

WORKSHOP REPORT

1st SEQA-ESG peer-learning workshop Alignment of processes and methods to the ESG Online workshop, 18-19 October 2021

The first peer-learning workshop focused on the **alignment of processes and methods to ESG**. It gathered representatives from all the participating project partners and featured renowned experts from ENQA and ESG-compliant quality assurance systems. The programme mainly tackled ESG 2.2 “Designing methodologies fit for purpose” and ESG 2.3 “Implementing processes”.

Day I

The workshop started with an explanation of the **meaning and importance of ESG 2.2**. Participants were reminded that there is no single way of developing external quality assurance (EQA) activities. In this regard, the ESG aim to accommodate the diversity across different agencies of the European Higher Education Area.

This explanation was followed by a practical session in which participants were asked to share their **understanding and comments on ESG 2.2**. The main outcomes of this exercise were:

- **Stakeholders** should be involved throughout: at the beginning (as co-designers to set up expectations), in the revision of methodologies and at the end (as end-users). If stakeholders are involved from the beginning, the proposed methodologies might have a greater acceptance and reduce the risk of issues arising later (for example, complaints and appeals).
- EQA should be **forward-looking** and have an impact on the higher education sector – developmental angle (fitness of purpose)
- EQA should be **continuously improving** to be adapted to the current needs (e.g., national context) – fitness-for-purpose. In this regard, for the procedures to be fit-for-purpose, they need to be clearly described and understandable to everyone involved
- **Legislative support** to making the methodologies fit for purpose is crucial (adoption of procedures should respect the agency’s design of methodologies as they work closely on this with stakeholders)
- **Consistency** of approaches to ensure confidence (transparency, objectiveness)
- Avoid the waste of resources and set up **efficient procedures**. For example, clusters of accreditations (or other types of EQA) and balancing the work of agencies (e.g., checking the criteria that overlap to save resources)



Figure 1: Ideas and comments raised by participants about ESG 2.2

After this first practical session, participants were divided into groups to discuss their **main challenges in complying with standard 2.2**. Some of the challenges raised by the participants were:

- The number of accreditation processes and the **burden** they represented not only to the agency but also to higher education institutions.
- The **legal framework** for designing and adopting QA methodologies. One participant pointed out that their agency had not been consulted during changes to the methodology. Another pointed out that the overregulation of external quality limited the capacity of the agency to design its procedures and methodologies.

Day 2

The second day started with an explanation of the **meaning of ESG 2.3**. One of the highlighted topics was the follow-up. Participants were told that there could be various approaches to follow-up. The agencies can decide according to their mission and context. However, the following review should not be considered a follow-up of the previous one. Another topic that was discussed was the four steps and whether deviations from this structure were possible. The participants were reminded that if some procedures deviate from the usual model, there should be an explanation for such deviation.

This presentation was followed by a practical session in which participants were asked to share their **understanding and comments on ESG 2.3**. The main outcomes of this exercise were:

- Relevance of **self-assessment**: it is the most important part of the process as HEIs have primary responsibility for their development. However, the so-called window dressing should be minimized. For that aim, one of the key aspects is the training of peer reviewers to know what parts of the standards are the most relevant, and what documents should be requested. Another significant point is the involvement of stakeholders in the design of methodologies.
- Importance of **consistency in the implementation of EQA**: agencies should make sure that there is a person, e.g., a coordinator, that can support panels in how standards should be considered or provide a document that further defines the expectations for every standard.
- Relevance of **reporting**: not only for the evaluated higher education institution (HEI) but for everyone involved in higher education (e.g., key information for students)
- The role of **follow-up**: it supports the continuous nature of QA (the process does not stop after reporting). It is also a strong tool for continuous improvement as it leads to a deeper sense of responsibility (HEIs should accept their commitment to continuous development).



