



# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ESG 2015 AND ESG 2005



## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ESG 2015 AND ESG 2005

This paper provides an overview of the changes in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as they were adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in 2015 in Yerevan compared to the ESG first published in 2005, including an outline of the changes in the context, scope, purposes and principles; a description of changes in the wording of the standards; and an analysis of the content of the related guidelines.

### CONTEXT, SCOPE, PURPOSES AND PRINCIPLES

In terms of changes in the introductory part of the document, the ESG 2015 take account of the **developments in European higher education** since 2005, such as the shift to student-centred learning and the need for flexible learning paths and the recognition of competencies gained outside formal education. In addition, the increased internationalisation of higher education, the spread of digital learning, and new forms of delivery are listed as important developments influencing the quality assurance of higher education. The ESG 2015 also make reference to other tools at the European level that contribute to transparency and trust in higher education, such as the qualifications frameworks, the ECTS, and the diploma supplement.

**The scope** of the ESG is clarified, and the text of the ESG 2015 underlines their applicability to all higher education provision offered in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) “regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery”. This makes it clear that the ESG apply equally to cross-border and transnational higher education, as well as to different modes of provision such as e-learning. In addition, the ESG 2015 clearly state that they apply also to higher education provision that is not part of a programme leading to a formal degree. As with the ESG 2005, the ESG 2015 focus on quality assurance related to learning and teaching; however, the ESG 2015 also include reference to “the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation”. Furthermore, while the ESG do not cover the quality assurance of other institutional activities, such as research or institutional governance, the ESG 2015 expect institutions to have policies and processes in place to address them. The text underlines that quality assurance has the twin purpose of accountability and enhancement and the ESG apply thus equally to different approaches to quality assurance.

**The purposes** of the ESG 2015 are to provide a common framework for quality assurance in Europe; to enable the assurance and improvement of quality of higher education; to support mutual trust; and to provide information on quality assurance in the EHEA.

The ESG 2015 are based on **four principles**: that the primary responsibility lies with higher education institutions for the quality and quality assurance of their provision; that quality assurance needs to respond to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes, and students; that quality assurance needs to support the creation of a quality culture; and that quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, other stakeholders, and the society. While all of these principles were present in some form in the ESG 2005, the recognition of diversity and the importance of supporting a quality culture have more focus in the ESG 2015.

The ESG remain “**generic principles**” that allow for diversity of practical implementation. As in 2005, they do not prescribe in detail what quality is, nor do they prescribe how quality assurance processes should be implemented. Rather, they maintain their role in providing guidance and indicating areas that are vital for quality provision of higher education. The ESG 2015 continue to recognise the diversity of European higher education systems, institutions, and quality assurance agencies and continue to maintain, as in 2005, that “a single monolithic approach to quality and quality assurance in higher education” in the EHEA is not appropriate.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
Marked in <b><u>bold and underlined</u></b> : new elements. Full text of the ESG 2015.	Marked in <i>italics</i> : still in the ESG, but differently worded. Marked <del>strike-through</del> : not part of the standards any more.

## PART 1: STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
<p>1.1 Policy for quality assurance</p> <p>Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and <b>forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should</b> develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>1.1: Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. <i>They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.</i></p>

### Analysis of the changes:

Standard 1.1 of the ESG 2015 underlines the importance of the quality assurance policy as part of an institution's strategic management.

The guidelines of the ESG 2015 list some characteristics of an effective quality assurance policy. Among these characteristics the following were not included in the previous ESG: "support academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud", "guard against intolerance", and "any form of discrimination". In addition, the policy needs to reflect the relationship between research, learning, and teaching as well as take into account the national and institutional context.

In the ESG 2015 students are listed among the institutional actors that have responsibility for quality assurance. In the ESG 2005 students were not indicated as being jointly responsible for internal quality assurance, though their involvement in quality assurance activities was called for.

Further, the new version extends the scope of the policy explicitly to institutional activities that are sub-contracted or carried out by third parties.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, in the document stakeholders are understood to cover all actors within an institution, including students and staff, as well as external stakeholders, such as employers and external partners of an institution.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
<p>1.2 Design and approval of programmes<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Institutions should have processes for the <b><u>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.</u></b></p>	<p>1.2: Institutions should have <i>formal mechanisms</i> for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.</p>

#### Analysis of the changes:

Standard 1.2 no longer includes the monitoring and periodic review of programmes, as it is now a separate standard (1.9). On the other hand, the design of programmes has been given more focus in the ESG 2015: whereas it was previously addressed within the guidelines of 1.2, it now has a more prominent place within the standard. In addition, while no reference to the QF-EHEA could be made in 2005, the ESG 2015 make it clear that all programmes should be referenced to a national qualifications framework, which is, in turn, referenced to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. The guidelines naturally reflect the changed scope of the standard and go into more detail regarding programme design. In particular, the guidelines now specifically mention the role of students and other stakeholders in the design of programmes. The expectation is also that programmes are planned so that they reflect the four purposes of higher education (Council of Europe); enable smooth student progression; define expected workload, “e.g. in ECTS”; and include placement opportunities “where appropriate”.

