

# EIQAS

## ENHANCING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

ERASMUS+ PROJECT

2014 - 2016



### STUDENTS' GUIDE:

ON

### PART I OF THE EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AND INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS



**A3ES**  
Agência de Avaliação  
e Acreditação  
do Ensino Superior



**п·а·к·v·i·s**  
Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije  
za kakovost in razvoj šolstva

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QUALIDADE  
DE ENSINO SUPERIOR

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**FREE PUBLICATION**

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

In 2005, Ministers responsible for higher education in Europe adopted the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) prepared by the so called “E4 group”, namely ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) in cooperation with ESU (European Students’ Union), EURASHE (the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education) and EUA (European University Association). In 2012-2015 ESGs were revised to “improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope” since its’ adoption. EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education), Education International and Business Europe also joined the initial E4 group. This resulted in the adoption of new Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015) by the ministers in the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in May 2015.

Quality assurance in Higher Education activities should be built on top of the successful implementation of an internal quality assurance system which provide information concerning quality of the institution’s activities and provide advice and recommendations on how to improve these activities. Quality assurance and quality enhancement are thus inter-connected, generating trust in the higher education institution’s performance.

ESG2015 apply to all higher education institutions (HEIs) of the EHEA, regardless of study cycle or place of delivery, as a model and a reference document for internal and external quality assurance. A key goal of ESG2015 is to contribute to a common understanding of quality assurance for learning and teaching among all stakeholders. 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. According to ESG2015, quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for their purpose.

The ESG are based on four principles for quality assurance: (i) HEI have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance; (ii) quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programs and students; (iii) quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture and (iv) quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.

In the scope of the Erasmus+ funded project EIQAS – Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems, students from Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia met to discuss the implementation of ESGs part I in the different countries. Students shared their perspectives on good practices, challenges and opportunities in different settings. In summary, students are seen as major stakeholders of HEIs, therefore playing a crucial role for the successful implementation of ESGs. Students are also those in closer contacts with the results of ESG2015 implementation, therefore they are important target group to evaluate the efficiency of action plans. As an example, students can provide invaluable feedbacks about the availability and access to information, to the quality of the teaching program and staff, to the quality and level of support to students’ activities, to the level of involvement of students in the governance bodies, and others.

From a students’ perspective all ESG2015 standards are important and all HEIs should aim for their full implementation. Notwithstanding, students shared the opinion that standards with major focus on students as 1.3. and 1.4. deserve special attention, furthermore standard 1.9. which deals with programme reviewing is also

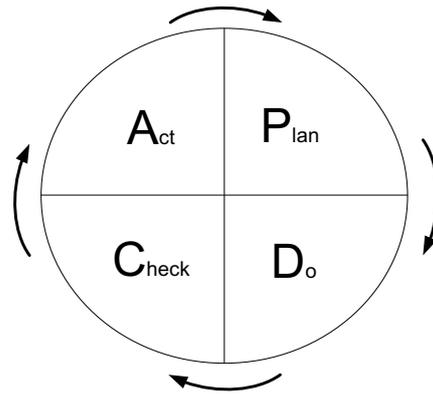
of great relevance for the quality of teaching in a given HEI. It is our understanding that an institution that periodically revise their programs involving relevant stakeholders, as suggested by ESG, that aims for advanced and up-to-date programs; which efficiently implements high quality student-centred learning methods for improved learning outcomes; and which provide easy to access, valid and clear information concerning students admission, progression, recognition and certification is already at a high quality level resulting in increased numbers of satisfied and qualified students.

European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education have been divided into three parts: (i) Internal quality assurance; (ii) External quality assurance and (iii) Quality assurance agencies. This guide will provide the students' perspective over part 1 of ESG2015 - Internal quality assurance.

## GLOSSARY

**Communication Channel** – are the means through which people use to communicate (e-mail, website, telephone, pamphlets, brochures, media...)

**Continuous improvement cycle** - also called Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle or Deming cycle (i.e. assurance and enhancement activities).



**Fig. 1.** Deming cycle

1. Planning – consist of indicating the problem and determining the course of action that will ultimately be able to reach a specific goal in quality.
2. Implementation - verifying previously planned activities by carrying out trials.
3. Checking - assessing the measures taken / planned activities. Determining the level of achieving the goals contained in the plan.
4. Action – implementation of improvements and corrective actions.

**ESG** - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

**ENQA** - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

**ESU** - European Students' Union,

**EURASHE** - European Association of Institutions in Higher Education

**EUA** - European University Association

**EHEA** - European Higher Education Area

**HEI** - Higher Education Institutions

**PQA** - Policy for Quality Assurance

**ECTS** - European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

**SCL** – Student-Centred Learning

**Excellent teacher** - the one who contributes positively to the learning environment and promotes Excellence in Teaching.

**Excellence in Teaching** – Is an academic process by which students are motivated to learn in ways that make a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how they think, act, and feel; it is a process that elevates students to a level where they learn deeply and remarkably.

