

Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

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[Foreword to be added to final publication]

Context, scope, purposes and principles

I. Context

Higher education, research and innovation play a crucial role in supporting social cohesion, economic growth and global competitiveness. Our systems need resilient higher education institutions that operate within a shared framework of quality assurance standards that enable international cooperation and mutual recognition, ensure that learners achieve the right skills and competences to be active citizens in knowledge-based societies and economies, and support innovation through flexible and fit-for-purpose regulatory frameworks. The increasing demand for skills and competences requires higher education to respond in new ways.

Given the diversity and expectations for higher education, the student-centred approach to learning and teaching enables flexible learning paths, recognition of competencies gained outside formal curricula and international cooperation, which is necessary to prepare students for life in multi-cultural societies and to find solutions together for current and future global challenges. Higher education institutions themselves also become more diverse in their missions, modes of educational provision and (international) cooperation.¹

Quality is mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment, as well as with external stakeholders and society as a whole. Quality education goes hand in hand with an operating context which fosters the social dimension of higher education and upholds the fundamental values of higher education.

Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose, and take into account the diversity of the student body. Quality assurance is crucial in supporting higher education systems and

¹ Communication from the European Commission: Opening up Education: Innovative teaching and learning for all through new Technologies and Open Educational Resources, COM(2013) 654 final, http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/doc/openingcom_en.pdf

institutions in responding to these changes while ensuring the qualifications achieved by students and their experience of higher education remain at the forefront of institutional missions. This role becomes even more critical in matching the ambitions of the international cooperation of higher education institutions and the support for recognition procedures. Moreover, the ambition of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to raise its attractiveness and further open up to international students must be backed up with reliable and well-developed systems for accountability and quality enhancement.

At the heart of all quality assurance activities are the twin purposes of accountability and enhancement. Taken together, these create trust in the higher education institution's performance. A successfully implemented quality assurance system will provide information to assure higher education institutions and the public of the quality of its activities (accountability) and provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement). Quality assurance and quality enhancement are thus interrelated. They can support the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all: from the students and academic staff to the institutional leadership and management, and recognised by external stakeholders.

A key goal of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) is to contribute to the common understanding of quality assurance for learning and teaching across borders and among all stakeholders. They have played and will continue to play an essential role in developing national and institutional quality assurance systems across the EHEA and support cross-border cooperation both within the EHEA and globally. In addition, the ESG play an important role in ensuring the implementation of the key commitments of the Bologna Process higher education reform agenda and in creating the conditions for the implementation of the fundamental values. The ESG are used by institutions and quality assurance agencies as a reference document for internal and external quality assurance systems in higher education. Moreover, they are used by the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), which is responsible for the register of quality assurance agencies that comply with the ESG.

II. Scope and Principles

The focus of the ESG is on quality assurance related to learning and teaching in higher education, including the learning environment and relevant links to research, innovation, and societal engagement. In addition, institutions should have policies and processes to ensure and improve governance and the quality of all their activities.

The ESG are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education, providing guidance that covers the areas vital for successful quality provision of learning environments in higher education.

The EHEA is characterised by its diversity of political and higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, and institutions, languages, aspirations and expectations.

This makes a single monolithic approach to quality and quality assurance in higher education inappropriate. Broad acceptance of all standards is a precondition for creating a common understanding of quality assurance in the EHEA. For these reasons, the ESG need to be at a reasonably generic level in order to ensure that they are applicable to all higher education offered in the EHEA regardless of the volume and mode of study, educational provider or place of delivery. The ESG also include international aspects of higher education such as joint, transnational and cross-border provision. The ESG also look into elements underpinning learning and teaching, such as governance and organisation of higher education.

The ESG should be considered in a broader context that also includes qualifications frameworks, ECTS, and the diploma supplement, as well as the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, which contribute to promoting transparency and mutual trust in higher education in the EHEA, thus creating the conditions for closer international and cross-border cooperation.

