical online journal) June 2010.

The Agency makes a decision on sending an experts group and then coordinates the terms of the site visit (usually 2 days) and the composition of experts group with the EO. Experts are selected regardless of whether they participated in the initial expert group for accreditation or not, since in this case, experts only assess the evidence base for the implementation of the action plan in accordance with the recommendations made during the previous visit. Experts prepare a report on post-accreditation monitoring to determine whether the activities carried out comply with the approved plan and to formulate the recommendations for further improvement of the quality of education (if necessary). The post-accreditation monitoring report, as well as the submitted interim reports, is submitted to the Accreditation Council for making a decision on the compliance of the activities carried out with the approved plan.

In case of EO's failure to submit a report to ARQA under the post-accreditation monitoring, the EO/EP's accredited status may be temporarily suspended by the decision of the ARQA's Accreditation Council. In such case, the information on accreditation will be deleted from the ARQA's website and excluded from the Register of Accredited Educational Organisations / Programmes (Registers [2](#) and [3](#)). At the moment, there have been no cases of non-submission of PAM reports since EOs are interested in improving the quality of education through following the recommendations made by the experts group. Apart from that, the submission of the report is one of the conditions of the concluded contract for accreditation.

7. Reaccreditation – Reaccreditation of EOs / EPs is carried out after the expiration of the current accreditation period. The reaccreditation procedure is carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Standards for institutional/programme accreditation and takes into account the results of the post-accreditation procedures. The EO must submit an application for re-accreditation within 6-12 months before the expiration of the validity period of the current accreditation.

Table 8 below demonstrates the information on the number of EQA activities carried out since the Agency's establishment.

Year	Number of training seminars, consultations		Number of site visits		Number of PAM procedures	
	IA	PA	IA	PA	IA	PA
2018	-	4	-	2	-	-
2019	13	18	6	8	-	-
2020	-	10	-	4	-	19
2021	-	7	-	2	6	134
2022 (until June)	-	15	-	6	-	69

Table 8. Data on EQA activities conducted

The external quality assurance procedures employ the four-stage model methodology adopted in the quality assurance systems in the EHEA. It is indicated that external quality assurance procedures include and ensure the reliability of implementation processes:

- self-assessment of EO's activities/EP delivery;
- external visit by an expert group that also includes students;
- publication of the expert group's full report, including the official results;
- consistent follow-up procedures. The Agency conducts post-accreditation monitoring, as well as some other events at the discretion of EOs. This ensures the

usefulness and effectiveness of the EQA, as is evidenced by the active feedback from the EOs.

Conclusion: ARQA's external quality assurance processes are reliable, useful, predefined, consistent and published.

6.4 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).

External quality assurance is carried out by an external expert group, which includes an academia representative, an international expert, employers' and students' representatives. Such groups are formed for institutional and program accreditation procedures. For institutional accreditation, the groups consist of 4-5 people, including an international expert, employers' and students' representatives. For programme accreditation, the group includes one expert for each EP, whereas an international expert, employers' and students' representatives participate in the assessment of all EPs. In the case of institutional accreditation, an international expert participates in all procedures, but might not write some sections of the report. In the case of programme accreditation, an international expert participates in all procedures, makes comments, but does not write any sections of the report since a particular EP might not be their area of expertise. The group mainly includes those experts who wrote expert conclusion reports on HEI's self-assessment report. This is due to the fact that each of them is already familiar with how the internal quality assurance system of HEI (institutional accreditation) or a separate unit (dean's office, department) responsible for the EP (programme accreditation) works. If an expert who wrote an expert conclusion report cannot participate in a site visit procedure, they are then replaced. This, however, is quite undesirable since an expert obtains a lot of information at the stage of writing an expert conclusion report, and during the site visit mainly refines and further develops their comments and recommendations.

Each expert group has a group head. Their responsibilities include the distribution of sections of the external assessment report among experts (institutional accreditation), monitoring the report writing progress, assistance to experts, editing the text of the report (both IA and PA). All the responsibilities of the head are described in detail in the contract between them and the Agency.

All matters regulating the procedure for writing and formatting an external assessment report are presented in the [Rules for developing a report on the results of external assessment of the activities of educational organizations / delivery of educational programmes](#) (QMS Ru 01-06-006-2018).

In order to ensure the relevance, accuracy and precision of the experts' work, a careful selection process is carried out based on the criteria set out in the [Regulation on Experts](#) (QMS R 01-06-007-2018). Apart from that, experts are given rigorous training and briefing.

The Agency has developed the following experts selection and recruitment criteria:

- criteria for employers' representatives: experience of practical work at enterprises and organizations for at least 5 years, experience in facilitation of improvement of the quality of education;

- criteria for students: high academic achievements, active participation in the work of student organizations, experience in facilitation of education quality improvement at EOs.

Criteria for the representatives of the academia include work experience at EOs for at least 5 years, active participation in the EO's work on the improvement of the education quality. Some additional criteria are as follows:

- a) for the heads of expert groups – managerial experience;

- b) for experts-academia representatives – teaching of the educational program being accredited or program from the corresponding group of educational programs.

The following procedure for recruiting experts-academia representatives has been established:

- the candidate for the position is selected by the director or the manager of the department based on the examination of CVs available on EOs' websites or on the recommendation of previously recruited experts. The Agency ensures the independence and absence of conflicts of interest among experts. To do this, first of all, the CV of the candidate for an expert's position is examined to reveal if they previously worked at the EO being accredited, as well as to identify their personal qualities.

- the director or the manager of the department then takes up references for the candidate from the EOs' heads (vice-rectors, deans, heads of departments, etc.).

- the director or the manager of the department receives the expert's preliminary consent to perform the corresponding work;

- the selected candidates are presented to the Agency's director for approval.

- if approved by the director, a contract for the performance of work is concluded.

Once this is done, the Agency requests upper management's (rector or vice-rector) consent in writing to finish the expert's recruitment.

The selection process for experts-employers' and -students' representatives is similar to the one above. However, in this case, the Agency coordinator looks through the websites of enterprises or EOs (if an EP being accredited is teaching-related) and universities delivering similar or the same EPs (for an expert-students' representative). A students' representative is selected from among students with high academic performance, who do community service and have received references from the university management.

The experience of TVETI cross-border accreditation in the Kyrgyz Republic has demonstrated that national experts quickly adapt to the accreditation system of this country. Apart from that, according to the accreditation rules of the Kyrgyz Republic, it is mandatory to include at least one expert recommended by one of the country's accreditation bodies in the expert group. This circumstance contributed to the fact that there were no appeals or any complaints from the EO.

The established requirements for the expert's (academia representative) professionalism and personal qualities include the following:

- An expert should be an individual with expertise in the field of education, who is involved in the external assessment decision-making process. They should have a

sufficient level of competence in teaching, professional and expert activities and have received special training.

- An expert should be a specialist in the relevant subject area and faithfully perform their official duties for a specified time. In order to prevent the possibility of cancellation or revision of the decisions made, each expert is responsible for the validity of their conclusions regarding the external assessment.

- In order to perform the contractual duties effectively, an expert should constantly improve the level of their professional competence. The expert should know the rules of interaction with representatives of educational organizations being externally assessed, as well as with other experts (on the basis of mutual respect). They should be restrained and patient, respect the decisions of colleagues.

- An expert should have such personal qualities that would allow them to follow the moral principles of honesty, trust, respect and responsibility when conducting an external assessment of EOs and / or EPs.

