



October 10, 2023

Dr. Margee Ensign
President
American University in Bulgaria
1 Georgi Izmirliiev Square
Blagoevgrad, 2700, Bulgaria

Dear President Ensign:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on September 22, 2023, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the report submitted by American University in Bulgaria and took the following action:

that the progress report submitted by American University in Bulgaria be accepted;

that the institution submit a report by October 27, 2023 to respond to the Commission's request of November 2, 2022 for an update about the institution's success in implementing its distance education offerings;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2026 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies as well as the matters specified in our letter of April 28, 2021, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2026 evaluation give emphasis to assessing the Board's effectiveness.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The report submitted by American University in Bulgaria was accepted because, with the one exception noted below, it was responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of February 17, 2021, April 28, 2021, and November 2, 2022.

We are pleased to learn of the success American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) has achieved since its Spring 2021 interim report as reflected by positive results in enrollment, financial performance, fundraising, and cost control. We particularly note with favor that total enrollment has climbed 17% since Fall 2017 with total FTE reaching 1,083 in Fall 2022; the institution generated operating surpluses in five of the past six years, most recently \$1.1 million in FY2022 and \$780,000 (projected) for FY2023; and the endowment has grown to \$31 million in FY2023. In addition, we give credit to the University for continuing to build fundraising capacity by expanding its advancement team to include two new positions focused on the U.S. and on foundation support that helped increase donations from \$2.5 million in FY2022 to \$3.6 million (projected) in FY2023. We also recognize that over the past three years AUBG has filled five senior leadership positions – Vice President of Strategy and Institutional

Effectiveness, Vice President of Finance and Administration, Provost, Vice President of Development, and Vice President of Admissions – and appointed a new president in August 2023.

However, the Fall 2023 progress report submitted by American University in Bulgaria did not include an update on the institution's success in implementing its distance education offerings as was requested in our letter of November 2, 2022. As indicated in the letter, the Commission is aware that, in addition to offering hi-flex courses, the University is "still exploring the opportunities" possible via distance education. We therefore ask that information about the institution's progress with respect to offering distance education courses be provided as evidence that "the institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5).

The Commission asks that American University in Bulgaria submit the requested information by October 27, 2023 for consideration at the Commission's November 2023 meeting. Please upload the requested information via the NECHE Institution Portal using the F2023 Requested Information Report review.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2026 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. We remind you of our letter of April 28, 2021 that specifies areas of emphasis for the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2026 evaluation. In addition, the Commission asks that attention be given to a matter related to our standard on *Organization and Governance*.

In its report, American University in Bulgaria detailed the changes made in Board membership since June 2021 that included the election of three new members who bring expertise in development, finance, and real estate, and the departure of four members. Most importantly, as highlighted by the institution, was the appointment of an experienced new Board Chair in June 2021. Particularly given the recent turnover of trustees, we seek assurance, through the Spring 2026 self-study prepared in advance of the comprehensive evaluation, that the Board "systematically develops, ensures, and enhances its own effectiveness through orientation, professional development, effective self-assessment, and regular evaluation including an external perspective" (3.8).

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Michael D. Marvin. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Russell C. Carey

RCC/jm

cc: Mr. Michael D. Marvin

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions