



STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

Jacobo Navarro de Peralta
Assessment, Planning and Quality Service
Technical University of Valencia (UPV)

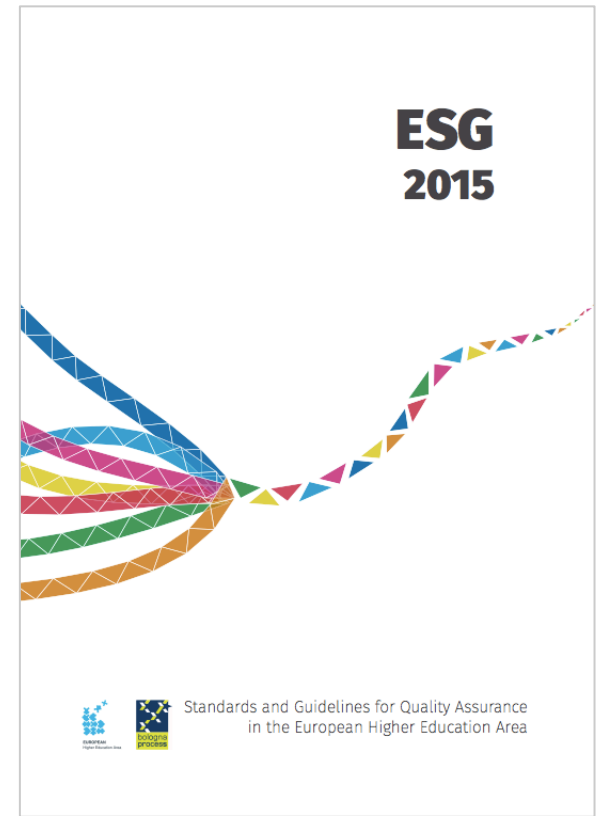


STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

ESG are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education.

- **Quality Assurance** is used to describe all activities within the continuous improvement cycle.
- **Standards** set out agreed and accepted practice for quality assurance in higher education. **What?**
- **Guidelines** explain why the standard is important and describe how standards might be implemented. **How?**

The focus of the ESG is on **quality assurance related to learning and teaching** in higher education.



European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

European Students' Union (ESU)

European University Association (EUA)

European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)

In cooperation with:

Education International (EI)

BUSINESSEUROPE

European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)



ESG: CONTEXT

The ESG have the following **context**:

- Higher education, research and innovation play a crucial role in supporting social cohesion, economic growth and **global competitiveness**.
- Broader access to higher education is an opportunity for higher education institutions to make use of increasingly diverse **individual experiences**.
- Higher education institutions become more **diverse** in their missions, mode of educational provision and cooperation, including growth of internationalisation, digital learning and new forms of delivery.
- The role of quality assurance is crucial in supporting higher education systems and institutions **while ensuring the qualifications achieved by students and their experience**.

The standards for quality assurance have been divided into **three parts**:

- Internal quality assurance
- External quality assurance
- Quality assurance agencies

ESG: PURPOSES AND PRINCIPLES

The ESG have the following **purposes**:

- 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 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**.



ESG: CRITERIA

✓ Academic criteria:

- 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

✓ Management criteria:

- 1.1 Policy for quality assurance
- 1.7 Information management
- 1.8 Public information
- 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
- 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