- An expert should be decent, open, observant, versatile, diplomatic, persistent, goal-oriented, able to make timely decisions based on logical considerations and analysis, have the ability to clearly and freely express their thoughts verbally and in writing and to sufficiently justify their findings and conclusions.

- An expert must follow the [Code of Ethics](#).

Despite the careful selection process and conducted seminars and trainings, the Agency is faced with situations when it has to return expert conclusion reports to them, and even terminate a contract with them. This happens due to the lack of expert's professionalism; when they make superficial judgments or stylistic and grammatical errors. In such cases, an Agency coordinator, who has read the preliminary version of the expert conclusion report, returns the report with a recommendation to follow the [Rules'](#) requirements. If such an attempt is still unsuccessful, then the coordinator terminates a contract with them and selects a new expert. To eliminate such cases, the Agency has created a pool of experts who have shown the best professional and personal qualities and plans to use only their services. Currently, the pool of experts includes 230 people. The recruitment of qualified experts made it possible to increase the effectiveness of recommendations for the improvement of EOs' activities.

Previously, it was impossible to do this as experts for programme accreditation were selected on the basis of the disciplines taught by them. Now, with an introduction of the new [national classification framework](#), educational programmes are combined into groups on the basis of programmes' subject areas. For that reason, experts are now selected in accordance with these areas.

The Agency has established criteria for the selection of international experts, but their functions are not clearly defined. This stems from the fact that the Agency has to take into account the experts' individual requirements and preferences. For example, some experts prefer not to participate in writing a report on an external visit as they are not proficient in the expert group's working language (mostly Russian). They only choose to be present during the visual inspections of the EO's facilities and infrastructure and interviews. The involvement of an international expert is aimed at bringing the other countries' accreditation experience into the Agency's accreditation process.

Methodological support of experts is provided not only during the external assessment procedure but throughout the entire period of cooperation with them. In

general, there can be 4 separate stages. The first stage takes place immediately after receiving the expert's consent to participate in the accreditation procedure, an agency coordinator sends the expert all the familiarization materials (Regulation on the Procedure for Conducting Institutional/Programme Accreditation, Agency Standards, writing Guidelines for a specific report type: expert conclusion report, external assessment report, expert conclusion report on PAM). The second stage is a training seminar for experts on external assessment (usually in an online format, 3-4 days before experts' departure for a site visit). The next stage is quite short – experts receive a briefing on the first day of the site visit (before the start of the assessment process). The last stage takes place after the site visit completion. Its purpose is to further discuss controversial / difficult issues relating to the site visit results (for example, further discussion of the standards on which the comments were made by the experts). This is usually done in the form of experts' individual informal requests (either in writing or orally) to the Agency.

Conclusions:

1) Careful selection of experts, the presence of relevant skills and abilities, professional competence when performing tasks, adequate training ensure the relevance, accuracy and precision of the experts' work. The Agency ensures the independence and absence of conflicts of interest among experts. The involvement of international experts in the external assessment procedure allows further enhancement of the EQA processes through the exchange of experience between experts;

2) It is necessary to find a comprehensive solution to the issue of criteria for the international experts' selection and their functions.

6.5 ESG Standard 2.5 Criteria for Outcome

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.

On the basis of the results of the external assessment (site visit) materials review, the Accreditation Council can make one of the following decisions:

- full accreditation;
- conditional accreditation;
- accreditation deferral;
- accreditation rejection.

AC Decision	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
	IA	PA	IA	PA	IA	PA	IA	PA	IA	PA
Accreditation type										
Full	-	19	6	134	-	71	-	17	-	73
Conditional	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Deferral	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rejection	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 9. Breakdown of decisions of the Accreditation Council by accreditation type and year (2018-2022)

A) Full accreditation: an EO / educational program has no shortcomings and meets the criteria of the Standards for institutional / programme accreditation. If such decision is made by the AC, an EO / EP is granted an accredited status and is issued an accreditation certificate for a period of five years.

B) Conditional accreditation: an EO/EP is accredited with the imposition of obligations, i.e. subject to revision, since the procedure revealed shortcomings of a content and (or) structural nature that must be eliminated during the validity period of conditional accreditation.

If the AC makes the decision to give a conditional accreditation status, the validity period of the institutional / programme accreditation is reduced and limited. An EO / EP is granted an accredited status and is issued an accreditation certificate for a period of three years. After the expiration of the conditional accreditation period, ARQA conducts an external assessment of the EO/EP in accordance with the Standards requirements. After the fulfillment of the imposed obligations, the term is extended to the full one. Expenses for an additional external assessment (site visit) are covered by the EO

C) Accreditation deferral: the decision is made on the basis of the EO application and should indicate the reasons and the period during which the EO has the right to apply for the procedure resumption. When the procedure is resumed, if necessary, decisions can be made to repeat the stages of the accreditation procedure.

D) Accreditation rejection: such decision is made if there are significant shortcomings of a content and (or) structural nature and non-compliances with the criteria of the Standards for institutional / programme accreditation.

Thus, decision-making is based on the presence of a finite list of possible decisions and clear criteria. The decision-making process is described in the [Regulation on the Procedure for Conducting Institutional/Programme Accreditation](#) (QMS R 01-06-011-2018).

Conclusion: The presence of clearly defined decision criteria ensures the objectiveness and reliability of the outcomes of ARQA's external assessment procedures.

6.6 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.

All formal decisions on external quality assessment are based on clear pre-defined criteria set out in the [Regulation on the Procedure for Conducting Institutional/Programme Accreditation](#), are implemented in a uniform and consistent manner.

The decisions on the EOs'/EPs' accreditation are submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for their inclusion in the MES's Register of Accredited EOs/EPs (Registers [2](#) and [3](#)). If a positive decision is made, ARQA sends the EO a certificate of institutional/programme accreditation.

The formal decisions made by the Accreditation Council are published on [ARQA's website](#) since 2018 (since the very first external assessment procedure conducted by the Agency). Full expert reports are published. They are clearly structured and include the following:

- a general characteristic of the education organisation/programme (to determine the EO's position in its specific context);
- description of the procedure, including the experts involved;
- documentary and factual materials, analysis and identified results;
- conclusions;
- examples of EO's good practices;
- recommendations on follow-up actions.

The report structure is identical for both institutional and programme accreditation. The availability of a template indicating a particular order of points in the report ensures the clarity of the structure. An expert can also compare their report with a report that has been published earlier. Inaccuracies in the wording of comments and recommendations are eliminated during the visit, the discussions among experts group members and when edited by the head of the group. This is the difference (in how the report clarity is ensured) between an external assessment report and an expert conclusion report. In the case of the latter, the report completeness and structure, but not its content, were evaluated by the Agency coordinator.

Conclusion: Presenting the outcomes in the form of formal decisions, which are not only posted on ARQA's website but also included in the MES RK's Registers, has a significant impact on EOs'/EPs' position and reputation in the educational space of Kazakhstan. Since this confirms their high quality of education, commitment to the quality culture and allows various groups of stakeholders to choose an EO to study at or partner with.

6.7 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.

The procedure for filing a complaint and/or an appeal is clearly defined in the [Rules for the Review of Complaints and Appeals](#) (QMS Ru 01-06-010-2018). These Rules regulate the issues of reasonableness of grounds for complaints and appeals submitted to the agency. In particular, the ones on accreditation decisions/EO or EP accreditation rejection/on the results of post-accreditation monitoring/quality of expert conclusion reports. The Rules also regulate the decision-making process, which is based on the careful review of those complaints/appeals. The Rules address "complaints" and "appeals" separately. Decisions on complaints are made by the Agency director, whereas decisions on appeals are within the competence of the Accreditation Council. The Rules apply to both institutional accreditation and programme accreditation. The EO's right to file an appeal is stated in the Accreditation Contract and [Self-Assessment Guidelines for Institutional/Programme Accreditation of Organization of Higher and Postgraduate](#)

Education (QMS G 01-06-033-2020).

