



«АККРЕДИТТЕУ ЖӘНЕ РЕЙТИНГТИҢ
ТӘУЕЛСІЗ АГЕНТТІГІ» КЕМ

НУ «НЕЗАВИСИМОЕ АГЕНТСТВО
АККРЕДИТАЦИИ И РЕЙТИНГА»

INDEPENDENT AGENCY FOR
ACCREDITATION AND RATING

TO SUPERVISORY BOARD

PROGRESS REPORT

on the activities of the Independent Agency for
Accreditation and Rating
in the year of 2020

TO SUPERVISORY BOARD



**PROGRESS REPORT
on the activities of the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating
in the year of 2020**

Nur-Sultan, 2020

CONTENT

List of symbols and abbreviations	3
INTRODUCTION.....	5
1. IAAR in the development of the education quality assurance framework in the national and international educational areas	6
1.1 Strengthening the IAAR’s market positions in the national and international accreditation services	6
1.2 Broadening and raising the quality potential of national and international experts	11
1.3 Improvement of the Agency’s personnel management system	13
2. Monitoring the quality of education and bringing the best global practices to the development of national education frameworks and organizations	15
2.1 Improving the quality of the post-accreditation monitoring procedure and rules	15
2.2 Enhancing the analytical capacity of the IAAR to improve national education quality assurance frameworks	15
3. Conduct of rating research in the field of higher education	16
3.1 Expanding the boundaries of rating research in higher and postgraduate education	17
3.2 Improving the methodology of rating research and creating public awareness about the rating results	18
4. Timely public awareness and improving feedback.....	19
4.1 Raising public awareness about quality assessment results.....	19
4.2 Improving the efficiency of IAAR activities and feedback.....	20
5. IAAR-recognized international accreditation agency	22
5.1 Strengthening and expanding the international recognition and prestige of the IAAR	22
5.2 Improving the quality of the IAAR international activities and achievements	24
SWOT analysis	25
CONCLUSION.....	27

List of symbols and abbreviations

- ABET** - Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology
ACBSP - Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs
ACQUIN - Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
APQN - Asia-Pacific Quality Assurance Network
AQAIIW - Association of Quality Assurance Agencies of the Islamic World
ASIIN - Accreditation Agency for Degree Programs in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics
CEENQA - Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
CIQG - Council for Higher Education Accreditation US International Quality Group
ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR - European Quality Assurance Register
ESG - Standards and Recommendations for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
INQAAHE - International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IREG - International Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence
PhD - Doctor of Philosophy Training Program
MA – Master of Arts Degree Program
QA - Quality Assurance
SAR - Self-Assessment Report
AC - Accreditation Council
BA - Bachelor of Arts Degree Program
IQAS - Internal Quality Assurance System
HEI - Higher Education Institution
WFME - World Federation of Medical Education
EPP - External Expert Panel
SPIID - State program of industrial and innovative development of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2015-2019
SPED - State Program for Education Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020
EHEA - European Higher Education Area
KR - Kyrgyz Republic
IA - Institutional Accreditation
MES RK - Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan
MOES KR - Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic
IAAR - Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating
RI - Research Institutes
NCE - National Chamber of Kazakhstan Entrepreneurs “Atameken”

NSOKO - National Framework for Education Quality Assessment

IE – Institution of Education

EP - Educational Programme

PEP – Principal Educational Programme

TS - Teaching Staff

RK - Republic of Kazakhstan

PSA – Primary Specialized Accreditation

MM - Mass Media

TVE - Technical and Vocational Education

EC - Expert Council



INTRODUCTION

The non-profit institution “Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating” (hereinafter - IAAR) is an international accreditation agency for quality assurance in education, which operates to improve the competitiveness of educational organizations at the national and international scopes. The strategic development goals of IAAR are aimed at strengthening the status of a recognized, nationally and internationally competitive Quality Assurance Agency in Education.

IAAR is a full member of European, Asian and American education quality assurance and accreditation networks and agencies. The IAAR is recognized and, along with the European Registry for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (EQAR), the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) has been included in *the Asia-Pacific Registry for Quality Assurance in Education (APQR)* since 2020. Due to full membership in international European networks, IAAR-accredited institutions of education and learning programmes gain the status of international accreditation. IAAR operates in compliance with the ESG and WFME standards.

The IAAR activities in 2020 were based on the goals and objectives defined by the program documents and legislation in the field of education of the countries of Central Asia and the European Higher Education Area, international documents in the field of quality assurance, as well as the IAAR Development Strategy for 2019-2023. In February 2020 the “IAAR Development Strategy 2019 – 2023” was amended and supplemented due to the Kazakhstan’s legislative amendments related to education, as well as the adoption of the State Programme for development of education and science for the years 2020-2025, taking into account new challenges and threats to international and national financial and economic stability and the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, claimed to be pandemic. The aforementioned Development Strategy has been amended in line with the ESG-2015 European standards and guidelines for external quality assessment and governing documents of ENQA, EQAR and WFME.

IAAR demonstrates strong competitive advantages while consistently conducting an independent, objective and professional assessment of academic activities in the European and Central Asian region. IAAR conducts international institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation procedures in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Romania based on concluded Agreements and recognition of IAAR by the relevant authorities of these states.

IAAR has been conducting rating studies in the Republic of Kazakhstan since 2014, in the Kyrgyz Republic since 2018, and since 2020 - the international rating “IAAR Eurasian University Ranking (IAAR EUR)”.

While applying best global practices to ensure quality, the IAAR improves efficiency and enhances quality of educational and scientific activities of educational institutions of the European and Asian countries, taking into account the jobs of the future and in line with key national and international trends in the development of education systems.

In connection with the announcement by the World Health Organization of the COVID-19 coronavirus as a pandemic and the introduction of quarantine measures, the IAAR has developed a “Regulation on the accreditation and accreditation status of educational organizations for the duration of quarantine measures” to be effective on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as abroad. At the same time, the IAAR has taken into consideration the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education ENQA recommendations related to flexibility and compatibility of switching to online processes and postponing the accreditation of educational organizations (ENQA Statement as of May 5, 2020).

Responding to the new challenges of the time, the IAAR makes adjustments to its current and future activities, improves accreditation procedures as an effective mechanism for enhancing competitiveness of educational services; focuses educational organizations to meet the diverse students’ interests and capabilities, concentrates on wide use of international experience, modern educational and digital technologies, increasing responsibility for the quality of services provided, including in the context of distance learning.

1. IAAR in the development of the education quality assurance framework in the national and international educational areas

The core activity of the IAAR is related to external evaluation aiming to facilitate the enhancements in the quality of education and greater competitiveness of educational services through independent accreditation, promotion of a quality culture at the national and international scales.

1.1 Strengthening the IAAR’s market positions in the national and international accreditation services

In 2020, the IAAR operations were based on the goals and objectives defined by international and national priorities in the development of education systems of the Republic of Kazakhstan and foreign countries, international experience and the implementation of key indicators of the IAAR Development Strategy for 2019-2023.