**External stakeholders** – all actors on the exterior of an institution (e.g. candidate students, employers, organizations and scientific associations, graduate students).

**Fit-for-purpose** – adequacy of resources available in Higher Education Institutions to the number of students and researchers in order to ensure the quality of education and research.

**Informal education** – learning process that comes as part of being involved in youth, students' and community organizations.

**Institution** – is used in the standards and guidelines to refer to higher education institutions.

**Internal stakeholders** – all actors within an institution, including students, faculty and administrative staff.

**Non-formal education** – the term covering various structured learning situations, which do not either have the level of curriculum, syllabus, accreditation and certification.

**Program** – refers to higher education in its broadest sense, including that which is not part of a program leading to a formal degree. Higher education aims to fulfil multiple purposes; including preparing students for active citizenship, for their future careers (e.g. contributing to their employability), supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation.

**Quality** – whilst not easy to define, is mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment.

**Quality assurance** – in higher education is a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provides (input, process and outcomes) fulfilment of the expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements.

**Quality Culture** - is the existence of a set of practices that are naturally executed by HEI's internal stakeholders (students, professors, staff...). These practices are aligned with the idea of improvement in teaching and learning.

**Strategic management** - process oriented on formulating and implementing institution strategy which facilitates the HEIs to preferable functioning in the environment and achieves the strategies objective.

**Student life-cycle** – all phases and related activities in which the student participates during academic education (from admission to after graduation).

# 1. STANDARDS FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE: A STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

## 1.1. POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

### **ESG 2015 STANDARD 1.1:**

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.

### **Students' Perspective:**

Quality assurance policy consists of internally coherent quality assurance processes. The essence of an efficient QA is to get the internal and external stakeholders, especially students, involved in the system operations. Extremely important is the students' awareness about the institutional policy and engagement in continuous improvement. A strong quality assurance policy supported by governance bodies contribute for the development of a quality culture in the institution.

### **Key concepts:**

- The involvement of internal (especially students) and external stakeholders in the creation, revision and in the implementation of the HEI strategy is crucial to establish a quality culture.
- Quality assurance is not steady-state, it aims the continuous improvement of the system.
- Students' perception of QA relevance is fundamental for students engagement.

### **Major challenges:**

A major challenge of policy for quality assurance (PQA) is resistance to implementation. For PQA to become more than paper work, HEIs should develop and implement well structured procedures which minimize resistance and enrol different stakeholders as a way to increase the overall quality culture.

Different engagement strategies might be needed to address the needs of different stakeholders.

Another challenge is to make QA wording friendly. HEIs should encourage the participation of different stakeholders in the reviewing process of major documents to guarantee a clear understanding of HEIs QA policies by readers of different group of stakeholders. A clear sense of PQA objectives will increase awareness which will ultimately contribute for a quality culture in all stakeholders.

### **Points for which additional clarification is needed:**

While ESG 1.1 clearly defines the importance of PQA in HEIs strategic management and the need to involve major stakeholders, several elements of the standard need further clarification by HEIs.

HEIs should further clarify:

- How will HEI made PQA public? Which communication channels will be used, to whom will it be directed?
- How will stakeholders – in particular students – be involved in PQA? At which stage of the process will they be involved? What are their roles and responsibilities?
- How will PQA-related proposals be discussed, approved, implemented and monitored?

Quality policies should present a pillar of HEIs strategic management. Publicly available policies are motivators towards achievement.

### **Conclusion**

Policy for Quality Assurance reflects HEI's most important values in research, learning, teaching, career development and relationship to the world outside academia. For IQAS to achieve its purpose, students should participate in all stages of quality assurance from analysis to development and implementation. There should be well-defined procedures in place (e.g. focus groups, surveys, interviews, open field conversations with director...) so that each stakeholder can contribute for PQA with their own vision.

A properly implemented quality policy is determinant for the success implementation of all ESG 2015 standards.

### **Examples of Good practices:**

- **Quality Assurance Week** - improves awareness about the policy and QA policy (open door policy for internal and external students/stakeholders, feedback on surveys) to create a quality culture. (Jagiellonian University, <http://www.tjk.uj.edu.pl/>)
- **ISO 9001: 2008 certificate for Quality Management System.** The policy, procedures and system's framework/structure which establishes involvement of all the stakeholders in quality assurance (Poznan University of Technology, Faculty of Engineering Management <http://www.fem.put.poznan.pl/> )
- **Welcome day for students** – familiarizing the students with the values of an institution, a strategy and a quality culture. (Jagiellonian University, <http://www.dzien-otwarty.uj.edu.pl/>)
- Provide **trainings about the quality management systems** – to improve awareness and understanding in this area. (Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach <http://www.us.edu.pl/szidjk/szkolenie-nt-funkcjonowania-wszjk-i-krk>)
- NOVA's **Teaching Quality Assurance System** (TQAS) contributing continuous improvement of the quality of teaching and learning at NOVA. (NOVA University of Lisbon, <http://www.unl.pt/en/university/Index/pid=322/ppid=97/>)
- **ProQual – Quality Promotion Office** which is responsible for quality policy and implementation strategy at institutional level. (Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences (FPCEUP), University of Porto, [www.fpce.up.pt](http://www.fpce.up.pt))
- **Quality Committee** – including representatives of all the internal stakeholders to ensure a global aggregating strategic vision. (University of Coimbra, [www.uc.pt](http://www.uc.pt))
- **Obligatory inclusion of students in Quality committee as equal members is part of national legislation** (Slovenia, <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO172> ).