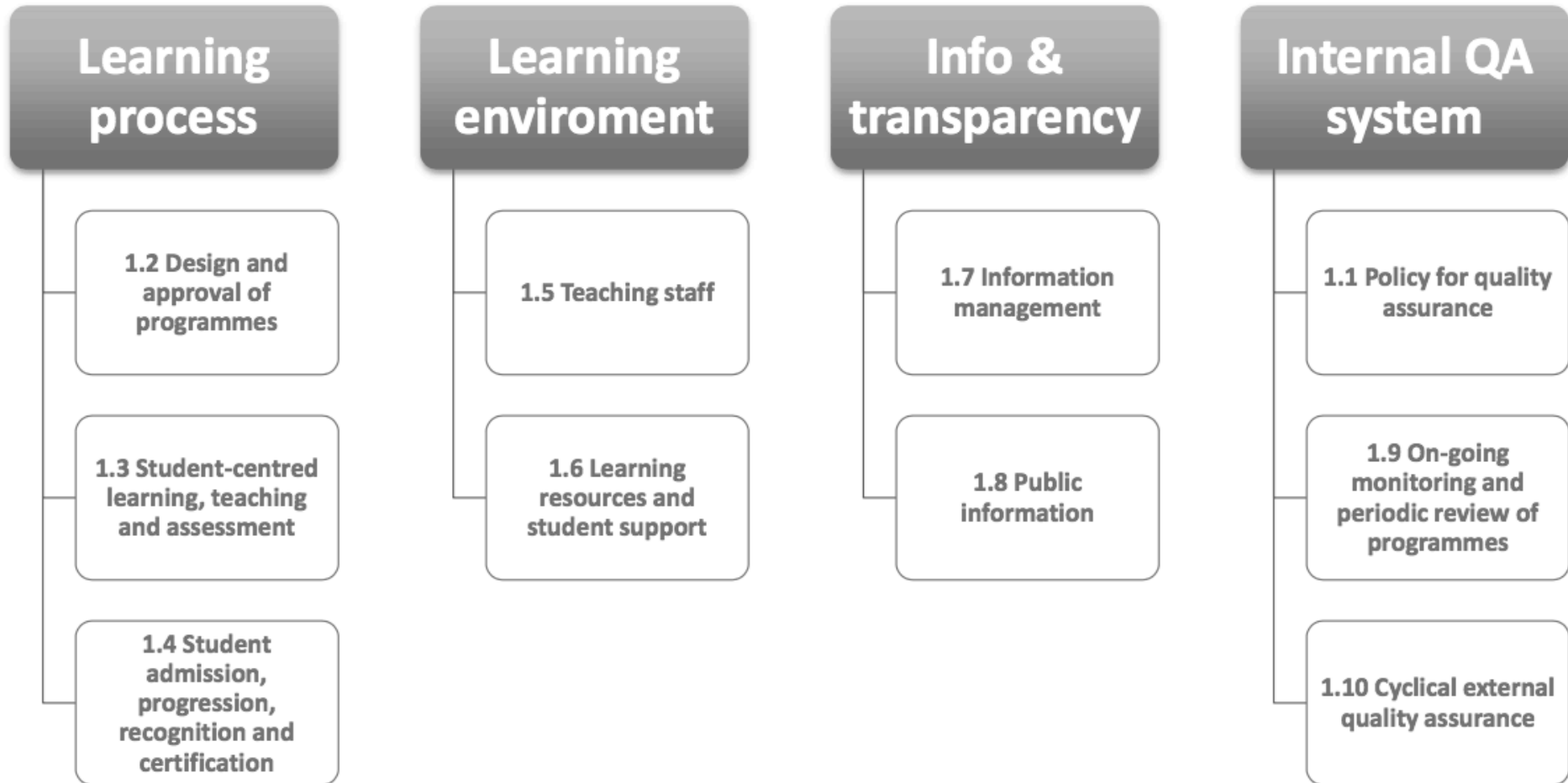




Part 1

Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance





1.1 POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

Guidelines

Policies and processes are the main pillars of a coherent institutional quality assurance system that forms a cycle for continuous improvement and contributes to the accountability of the institution. It supports the development of quality culture in which all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the institution. In order to facilitate this, the policy has a formal status and is publicly available.

Quality assurance policies are most effective when they reflect the relationship between research and learning and teaching and take account of both the national context in which the institution operates, the institutional context and its strategic approach. Such a policy supports

- the organisation of the quality assurance system;
- departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units as well as those of institutional leadership, individual staff members and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance;
- academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud;
- guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff;
- the involvement of external stakeholders in quality assurance.

The policy translates into practice through a variety of internal quality assurance processes that allow participation across the institution. How the policy is implemented, monitored and revised is the institution's decision.

The quality assurance policy also covers any elements of an institution's activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties.

1.2 DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF PROGRAMMES

Standard

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the **Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area**.

Guidelines

Study programmes are at the core of the higher education institutions' teaching mission. They provide students with both academic **knowledge and skills** including those that are transferable, which may influence their personal development and may be applied in their future careers.

Programmes

- are designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have **explicit intended learning outcomes**;
- are **designed by involving students and other stakeholders** in the work;
- benefit from external expertise and reference points;
- reflect the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (cf. Scope and Concepts);
- are designed so that they enable **smooth student progression**;
- define the expected student workload, e.g. in ECTS;
- include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate;
- are subject to a formal institutional approval process.

1.3 STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

Standard

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Guidelines

Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in **stimulating students' motivation**, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. This means careful consideration of the design and delivery of study programmes and the assessment of outcomes.

- The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching respects and **attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths**;
- considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;
- flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;
- regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods;
- encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher;
- promotes mutual **respect within the learner-teacher relationship**;
- has **appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints**.

Considering the importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers, quality assurance processes for assessment take into account the following:

- Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field;
- The criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance;
- The **assessment allows students to demonstrate** the extent to which the **intended learning outcomes have been achieved**. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process;
- Where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;
- The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;
- Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;
- A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.

1.4 STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION

Standard

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Guidelines

Providing conditions and support that are necessary for students to make progress in their academic career is in the best interest of the individual students, programmes, institutions and systems. It is vital to have **fit-for-purpose admission, recognition and completion procedures**, particularly when students are mobile within and across higher education systems.

It is important that access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner. Induction to the institution and the programme is provided.

Institutions need to put in place both processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression.

Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, **including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning**, are essential components for ensuring the students’ progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on

- institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;
- cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country.

Graduation represents the culmination of the students’ period of study. Students need to receive **documentation explaining the qualification gained**, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.



1.5 TEACHING STAFF

Standard

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

Guidelines

The teacher's role is essential in creating a high quality student experience and enabling the acquisition of knowledge, competences and skills. The diversifying student population and stronger focus on learning outcomes require student-centred learning and teaching and the role of the teacher is, therefore, also changing (cf. Standard 1.3).

Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff and for providing them with a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively. Such an environment

- sets up and follows clear, transparent and fair processes for staff recruitment and conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching;
- offers opportunities for and promotes the professional development of teaching staff;
- encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research;
- encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.



1.6 LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Standard

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

Guidelines

For a good higher education experience, institutions provide a range of resources to assist student learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries, study facilities and IT infrastructure to human support in the form of **tutors, counsellors and other advisers**. The role of support services is of particular importance in facilitating the mobility of students within and across higher education systems.

The needs of a diverse student population (such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities), and the shift towards student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources and student support.

Support activities and facilities may be organised in a variety of ways depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are fit for purpose, accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.

In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.



1.7 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Standard

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

Guidelines

Reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making and for knowing what is working well and what needs attention. Effective processes to collect and analyse information about study programmes and other activities feed into the internal quality assurance system.

The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the institution. The following are of interest:

- Key performance indicators;
- Profile of the student population;
- Student progression, success and drop-out rates;
- Students' satisfaction with their programmes;
- Learning resources and student support available;
- Career paths of graduates.

Various methods of collecting information may be used. It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.



1.8 PUBLIC INFORMATION

Standard

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

Guidelines

Information on institutions' activities is useful for prospective and current students as well as for graduates, other stakeholders and the public.

Therefore, institutions provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer and the selection criteria for them, the intended learning outcomes of these programmes, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students as well as graduate employment information.



1.9 ON-GOING MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES

Standard

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and **respond to the needs of students and society**. These reviews should **lead to continuous improvement** of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be **communicated** to all those concerned.

Guidelines

Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programmes aim to ensure that the provision remains appropriate and to create a supportive and effective learning environment for students.

They include the evaluation of:

- The content of the programme in the light of the **latest research** in the given discipline thus ensuring that the programme is up to date;
- The **changing needs of society**;
- The students' workload, progression and completion;
- The effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students;
- The **student expectations, needs and satisfaction** in relation to the programme;
- The learning environment and support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme.

Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly **involving students and other stakeholders**. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised programme specifications are published.



1.10 CICLICAL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

Guidelines

External quality assurance in its various forms can verify the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance, act as a **catalyst for improvement and offer the institution new perspectives**. It will also provide information to assure the institution and the public of the quality of the institution's activities.

Institutions participate in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account, where relevant, of the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate. Therefore, depending on the framework, this external quality assurance may take different forms and focus at different organisational levels (such as programme, faculty or institution).

Quality assurance is a continuous process that does not end with the external feedback or report or its follow-up process within the institution. Therefore, institutions ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.