The objective of the external evaluation is aligned with the mission, vision, and strategic goals defined in the “IAAR Development Strategy 2019-2023”, developed in collaboration with external stakeholders and coordinated with the IAAR collegial bodies. The main principles of external evaluation are transparency and regularity, which are characterized in the IAAR Quality Assurance Policy.

The IAAR conducts external evaluation for the following types of accreditation: institutional accreditation of secondary education institutions, technical and vocational education (TVE), higher and postgraduate education (HPE), medical education and continuing education (SCE), primary accreditation of HVE IE, medical education; specialized (programme) accreditation of TVE IE, HVE IE and medical education; primary specialized (primary programme) accreditation of HVE IE, medical education;

joint accreditation of HVE IE. The IAAR regulations governing external quality assurance procedures are available on the IAAR website.

Development and improvement of IAAR standards and documents. The IAAR standards are fully compliant with ESG and WFME standards and are developed collaboratively with stakeholders. The IAAR, guided by the ENQA recommendations, has systematized the accreditation standards review and improving procedures in compliance with the “Instructions for the development and improvement of the IAAR Standards” (approved and put into effect by the IAAR Director order No. 19-15-01 as of September 2, 2015).

To support the IAAR activities an extensive work was carried out in 2020 to improve the regulatory documents of the Agency, make amendments and additions to the Standards of institutional and specialized accreditation of higher education institutions given the SPED objectives set for 2020 – 2025, the new legal acts of the RK on regulation of the HVE organizations’ activities, as well as changes to the “IAAR Development Strategy for 2019 – 2023”. The IAAR in accordance with the ESG standards and guidelines (2015) has updated the Standards for Institutional and Specialized Accreditation, approved in 2015, revised in 2017 and *introduced on June 16, 2020 in a new edition: Standards for Institutional Accreditation of Organizations of Higher and (or) Postgraduate Education (Republic of Kazakhstan) and Standards for Specialized Accreditation of educational programmes of Higher and (or) Postgraduate education (Republic of Kazakhstan)* (approved by the IAAR Director-General Order No. 57-20-CO as of June 16, 2020).

In accordance with the Standards in new edition, the Self-assessment Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation of Higher and (or) Postgraduate Education (Republic of Kazakhstan) and the Self-assessment Guidelines for Specialized Accreditation of Higher and (or) Postgraduate Education (Republic of Kazakhstan) were approved (approved by the IAAR Director-General Order dated June 16, 2020 No. 57-20-OD).

Standards and Guidelines were improved in terms of strengthening student-centered learning, expanding the academic freedom of HEIs and students, applying more flexible approaches to assessing the quality of education, evaluating the effectiveness of the intra-university quality assurance system, and widely introducing best practices, including distance learning technologies, into the learning process.

Due to the WHO declared COVID-19 coronavirus a pandemic and with the introduction since March 15, 2020, in Kazakhstan of a state of emergency and, pursuant to order of the Minister of education and science of RK “On strengthening measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 coronavirus infection at institutions of education organizations, organizations for children-orphan and children left without parental care for the period of the pandemic” No. 108 dated 14 March 2020, taking into account the ENQA recommendations related to flexibility and affordability of the transition to online processes and deferral of educational organizations’ accreditation (ENQA Statement dated May 5, 2020), the IAAR developed and entered into force the *Regulations of the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating governing accreditation procedures and accreditation status of institutions of education for the pandemic (COVID-19) outbreak period* (approved by the Director-General order of the NI “Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating” as of May 11, 2020 No. 56-20-

OD) and the *Guidelines for organization and conduct of the external expert panel on-line visits (including the post-accreditation monitoring expert group's visits) for the duration of restrictive measures in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic* (approved by the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating Director-General Order No. 58-20-CO dated July 01, 2020). These documents have allowed to govern the accreditation procedures and accreditation status of IE during the quarantine period on the territory of Kazakhstan and abroad, including the introduced provision that the on-line EEP visit to the organization of education should be attended by no more than two experts under the specialized and primary (specialized) accreditation; also limiting the number of students and employers in the EEP composition, etc.

International accreditation. The year of 2020 was marked by completed institutional and specialized (programme) accreditation procedures of higher education institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Moldova, the Republic of Tajikistan. In 2020, the IAAR's scope of activity expanded: for the first time, HEIs in Romania and Ukraine were accredited. In 2020, **19** IEs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, **4** foreign HEIs (Kyrgyz Republic, Romania, Ukraine) have come through the international institutional accreditation procedure, the international specialized accreditation procedure was completed in relation to **587** different levels of EPs in Kazakhstan and **30** EPs of foreign HEIs (Kyrgyz Republic, Russian Federation, Republic of Tajikistan).

International accreditation in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The IAAR accreditation procedure is implemented in Kazakhstan based on the relevant Standards and Guidelines with the proactive stakeholder involvement. For more information about the procedure and methodology of accreditation in Kazakhstan, please refer to the "Accreditation" section of the IAAR website www.iaar.agency.

Considering that universities that have signed an agreement with IAAR for 2020 are fully ready to undergo the international institutional and specialized accreditation procedure, due to the current situation evolving in the country and the world, due to inability to travel to the university for the EEP visit the IAAR, as well as taking into account the authorized body (MES RK) recommendation on allocation of the state order based on the results of institutional accreditation (*Order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 122 of January 29, 2016*), IAAR issued 234 certificates of accreditation, with the subsequent implementation of all accreditation procedures.

Institutional accreditation. The quality assessment of institutions of education was implemented based on standards and guidelines for institutional accreditation of higher, vocational, higher and postgraduate medical education, medical colleges, organizations of additional education for adults, schools implementing international programs of primary, basic secondary and general secondary education. In total, **19** institutions of education, including **8** HEIs, **11** TVE organizations (including medical colleges), have come through the institutional accreditation by the IAAR in 2020. The vast majority of IEs have fully demonstrated compliance with the IAAR institutional accreditation standards and have been accredited for 5 years.

In 2020, the focus of special attention of higher education organizations due to the transition to a distance learning format was on e-learning, as well as the

development and implementation of digital and distance learning technologies, the expansion of electronic educational resources and the digitalization of HEIs. In the context of the recommendations of HEIs as part of institutional accreditation, the most common were: a systematic review of risk management and use of its outcomes in the formation of strategic development plans, involvement of students to non-University innovation and entrepreneurship; strengthening of the faculty's scientific-research activity, etc.