- **Exchange of good practices among University members** specifically focused on quality assurance procedures (University of Ljubljana [https://www.uni-lj.si/o\\_univerzi\\_v\\_ljubljani/kakovost/projekt\\_kul/](https://www.uni-lj.si/o_univerzi_v_ljubljani/kakovost/projekt_kul/) )
- **Shorter version of PQA** which include the essence of PAQ is readable and understandable for all stakeholders.

## 1.2. DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF PROGRAMMES

### ESG 2015 STANDARD 1.2:

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.

### Students' Perspective:

Design and approval of programmes is one of the most relevant activities of any HEI. A well-planned and well-structured programme enables attaining high quality learning outcomes. Therefore, study programmes should first of all be consistent with HEI strategy and meet the needs of students and other relevant stakeholders.

### Key concepts:

- Students' participation in the design and approval of study programmes. This participation should not be limited opinion-sharing; it should be based on the active participation of the student in all stages of design and approval of study programme.
- Students' feedback of current programmes should be considered in the process and gathered in the form of surveys, informal consultations or interviews.
- Elements of major importance in programme design and approval are learning outcomes, student workload, alignment of workload and ECTS, the sequence of disciplines, organization of lectures and practical trainings.
- Rules guiding the accreditation and recognition of ECTS derived from activities outside the study programme (from formal, non-formal or informal education – see standard 1.4) should also be considered when designing and approving new study programmes;
- Enable students to be partners in the design of new study programmes, contributes for the empowerment of students which increases engagement with the institution and with quality procedures.

### **Major challenges:**

A major challenge for the full implementation of this standard is the resistance of more conservative HEIs to involve students in the aforementioned processes. A second and equally important challenge is the resistance of students to participate in the same processes due to limitations in time and extra workload.

A mechanism to fight these challenges is to foster a quality culture in HEIs which transform QA from procedures and paper-work to a working environment. Students should be involved in QA training and working groups from the very beginning. Moreover students' feedback should be considered and used in decision-making in order to motivate their participation and to motivate others to participate.

### **Points for which additional clarification is needed:**

While developing the guidelines for the design and approval of new programmes HEIs should clearly define:

- How will stakeholders – in particular students and alumni – be involved in the design and approval of new programmes? At which stage of the process will each stakeholder be involved? What are their roles and responsibilities?
- How, when and where will proposals for new programmes be discussed, approved, implemented and monitored?
- Which learning outcomes are expected from each course of a study programme?
- What is the weight of the different learning outcomes – knowledge, technical skills and soft skills – in the assessment of students' performance?
- How will these learning outcomes be assessed and which criteria will be used?
- How does these learning outcomes or qualifications fit market needs?

### **Examples of Good practices:**

- Study programme development councils

Student representatives are official members of program councils which are responsible for the design of new programmes and for restructuring existing programmes. The council periodically reviews curriculums and verify whether the intended learning outcomes were obtained. Students have a dedicated section on the council report to contribute with ideas and opinions. In the situation of developing a new program, students are asked to submit written opinions on the proposals and to present their own ideas.

## **1.3. STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT**

### **ESG 2015 STANDARD 1.3:**

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.

### **Students' Perspective:**

Student-centred learning (SCL) should be perceived as a change of paradigm in education as it once was and as it is now. It is a change of focus on teaching and teacher, to focus on learning and learner, i.e. the student. Inclusion of SCL to ESG can be perceived as one of the most notable achievements, since SCL can be characterised as an example of good practice on its own, but at the same time it can appear in several different forms and contexts.

SCL is characterized by adopting innovative teaching methods that are based in a close cooperation between teacher(s) and students, where students are encouraged to develop critical, analytical and creative thinking and to become active citizens. Students are partners and active participants in the learning process. Study programmes should be designed in a way to focus the needs of students, and not the interests/needs of teachers and universities. SCL imply that the most important result of an educational process is learning-how-to-learn-skills. SCL serve as a foundation to create conditions in which the students develop awareness and responsibility about how they learn, and how their own learning is assessed. An essential element of such approach is active and responsible attitude of students as participants in their own learning and their own learning pace.

Students should be aware of the importance of being involved on the basis of equality in every stage of the preparation, implementation and evaluation of study programmes. Teaching methods used, as well as ways to assess the achievements, should be determined jointly by teachers and students, with special emphasis given to their learning needs – successful study process and obtaining learning outcomes are a shared responsibility of teachers and students.

