

II.1. Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Part 2: Standards and guidelines for external quality assurance

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The ESG



- Adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in 2005 after a proposal by:
 - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with
 - European Students' Union (ESU)
 - European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)
 - European University Association (EUA).
- Revised in 2015 after contributions by:
 - ENQA
 - ESU
 - EUA
 - EURASHE
 - In cooperation with:
 - Education International (EI)
 - BUSINESSEUROPE
 - European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)

The ESG



- The focus of the ESG is on quality assurance related to learning and teaching in higher education, including the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation.
- The ESG apply to all higher education offered in the EHEA regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery.
- They set a common framework for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching at European, national and institutional level;
- They enable the assurance and improvement of quality of higher education in the European higher education area;
- They support mutual trust, thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders;
- They provide information on quality assurance in the EHEA.

The ESG



- The ESG are based on the following four principles for quality assurance in the EHEA:
 - Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
 - Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;
 - Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;
 - Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.
- The standards for quality assurance have been divided into three parts:
 - Internal quality assurance
 - External quality assurance
 - Quality assurance agencies

2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance



External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

- 1.1 Policy for quality assurance
- 1.2 Design and approval of programmes
- 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
- 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
- 1.5 Teaching staff
- 1.6 Learning resources and student support
- 1.7 Information management
- 1.8 Public information
- 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
- 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Lecture II.4
Lecture III



2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose



External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

- Aims, methodologies and processes clearly stated and agreed with stakeholders
 - Collaboration with universities in designing methodologies and processes
 - Take into account government, society and employers needs
 - Consultation processes



2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose



In designing processes:

- Cost and workload for the institutions
- The need to support institutions to improve quality
- Allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement
- Clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up

The more institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance the less control SHOULD be applied by agencies (incentives)

Lecture II.3



2.3 Implementing processes



External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.



2.3 Implementing processes



- External assessment must be:
 - Professional and independent
 - Transparent
 - Consistent
- External assessment include:
 - A self-assessment report made by the institution. It must include evidence supporting the findings
 - A site-visit carried out by a panel of experts appointed by the agency (conflict of interest with the institution must be avoided)
 - A report summarizing the site-visit findings providing clear guidance for institutional action
- A **follow-up process** for monitoring the actions taken by the institution (*key aspect in the agencies external assessments carried out by ENQA*).

Lecture II.4



2.4 Peer-review experts



External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

- A bank of peer experts: academics, students, employers/professional practitioners and other people from institutions.
- Agency's procedure (publicly available):
 - Define experts' profile (knowledge field, expertise, academic and research merits, etc.)
 - Experts independence: mechanism of no-conflict of-interest.
 - Selected accordingly:
 - Profile
 - Appropriate skills
 - Competency to perform their task
 - Other: gender, institutions, nationalities, etc.
 - Experts training sessions or briefing.

Lecture II.4



2.5 Criteria for outcomes



- **Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.**
- External quality assurance and in particular its **outcomes have a significant impact on institutions and programmes** that are evaluated and judged.
- In the interests of equity and reliability, outcomes of external quality assurance are based on **pre-defined and published criteria**, which are interpreted consistently and are evidence-based.
- Depending on the external quality assurance system, outcomes may take different forms, for example, **recommendations, judgements or formal decisions**.

Lecture II.2



2.6 Reporting



Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

- The external report provides:
 - The expert panel findings: judgement, recommendations and/or decisions.
 - Information for society
- It is the basis for the institution's follow-up.
- Must be clear and concise (language and structure).



2.6 Reporting



- The reports must include:
 - A context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context);
 - A description of the individual procedure, including experts involved;
 - Evidence, analysis and findings;
 - Conclusions;
 - Features of **good practice**, demonstrated by the institution;
 - Recommendations for follow-up action.
- Good practice:
 - To give the institution the opportunity to **point out errors of fact** before the report is finalised.

Lecture II.4

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2.7 Complaints and appeals



- **Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.**
- The agency external quality assurance procedures must be operated in an accountable way and must be opened to criticism and improvement.
- The agency must implement:
 - Procedures that allow institutions to raise issues of concern with the agency or dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out (experts, project managers, etc.)
 - These procedures have to be handled in a professional way by means of a clearly defined process that is consistently applied.

Lecture II.4

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