Guidelines
on organization and conduct of an on-line visit of an external expert panel (as well as a visit of an expert group on post-accreditation monitoring) for the duration of restrictive measures due to the COVID- 19 pandemic outbreak

**«АККРЕДИТТЕУ ЖӘНЕ РЕЙТИНГТІҢ
ТӘУЕЛСІЗ АГЕНТТІГІ» КЕМ**

**НУ «НЕЗАВИСИМОЕ АГЕНТСТВО
АККРЕДИТАЦИИ И РЕЙТИНГА»**

**INDEPENDENT AGENCY FOR
ACCREDITATION AND RATING**

GUIDELINES
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Content

1. General information and scope

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the education system has faced new challenges. The profound changes emerging in education and associated to COVID-19 have a tangible impact on quality of learning services. Despite the current situation, the global community is interested in assuring that the quality of education not only remains at the same level, but also continuously improves and becomes competitive in the international educational area. Quality assurance in education of advanced nations is deemed as a key stability and development factor in the society, as a meaningful direction for progress and sustainable state growth. Higher education institutions of various countries and their societies should be firmly interested in promotion of higher education institutions' course programs and greater competitiveness of educational services.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the new coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic in most countries. In March to April 2020, many countries imposed a state of emergency and restrictive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This certainly became a new challenge and affected the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating activities (hereinafter - IAAR).

All accreditation procedures planned for March to April 2020 have been postponed to a later date. Since mid-March 2020, the IAAR has been studying international experience, closely following colleagues' research from international quality assurance networks, and has developed various operational scenarios in the COVID-19 pandemic condition.

In this regard, due to the Republic of Kazakhstan Presidential decree "On introduction of the state of emergency in the Republic of Kazakhstan" No. 285 dated March 15, 2020, under the COVID-19 pandemic related declaration by the World Health Organization (WHO), and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereinafter - ENQA) Statement on the COVID-19 coronavirus as of May 5, 2020, the IAAR developed the *Regulations of the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating governing the accreditation procedure and accreditation status of educational organizations for the period of restrictive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic (approved by No. 56-20-OD as of May 11, 2020) (hereinafter - the Regulations).* This Regulations governs the accreditation procedures and accreditation status of educational institutions for the period of restrictive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic both in the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as in international jurisdictions.

Under the *Regulations, as well as* taking into account the ENQA core recommendations on flexibility and the accessibility of transition to on-line processes and deferral of the accreditation of educational organizations

(ENQA Statement as of May 5, 2020), the IAAR decided to extensively support the students, applicants and accredited educational organizations' interests through the extension of the accreditation validity of educational organizations (hereinafter - EOs) and educational programs (hereinafter - EPs), previously accredited by the IAAR and issuance of a conditional accreditation certificates to other applied educational organizations and programs, provided that self-assessment reports are submitted at the time of the Regulations adoption. In addition, the external expert panel visit dates (hereinafter - the EEP) were rescheduled and postponed to a later period.

As the distance work experience in the restrictive lockdown conditions and the longer-term impact of the pandemic (COVID-19) on the activities of accreditation bodies in transformation of the education system has demonstrated, it has become clear that, in general, priority should be given to identifying new approaches, forms and methods to improve the quality of educational services. In this regard, it was decided to launch a new mechanism for the external review procedure by the EEP implemented via an on-line visit.

The Guidelines on organization and conduct of an external expert panel's on-line visit (as well the visit of the expert group on post-accreditation monitoring) for the duration of restrictive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak (hereinafter - the Guidelines for the EEP on-line visit) was prepared under the aforementioned *Regulations* and is an integral part of the valid *Regulations on organization and conduct of the external evaluation procedure in the accreditation process of an organization of education and (or) educational program (hereinafter - the Guidelines to accreditation).*

The "Guidelines for the EEP on-line visit" were prepared for the purposes of satisfying the IAAR requirements for external evaluation processes and the quality assurance in all procedures' implementation, regardless of the type of accreditation, in accordance with the accreditation guidelines.