Evaluation of students should be based on assessing whether the established learning outcomes were achieved or not. Assessment criteria should be transparent, publicly available and consistently used on equal basis. Each student should be entitled to an adequate feedback on the results achieved and, if needed, additional instructions and guidelines on course requirements.

Provide encouragement, inform and train students to participate, be aware by increasing the responsibility and improve planning. This is essential for students to choose their own learning paths and successfully achieve all desired learning outcomes. Students should have a chance to freely choose elective courses or modules and participate in national and international mobility programmes. Students should receive support, be encouraged to take informed choices and should be informed about their role in the decision making and evaluation processes of SCL.

SCL focuses on achieving the intended learning outcomes, therefore SCL should be strongly supported by internal quality assurance systems. This can be achieved both during the implementation of SCL at the course level, as well as after the course when evaluating learning outcomes.

### **Key concepts:**

- Change of paradigm in education (from teaching to learning, from teacher to student);

- Students as active participants in their own learning where sharing responsibility to achieve successful learning and study process is crucial;
- Learning and assessment: to ensure students participation in the preparation and development of a study programme (e.g. development of curriculums, learning outcomes) –see standard 1.2;
- Students should be assessed using transparent and publicly accessible criteria;
- Teaching methods should divert focus from teacher to student and should correspond to the needs of the learner;
- Teaching and learning is a shared responsibility between teachers and students;
- Increasing awareness, motivation and responsibility of students for their learning needs
- Orientation towards achieving the expected learning outcomes;
- Impact on the quality culture: increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student / partnership between teachers, staff and students at every level;
- Impact on the IQA: assessment of implementation of SCL for certain field of study / SCL need to be support by IQA / the involvement of students in decision-making at every level of institutions.

Successful implementation of SCL has positive effects on building a quality culture. Students with increased self-reflection, responsibility, sense of inclusion and encouragement to participate in HEIs activities contribute to build a strong partnership between teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders which is essential for HEIs success.

#### **Major challenges:**

- SCL does not have a „One-Size-Fits-All” solution:

All higher education institutions, teachers and students population are different. Each have a set of unique needs arising from different environments, societies, resources and characteristics of diverse scientific fields and other relevant factors. SCL is a paradigm of teaching and learning which requires each individual institution to develop their own solutions which corresponds to their own needs in teaching and learning

- Limitations of flexibility – learning outcomes should not be hindered.

Selection of flexible learning paths and learning methods must ensure that learning outcomes can be obtained.

- Different students’ needs, level of experience, interests, background etc.

SCL must determine and react to different educational needs students have and promote autonomy in the learner. Some students learn better through practical demonstrations (e.g. Learning-by-doing, project-based learning...), while some prefer to study through literature. Adequate guidance and support from the teacher is essential.

- Assessment of implementation of SCL for certain field of study.

Each individual field of studies reflects its' own specificities when it comes to teaching and learning methods. Therefore SCL should adapt to these needs. Also, internal quality assurance system mechanism should develop appropriate indicators and mechanisms to enable constant improvement of the learning process.

- Raise awareness and train academic staff and students in SCL.

Each HEI should strive to raise awareness by actively training students, academic staff and other relevant stakeholders in order to understand the SCL concept, its practical implementation and its advantages.

**Points for which additional clarification is needed:**

- How does HEI understand “active role of students” and “Student-Centred Learning” – along with standards 1.1 and 1.2 define what, who, where, when and how in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation process;
- Define how... and how it will be assessed
  - ...to increased responsibility, autonomy and awareness of students for their learning process and learning outcomes...;
  - ...to involve students participation in choosing teaching and learning methods...;
  - ...to involve students participation in choosing flexible learning paths...;
  - ...to involve students participation in course evaluation and interpretation of their results...

**Conclusion:**

SCL is based on partnership relationship between students and teachers, where students are encouraged to develop critical, analytical and creative thinking to become active citizens.

**Examples of Good practices:**

- Dedicated support programmes for low-performing students which take into account their individual needs. If appropriate, individual programme of study should be created jointly by the student and teacher (i.e. mentoring programme).
- The use of the Socratic teaching method instead of “ex-cathedra” teaching (which is by definition a “teacher-centred learning”) where teacher is guiding and helping students which work in groups – here responsibility is shared between teachers and students.

**1.4. STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION**

**ESG 2015 STANDARD 1.4:**

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.

### **Students' Perspective:**

Student life-cycle begins with admission and registration; it covers all phases of the academic progression in HEI until graduation and beyond. All the procedures, including those applied to the recognition of formal, informal and non-formal education should be predefined and publicly available for future professional activity.

### **Key concepts:**

- Procedures associated to the student life cycle should be well defined, published and be consistently implemented.
- IQA system must ensure a fit-for-purpose admission, the necessary support and mobility within and across higher education institutions
- HEIs must ensure the recognition of qualifications, including those from informal and non-formal education, obtained during students life cycle as part of the study programmes or in mobility;
- All procedures must be focus in the success of the learning process.
- The graduation represents the completion of the period of study and students should receive documentation explaining the qualification gained which should be recognized within the EHEA.
- The fit-for-purpose principle aims to ensure HEIs admit students according to the resources available in order to guarantee the quality of teaching and study programmes.

### **Major challenges:**

The main challenge is to ensure that adopted procedures cover efficiently all phases of a student life cycle, not just admission and graduation. Monitoring the academic progress of students along the study programme is essential as it is to establish a functional alumni network, to assure the collaboration with external organizations as potential employers and National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC).

With regard to formal, informal and non-informal education, a substantial level of efforts should be made to develop standards to evaluate and recognize these learning processes in situ and in mobility. As with any other standard, students are important internal stakeholders therefore should be included in all these processes through appropriate protocols.

### **Points for which additional clarification is needed:**

- HEIs should clearly define how students are involved in the development, evaluation, implementation and monitoring of admission, progression, recognition and certification processes.
- HEIs should define how they understand "student life cycle" and how to create a functional network of alumni.
- HEIs should define the mechanisms and criteria which evaluate formal, informal and non-formal education.
- HEIs should define how formal, informal and non-formal education will be included in the *Supplement to Diploma*.

### **Examples of Good practices:**

- HEIs publish the conditions for admission in an accessible and clear manner.
- The admission processes and the inclusion of extracurricular activities in the *Supplement to Diploma*, particularly those concerned with informal and non-formal education, are part of the regulation.
- Decisions about these processes are made in the appropriate HEI structure and in the presence of all relevant stakeholders.
- Student retention rate is analysed and considered as element of evaluation (teachers, teaching methods, study programmes, facilities and other resources)
- The institutions' issue the *Supplement to Diploma* in both the country language and English.

## **1.5. TEACHING STAFF**

### **ESG 2015 STANDARD 1.5:**

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.

### **Students' Perspective:**

The growing diversification is a clear advantage to HEIs, however diversification of students nature require diversification and adaptation of teaching methods. Institutions should be aware of the fundamental role of the teacher in the learning process thus promote the development of their staff in light of quality assurance.

Higher education institutions are primary responsible for the quality of their staff and should always ensure the fairness and transparency in the processes of recruitment and development of the teaching staff.

The teacher should be seen as a researcher, a lecturer, a motivator, a mentor and as a coordinator. Development of teaching quality must be a priority for HEIs. Therefore, HEIs should encourage the link between education and research by fostering the teacher to learn innovative pedagogical methods and by providing the ideal environment for teachers to do research in their field of expertise.

### **Key concepts:**

- HEIs have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff.
- HEIs should recognize excellence in teaching as important as scientific results during teachers' performance assessment.
- HEIs should promote teaching excellence internally. The recognition of the pedagogical excellence can give rise to a positive challenge for other teachers.
- HEIs should recognize the importance of students in the assessment of teachers performance and, when possible, in the processes of recruitment.
- Enrolling students in the teaching assessment might increase students' engagement with quality procedures and culture and with the HEI.

- The recruitment and assessment of the teaching staff should follow transparent and publicly announced procedures and criteria.
- HEIs should develop self-driven approaches to assess the competence of the teachers, and all relevant and useful skills.

A Potential impact of this standard in building a quality culture in HEIs is that teachers start recognizing the positive impact of innovative teaching methods in their students performance and in their research activities; students feel more involved and engaged with HEIs, and young teachers are enrolled in a quality-friendly environment from the beginning thus incorporating quality assurance and quality culture as a natural part of their jobs.

### **Major challenges:**

- There is a need to develop criteria for balancing pedagogical and scientific results in performance evaluation.
- HEIs must clearly define “excellence” in teaching and research and how it will be measured and evaluated.
- HEIs should clearly specify the competences and skills expected from the teaching staff in order to ensure fairness and quality of the evaluation process.
- HEIs should clarify how they perceive the link between teaching and research. How flexible a specific study programme is to accommodate the most recent research discoveries in the unit curricula.
- A clarification of the *student-centred learning and teaching* concept is crucial for the good understanding of the HEI quality system (see standard 1.3).

### **Points for which additional clarification is needed:**

- HEIs should define criteria to evaluate the interplay between teaching and research. The strength of this link is dependent of HEI history, population, environment... therefore HEIs should clearly define what is expected from teachers concerning teaching and research activities.
- HEIs should define the equilibrium between research and teaching skills development.
- HEIs should define how to engage students to assess pedagogical qualities of teachers.
- HEIs should periodically publicly announce the result of students’ questionnaires (annually or every semester), detail the analysis and provide an action-plan to minimize negative aspects and highlight positive aspects.

### **Examples of Good practices:**

- Peer-to-peer evaluation: teachers visit other teachers during lectures and give feedback.
- Pedagogical surveys: pedagogical surveys should assess the quality of teaching methods and learning outcomes as perceived by students;

- Diploma of excellence in teaching: award the best-rated teachers through the pedagogical surveys.

