

Deferral of the Application
by National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and
Research (ANACEC)
for Inclusion on the Register

Register Committee
 11-12 December 2023

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Application of:	2022-10-24		
Agency registered since:	n/a		
Type of review:	Full	Site visit:	2023-06-19
External review report of:	2023-10-25	Submitted:	2023-11-06
Review coordinated by:	European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA)		
Review panel members:	Adrian Korzeniowski, Anca Prisacariu, Aurelija Valeikienė, Melita Kovacevic,		
Decision of:	2023-12-12		
Registration until:	n/a		
Absented themselves from decision-making:	n/a		
Attachments:	1. External Review Report, 2023-10-25 (external document)		

1. The application of 2022-10-24 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 2022-11-24.
3. The Register Committee considered the external review report of 2023-10-25 on the compliance of ANACEC with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).

Analysis:

4. In considering ANACEC's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account:
 - External evaluation for the authorization of provisional operation of study programmes (cycle I – Bachelor, Integrated studies, cycle II – Master, cycle III – Doctorate)

- External evaluation for the accreditation/reaccreditation of study programmes (cycle I – Bachelor, Integrated studies, cycle II – Master, cycle III – Doctorate)
- External evaluation for the authorisation of provisional operation of higher education institutions
- External Evaluation for the accreditation/reaccreditation of higher education institutions
- External evaluation for the authorisation of joint programmes (based on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes)
- External evaluation for the accreditation of joint programmes (based on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes)

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

- Quality assurance in general education
- Quality assurance in vocational education and training
- Evaluation of continuous professional training programmes
- Evaluation of organisations in the field of research and innovation
- Evaluation of the scientific and scientific-teaching staff
- Evaluation of scientific publications and other evaluations

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

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

ESG 2.1 – Consideration of internal quality assurance

8. The Register Committee noted that ANACEC's processes are rather externally driven and the procedures are done in a quite formalistic manner. Furthermore, as underlined by the panel, the Committee noted that ANACEC procedures do not reflect sufficiently the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention for the recognition of qualifications from abroad (ESG 1.4.).

9. The Register Committee further emphasised the recommendation of the panel to enhance the development of quality culture and support institutional capacity and capability so that quality assurance at institutional level is not an externally driven preoccupation, but an internally understood responsibility.

10. The Register Committee therefore concurred with the panel that ANACEC only partially complies with ESG 2.1.

ESG 2.2 – Designing methodologies fit for purpose

11. The Register Committee noted the panel’s concerns that ANACEC’s framework has been developed on the basis of the frameworks and provisions of other national quality assurance agencies. Furthermore, the Committee underlined the panel’s recommendation that ANACEC should better ensure adapting to its national specifics in the framework.

12. Furthermore, the Committee noted that despite having the methodologies and the criteria set by the agency, as a subordinate to the ministry, the agency is dependent and cannot safeguard the contextualisation and developments of upcoming procedures, as well as the revision of existing ones in the current regulatory framework the agency operates under (see more under ESG 3.3).

13. The Register Committee therefore concurred with the panel that ANACEC only partially complies with ESG 2.2.

ESG 2.7 – Complaints and appeals

14. The Register Committee noted that the provisions for complaints and appeals are distributed in two documents, the Methodology of External Evaluation and the Regulations on the settlement of petitions submitted to ANACEC. The panel remarked that when comparing these two documents there are contradictions and inconsistencies that should be addressed.

15. Furthermore, the Register Committee noted that the President of ANACEC appoints the Appeals Committees and validates the decision of the Appeals Committees, while at the same time chairs the Governing Board which is the decision making body, which may raise concern of potential conflict of interest.

16. The Register Committee therefore underlined the panels’s recommendation of revising the applicable regulations in order to avoid contradictions as well as the division of responsibilities in terms of appointing and approval of appeals in order to guarantee a fair decision making and avoid potential conflict of interest.

17. Considering the several above-mentioned issues the Register Committee could not follow the panel’s conclusion of compliance, but considered that ANACEC complies only partially with ESG 2.7.

ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

18. The Register Committee noted the panel’s concerns of the lack of interconnectivity between the Strategy of the agency and the Annual Activity Plans and the lack of evidence of how these two documents are cascading in the de-facto activities of the agency. Furthermore, the Register Committee noted the lack of structure, clarity and capacity building in its strategic planning process.

19. Furthermore, the Register Committee noted the concerns raised by the panel about stakeholder involvement at the agency, especially the

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meritocratic system in the selection of students both for the governing bodies of the agency, as well as the selection of students in the review panels.