Specialized (programme) accreditation in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The EPs were qualitatively assessed based on standards and guidelines for specialized (programme) accreditation of higher, vocational, basic medical and postgraduate medical education, medical colleges, schools implementing international programmes of primary, basic secondary and general secondary education. As part of the specialized (programme) accreditation in 2020 a total of **587** EPs, including **458** EPs of civil HEIs and **23** EPs of medical HEIs, **106** TVE EPs, including medical colleges, were accredited. **234** EPs have been granted conditional accreditation in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The positive trends in the development of accredited EPs in 2020 are as follows: annual update of EPs based on employers, faculty, students' and potential employers' recommendations; provision of equal opportunities for students irrespective of language of instructions; regional focus on the EPs development plans of regional HEIs. In the context of recommendations to HEIs within the framework of specialized (programme) accreditation, the most common are: provision of students with the opportunity to choose alternative learning paths; search for the possibility of preparing students for professional certification, strengthening international relations for the implementation of double-degree education in the future, etc. Due to COVID – 2019 virus infection outbreak of particular relevance were recommendations for the development of on-line courses and their regular use in the learning process within the framework of distance learning.

Cross-border accreditation

According to the IAAR Development Strategy for 2019-2023, the Agency is tasked with strengthening the IAAR's market position in the international market of accreditation services through improving the quality, expanding the geography and improving the accreditation procedures.

In the process of cross-border accreditation procedures the IAAR takes into account the principles and provisions of the ENQA document "Cooperation in Cross-border higher education: a Toolkit for Quality Assurance Agencies" and "Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Cross-Border Higher Education (UNESCO and OECD)". When conducting international accreditation procedures, the IAAR ensures that external assessment procedures comply with the requirements of European quality assurance networks, ESG standards, as well as with the rules and procedures established by the Authorized bodies in the field of education of foreign countries. The main tool for external quality assessment is the "Standards and Guidelines for international accreditation of foreign educational organizations and educational

programmes (ESG based)” (approved and put into effect in accordance with the IAAR Order No. 68/1-18-CO as of 25/05/2018).

In 2020, the boundaries of IAAR accreditation activities were expanded geographically: it was for the first time, that the Romania and Ukraine HEIs were accredited. Within the framework of the international institutional accreditation the IAAR conducted an external quality assessment of 4 foreign HEIs (Kyrgyz Republic, Romania, Ukraine). 36 educational programmes of 8 foreign HEIs have passed the international programme accreditation conducted by the IAAR.

International accreditation in the Kyrgyz Republic. International accreditation of educational organizations and of the basic educational programmes of HEIs is carried out in accordance with the rules established in the Kyrgyz Republic documents, particularly the “Procedure for recognition of accreditation authorities”, “Procedure for accreditation of educational organizations and programmes” (resolution of the KR Government as of September 29, 2015 No. 670) and in accordance with the approved standards and guidelines within the framework of international institutional, programme and primary programme accreditation of IAAR, developed for HEIs of the Kyrgyz Republic based on ESG, taking into account the legislative requirements of the state. In total, in 2020, 1 HEI of Kyrgyzstan - Jalal-Abad State University named after B. Osmonov has been accredited under the institutional accreditation (for 3 years), and 27 HEIs received specialized (programme) accreditation status. The analysis of the EEP reports on the evaluation results of 27 EPs of three educational organizations in Kyrgyzstan showed the presence of positive practices in the development, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of the reviewed EPs. The result of the IE’s external evaluation is available on the website <https://iaar.agency/reports/vek-reports>.

IAAR’s International accreditation procedures in the Republic of Tajikistan. The quality of HEIs and educational programmes at the bachelor’s, master’s and PhD levels of the Republic of Tajikistan within the framework of international accreditation is determined in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Accreditation of foreign educational organizations and educational programmes (ESG based), introduced by the IAAR in 2018. In accordance with the international Agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Tajikistan dated May 13, 2019, the IAAR activities are recognized in Tajikistan.

In 2020, 3 EPs of the Tajik State University of Finance and Economics and 3 EPs of the Technological University of Tajikistan were accredited by the IAAR. All EPs of the Tajik State University of Finance and Economics were accredited for a period of 3 years, and EPs run by the Technological University of Tajikistan - for 3 and 5 years.

IAAR’s International accreditation procedures in the Russian Federation. In accordance with the “Agreement on cooperation and interaction in order to assess the quality of higher education and accreditation of educational programmes” as of May 6, 2019 with FSBI “Rosaccredagentstvo” international accreditation of IAAR is recognized on the territory of the Russian Federation. In 2020, the IAAR conducted international programme accreditation of 3 Russian federal HEIs - Pyatigorsk State University (3 EPs), Chechen State University (6 EPs) and Ingush State University (3 EPs). IAAR’s EEP prepared reports on the EPs compliance levels with the standards

criteria, the justification for which is set out in the reports on the accreditation procedures results.

IAAR's International accreditation procedures in Romania and Ukraine. The Agency conducts international accreditation in Romania and Ukraine under the “Standards and Guidelines for international accreditation of medical educational organizations IAAR (WFME/ AMSE based)”, taking into account the principles of the Bologna Process and the international accreditation experience, national legislation in higher education, and they also correlate with the ESG and WFME standards.

In 2020, the IAAR conducted the institutional accreditation procedure of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy “Grigore T. Popa” from Iași, Romania and the institutional accreditation procedure of Kharkiv International Medical University and Kharkiv National Medical University (Ukraine).

Thus, the IAAR, demonstrating high competitiveness in the international market of accreditation services, successfully conducts international accreditation of HEIs in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia, Romania, Moldova, and from 2020 - Ukraine.

1.2 Broadening and raising the quality potential of national and international experts

The IAAR, guided by its mission and strategic goals, assigns an important role to national and external experts to achieve the ultimate goals of external quality assurance procedures in higher education. The IAAR's expertise at the end of 2020 includes more than 3,500 members of the academic community in **31** countries. The IAAR proactively cooperates with foreign accreditation agencies, carrying out mutual exchange of experts and improving their skills. Since 2012, the IAAR commissions have included experts from ASIIN, ACQUIN, FIBAA, WFME, AIC, ANACEC, Rosaccredagentstvo, representatives of foreign IE's from Great Britain, Germany, France, Turkey, Poland, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and other countries.

In the framework of the implementation of measures to attract foreign experts FSBI “Rosaccredagentstvo” (Russian Federation, Director L.S. Izmailova) recommended to include in the EEP of IAAR the following experts: A. V. Tomarov, Ph.D. in Technical Sciences, Ulyanovsk State Technical University, T. A. Tabishev, Ph.D. in Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor, Head of the Center for joint international educational programmes of the Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education “Kabardino-Balkar State University named after Kh. M. Berbekov”, etc. Teaching staff experts from the Kyrgyz and Tajik HEIs (Bishkek Humanitarian University named after K. Karasayev, Osh Technological University named after M. Adyshev, Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, Tajik State University of Commerce) were involved in the accreditation procedures of the primary educational programmes of 3 HEIs of Kyrgyzstan.

By showing an interest in enhancing the role and capabilities of students and employers in quality assurance in education, the IAAR engages them in evaluation of the quality of education and participation in the decision-making process. In 2020, 3 employers and 3 students took part in the accreditation procedures of Kyrgyzstan HEIs

(Bishkek Humanitarian University named after K. Karasayev, International University of Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz-Uzbek University). Since 2019, the IAAR has been appointing an experienced foreign expert as the EEP Chair following the recommendation of partner agencies. Under the chairmanship of foreign experts, more than **10** EEP visits were organized and it is planned to continue this practice in the future.

