

**Deferral of the Application**  
**by Agency for Recognition and Quality Assurance in**  
**Education (ARQA)**  
**for Inclusion on the Register**

**Register Committee**  
30 June 2023

**Ref.** RC39/A125  
**Ver.** 1.0  
**Date** 2023-07-31  
**Page** 1 / 6

<b>Application of:</b>	2022-01-26		
<b>Agency registered since:</b>	n.a.		
<b>Type of review:</b>	Full	<b>Site visit:</b>	2022-10-03
<b>External review report of:</b>	2023-04-19	<b>Submitted:</b>	2023-05-04
<b>Review coordinated by:</b>	European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA)		
<b>Review panel members:</b>	Eva Fernández de Labastida, Iuliu Gabriel Cocuz, Stephen Jackson, Tatjana Volkova,		
<b>Decision of:</b>	2023-06-30		
<b>Absented themselves from decision-making:</b>	n.a.		
<b>Attachments:</b>	1. <a href="#">External Review Report, 2023-04-19</a> 2. <a href="#">Clarification by the Review Panel, 2023-06-21</a>		

1. The application of 2022-01-26 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 2022-02-16.
3. The Register Committee considered the external review report of 2023-04-19 on the compliance of ARQA with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).
4. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from the review panel on 2023-06-21.

**Analysis:**

5. In considering ARQA's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account:

- *Institutional accreditation of higher and postgraduate education*
- *Specialized (programme) accreditation of higher and postgraduate education*

6. The following activities are not within the scope of the ESG and, thus, not pertinent to the application for inclusion on the Register:

- Institutional accreditation of TVET
- Programme accreditation of TVET

7. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on ARQA's level of compliance with the ESG.

8. With regard to the specific European Standards, the Register Committee considered the following:

**Register Committee**

30 June 2023

**Ref.** RC39/A125

**Ver.** 1.0

**Date** 2023-07-31

**Page** 2 / 6

### **ESG 2.1 – Consideration of internal quality assurance**

9. The Register Committee learned from the review report analysis that several standards of ESG Part 1 (1.7, 1.8, 1.9) are not addressed in ARQA's standards for specialized programme accreditation. Given the panel's assessment of compliance, the Register Committee sought further clarification by the panel on the mapping of the agency's standards against ESG Part 1.

10. The panel clarified that despite the incomplete coverage of standards from ESG Part 1, that the agency takes its compliance with the ESG seriously and their methodologies are following the ESG. However the panel confirmed that there are still some issues to be fully resolved in particular related to how the agency's addresses ESG 1.7, ESG 1.8 and ESG 1.9 in its specialized programme accreditation processes.

11. The Register Committee noted the clarification by the panel, however considered that the issue at hand is deficiency, having in mind that the majority of external quality assurance activities are programme accreditation procedures.

**12. The Register Committee was therefore unable to concur with the panel's conclusion that ARQA complies with the standard, but concluded that ARQA only partially complies with ESG 2.1.**

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

13. The review report showed that despite the evidence provided and addressed during the site-visit regarding the procedures for designing and revision of methodologies, the panel has not found any documents that are explaining the processes. Therefore, the Register Committee sought for further clarification from the panel on whether ARQA has established a mechanism for development, review and update of its methodologies.

14. The panel confirmed that the agency developed the processes during the interviews. However, the concerns raised by the panel were related to the lack of written documentation that are assuring that this mechanism are done and how they are done to ensure fitness for purpose. While the panel suggested that these documents describing the procedures could be drawn-up and integrated into the Quality Management System of the agency (ESG 3.6), the Committee could not follow how does the agency currently satisfy

itself that it can implement the set framework in compliance with the ESG, how does the agency translate the set framework into specific processes and criteria and how it ensures that the methodologies are fit for the purpose.

**15. The Register Committee therefore could not follow the panel’s judgement on compliance, but concluded that ARQA complies only partially with ESG 2.2.**

### ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes

16. The Register Committee noted in the panel’s analysis the inconsistencies between the criteria for outcomes in the Regulation on procedure for conducting programme/institutional accreditation and the Regulation on Accreditation Council. The Committee sought further clarification from the panel on the nature of these inconsistencies.

17. The panel explained that the inconsistency at the time of the site-visit has been of technical nature.

18. While the Register Committee considered the panel’s clarification, the Committee underlined that ARQA should provide further evidence on how it ensures a consistent application of its criteria and alignment of its criteria for outcomes in its different documents and website

**19. The Register Committee therefore could not follow the panel’s judgement on compliance, but concluded that ARQA complies only partially with ESG 2.5.**

### ESG 2.6 – Reporting

20. The Register Committee noted the panel’s raised concerns regarding the readability and accessibility of the reports on the agency’s website.

