

**Revision of the ESG
Draft proposal submitted to the BFUG
October 2013**

Explanatory Note

1) Mandate

At the Ministerial Meeting in Bucharest, on 26 and 27 April 2012 the E4 organisations proposed to ministers: "Based on the findings of the project 'Mapping the implementation and application of the ESG' and the conclusions derived from the findings, ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE recommend that ministers of the EHEA countries mandate the E4 organisations to carry out, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, notably Education International, BusinessEurope, the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) and EQAR, a careful revision of the ESG in order to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness. This work would be carried out in the understanding that the current principles would be maintained."

The ministers took on the initiative and decided: "We acknowledge the ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE (the E4 group) report on the implementation and application of the "European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance" (ESG). We will revise the ESG to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope. The revision will be based upon an initial proposal to be prepared by the E4 in cooperation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which will be submitted to the Bologna Follow-Up Group."

After the Bucharest Ministerial Meeting the E4 invited Education International, BusinessEurope and EQAR to a meeting (10th July in Brussels) where the seven organisations agreed on the process, timelines and structure for the preparation of the initial proposal for the revised ESG to the BFUG.

2) Working structure

The revision of the ESG is conducted in accordance with the proposal that was submitted to the BFUG meeting in Nicosia 28/29 August 2012. Hence, the following structure was set up:

A steering group was set up, composed by representatives of EUA, EURASHE, ESU, ENQA, BusinessEurope, EQAR, and EI. In addition a drafting group was set up, composed of QA experts that have participated in the mapESG project, nominated by EUA, EURASHE, ESU, and ENQA. The steering group discusses all issues related to the revision of the ESG and decides upon content matters. The drafting group puts the decision of the steering group into writing and submits drafts of the revised chapters to the steering group as basis for discussions. ENQA performs the secretarial function for the Steering Group meetings.

3) Current state of development and next steps

After a series of meetings the Steering Group, on 16 October 2013 agreed on a draft to be submitted to BFUG. In addition to the report of the mapESG project and additional

submissions by the stakeholders the results of an open consultation process which also addressed the ministries of the Bologna countries were taken into account.

It's worth noting that in general the collaboration of the seven organisations has been very constructive. So far all discussion led to a consensus. Hence the draft initial proposal submitted to the BFUG at present is based on a broad and sound consensus of all relevant stakeholders.

The Steering Group submits the draft initial proposal for revised ESG to the BFUG at its meeting on 7-8th November 2013. The purpose is to gather oral feedback during the thematic session and to receive directions for the next steps. In addition written feedback is welcome till 15th December at the latest. Starting from January 2014 the Steering Group will analyse the feedback and finalize the initial proposal for revised ESG to be submitted to the BFUG at its meeting on 7-8th April 2014.

4) Guiding Principles

Following the Bucharest Communiqué the collaborating organisations took the results from the mapESG report published in 2011 as starting point:

“Purpose and Scope: it was generally concluded that it is essential to maintain the concept of the generic principle in order to ensure the continuing relevance of the ESG to all relevant stakeholders in the EHEA and to maintain their authority as the common reference point for QA in the EHEA. A tension regarding the purpose of the ESG was raised: that of their role as a reference document as opposed to that of a compliance tool. The current scope is deemed to be generally appropriate but there is encouragement to reflect on the extent to which a revised ESG document should link to specific Bologna commitments and reflect overarching principles agreed among the Bologna signatories.

Clarity and Usability: it is clear that the document could be improved by some further work to increase clarity of terminology and to ensure the removal of ambiguity both in terms of language used and also with regard to standards and guidelines themselves to ensure that they are as clear as possible.”

In addition the following considerations guided the drafting of the revised ESG:

Scope: In accordance with the mandate by the ministers the scope of the ESG was also considered in the revision.

Adaptability to future developments: The revised version of the ESG is meant to be valid for the next generation of users and thus need to be forward-looking.

ESG in the context of the whole 'Bologna-Infrastructure': The ESG refer to standards for quality assurance rather than to academic standards. Academic standards are dealt with partly by tools such as QF-EHEA, Learning Outcomes, ECTS, Diploma Supplement etc. Hence, it is the application of the ESG in conjunction with these tools that guarantees and enhances the quality of HEIs and their programmes.

Standards and Guidelines: Standards describe agreed good practice. Guidelines explain why a standard is important. They further elaborate the standards and illustrate what it means to comply with a standard, accepting the fact that the presented examples are not the only possible way. While the ESG should not become a “how to do” book, they can provide some indications and guidance on possible implementation of the standards in the guidelines.

Legal and political framework of quality assurance: Stakeholders expect that ministries take responsibility for the creation of an adequate framework in which ESG can be implemented and that is compatible with the ESG.

5) Structure of revised ESG

The overall structure of the ESG remains the same:

- Context, scope, purposes and principles
- Part I: Internal quality assurance
- Part II: external quality assurance
- Part III: quality assurance agencies

In order to avoid existing overlaps between the parts II and III the steering group moved some standards from the one to the other part because in both chapters subject matters were a mixture of standards referring to external QA processes and standards referring to agencies' policies. Also the order of the standards within the three parts sometimes had to be reorganised, for reasons of clarity and consistency.

The structure of standards and accompanying guidelines remains. However a clearer distinction between both is made in so far as some contents which are currently placed in a guideline is moved to the standard and vice versa. This is to clarify that the guidelines explain why the standard is relevant and explain the rationale behind the standard rather than introduce additional content.

6) Content of revised ESG

In general:

Based on the outcomes of the mapESG project and following the mandate by the ministers the main purpose of the revision of the ESG is "to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope."

However, contextualizing ESG in the year 2013 and beyond means taking into account the role of other 'Bologna-Tools' such as qualifications frameworks (in combination with learning outcomes), recognition, Diploma Supplement and ECTS. Another major addition was introduced by highlighting the concept of student centred learning. Therefore part one was reorganized in order to capture better the whole learning process.

Generally speaking, in order to improve clarity editorial changes were needed being more significant than perhaps originally expected. In particular minimizing overlaps, reorganizing the order of standards according to better understandable logic, moving standards from one part to another led to a document that looks quite different from the first version of the ESG.