

**External Review of the
Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (AIKNC) by
the Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK)**

Annex 1 to the Agreement: Terms of Reference and Protocol

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1 Background and Context

1.1 Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre

In cooperation between the Latvian Rector's Council and the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia, a non-profit foundation "Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre Ltd" (hereinafter - AIKNC) has been established on 28 December 1994, with the main aim to organise the quality assessments of higher education institutions and their programmes. The founders of AIKNC are the Ministry of Education and Science and (according to a decision made by the Council of Rectors) five higher education establishments: University of Latvia, Riga Technical University, Riga Stradins University, Daugavpils Pedagogical University and "School of Business Turība". The activities of the AIKNC are supervised by the eight person Board. The day-to-day activities of the AIKNC are entrusted to the Chairman of the Board elected by the meeting of the shareholders - five higher education establishments, mentioned above. Employees of the AIKNC are appointed by the order of the Chairman of the Board. Now the personnel of the AIKNC consist of 3 full time employees, including Chairman of the Board, and 2 part time employees.

The aims of the AIKNC are:

- to promote development of higher education in Latvia;
- to organise quality assurance evaluations of higher education institutions and their study programmes based on European guidelines;
- to provide consultations on the issues related to higher education quality assurance;
- to compile, maintain, publish and promote information on quality, licensing and accreditation of the higher education institutions and their study programmes.

The activity of AIKNC covers Latvian higher education institutions.

1.2 Employers' Confederation of Latvia

Employers' Confederation of Latvia (LDDK) is the biggest organization representing the interests of employers.

LDDK acts as a partner in socioeconomic negotiations with the Parliament (Saeima), the Cabinet of Ministers of Republic of Latvia and Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia.

LDDK unites 42 branch and regional associations and federations that take a significant place in Latvian economics, as well as enterprises that employ over 50 people. The members of LDDK employ at large 35% of employees in Latvia.

Mission of LDDK is:



- to enhance effectiveness of entrepreneurship and employment development by taking into account the interests of society at large, to promote strengthening and development of Latvian employers and their organizations;
- to enhance the growth of Latvian employers, the development of enterprise culture and creation of favorable social conditions;
- to represent and protect economic, social and professional interests of its members in conformity with the Law on Employers' Organizations and Their Associations;
- to represent and defend its members' interests in relations with trade unions, state and municipal institutions, as well as international employers' organizations;
- to provide LDDK members with an opportunity to participate in discussion of issues of their interest at all government levels.

2 The Review

2.1 Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

AIKNC as a quality assurance agency wishes to continue its membership at the ENQA, therefore is required to undergo external review:

- to demonstrate that AIKNC operates in substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education;
- to show the real position of AIKNC in Latvian higher education system;
- to present in transparent way the steps of procedures, operating methods used by AIKNC and the experience of its experts and members of evaluation groups;
- to analyse the results of AIKNC's operations and real influence on the promotion of quality standards within Latvian higher education institutions.

This is a type B review, as defined in the Guidelines for national reviews of European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereinafter - ENQA) member agencies. It will evaluate the way in which and to what extent AIKNC fulfils the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. Consequently, the review will also provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether AIKNC Full Membership in ENQA should be reconfirmed. The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards the reconfirmation of AIKNC's Full Membership in ENQA.

In addition to the European context, the review also aims at providing feedback on AIKNC's role and tasks in the context of the Latvian higher education system. As indicated earlier, AIKNC is the main instrument for quality promotion and assurance, to be carried out through assessment, process certification and the accreditation of learning and research processes in Latvia. Feedback from the re-



view panel about AIKNC activities is useful for AIKNC to determine their effectiveness and whether they meet the set aims. Additionally, AIKNC aims to confirm its exceptional position in Latvia as the only non-governmental higher education quality assurance agency in the country and to send a signal to the universities that it observes European standards and procedures and operates with the methods accepted by European agencies, ENQA and the European Quality Assurance Register (hereinafter – EQAR). It wants also to improve its position in Europe and especially throughout the 46 Bologna countries.

The review takes place in English.

2.2 AIKNC's Self Evaluation Report (SER)

AIKNC is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-evaluation process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-evaluation is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-evaluation report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation: background description of the current situation of the Agency; analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a summary of perceived strengths and weaknesses;
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which AIKNC fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the *European Standards and Guidelines*. The report will be submitted to the review panel a minimum of four weeks prior to the site visit.