In order to conduct a qualitative assessment of an IE and/or EPs, the IAAR management pays special attention to the selection and training of experts. The Regulations governing the expert activity of an external expert of the IAAR sets out the requirements and selection criteria for each category of experts. With the expansion of cross-border capabilities, the IAAR is working to expand the database of national experts with the English language proficiency.

Training of experts is carried out in accordance with the Regulations on training, retraining and advanced training of external experts. In order to develop the competencies of candidates for quality assessment experts, the IAAR conducts training seminars of 2 levels of training. Upon successful completion of level 2 tasks, the candidate is included in the database of experts and assigned a category (1, 2, 3). These categories allow the agency to track the number of expert engagements and the quality of his work.

In compliance with the IAAR Development Strategy for 2020 implementation plan, following the recommendations of the Expert Council on Higher Education, the IAAR has launched a *Program of professional development of independent experts*, which stipulates four training seminars for existing and new experts 1 time per quarter. On February 14, 2020, the first training workshop was held in Nur-Sultan city on the use of quality external evaluation tools in relation to EPs and methods for developing the assessment results of the quality of EPs of higher and (or) postgraduate education.

The IAAR annually conducts *major international workshops on professional development of experts with the participation of representatives of quality assurance networks and partner agencies*. As such, on March 2-3, 2020, the IAAR held a training seminar on advanced training of agency experts (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) specializing in basic and postgraduate medical education in the premises of S. D. Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University with the participation of Professor Janet Grant, a special adviser to WFME.

On May 29, 2020, IAAR held an *international webinar on internal quality assurance of higher education with the participation of Anna Gover, Project Manager of ENQA*. The webinar was attended by more than **150** people, representatives of the IE teaching staff and accreditation agencies of Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

In order to improve the quality of the expert capacity, the IAAR has created a database of experts and constantly monitors its qualitative updating. In 2020, an e-database of experts with a practical search system will be fully implemented (on the website **www.iaar.agency**). At the beginning of 2020, the IAAR expert base consisted of more than **3,500** experts, including **1,500** national experts, **500** foreign experts, **400** medical experts, **300** employers, **250** students, and **1,000** TVE specialists.

Following the developed Regulations on Expert Councils, the Agency compiles Expert Councils in the following areas from the database of certified experts. The

Agency delegates individual experts to participate in the work of Kazakhstan and international events related to quality assessment issues.

For experience exchange purposes, national and foreign experts proactively participate in forums, congresses, conferences, round tables, workshops and trainings. IAAR experts are also proactively engaged in the development of methodological guidelines for accreditation and rating procedures, publication of articles, analytical materials in the IAAR scientific and methodological and information journal “Education.QA”. The professional activity of IAAR experts is regulated by a set of regulatory documents, which define the ethical behavior and competence of the expert. Annual surveys of accredited public organizations and certified experts are important tools for quality assurance, which contribute to the continuous improvement of the agency’s activities.

1.3 Improvement of the Agency’s personnel management system

The mission and strategic development goals of the IAAR defined the organizational structure and application of the project approach. The structure of the IAAR is composed of the following divisions: “Medical projects”, “International projects”, “Project for institutional and specialized accreditation of higher education institutions”, “Project for accreditation of the TVE institutions”, “Information-analytical project”, etc., governed by the laws of Kazakhstan and internal documents of the IAAR. There is a Supervisory Board, an Accreditation Board, an Appeals and Complaints Review Commission, an Advisory Board on Ranking issues and activity-specific Expert Councils. The general management of the Agency’s activities is carried out by the Director-General.

19 people are employed by the Agency on a permanent basis. The functional responsibilities and commitments of the IAAR employees are defined in job descriptions and work plans. Communication is carried out through daily interaction, weekly meetings, internal audit. IAAR observers fill out a questionnaire after each visit to the EEP. All this has a positive impact on the work and allows to improve the accreditation procedures.

IAAR strives to improve the competence of its employees in lieu of the requirements set in the “ENQA Professional Competence Framework for Quality Assurance”, which defines the overall core competencies of quality assurance and quality improvement specialists in ENQA member agencies. Under the Human Resources Development Plan for 2019-2023 the IAAR employees regularly enhance their professional competencies, participate in various conferences, seminars and forums on education and quality assurance. In October-December 2020, **8** IAAR employees completed training of the “KUTEL E-COURSE”. Learning process will continue until February 2021.

IAAR employees improve their skills by participating in various webinars organized by international partners, including the CHEA-CIQG webinar “Ensuring the quality of higher Education in times of crisis” on May 6, 2020; the DEQAR CONNECT webinar – “The launch webinar Agenda and Practical information” on May 11, 2020; the CHEA / CIQG webinar “Higher Education and Quality in the fall of 2020: What do we need to do and how do we do it?” on May 28, 2020; the CHEA /

CIQG webinar “Maintaining and Strengthening Institutional autonomy: the role of Quality Assurance” on April 16, 2020, etc. The process of professional development of employees is planned and controlled by the IAAR management.



2. Monitoring the quality of education and bringing the best global practices to the development of national education frameworks and organizations

2.1 Improving the quality of the post-accreditation monitoring procedure and rules

Post-accreditation monitoring is carried out in order to monitor the implementation of the external expert panel recommendations to an accredited institution of education and/or educational programmes compliant with the criteria of the appropriate type of accreditation. For the quality of post-accreditation monitoring enhancement purposes, in 2020 the Agency developed and approved the structure of the report of educational organizations and educational programmes, and revised the Regulations on Post-Accreditation Monitoring.

Accredited IEs submit interim reports to the IAAR, containing specific information on their taken measures to implement the EEP recommendations for the entire period from the date of receipt of the accreditation certificate and includes information on all changes in the IEs in accordance with the accreditation standards. According to the Accreditation Council work plan, the report of the Expert Council Chair on Higher Education related to the post-accreditation monitoring results is presented.

In 2020, **49** institutions of education (IEs), including **15** HEIs, **29** colleges, **4** organizations of continuing education and **1** school within the framework of institutional accreditation, have come through the post-accreditation post-monitoring procedure. Under the specialized (programme) accreditation in 2020, post-accreditation monitoring was implemented with respect to **359** EPs, including **204** HEIs' EPs and **155** TVE EPs.

Information on the decisions taken by the Accreditation Council for Post-Accreditation Monitoring is available on the agency's website. The IAAR website contains Expert Group reports for 2014-2020 based on the post-accreditation monitoring results in relation to IEs and/or EPs.

2.2 Enhancing the analytical capacity of the IAAR to improve national education quality assurance frameworks

As part of the 2019 – 2023 Development Strategy implementation, to improve the quality of accreditation procedures and receiving expert feedback, the IAAR conducts analytical activities and presents the following developed documents and materials to the general public:

- *Analytical report on the IAAR-accredited IEs' questionnaire survey results* is compiled annually and used in the revision and improvement of the IAAR internal quality assurance framework. The purpose of the survey is to determine the extent of IEs' satisfaction with the institutional and programme accreditation procedures, to study the degree of influence of these procedures on further improving the level of competitiveness of educational services.

