

Approval of the Application
by Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Career
Development (AKKORK) for Inclusion on the Register

Register Committee

Ref. RC16/2015/A25

Ver. 1.0

Date 2015-11-18

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Application of:	14/03/2015
External review report of:	October 2014
Review coordinated by:	ENQA
Review panel members:	Radu Damian (chair & academic), Bastian Baumann (secretary), Mikus Dubickis, (student) Jean-Pierre Finance, Patricia Georgieva
Decision of:	17 November 2015
Registration until:	31 October 2019
Absented themselves from decision-making:	none

1. The application of 14/03/2015 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee considered the external review report of October 2014 on the compliance of AKKORK with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG¹). The Committee also considered AKKORK's statement on the external review report (of 14/03/2015).
3. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from AKKORK (letters of 11/05/2015 and 29/05/2015) and the chair of the external review (letter of 11/05/2015) in order to supplement the findings and analysis presented in the external review report.
4. On the basis of the above-mentioned documentation the Register Committee was unable to conclude that AKKORK substantially complies with the ESG. The Committee therefore invited the agency (on 11/06/2015) to make additional representation on the grounds for a possible rejection of its application.
5. AKKORK made additional representation on 06/09/2015. The Register Committee subsequently considered the application taking into account the representation and further clarification from AKKORK (letter of 15/10/2015).

¹ The application was made before adoption of the 2015 version of the ESG. It has therefore been considered on the basis of the 2005 version of the ESG, and all references refer to that version.

Analysis

ESG 2.3: Criteria for decisions

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6. According to its “multi-standard approach”, AKKORK uses different sets of criteria for its different types of reviews. The external review panel noted that while some of the criteria were published at the time of the external review of AKKORK, not all criteria were made available. According to the panel, the agency explained the decision of not publishing all criteria by concerns that those might be copied by others without authorisation.

In its statement on the external review report, the agency stated that criteria for all its external quality assurance procedures could now be found on its website. The Register Committee was, however, unable to locate all these documents and therefore requested clarification. In its response, AKKORK provided links to the criteria for its different procedures.

From the clarification it appeared that most of the different types of review offered by AKKORK employ the same criteria and that the agency has published the detailed criteria for programme accreditation only.

In its additional representation, AKKORK explained that depending on the type of evaluation carried out, the decision on accreditation is taken by one of AKKORK’s two councils (Accreditation Council and the International Accreditation Council), depending on the type of accreditation aimed for. AKKORK explained that it employs a “multi-standard approach”, meaning that it adds additional specific criteria to its normal programme assessment criteria (e.g. related to e-learning, development of the internal QA system, etc.).

While the Register Committee noted that the criteria for AKKORK’s different external quality assessment approaches are now published, the Committee noted that it is not easily understood which criteria apply in which type of review and, thus, whether they are applied consistently.

The Register Committee was thus unable to concur with the panel’s conclusion of substantial compliance. Having considered the additional clarification provided by AKKORK the Register Committee was able to conclude that AKKORK partially complies with the standard. The issue was therefore flagged.

ESG 2.5 Reporting

7. The panel stated that AKKORK did not publish reports of its institutional reviews or the negative reports and negative accreditation decisions (p. 23). In its statement on the review report, AKKORK explained that it was moving its website to a new server and that the missing reports would be published on its updated website.

In its additional representation, AKKORK stated that all reports of its external reviews are published, including the ones that did not pass accreditation. The Register Committee was able to verify that AKKORK

published the reports institutional reviews. The Committee noted that AKKORK last published a negative report in 2010.

In its clarification letter (15/10/15), AKKORK explained that there have not been any negative reports since 2010.

Only after having considered the additional information provided by AKKORK was the Register Committee able to concur with the review panel's conclusion that AKKORK substantially complies with the standard.

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ESG 2.6: Follow-up procedures

8. According to the review report AKKORK asks higher education institutions under review to submit a plan with "corrections of concerns" within three months of the review report (p. 24).

The review panel noted that AKKORK's follow-up procedures were in a considerable number of times not followed through.

The Register Committee requested the review panel to clarify how often AKKORK has not followed up its recommendations. The panel was not able to provide an estimate of cases where the follow-up has not happened. Following the interviews with higher education institutions, the panel formed the view that follow-up procedures were not carried out sufficiently systematically and that the communication with institutions was not carried out in a structured manner.