21. Further the Register Committee also found inconsistencies in the agency’s publishing practice i.e., in some cases only the decisions are published but not the reports and that for some institutional accreditations procedures the reports for institutional accreditation were missing (<https://arqa.agency/registry/univer/95>; <https://arqa.agency/registry/univer/90>).

**22. Considering the above raised issues the Register Committee was unable to concur with the panel’s conclusion that ARQA complies with the standard. Therefore, the Register Committee concluded that ARQA only partially complies with ESG 2.6.**

### ESG 2.7 – Complaints and appeals

23. In considering the panel’s analysis the Committee was unclear on whether the main concerns related to the agency’s functioning or set up of the Appeals Commission. The Register Committee therefore sought further clarification from the panel.

24. The panel underlined that the process of appointing the members which is solely done by the Director, who is also founder of ARQA (see ESG 3.3) is problematic. The panel further underlined that the process where the recommendations from the Appeals Commission would go back to the Accreditation Council who can either take them into account or disregard them completely does not function properly. In the panels' view, the Appeals Commission has not enough authority to be taken seriously by the Accreditation Council.

25. The Register Committee noted the concerns raised by the panel and underlined that the independence and impartiality of the Appeals Commission is of importance and should be further addressed by ARQA.

**26. The Register Committee therefore followed the panel's conclusion that ARQA only partially complies with ESG 2.7.**

### **ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance**

27. The Register Committee noted that the evidence of how the agency translated its goals and objectives into its everyday activities can be found in its procedures, criteria and guidelines. However, the Committee underlined that without a strategy, it remains unclear how effectively the goals and objectives are translated into the procedures.

28. The Committee further noted that ARQA's mission of enhancing quality remains invisible from the review reports which are rather based on the 'compliance of standards' principle.

**29. The Register Committee therefore could not follow the panel's judgement on compliance, but concluded that ARQA complies only partially with ESG 3.1.**

### **ESG 3.3 – Independence**

30. The Register Committee noted the strong influence held by the founder of the agency, who also acts as Director. The founder is responsible in nominating, appointing and deciding the term of office of members of all the bodies of the agency; he/she may also recruit staff members and participates in the decision making body with a voting right.

31. The Register Committee found the situation where one single actor or stakeholder has a 'controlling stake' in an agency as incompatible with the requirements of the Standard (see interpretation no. 18 in the Use and Interpretation of the ESG).

32. While the Register Committee considered it usual and acceptable for the main founder to remain involved, the Register Committee underlined that the requirement of independence should be understood to the effect that the new organisation, once it has been founded, should be able to function independently. The Register Committee found it particularly problematic that the founder has executive, managerial and decision making attributions.

33. The Committee further emphasised the recommendation of the panel to ensure that the organisational independence is formally secured by separation of the roles of Founder and Director.

**34. The Register Committee therefore concurred with the panel that ARQA only partially complies with ESG 3.3.**

### **ESG 3.4 – Thematic analysis**

35. The Register Committee understood that the agency considers the annual reports submitted to the ministry as thematic analysis prepared by the agency.

36. While the panels found that the annual reports cannot be considered as thematic analysis under ESG 3.4, the Committee noted that these analysis provide useful information regarding ARQA’s activities including recommendations given to accredited institutions/programmes.

37. The Register Committee further emphasised the recommendation of the panel on having a more in-depth approach to analysing findings from its procedures and publishing such thematic reports on its website.

**38. The Register Committee therefore concurred with the panel that ARQA only partially complies with ESG 3.4.**

39. For the remaining standards, the Register Committee was able to concur with the review panel's analysis and conclusion without further comments.

### **Conclusion:**

40. Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that ARQA demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Review panel conclusion</b>	<b>Register Committee conclusion</b>
2.1	Compliance	Partial compliance
2.2	Compliance	Partial compliance
2.3	Compliance	Compliance
2.4	Compliance	Compliance
2.5	Compliance	Partial compliance
2.6	Compliance	Partial compliance
2.7	Partial compliance	Partial compliance
3.1	Compliance	Partial compliance
3.2	Compliance	Compliance
3.3	Partial compliance	Partial compliance
3.4	Partial compliance	Partial compliance

3.5	Compliance	Compliance
3.6	Compliance	Compliance
3.7	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

**Register Committee**

30 June 2023

**Ref.** RC39/A125

**Ver.** 1.0

**Date** 2023-07-31

**Page** 6 / 6

41. Since ARQA only achieved partial compliance with a number of standards and thus fails to meet some key requirements of the ESG, in its holistic judgement on the basis of the documentation available and the considerations above, the Register Committee was unable to conclude that ARQA complies substantially with the ESG as a whole.

42. **The Register Committee therefore intends to reject the application. In accordance with §3.27 of the Procedures for Applications, the Committee therefore deferred the consideration of ARQA’s application for inclusions, pending additional representation by ARQA on the grounds for possible rejection, set out in the present decision.**

43. **ARQA is requested to make additional representation by 2023-09-17 at the latest.** ARQA may also withdraw the application before that date according to §3.27 of the Procedures for Applications. If no additional representation is made by that date, ARQA will be deemed to have withdrawn the application.