The ESG have the following core purposes:

1. **They set a common framework** for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching at European, national and institutional level;
2. **They enable the assurance and improvement of quality** of higher education in the European Higher Education Area;
3. **They support diverse groups of stakeholders** in higher education systems in continuously monitoring and enhancing the education provided;
4. **They support mutual trust**, thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders and supporting international cooperation;
5. **They provide information on quality assurance** in the EHEA.

Higher education aims to fulfil multiple purposes including preparing students for active citizenship, for their future careers (e.g. contributing to their employability), supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation.² Therefore, stakeholders, who may prioritise different purposes, can view quality in higher education and quality assurance of higher education differently. The ESG take into account these different perspectives.

Principles

The ESG provide a framework at European level against which quality assurance agencies, and higher education institutions and their activities are assessed.³ This ensures that quality

² Recommendation Rec (2007)6 by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on the public responsibility for higher education and research,
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/News/pub_res_EN.pdf

³ Agencies that apply for inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) undergo an external review for which the ESG provide the criteria. Also, the European Association for Quality

assurance agencies in the EHEA adhere to the same set of principles and that the processes and procedures are modelled to fit the purposes and requirements of their contexts.

The ESG are based on the following principles for quality assurance in the EHEA:

1. Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
2. Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;
3. Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;
4. Quality assurance supports and enables international cooperation based on trust;
5. Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.

Key terms / Glossary of terms *(In progress, position in the document TBC)*

Programme	Refers to higher education in the broader sense, including that which is not leading to a formal degree.
Quality assurance	Refers to all activities within the continuous improvement cycle (i.e. assurance and enhancement activities).
External quality assurance	Refers to the comprehensive set of evaluation activities carried out by a quality assurance agency. Given the multiple needs of higher education institutions, external quality assurance may take various forms to achieve different objectives. These may include evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities, which may be carried out differently and at different levels (such as programme or institutional level).
Stakeholders	All actors within an institution, including students and staff, as well as external interested parties such as employers and other partners of an institution.
Institution	Refers to higher education institutions and other providers that provide education aligned with the descriptors of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) relies on compliance with the ESG when it comes to granting quality assurance agencies membership in the organisation.

Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education

The standards for quality assurance have been divided into three parts:

- Internal quality assurance
- External quality assurance
- Quality assurance agencies

It should be kept in mind, however, that the three parts are intrinsically interlinked and together form the basis for a European quality assurance framework. External quality assurance in Part 2 recognises the standards for internal quality assurance in Part 1 thus ensuring that the internal work undertaken by institutions is directly relevant to any external quality assurance that they undergo. In the same way, Part 3 refers to Part 2. Thus, these three parts work on a complementary basis in higher education institutions as well as in agencies and also work on the understanding that other stakeholders contribute to the framework. As a consequence, the three parts should be read as a whole.

The standards set out agreed and accepted practice for quality assurance in higher education in the EHEA and should, therefore, be taken account of and adhered to by those concerned, in all types of higher education provision.⁴ The summary list of standards for quality assurance is placed in the annex for easy reference.

The *guidelines* explain why the standard is important and describe how standards might be implemented. They set out good practice in the relevant area for consideration by the actors involved in quality assurance. Implementation will vary depending on different contexts.

⁴ The standards make use of the common English usage of “should” which has the connotation of prescription and compliance.

Part 1: Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance

1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance

Standard

Institutions should have a published policy for quality assurance of learning and teaching, with associated structures and procedures, which support a coherent system that forms an effective cycle of continuous improvement.

The policy should be publicly available and be integrated in the strategic and operational management of the institution, ensuring thus links to the other institutional missions.

The development and implementation of the policy for quality assurance should include a structured, meaningful and visible role for students and all other internal and external stakeholders. The core outcomes of the QA processes and the measures taken should be shared with the stakeholders, including students.

Guidelines

An effective internal quality assurance system — encompassing planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and enhancement — supports the development of a quality culture. All internal stakeholders share responsibility for quality and actively engage in quality assurance and enhancement at all levels of the institution.

Quality assurance policies are most effective when they reflect the relationship between research, learning, teaching and the societal mission of higher education.

