

## WORKSHOP REPORT

### 2<sup>nd</sup> SEQA-ESG peer-learning workshop National Criteria and the ESG

Online workshop, 29-30 November 2021

The second peer-learning workshop themed around “**National Criteria and the ESG**” gathered participants from all project countries and featured several renowned experts from ENQA and ESG-compliant quality assurance systems. The programme mainly tackled ESG 2.1 and Part I of the ESG that ESG 2.1 refers to.

It was stressed at the start of the workshop that it is important to **address all the aspects of ESG 2.1** (thus all standards of Part I of the ESG) when implementing this standard by an agency. While recognizing the primary responsibility of higher education institutions (HEIs) for their quality, external quality assurance (QA) must verify that this is the case and must **support this responsibility of HEIs**. A broad discussion should be initiated with all stakeholders to drive the development of a quality culture.

An issue of interest that resonated throughout the workshop was how to **assess the effectiveness of internal quality assurance processes** at higher education institutions in external QA processes. At the same time, there is hardly a one-size-fits-all approach; rather, each national context and each system will have its own ways of tackling this challenge. The general consensus was, however, that **site visits as part of external QA are absolutely crucial** for verifying the situation on the ground and the functioning of internal quality assurance processes at HEIs.

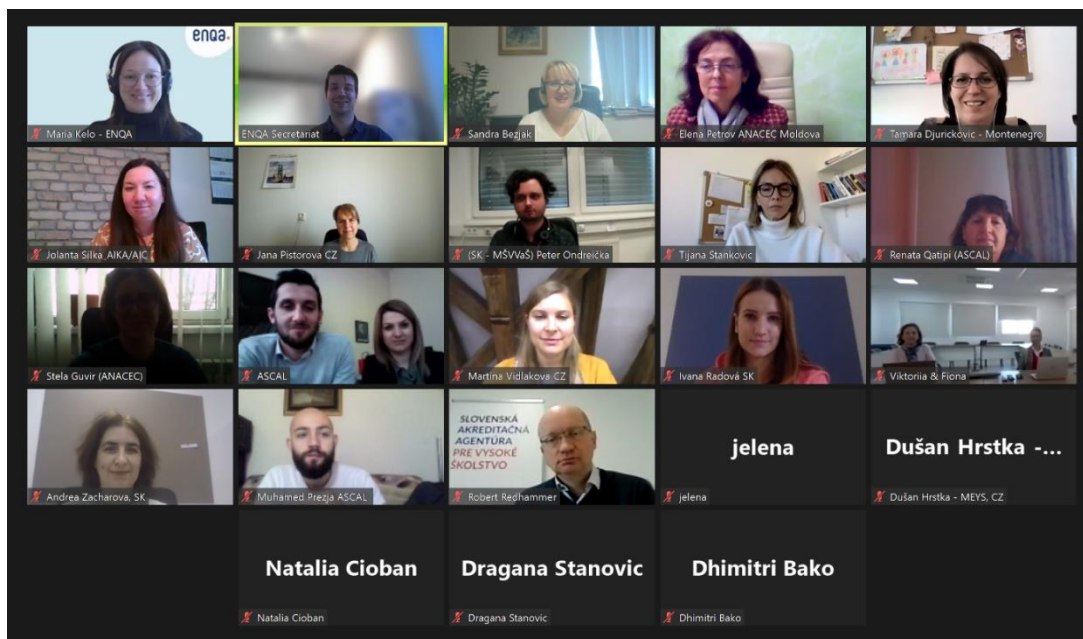
An approach of using **indicators in external QA** was introduced to the participants. A combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators as well as identifying key performance indicators is deemed very useful in some contexts.

In relation to **Part I of the ESG**, standards 1.1, 1.3 and 1.4 are considered most problematic during ENQA agency reviews. Standard 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment came out as the most complex to address by the QA agencies under review. The importance should not be put on practice in place for supporting student-centred learning, but rather on the **effectiveness of the internal quality assurance** on this at HEIs. Communication with all types of stakeholders at all stages of this process is crucial. Quality assurance agencies should give **more support to the HEIs to further build student-centred learning**. All in all, participants of the workshop noted that the external QA of Part I of the ESG is challenging because of the variability in levels of reporting on standards. Another issue is how to assess the effectiveness of the system and how to check what is going on at the HEIs between the external reviews. Participants pointed out the sampling of study programs as one of the methods used to approach standards related to Part I of the ESG in the most effective and efficient manner. Finally, one should note that every country and QA system has its own way of demonstrating the effectiveness of the processes in higher education even when participants agreed that they face similar challenges.