## 1.6. LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT

### **ESG 2015 STANDARD 1.6:**

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

#### **Students' Perspective:**

It is the responsibility of the HEIs to provide, physical resources such as libraries, study facilities and IT infrastructure, human resources such as tutors, counsellors and other advisers and social and moral support service such as psychological and moral support offices or scholarship pools for students with special needs (Physical disabilities, low financial resources, or others).

#### **Key concepts:**

- HEIs should involve students when developing a responsible management strategy plan.
- This plan should identify priorities aiming to the establishment of sustainable and accurate financial plan.
- The creation of a framework to follow-up implementation of this strategic plan is crucial.
- Teaching and learning resources should be major focus for HEIs.
- Socio-economic and moral support resources are very important and should be first priority (e.g. residences, scholarships, psychological and moral support offices).
- HEIs should provide financial support and access to infrastructures to students' organization initiatives (e.g. courses, seminars and research).

This standard assures that the HEIs should provide appropriated resources to learning activities, which should not be understood as a mean to provide the minimum acceptable resources, rather it should be perceived as a way to improve students' learning outcomes by providing all kinds of physical, human, social and moral resources.

#### **Major challenges:**

- Important challenges to the full implementation of this standard are of economic and political nature. Nevertheless HEIs should work around it by means of partnerships, collaborations or others strategies with relevant organizations.
- Cooperation with other HEIs should be enforced (e.g. creation of inter-university study programmes) taking advantages of the best resources of each HEI thus increasing quality of the study programme.

- HEIs should not depreciate scientific research and scientific development of their staff as research is an important mechanism to promote the HEI inside and outside borders international and also to raise extra funding.

### **Points for which additional clarification is needed:**

The word “resources” is vaguely defined. Resources can be perceived as physical resources like infrastructures (e.g. classrooms, laboratories, library, working rooms ...), material resources (e.g. books, computers, laboratory material...) human resources (e.g. academic and non-academic staff), social-economic resources (scholarships, canteens, healthcare...) moral support resources (psychological advisers, tutors...). HEIs should define and detail classes of resources in their internal documentation and clarify when to refer to each.

### **Examples of Good practices:**

- The resources should not be institution-centred but oriented for students and study cycles (fit for different needs and students’ population).
- Existence of an “International Relations and Mobility Office”. The mission of this office consists in promoting the University involvement in national and international programmes and projects, within research and development, education and training, culture, cooperation and exchange. The aim of this office is fostering and managing students, teachers and technicians mobility, providing support to elaborate applications for national and international projects programmes, ensuring, more closely, its management and financial execution with the involved teachers and researchers and management of "IN" and "OUT" mobility processes for students and teachers.
- Existence of the “Psychological and Social Support Office”. These offices provide social, psychological and moral support for students in need. These offices are headed by Psychologists, Social workers or similar who provide an answer to students’ most relevant needs. Examples of these answers are the award of scholarships or housing to students with limited financial support or psychological and moral support for those in need for counselling, among other activities.
- Students should have access to laboratories during week days to do assigned tasks, projects and diploma work.
- Students should have designated computer rooms where they can work on projects and assignments.
- Tutorial classes should be provided whenever a minimum number of students show interest. These classes are extra to the study programme and should have different professor in charge.
- “Human resources and advancement” offices providing a link between academia and industry should be available to help students getting in the work market in their respective fields.

### **Conclusion**

This standard is crucial for the conduct of courses and focus of HEIs should be teaching and learning and socio-economic and moral resources assuring that HEIs should provide appropriated resources to learning activities.

## 1.7. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

### **ESG 2015 STANDARD 1.7:**

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

#### **Students' Perspective:**

This standard covers general issues related to information management. Institutional self-knowledge is the basis for an effective quality assurance. It is of great significance that institutions have the means of collecting and analysing information about their own activities. Thus HEIs should be aware of what is working well, what needs further improvement or what were the results of implementing a given action plan to better define a strategic plan and to position / compare themselves with other HEIs.

#### **Key concepts:**

- HEIs must collect information concerning their environment to support responsible decision-making;
- Information to be collected should include all relevant aspects of an HEI, both external factors (demographic, political, economical, social, scientific...) and internal (admission, progression, qualifications, success rate, career paths after graduation...).
- Information should be analysed and presented in the digested form for better understanding and use.
- Information should be kept up to date to support more responsible and efficient action plans.

#### **Major challenges:**

- To define accurately which data that should be collected to better characterize academic population (students, professors, staff...), environment (political, economical, social, scientific...) and better support predictions and action plans.
- To maintain a regular collection of data and data analysis.
- The analysis should stand above any personal interests and include interpretation to support independent decision making and action plan(s).
- To develop the adequate resources (human, physical, material...) for an efficient data collection and analysis;
- HEIs must recognize the importance of students' feedback on the internal quality assurance and the importance of students' perspective on data collection and data interpretation therefore involvement of students in all stages of information management should be encouraged.

#### **Points for which additional clarification is needed:**

- Students are important stakeholders and are a valuable source of information for quality evaluation. However, the data collected will be incomplete unless information is compared with data from other

stakeholders and data from external environment. HEIs should define data collection mechanism, data sources and data analysis, HEIs also should define periodicity of data collection and how to publish it.