The "Guidelines for the EEP on-line visit" excludes a reduction in the number of experts. The External expert panel evaluates the quality of the EOs or EPs, the composition and organization of the latter are governed by the procedure stipulated in the Regulations on the external expert panel of the IAAR (hereinafter - the Regulations on the EEP).

"The Guidelines for an on-line visit of the EEP" sets out the duties and functions of the EEP members, the IAAR coordinator and the EO, presented in addition to the duties and functions specified in the accreditation Guideline and requires their implementation in an appropriate manner based on the Regulations on the EEP.

This Guideline requires all stakeholders to comply with the standards of conduct determined in the Accreditation Guidelines and the Regulations of the EEP on on-line external assessment procedure, and takes into account the stakeholder interests to ensure the quality of external assessment equivalent

to a (physical) face-to-face visit of the EEP to an educational organization.

The "Guidelines for an on-line EEP visit" are intended to be used in the external assessment of the IAAR for the duration of restrictive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, until the situation in the world normalizes and allows for a face-to-face EEP visit to the EO. The IAAR plans to return to on-site visits to educational organizations as soon as this becomes possible again, since the IAAR is convinced that face-to-face visits have many advantages and opportunities for sharing experience between the involved stakeholders, which may not occur in an on-line environment.

This Guideline for an on-line EEP visit will be revised should there occur any complications due to the COVID-19 global pandemic outbreak. The IAAR reserves the right to make changes to the accreditation procedures.

2. The goal and core principles of the external expert panel's on-line visit to the organization of education

This Guideline to the EEP's on-line visit amends the procedural activities of EEP, coordinator on behalf of the IAAR and EO stipulated in the *"Guideline to organization and conduct of the external review procedure in the accreditation process of the organization of education and (or) educational program"* and specifies the methodology and requirements for technical facilities for the duration of restrictive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, at the same time the goal and objectives of the EEP external review procedure implemented through the on-line visit remains unchanged.

The purpose of the EEP on-line visit to an educational organization corresponds to the goal specified in the accreditation guideline *(see section 1.)*, which is to assess the quality of the EO and (or) EP for compliance with the IAAR's criteria of accreditation standards and develop recommendations for further improvement of the quality assurance system of the EO, as well as for the EEP to make a collegial decision on the recommended accreditation period for further review by the Accreditation Council.

Objectivity, reliability, transparency, independence, professionalism, and confidentiality remain **the core principles** of an on-line EEP visit.

All the best practices related to a face-to-face visit remain relevant for on-line IAAR's EEP visits:
- external review is carried out by external experts, including representatives of the student community and employers;
- independent and unbiased assessment of the quality of the EO and (or) EP;
- high culture of expert activity by external experts;
- privacy and security;
- comprehensive training and instruction of the external expert panel's

members;
- interviews with various stakeholders, etc.

3. Organization and conduct of the on-line external expert panel's visit and a visit of an expert group for post-accreditation monitoring

The on-line EEP visit is organized in compliance with the *"Guidelines for accreditation"* (see section 1.) and is implemented with due account of the amendments made:

3.1. The EEP on-line visit requires preliminary preparation and action planning of all parties involved in the accreditation process. The IAAR carefully plans the visit in close cooperation with the EO and the EEP at least 1 month prior to the on-line visit start commencement. In addition, the IAAR provides training for employees (mainly coordinators) on the use of various digital platforms and online interviewing tools.

3.2. Should the restrictive measures be relieved, allowing the visit to the EO, the IAAR has the right to apply a hybrid model EEP's on-line visit that is when EO is actually visited by the IAAR coordinator and EEP Chair, the EEP members keep distance working. This on-line visit model will be applied especially in the case of accreditation of EOs and (or) EPs in medicine, as well as of EOs that conduct laboratory and clinical training.

3.3. The IAAR excludes shortening the time frames of such EEP on-line visit to an EO. The duration of an on-line visit may be extended from 3 to 5 days to take account of different time zones. The program of the visit is developed accounting for the need of constant use of information and communication technologies. The EEP on-line visit program is to be prepared following the recommended template (see Appendix 2. *"Guidelines for organization and conduct of the external review procedure in the accreditation process of the organization of education and (or) educational program"*).