At the end of the workshop, the host agencies from the Czech Republic and Slovakia presented their **challenges related to the application of ESG 2.1 and Part I**. In the Czech case, the issue of evaluating the **effectiveness of processes** resonated strongly, especially in the context of having introduced institutional accreditation to the system 5 years ago. In addition, **standard 1.3 is not as well covered** in the national standards as the other standards of Part I of the ESG. The focus in the

future will be on fully covering all standards of Part I and on enforcing a multilateral dialogue with stakeholders.

In the case of Slovakia, the country is finalising the first round of accreditations of new study programmes, in accordance with the ESG. The first outcomes as reported by the agency are: provide **more detailed interpretations** of the standards and methodology to the HEIs and work more specifically during the **training** of different groups of experts. Next, the most problematic standards for HEIs seem to be national standards related to the ESG 1.2, 1.3 and 1.5. By the end of 2022, all HEIs in Slovakia must apply for institutional accreditation, for which, in the eyes of the agency, the greatest challenge will be the change of **shifting the responsibility** for quality assurance from the agency to the individual institutions (including for standards related to Part I of the ESG).



**Print screen of participants**

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## Annexes

- Annex 1: Agenda of the workshop
- Annex 2: List of participants
- Annex 3: Standards and guidelines from Part I of the ESG



## Annex I: Agenda of the workshop

### 2nd SEQA-ESG peer-learning workshop NATIONAL CRITERIA AND THE ESG Online, 29 and 30 November 2021

**Project:** Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG (SEQA-ESG)

**Call:** EPLUS-2019-09-EHEA - Initiatives to support the implementation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) reforms

**Venue:**

Zoom (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83069198759>)

**Outline of the workshop:**

This workshop will address the alignment of national criteria for (external) quality assurance/accreditation with the ESG. In particular, the standard 2.1, and through it the elements of Part I of the ESG will be discussed and addressed. Specific problematic standards from Part I, based on feedback from the partners, will be addressed. Experiences from ESG compliant agencies who have recently aligned their criteria to the ESG will be shared.

**Programme:**

**Day I - Monday, 29 November 2021**

*From 13.45 on Participants enter the meeting room*

- 14.00-14.05 **Welcome**  
Maria Kelo, ENQA Director
- 14.05-14.15 **SEQA-ESG project timeline – where do we stand?**  
Goran Dakovic, ENQA Reviews Manager
- 14.15-14.30 **Aims and objectives of the workshop**  
Goran Dakovic, ENQA Reviews Manager
- 14.30-15.15 **ESG and consideration of internal quality assurance**  
Maria Kelo, ENQA Director

The presentation will cover the requirements of the ESG when considering internal quality assurance at HEIs (ESG 2.1). To complement the presentation, some of the key challenges on this standard as observed through ENQA Agency Reviews will be introduced. The presentation will conclude with a reflection on how external QA can support the internal QA mechanisms of HEIs through the agency's compliance with the ESG.

Altogether, the 30 min. The presentation will be followed by Q&A (15 min.).

- 15.15-16.00 **Understanding ESG 2.1 through the national context**  
Presentation by Jolanta Silka, Head, AIC, Latvia

The presenter will use 20 minutes to introduce how the national QA agency in

Latvia manages the national context and its related challenges when supporting the internal QA of HEIs. The presentation thus aims to answer the question what are national-level challenges that are addressed through the agency's external QA activities, and how these activities of the agency help HEIs to further enhance.

The presentation will then touch upon challenges as sent by project partners prior to the workshop (10 min. to summarise the participants' challenges on ESG 2.1), and open the floor to reflect on possible solutions through the discussion (15 min.).

16.00-16.15 *Short break*

16.15-17.00 **Challenges in reaching compliance with ESG 2.1 – examples from the hosts (Czech Republic and Slovakia)**

Michal Zima, Board Member of NAB, Czech Republic

Andrea Zacharová, Head of Accreditation Department, Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, Slovakia

Ivana Radová, Accreditation Administrator, Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, Slovakia

Two participating countries that host the workshop present their challenges in reaching compliance with ESG 2.1 in 15 min. (each), followed by a discussion (15 min.)