Only complaints about the actions/inaction of agency officials or experts during the entire accreditation period, that is, from application submission to post-accreditation monitoring, are subject to review. In case of wrongful action / inaction of an agency official, this official provides an explanation to the Agency's director. In case of wrongful action/inaction of an agency expert, this expert will be suspended from the work of the expert group. Since the Agency's launch, there were cases of complaints, but they were not recorded as they were insignificant, and the causes of those complaints were eliminated during the site visits.

The appeal procedure only begins if there is a written application for appeal (this point is necessarily included in the contract for the provision of services concluded between the Agency and each EO) against:

- 1) an expert conclusion on the self-assessment results report;
- 2) accreditation decisions/EO or EP accreditation rejection/on the results of post-accreditation monitoring.

In case of disagreement with the decision of the AC, an EO must file an appeal within 30 calendar days after receiving the decision.

The appeal application is submitted to the Agency's Accreditation Council. After that, an Appeals Commission is created. To process the application, an Appeals Commission should have at least 3 members. The composition of the AC is formed from among reputable scientists and practitioners on the recommendation of the HEI accreditation department head. The Appeals Commission candidates should meet the following criteria: at least 5-year work experience in EOs, enterprises and organizations; personal qualities that would allow them to follow the moral principles of honesty, trust, respect and responsibility when reviewing appeals. Members of the commission should not be employees of the same organization. The Commission's composition is approved by the director's decree, which should indicate its chairman. In order for proceedings of the Appeals Commission's meeting to be valid, all members of the Commission should be present at it. The Commission can make one of the following decisions:

- appeal dismissed;
- appeal partially allowed;
- appeal allowed.

The Commission takes the decisions by simple majority. The decisions then get recorded and are brought to the attention of the members of the Accreditation Council. The AC votes for the second time. In such a case, the AC's decision is final and is not subject to revision. The AC's decision on the appeal application is sent to the EO within 7 days after the decision is made. To date, the Agency has not received any appeals against the decisions made by the Accreditation Council or other actions.

Conclusion: The effective assistance to EOs at all stages of the accreditation process, the presence of clear and published decision criteria, the openness of the Agency to discuss emerging problems are the reasons for the absence of appeals from EOs. Nevertheless, in case of their occurrence, the agency has clear response mechanisms and pre-defined, published procedures.

7. Opinions of stakeholders

To improve the quality of the Standards, the Agency practices sending the developed standards to specialists in the field of education quality research for review on a systematic basis. Stakeholders such as experts can make suggestions if there are any. Experts in the field of education quality assessment, university and college teachers are invited as reviewers.

The reviewers' comments contributed to the fact that corresponding amendments were made to the standards. Most of the proposals are put forward by experts and coordinators who directly participated in site visit procedures. Annex 7 provides an analysis of the proposals submitted. Two reviews below are given as an example:

Expert A suggested clarifying the wording of criterion 1 in the following way: "The management of the EP must demonstrate that the teaching staff that trains EP students meets the qualification requirements." The recommendation has been accepted: the criterion wording has been changed. However, the expert's proposal to compile a book or a list of indicative questions for each group of interviewees (HEI management, teachers, students, etc.) was not accepted, since the expert should be free to choose those aspects of the organization's activities that are most important for an objective assessment.

Expert B noted that the Standards should only include the standards themselves and standards criteria. For that, the section related to procedures has been excluded from the standards. However, it should be noted that in Kazakhstani practice the section related to procedures is usually included in both the Standards and the Guidelines. The expert's proposals on the combination of some standards were implemented. This made it possible to consider interrelated procedures in one standard. The expert questions the fact that HEI's provision of documents and description of their content is sufficient to guarantee its full compliance with Standard 2. However, this opinion was not supported by the Accreditation Council, since the Standards are based on trust, which is highlighted in ESG-15.

At the same time, some EOs submit their proposals to improve the Agency's standards (see Annex 8). For example, in its letter, K.Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University noted that in addition to official comments related to ARQA standards, during the site visit, experts gave friendly recommendations on improvement of its activities. The university also recommended strengthening Agency's standards by concretizing criteria for student-centered learning.

Receiving regular feedback on the effectiveness of the external assessment procedures conducted by ARQA is the Agency's next goal in the field of systematic monitoring of the opinions of its stakeholders. As can be seen from the reviews of receivers of the Agency's services, they all express satisfaction with the results of cooperation with the Agency.

Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan is ARQA another stakeholder. The Agency's director is a regular participant of MES RK's meetings. The Committee for Quality Assurance in Education and Science regularly organizes meetings on accreditation issues, holds meetings of the Republican Accreditation Council where the Agency's Director is always invited and present.

It should also be noted that the self-assessment report was sent to independent national and international experts who participate in the work of the agency for

suggestions and comments. The received recommendations were taken into account and corresponding changes and additions were made to the report.

Conclusion: ARQA carefully examines all the recommendations and suggestions made by both experts and EOs. Not a single comment or suggestion by experts is ignored or neglected. The Agency always shares its opinion and a corresponding decision on the received proposals. It also believes that this contributes to further improvement of feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the Agency's activities.

8. Recommendations and main findings from previous review(s) and agency's resulting follow-up (for second and subsequent reviews only)

Since this is Agency's **first ENQA-coordinated external review**, there are no previous recommendations and main findings.

9. SWOT analysis

S (strengths)	W (weaknesses)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Agency supports the ESG model and accepts all its principles. 2. The Agency is included in the MES RK's Register of recognized bodies. 3. The Agency is a full or affiliate member of several international networks for quality assurance agencies in education (ENQA, INQAAHE, CEENQA & IREG). 4. The Agency's external quality assurance procedures address the effectiveness of internal quality assurance processes. 5. All formal decisions made on external quality assessment are based on clear generally accepted criteria. 6. The Agency has implemented a Quality Management System (QMS). 7. The Agency's standards retain their uniqueness; are developed using the scientific research methodology and take into account the opinions, recommendations of specialists and stakeholders. 8. International expansion (accreditation of Kyrgyzstani College, signing of memorandums of cooperation with accreditation agencies of the Kyrgyz Republic). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agency is faced with situations when it has to return expert conclusions to them, and even terminate a contract with them. This suggests that the experts selection process should be enhanced and become even more rigorous. 2. The Agency has not developed unified functions of international experts. 3. The Agency does not provide or get sufficient feedback from stakeholders. 4. The Agency does not hold regular discussions with greater involvement of stakeholders on its own initiative. For example, on the issues of quality assurance in education. 5. There is an increased staff turnover at the Agency. 6. The Agency does not participate in international programs and projects on quality assurance in education, educational organizations rankings.
O (opportunities)	T (threats)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Two Kazakhstani accreditation agencies have successfully become members of ENQA and have been included in EQAR, which means that these goals are attainable for ARQA as well. 2. Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan has developed the "Quality Assurance Guidelines". 3. Strengthening international activities through the signing of a memorandum of cooperation with Ukrainian and other foreign accreditation agencies. This should also enable enhancement and the selection and training of experts. 4. Receiving official recognition by MES of Kyrgyz Republic. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MES's recommendations for the creation of HEIs' internal quality assurance system based on the ESG cannot be implemented in a short time. 2. The "Quality Assurance Guidelines" developed by the Ministry of Education and Science state that quality assurance agencies and EOs are jointly and severally liable for the results of accreditation.

