

**13TH ENQA TRAINING OF AGENCY
REVIEWERS**

USE OF THE ESG FOR THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

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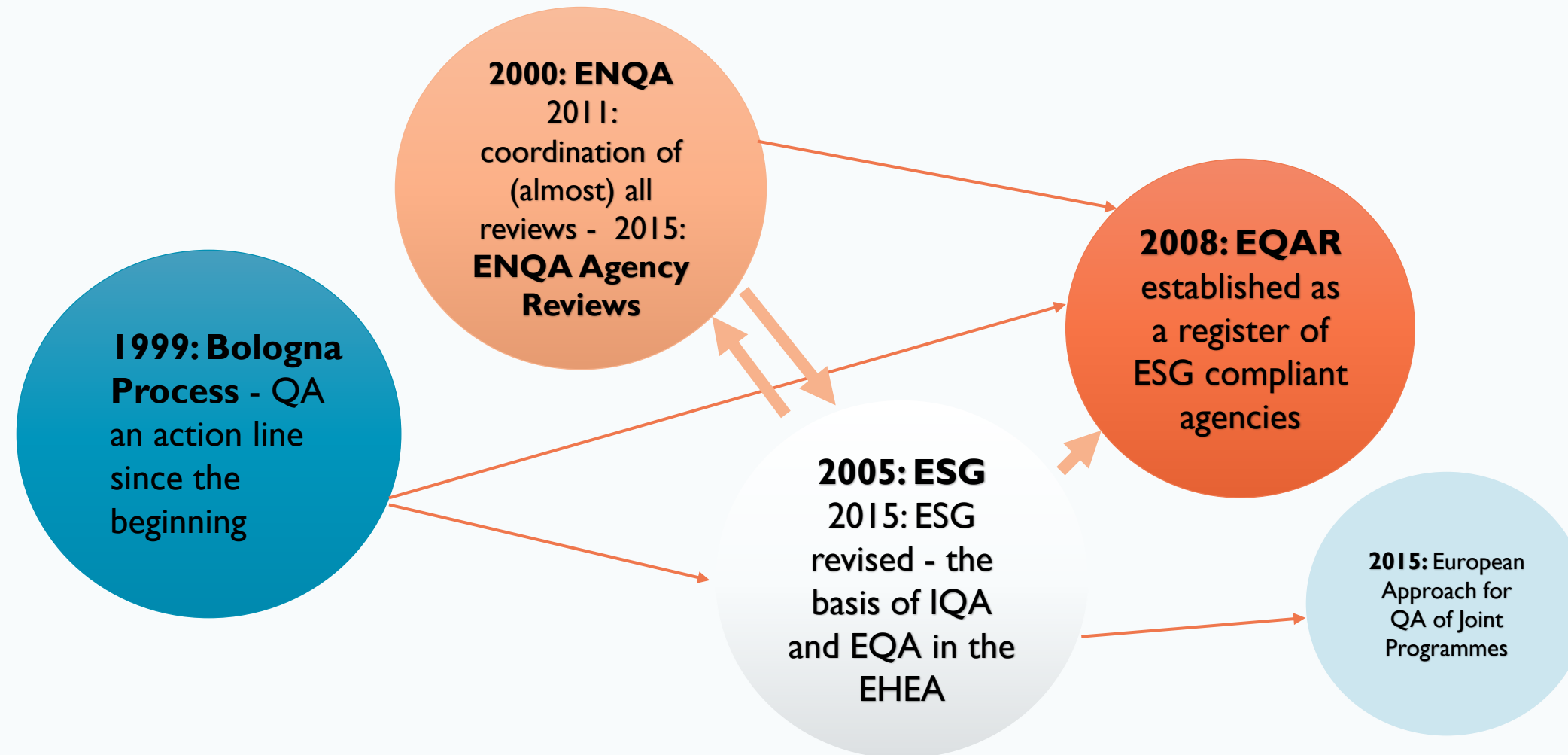
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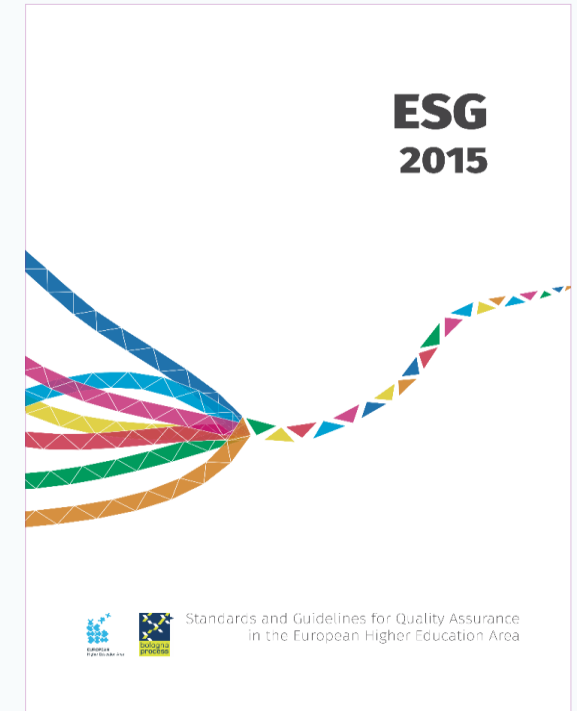
enqa.

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK



THE ESG

- Written by the stakeholders, adopted by the ministers (2015)
- Composed of three parts:
 - Part 1 - Internal QA within HEIs
 - Part 2 - External QA by QAAs
 - Part 3 - Internal QA and operation of QAAs
- ESG are a document that needs to be read as a whole:
 - introductory part is of central importance!
 - parts 1, 2 and 3 build on each other
- Four main purposes:
 - Set a common framework for QA in Europe
 - Enable assurance and improvement of quality
 - Support mutual trust
 - Provide info on QA



WHAT ARE THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES?