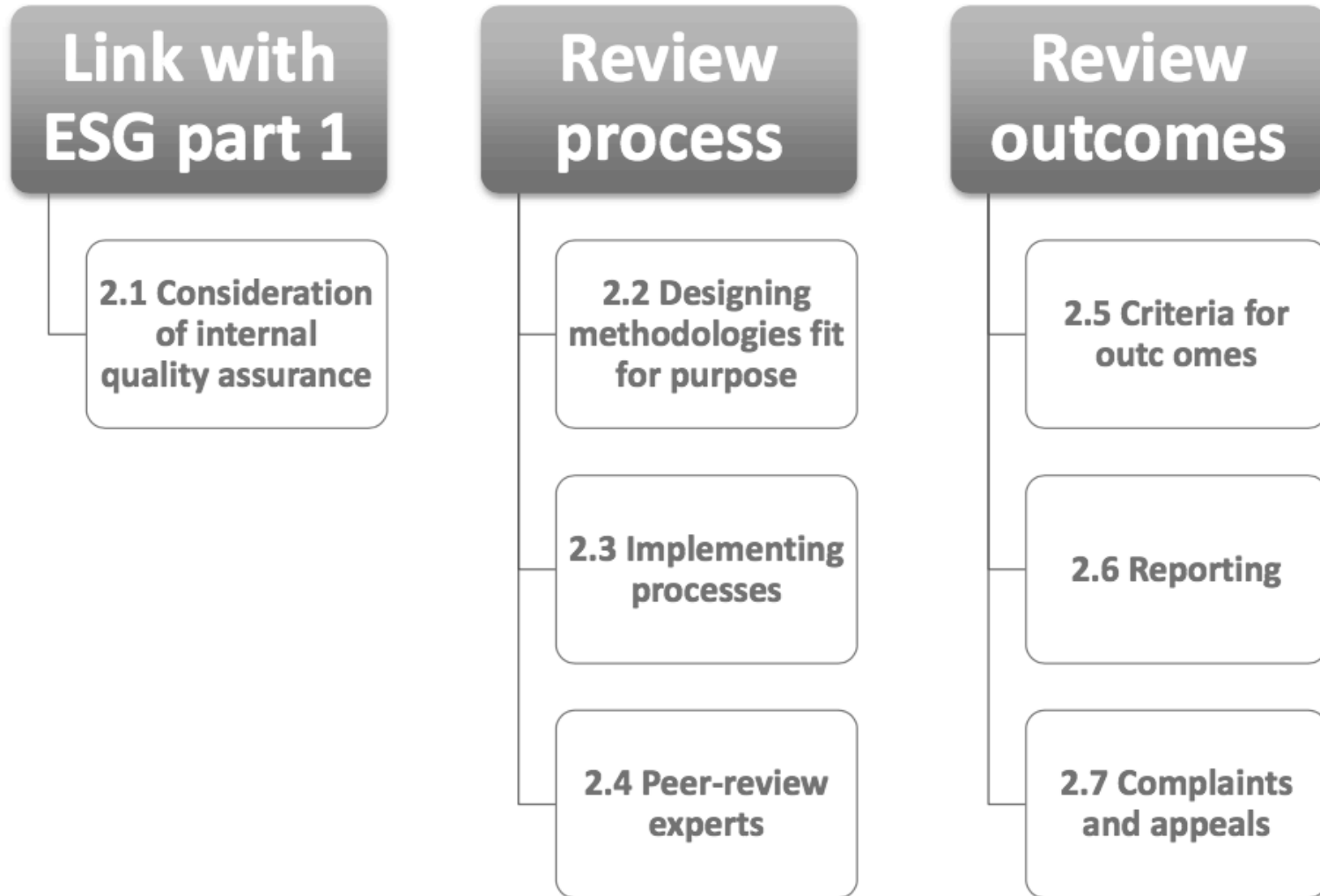




Part 2

Standards and guidelines for external quality assurance





2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard

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

Guidelines

Quality assurance in higher education is based on the institutions' responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision; therefore it is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance. To ensure the link between internal and external quality assurance, external quality assurance includes consideration of the standards of Part 1. These may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance.



2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard

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.**

Guidelines

In order to ensure effectiveness and objectivity it is vital for external quality assurance to have clear aims agreed by stakeholders.

The aims, objectives and implementation of the processes will

- bear in mind the **level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions;**
- take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality;
- allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement;
- **result in clear information on the outcomes** and the follow-up.

The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more exible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.



2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard

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.

Guidelines

External quality assurance carried out professionally, consistently and transparently ensures its acceptance and impact.

Depending on the design of the external quality assurance system, the institution provides the basis for the external quality assurance through a self-assessment or by collecting other material including supporting evidence. The written documentation is normally complemented by interviews with stakeholders during a site visit. The findings of the assessment are summarised in a report (cf. Standard 2.5) written by a group of external experts (cf. Standard 2.4).

External quality assurance does not end with the report by the experts. The report provides clear guidance for institutional action. Agencies have a consistent follow-up process for considering the action taken by the institution. The nature of the follow-up will depend on the design of the external quality assurance.



2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard

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

Guidelines

At the core of external quality assurance is the wide range of expertise provided by peer experts, who contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners.