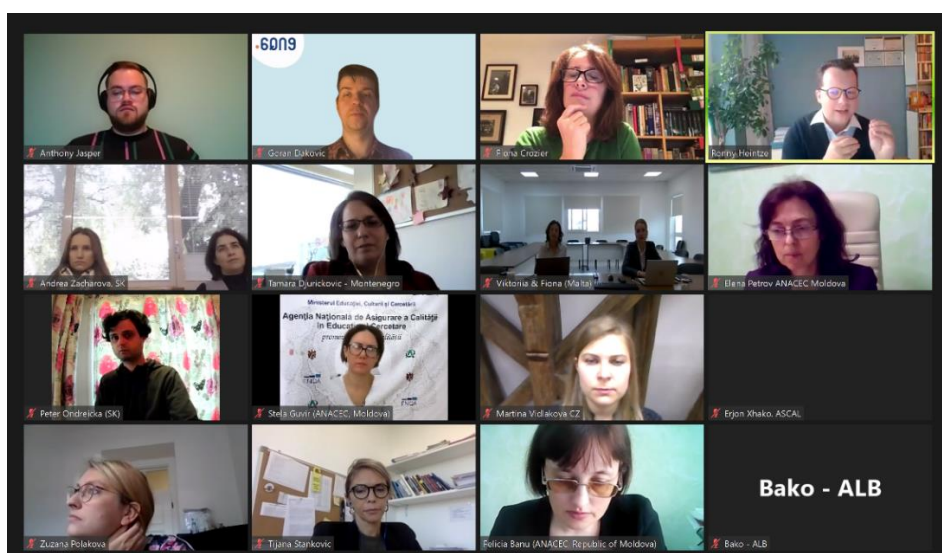
Figure 2: Ideas and comments raised by participants about ESG 2.3

After this first practical session, participants were divided into groups to discuss their **main challenges in complying with standard 2.3**. Some of the challenges raised by the participants were:

- The **follow-up procedures**. Participants pointed out that the follow-up sometimes lacked consistency and was not always clear if they contributed to the development of the higher education institution.
- **Legal restrictions** on the publication of the reports. In addition, some participants pointed out that higher education institutions are sometimes worried about the content of these reports.
- **Unfeasible schedules** set in the legislation that results in delays and excessive workload for the agencies.

To end the workshop, participants from each of the project-participating countries were asked to highlight **one takeaway** from it. The answers provided were:

- **Montenegro**: nature of follow-up to QA activities will differ depending on different outcomes of accreditation; to what extent experts are involved in follow-up will depend on the amount of resources available to the agency and the impact the agency wishes to achieve
- **Albania**: stronger involvement of stakeholders (with different approaches); accreditation in clusters of academic fields to be implemented
- **Slovakia**: regularity of meetings with stakeholders (with different approaches) at the level of HEIs
- **Czech Republic**: reporting (in relation to acceptance of EQA)
- **Moldova**: consistency to the follow-up procedures (rules on when a particular follow-up approach applies to the HEI)
- **Malta**: a different approach to follow-up (currently is paper-based analysis) and cluster approach to programme accreditations



Print screen of participants

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Annexes

- Annex 1: Agenda of the workshop
- Annex 2: List of participants

Annex I: Agenda of the workshop

SEQA-ESG THEMATIC PEER LEARNING WORKSHOP I: ALIGNMENT OF PROCESSES AND METHODS TO THE ESG

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82415465120?pwd=aklwQm5LdFdrVmFpN3N3dG9TRlRk4UT09>

Meeting ID: 824 1546 5120

Passcode: 812882

Day I: 18th October 2021, Focus on ESG 2.2: Designing methodologies fit for purpose 09.00-13.00

- 09.00 Introductions and icebreaker activity
Ronny Heintze and Fiona Crozier
- 09.15 Opening session: aims and objectives and format of the workshop
Goran Dakovic
- 09.30 Focus on ESG 2.2
Ronny Heintze

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.

Purpose of the session:

This session aims to help us all think carefully about **what** standard 2.2 means and **why** it is important. In particular, we will focus on the three phrases highlighted in yellow to get your ideas on what these mean for you in your context. Don't forget, there is no single way of doing things; the ESG embrace diversity across the different agencies. In this exercise, we are focusing on **why** the principle of the standard is important rather than **how** we might align with it.

How the session will work:

We will use an online 'whiteboard' to brainstorm and capture your ideas and comments. We'll use these to open up discussion about how the standard allows for different ways of ensuring alignment. This is a full group session.

- 10.15 **Break**
- 10.30 Building on the principles behind 2.2: how do we demonstrate alignment with the standard?
Fiona Crozier

Purpose of the session:

The session aims to help participating agencies share the challenges that they have in aligning with ESG 2.2. In sharing these with other agencies, there should be reciprocal learning from one another and a variety of ways of meeting the standard will be shared. An external perspective on what we do can provide a useful stimulus for reconsidering

our own processes and mechanisms. The aim is to reinforce the idea that there are diverse ways of overcoming the challenge.