2.3 Nomination and Appointment of the Expert Panel

The review panel will consist of four members: three external reviewers (one higher education quality evaluation expert – acting as a review secretary, one quality assurance expert with working experience in other quality assurance agency and a student member, nominated by the European Students' Union) and one national expert, nominated by the social partner, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the AIKNC review.

The secretary, in charge of the production of the external review report, will be a full member of the panel of equal status with the other members, but with specific duties from theirs. Rights and obligations of the panel members will be specified in the agreements made between each panel member and LDDK.

2.4 The Site Visit

The review panel will draw up and publish a schedule of the site visit. AIKNC shall be given at least one month's notice of the site visit schedule in order to properly organise the requested interviews. The schedule will include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review team during the site visit, the duration of which will be 2 days. The working lan-

guage for the site visit is English. In case that interview partners are not able to communicate in English, AIKNC is responsible to provide the translation.

2.5 Evaluation Report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the expert panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under article 2. The report will provide sufficient evidence of the applicant's substantial compliance with the ESG.

It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings. The report should be drafted in agreement among all the reviewers involved. The report will be written in English and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

A draft will be submitted for comment to AIKNC within four weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If AIKNC chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chairperson of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the expert panel will take into account the statement by AIKNC, finalise the document and submit it to AIKNC and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised not later than within two months of the site visit.

The following points must be included in the report:

- executive summary;
- contextual details of the review;
- outline of the report's supporting documentation;
- outline of the frame of reference, sequence and central elements of the review;
- evidence-based analysis referring to national issues and the ESG;
- a summative conclusion regarding whether and/or to what extent the ESG (Part 2 and 3) are considered to be substantially fulfilled, partially fulfilled or not fulfilled;
- recommendations for improvement.

2.6 Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

AIKNC will consider the expert panel's report and inform ENQA of its plans to implement any recommendations contained in the report. Subsequent to the discussion of the evaluation results and any planned implementation measures with ENQA, the review report and the follow-up plans agreed upon will be published on AIKNC website.

2.7 Budget

8.1 AIKNC shall pay the following review related fees:

- Chair 1.330 LVL (approximately 1.900 EUR)
- Review secretary 1.330 LVL (approximately 1.900 EUR)
- Other panel members (2) 700 LVL (approximately 1.000 EUR each)



- Administrative overhead for LDDK Secretariat 500 LVL (approximately 714 EUR)
- Travel and subsistence expenses (approximate) 3360 LVL (approximately 4.800 EUR)

This gives a total indicative cost of 7920 LVL (approximately 11.314 EUR) for the review. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses are exceeded, AIKNC will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review.

2.8 Role of LDDK

LDDK is asked to:

- draft the agreement with the AIKNC;
- inform ENQA about the terms of reference of the review;
- nominate and appoint a panel of reviewers;
- organise/plan the site visit;
- take care of the payment of the reviewers' fees.

LDDK is not asked to:

- assist in the self-evaluation phase;
- organise/provide logistic support for the site-visit;
- make reservations for the meeting rooms and accommodations;
- print, distribute and publish the final report.

2.9 Independence

The LDDK declares to be independent and has no conflict of interest in coordinating the external review. LDDK will coordinate the external review objectively and without bias. LDDK will also ensure the independence of the review team.

2.10 Indicative Schedule of the Review

The duration of the evaluation is scheduled to take about 6 months, from 1 June 2010 to 30 November 2010:

Agreement on terms of reference and protocol for review	June 2010
Appointment of review panel members by LDDK	June 2010
AIKNC starts self-evaluation	January 2010
Briefing of review panel members	July 2010
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	September 2010
AIKNC self-evaluation completed	June 2010
Review panel site visit	October 2010



Employers' Confederation of Latvia



Draft of evaluation report to AIKNC	October 2010
Statement of AIKNC to review panel if necessary	November 2010
Submission of final report to AIKNC and LDDK	November 2010
Consideration of report by AIKNC	November 2010
Consideration of the report and response of AIKNC by LDDK	December 2010
Publication of report and implementation plan	December 2010