3.4. The IAAR to conduct the on-line visit to an EO forms EEP from among the highly qualified, motivated and experienced experts, well-skilled in the use of information and communication technologies.

3.5. The IAAR provides the EEP with a reliable and convenient system for conducting video conferences with a "waiting room" without time restrictions (for instance, through ClickMeeting, Zoom, Teams, etc.).

3.6. In order to ensure a high level of confidentiality and create conditions for a closed meeting of only the EEP members, the EEP prepares two separate "on-line rooms" for each online visit: one for interviews with the management and target groups, and the other for the work of the EEP members. EEP members should be able to join the on-line room at any time. Interviews with the EOs' management and target groups can be conducted in parallel depending on the number of clusters under the visit program. If the EEP is

divided into groups, each group must be assigned a moderator. A temporary WhatsApp group can be created for quick exchange of views between the members of the EEP.

3.7. For protection of information and assuring confidentiality, interviews with the management of the EO and target groups are not recorded in the system used for teleconferences. For various purposes of public awareness, it is allowed to print the screen and keep the minutes of meetings (interviews).

3.8. Interviews with the management of the EO and target groups, including tutors and students, are considered as the main method of obtaining information during an on-line EEP visit.

3.9. The number of participants in interviews with target groups should not exceed 10 (ten) people without taking into account the EEP. An interview participant can only represent one target group.

3.10. All links to online meetings must be determined in advance and included in the program of the on-line visit to the EEP, access to connect participants to the on-line interview must be open 10 minutes before it starts. The program of the EEP on-line visit should include a 15-minute break between interviews with the EOs' management and target groups.

3.11. The Survey of the teaching staff and students to determine the degree of satisfaction with the educational process of the EO is conducted remotely. The EO must attach a list of teaching staff and students with their email addresses to the on-line program of the EEP visit.

3.12. The IAAR a week before the visit of the EEP conducts on-line briefing for the EEP members, with the aim of explaining the main provisions of this Guideline, training about on-line meetings with the leadership and the target groups, as well as discussion of the program of the upcoming EEP on-line visit.

3.13. In accordance with the section 9 *"Guidelines for accreditation"*, a preliminary (instructional) on-line meeting of all members of the EEP shall be held one day before the EEP visit, according to the program of the visit.

3.14. During the on-line visit, the IAAR should ensure the organization of a virtual inspection of the EO's facilities. Methods of such inspection shall be agreed in advance by the responsible representative of the EO with the IAAR coordinator. In the case of hybrid on-line visit model, the Chair of the EEP may request the EO or EP to demonstrate proper functioning of equipment (educational, laboratory) and its conformity with the actual documents as a verification to the EEP.

3.15. The IAAR jointly with the EO must ensure the information accuracy and use the method of identification of individuals involved in the on-line interview. During an on-line interview, the Chair of the EEP may request the interviewee to show an identity card in front of the camera.

3.16. The EEPs' recommendations and conclusions on the evaluation tables according to the criteria of the IAAR standards shall be approved by means of using the voting tool in the video conference system, which is equivalent to a digital signature. In addition, the IAAR has the right to keep a record of the closed meetings of the EEP members on the discussion of recommendations and conclusions on the evaluation tables based on the IAAR standards criteria.

3.17 The principles and provisions of this Guideline shall also apply to the organization of on-line visit of the expert group on post-accreditation monitoring, conducted based on the "Regulations on the post-accreditation monitoring procedure of EO and (or) EP", while other procedures shall remain unchanged.