The quality assurance policy supports the institutional mission as well as academic and non-academic organisational units in monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The quality assurance policy is aligned with other institutional policies, such as those supporting the social dimension of higher education and those safeguarding fundamental values, including

- academic freedom
- academic integrity
- public responsibility of higher education.

The quality assurance policy also covers activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties.

1.2 Design, approval, ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Standard

Institutions should have processes for the design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of their programmes to ensure that they are coherent, informed by the latest academic and professional developments, and reliable in leading to the intended learning outcomes. These processes should ensure that programmes continue to achieve their objectives and respond to the needs of students, society and the labour market, supporting graduates' employability.

These processes should involve relevant internal and external stakeholders, including students and graduates, and lead to continuous improvement of the provision.

The information collected during monitoring and periodic review of programmes is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised programme specifications are published.

Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

The programmes should be designed based on the learning outcomes methodology.

The qualification and learning outcomes correspond to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area. The qualification resulting from a programme should be specified and communicated.

Guidelines

Study programmes should be designed and delivered to enable students to acquire academic knowledge and skills, including those that are transferable, which may influence their personal development and may be applied in their future careers.

The design and development of programmes are based on defined programme objectives and intended learning outcomes aligned with the institutional strategy and relevant external reference points, including national qualifications frameworks and professional or disciplinary standards.

Students are equal partners in programme design, approval, monitoring and review. Other stakeholders — such as employers, professional bodies, graduates and external experts — are systematically and meaningfully involved to ensure relevance for society and the labour market.

Programmes

- have clearly defined learning outcomes providing students with academic knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy;
- define the expected student workload, e.g. in ECTS;

- are informed by the latest research and benefit from external expertise and reference points;
- include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate;
- include research-based learning experiences;
- are designed in line with the institutional strategy and have clearly defined learning outcomes in order to support recognition of qualifications and graduate employability;
- are designed by involving students and other stakeholders;
- are designed to support active participation of students in democratic societies;
- foster students' lifelong personal development;
- are regularly monitored and periodically reviewed.

Regular monitoring may 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;
- whether the programme responds to the changing needs of society and the labour market;
- the students' workload progression and completion;
- the effectiveness of procedures for the assessment of students;
- the student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme;
- the learning environment and its fitness for purpose for the programme.

1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Standard

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are designed and delivered in a way that fosters an active role of students in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach. Learning and teaching processes should support students for such an active role.

Guidelines

When designing study programmes institutions consider how to stimulate students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process.

Quality assurance processes for student-centred learning and teaching:

- ensure that institutional approaches to learning and teaching respect and address the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths and supporting lifelong learning;

- verify that a variety of pedagogical methods and modes of delivery are considered and used, including the effective use of digital and technological tools to support learning outcomes;
- verify that learning and teaching practices encourage student autonomy, while ensuring appropriate guidance and support from teaching staff;
- promote a culture of mutual respect within the learner–teacher relationship and ensure that this is reflected in institutional policies and feedback mechanisms;
- ensure that institutions regularly evaluate and adjust their modes of delivery and pedagogical methods, based on evidence and feedback from students, staff, and other stakeholders.

Quality assurance processes for students’ assessment take into account that:

- assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field;
- 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;
- assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;
- the criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance;
- the regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances;
- a formal procedure for student complaints and appeals is in place. The procedures are visible, accessible, and include regular publication of anonymised outcomes and actions taken.

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”: student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Guidelines

It is important that access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently, fairly, and in a transparent manner. Induction to the institution and the programme is provided.

Institutions need to put in place processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression.

Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study, work placements, and prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning, is essential for ensuring students' progress in their studies, and for 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 system.

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. This information could be included in the diploma supplement or other relevant documents.

1.5 Teaching staff

Standard

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teaching and other staff involved in education delivery. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment, development and evaluation of the staff. These processes should reflect the institutional mission, its programmes, and the objectives set for them, as well as the evolving role of teaching staff.

Guidelines

Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff and for providing them with appropriate support, development opportunities, and regular review of teaching practice to carry out their work effectively.