<sup>2</sup> The term “programme” in these standards refers to higher education provision in the broadest sense, including provision that is not part of a programme leading to a formal degree.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	
Institutions should ensure that the <b><u>programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process</u></b> , and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.	1.3: <i>Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.</i>

### Analysis of the changes:

Standard 1.3 is a new standard, which covers the need for institutions to implement a student-centred approach to learning and teaching. While it also incorporates the 2005 standard 1.3 on student assessment, the main focus is on the delivery of programmes in a way that involves the student in an active role as a co-creator of the learning process. This new focus is also reflected in the guidelines.

The new guidelines indicate how an institution could implement student-centred learning, by outlining some of its main characteristics. In addition, the guidelines also cover student assessment as well as the expectation that a formal procedure for student appeals needs to be in place.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	
Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations <b><u>covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification</u></b> .	1.3: <i>Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.</i>

### Analysis of the changes:

Some elements of this standard were previously contained in standard 1.3. The fact that the whole student "life cycle" is covered in one additional standard is new for the ESG 2015.

The guidelines cover issues such as access and admission; information on student progression; and graduate documentation. Such elements were not previously included in the ESG. In addition, there is

significant focus on recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning. The guidelines also indicate that appropriate recognition procedures need to a) be in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition and b) rely on cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies, and the national ENIC-NARIC centres so that recognition may be coherent across a country's higher education system.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
1.5 Teaching staff	
<p>Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. <b><u>They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.</u></b></p>	<p>1.4: Institutions should have <i>ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students</i> are qualified and competent to do so. <del>They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.</del></p>

#### Analysis of the changes:

The scope of the standard on teaching staff (formerly “quality assurance of teaching staff”) is wider now than in the ESG 2005 and emphasises the key role of teachers in implementing student-centred learning (see also standard 1.3). The guidelines underline that this approach leads to a changing role of teachers and expect the institutions to provide teaching staff with a supportive environment in order to facilitate their work. Furthermore, the guidelines include the need for fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of staff.

In the ESG 2005, the guidelines mentioned that the institutions would need to “provide *poor teachers* with opportunities to improve their skills to an *acceptable level*”. In the ESG 2015 the importance of continuous development of teaching staff is given a wider meaning: institutions need to “offer opportunities for and promote the professional development of teaching staff” – not only those considered “poor”. Similarly, institutions are expected to “encourage scholarly activity” to support a better connection between education and research and to encourage innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.



ESG 2015	ESG 2005
1.6 Learning resources and student support	
Institutions should have appropriate <b>funding for learning and teaching activities</b> and ensure that adequate and <b>readily accessible</b> learning resources and student support are provided.	1.5: Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

### Analysis of the changes:

The text of this standard has remained very similar in the ESG 2015 compared to ESG 2005, with the addition of explicit mention of the need for sufficient funding to be allocated to learning and teaching. Several of the original guidelines have also found their place in the revised version.

Different from 2005, the ESG 2015 make specific reference to the importance of support for student mobility within and across higher education systems. The diverse student groups likely to need specific support are listed and include “mature, part-time, employed, and international students as well as students with disabilities”. Through this, attention is drawn to the fact that the shift to student-centred learning may further have an impact on the learning resources and support needed.

The guidelines expect a more proactive role of the institution towards the student: while in 2005 the expectation was that services need to be “accessible”, the 2015 guidelines mention that students are “informed” about the services available to them.

Going beyond standard 1.5 relating to teaching staff, the guidelines of standard 1.6 make it explicit that support and administrative staff also need to “be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competencies”.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
1.7 Information management	
Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.	1.6: Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes <i>of study</i> and other activities.