Table 10. SWOT analysis

10. Key challenges and areas for future development

The Weaknesses and Threats sections of the SWOT-analysis present the problems that need to be solved in the near future. The Agency has already found the ways to solve some of them.

The issue of the Agency's participation in international programs and projects on quality assurance in education will be solved by forming partnerships and cooperative relationships with foreign accreditation agencies.

However, there is a more complex problem, which requires time and considerable resources to solve. This problem is related to the fact that the Agency's name includes "rankings", and the EOs rankings is mentioned in the Charter as one of its tasks. There is an agency in Kazakhstan that has been involved in university rankings for a long period. This agency has its own methodology, a fairly large contingent of participants. It will therefore be difficult for ARQA to develop its own methodology and find sufficient numbers of those who would want to participate in the rankings. In this regard, elaborate methodological, resource and marketing preparation is required. Nevertheless, the Agency will strive to develop its original methodology and produce university rankings.

It should also be noted that under the conditions of forced digitalization caused by COVID-19, the Agency had to review its activities and switch to a hybrid format. The use of information technologies and hybrid forms of work facilitated the conduct of site visits and meetings of the Accreditation Council in accordance with the established rules. ARQA also believes that its future development lies in the extensive and greater use of information technologies, taking into account the experience gained under the constraints associated with COVID-19.

11. Glossary of Terms

ISO (International Organization for Standardization)	an independent non-governmental organization specializing in the development of international standards
Recognition of a national and foreign accreditation body	the procedure for officially recognizing the powers of a legal entity to conduct institutional accreditation of educational organizations and (or) programme accreditation of educational programs
Quality Management System (QMS)	a part of a quality-oriented management system created to develop policies and goals, as well as processes necessary to achieve these goals
Accreditation of educational organizations	procedure of recognition by the accreditation body of compliance of educational services with the established accreditation standards (regulations) in order to provide objective information about their quality and confirm the existence of effective mechanisms for improving it.
Accreditation bodies	legal entities that develop standards (regulations) and conduct accreditation procedures of educational organizations on the basis of standards (regulations) they have developed.
Accreditation Council	Permanent Advisory body of the Agency for Recognition and Quality Assurance in Education, created to review and make decisions on accreditation or accreditation rejection, as well as on the terms and conditions of accreditation of educational organizations and educational programs delivered by educational organizations. Decision-making is based on the Agency's Accreditation Standards.
External assessment (site visit)	visit of an expert group to an educational institution to conduct an assessment of compliance with the accreditation standard.
Registers 1, 2 and 3 of MES RK	lists of recognized accreditation bodies, accredited educational organizations and accredited educational programmes.
MES RK	Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan
HEI	higher education institution
TVET	technical and vocational education and training

Educational organization (EO)	an organization that implements a continuous process of education and training. This is carried out for the purposes of moral, intellectual, cultural, physical development and the formation of professional competence
Educational programme (EP)	single set of basic characteristics of education, including the goals, results and content of learning, the organization of the educational process, ways and methods of their implementation, and criteria for evaluating learning outcomes.
Practice base	an organization or an enterprise where a student does their placement or externship
Expert conclusion report	a document containing an examination and analysis of the report on the results of self-assessment of EO's activities/EP's delivery carried out as a part of institutional/programme accreditation

12. Annexes

Annex 1: Extracts from the Rules for the Recognition of Accreditation bodies

Extracts from the Rules for the Recognition of Accreditation bodies (including foreign ones) and the formation of registers of recognized accreditation bodies, accredited educational organizations and educational programs (Approved by Decree of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 629 dated November 1, 2016).

Chapter 2. Requirements for an accreditation body

4. In order to be recognized as an accreditation body and be included by the authorized body in the Register 1, the accreditation body must meet the following requirements:

- 1) have the status of a legal entity in the organizational and legal form of a non-profit organization;
- 2) be a full member of the international European network for quality assurance in education;
- 3) have the resources necessary to fulfill its obligations to accredit educational organizations, educational programs;
- 4) have at least ten recruited experts with the degree of Candidate of Science (or Doctor of Science) or PhD, with at least 5-year experience in the field of accreditation of educational programs;

For each accreditation procedure, one third of the accreditation body's experts group must be comprised of Kazakhstani experts with the degree of Candidate of Science (or Doctor of Science) or PhD and who are representatives of the professional community with at least 5-year experience in the field of accreditation of educational programs or 5-year experience of training/teaching the specialty of EO being accredited;

- 5) have accreditation standards that establish requirements for the accreditation procedure.

Chapter 4. The procedure for forming the Register 1, Register 2 and Register 3

18. The Agency annually, until July 1 of the year following the reporting one, submits information on the accreditation of educational organizations and educational programs for the past period to the authorized body in accordance with Appendix 5 to these Rules.

19. On the basis of the results of accreditation, the accreditation body sends the authorized body a copy of the recommendations for the elimination of systemic deficiencies identified in the EO's activities (if any).

Annex 2: List of articles on QA system published by Agency staff

No	Article title	Publisher, journal (title, year, page number),	Name of author & co-authors
1	Information and educational environment of a modern university as a factor in the formation of information and analytical culture of students	Bulletin of the L.N.Gumilev Eurasian National University. Tribune of Young Scientists – Astana: 2016.- No 3 (112). pp.287-291	Yessentemirova A.
2	Integrated standards of higher professional education	Development and current issues of modern science: International Scientific Journal, 2017, No 5 (5).- pp.101-103	Nabi I. Temirova A.
3	Legal and theoretical foundations of higher and postgraduate education in Kazakhstan	Collection of articles based on the materials of the XI International Scientific and Practical Conference on "Innovative Approaches in Modern Science". Moscow, 2017, No. 11 (11), pp.131-141.	Yessentemirova A. Amandykova S.
4	Legal regulation of higher and postgraduate education in Kazakhstan	Collection of materials of the 15th (anniversary) International Conference on "Education through Life. Continuing Education for Sustainable Development". – Astana, 2017.- pp.244-251.	Yessentemirova A.
5	Legal and theoretical foundations of convergence of basic institutions of higher and postgraduate education on the basis of the Bologna Declaration	Materials of the "Harmonization of national legislation within the framework of integration processes" International Scientific and Practical Conference. Karaganda: Buketov Karaganda State University, 2017.- pp.148-153.	Yessentemirova A. Turlayev A.
6	Theoretical and legal aspects of the implementation of the Bologna Principles in higher and postgraduate education in the Republic of Kazakhstan	Bulletin of the Buketov Karaganda State University. The Law edition. – Karaganda, 2017.- No 2(86). – pp.53-59	Yessentemirova A. Turlayev A.
7	Theoretical and legal foundations of the development of higher and postgraduate education in the Republic of Kazakhstan in the context of the Bologna process	Bulletin of the L.N.Gumilev Eurasian National University. – Astana: 2017.-No 3 (118). pp.348-355	Yessentemirova A. Amandykova S., Turlayev A.
8	Methodological Principles of the Electronic Learning in the Context of the Higher Education Quality Assurance: Monograph	Astana, 2017.	Nabi I.

