



Monika Schröder,  
Dipl.-Ing.  
Project Leader FIBAA Consult

## The new European Standards and Guidelines<sup>1</sup> (ESG)

**Which modifications result from the revised ESG for higher education institutions, external quality assurance procedures and accreditation agencies?**

A revised version of the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG) was adopted on 14/15 May 2015 in Yerevan (Armenia).

The ESG have had a significant impact on the currently 47 “Bologna States”. FIBAA aligned their national and international procedures to these standards and criteria.

This article describes the modifications made in the revised version of the European Standards and Guidelines and it gives first indications as to the possible consequences of the ESG for the internal quality assurance and quality development of the higher education institutions (HEIs) and their external assessment by means of an accreditation. Although the ESG are intended to provide guidance, they serve as an approved standard for the quality assurance of higher education institutions. Additionally, agencies that are listed with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (eqar)<sup>2</sup> comply with the ESG and conduct their accreditation procedures based on these assessment criteria.

---

<sup>1</sup> Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). (2015). Brussels, Belgium. [https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/bologna/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/bologna/ESG_2015.pdf). Last access: 09/02/2016.

<sup>2</sup> European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education: <https://www.eqar.eu/>. Last access 10/02/2016.

## Overview of the most important changes<sup>3</sup>:

The ESG have not fundamentally changed since 2005; the revised version of 2015, however, is more clearly formulated and some topics are described more detailed to highlight their importance (see below). The ESG consist of three parts for which standards and criteria are phrased: 1. for the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions, 2. for the external quality assurance of the higher education sector and 3. for quality assurance agencies. These three parts are now intrinsically interlinked.

Thematically, the ESG still concentrate on learning and teaching, but they now also include the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation.

Additionally, the new ESG use a broad term for tertiary education which is not limited to study programmes but includes all kinds of higher education offers, even cross-border and online offers. Thus, the field of further education is integrated as well.

## Part 1 of the ESG: Internal Quality Assurance and Development at Higher Education Institutions

In part 1 of the ESG, the requirements for internal quality assurance and quality development at HEIs is described. Many HEIs already take responsibility for their quality development and have adapted the standards of the new ESG. Moreover, the new standards are already assessed in FIBAA's procedures since they are embedded in our criteria for programme and institutional accreditation<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, only the additional and emphasised requirements of the new ESG, in comparison to the existing requirements of the ESG, will be described in the following sections (standard 1 to 10).

### Standard 1. Policy for quality assurance

This standard remains almost unchanged. The modifications are that

- institutions should make public their policy for quality assurance and
- internal stakeholders (including students and staff) should develop and implement the policy for quality assurance through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders (e.g. employers and cooperation partners).

### Standard 2. Design and approval of programmes<sup>5</sup>

This standard has not significantly changed either. It is highlighted that programmes should be designed involving students and other stakeholders in the work and benefit from external expertise and reference points (qualification frame).

### Standard 3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Standard 3 is discussed in detail in the new ESG, a fact that highlights its importance. Student-centred learning and teaching is not a new, but still an approach that is rarely implemented in all its facets. The ESG want students to be encouraged to take an active role in creating their learning process, and that this "dialogic" approach is taken into consideration in feedbacks and examinations. The following guidelines should be implemented:

- The students' diversity is supported by means of flexible learning paths,

---

<sup>3</sup> Comparative table: ESG 2015 vs ESG 2005. EQAR. 2015.

[https://eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/information/Mapping\\_ESG\\_NewVsOld.pdf](https://eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/information/Mapping_ESG_NewVsOld.pdf), last access: 25/11/2015

<sup>4</sup> FIBAA's Quality Standards for Programmes: <http://www.fibaa.org/en/procedures-at-programme-level/prog-according-to-fibaa-quality-standards/guidelines-and-targets.html>

<sup>5</sup> The term "programme" as used in the ESG explicitly includes study offers that do not lead to a formal degree.

- different modes of delivery (presence, transparencies, filmed lectures...) and pedagogical methods (discussion rounds, quizzes, inverted classroom...) are used and regularly evaluated and adjusted,
- Self-study is encouraged and supervised and
- the learner-teacher relationship is based on mutual respect; appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints are in place.

