

Background to the *Standards & Guidelines for QA in the EHEA (ESG)*

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Introduction

The history of the ESG, their original role and purpose

Comments on the current use of the ESG in reviews

Looking into the future...

The history of the ESG – a little exercise!

- When and where were the ESG first proposed?
- Who was responsible for writing them?
- When and where were the ESG adopted as part of the Bologna Process?
- How are the ESG structured?
- How do you think the ESG were intended to be used?

Answers

- Ministers' meeting, Berlin, 2003
- ENQA was given the mandate, in cooperation with the other members of the E4 group
- Ministers' meeting Bergen, 2005
- The ESG are structured in 3 parts (internal QA, external QA and the QA of agencies; they follow the format of a standard followed by guidelines
- ...?

A few quotations from the current edition

- “...the report sets its face against a narrow, prescriptive and highly formulated approach to standards.”
- “...the report prefers the generic principle to the specific requirement.”
- “The purpose of these S&G is to provide a source of assistance and guidance to both HEIs...and agencies as well as to contribute to a common frame of reference.”
- It is not the intention that these S&G should dictate practice or be interpreted as prescriptive or unchangeable.”

Things to remember when using the ESG in a review...

The ESG have to cover a multitude of contexts:

- Principles-based versus rules-based legal systems
- ESG have to apply to accreditation, evaluation, audit systems
- Differing levels of autonomy of HEIs
- What is internal QA in one system is external QA in another (programme approval, for example)
- Different national legal issues to do with publication of information (33 of the 47 countries in the EHEA have some form of Freedom of Information legislation)

Things to remember...

“Standards” and “Guidelines”

Standard:

- an acknowledged measure of comparison for quantitative or qualitative value; a criterion
- a degree or level of requirement, excellence, or attainment

Guideline:

- Recommended practice that allows some discretion or leeway in its interpretation, implementation, or use
- One can comply with a standard. One cannot comply with a guideline.

Things to remember...

...about ENQA membership...

- Each ENQA membership criterion is followed by guidelines which provide additional information about good practice. Although the guidelines are not part of the criteria themselves, the criteria should be considered in conjunction with them.

...about the totality of the ESG...

- The review of an external QA agency must involve examining the operation of the agency (ESG: Pt 3) which should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external QA processes that the agency operates on HE institutions (ESG: Pt 2) which must take into account the internal QA processes operating within the HE institutions (ESG: Pt 1)

Some recommendations from the ENQA project, “Learning from agency reviews: application of the ESG” (published Spring 2011)

Structure of the report:

- **Legitimacy**
 - 3.2 Official status
 - 3.5 Mission statement
 - 3.6 Independence
- **Activities**
 - 3.1 Use of external QA procedures – part 2
 - 3.3 Activities
 - 3.7 External QA – the processes & criteria used
 - 3.8 Accountability procedures
- **Sustainability**
 - 3.4 Resources
 - 3.8 Accountability procedures

Legitimacy

- Emphasis on the **overlap between 3.2 and 3.5** (Official Status and Mission Statement). Also **possible overlap with 3.6** (Independence)

NB: 3.2 (Official status) usually no problem if the agency is established by, e.g., an act of parliament. Otherwise it should have an established legal basis (e.g. As a guaranteed company).

3.5 (Mission statement) How does the it translate into a clear policy/management plan?

- **3.6: bear in mind the difference kinds of independence** that might be considered:
 - Legal, operational, financial, prevention of conflicts of interest

Activities

- **3.3 (Activities)** Bear in mind the huge variation in agencies (size, scope, remit etc.) For example, the range of HEIs that an agency might be responsible for reviewing is from 5 – 1,500!
- **3.7 (External QA criteria and processes used)** There were various reasons for not achieving full compliance (these could be structural, developmental or size-related). Remember that many agencies are also constrained by the legal context in which they work.
- **3.8 (Accountability procedures)** Again, several reasons for not receiving full compliance. Some variation of interpretation of this standard – does it refer to internal accountability or analysis of the impact the agency is making externally? Certainly, for the purpose of review, the former should be expected.

Sustainability

- **3.4 (Resources)** bear in mind the impact of the evolution of mission statements

NB: For the moment, this is one of only 2 standards that has no associated guidelines. However, it would be difficult to see how this standard could be achieved without some minimum number of full-time staff.

- **3.8 (Accountability)** Remember the age of the agency – this will have a bearing on how developed any internal QA policy might be.

Looking to the future...

The MAP-ESG project

- A mapping exercise to review the extent of the application and implementation of the ESG over the last 5 or so years
- It reported to the ministerial meeting in Bucharest in April 2012.
- Project chaired by ENQA and steered by the E4 group, assisted by an Advisory Board.
- Each of the Es carried out a consultation among its stakeholders to gather views on the utility and applicability of the ESG and produced a report
- A final report was drafted, incorporating the main headlines from the 4 reports, and was presented to the ministers
- The Bucharest Communiqué says: “We will revise the ESG to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope. The revision will be based upon an initial proposal to be prepared by the E4 in cooperation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which will be submitted to the Bologna Follow-Up Group”.

The project was carried out because...

- HE is changing rapidly – are the ESG still as appropriate to the world of 2012 as they were in 2005?
- The Bologna stocktaking exercise appeared to suggest that the ESG are less than fully implemented in the EHEA – is that the case and if so why?
- Isn't it always good to have a periodic look at things? The current ESG were always a “first step.”

Headlines from the ENQA consultation

- The majority of agencies see no reason to revise the ESG substantially in the near future
- Clarification of terminology or a glossary would be useful, as would a clearer demarcation of the status of and difference between a standard and a guideline (but little desire to revise the actual content)
- Despite agencies' awareness of tension between original intention of the ESG and actual use (ENQA membership and Register criteria), the majority would prefer to see the ESG as a reference point rather than a compliance tool
- The majority feel that the current scope of the ESG is appropriate
- Problems in differentiating between partial/substantial compliance (however, no desire for a threshold to be defined)
- More could be done to achieve consistency of application and mutual understanding of ESG amongst all stakeholders
- The most difficult standards for agencies were 3.4 (Resources) and 3.6 (Independence). 3.6 was also seen as the most central standard for agencies

The project to revise the ESG

- The revision will begin in late summer/early autumn 2012
- It will be co-ordinated by the E4 group with the participation of Education International, BusinessEurope, EQAR and BFUG
- Final report to be approved by BFUG in early 2014
- “...the report is no more than a first step...to the establishment of a widely shared set of underpinning values, expectations and good practice in relation to quality and its assurance...”
- “What has been set in motion by the Berlin mandate will need to be developed further if it is to provide the fully functioning European dimension of QA for the EHEA.”

Conclusions

- This has been an attempt to give more focus to the ESG
- The next part of today's agenda will take you through the process in which you'll be using the ESG and the concepts of independence (a tricky standard!) and compliance (a tricky concept!)
- Then you'll have the opportunity to try and put what we've been discussing into practice.

Thank you!