



EAIR Seminar Athens

ENQA Standards and Guidelines: identifying and addressing the implementation challenges

Discussion group arrangements and logistics

Guidance for Discussion Groups

1. Contextual considerations

a) **The ENQA Standards and Guidelines**

To maximise discussion opportunities all participants are advised to read in advance and to bring with them the *ENQA Standards and Guidelines*. The document contains a very useful Executive Summary. The document can be found at http://www.enqa.eu/pubs_esg.lasso. There is a link to this document on the seminar website, on the programme page.

b) **Seminar Aims: *aide memoire***

The idea for this seminar developed at the 2006 EAIR Forum in Rome, during discussions in the Special Interest Group on 'Quality in Higher Education'. Colleagues were keen to identify an opportunity to consider the *ENQA Standards and Guidelines*, and in particular to identify and assess the implementation challenges for agencies and for institutions. This seminar is intended to provide participants with such an opportunity. Indeed, the seminar theme is of interest to governments, higher education policy researchers, quality managers and administrators, academics, and students.

We are fortunate that not only do each of our three distinguished keynote speakers bring a variety of perspectives to our discussions, but that participants also represent a broad spectrum of backgrounds, experience and expertise in respect of quality assurance in higher education. This of course is quite fitting given the wide range of institutions and agencies across the European Higher Education Area and the membership of EAIR.

c) **Key considerations to inform discussion**

Given the aims and overarching theme for this seminar, it is especially important to note that the standards cover the following:

- the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions (the internal arrangements we have in place or are working towards);
- the external quality assurance of higher education (the activities of quality assurance agencies in respect of institutions or programmes);
- the quality assurance of external quality assurance agencies (e.g. agencies own accountability procedures; and external review of agencies, on a cyclical basis).

If there are two 'keywords' that might be said to be central to the seminar's deliberations they are probably 'implementation' and 'engagement'.

If the *Standards and Guidelines* are to be helpful to institutions and to national agencies then this depends on successful policy implementation approaches and strategies, and on meaningful engagement by all relevant parties. This, in turn, poses questions about how the *Standards and Guidelines* will be received, responded to, and used. The 'group discussion tasks' have been identified with these considerations in mind.



2. Group discussion tasks

Day 1: Thursday 22nd March

Breakout 1: Issues at national and European levels (11.45 to 13.15)

The first breakout session will take place following the first two of the Seminar's three keynote presentations: the presentations by Professor Amourgis and by Peter Williams. These, together with the *Standards and Guidelines* document, will provide valuable reference points for the commencement of group discussions.

The *European Standards and Guidelines* (ESG) set out the principles that underpin independent, transparent, accountable processes for undertaking external quality reviews and also for the review of the quality assurance agencies. The ESG reinforce the autonomy and responsibility of institutions in delivering quality and only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions in meeting agency requirements.

The ESG are designed to be an aid to agencies and institutions not a set of requirements for rigid compliance.

Part 2 of the ESG suggest, *inter alia*, the following:

External quality assurance processes should:

- take into account the effectiveness of the institutional internal quality assurance processes;
- have predetermined aims and objectives;
- ensure formal decisions are based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently;
- be designed to achieve the aims and objectives;
- publish reports and ensure they are accessible;
- have a follow-up procedure for recommendations that is implemented consistently;
- take place on a cyclical basis;
- result in summary reports describing and analysing general findings of reviews.

Part 3 of the ESG suggest, *inter alia*, the following:

External quality assurance of agencies should:

- take into account the external quality assurance processes of institutions;
- be formally recognised and have an established legal basis;
- undertake external quality assurance activities on a regular basis;
- have adequate resources to do the job;
- have clear and explicit goals and objectives, contained in a publicly available statement;
- be independent; including autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties;
- have predefined and publicly available processes, criteria and procedures;
- have in place procedures for their own accountability.



Discussion questions:

- A. To what extent are these guidelines achievable (or achieved) in your setting and how meaningful are they? Are they being treated as a checklist for compliance or a guide to organic development?
- B. Do the ESG encourage improvement as well as accountability?
- C. Are the ESG helpful in clarifying and harmonising approaches to quality assurance across Europe, is such harmonisation necessary? How significant are possible/actual variations in national contexts?

Breakout 2: Issues at institutional level (15.15 to 16.30)

The afternoon breakout session will follow the keynote presentation by Dr Dermot Douglas, in which he considers implications of the *Standards and Guidelines* for institutions. It will provide an opportunity to focus on issues at an institutional level for senior quality managers, administrators, academics and students (for performance measurement and benchmarking, feedback, and improvement).

For discussion purposes most participants will be familiar with the desirability for systems and procedures to provide the basis upon which the student and staff experience can be enhanced, while meeting accountability requirements. Furthermore, quality assurance arrangements should not be perceived as bureaucratic, burdensome, and compliance-based.

Part 1 of the ESG suggest, *inter alia*, the following:
Institutions should:

- have a formal, publicly-available policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards;
- explicitly develop a quality culture for the continuous enhancement of quality;
- include a role for students and other stakeholders;
- have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring;
- assess students using published criteria, regulations and procedures that are applied consistently;
- have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so;
- ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered;
- ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes;
- regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information about their programmes.

Discussion questions:

- D. Do the ESG represent a burden or an opportunity for higher education institutions? Will they be seen as an instrument of compliance?
- E. How might institutions secure the engagement of administrators; academic staff; academic managers? and how do the guidelines assist them in so doing?
- F. Would more sharing of experience and expertise in quality assurance assist in implementation of the ESG? How might this be achieved?



Day 2: Friday 23rd March

Breakout 3: Identifying future challenges (10.15 to 11.30)

This session is scheduled to take place immediately following the first session of the day (the Plenary ‘Summary of emerging themes’) during which an overview will be provided across Thursday’s group discussions and keynote presentations.

The principal tasks during Breakout 3 are as follows:

- to address and discuss the ‘summary of emerging themes’ (a brief handout will be made available on this topic during the 09.30 Plenary);
- to agree main points for the Final Plenary.

Also, to consider:

- the consequences of 45 local interpretations of the ESG;
- how to limit the burden on institutions;
- the feasibility of the deadline of 2010.

And:

- to discuss future challenges for or in relation to:
 - national agencies;
 - higher education institutions;
 - governments/states;
 - ENQA/European Consultative Forum.