- HEIs should collect and analyse all the information needed to characterize quality of study programmes, students population needs and expectations and, needs and expectations of external partners.
- HEIs must define how information collected is used to support quality assurance and quality improvement.
- HEIs should pay special attention to defined groups of students with minor representation in the overall population as students with special needs, foreign or from ethnic minorities.
- HEIs should motivate a culture of collaboration where stakeholders recognize the importance of data collection and information management. HEIs should define strategies to enrol major stakeholders in the process;

### **Examples of Good practices:**

Most of the good practices that are in connection with this standard are specifically related to the students' real involvement in the process of information management:

- Evidences of feedback collected from different stakeholders, particularly students.
- Evidences that data analysis was made public or shared among relevant stakeholders.
- Dissemination of the action plans throughout the HEI;
- Giving students regular feedback about the courses and an in-depth feedback at the end of the course.
- Gathering feedback from graduates for strategic purposes and for enhancing the quality of teaching provision and services;
- Paying attention to feedback gained through informal communication.
- Making use of electronic information management systems;
- Evidences of data collection concerning, students' satisfaction with study programmes, learning resources and learning outcomes;
- Evidences of data collection regarding, students' profile, student progression, success rates and drop-out rates and graduates' career paths;
- Evidences of data collection concerning political, economical, sociological, technological, legal, and other relevant environmental data;

### **Conclusion:**

An institution's self-knowledge is fundamental for efficient decision-making. Institutions have to respond efficiently to the vast range of demands for information and develop an ability to collect, manage and use relevant information in a variety of formats. Considering the importance of this standard for the HEIs' quality culture, it is important to highlight the role of sharing results and action plans with students and other relevant stakeholders to increase their engagement in quality culture.

## 1.8. PUBLIC INFORMATION

### **ESG 2015 STANDARD 1.8:**

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

#### **Students' Perspective:**

This standard highlights the importance of information availability and accessibility. HEIs should collect information concerning external and internal factors, as defined in standard 1.7, and publish it to all relevant stakeholders: candidates, students, alumni, professors, staff, partners, industry... and the society in general using the most adequate communication channel for each information/target pair.

#### **Key concepts:**

- Public, is defined as the easy access to relevant information by stakeholders and decision-makers without hassle.
- It is very important to have all relevant information available and up to date to help better decision making by internal and external stakeholders.
- Institutions should provide transparent and reliable data about their activities.
- Information should be communicated to relevant stakeholders using efficient communication channels which should be adapted to different scenarios;

#### **Major challenges:**

- A major obstacle is the resistance to make public what is considered "private" or "strategic" information.
- An additional challenge is to create awareness for the importance of publicising relevant information to increasing quality culture.

#### **Points for which additional clarification is needed:**

- HEIs should clearly define criteria and rules about which information is made public, what is the communication channel used and how much details will be published.
- HEIs should define in which language(s) official documents will be written and published.
- HEIs should define mechanisms for reviewing and verify the accuracy of published information. Erroneous and outdated information must not be tolerated.

#### **Examples of Good practices:**

- An example of good practice would suggest that institutions regularly publish their QA report on the internet and periodically send newsletter to relevant stakeholders.

- Institutions collect and publish information on the employment of their graduates.
- Provision of targeted information, especially for prospective students who require specific information to help making informed decisions.
- The use of HEIs website is a good way to deliver information. Nevertheless diverse communication channels increase likelihood of reaching a diverse target audience. A good practice is to complement HEI website with catalogues, leaflets, local TV, newspapers, newsletters, emails, social media, meetings with students, etc.

### **Conclusion:**

It is important that institutions recognize the correlation between provision of relevant information for internal and external stakeholders and prosperity for the institution. This practice increases visibility, transparency and accountability of the HEI and the engagement of relevant stakeholders.

## **1.9. ON-GOING MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES**

### **ESG 2015 STANDARD 1.9:**

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.

### **Students' Perspective:**

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their study programmes for continuous improvement. Improvement is perceived as increased satisfaction of (i) academic community (staff and students), (ii) market (industry, academia, future employers, ...) and (iii) society.

Programme reviewing processes must be proactive and preventive rather than corrective. It should aim to meet expectations of key stakeholders and to integrate the most up-to-date state of the art in the programme syllabus. Any action planned or taken should be publicly available and communicated to all those concerned.

### **Key concepts:**

- HEIs should recognize the importance of a frequent and periodic monitoring process.
- HEIs should recognize the reviewing process as a mechanism centered in students' expectations, needs and satisfaction.
- HEIs should recognize this monitoring process as a self-assessment tool to identify need-for-improvement issues.
- HEIs should develop a formal process to address students and stakeholders needs.
- HEIs should involve students in processes of monitoring and periodic review of programmes.

### **Major challenges:**

The students identify as major challenges in this standard the incorporation of key internal (students) and external (e.g. alumni, future employers...) stakeholders in the reviewing process. HEIs must clearly define the role of internal and external stakeholders in the reviewing process. Moreover HEIs must clearly define how to deal with conflicting point-of-views from different stakeholders.