4. Functions and responsibilities of the external expert panel members arising during an on-line visit to an educational organization

4.1. Functions and responsibilities of the EEP members in the context of on-line visit shall correspond with the Guidelines to accreditation (see section 4.), in addition involving the following procedural steps:

- performance of functions and responsibilities stipulated in the Guidelines on accreditation and the EEP's Regulations, as well as herein referred to on-line procedures;

- establishing communication with representatives of accredited educational organizations only through the coordinator or Chair of the EEP;

- EEP members must fully engage themselves in the on-line visit procedure according to the approved program;

- compliance with the provisions of the Code of ethics of an external accreditation expert and the Non-conflict of interest Statement;

- participation in on-line interviews with the EO management and target groups;

- remote attendance of classes according to the schedule;

- inspection/review of learning facilities, work placement bases, etc. according to the program of the EEP's on-line visit;

- on-line participation in the preliminary and other meetings of the EEP, as well as at the final meeting to agree on recommendations and make a decision on the terms of accreditation;

- participants and members of the EEP must keep their microphones turned off while other people are talking;

- avoid welcome rounds, interviewees and members of the EEP may briefly introduce themselves during the discussion.

4.2 Additional functions of the EEP expert prior to the commencement of the on-line visit:

▪ requesting the IAAR's coordinator necessary documents and materials for on-line visit review to the organization of education following up the analysis of the EO's and (or) EP related self-assessment report at the latest 2 weeks prior the on-line visit;

▪ preparation of the main questions (the most important questions) that require clarification following up the analysis of the EO's and (or) EP related self-assessment report before the start of the EEP on-line visit;

▪ identify classes that are to be remotely attended based on the schedule of learning sessions obtained from the IAAR coordinator, at the latest 3 days before the EEP on-line visit commencement.

5. Functions and responsibilities of the IAAR coordinator in organization and conduct of an on-line visit of the EEP

The functions and responsibilities of the IAAR coordinator in organization and conduct of an on-line EEP visit shall comply with the *Guidelines for accreditation (see section 4.)*, including the following procedural actions to be made and adhered:

- organization and implementation of measures to create the necessary conditions for an on-line EEP visit in cooperation with the EO, the Chair and other members of the EEP;

- ensuring that all participants and stakeholders of the on-line visit are familiar with this Guideline for an on-line EEP visit;

- ensuring the proper operation of various digital platforms and facilities for holding meetings of the EEP members, interviews with the management of the EO and target groups in on-line mode;

- providing access to connect EEP members and interview participants based on the on-line visit program.

6. Functions and responsibilities of an educational institution in organization and conduct of an on-line visit of an external expert panel

The functions and responsibilities of an educational organization in organization and conduct of an on-line visit to the EO shall comply with the Guidelines on accreditation (see section 9.).

6.1. In addition, the following procedural actions shall be implemented:

- the coordinator from the EO is responsible for high-quality communication between the target groups of the EO and the members of the EEP, avoiding any problems with communication and the use of information and communication technologies;

- assistance in the dissemination and familiarization of participants and stakeholders by this "Guideline on the EEP on-line" prior to the on-line visit;

- provision of high-speed Internet for the EEP's activities;

- provision of all meeting participants with information and communication technologies for high-quality communication with members of the EEP (for instance, headphones with a microphone, a camera, etc.);

- timely submission to the IAAR coordinator of additional requested documents and materials required for the review;

- submission of the training schedule to the IAAR coordinator one week prior to the on-line visit commencement;

- ensuring uninterrupted inspection of training facilities, work placement bases, etc. according to the program of the EEP visit in online format;

- formation of target groups in accordance with clause 3.9. of this Guideline.

6.2. Additional functions of the organization of education in the case of using the hybrid model of on-line visit:

- compliance with sanitary rules as a precautionary measure due to the coronavirus pandemic outbreak;

- providing members of the external expert panel with personal protective equipment for citizens;

- the EO provides an on-line platform for video conferencing and interviewing.

7. Presentation of the evaluation outcomes by the external expert panel, preparation of the EEP report

The procedures for summarizing the external review outcomes completed by the EEP in reference to the on-line visit and preparation of the Report as well as drafting recommendations for further improvement of the system of quality assurance of educational institutions and terms of accreditation for further consideration by the Accreditation Council complies with the *"Guidelines for organization and conduct of the external review procedure in the accreditation process of the organization of education and (or) educational program" (see sections 14, 15, 16)* and the Regulations of the EEP.

During the on-line EEP visit, experts are recommended to use on-line tools for compiling the EEP report (for instance, Confluence, Google Docs,

etc.).