Incorporating student feedback into teacher evaluation can provide valuable insights into teaching effectiveness and areas for professional development.

A supportive environment:

- provides conditions of employment that recognise and value the importance of teaching;
- encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research and the societal mission of higher education;
- encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.

1.6 Learning environment

Standard

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

Guidelines

Institutions take into account the needs of a diverse student population and the principles of student-centred learning when allocating, planning and providing learning resources, student support and infrastructure.

Resources to assist student learning might vary from course materials and libraries to databases, dedicated software and simulation facilities.

Human support is crucial, and besides teaching staff, such support could be provided by technical and/or administrative staff, tutors and counsellors. The role of support services is of particular importance in facilitating the mobility of students within and across higher education systems.

Students are informed about the resources and services available to them, and are consulted in their planning and evaluation to ensure they are fit for purpose.

1.7 Information management

Standard

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

Guidelines

Effective processes to collect and analyse information on learning and teaching activities feed into the internal quality assurance system and support evidence-based decision-making.

Institutions collect data periodically on the level of satisfaction of students regarding the support services.

The information gathered, depending, to some extent, on the type and mission of the institution, includes relevant data for the student life-cycle and staff development, such as profile of the student population, student progression, success and drop-out rates, students' satisfaction with their programmes, including support services and resources, career paths of graduates, student and staff mobility rates.

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 and the outcomes of quality assurance processes. Information provided should be clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible for different target groups.

Guidelines

More specifically, 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 Cyclical external quality assurance

Standard

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

Guidelines

Institutions participate in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account of the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate. Therefore, depending on the framework, external quality assurance may take different forms and focus on different organisational levels.

Institutions ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.

Part 2: Standards and guidelines for external quality assurance

2.1 Addressing internal quality assurance

Standard

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes for learning and teaching, while assuring themselves that the education provision is at the correct level of higher education.

All standards of Part 1 of the ESG should be covered by external quality assurance.

Guidelines

Depending on the type of external quality assurance, the standards included in Part 1 may be addressed differently.

It is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance.

2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

Standard

External quality assurance should be defined and designed to ensure that it achieves the aims and objectives set for it, including its dual purpose of accountability and enhancement in higher education.

The design of methodologies should take into consideration relevant regulations.

Stakeholders should be involved in the design and continuous improvement of external quality assurance.

Guidelines

The processes are designed so that they will:

- bear in mind the level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions;
- take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality;
- allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement;
- result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up.

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.

2.3 Implementing processes

Standard

External quality assurance processes should be pre-defined, published and implemented consistently, adapted to the methodology designed as described in standard 2.2. Processes should support the aims set for them.

The processes include the following specific activities

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including an in-person site visit by peer review experts, complemented with stakeholder interviews, ensuring input from various perspectives;
- a report resulting from the external assessment by peer review experts;
- a consistent follow-up.

Guidelines

The nature of the specific activities within the process depends on the aims and design of external quality assurance.

Standard 2.4 Peer-review experts

Standard

External quality assurance should be carried out by competent and independent peer-review experts that include (a) student member(s). The selection of experts takes into consideration the aims and objectives of the process.

Guidelines

The peer-review experts contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners.

In order to ensure the value and consistency of the work of the experts, they have adequate skills to perform their task and are supported by appropriate training and/or briefing.

The agency implements a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest.

The involvement of international peer-review experts in external quality assurance is desirable as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.

2.5 Processes and criteria for outcomes

Standard

Any outcomes, including formal decisions made as a result of external quality assurance, should be based on evidence collected and analysed through the review process, and on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently.

The agency provides transparent information about the formal recognition of outcomes of its external quality assurance processes.

Guidelines

Depending on the external quality assurance system, outcomes may take different forms, for example, recommendations, judgements or formal decisions.

2.6 Reporting

Standard

All full reports by the peer-review experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners, and other interested individuals. Any other evidence and documents used in the decision-making should be published with the report written by the peer-review experts.

The reports should be useful for the evaluated institution and provide recommendations for improvement.

The evaluated institution should be given an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the report before it is finalised.