20. The Register Committee further emphasised the recommendation of the panel, for the agency to revisit its methodology for the representation of stakeholders on the Governing Board.

21. Considering the concerns and above-mentioned issues the Register Committee could not follow the panel's conclusion of compliance, but considered that ANACEC complies only partially with ESG 3.1.

ESG 3.3 – Independence

22. The Register Committees noted the panel's analysis that according to the official documentation ANACEC is not independent of the Government and the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, the status of the agency is as subordinate to the ministry, which defines the rules for the election of the members on the Governing Board.

23. The Committee further noted the panel's concerns that with the current status the organisational independence of ANACEC is at risk.

24. The Committee further noted the panel's concerns that the current situation also puts in jeopardy the operational independence of ANACEC. As noted by the analysis of the panel, the palette of ANACEC's activity is too broad and the ministry is too close.

25. The Register Committee, further noted that the final decision regarding the procedures lays with the ministry and not with the Governing Board of the agency with instances where the ministry deciding not to follow the proposed decision by the agency of non-accreditation.

26. Considering the concerns on the organisational, operational and independence of formal outcomes the Register Committee could not follow the panel's conclusion of partial compliance, but considered that ANACEC does not comply with ESG 3.3.

ESG 3.4 – Thematic analysis

27. While evidence of thematic analysis was presented, the panel underlined that this study was done for one study field and not repeated in other fields. The Committee further underlined the panel's analysis that annual reports and other individual initiatives does not represent thematic analysis.

28. The Register Committee acknowledged the agency's activity with preparing thematic analysis for one study field, however as it stands these activities are modest. The Committee underlines the review panel's recommendations on the formal commitment by the agency regarding the regular conducted and published thematic analysis.

29. Considering the limited work in producing thematic analysis, the Register Committee concurs with the panel’s conclusion that ANACEC complies only partially with ESG 3.4.

ESG 3.5 – Resources

30. The Register Committee noted the panel’s concerns related to the financial sustainability of the agency and the need of more autonomous financial management.

31. Furthermore, the Committee noted the panel’s concerns on the lack of human resources and the heavy workload ahead for ANACEC with the institutional and doctoral school evaluations.

32. The Committee emphasises the panel’s recommendations on the need for the agency to pursue with the authorities changes in its financial management, which would also ensure more funding to enable increasing the human resources of ANACEC.

33. **The Register Committee therefore concurred with the panel’s conclusion that ANACEC complies only partially with ESG 3.5.**

ESG 3.6 – Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

34. The Register Committee noted that even if ANACEC has a Quality Policy as a document, as underlined by the panel this is not translated into practice i.e., not reflected in the internal quality assurance system of the agency.

35. Furthermore, as underlined by the panel the feedback mechanisms are not clearly defined and implemented, i.e., the collection and analysis from the feedback collected by the reviewed institutions and the panels is not clear and predictable, nor is formally defined in any policy of the agency.

36. Despite ANACEC’s work and developments on its own internal quality assurance system, the Register Committee found that the process is still in a developmental phase and the agency should further strengthen, align and implement its practices.

37. **In light of these concerns, the Register Committee could not follow the panel’s judgement of compliance and found that ANACEC complies only partially with ESG 3.6.**

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

Conclusion:

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

Standard	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee
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		conclusion
2.1	Partial compliance	Partial Compliance
2.2	Partial compliance	Partial Compliance
2.3	Compliance	Compliance
2.4	Compliance	Compliance
2.5	Compliance	Compliance
2.6	Compliance	Compliance
2.7	Compliance	Partial Compliance
3.1	Compliance	Partial Compliance
3.2	Compliance	Compliance
3.3	Partial compliance	Non-Compliance
3.4	Partial compliance	Partial Compliance
3.5	Partial compliance	Partial Compliance
3.6	Compliance	Partial Compliance
3.7	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

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40. Since ANACEC 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 ANACEC complies substantially with the ESG as a whole.

41. 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 ANACEC’s application for inclusions, pending additional representation by ANACEC on the grounds for possible rejection, set out in the present decision.

42. In case of rejection, ANACEC would have the right, according to §3.31 of the Procedures for Applications, to undergo a focused review addressing those issues that led to rejection, and to reapply within 18 months based on that focused review.

43. ANACEC is requested to make additional representation by 2024-03-05 at the latest. ANACEC 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, ANACEC will be deemed to have withdrawn the application.

44. ANACEC has the right to appeal this decision of the Register Committee in accordance with the [EQAR Appeals Procedure](#). Any appeal must reach EQAR within 40 days from receipt of this decision.