



ESG PART 3

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QA AGENCIES

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Background

- **AQAS** – largest accreditation agency in Germany
- 8000+ programmes and institutions accredited in 20+ years (Germany, Europe, Asia, GCC, Africa, South America)
- Approach: partnership for quality – enhancement orientation of the ESG implemented in procedure
- AQAS times reviewed against ESG (2x 2015 version)
- Reviewer for numerous agencies from all parts EHEA & beyond
- Active in ENQA Agency Review Committee (since founding)



The ESG in very short

- Reference framework for agreed practice in QA in Europe
- Three parts covering
 - Internal QA within HEIs
 - External QA carried by QAAs
 - **Internal QA within QAAs**
- Focus on quality assurance of higher education
- Principles for QA in the EHEA
 - HEIs have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance
 - QA responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students
 - QA supports the development of a quality culture
 - QA takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society



Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
in the European Higher Education Area

Part 3 Standards



3.2 Official Status

3.3 Independence

3.4 Thematic Analysis

3.5 Resources

3.6 Internal Quality Assurance and Professional Conduct

3.7 Cyclical External Review of Agencies

3.1 Activities, Policy and Processes for quality assurance

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They 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 involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work**.



To ensure the meaningfulness of external quality assurance, it is important that **institutions and the public trust agencies**.

Therefore, the **goals and objectives** of the quality assurance activities are **described and published** along with the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the scope of the agencies' work. The expertise in the agency may be increased by **including international members in agency committees**.

A variety of external quality assurance activities are carried out by agencies to achieve different objectives. Among them are evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities at programme or institutional level that may be carried out differently. **When the agencies also carry out other activities, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and their other fields of work is needed.**

3.2 Official Status

Agencies should have an **established legal basis** and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by **competent public authorities**.



In particular when external quality assurance is carried out for regulatory purposes, institutions need to have the security that the outcomes of this process are accepted within their higher education system, by the state, the stakeholders and the public.

3.3 Independence

Agencies should **be independent** and act autonomously. They should have **full responsibility** for their **operations** and the **outcomes** of those operations **without third party influence**.

Autonomous institutions need **independent agencies** as counterparts.



In considering the independence of an agency the following are important:

- **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;
- **Operational independence**: the definition and operation of the agency's procedures and methods as well as the nomination and appointment of external experts are undertaken independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders;
- **Independence of formal outcomes**: while experts from relevant stakeholder backgrounds, particularly students, 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 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**.

3.4 Thematic Analysis

Agencies should **regularly publish reports** that describe and **analyse the general findings** of their external quality assurance activities.



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 and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts**.

A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show **developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty**.

3.5 Resources

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.



It is in the public interest that agencies are adequately and appropriately funded, given higher education's important impact on the development of societies and individuals. The **resources of the agencies enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance activities in an effective and efficient manner**. Furthermore, the **resources enable the agencies to improve, to reflect on their practice and to inform the public about their activities**.

3.6 Internal Quality Assurance and Professional Conduct

Agencies should have in place **processes** for internal quality assurance related to **defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity** of their activities.



Agencies need to be accountable to their stakeholders. Therefore, high professional standards and integrity in the agency's work are indispensable. The review and improvement of their activities are on-going so as to ensure that their services to institutions and society are optimal.

Agencies apply an internal quality assurance policy which is available on its website. This policy :

- ensures that all persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically;
- includes **internal and external feedback mechanisms** that lead to a continuous improvement within the agency;
- guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination;
- outlines the appropriate **communication** with the **relevant authorities** of those jurisdictions where they operate;
- ensures that any activities carried out and material produced by **subcontractors** are in line with the ESG, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance activities are subcontracted to other parties;
- allows the agency to establish the status and recognition of the institutions with which it conducts external quality assurance.

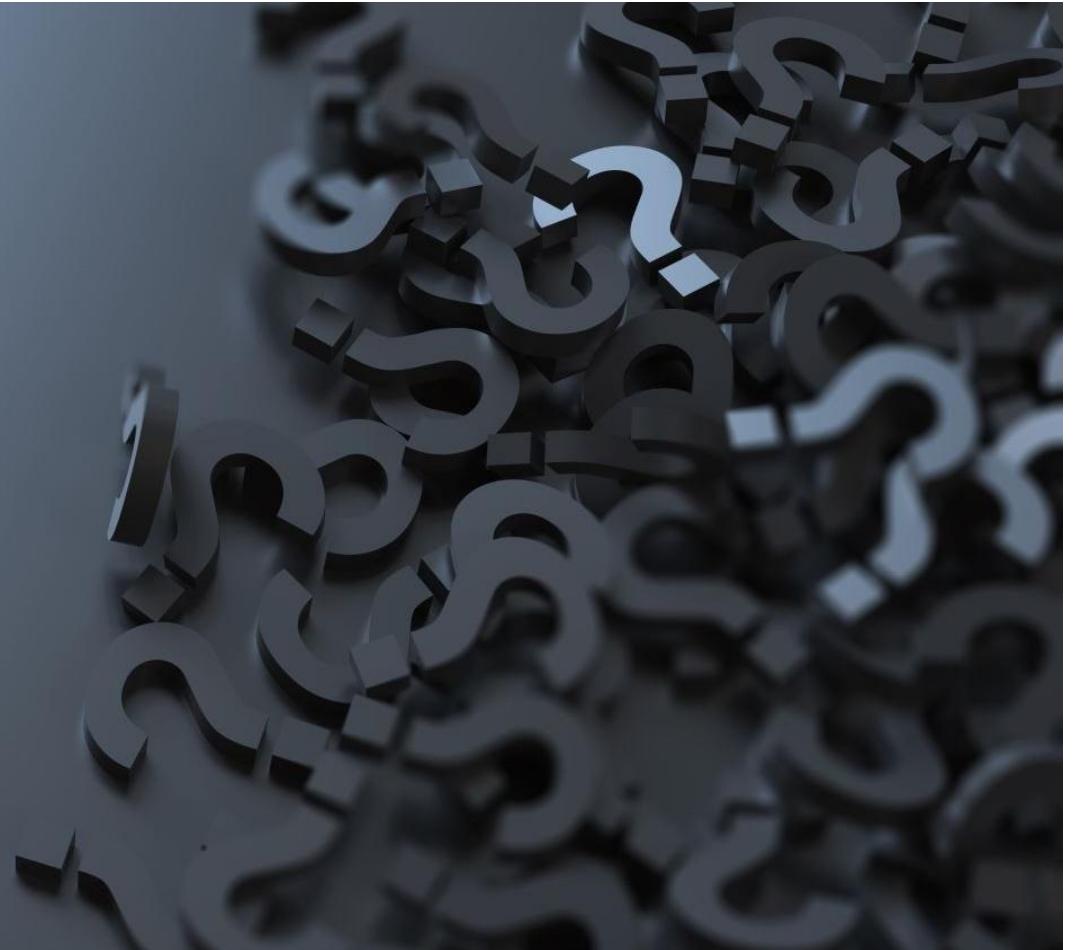
3.7 Cyclical External Review of Agencies

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.



A periodic external review will help the agency to reflect on its policies and activities. It provides a means for assuring the agency and its stakeholders that it continues to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.

What do you think?





AQAS

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