How the session will work:

You have been asked to send the facilitators, in advance of the workshop, one main challenge for your agency in meeting standard 2.2. You will break out into peer groups with one other agency and will take turns to discuss your challenges. (15 minutes for one agency, then switch for 15 minutes to discuss the other agency's challenge). The aim is to share your experiences and learn from one another. Try to remember the discussion in the first session and work together to offer solutions to each other's challenges.

We will use online breakout rooms. After 30 minutes, you will move to another breakout room and repeat the exercise with a different peer agency.

11.30 **Break**

11.50 Group discussion
Ronny Heintze and Fiona Crozier

Moderated discussion around peer-to-peer discussions. Reference to any examples from previous ENQA reviews that may be helpful.

Each participant (or agency participant) is to agree and feed back one key action to take away in relation to 2.2.

12.45 Final questions and close
Goran Dakovic

**Day 2: 19th October 2021: Focus on ESG 2.3: Implementing processes
09.00-13.00**

09.15 Brief recap on day one: questions/observations etc.
Goran Dakovic

09.30 Focus on ESG 2.3
Ronny Heintze

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.

This session aims to help us all think carefully about **what** standard 2.3 means and **why** it is important. In particular, we will focus on the three phrases highlighted in yellow to get your ideas on what these mean for you in your context. Don't forget, there is no single way of doing things; the ESG embrace diversity across the different agencies. In this exercise, we are focusing on **why** the principle of the standard is important rather than **how** we might align with it.

How the session will work:

We will use an online 'whiteboard' to brainstorm and capture your ideas and comments.

We'll use these to open up discussion about how the standard allows for different ways of ensuring alignment. This is a full group session.

10.15 **Break**

10.30 Building on the principles behind 2.3: how do we demonstrate alignment with the standard?

Fiona Crozier

Purpose of the session:

The session aims to help participating agencies share the challenges that they have in aligning with ESG 2.3. In sharing these with other agencies, there should be reciprocal learning from one another and a variety of ways of meeting the standard will be shared. An external perspective on what we do can provide a useful stimulus for reconsidering our own processes and mechanisms. The aim is to reinforce the idea that there are diverse ways of overcoming the challenge.

How the session will work:

You have been asked to send the facilitators, in advance of the workshop, one main challenge for your agency in meeting standard 2.3. You will break out into peer groups with one other agency and will take turns to discuss your challenges. (15 minutes for one agency, then switch for 15 minutes to discuss the other agency's challenge). The aim is to share your experiences and learn from one another. Try to remember the discussion in the first session and work together to offer solutions to each other's challenges.

We will use online breakout rooms. After 30 minutes, you will move to another breakout room and repeat the exercise with a different peer agency.

11.30 **Break**

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Ronny Heintze and Fiona Crozier

Moderated discussion around the peer-to-peer discussions. Reference to any examples from previous ENQA reviews that may be helpful.

Each participant (or agency participants) is to agree and feed back one key action to take away in relation to 2.3.

12.45 Final questions and close

Goran Dakovic

Annex 2: List of participants

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS 1st workshop 18-19 October 2021

Name and surname	Organisation
Renata Qatipi	ASCAL (Albania)
Erjon Xhako	ASCAL (Albania)
Dhimiter Bako	MESY (Albania)
Martina Vidlakova	MSMT/NAB (Czech Republic)
Jana Pistorova	MSMT/NAB (Czech Republic)
Dusan Hrstka	MSMT (Czech Republic)
Zuzana Polakova	MSMT (Czech Republic)
Viktorii Maltseva	MFHEA (Malta)
Fiona Mccowan	MFHEA (Malta)
Stela Guvir	ANACEC (Moldova)
Elena Petrova	ANACEC (Moldova)
Felicia Banu	ANACEC (Moldova)
Tijana Stankovic	ACQAHE (Montenegro)
Tamara Djurickovic	ACQAHE (Montenegro)
Milica Kavedzic	ACQAHE (Montenegro)
Ana Rutovic	ACQAHE (Montenegro)
Neda Ojdanic	MPS (Montenegro)
Kristina Ljulidjuraj	MPS (Montenegro)
Andrea Zacharova	SAAHE (Slovakia)
Peter Ondreička	MSVVaS (Slovakia)
Goran Dakovic	ENQA
Anthony Jasper	ENQA
Fiona Crozier	External expert
Ronny Heintze	External expert