### Analysis of the changes:

Standard 1.7, as well as its guidelines, have changed only very slightly between 2005 and 2015. One

noteworthy point is, however, that while the 2005 version referred to the value for institutions to be able to compare themselves with other institutions in the EHEA, there is no such reference in the 2015 version.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
1.8 Public information	
Institutions should publish information about their <b>activities, including programmes</b> , which is <b>clear, accurate</b> , objective, up-to date and readily accessible.	1.7: Institutions should <del>regularly</del> publish up to date, <i>impartial</i> and objective information, <del>both quantitative and qualitative</del> , <i>about the programmes and awards they are offering</i> .

**Analysis of the changes:**

The text of the standard and guidelines have not changed substantially. The guidelines are slightly shorter in the ESG 2015, as the main points of the standard are not repeated in the text of the guidelines.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	
Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes <b><u>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.</u></b>	1.2: Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the <i>approval</i> , periodic review and monitoring of their programmes <i>and awards</i> .

**Analysis of the changes:**

The content of standard 1.9 was formerly included under standard 1.2. Through the introduction of this new standard in 2015, the importance of continuous improvement and the follow-up of monitoring activities is strongly underlined. Consequently, the guidelines stress the importance of collecting

feedback from students as well as other stakeholders. In particular, review mechanisms are expected to address the expectations of students, their needs, and satisfaction in relation to the programme. Additionally, the internal evaluation of programmes is expected to cover issues, such as the content of the programme in light of the latest research on the subject; needs of society; workload, progression, and completion rates; effectiveness of the student assessment methods; and the learning environment and available support services.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
<p>1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</p> <p>Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.</p>	<p>2.7: External quality assurance of <i>institutions and/or programmes</i> should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. <del>The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.</del></p>

**Analysis of the changes:**

Reference to cyclical external quality assurance was moved from Part 2 of the ESG 2005 to Part 1, standard 1.10 of the ESG 2015. This change highlights that responsibility for ensuring periodic review lies with the institution rather than the agency, in line with the expectation that the institutions should be able to freely choose a suitable quality assurance agency from those registered in EQAR. The guidelines are not significantly changed but further reflect the institutional responsibility for this activity.

## PART 2: STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance	
External quality assurance should <b>address</b> the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance described in Part 1 of the ESG.	2.1: External quality assurance procedures should <i>take into account</i> the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

### Analysis of the changes:

There is no substantial change in the text of standard 2.1. The reformulation of the text is intended to make the connection between Parts 1 and 2 clearer to the reader (in the same way as standard 3.1 does for Parts 2 and 3).

The 2015 guidelines of this standard underline the institutional responsibility for the quality assurance of their provision. In addition, while the 2005 version refers to Part 1 as providing “a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process”, the ESG 2015 refer more explicitly to the need for external quality assurance to “include consideration of the standards of Part 1”.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose	
External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, <b>while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders</b> should be involved <b>in its design and continuous improvement.</b>	2.2: The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by <i>all those responsible (including higher education institutions)</i> and <i>should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.</i> 2.4: All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

### Analysis of the changes:

Standard 2.2 covers parts of the former standards 2.2 and 2.4, and the guidelines include elements of the former standard 2.6. Some other aspects of the former standard 2.4 are now included elsewhere, in particular the issues related to review experts, which are covered by a separate new standard (2.4). The former guidelines of 2.4, covering the quality assurance process and its steps, appear in the ESG 2015 under standard 2.3 (which covers most of the text of the former standard 3.7 – see below).

The current guidelines describe the main characteristics of a procedure that is “fit-for-purpose”. They are expected to: bear in mind the workload and cost for institutions; consider the need to support institutions in improving quality; allow institutions to demonstrate such improvement; and result in clear information on outcomes and follow-up.

The guidelines also refer to the possibility of a “more flexible way” of external quality assurance for institutions that can demonstrate they have an effective internal quality assurance system.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
2.3 Implementing processes	
External quality assurance processes should be <b>reliable, useful</b> , pre-defined, <b>implemented consistently</b> and published. They include <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- a self-assessment or equivalent;</li><li>- an external assessment <b>normally</b> including a site visit;</li><li>- a report resulting from the external assessment;</li><li>- a <b>consistent</b> follow-up.</li></ul>	3.7: The processes, <i>criteria and procedures</i> used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure <i>by the subject of the quality assurance process</i>;</li><li>- an external assessment by a group of experts, <i>including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency</i>;</li><li>- <i>publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes</i>;</li><li>- follow-up procedure to <i>review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.</i></li></ul>

	2.6: Quality assurance processes <del>which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan</del> , should have a <i>predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently</i> .
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**Analysis of the changes:**

Standard 2.3 covers most elements of the former standard 3.7 and includes the follow-up procedures formerly contained in standard 2.6. The details pertaining to reviewers and the publication of the review report previously under standard 3.7 appear now as separate standards (2.4 and 2.6 – see below). The guidelines underline the importance of the institution’s self-assessment as part of the review process. The guidelines also explain the expectations related to the follow-up procedure but are less prescriptive than the guidelines of the former standard 2.6, which made specific reference, e.g., to possible “further meetings” with the institution.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
2.4 Peer-review experts	
External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of experts that include (a) student member(s).	3.7: [...] an external assessment by a group of experts, including, <del>as appropriate</del> , (a) student member(s), [...]

