

External review of QA agencies: addressing effectiveness of internal quality assurance by external quality assurance.

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How do quality assurance agencies (QAAs) manage to fulfil expectations of ESG in general, and more specifically on ESG 2.1 ?

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

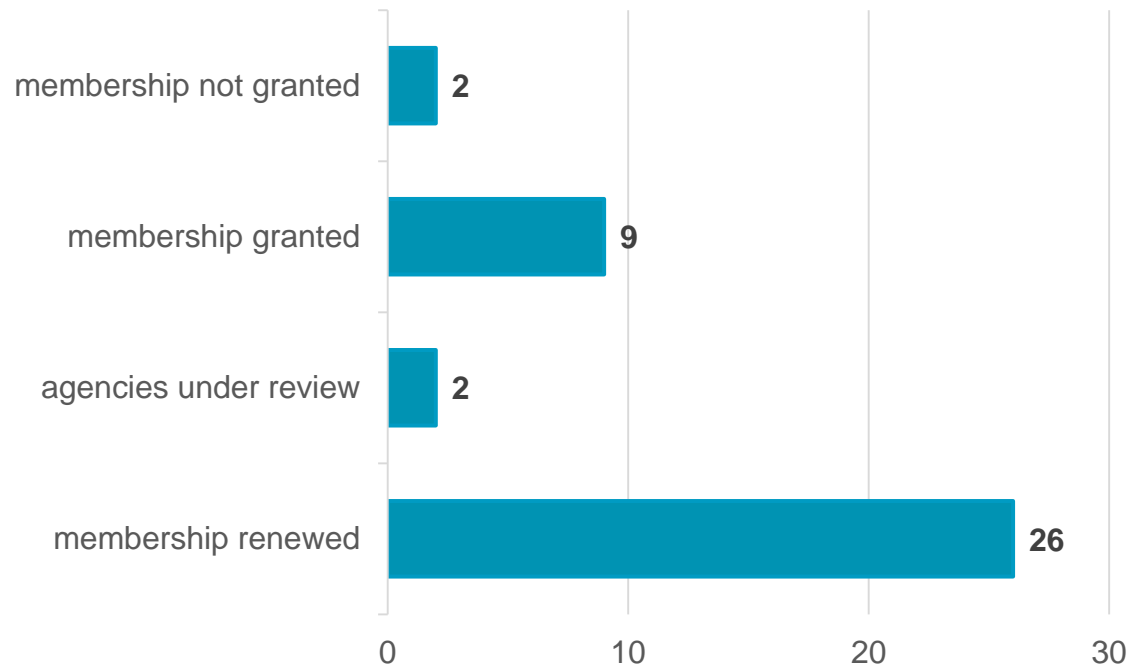


Part 1: ESG 1.1 to 1.10

Overview, on the quantitative side

since the adoption of ESG 2015,
39 reviews were conducted (and considered
by the ENQA Board)

Source: <https://enqa.eu/index.php/reviews/review-reports-and-decisions/>



The figures show that 90% of the QA Agencies were granted membership (first time or renewal). Among the standards, the cyclical review (3.7) and the official status (3.2) raise no issue. On the contrary, the most challenging ESGs are:

- 2.7. complaints and appeals
- 3.4. thematic analysis
- 2.6. reporting

On the whole, ESG 2015 prove to be working in an appropriate manner both for agencies and HEIs.

Indeed, QA has been implemented for some time now.

Interestingly, the revision process of the ESG (highly participative) and the EQUIP project as a supportive and monitoring activity have been important to *gain understanding and ownership of QA principles*

<http://www.equip-project.eu/>

How do quality assurance agencies (QAAs) manage to fulfil expectations of ESG in general, and **more specifically on ESG 2.1** ?

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.



**Part 1:
ESG 1.1 to 1.10**

ESG

Part 1

standards

for IQA



1.1 POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

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.

1.2 DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF PROGRAMMES

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.

1.3 STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

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.

1.4 STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION

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.

1.5 TEACHING STAFF

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.

1.6 LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT

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

1.7 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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

1.8 PUBLIC INFORMATION

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

1.9 ON-GOING MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES

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.

1.10 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

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

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.