- **Analytical report on the expert opinion questionnaire survey results.** The annual survey of IAAR experts is aimed at identifying the degree of experts' satisfaction with the organizational terms for EEP visits, and to evaluate the work of IAAR employees. In 2020, analytical reports were prepared based on surveying accredited IEs and experts in 2018-2019.

- **Feedback after the EEP visit.** After the completion of the IAAR accreditation process, a questionnaire survey is conducted to collect experts' and IEs' opinion on their satisfaction with the procedure. The questionnaires are also filled out by IAAR observers.

- IAAR annually conducts an **analysis of EEP reports** in order to comprehensively study and analyze EEP reports and expert recommendations, identify current problems and prospects for the development of HEIs, and identify new approaches to quality assurance. In 2020, monitoring based on the analysis of the EEP reports was carried out in 2019 in relation to **686** EPs of **28** Kazakhstan HEIs.

The results of the analysis of all types of surveys are submitted for consideration by Expert Councils and as recommendations are submitted to the Director-General for decision-making.

- **Case studies.** In 2020, the IAAR conducted an analysis of the international accreditation of HEIs of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2019-2020. In 2020, the IAAR prepared a report on promotion of the quality culture in educational institutions of the Kyrgyz Republic. Based on the MES KR requirements the Agency prepared and submitted on June 17, 2020 relevant information about the accreditation status of IEs and EPs in accordance with the reporting form "Register of accredited organizations and programmes."

- **The annual progress report of IAAR** contains information on all areas of IAAR's operational activity and is submitted to the Supervisory Board.

- In pursuance of the Implementation Plan of the IAAR Strategy for 2020, the IAAR has also prepared a progress report on its operations for submission to the authorized body in the field of education and science.

All of the above analytical materials and reports are made available on the IAAR website (<http://iaar.kz/en/about/iaar-reports/analytical-reports>) in efforts to ensure open access to information for the general public.

Thus, in order to summarize best practices and identify trends in the field of quality assurance in education, the IAAR carries out targeted analytical work, the results of which are used by interested stakeholders both at the national and international contexts.

3. Conduct of rating research in the field of higher education

The IAAR has been conducting rating studies in the Republic of Kazakhstan since 2014, in the Kyrgyz Republic since 2018, and under the international rating of IAAR EUR since 2020. In 2019, the IAAR rating framework has come through an external audit procedure by the IREG Observatory, and in 2020 was awarded highly recognized "IREG Approved" Seal of Approval ([16](https://ireg-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

observatory.org/en/initiatives/ranking-seal-of-approval/). Under the IAAR Charter, rating studies are conducted independently of the accreditation process and do not affect its results. The IAAR structure includes functioning a Ranking Advisory Council, whose activities are governed by the Regulation “On the IAAR Ranking Advisory Council”.

3.1 Expanding the boundaries of rating research in higher and postgraduate education

Over the period of 2014 to 2020 the IAAR has improved its ranking methodology, updated its software product based on which the rating is conducted, and substantially increased the number of ranking participants.

In February - May 2020, the IAAR conducted an annual rating study *“National Rating of HEIs’ demand in the Republic of Kazakhstan-2020”*, which engaged 91 HEIs and covered 1939 EPs. The L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University was ranked the first among Kazakhstan HEIs in 2020, the S. Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical University was the 2nd, the Aktobe Regional State University named after K. Zhubanov and Karaganda State University named after E. A. Buketov were the 3rd, becoming the best among “non-capital” HEIs.

Analysis of the IAAR Rating results from 2014 to 2020 indicates such positive trends as an increase in the faculty’s publication activity, the number of joint EPs with foreign partner HEIs, and greater internationalization of HEIs. High performance results based on these criteria provided the country’s HEIs with the opportunity to enter the TOP 20 of the National Rating of HEIs’ demand in the Republic of Kazakhstan, conducted by the IAAR.

The IAAR also conducts rating research in the Kyrgyz Republic. In the “Independent Ranking of HEIs of the Kyrgyz Republic – 2020”, **25** HEIs of the country took part in **174** bachelor’s (specialty) programmes and **46** master’s programmes, which is 4 times more than in previous years. The leaders in the number of points scored were Osh State University and the Kyrgyz State Medical Academy named after I. Akhunbayeva, International Higher School of Medicine, N. Isanov Kyrgyz State University of Construction, Transport and Architecture, Zhalal-Abad State University, Kyrgyz National University named after Zh.Balasagyna. The analysis of the rating results indicates increased concentration of talented students in higher education institutions, greater internationalization of education and academic mobility, higher

In 2020, for the first time, the IAAR conducted the international rating *“IAAR Eurasian University Ranking (IAAR-EUR)”*, involving HEIs from Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova, indicating international recognition by the academic community of the rating “IAAR Eurasian University Ranking (IAAR – EUR)”. **55** applications were submitted for participation in the rating, but due to the current emergency and lockdown conditions in many countries of the world, some HEIs were unable to participate. The International Rating “IAAR Eurasian University Ranking (IAAR-EUR) – 2020” outcomes are available on the following websites www.ireg-observatory.org and www.iaar.agency.kz.

The Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation was ranked the first in the International Rating “IAAR Eurasian University Ranking

(IAAR-EUR) – 2020”. The top three were Tomsk State University of Control Systems and Radioelectronics and Kemerovo State University. The L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University was ranked the fourth, and the N. Testemitsanu State Medical and Pharmaceutical University was the fifth in the rating.

The main target groups of the ratings are applicants, employers, IEs, representatives of state and international organizations, etc. The IAAR ratings provide information to potential consumers for the most reasonable and rational selection of an institution for study; allow HEIs to develop in accordance with international requirements and contribute to their entry into the global educational area.

3.2 Improving the methodology of rating research and creating public awareness about the rating results

The methodology of the International Rating “IAAR Eurasian University Ranking (IAAR-EUR)” is based on compliance with the Berlin Principles, and is carried out on the basis of a specially developed methodology using digital technologies with Webometrics elements. This rating is built upon four indicators, each comprising from 4 to 6 evaluation parameters. Indicators reflecting the HEI’s operational activity of HEI are analyzed in the program from the database of domestic and international information resources. HEIs independently enter information about their achievements and are responsible for the objective completion of indicators.

To promote Kazakhstan HEIs in the global rankings and improve the quality of education, the evaluation methodology used in the Independent Kazakhstan HEIs’ demand rating is constructed as close as possible to the HEIs’ evaluation frameworks applied by well-known international organizations. All rating criteria are represented by 4 blocks: High concentration of talented students, teachers and researchers (25 %); Academic mobility (25%); graduate competitiveness (25%); Competitiveness of scientific publications by the course teaching staff, master degree and doctoral students (25%).