## Day 2 - Tuesday, 30 November 2021

*From 8.45 on Participants enter the meeting room*

9.00-9.45 **Linking the internal and external QA in practice – example of Croatia**

Sandra Bezjak, Assistant Director for HE, ASHE, Croatia

The presentation will elaborate on how ASHE covers Part I of the ESG through their external quality assurance activities, including providing a description of the related key performance indicators.

Following the presentation of 30 min., participants of the workshop will be invited to ask questions and discuss the provided example (15 min.)

9.45-10.45 **World cafe – addressing key aspects of Part I of the ESG through ESG 2.1**

Participants will engage in a brainstorming session on the key challenges when addressing the effectiveness of internal QA at HEIs. These key challenges are: policies for QA at HEIs; student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; and student admission, progression, recognition and certification. For this purpose, four different breakout sessions will be arranged in Zoom (the three of them will cover the listed topics and the fourth one will collect other agencies' challenges related to ESG 2.1).

To implement the session, participants will be split into four breakout groups consisting of six people. Each group will be moderated by four different moderators, each moderator engaging the group in a discussion for 15 minutes. In one hour, the group will therefore engage in a discussion on four different topics as moderated by four different moderators. After the time of 15 minutes is up, the

moderators will exit their first breakout room and be assigned to the next room by the system. The moderators should discuss the topics as listed below and have a task to collect key challenges and notes from the groups' discussion:

Policies for QA at HEIs

Moderator: Jolanta Silka, Head, AIC, Latvia

Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Moderator: Sandra Bezjak, Assistant Director for HE, ASHE, Croatia

Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Moderator: Maria Kelo, Director, ENQA

Other challenges related to ESG 2.1

Moderator: Goran Dakovic, Reviews Manager, ENQA

10.45-11.00 *Short break*

11.00-11.40 **Reporting from the world cafe stations with discussion**

Four moderators (see the previous session)

Each of the four moderators reports from their working station (5 minutes, followed by a discussion of 5 minutes).

11.40-12.00 **Administration of project finances**

Goran Dakovic, Reviews Manager, ENQA

12.00-12.30 **Wrap-up and information on upcoming activities**

Goran Dakovic, Reviews Manager, ENQA

12.30 *End of workshop*

## Annex 2: List of participants

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop 29-30 November 2021

Name and surname	Organisation
Renata Qatipi	ASCAL (Albania)
Muhamed Prezja	ASCAL (Albania)
Dhimiter Bako	MESY (Albania)
Martina Vidlakova	MSMT/NAB (Czech Republic)
Jiri Smrcka	MSMT/NAB (Czech Republic)
Jana Pistorova	MSMT/NAB (Czech Republic)
Dusan Hrstka	MSMT (Czech Republic)
Simon Stiburek	MSMT (Czech Republic)
Radek Spricar	NAB (Czech Republic)
Michal Zima	NAB (Czech Republic)
Viktoriia Maltseva	MFHEA (Malta)
Fiona Mccowan	MFHEA (Malta)
Lilia Parhomenco	MECC (Moldova)
Andrei Chiciuc	ANACEC (Moldova)
Sergiu Baciuc	ANACEC (Moldova)
Stela Guvir	ANACEC (Moldova)
Elena Petrova	ANACEC (Moldova)
Felicia Banu	ANACEC (Moldova)
Tijana Stankovic	ACQAHE (Montenegro)
Tamara Djurickovic	ACQAHE (Montenegro)
Jelena Đukanović	ACQAHE (Montenegro)
Kristina Ljuljdjuraj	MPS (Montenegro)
Ivana Radova	SAAHE (Slovakia)
Robert Redhammer	SAAHE (Slovakia)
Andrea Zacharova	SAAHE (Slovakia)
Peter Ondreička	MSVVaS (Slovakia)
Goran Dakovic	ENQA
Douglas Blackstock	ENQA
Maria Kelo	ENQA
Jolanta Silka	External expert
Sandra Bezjak	External expert

## **Annex 3: Standards and guidelines from Part I of the ESG**

### **1.1 Policy for quality assurance**

#### **STANDARD**

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.

#### **GUIDELINES**

Policies and processes are the main pillars of a coherent institutional quality assurance system that forms a cycle for continuous improvement and contributes to the accountability of the institution. It supports the development of quality culture in which all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the institution. In order to facilitate this, the policy has a formal status and is publicly available.