The review report also noted (p. 25) that AKKORK does not have any follow-up mechanisms for public-professional accreditation procedures carried out on behalf of the employers' organisation. In its statement to the review report AKKORK explained it views the results of these accreditation procedures to be the responsibility of the employers' organisation.

In its additional representation, AKKORK stressed its limited role in case of professional-public accreditations, where it does not take the final decision and thus it considers not to be responsible for the follow-up procedure. AKKORK added that its role in this procedure is to only provide information on the requests made by the employer organisation or the institution.

For its other procedures, where the final accreditation decision is taken by AKKORK, the agency stressed that it cannot oblige institutions to fulfil the requirements of the correction plan, since AKKORK accreditation is voluntary.

The Register Committee considered that the agency remains responsible for ensuring a consistent follow-up even if the formal decision is taken by another body. If another body carries out the actual follow-up the agency nevertheless retains responsibility.

The Register Committee was thus unable to concur with the panel's conclusion that AKKORK substantially complies with the standard and found that AKKORK only partially complies with the standard. This issue was therefore flagged.

ESG 3.3: Activities

9. The Register Committee noted that AKKORK carries out a number of different external QA procedures focused primarily on the quality of study programmes. The review panel further stated that the agency carries out also consultancy services and that it had in the past accredited study programmes in the same period it had provided the institution with consultancy services.

AKKORK stated in its response to the review report that following the recommendation of the review panel to separate the consultancy services from review activities, it has decided to remove consultancy activities altogether from its offer.

The Register Committee noted that “Management consulting” was still mentioned on the website of the agency and has therefore asked the agency to clarify the current status of its consultancy activities. In its letter of 11/05/2015 AKKORK replied that the information on consulting services was removed from its website as AKKORK decided not to offer consulting services anymore.

The Register Committee requested AKKORK to clarify the nature of procedures on “Internal quality assurance system development and certification (IQAS)”, which, according to the agency's website, includes “a complex set of consultative and methodological work in IQAS development”. AKKORK explained that the nature of the procedure is evaluative and the “consultative” step in this procedure refers to the recommendations set out by the panel.

The Register Committee concluded that AKKORK clarified that indeed it does no longer carry out any type of consultancy activities, and hence the question of separation between consultancy and review activities has become obsolete.

Following the clarification the Register Committee was able to concur with the review panel that AKKORK complies substantially with the standard.

ESG 3.7: External QA criteria and processes used by the agency

10. The review panel noted that students were not involved in all review panels due to lack of “adequate student members” and “unwillingness by some higher education institutions as this would entail further costs” (p. 22).

In its statement to the external review report, AKKORK stated that it would try to involve a student representative in every accreditation project and that it had already done so for two international review procedures at two Russian universities.

The review report noted that AKKORK involved international experts only in a few cases, where his/her assessment was carried out independently of the panel. The Register Committee underlined that the standard requires the joint work of the team of external experts in the review and approval of their review report.

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In its additional representation, AKKORK stated that it involved students in all its review procedure since October 2014 and clarified that reports for international accreditation are prepared jointly with international reviewers. The Register Committee requested AKKORK to clarify the selection process for student panel members and the role of international experts in reviews. The Register Committee has therefore asked for further clarification.

In its letter of 15/10/2015 AKKORK explained the way in which students are selected. AKKORK further clarified that international experts work jointly with other review team members and provided the regulation describing the full involvement of experts.

In light of the explanations provided by the agency, the Register Committee concurred with the panel's conclusion of compliance.

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Conclusion:

11. **Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that AKKORK complies substantially with the ESG and therefore approved the application for inclusion on the Register.**
12. **AKKORK's inclusion shall be valid until 31/10/2019.²**
13. The following issues have been flagged for particular attention when considering a potential application for renewal of inclusion. AKKORK is expected to address these issues specifically in its next self-evaluation report, setting out whether the issue has been resolved or indicating what progress has been made. AKKORK is further responsible for informing the coordinator of the next external review and the review panel of the need to address these issues in the external review report.

ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions

It should be addressed whether AKKORK published the detailed criteria for all its procedure and their explicit use.

ESG 2.5: consistent publication of full reports

It should be addressed whether AKKORK has consistently published all external evaluation reports.

ESG 2.6: Implementation of follow-up

It should be addressed whether the follow-up procedures were implemented consistently for all of AKKORK's external quality assurance activities.

ESG 3.7: Consistent involvement of students

It should receive attention whether AKKORK has involved students regularly in its review committees.

² Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see §4.1 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.