In order to ensure the value and consistency of the work of the experts, they

- are carefully selected;
- have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
- are supported by appropriate training and/or briefing.

The agency ensures the independence of the experts by implementing a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest.

The involvement of international experts in external quality assurance, for example as members of peer panels, is desirable as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.



2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard

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.

Guidelines

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.



2.6 REPORTING

Standard

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.

Guidelines

The report by the experts is the basis for the institution's follow-up action of the external evaluation and it provides information to society regarding the activities of an institution. In order for the report to be used as the basis for action to be taken, it needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover

- context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context);
- 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.

The preparation of a summary report may be useful.

The factual accuracy of a report is improved if the institution is given the opportunity to point out errors of fact before the report is finalised.



2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Guidelines

In order to safeguard the rights of the institutions and ensure fair decision-making, external quality assurance is operated in an open and accountable way. Nevertheless, there may be misapprehensions or instances of dissatisfaction about the process or formal outcomes.

Institutions need to have access to processes that allow them to raise issues of concern with the agency; the agencies, need to handle such issues in a professional way by means of a clearly defined process that is consistently applied.

A complaints procedure allows an institution to state its dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out.

In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcomes of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, that criteria have not been correctly applied or that the processes have not been consistently implemented.





Part 3

Standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies



Link with ESG part 2

**3.1 Activities,
policy and
processes for
quality assurance**

Organisational setup

3.2 Official status

3.3 Independence

3.5 Resources

Activities

**3.1 (bis) Activities,
policy and
processes for
quality assurance**

**3.4 Thematic
analysis**

QA of QAAs

**3.6 Internal
quality assurance
and professional
conduct**

**3.7 Cyclical
external review of
agencies**



3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

Guidelines

To ensure the meaningfulness of external quality assurance, it is important that institutions and the public trust agencies.

Therefore, the goals and objectives of the quality assurance activities are described and published along with the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the scope of the agencies' work. The expertise in the agency may be increased by including international members in agency committees.

A variety of external quality assurance activities are carried out by agencies to achieve different objectives. Among them are evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities at programme or institutional level that may be carried out differently. When the agencies also carry out other activities, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and their other fields of work is needed.



3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

Guidelines

In particular when external quality assurance is carried out for regulatory purposes, institutions need to have the security that the outcomes of this process are accepted within their higher education system, by the state, the stakeholders and the public.



3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

Guidelines

Autonomous institutions need independent agencies as counterparts.

In considering the independence of an agency the following are important:

- **Organisational independence**, demonstrated by official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation) that stipulates the independence of the agency's work from third parties, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations;
- **Operational independence**: the definition and operation of the agency's procedures and methods as well as the nomination and appointment of external experts are undertaken independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders;
- **Independence of formal outcomes**: while experts from relevant stakeholder backgrounds, particularly students, take part in quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency is informed that while they may be nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency. Independence is important to ensure that any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise.



3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

Guidelines

In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts.

A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty.



3.5 RESOURCES

Standard

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

Guidelines

It is in the public interest that agencies are adequately and appropriately funded, given higher education's important impact on the development of societies and individuals. The resources of the agencies enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance activities in an effective and efficient manner. Furthermore, the resources enable the agencies to improve, to reflect on their practice and to inform the public about their activities.



3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

Guidelines

Agencies need to be accountable to their stakeholders. Therefore, high professional standards and integrity in the agency's work are indispensable. The review and improvement of their activities are on-going so as to ensure that their services to institutions and society are optimal.

Agencies apply an internal quality assurance policy which is available on its website. This policy

- ensures that all persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically;
- includes internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to a continuous improvement within the agency;
- guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination;
- outlines the appropriate communication with the relevant authorities of those jurisdictions where they operate;
- ensures that any activities carried out and material produced by subcontractors are in line with the ESG, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance activities are subcontracted to other parties;
- allows the agency to establish the status and recognition of the institutions with which it conducts external quality assurance.



3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

Guidelines

A periodic external review will help the agency to reflect on its policies and activities. It provides a means for assuring the agency and its stakeholders that it continues to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.



**EHEA
(ESG+EQAR)**



**PART 3
(QA AGENCIES)**



**PART 2
(EXTERNAL QA)**



**PART 1
(INTERNAL QA)**



**TEACHING & LEARNING
PROCESS**





Jacobo Navarro de Peralta
navarro@upv.es

sepq@upv.es
<https://www.upv.es/entidades/SEPQ>
@sepq_upv



Contact





UNIVERSITAT
POLITÈCNICA
DE VALÈNCIA

www.upv.es