Quality assurance policies are most effective when they reflect the relationship between research and learning & teaching and take account of both the national context in which the institution operates, the institutional context and its strategic approach. Such a policy supports

- the organisation of the quality assurance system;
- departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units as well as those of institutional leadership, individual staff members and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance;
- academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud;
- guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff;
- the involvement of external stakeholders in quality assurance.

The policy translates into practice through a variety of internal quality assurance processes that allow participation across the institution. How the policy is implemented, monitored and revised is the institution's decision.

The quality assurance policy also covers any elements of an institution's activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties.

### **1.2 Design and approval of programmes**

#### **STANDARD**

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.

#### **GUIDELINES**

Study programmes are at the core of the higher education institutions' teaching mission. They provide students with both academic knowledge and skills including those that are transferable, which may influence their personal development and may be applied in their future careers.

Programmes

- are designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes;
- are designed by involving students and other stakeholders in the work;



- benefit from external expertise and reference points;
- reflect the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (cf. Scope and Concepts);
- are designed so that they enable smooth student progression; - define the expected student workload, e.g. in ECTS;
- include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate;
- are subject to a formal institutional approval process.

### **1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment**

#### **STANDARD**

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.

#### **GUIDELINES**

Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. This means careful consideration of the design and delivery of study programmes and the assessment of outcomes.

The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching

- respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths;
- considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate;
- flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods;
- regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods;
- encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher;
- promotes mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship;
- has appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.

Considering the importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers, quality assurance processes for assessment take into account the following:

- Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field;
- The criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance; - The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process;
- Where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;
- The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;
- Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;
- A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.

### **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.

## **1.5 Teaching staff**

### **STANDARD**

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

### **GUIDELINES**

The teacher's role is essential in creating a high quality student experience and enabling the acquisition of knowledge, competences and skills. The diversifying student population and stronger focus on learning outcomes require student-centred learning and teaching and the role of the teacher is, therefore, also changing (cf. Standard 1.3). Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff and for providing them with a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively. Such an environment

- sets up and follows clear, transparent and fair processes for staff recruitment and conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching;
- offers opportunities for and promotes the professional development of teaching staff;
- encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research;
- encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.

## **1.6 Learning resources and student support**

### **STANDARD**

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

### **GUIDELINES**

For a good higher education experience, institutions provide a range of resources to assist student learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries, study facilities and IT infrastructure to human support in the form of tutors, counsellors and other advisers. The role of support services is of particular importance in facilitating the mobility of students within and across higher education systems.

The needs of a diverse student population (such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities), and the shift towards student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources and student support.

Support activities and facilities may be organised in a variety of ways depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are fit for purpose, accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.

In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.

## **1.7 Information management**

### **STANDARD**

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

### **GUIDELINES**

Guidelines: Reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making and for knowing what is working well and what needs attention. Effective processes to collect and analyse information about study programmes and other activities feed into the internal quality assurance system.

The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the institution. The following are of interest:

- Key performance indicators;
- Profile of the student population;
- Student progression, success and drop-out rates;
- Students' satisfaction with their programmes;
- Learning resources and student support available;
- Career paths of graduates.

Various methods of collecting information may be used. It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities

## **1.8 Public information**

### **STANDARD**

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

### **GUIDELINES**

Information on institutions' activities is useful for prospective and current students as well as for graduates, other stakeholders and the public.

Therefore, institutions provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer and the selection criteria for them, the intended learning outcomes of these programmes, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students as well as graduate employment information.

## **1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes**

### **STANDARD**

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.

### **GUIDELINES**

Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programmes aim to ensure that the provision remains appropriate and to create a supportive and effective learning environment for students.

They include the evaluation of:

- The content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline thus ensuring that the programme is up to date;
- The changing needs of society;
- The students' workload, progression and completion;
- The effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students;
- The student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme;
- The learning environment and support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme.

Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised programme specifications are published.

## **1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance**

### **STANDARD**

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

### **GUIDELINES**

External quality assurance in its various forms can verify the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance, act as a catalyst for improvement and offer the institution new perspectives. It will also provide information to assure the institution and the public of the quality of the institution's activities.

Institutions participate in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account, where relevant, of the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate. Therefore, depending on the framework, this external quality assurance may take different forms and focus at different organisational levels (such as programme, faculty or institution).

Quality assurance is a continuous process that does not end with the external feedback or report or its follow-up process within the institution. Therefore, institutions ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.