**Analysis of the changes:**

In order to emphasise that European external quality assurance is based on a peer-review approach, reference to the experts now appears in a separate standard, while in 2005 they were included under standard 3.7. Several elements of the guidelines of standard 2.4 were however also contained in the former standard and guidelines 2.4 “Processes fit for purpose”. These include: careful selection of experts; appropriate skills and competencies of the experts; and provision of appropriate training and briefing. New to the ESG 2015 guidelines is the explicit specification that the expert groups need to include a range of expertise and provide different perspectives, such as those of “institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners”. The ESG 2015 also contain an explicit mention of a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism which would need to be applied by the agency.

The use of international experts is mentioned in the guidelines of the ESG 2015 standard 2.4 as “desirable as it adds a further dimension”, while the 2005 version (in guidelines of standard 2.4) listed the use of international experts as one of the “widely used elements of external review processes”. The use of (a) student member(s) in the groups of external experts is now included as a requirement for all procedures, not only “as appropriate” as was the formulation in 2005. This makes explicit the general interpretation that previously existed about the need to include student representation in external quality assurance.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
2.5 Criteria for outcomes	
<b><u>Any outcomes or judgements</u></b> made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, <b><u>irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.</u></b>	2.3: <i>Any formal decisions</i> made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently. 3.7: The [...] criteria [...] should be pre-defined and publicly available.

#### Analysis of the changes:

This standard covers the former standard 2.3 as well as part of the former standard 3.7. The ESG 2015 refer in this standard to “any outcomes or judgements ... *irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision*” making it clear that it applies to all outcomes of quality assurance procedures. The guidelines of the standard give examples of the different possible outcomes further clarifying the scope of the standard.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
2.6 Reporting	
<b><u>Full</u></b> reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the <b><u>academic community, external partners and other interested individuals.</u></b> If the agency takes any formal decision	2.5: Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible <i>to its intended readership.</i> Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained

based on the reports, <b><u>the decision should be published together with the report.</u></b>	in reports should be easy for a reader to find.
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**Analysis of the changes:**

Standard 2.6 now states that full reports should be published, thereby dealing with the previous ambiguity as to whether it was sufficient to publish summary reports. The text used for the 2015 standard also clarifies the “intended readership” referred to in the ESG 2005 standard 2.5 in order to ensure that the agencies are aware of and consider the different needs of the various potential user groups. Furthermore, standard 2.6 states, different from the 2005 version, that any decision resulting from the report should be published together with the report.

The guidelines give a more detailed list of issues to be covered by the reports including, e.g., explicit reference to the usefulness of describing the context in which the institution operates. The guidelines also include the expectation that the report describes “features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution”, while the 2005 version expected the report to contain “commendations”.

The 2015 guidelines mention for the first time the usefulness of providing summary reports and the advantage of enabling the institutions to point out factual errors before the report is finalised.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
2.7 Complaints and appeals	
<b><u>Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.</u></b>	3.7 Guideline: Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency. <del>2.7: External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.</del>

**Analysis of the changes:**

Complaints and appeals were formerly addressed – though only partially – by the guidelines of stand-



ard 3.7. The most important change, beyond moving this point from the guidelines of a standard, is the inclusion of the need for complaints processes in addition to appeals processes, thus extending the scope of the standard to cover all quality assurance procedures, including those not leading to a formal decision.

## PART 3: STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
<p>3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance</p>	
<p>Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities <b>as defined in</b> 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. <b><u>These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.</u></b></p>	<p>3.1: The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account <i>the presence and effectiveness</i> of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.</p> <p>3.3: Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (<i>at institutional or programme level</i>) on a regular basis.</p> <p>3.5: Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.</p>

### Analysis of the changes:

Standard 3.1 contains elements of ESG 2005 standards 3.1, 3.3, and 3.5, as it brings together the policy, activities, and processes under the same heading. The standard makes a clear connection between Part 2 and Part 3 of the ESG.