9	Didactics of the German higher school: a view from Kazakhstan	"Introduction of modern pedagogical technologies into the practice of universities" / Materials of the Republican scientific and practical online conference of students-graduates of the advanced training program of teaching staff of pedagogical specialties of universities of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2012 – 2017, Almaty, February 21, 2018, pp.18-20	Nabi I.
10	Models of quality assurance of higher education: comparative aspect	Modern trends in the development of military education: (November 22, 2018) Materials of the International Scientific and Practical Conference - Almaty: Military Engineering Institute of Radio Electronics and Communications, 2018- pp.41-48, ISBN978-601-7326-14-2.	Nabi I. Umankulova O.
11	Some problems and prospects of Kazakhstani higher education	Bulletin of the L.N.Gumilev Eurasian National University. The Law edition – Astana: 2018.-No 2 (123). pp.14-24	Yessentemirova A. Amandykova S.
12	The Validity of a Design Technology for a Higher Education Quality Assurance System Based on the EFQM Model	EURASIA Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education.- ISSN: 1305-8223 (online) 1305-8215 (print) 2018 14(3):831-847 DOI: 10.12973/ejmste/81039	Nabi I. Shaprova G., Buganova S., Suleimenova K., Toktarkozha G. , Kobenkulova Sh. , Zhekseminova A., Sekenova A.
13	Some issues of the formation of legislation on higher and postgraduate education in the Republic of Kazakhstan	"Science and Life of Kazakhstan" International Scientific journal. Legal sciences. - Almaty, 2019. - No. 8/2 2019. – pp. 22-30.	Yessentemirova A. Balmagambetova V.
14	A number of issues of the formation of legislation on higher and postgraduate education in the Republic of Kazakhstan	Collection of materials of the international online conference on the topic: "Corporate governance and anti-corruption in the field of higher education: the examples of Great Britain, the USA, the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic", London, 2019.- pp.77-89	Yessentemirova A. Amandykova S.
15	ESG-2015 as the basis of criteria and standards of accreditation agencies of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan	International Conference on Evolving Trends in Interdisciplinary Research & Practices/ August 19-23, 2019 Manhattan, New York City ISBN-978-605-7695-83-3 İKSAD PUBLICATION pp.80-87	Nabi I. Umankulova O., Seitov I.
16	Legislation and higher educational policy in Kazakhstan since independence: Problems, perspectives and prospects	Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues (United States). ISSN:1544-0036. Volume 22, Issue 2, 2019.- P11. https://www.abacademies.org/articles/legislation-and-higher-educational-policy-in-kazakhstan-since-independence-problems-perspectives-and-prospects-8170.html	Yessentemirova A. Balmagambetova V. Kussainov A. Busurmanov Z.

17	On the problem of developing methodological approaches to the modernization of education	Bulletin of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Kazakhstan. No 6, 2020	Nabi I. Tolbayev A., Shaprova G., Ibishev O.
18	Development of programme accreditation standards in the context of a systematic approach	Collection of abstracts of the international conference on "Modernization of engineering and technical education in the Central Asian region in the context of digitalization. International accreditation". Almaty, February 14, 2020-Almaty: Kazakh University, 2020.-107 p.	Nabi I. Kassymkhanov A.
19	Analysis of methodological views on improving the quality of education	Eurasian Union of Scientists: An international research Journal.- No 1 (82/2021). ISSN 2411-6467.	Nabi I.
20	Methodological views on improving the quality of education: aspect of institutional accreditation		Nabi I. Shaprova G., Tolbayev A., Ibishev O.
21	Higher education quality management systems (using the examples of the USA, Great Britain, Norway and Finland)	Bulletin of the Turan University. 2021, (4): pp.216-223. https://doi.org/10.46914/1562-2959-2021-1-4-216-223	Suleimenova Sh.
22	From practice to methodology: the way to improve accreditation in education	The state and prospects of the quality assurance system of education in the Kyrgyz Republic. Collection of articles, Bishkek, 2021. pp.66-72	Nabi I. Umankulova O.
23	The main areas of governmental support for the development of entrepreneurial education	Collection of Materials of the International Scientific and practical Conference on "Universities of the future", Pavlodar: Toraighyrov University, 2021, pp.75-80.	Suleimenova Sh.
24	Expanding the Application of EFQM model for Institutional Accreditation of Educational Organizations	Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal – Vol.8, No.1 Publication Date: January 25, 2021 DOI:10.14738/assrj.81.9624. P. 289-295	Nabi I.
25	Innovative methodological views on improving the quality of education based on institutional accreditation conducted using the EFQM model	Materials of the international scientific and practical conference on "New Horizons in world knowledge and education", held in honor of the 70th anniversary of Academician A.Kusainov	Nabi I. Shaprova G., Tolbayev A., Ibishev O.

26	Harmonization of Accreditation Standards in Education of Central Asian Countries: Theoretical Aspect	World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology// International Journal of Economics and Management Engineering Vol:15, No:10, 2021 ISSN:2225-742X(Print) ISSN:2226-7344(Online)	Nabi I. Umankulova O., Seitov I.
27	Experience and prospects of cooperation	CEENQA Newsletter, December 2021, 11 (2), pp.4-6.	Nabi I.

Annex 3: Some examples of the "best practice"

1) Atyrau State University named after Khalel Dosmukhamedov

- Criterion referenced assessment is being introduced in the following disciplines: "Academic painting", "Composition", "Engineering graphics and Design".

- For the first time, ASU named after H. Dosmukhamedov has started work on the implementation of a project with Almalyk LLP on scientific research commercialization. The project is financed (more than 175 million tenge) by the Science Foundation JSC of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

- The business incubator is supporting 8 startup projects of students and teachers of Atyrau University.

- In 2017, the university started a business incubator and "i-Space" coworking – an innovative form of university activity focused on the formation of entrepreneurial culture and skills among students, assistance in launching startups and facilitation of growth of new companies at an early stage of development.

- The University received the international "Recognition" award for the effective use of the university's official Internet resources to improve the quality of EPs and ensure thorough stakeholders information.

2) Pavlodar State Pedagogical University:

- Availability of grants given by the akim of Pavlodar region

- In accordance with the decision of the International Certification Company SGS (SGS Kazakhstan Ltd., Switzerland), the quality management system of PSPU has been assessed and certified as 'meeting the requirements of the International ISO 9001:2015 Standard'. On January 20, 2017, the PSPU has been issued a certificate No. CH17/0079 for a period of 3 years.

3) Al-Farabi Kazakh National University:

- Participation of foreign partner universities in the development of most of the EPs (90% of the total number), broadcasting the experience of the world's best universities.

- Creation of specialized research and educational centers of leading companies ("Hewlett-Packard", "Cisco", "Copisa Minolta", "Fujitsu", "Samsung", "Alcatel", "Kaspersky Lab", Microsoft, Intel, Huawei) for the delivery of EPs.

- Reducing the teaching load of teaching staff at the following rate: 1 article published in journals included in the Web of Science, Scopus international databases is equal to 3 credits.

- The presence of the Keremet DLE service center, located in a separate building, in which more than 500 educational, social, cultural and leisure services, as well as primary health care and health diagnostics, are provided on "one window" principle.

- Effective tools for collecting and monitoring information in the form of the "Univer" system, "Indicative Planning", the analysis of which is carried out by the means of the Power BI program purchased by the university.

- A high-tech system of a unified information network for managing the university, demonstrated by the work of the Situational Management Center through the introduction of cloud technologies into the automation of the university's activities; Smart technologies into the campus infrastructure management; Big Data technologies for the formation of an analytical system.