## Application by ARQA for Inclusion on the Register / Renewal of Registration

Register Committee

Clarification provided by the Panel

Ref. A125  
Date 2023-06-22  
Page 1 / 3

<b>Date of the conversation:</b>	2023-06-21
<b>Panel members:</b>	Tatjana Volkova, Stephen Jackson
<b>Representative of EQAR:</b>	Blazhe Todorovski, Melinda Szabo

1. ARQA has submitted on 2022-01-26 an application for inclusion on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). On 2023-05-04, ARQA submitted the external review panel's report of 2023-04-19.
2. In order to prepare the deliberations of the Register Committee on ARQA' compliance with the ESG, EQAR contacted the Panel to clarify the matter(s) below.

### ESG 2.1 – Consideration of internal quality assurance

3. EQAR representatives asked the panel to elaborate and clarify further their conclusion related to the mapping of the agency's standards against the ESG part 1.
4. The panel clarified that based on their findings the agency mainly conducts programme accreditation in Kazakhstan and even if some of the standards in ESG part 1 are not mapped completely the panel's holistic judgment was positive. The panel also reaffirmed that the agency takes the ESG seriously and the agency's methodologies are fully based on the ESG. The panel found that the agency addressed ESG 2.1.
5. The panel however confirmed that there are some issues that need to be fully resolved in particular to the standards for programme accreditation that are related with ESG 1.7, ESG 1.8 and ESG 1.9.

### ESG 2.2 – Designing methodologies fit for purpose

6. EQAR representatives asked the panel to clarify whether ARQA has established a mechanism for development, review and update of its methodologies which includes the involvement of stakeholders
7. The panel confirmed that the agency elaborated the process during their site-visit. However, the concerns raised by the panel were made since there were no specific documents that are assuring that this is done.

Therefore, the panel recommended for further formalisation of the processes, for which the agency was aware of.

### ESG 2.4 – Peer-review experts

8. EQAR representatives asked the panel to clarify their reservations regarding the involvement and training of international experts.
9. The pane clarified that their reservations were related with their perception of the unequal role of the international experts and the fact that the international experts were very country specific (i.e. Kyrgyzstan). Nevertheless, the panel confirmed that the agency organises regular trainings and there were no concerns in systematic trainings of the experts.

### ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes

10. EQAR representatives asked the panel to clarify if there are inconsistencies between the criteria for outcomes in the Regulation on procedure for conducting programme/institutional accreditation and the Regulation on Accreditation Council.
11. The panel clarified that the agency has made the alignment of the criteria for outcomes in the Regulation procedure and the Regulation on Accreditation council. The panel underlined that the inconsistency at the time of the visit has been because of technical organisation. However, the published information on the website is correct.

### ESG 2.6 – Reporting

12. EQAR representatives asked regarding the numerous inconsistencies between the agency's decisions and the review reports published on the website, especially between the different language versions.
13. The panel clarified that they have underlined these inconsistencies during the site-visit as well, but they have understood that this is more of a technical issue and poor maintenance of the website by the agency staff and not a systemic issues.
14. EQAR representatives asked for clarification regarding the institutional accreditation report and decision granted for 11 years to one higher education institution noted in the report.
15. The panel clarified that ARQA assured them that this has been a technical mistake from their side and that it will be resolved. The panel noted that they are surprised that this issue has not been resolved yet and the report and decision are still publicly available without any changes.



## ESG 2.7 – Complaints and appeals

16. EQAR representatives asked whether the panel had concerns in the functioning of the appeals committee based on the procedure of appointment of the Appeals commission members.
17. The panel underlined that in their view the process of appointing the members of the Appeals Commission which is solely done by the Director who is also the founder of ARQA, raised concern with the panel, which has been also mentioned under ESG 3.3. The panel further underlined that based on their findings, the recommendations from the Appeals Commission would go back to the Accreditation Council who can either take into account or disregard completely the recommendation by the Commission, Therefore in the panels view, the Appeals Commission has not enough authority to be taken seriously by the Accreditation Council.

## Register Committee

Ref. A125  
Date 2023-06-22  
Page 3 / 3

## ESG 3.6 – Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

18. EQAR representatives asked the panel regarding their conclusion where the panel stated that when it comes to internal quality assurance system that there are policies/practices in place, but that they did not find documentary evidences about to support it.
19. The panel clarified that their conclusion referred to the lack of detailed documentation for the practice in place. However, during their site-visit interviews the panel understood that the agency has the practice and is doing the internal quality assurance of the agency where it involves the stakeholders as well but there is no formal documentation on the procedure where it shows how the agency works. Therefore, the panel made the recommendation for the agency to formalise the processes .in writing.