### **Points for which additional clarification is needed:**

- HEIs should define how “improvement” is perceived and how it will be assessed.
- HEIs should clearly define the mechanisms supporting the review process.
- HEIs should define the role and impact of different stakeholders in the reviewing process.

### **Examples of Good practices:**

- HEIs use questionnaires and surveys to assess student’s satisfaction, perception of teaching methods and syllabus.
- HEIs create a network of alumni and external partners which are consulted periodically to access market and society needs.
- HEIs invite students and external stakeholders to discuss programme evaluation reports, suggest room for improvement areas and to participate in the implementation process (e.g. by monitoring implementation success).
- HEIs use an internal audit processes to study negatively rated aspects (curricular units, professors, teaching methods, resources...).
- HEIs implement a “pool of tutors” to support student learning and progression.
- A report summarizing the results from students’ questionnaires or surveys which includes a “Learned lessons” and an “Action plan” chapters is publicly available for the academic community after each evaluation round.
- Whenever applicable, a chapter with the evolution of programme rating is also included in the above mentioned report to monitor failure and success;

## **1.10. CYCLICAL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

### **ESG 2015 STANDARD 1.10:**

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

### **Students’ Perspective:**

HEIs focused in improving quality of their activities will naturally align external and internal quality assurance processes. The link between internal and external QA processes stimulates HEIs self-reflection, stakeholders’

engagement and performance for improvement. Therefore HEIs should engage in external evaluation of quality assurance processes as defined by national regulations.

### **Key concepts:**

- External quality assurance reviews are conducted within a national quality framework.
- Cyclic external evaluations of HEIs quality assurance processes enhance public confidence in the quality of the HEI and of HEI's educational programmes.
- Quality assurance is a continuous process, it does not end with the external feedback or report.
- External quality assurance evaluations should feed an internal process for quality improvement.
- HEIs must ensure that the progresses made in a given external quality assurance activity is conserved or further improved for the next rounds of external evaluation;

### **Major challenges:**

A major challenge of this standard is its dependence of external / national legislation. HEIs must comply with national guidelines for external quality assurance evaluation. Nevertheless HEIs must ensure the participation in cyclical evaluation of their QAS by external entities with a proactive attitude. Moreover, whenever national legislation allows, HEIs must involve students in the process of external evaluation.

### **Points for which additional clarification is needed:**

- If not defined at national legislation, HEIs should establish the periodicity of an evaluation cycle published it.
- HEIs should define the role of students in the process of external quality assurance evaluation.
- The cyclical external quality assurance supports the development of quality culture. The involvement of different stakeholders in the quality assurance processes strengthens engagement with quality and fosters quality culture, therefore HEIs should define the role of each stakeholder in the process;

### **Examples of Good practices:**

- HEIs enrol students in external quality assurance evaluation processes.
- Students are trained by HEIs quality departments or by external organization on quality assurance and European Standard Guidelines.
- Students' personal experiences and involvement quality assurance processes are important for the quality enhancement. A good practice is to enrol students' representatives in quality assurance committees or similar bodies.
- Students are motivated to participate in the external evaluation processes by participating in the construction of HEIs self-assessment report.

## 2. GENERAL CONCLUSION TO THE GUIDE

This publication intends to provide an overview of the student perspective on the implementation of ESG2015 in HEIs of the EHEA, with special focus on Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia. Additionally, it aims to present key concept, major challenges and other aspects which students believe to be crucial to improved internal quality assurance systems.

Internal Quality Assurance System is a set of tools that should be used by HEIs to help monitoring, evaluating and implementing actions plans which will assist quality development. HEIs must see quality assurance not as a final goal to achieve perfection but as a way to improve continuously through a constant reevaluation and redefinition of HEI's objectives and challenges to better meet society expectations and needs.

Students have always been major players in the evolution of policies and quality in higher education. Students' feedback are valuable tools to use in the development of study curricula, learning outcomes and assessment procedures, students should also be involved in working groups which discuss action plans for any given situation which needs improvement. In this document we can see that student-centred learning and student consultation are major issues for quality assurance enhancement in higher education. Worth noting is that "Good Practices" are not limited to those included in this guide. These examples are used as an extension of the standard itself and are intended to help understanding for better implementation of the standard in HEIs. HEIs should not, in any occasion, look at them as restrictive or as a point limiting their activities. Good practices should adequate to each HEI surrounding environment.

Students need to be consulted as they are able to provide a unique perspective. By nature, students are friendly with quality assurance concept and, in an encouraging environment; students are easily engaged in quality assurance processes. Students have major beneficiaries of the pedagogical training of teachers, and any other quality enhancer therefore they are easily engaged to contribute for the enhancement of quality in their HEI.

While there are many challenges towards the implementation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems we can see a strong interest and motivation of the students to actively contribute for it, therefore we strongly recommend to include students in Quality Assurance bodies and to take advantages of students unique point of views.

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