4) D. Serikbayev East Kazakhstan technical university:

- high levels of digitalization of the administration of EPs

5) Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau State University:

- high levels of implementation of inclusive education;

- According to the "Atameken" (National Chamber of Entrepreneurs) rankings, '5Bo8o8oo – Soil Science and agrochemistry' and '5Bo912oo – Catering and hospitality' programmes ranked first in their sections.

6) Kazakh Humanitarian Law Innovative University (KazHLIU):

- "Altyn ūiağa - tağzym" project is being implemented in partnership with the KazHLIU Alumni Association – social support provided by KazHLIU graduates of different years to the students.

Annex 4: Recommendations for the improvement of the activities of universities/ EPs (systemic shortcomings only); with an indication of cause-and-effect relationships.

1. A small number of graduate students at many universities leads to a lack of options of courses that are of interest for students, i.e. to the nominal formation of an individual plan. RECOMMENDATION: to introduce interdisciplinary modules that cover the interests of students and provide an opportunity to choose a teacher.

2. Despite the fact that there are currently wide academic mobility opportunities for both students and teaching staff, a maximum of 1% of university students participate in exchange programs. This leads to the isolation of the educational process within one university and does not facilitate the exchange of experience. RECOMMENDATION: to increase the number of students participating in the academic mobility programs.

3. Universities have a fair number of concluded international agreements with partner universities, but most of them remain dead letters. RECOMMENDATION: to ensure the implementation of joint international projects.

4. Most modular educational programs have no clear formulation of what a student should achieve and how this achievement will be demonstrated through the use of various forms of control (such as written exams, project works, portfolios, assessment system with rubrics). As a result, the expected learning outcomes do not fulfil their intended purpose of being a measure of assessment of the competencies being formed. RECOMMENDATION: the content of the modules and the measurement tools should be brought in line with the planned learning outcomes.

5. Despite the fact that universities are reporting on the transition to trilingual education, there are still very few teachers who have IELTS certificates (score of 5.5 and above). RECOMMENDATION: to increase the proportion of teachers who have a high level of English proficiency.

6. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan annually provides grants for research works (including a separate competition for young scientists). However, the teaching staff remains passive when it comes to participation in various funded projects, which does not facilitate the increase in the university budget funds (from various sources), teaching staff skills improvement and creation of favourable conditions for the use of research results in the educational process. RECOMMENDATION: To increase the participation of teaching staff in various funded projects.

7. Undergraduate students participate in the procedure for assessing the quality of university EPs, which, however, is not the case with master's degree programs. RECOMMENDATION: to implement a mechanism for facilitating the participation of master's students in the procedure for assessing the quality of EPs.

8. In recent years, there has been a considerable increase in the number of articles published by university teaching staff in international journals with an impact factor. However, this growth occurs only in the country's leading universities, whereas the teaching staff of regional universities shows low activity compared to national universities. RECOMMENDATION: to increase the publication activity of teaching staff of regional universities in the international journals with an impact factor, the management of these universities should introduce incentives schemes to increase publication activity.

9. Due to the requirements for an increase in the number of articles published by university teaching staff in international journals with an impact factor, this indicator has become the main measure of effectiveness of the teaching staff's research and methodological activities. RECOMMENDATION: To comprehensively assess the effectiveness of research and methodological activities of the teaching staff, universities must not neglect such indicators as the publication of monographs, articles in national journals, textbooks, the use of innovative teaching methods, encouragement of student research, the use of specialized scientific research of teachers involved in the EP delivery.

10. During the external visits, ARQA experts note outdated laboratory equipment. This calls into question the fact that the latest achievements of science and technology are being introduced into the educational process. In this regard, experts RECOMMEND purchasing specific laboratories and laboratory equipment.

Annex 5: Extracts from the «ESG-2015 as the basis for criteria and standards of accreditation agencies of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan» article

Extracts from the «ESG-2015 as the basis for criteria and standards of accreditation agencies of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan» article by Nabi, I. A., Umankulova, O. A. and Seitov, I. A.

Section: Comparative analysis of the content of standards and criteria of the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani accreditation agencies.

The interconnection between the standards and criteria of the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani accreditation agencies and the ESG-2015 is shown using the matrix method. Figure 6 presents a matrix, in which the names of the ESG-2015 standards are located horizontally and the titles of the standards of Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani accreditation agencies are located vertically. As can be observed from the matrix data, there is a complete match of 30% and a semantic match of 10% between the Kyrgyzstani agency's criteria and ESG-2015 standards, whereas for the Kazakhstani agency the numbers are 90% and 10%, respectively.

EdNet	ESG-2015									
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.10
Criterion 1. The mission of the university										
Criterion 2. Objectives and learning outcomes of the educational program		#								
Criterion 3. The content of the program		#								
Criterion 4. The educational process and assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes			#						#	
Criterion 5. Teaching staff					△					
Criterion 6. Satisfaction of stakeholders								#		
Criterion 7. Infrastructure, learning resources and support						△				
Criterion 8. Information and reporting and transparency policy							#	#		#
ARQA	ESG-2015									
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.10
Standard 1. Quality assurance policy	△									
Standard 2. Educational programs: design, constant		△								

monitoring and periodic evaluation										
Standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment of academic performance			△							
Standard 4. Students: admission, academic performance, recognition and certification				△						
Standard 5. Teaching staff					△					
Standard 6. Educational resources and student support system						△				
Standard 7. Information analysis and management							#			
Standard 8. Public information								△		
Standard 9. Scientific activities management										
Standard 10. Continuous monitoring and periodic evaluation of educational programs									△	
Standard 11. Periodic external quality assurance										△

**Note:*

△ – complete match;

– semantic match;

1.1 – Policy for quality assurance;

1.2 – Design and approval of programmes;

1.3 – Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment;

1.4 – Student admission, progression, recognition and certification;

1.5 – Teaching staff;

1.6 – Learning resources and student support;

1.7 – Information management;

1.8 – Public information;

1.9 – On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes;

1.10 – Cyclical external quality assurance.

Figure 6. Matrix of the interconnection between the standards and criteria of the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani accreditation agencies and the ESG-2015

Comparative analysis of the content of standards and criteria of the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani accreditation agencies revealed that they mainly correspond to the ESG-2015 standards. To prove this, the number of times the key terms (such terms included the ones that were considered the most important) of the ESG-2015 are mentioned in these standards has been calculated. Table 11 below lists these terms and shows how many

times they are mentioned in the standards and criteria. Moreover, the frequency of use of these terms in relation to the number of standards/criteria has been identified. On the basis of these results, it was revealed that EdNet pays little attention to the connection between learning and research & innovation and to student-centered learning, while ARQA does not focus universities on the importance of formulating and demonstrating learning outcomes. The practical implication of this study was that by taking into account this gap, the ARQA agency developed a new version of the standards (Figure 7).