The distinguishing feature of the *IAAR’s rating research of Kazakhstan’s HEIs’ demand in 2020* is the ranking of EPs by groups, areas, regions and levels (bachelor, master, doctorate), in compliance with the staff training classifier for higher and postgraduate education approved by the MES RK.

The *HEIs’ rating in the Kyrgyz Republic-2020* reflects current international trends in the development of education and serves as an important tool for transparent and comprehensive assessment of the HEIs’ activities. The number of participants and ranked EPs has risen significantly. The outcomes of the “Independent Rating of Universities of the Kyrgyz Republic-2020” are available on the website: www.iaar.agency and the republican newspaper “Kutbilim”. On September 17, 2020, within the framework of the Digital University conference, a solemn ceremony of awarding certificates following the outcomes of the “Independent Rating of Universities of the Kyrgyz Republic 2020” by the IAAR was held at the Osh State University. Minister of Education and Science of Kyrgyzstan K. Isakov presented certificates to the rating leaders. The event attendees shared their opinion that the IAAR

rating aims to broaden international cooperation and improve the competitiveness of the country's HEIs.

Under the IAAR Strategy Implementation Plan, training workshops on the rating and ranking methodology of public organizations were held at the Kazakh National Agrarian University (January 21-22, 2020, Almaty) and at the Kyrgyz State Technological University named after I. Razzakov (January 24, 2020, Bishkek).

The IAAR ratings are conducted annually with their outcomes being published in May prior to the Unified National Testing of school graduates of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the national testing of schoolchildren of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Programme ranking, along with positive trends in the field of higher and postgraduate education, allows to view those areas of the national training frameworks development require adjustment and / or revision of strategic objectives aimed at meeting the needs of society, national and international labor markets.

4. Timely public awareness and improving feedback

4.1 Raising public awareness about quality assessment results

Informing the public about the external evaluation results in relation to assessment of IEs/EPs is conducted in the following areas: publication of EEP reports and AC decisions on the IAAR website; workshops, seminars, online-conferences, round tables and the annual Asian Forum on quality assurance; participation in interactive areas of the MES and higher education institutions; participation in conferences and forums organized by international networks and international partners; publication of materials about the effectiveness of external evaluation by the IAAR in the journal "Education. Quality Assurance"; speeches, interviews and publications in the media, scientific publications; publication of information and news feed on the IAAR website.

In the interests of public awareness, the IAAR publishes information on all the main activities of the Agency, changes in regulatory documents, internal quality assurance system, etc. January and February of 2020 were devoted to publication of materials, including EEP reports, EEP composition and Accreditation Council decisions on the new IAAR website (in early 2020, the new IAAR website was launched at www.iaar.agency). During the 1st quarter of 2020, the Register of accredited IE and EPs was actively filled in, as well as information on various sections was updated. The outcomes of IAAR operational activities are also reflected in annual analytical reports, which include all accreditation processes and procedures.

Information about the IAAR activities on international accreditation and ratings is reflected in social networks, in national and foreign media, on the official resources of public authorities, HEIs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and foreign countries, international organizations, indicating the trust in the Agency's activities, its high reputation and recognition both in Kazakhstan and internationally.

In order to highlight the best domestic and international practices in the field of quality assurance of education, the IAAR issues the *scientific and information journal* "Education. Quality Assurance" in the Kazakh, Russian and English languages, which has its own website <http://iaar-education.kz/>. For the Journal distribution purposes in 2020, the contract with Kazpost JSC and Express Press Astana LLP was extended and

the contract with Eureka - Press LLP was concluded. The journal is published quarterly and is distributed both in the Republic of Kazakhstan and overseas.

Over the year 2020 the Journal “Education. Quality Assurance” published **43** articles and **2** interviews on the issues of quality assurance and international accreditation, of which 12 papers were published by foreign authors: Russian Federation – 5, Ukraine – 3, Tajikistan – 2 Greece – 2 and one article written by a representative of the Kazakhstan Alliance of students. The first issue of the Journal for 2020 published a Draft Strategy for the internationalization of the Republic of Kazakhstan higher education until 2025 by the Center for the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility.

In 2020, the agency was proactively engaged in the work to attract public attention to the results and significance of the agency’s activities to ensure the quality of education by organizing and participating in webinars, seminars, workshops, conferences and forums, information about which is available in the news feed of the IAAR website.

4.2 Improving the efficiency of IAAR activities and feedback

The IAAR creates an internal environment for the full involvement of both employees and stakeholders in achieving strategic goals and determining the degree of customer satisfaction. In the Development Strategy for 2019 - 2023, the IAAR has defined the mission, vision, and strategic goals that serve as the basis for the preparation of annual work plans. Working with consumers of services in accordance with the Quality Policy is aimed at meeting their requirements and is based on the principles of feedback and mutually beneficial partnership.

In order to improve the efficiency of the IAAR’s activities, an *internal quality assurance system* (hereinafter - IQAS) has been developed, documented, implemented and maintained. In June 2020, the policy and Guidelines on internal quality assurance system were updated to reflect the evolving changes in the internal and external environment.

The IAAR, in cooperation with the collegial bodies and experts, continuously works to improve the IQAS, develops external and internal feedback mechanisms, and organizes working groups of initiative employees and experts. Members of the collegial bodies and employees regularly participate in the discussion of important regulatory documents of the IAAR, offer recommendations and suggestions for enhancing the agency’s activities.

To ensure effective performance, IAAR uses the results of internal audits, surveys of key stakeholders, analytical reports, analysis of reports of the EEP, etc. According to the internal audit results in 2020, 6 recommendations were included in the corrective action plan, which were fully implemented. According to the corrective action plan, a self-assessment report template has been developed under the standards and guidelines for each activity area, as well as a checklist template for the internal audit working group; and the requirements for drafting HEIs’ reports on post-accreditation monitoring as a follow-up to the EEP recommendations have been designed. The results of the internal review are also taken into account in operational activities, in the development of annual development plans for the IAAR, etc.

The IAAR ensures well-functioning of processes related to stakeholders, systematically conducts activities to study the stakeholder opinions in relation to its products and services. The results of the survey analysis of educational organizations and experts are available on the IAAR website in the section “Analytical Reports”.

The IAAR is engaged in constructive cooperation with non-governmental and public organizations, international partners, correspondent authorities in the field of education of the countries in which it operates. The IAAR annually reports on its activities, and also regularly informs the MES, the MES of the KR, the National Accreditation Council of the KR and MES RT on accredited IE’s and/or EPs (as per their requirements).

The IAAR Development Strategy for 2019-2023 stipulates a *periodic external quality assessment of the IAAR*, both at the national and international scales. To review its quality assurance policy and activities for compliance with the ESG in 2020, the IAAR applied for re-evaluation by the ENQA and inclusion in the EQAR. From April to October 2020, the Agency was engaged in the *self-assessment of its activities* for compliance with the ESG with preparation of a self-assessment report, which allowed to analyze and critically evaluate the IAAR performance, to determine the prospects for its development.

