

Standards & Guidelines for QA in the EHEA (ESG) – What, Why and How

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ESG – What is it?

- An agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines (ENQA, EUA, EURASHE, ESU, signed by the Ministers in Bergen 2005)
- A prerequisite for membership in ENQA

ESG – the structure

Part 1

ESG for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions. 7 standards, all accompanied by guidelines.

Part 2

ESG for the external quality assurance of higher education. 8 standards, all accompanied by guidelines.

Part 3

ESG for external quality assurance agencies. 8 standards, 6 guidelines.

Standards and Guidelines – what are they?

Standard:

- an acknowledged measure of comparison for quantitative or qualitative value
- 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 does not assess compliance with a guideline.

ESG – Why?

Based on generic principles to ensure the continuing relevance to all relevant stakeholders in the EHEA

A common reference point for quality assurance in the EHEA

A source of assistance and guidance to both HEIs...and agencies

Support transparency and trust across borders

ESG – How to operate?

The ESG have to cover a multitude of contexts:

- Principles-based versus rules-based legal systems
- 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)

Main areas

- **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

- **3.2 Official status;** usually no problem if the agency is established by 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;** there is a 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;** the reasons for not achieving full compliance could be structural, developmental or size-related. 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 – this standard should refer to internal (agency) accountability.

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;** The age of the agency will have a bearing on how developed any internal QA policy might be.

Things to remember...

...for ENQA membership...

- Most of the standards are followed by guidelines which provide related indicators 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)

Mapping of implementation

Headlines from the ENQA consultation

- 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)
- 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

Looking to the future...

The MAP-ESG project

- A final report was presented to the ministerial meeting in Bucharest in April 2012.
- 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 to revise the ESG

- Final report to be approved by BFUG in early 2014
- “What has been set in motion by the Berlin mandate (2003) 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 training seminar will take you through the process in which you'll be using the ESG as reviewers
- Then you'll have the opportunity to try and put what we've been discussing into practice.

Thank you!