Key terms of the ESG-2015	How many times the standards / criteria refer to ESG-2015 key terms	
	EdNet	ARQA
Connection between learning and research & innovation		1
Stakeholders	3	2
Awareness / availability of information on the quality of the higher education institution's activities	6	16
Responsibility for the quality of education provided and its guarantee		3
Student-centered learning		2
Learning outcomes	12	4
Interaction between teachers, students and the educational environment of the university		1
Monitoring of educational programs	1	9

Table 11. Frequency of use of ESG-2015 key terms

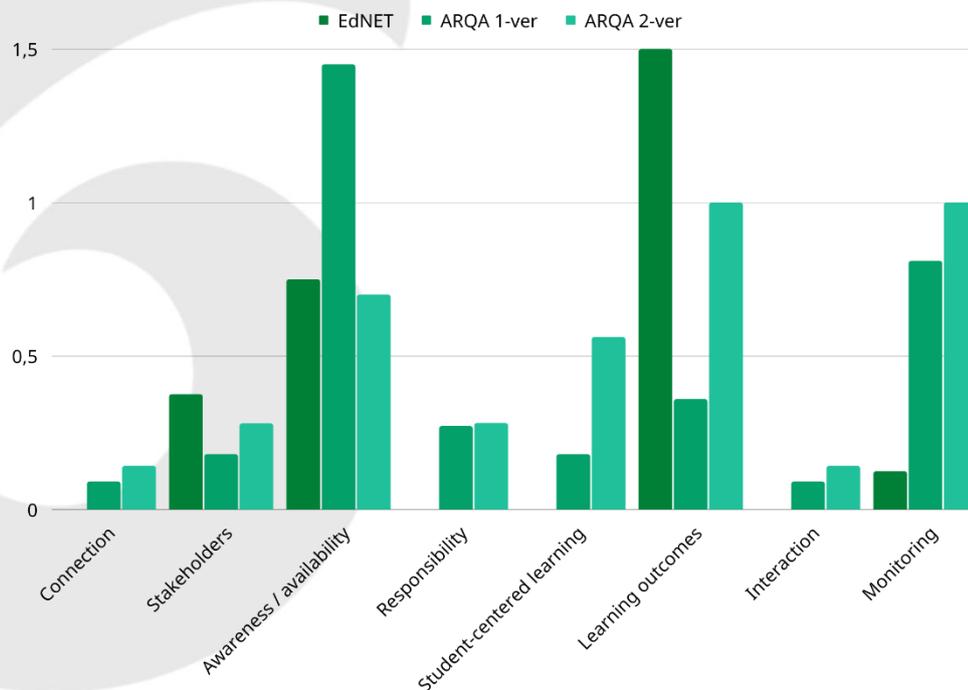


Figure 7. Frequency of use of ESG-2015 key terms in relation to the number of standards / criteria

Note: Key terms of ESG-2015

- Connection between learning and research & innovation

- Stakeholders
- Awareness / availability of information on the quality of the higher education institution's activities
- Responsibility for the quality of education provided and its guarantee
- Student-centered learning
- Learning outcomes
- Interaction between teachers, students and the educational environment of the university
- Monitoring of educational programs

Annex 6: List of ARQA QMS documents

No.	Name of the document	Identification number	Note
1	2	3	
Quality Manual			
1.	Quality Manual	QMS QM	+
Quality Policy and Objectives			
1.	Quality Policy at ARQA	QMS QP	+
2.	Quality objectives at ARQA	QMS QO	+
Standards			
1.	General requirements for the structuring, presentation and formatting of QMS documentation	QMS S 01-12-001-2018	+
2.	Development of quality objectives and QMS improvement planning	QMS S 01-12-002-2018	+
3.	The procedure for the development, registration, approval and implementation of Regulation on Division	QMS S 01-12-003-2018	+
4.	The procedure for the development and approval of Job Description	QMS S 01-12-004-2018	+
5.	Design and development of services	QMS S 01-12-005-2018	+
6.	Analysis of QMS by management	QMS S 01-12-006-2018	+
Documented procedures			
1.	Documentation management	QMS DP 01-17-007-2018	+
2.	Records management	QMS DP 01-17-008-2018	+
3.	Internal audit	QMS DP 01-17-009-2018	+
4.	Management of nonconforming products	QMS DP 01-17-010-2018	+
5.	Corrective and preventive actions	QMS DP 01-17-011-2018	+
Regulations on Divisions			
1.	Regulations on the Higher Education Institutions Accreditation Department	QMS RD 01-04-001-2018	+

2.	Regulations on the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutions Accreditation Department	QMS RD 01-04-002-2018	+
ARQA Standards			
1.	Standards for institutional accreditation of higher education institutions	QMS S 01-05-001-2018	replaced
2.	Standards for programme accreditation of higher education institutions	QMS S 01-05-002-2018	replaced
3.	Standards for programme accreditation of postgraduate educational programs	QMS S 01-05-003-2018	replaced
4.	Standards for programme accreditation of technical and vocational education institutions	QMS S 01-05-004-2018	replaced
5.	Standards for institutional accreditation of technical and vocational education institutions	QMS S 01-05-005-2018	replaced
6.	Standards for programme accreditation of medical education institutions	QMS S 01-05-006-2018	replaced
7.	Standards for programme accreditation of continuing education institutions	QMS S 01-05-007-2018	replaced
8.	Standards for programme accreditation of educational programs of technical and vocational education institutions	QMS S 01-05-030-2020	+
9.	Standards for institutional accreditation of technical and vocational education institutions	QMS S 01-05-028-2020	+
10.	Standards for programme accreditation of educational programs of organizations of higher and postgraduate education	QMS S 01-05-029-2020	+
11.	Standards for institutional accreditation of organizations of higher and postgraduate education	QMS S 01-05-018-2020	+
12.	Standards for institutional accreditation of secondary education organizations	QMS S 01-05-031-2020	+
ARQA Procedures			
1.	Strategic Development Plan of the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Examination of the Quality of Education "ARQA" for 2018-2022	QMS Pl 01-06-001-2018	+
2.	Regulation on post-accreditation monitoring	QMS R 01-06-002-2018	replaced
3.	Regulation on the Supreme Expert Council	QMS R 01-06-003-2018	amended
4.	Regulation on expert councils	QMS R 01-06-004-2018	amended
5.	Rules for developing an expert conclusion report on the report on the results of self-assessment of the activities of educational organizations / delivery of educational programs within the framework of institutional / programme accreditation	QMS Ru 01-06-005-2018	+
6.	Rules for developing a report on the results of external assessment of the activities of educational organizations / delivery of	QMS Ru 01-06-006-2018	+

	educational programs within the framework of institutional / programme accreditation		
7.	Self-assessment Guidelines for university accreditation	QMS G 01-06-007-2018	replaced
8.	Self-assessment Guidelines for college accreditation	QMS G 01-06-008-2018	replaced
9.	Regulation on the Accreditation Council	QMS R 01-06-009-2018	+
10.	Rules for the Review of Complaints and Appeals	QMS Ru 01-06-010-2018	+
11.	Regulation on the Procedure for Conducting Institutional/Programme Accreditation	QMS R 01-06-011-2018	+
12.	Regulation on Experts	QMS R 01-06-007-2018	amended
13.	Regulation on Personnel Policy	QMS R 01-06-008-2018	+
14.	Regulation on post-accreditation monitoring	QMS R 01-06-018-2020	+
15.	Self-assessment guidelines for institutional / programme accreditation of TVET institutions	QMS G 01-06-032-2020	+
16.	Self-assessment guidelines for institutional / programme accreditation of organizations of higher and postgraduate education	QMS G 01-06-033-2020	+
17.	Rules developing an expert conclusion on the report on the implementation of the action plan for the implementation of the experts' recommendations during the accreditation validity period	QMS Ru 01-06-034-2020	+
Job descriptions			
1.	Job description of the manager of the Higher Education Institutions Accreditation Department	QMS JB 01-12-001-2018	amended
2.	Job description of the manager of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutions Accreditation Department	QMS JB 01-12-002-2018	+
3.	Job description of the director of the Higher Education Institutions Accreditation Department	QMS JB 01-12-003-2018	+
4.	Job description of the Director of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Institutions Accreditation Department	QMS JB 01-12-004-2018	amended