Focus on ESG 1.4 via ESG 2.1 in ENQA reviews

METHODOLOGY

In general, when reviewing agencies, panels of experts look at:

- how clear reference to ESG is given in the QA Agencies procedures and guidelines
- how clear reference to ESG is given in the EQA review reports
- evidence such as alignment tables or matrices or mapping grids (national set of standards and ESG, per EQA procedure) in the SER
- how the stakeholders (in particular HEIs) perceive their role in IQA

The following results are based on the analysis of 17 reviews (focus on ESG 2.1) between January 2018 and March 2019:

EKKA (Estonia), NEA (Bulgaria), CAQA (Serbia), ECCE (Europe), EAEVE (Europe), NQA (The Netherlands), QAA (UK), AIC (Latvia), NOKUT (Norway), ARACIS (Romania), HAC (Hungary), RCVS (UK), PKA (Poland), SQAA (Slovenia), CYQAA (Cyprus), Unibasq (Spain) and IEP (Europe).

Focus on ESG 2.1 in ENQA reviews

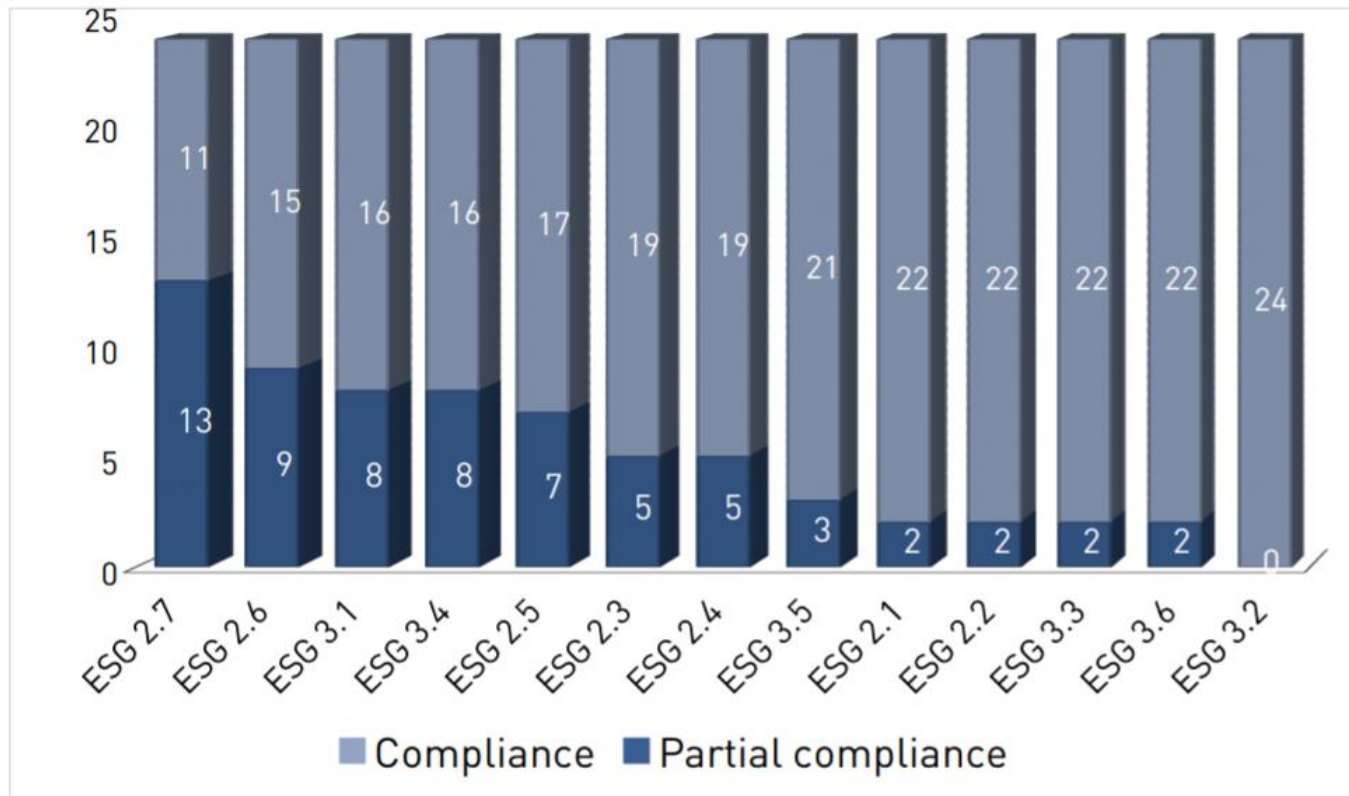


and what about eqar?

Compliance with ESG Part 2 & Part 3

Register Committee conclusions on individual standard

eqar



Conclusions based on 24 applications considered since 2015

- Compliance (78%)
- Partial compliance (21%).