The ESG put special emphasis on examinations. The HEIs' quality assurance is required to take into consideration that students need to receive systematic feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process / on their further studies.

#### **Standard 4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification**

This standard has only changed in that it stresses that HEIs should implement some kind of a monitoring system covering all phases of the student "life cycle": student progressions are to be recorded and monitored in order to take action if necessary.

#### **Standard 5. Teaching staff**

This standard remains almost unchanged, although it mirrors the aforementioned requirements on teaching. HEIs should, by means of their staff recruitment (assuring the competence of their teachers) and conditions of employment (opportunity for further education, promotion of research activities, encouraging innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies), ensure the teacher's extended role.

#### **Standard 6. Learning resources and student support**

This standard remains almost unchanged. HEIs should provide a range of resources to support the following:

- Mobility (national and international)
- Assistance based on the needs of a diverse student population (such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities) and
- Orientation towards student-centred learning as well as on flexible teaching and learning methods.

#### **Standard 7. Information management**

This standard remains unchanged. HEIs should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities in order to use them in the internal quality assurance system. Students and staff should be involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.

#### **Standard 8. Public Information**

This standard remains unchanged, transparency has already been assessed in accreditation procedures. The ESG require information on the following to be provided:

- Programmes and selection criteria,
- intended learning outcomes for these programmes,
- the qualifications they award,
- the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used,
- the pass rates,
- the learning opportunities available to their students and
- graduate employment.

#### **Standard 9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes**

This standard has been expanded. HEIs have already been required to constantly improve their study programmes. In addition to that, the changing social needs and the effectiveness of procedures for as-

assessments are taken into particular consideration. Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders, and revised programme specifications are published.

#### **Standard 10. Cyclical external quality assurance**

This standard affirms that HEIs should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

### *Part 2 of the ESG: External quality assurance*

Part 2 of the ESG is concerned with external quality assurance, that is, how external quality assurance of HEIs or of programmes should be conducted; in accreditation, this applies to the standards based on which agencies implement their procedures and assess HEIs. FIBAA's current regulations for programme and institutional accreditation already comply with the new ESG. In comparison to the "old ESG", there are rearrangements and one substantial modification, highlighted in the following text which apart from that briefly describes the standards (1 to 7). In general, the ESG's standards apply also to voluntary evaluations without the awarding of a seal!

#### **Standard 1. Consideration of internal quality assurance**

The ESG affirm that standards 1 to 10 from part 1 need to be considered in an accreditation. The aforementioned requirements for the internal quality assurance of HEIs should thus be assessed externally.

#### **Standard 2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose**

The agencies' procedures must be objective and efficient. The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance (no need for additional programme accreditation procedures).

#### **Standard 3. Implementing processes**

External quality assurance processes include a self-assessment or equivalent, an external assessment (normally including a site visit), a report resulting from the external assessment and a consistent follow-up. The accreditation procedures conducted by FIBAA already comply with the ESG's requirements.

#### **Standard 4. Peer-review experts**

The procedures conducted by FIBAA already comply with the ESG's requirements for the expert panels (particularly the participation of a student member student in every expert panel). Additionally, the ESG recommend the involvement of international experts in all expert panels.

#### **Standard 5. Criteria for outcomes**

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently.

#### **Standard 6. Reporting**

This is the only criterion that implicates a substantial modification of the existing accreditation procedures. **The ESG determine that full reports by the experts must be published, even in the event of unsuccessful accreditation.** So far, only positive accreditation decisions had to be published.

#### **Standard 7. Complaints and appeals**

Complaints and appeals processes regarding the HEIs' accreditation decisions should be offered to the institutions. FIBAA has already held those available.

FIBAA applies the standards of the ESG in all accreditation procedures on programme and institutional level according to the specifications of the German Accreditation Council as well as in our own programme and institutional accreditation procedures according to FIBAA quality standards. FIBAA Consult, amongst other services, offers evaluations that are conducted based on the standards determined in the ESG.

## Contact us

FIBAA Consult  
Berliner Freiheit 20-24  
53111 Bonn  
[www.fibaa-consult.org](http://www.fibaa-consult.org)

Tel: +49 (0) 228 – 280 356 32 oder 33  
Fax: +49 (0) 228 – 280 356 20  
[consult@fibaa.org](mailto:consult@fibaa.org)