Annex 7: Analysis of some suggestions made by specialists and stakeholders

Recommendations	Agency's conclusion
Expert A	
To include the assessment of infrastructure and facilities in the Standard	The university itself is responsible for the quality of the learning environment (including infrastructure and facilities), and all aspects of its activities in general, as part of internal quality assurance system; and the external quality assurance system that includes certification, accreditation, etc. is based on the internal one. During programme accreditation procedure, experts pay attention to the lack of equipment and <i>may recommend</i> the purchase of the specific equipment, whereas HEI <i>may accept</i> this recommendation.
To clarify the wording of criterion 1 in the following way: "The management of the EP must demonstrate that the teaching staff that trains EP students meets the qualification requirements."	The wording of criterion 1 of Standard 5 has been changed.
Compile a book or a list of indicative questions for each group of interviewees (university management, teachers, EP students, etc.).	Providing such a book or a list would be wrong as experts should be free to choose those aspects of the organization's activities that are most important to them.
Expert B	
According to their definition, the Standards should only include the standards themselves and criteria for them. But it is a common practice in Kazakhstan to include a section related to procedures in both the Standards and the Manual. It would therefore be helpful to have it there.	The section related to procedures has been excluded from the standards.
The Standards do not have clear reference to the analysis of differences in the goals and content between EPs of different levels (bachelor's – master's – doctoral).	The first 7 standards are the same for all levels; the specifics of each level are reflected in Standard 8.
The criteria of Standard 2 "Educational programs: development and approval" are aimed at assessing how the process of developing, approving and updating the EP is documented at EOs. This means that an EO can just provide the documents, describe their content and that would be sufficient to guarantee its full compliance with Standard 2, which, however, might not be the case.	The standards are based on trust, which is emphasized in the ESG-15.

Annex 8: Analysis of feedback on the quality and consistency of Agency services

Excerpts from letters from educational organizations	Agency's comment and conclusion
K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University	
<p>From the first training seminar up to the present, the university staff has witnessed the support and assistance of the agency's specialists. The qualified work of the agency's experts allowed us to see the shortcomings of the university activities, which we previously did not attach importance to. In addition to the official comments related to the agency's standards, during the site visit, the experts have provided friendly recommendations for the improvement of the university activities. The University considers the agency to be its partner and hopes to work together in the future.</p> <p>The university, in its turn, recommends that the agency enhance its standards by making the criteria for student-centered learning more detailed and comprehensive.</p>	<p>The recruitment of qualified experts made it possible to increase the effectiveness of recommendations. Not only for this university, but also for other educational organizations, experts make recommendations that go beyond the standards, but do contribute to the improvement of the EOs' activities.</p> <p>Agency's conclusion: The Agency appreciates that the University considers the Agency its partner, thanks for the recommendation and will take it into account to improve the standards.</p>
Mahambet Utemisov West Kazakhstan university	
<p>The new educational paradigm involves the fulfilment of cognitive and spiritual needs and the formation of a comprehensively developed, creative personality. It views a student as a subject of the educational activity, forming value orientations towards education based on creative interests. University particularly appreciated ARQA's activities aimed at providing additional assistance in dealing with regulatory documents paperwork, facilitating the professional growth of the teaching staff, the use of the latest methods of organizing the educational process.</p>	<p>The letter from the university management clearly states the mission of the organization, which is the formation of a comprehensively developed, creative personality. This formation is only possible when the student is included in the learning process as a subject of educational activity.</p> <p>Agency's conclusion: The agency believes that it has made its contribution to the fulfillment of the mission by helping organize the professional growth of teachers, to the implementation of the requirements of legal acts and introduction of innovations.</p>
Toraighyrov University	
<p>The university staff has accumulated considerable experience while preparing for and undergoing Agency's accreditation procedure. The university staff has accumulated considerable experience in the ARQA accreditation procedure. The EO hopes that cooperation will continue to be successful and fruitful in the future.</p>	<p>Indeed, the Agency's employees share their experience, strive for fruitful cooperation, support the desire of the univesrity staff to develop effective workflow.</p> <p>Agency's conclusion: The Agency is ready for further cooperation.</p>
West Kazakhstan University of Innovation and Technology	

<p>The university administration and staff managed to prepare a self-assessment report accurately and smoothly as a result of the training seminar held at the university site. The Agency coordinator supervised the entire process of undergoing the self-assessment, indicating solutions.</p> <p>The HEIs Accreditation Department, continues to inform the university about changes in the field of accreditation as part of our partnership. The Department held a consultation on the implementation of measures based on the results of accreditation and the post-accreditation procedure.</p>	<p>Supervision of the self-assessment process is the Agency's main task, which it performs with great responsibility. A training seminar at university site has been held. The Agency staff has held more than 10 consultations (in an online format) and has also given oral recommendations on emerging issues.</p> <p>Apart from that, the Agency held some other events that are mentioned in the letter.</p> <p>Agency's conclusion: The Agency is grateful for the appreciation of the quality of the services provided.</p>
<p>Pavlodar Pedagogical University</p>	
<p>The HEIs Accreditation Department provided qualified assistance in the preparing and conducting programme accreditation. The Agency held training seminars among internal stakeholders to explain the procedure, methodology and technology of accreditation, gave recommendations for writing a self-report, as well as consultations on methodological aspects of the process. In the first year of the organization's accredited status, the agency organized a meeting with HEI's management and staff.</p>	<p>The educational process of any multidisciplinary organization is more complex compared to that of specialized ones. University ensures the quality of education in all fields of study. This is evidenced by the results of programme accreditation. The achievement of the results was facilitated not only by the Agency's constant assistance, but also by the university staff's adherence to the methodological recommendations for writing a self-assessment report.</p> <p>Agency's conclusion: The agency will continue to provide assistance to the university.</p>

Annex 9: Mechanism of the accreditation procedure by the agency

No	Activity	Time frame
1.	Conclusion of contract on the conduct of the accreditation procedure with an EO	Day 1
2.	Appointment of the agency's representative as an external review coordinator	Days 2-3
3.	Approval of the accreditation procedure schedule	Days 3-5
4.	Conducting a training seminar for EO's representatives	Day 10
5.	Selection of experts	Days 10-35
6.	EO sends the first version of the SAR to the Agency	Days 40-41
7.	Submission of SAR to ARQA for verification of its compliance with the Guidelines	Days 42-44

8.	The first version of SAR is sent to agency experts	Days 44-45
9.	Submission of expert conclusion reports by experts to the Agency	Days 45-55
10.	Verification of expert conclusion reports for their compliance with the guidelines by Agency staff	Days 56-64
11.	Sending expert conclusion reports to an EO	Day 65
12.	Submission of final version of SAR to the Agency	Days 95-96
13.	Preparation of all documentation necessary for experts support	Days 96-117
14.	Approval of the site visit timetable and the composition of the experts group by agency director	Days 118-119
15.	Conducting a training seminar for experts	Days 120-121
16.	Site visit to an EO	Days 125-128
17.	Submission of the final version of the review reports by experts to the Agency	Days 129-140
18.	Presentation of the expert group's conclusions at the Accreditation council's meeting. Accreditation Council makes the decision.	According to the schedule (up to 3 months)
19.	Informing an EO about the decisions made by the Accreditation council	1-2 business days
20.	Preparation of EOs'/EPs' accreditation certificates in case of AC's positive decision	Up to 5 business days
21.	Sending a corrective actions plan (based on the expert comments) to an EO	One month after receiving the letter from the Agency
22.	Verification of a follow-up action plan for its compliance with the guidelines by the Agency staff	3-5 days