An important area of the IAAR activity is constructive cooperation with *national partners* - state and non-state organizations, political parties and public associations. In 2020, IAAR representatives took part in the extended meeting of the Board of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan B. Saparbayev (January 31, 2020) on the development of education and science in 2020; as well as in the online forum “Global in Regional: Kazakhstan in the Bologna process and EU projects” (October 21, 2020), where the Director-General of IAAR A. Zhumagulova made a presentation: “International accreditation of IAAR in the framework of the implementation of the Bologna Process principles and ESG standards”, presenting the principles of international accreditation and the Agency achievements.

In 2020, based on the Memorandum of Cooperation with the Republican Student Movement “Alliance of Kazakhstan Students” (dated April 19, 2019), the IAAR widely attracted HEI and college students to the collegial bodies of the IAAR and to the expert commissions. Students take an active part in various IAAR activities: from the development and revision of the documentation and methodology of the IAAR to ensure the internal quality of the agency, to the implementation of accreditation procedures and decision-making. In 2020, the IAAR analyzed student expert’s survey data after the completion of the accreditation procedure for 2016-2018. The survey data demonstrates that the student experts evaluated with a high score the organization of the EEP (**89% of respondents**), the efficiency of the IAAR work (**92% of respondents**), observers’ contribution (**96% of respondents**), the chair’s work (**87%**) and the academic experts’ work (**78%**). At the same time, student experts believe that it is necessary to pay more attention to the work with students during the visit. The IAAR’s work with the student community contributes to further raising the awareness and involvement of students in the quality assurance processes and improving the system of domestic higher education.

Therefore, in 2020, the IAAR completed substantial work to improve the effectiveness of the Agency's operations by improving the internal quality assurance framework and feedback from all stakeholders, informing educational organizations and the general public about the development of the national quality assurance framework and trends in higher education in general.

5. IAAR-recognized international accreditation agency

One of the key objectives of the implementation of the mission and vision of the IAAR, outlined in the Development Strategy for 2019-2023, is the recognition of IAAR at the national, European and international scales as a reliable partner in quality assurance. This strategic goal is being implemented via the proactive position of IAAR on the international platform, commitment to European quality standards, and the study and implementation of best foreign practices.

5.1 Strengthening and expanding the international recognition and prestige of the IAAR

The Agency is proactively working to develop mutually beneficial cooperation with the world's recognized quality assurance agencies in the field of higher education, and has signed agreements (memoranda) on bilateral cooperation with 23 partner organizations. The IAAR is *recognized by major international and regional quality assurance networks*:

The IAAR based on the external review and audit outcomes is recognized and included along with the European registry for quality assurance in higher education (EQAR), the World Federation for Medical Education (*WFME*) in 2020 in the *Asia - Pacific registry for quality assurance in education (APQR, for 5 years)*.

The IAAR proactively cooperates with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The IAAR Director-General A. Zhumagulova took part in the ENQA General Assembly work on October 22, 2020. The IAAR management also participated in the ENQA Webinar for agency managers on their strategic response to COVID-19 (May 20, 2020) and the ENQA webinar on online visit and external Quality Assurance during COVID-19 (June 16, 2020).

In 2020, in order to analyze its activities for compliance with the ESG, the IAAR applied for re-evaluation by the ENQA and inclusion in the EQAR. Over the period from April to October 2020, the Agency was engaged in *self-assessment of its activities* of the IAAR for compliance with the Standards and Guidelines of the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The Working Group has prepared a self-assessment report, which will be submitted to ENQA in November 2020. ENQA experts visit is expected in 2021.

Following the WFME requirements, the IAAR has prepared and is going to submit in March 2021 the annual IAAR report on the implementation of the WFME experts' recommendation for 2020. On June 24, 2020, the IAAR representatives participated in the WFME Internet Workshop "WFME Perspectives: The Impact of the 2020 Pandemic on the Accreditation and Practice of Medical Education".

The IAAR has successfully come through the international audit of the IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence and has been awarded the "IREG

Approved” Seal of Approval in January 2020. The IAAR, as a member of IREG, participated in the Beijing IREG 2020 Conference (October 20-21, 2020), where the transformation of academic rankings and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of universities were discussed.

In 2020, the IAAR, as a member of the INQAAHE (International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), took an active part in its most important events: Webinars “Access, success and challenges in higher education in the context of COVID-19 and beyond: the role of national / university management and quality assurance in risk reduction” (July 8, 2020), “Online assessment: Best practices and practical solutions” (June 23, 2020), “New Realities of Quality assurance and Online Resources: reflections on the role of INQAAHE on a global scale” (July 14, 2020) and the INQAAHE Forum “Quality, Competencies and Learning Outcomes: Preparing for Generation Z Employment”.

On November 18-20, 2020, the IAAR Director-General A. Zhumagulova participated in the EHEA 2020 Ministerial Conference as part of the Kazakhstan delegation. November 25, 2020 was marked by the discussion of outcomes of the EHEA Ministerial Conference in 2020 by the Ministry of education and science of Kazakhstan, whereby the Director-General of the IAAR, A. Zhumagulova, gave a presentation and focused on the task of the Rome Communique as further development of the higher education system for the next 10 years.

In 2020, the IAAR has signed the following memoranda of cooperation:

- ✓ On May 27, 2020, the IAAR signed a Cooperation Agreement with the National Agency for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (NAQA, Ukraine)
- ✓ On July 20, 2020, the IAAR signed a Memorandum of Mutual Cooperation with the Center for Innovative Education, Georgia
- ✓ On November 20, 2020, the IAAR signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Autonomous Non-profit Organization “Expert Center of the Russian Association of Lawyers for the Assessment of Quality and Qualifications in the Field of Jurisprudence”, Russian Federation

Partnership with foreign government agencies. Since 2018, the IAAR has been consulting and supporting the implementation of measures to ensure the quality of higher education to the Authorized Bodies of *Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Romania, Moldova, Uzbekistan and Ukraine.*

IAAR is an active participant in various levels of quality assurance activities in education conducted by the Ministries of Education, public associations and universities of the European and Central Asian countries. On September 30, 2020, the IAAR Director-General Ms. A. B. Zhumagulova made a presentation on the topic: “International accreditation in the Central Asian region: approaches and prospects” at the scientific and methodological conference “International Accreditation is a factor for improving the quality of education”, organized by the Tajik State University of Law, Business and Politics. On November 12, 2020, at an international workshop organized by the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) on the topic: “International activities of educational organizations as a way to manage the quality of educational activities”, Adviser O. A. Yanovskaya made a presentation. Due to the declared pandemic and the restrictive

conditions in most countries of the world, the participation of the IAAR in international events was mainly in an online format.