- **Generic principles** → allow for diversity of implementation; need to be “translated” into different context without losing their meaning
- **Standards** “set out agreed and accepted practice... and should be taken account of and adhered to by those concerned”
- **Guidelines**
 - “explain why the standard is important”
 - “describe how standards *might* be implemented”.
 - “set out good practice ... (but).. Implementation *will* vary depending on different contexts”
 - If do things in another (good) way, OK → explain “why?”

HOW TO USE THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES?

- The big challenge of the ESG and for the reviewers: **not a checklist!**
- **Interpretation** by programmes, HEIs, agencies, ENQA, EQAR... (leave your package home: no one way to do it!)



ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Standards of Part I may be addressed in different ways, not necessarily to the same extent in various procedures that Agencies implement – depending on the type and aims of external QA activity (programme vs. institutional review)
- Agencies are expected to map coverage of ESG Part I in **every type of external QA that is subject to review under the Terms of Reference.**

ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

- If some procedures deviate from the usual model there has to be explanation and justification provided (e.g. if the site visits is not a part of the process)
- There could be various approaches to follow-up, agency decides in light of its mission and as appropriate in its context. BUT the next review should not be interpreted as follow-up!
- Processes should be useful (identification of main stakeholders and their views on the usefulness)
- Good practice: recommendations, methodologies that support follow-up; special events.
- Linked to 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6...

ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

- At least one student member in any panel for EQA
- Role of students: How does an agency demonstrate that students are equal members of the panel? Do they participate in decision making?
- How wide is the range of experts? Who are/should be in panels depending on the nature of the process? What about international experts? (guideline – but a “strong” one)
- Is it clear, what the expert selection criteria and methods are for each QA activity?
- How is no-conflict-of-interest guaranteed?
- Also: opinions of stakeholders and experts themselves (training etc.)

ESG 2.6 REPORTING

- To consider:
 - Summary reports not enough – need to publish full (expert) reports.
 - Full reports published also for CBQA activities if within the scope of the ESG.
 - What measures/internal procedures has the agency in place to ensure the reports are clear (“reader friendly”) and accessible? (see also ESG 3.6)
 - How is the quality and consistency of the content ensured (e.g. by training, guidance, report templates)?
 - Who are the reports for? How does the agency know if they are useful and usable for those primary target groups? Who else reads them?
 - Good practice: summary reports (to better serve the needs of different target groups)

ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

- To consider:
 - Possibility to appeal any formal decision – agency must have a predefined process for that.
 - Possibility to complain – to raise any issues of concern e.g. to state dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process. Also a predefined process.
 - Even if the procedure leads to recommendations and no decisions, there should be a possibility to contest the outcomes and procedures such as conduct of people involved e.g. experts, staff of the Agency etc.
 - Going to the court should not be the only option! (Internal, lower threshold processes needed too)



ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

- To consider:
 - There should be a clear link between agency's mission, strategy and annual work plans (strategy should translate into the daily work of the agency).
 - Stakeholder involvement in the governance and work
 - QA activities “as defined in Part 2” → increasing complexity!

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

- To consider:
 - **Organisational**, **operational** and **independence of outcomes**
 - It is not enough to present official documents and general information:
 - an in depth analysis demonstrating operational independence, especially if agency's independence is not obvious from its structures and status.
 - consider in greater detail how operational independence is safeguarded in practice = de facto independence
 - ... but also safeguarded on paper
 - Cross-check: perceptions from the stakeholders
- Remember: not only from ministries, but also from HEIs and other stakeholders!
- If the agency has other activities than external QA (e.g. seminars, consultancy), adequate policies and processes should be in place to safeguard independence.

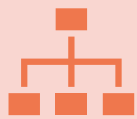
ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

- To consider:
 - Thematic reports should present the general findings of EQA activities and not any other kind of information about the agency or its performance
 - factual and descriptive annual reports do not qualify as thematic reports!
 - The regularity of the reports can depend on the scope of the agency's activities, but the agency should **have a clear plan for when and how to carry out these analyses**, e.g. at the end of each review cycle; after each cluster of evaluations; selecting thematic topics (how?) every 3-4-5 years, etc. → ideally not only ad hoc projects!
 - How are the topics selected? Who reads them? Are they useful for the sector?

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

- To consider:
 - Agencies should demonstrate a **good balance between their financial and human resources and the volume and type of their activity.**
 - Agencies should have adequate and appropriate **resources to carry out all activities connected to their mission** including:
 - to improve continuously (e.g. investment in staff development, IQA)
 - to carry out information activities (adequate website, info materials, events)
 - to carry out thematic analysis
- “do not have time”, or “do not have the right people” are **not good excuses** for not doing thematic analysis, info activities, follow-up, training of experts, etc.

ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT



Internal quality processes and organisational culture, in particular integrity of their activities, are paramount to the Agencies who evaluate quality of others.



The processes for internal quality assurance need to be **formal and regular**, and not just informal.



IQA policy

ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

- Mandatory by legislation or voluntary?
- An external review is important as an accountability measure, but it also represents an opportunity for the Agency to think and evaluate its own work.
- How does the agency use the external review process to improve and develop?

TRIANGULATION

- Analysis of SAR and documentation
- Oral evidences (agency staff and stakeholders)
- Forming experts' own opinion, discussing and taking judgment



fair-minded

truthful
fair-minded
even-handed
neutral

nonpartisan

impartial

equitable

fair

truthful
unprejudiced

unbiased

just

neutral

equitable

just

balanced

honest

neutral

probing

inquiring

fair

neutral

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detached

objective

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open-minded