The guidelines now explain that the purpose of publishing the goals and objectives of an agency, as well as the nature of its interaction with stakeholders, is important in order to reinforce public trust in its operations.

The guidelines list examples of the different types of quality assurance activities that may be taken by the agency (audit, evaluation, review, assessment, accreditation, and others). Agencies are required to make a clear distinction between their quality assurance activities and other fields of work if relevant.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
3.2 Official status	
Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.	3.2: Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities <del>in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance</del> and should have an established legal basis. <del>They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.</del>

### Analysis of the changes:

In the revised standard 3.2 agencies are no longer required to be recognised by public authorities specifically in the European Higher Education Area. This opens up the possibility of agencies being considered compliant with the ESG, even if they are established elsewhere.

The ESG 2005 contained no guidelines for this standard. In the revised version, the guidelines state that – in particular when 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”.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
3.3 Independence	
Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have <b>full</b> responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.	3.6: Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the <i>conclusions and recommendations made in their reports</i> cannot be influenced by third parties <del>such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.</del>

### Analysis of the changes:

The 2015 guidelines explain that having independent agencies is an important counterpart to having autonomous institutions.

They also clarify, in greater detail compared to 2005, what is meant by independence of agencies by separating three areas of independence: organisational independence, operational independence, and independence of formal outcomes. The new guidelines also require that anyone contributing to the work of the agency, whether as an external expert or as a nominee of a stakeholder body, acts only in their individual capacity so that “any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise”.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
3.4 Thematic analysis	
Agencies should <b>regularly</b> publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.	2.8: Quality assurance agencies should produce <i>from time to time</i> summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

#### Analysis of the changes:

This standard’s name has changed from “system-wide analysis” to “thematic analysis” to better cover also agencies not operating in “a system” or operating in several different systems. The standard has furthermore become more demanding as to the frequency of the analyses, which were formerly expected to take place “from time to time”.

The guidelines now mention that the analyses could be of relevance not only in the national context but also internationally.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
3.5 Resources	
Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.	3.4: Agencies should have adequate and <i>proportional</i> resources, both human and financial, <i>to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.</i>

**Analysis of the changes:**

Formerly the standard restricted the requirement of adequate resources to refer to the agencies’ “external quality assurance processes”. Recognition of the wider scope of the work of agencies is clearly reflected in the text of the 2015 standard, which now simply states that resources should be adequate “to carry out their work”.

The guidelines now mention that the resources are “adequate and appropriate” if they enable agencies not only to organise their quality assurance activities effectively and efficiently, but also to improve; to reflect on their practice (see thematic analysis); and to “inform the public about their activities”.

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct	
Agencies should have in place processes for <b><u>internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.</u></b>	3.8: Agencies should have in place <i>procedures</i> for their own accountability.

**Analysis of the changes:**

Standard 3.6 makes it explicit that agencies should not only have procedures for their own accountability, but – importantly – also to constantly enhance the quality and integrity of their activities. Also the guidelines underline the importance of continuous improvement throughout.

While previously the agency was expected to have mechanisms to “ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors”, the ESG 2015 explicitly mention that the subcontracted activities need to be in line with the ESG.

In view of the extension of the agencies’ activities in many cases, two specific guidelines have been introduced under this standard to reflect the fact that many agencies extend their activities to institutions and programmes outside their own system. One of them states that the agency’s internal quality assurance policy needs to outline “the appropriate communication with the relevant authorities in the jurisdictions where they operate”. The second notes that the internal quality assurance policy needs to be such that it allows the agency “to establish the status and recognition of the institutions with which it conducts external quality assurance”. While the latter is of course also necessary in a national context, it is particularly relevant in an international setting.

The requirement for cyclical external review has been moved from the guidelines of the former stand-

ard 3.8 (on accountability procedures) into a separate standard 3.7 (see below).

ESG 2015	ESG 2005
3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies	
<b><u>Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.</u></b>	3.8 Guideline: [...] A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years. [...]

**Analysis of the changes:**

The cyclical review of agencies appeared in the ESG 2005 as a guideline under standard 3.8, while it is now a standard in its own right, thereby reflecting the fact that such external reviews have become standard practice in the decade since the first version of the ESG was published. Standard 3.7 now mirrors standard 1.10 on the cyclical review of higher education institutions.



This paper provides an overview of the changes in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as they were adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in 2015 in Yerevan compared to the ESG first published in 2005, including an outline of the changes in the context, scope, purposes and principles; a description of changes in the wording of the standards; and an analysis of the content of the related guidelines.

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