<https://eqar.eu/>

Focus on ESG 1.4 via ESG 2.1 in ENQA reviews : some comments (1)

GRADING COMPLIANCE IS NOT A SCIENTIFIC MEASUREMENT BUT A HUMAN ACTIVITY :

- Standards (= requirements) and guidelines (explanations, examples, not requirements)
- fully/substantially compliant for ENQA, which leads respectively to suggestions for further improvement/recommendation
- for eqar, the grading becomes « compliant, partially compliant or non compliant »
- different panels (some are stricter, some are more lenient)
- which review? (first or subsequent reviews > different stages of development of the agency)
- level of detail in the analysis, consideration of context, etc.

Some examples extracted from review reports

the ESG except for very few aspects. External stakeholder involvement (ESG 1.1) would need to be integrated not only for programmes, as now, but also for QA policy and overall QA activities. Academic integrity and fraud (ESG 1.1) could feature more strongly, not only with regard to the PhD level, and the standards would need to refer explicitly to a student complaint procedure (ESG 1.3), and recognition of qualifications based on the Lisbon Convention, study periods, prior learning and non-formal and informal learning (ESG 1.4). Unlike ESG 1.7, the corresponding standards do not define precisely the kind of data to be collected for management purposes. The panel also notes that student involvement in IQA is very comprehensively covered by the standards (strategy, structures, development of standards and procedures, programme review, and self-evaluation). At the same time, while the standards do indeed capture various aspects of SCI the panel believes that it would be a good idea

- Alignment of teaching and learning processes with educational levels, adequacy of learning support tools and learning approach (ESG 1.3).
- Requirement that ECTS credits to enter undergraduate and graduate programmes are in line with the NQF (ESG 1.4).
- Competence of teachers and relevance of scientific and professional qualifications (ESG 1.5).
- Infrastructure (facilities, library, IT), scientific background of programme and resources to mentor talented students (ESG 1.6).
- Analysis and use of information and regulations pertinent for the effective management of the programme (ESG 1.7).
- Clarity and accessibility of information (ESG 1.8).
- Ongoing monitoring and reviewing of the programme (ESG 1.9).
- Cyclical follow-up procedures (ESG 1.10).

The panel holds that such an approach is fit for purpose of providing comprehensive institutional evaluation with recommendations, rather than checking compliance. It provides a valuable service of helping institutions which are inexperienced with the ESG to embed them into their practices while avoiding prescriptivism and respecting the ESG principle of institutional responsibility. At the same time, it enables panels to focus only on relevant aspects of the ESG when evaluating institutions which are already evaluated by national agencies which work on the basis of the ESG.

Panel recommendations

- The panel recommends the agency integrates the concept of student-centred learning as a core element in the agency's work and in its procedures (ESG 1.3).

In general, the panel finds that the agency's accreditation system can benefit from a more open and less prescriptive approach. According to the ESG, quality assurance should support the development of a quality culture (ESG 2015, p. 8). SQAA can foster this by focussing more on quality enhancement and less on quality control. In doing so, it could lead the way for HEIs to a more effective internal

Focus on ESG 1.4 via ESG 2.1 in ENQA reviews : some comments (2)

Most of the reports make a detailed analysis of each item of ESG, part 1
As shown by figures, there is an overall compliance of the agencies against standard 2.1,

with some weaker judgements because the panels:

- noted an uneven « coverage » in various EQA procedures (increasing diversity of QAAs activities and profiles)
- indicated that there would be a need to better apply the principles of the ESG such as fitness for purpose, institutional responsibility for quality, student-centered learning...

ex: « provide greater support for HEIs to take the primary responsibility for quality », « gradually shift the focus in its processes after the first accreditation cycle from controlling institutions to supporting them in carrying their responsibility for quality and in quality improvement, with due consideration to be given to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance », « integrate the concept of student-centred learning as a core element in the procedures »

to conclude with...

- QA Agencies do take into consideration the effectiveness of the HEIs IQA : ESG part 1 well referenced in most cases
- Recognition procedures are – among other procedures – included, with a rather implicit reference to the Lisbon Recognition Convention
- Quality assurance is one of the tools to support the enhancement of quality higher education: EQA can play different roles within a higher education system and the clear division of responsibilities needs to be made explicit
- In this very context, the LIREQA project gives an excellent opportunity to better connect all the stakeholders and discuss their respective roles



Thank you!