5.2 Improving the quality of the IAAR international activities and achievements

In 2020, in order to further expand and strengthen international cooperation, the IAAR paid special attention to the dissemination of its own experience in the field of quality assurance in other countries. The IAAR conducts *various international events to ensure the quality of education* both in the Republic of Kazakhstan and abroad. The IV Central Asian International Forum on Quality Assurance in Education was held in an online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic on October 2, 2020. The Forum was attended by 287 people - representatives of the scientific and pedagogical community, state and public organizations, employers and students from Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Latvia, Ukraine and Greece. The forum contained a Plenary session and three sections: “International experience of quality assurance”, “Architecture of a quality education” and “Integration of science and education: new trends of the digital age”. The main issues for discussion were related to the transformation of higher education in compliance with the requirements of the labor market, the implementation of EP in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the new approaches to cross-border accreditation of HEIs in the context of modern challenges.

The IAAR conducts major international seminars on the professional development of experts with the participation of representatives of quality assurance networks and partner agencies. In order to spread the experience of quality assurance in higher education, representatives of the IAAR participated in various international seminars and scientific conferences. The IAAR Director-General Mrs. A. B. Zhumagulova and Adviser Mrs. O. A. Yanovskaya participated and acted as experts at scientific conferences in St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Smolensk, etc. in October-November 2020.

Participation in international research projects. The IAAR is proactively involved in projects, including Erasmus+, aiming to extend the accessibility and internationalization of higher education.

In 2020, the IAAR participated and continues to proactively participate in the following international projects:

- “Introduction of education quality assurance frameworks via university-state-business cooperation in higher education institutions (EDUQAS) as an affiliated partner. *The project is being implemented in the period from 2017 to 2020.*

- Since 2018, the IAAR has been participating in the Erasmus+ project “Kazakhstan Universities for improving quality assurance processes in education using advanced technologies” as a full partner. *The project has been implemented from November 15, 2018 to November 14, 2021.* The KUTEL project aims to modernize management in the field of education, maximizing the e-learning potential.

- Since 2019, the IAAR has been participating in the Erasmus+ project “Improving Postgraduate Research on Sustainable Agriculture and Agricultural

Activity Systems of the Future (SAGRIS)”. *The project is implemented from January 15, 2020 and is designed for 3 years.*

- Since 2019, the IAAR has been participating in the Erasmus+ project “Expanding the Coverage and Quality Assurance Capabilities in the European Higher Education Area through DEQAR (Enhancing the Coverage and Connectivity of QA in the EHEA through DEQAR (DEQAR CONNECT)”. The project coordinator is the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education EQAR (the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education EQAR). *The project is being implemented from February 1, 2020 to January 31, 2022.*

In 2020, under the Erasmus + project, the IAAR representatives participated in the evaluation of a number of educational programmes, online training, preparation of training materials and work packages, exchange of experiences in the development of modules, etc.

On October 20-21, 2020, an exhibition of the Erasmus+ projects on capacity building in the field of higher education was held in Kazakhstan. The IAAR presented the results of the EDUQAS, KUTEL and SAGRIS projects in collaboration with other project partners and discussed their impact at the individual, institutional and national scales, as well as their potential for sustainability. All information about international IAAR projects is publicly available on the IAAR website.

IAAR’s participation in international projects allows to work closely with the international academic community, proactively engage in the work with national and foreign HEIs, which has a positive impact on quality assurance of educational services and expanding the horizons of international cooperation.

SWOT analysis

The SWOT analysis reflects the implementation of strategic goals and serves as the basis for the annual planning of IAAR activities (Table 1).

Table 1. SWOT analysis

S (Strenghts)	W (Weaknesses)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IAAR recognition in Kazakhstan and abroad; - full membership of IAAR in international quality assurance networks and associations; - conducting international accreditation abroad; - cooperation with foreign partners; - harmonization of the IAAR standards with the revised ESG and WFME standards; - participation of IAAR in international projects for the development of education and quality assurance; - cooperation with stakeholders, state and non-state organizations within the framework of the Bologna and Turin processes; - monitoring the implementation of the EEP recommendations to accredited IEs and / or accredited EPs; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - insufficient level of the English language proficiency by the agency’s employees; - lack of an electronic document flow management system; - poor coverage of feedback from the professional community of employers due to their low interest; - incomplete use of the possibilities of technology ranking; - insufficient development of partnerships with foreign agencies for technical and vocational education.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WFME support to the development of the national accreditation framework for medical and pharmaceutical education; - annual IAAR International Forum on Quality Assurance in Education; - IAAR professional team; - availability of a broad database of professional and competent experts; - successful completion of the IREG audit and obtaining the “IREG APPROVED” Seal of Approval; - carrying out the rating research of HEIs in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; - conducting the international rating IAAR EUR; - continuous and timely public awareness; - IQAS functionality 	
O (Opportunities)	T (Threats)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - amendments and additions to the legislation in the field of education, which opened up new opportunities in the quality assessment of HEIs in Kazakhstan; - IAAR support by international quality assurance networks (ENQA, INQAAHE, IREG, APQN, WFME); - growing interest in the IAAR activities from foreign HEIs; - access to national, European and international educational and research resources; - availability and use of IT technologies for quality assurance, which help to improve the efficiency of processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - instability of the financial and economic situation in the country and the world; - emergency situations (epidemics, COVID-19 pandemic, man-made threats and natural phenomena); - growing competition (including unfair competition) in the field of accreditation; - insufficient activity of employers in the educational activities of educational organizations.

SWOT analysis allowed to formulate in a form of a logically coherent scheme interaction of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats; it also enabled to identify promising and priority development directions to strengthen the competitive IAAR positions, and serves as a basis for planning activities of IAAR for 2021.

CONCLUSION

The Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating as a recognized international agency for quality assurance in education has implemented extensive work on external quality assurance in higher and postgraduate, professional and technical, secondary education (international schools) in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Russian Federation, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine in 2020.

The IAAR continuously updates the external assessment methodology by type of accreditation, constantly monitors, evaluates and analyzes the educational activities of the IEs based on the development of feedback; identifies, summarizes and distributes best practices in the field of quality assurance and culture at the international and national scales, systematically informs the public about its activities that contribute to qualitative institutional changes both in individual educational organizations and in national education frameworks as a whole.

Inclusion of IAAR in the Asia-Pacific Register for Quality Assurance of Education (APQR) in 2020, award of the “IREG Approved” Seal of Approval, conduct of the international rating “IAAR EUR”, extended boundaries of accreditation activities (for the first time, accreditation of Ukrainian HEIs has been carried out) promote the growth of the authority and influence of IAAR in the international market of accreditation services and confirms the status of a recognized international accreditation agency.

Prospects for the development of international cooperation of the IAAR in the following years are related to the solution of such important tasks as gaining the status of full ENQA member; re-entry in the European register EQAR; maintaining the status of the WFME recognized agency; joining IAAR to the international network EQAVET (technical and vocational education); obtaining IAAR membership in the ENAEE European International Association for Quality Assurance in Engineering Education; development of an international network of agencies and educational organizations of the Central Asian and Eurasian space on quality assurance in education; further expansion of the operational geography of international accreditation and participation of IAAR in various international projects on the development of education and science.