Guidelines

The report by the experts is the basis for the institution's follow-up action. It also provides information to society regarding the activities of the evaluated institution.

To achieve this, the report needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover:

- context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context);
- description of the individual procedure, including experts involved;
- evidence, analysis and findings;
- conclusions;
- features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution;
- recommendations for follow-up action.

To increase the accessibility and usability of the reports, they may be made available in a searchable electronic format. A summary of the report would increase its accessibility and transparency.

2.7 Complaints and Appeals

Standard

Agencies should have complaints and appeals processes that are defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and clearly communicated to the institutions.

Appeals should be considered by a different entity than the one whose decision is appealed against.

Guidelines

Agencies need to handle issues of concern related to the conduct of the process or those carrying it out in a professional way by means of a clearly defined complaints procedure that is consistently applied.

Agencies may also have a policy for complaints from third parties.

Agencies have transparent processes in place to handle appeals within their own structures. In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcomes of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, or that criteria have not been correctly applied.

Part 3: Standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies

3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Standard

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis.

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency.

Agencies should ensure the meaningful involvement of stakeholders, including students, in their governance and work.

Guidelines

The goals and objectives of the different quality assurance activities and the scope of the agencies' work are described transparently and are published. This information also addresses the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions.

The expertise in the agency may be increased by including international members in agency structures.

3.2 Independence

Standard

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without undue influence from any single party. The agency should have specific safeguards, checks and balances that ensure autonomy and independence so that no one stakeholder, entity, or individual has a dominant role over the agency.

The key elements of independence of agencies include:

- 1) Organisational independence
- 2) Operational independence
- 3) Independence of formal outcomes

Guidelines

1) Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation) that stipulates the independence of the agency's work from third parties, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations.

2) Operational independence: the definition and operation of the agency's procedures and methods as well as the nomination and appointment of peer review experts are undertaken independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders.

3) Independence of formal outcomes: while experts from relevant stakeholder backgrounds take part in quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency (e.g. as a peer-review expert) is informed that while they may be nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency. Independence is important to ensure that any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise and evidence.

3.3 Activities for enhancement

Standard

Agencies should regularly engage in activities and publish results that support the enhancement of quality assurance and learning and teaching in the context in which they work.

Guidelines

In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system.

These findings can contribute to the reflection on developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulties, and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in national and international contexts.

3.4 Resources

Standard

Agencies should have adequate resources to carry out their work professionally. These resources, both human and financial, should enable effective and sustainable implementation of the agency's activities.

Agencies should provide professional development opportunities to ensure the high level of competencies of its staff.

Guidelines

The resources enable the agencies to reflect on their practice, to improve it when needed, and to inform the public about their activities.

When managing resources, aspects of digital and sustainable transition may be taken into consideration.

3.5 Professional conduct and integrity

Standard

Agencies should have high professional standards to create trust in their work and credibility.

Effective tools should be in place to ensure the integrity of their operations on national and international levels and to prevent conflicts of interest.

When the agencies also carry out activities that are not in the scope of the ESG, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and other fields of work is needed. This needs to be clearly communicated to the wide public.

Guidelines

The agency ensures that all persons involved in its activities have adequate competencies and act professionally and ethically.

There are mechanisms in place that guard against intolerance of any kind or discrimination.

When working abroad, the agency communicates appropriately with the relevant authorities of the jurisdiction in which it operates.

3.6 Internal quality assurance

Standard

Agencies should have a published internal quality policy that defines the procedures and tools in use for continuous enhancement of their activities.

The internal quality assurance system should assure and enhance the quality and integrity of the agencies' activities.

Guidelines

Internal and external feedback is collected by the agency from its stakeholders which contributes to continuous improvement of its activities.

Responsibility for the quality of any activities carried out by partners lies within the agency.

3.7 Review of agencies

Standard

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG, addressing, where relevant, the outcomes of the previous review.

Guidelines

The agency reflects on its policies and activities continuously. A periodic external review assures the agency and its stakeholders that it continues to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.

[Annex with summary list of standards to be added to final publication]