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GOOD PRACTICES IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

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PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AS A PREREQUISITE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF GOOD PRACTICES

- ▶ The principles of quality assurance are the basis on which the quality system should be developed.
- ▶ They extend beyond the quality processes accepted by organizations related to quality assurance of programs, courses, trainings, etc.
- ▶ They include the organization itself, its culture, management, equipment, employees and systems. Their aim is to provide a common reference framework that can be used to match, inform and raise the expectations of all stakeholders about the education processes and results.
- ▶ Simultaneously, these principles should help the training institution/ organization to develop its own quality assurance systems for the various training curricula.
- ▶ Quality assurance principles are not recommendable or static over time, nor are they intended to set evaluation rules or limit diversity, initiative and innovation.
- ▶ However, the awareness of and engagement with them will assist the training institution/ organization in ensuring the development and implementation of good practices in the quality assurance activity.

PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE ...

The principles are grouped into eight sections.

1. Institutional structure and culture

Training institutions/ organizations have the primary responsibility for ensuring the quality of the programs they offer. Quality should be part of the institutional ethos (character) embedded in all teaching, training and management activities. This is achieved through:

- management support for all quality procedures and processes;
- quality assurance as an integral part of the internal management of the individual units;
- the quality objectives are clearly stated and a systematic approach to achieving them is provided;
- quality assurance is a common process at all levels involving the broad participation of trainers, staff, trainees and stakeholders;
- all activities are supported by an effective and efficient organizational structure;
- the roles, responsibilities and mandate of the different parties involved in quality assurance are clearly defined;

However, simultaneously, it is necessary that quality assurance should be given a formal status within the organization providing opportunities for individual bottom-top initiatives in the system.

PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE ...

2. Institutional autonomy and public accountability

Training quality assurance implies achieving certain educational standards and meeting the needs of stakeholders.

Therefore, recognizing the own identity of the training institution/ organization, at the background of the diversity in the provision of educational services, is also part of the quality assurance process through clear derivation of educational and social responsibilities and public accountability.

The dynamics in the sector, together with the domestic and international competition, the transfer of trainees and their movement through different mobilities, requires a clearer positioning in the public space in order to make the training institution/ organization more easily recognizable.

In this sense, the principle aims to support the training institution/ organization by managing and improving the quality of the offered curricula and thus establishing its institutional autonomy.

PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE ...

3. Mission and resources

Quality assurance is the result of the context and interactions that take place among the various participants in the process.

The quality policy should reflect the stated mission and values. It is of great importance that the fulfillment of the quality assurance requirements should not be a burdensome task, which could harden the operation of the institutions and organizations providing it.

Furthermore, the quality systems and related structures should be built on the basis of optimal sufficiency and effort economy.

PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE ...

4. Consultations and interaction for continuous improvement

Education aims to reflect the changing needs of society.

Therefore, continuous improvement and development are crucial for the long-term prosperity and survival of the institutions and organizations providing it.

As a result, the quality assessment criteria and indicators should develop and adapt in order to be up-to-date and effective.

PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE ...

5. Quantitative and qualitative indicators

Most quality assurance systems use quantitative data combined with qualitative evaluations to identify the quality of education results. Quantitative evaluations allow for results comparability but at the same time, qualitative evaluations also deserve attention especially regarding those aspects that are less susceptible to quantitative monitoring. Quality data often provides important information that can be used as a decision-making basis for quality enhancement.

PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE ...

6. Self-assessment and mutual assessment

Effective quality assurance systems combine elements of self-assessment and mutual assessment.

Most quality assurance assessments begin with self-assessments, which provide an opportunity to review the extent to which the individual objectives have been met.

Self-assessment should also allow for the identification of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (or rather difficulties) that teachers (trainers) in the training institution/ organization are faced with. On the other hand, mutual or partner assessment makes the process independent and objective.

PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE ...

7. Participation of external parties

Quality assurance policies provide for the participation of external parties. The external factor in the quality assurance process increases transparency, independence, objectivity and allows for comparative analyses. In this way, external persons can act as advisors on issues such as the curriculum design or the introduction of indicators for the validation of certain competencies, etc.

PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE ...

8. Transparency of the quality assurance process

Quality assurance is a public process, about which information is available and accessible for stakeholders. The information should be up-to-date, impartial and objective.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Quality assurance systems should not be static. As it aims to achieve quality enhancement, the training institution/ organization should constantly strive to improve the developed and implemented quality assurance system through regular reviews and feedback from the participants.
- ▶ An important aspect is also the development of a quality culture within the training institution/ organization. Every person involved in the training process should be committed to high academic and professional achievement. It is also important to demonstrate a clear and unambiguous commitment to quality so that all related issues are treated seriously by all employees.
- ▶ Quality really matters. It is the responsibility of the training institution/ organization to strive to provide curricula of the highest possible quality. The application of the “adequacy-to-suitability“ principle in quality assurance will help to ensure that the needs and expectations of stakeholders are met and the training institution/ organization is socially responsible and committed.

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

- ▶ The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) were adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in 2005 following a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the European Students' Union (ESU was formerly known as ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the European University Association (EUA).
- ▶ Since 2005, considerable progress has been made in quality assurance as well as in other Bologna action lines such as qualifications frameworks, recognition and the promotion of the use of learning outcomes, all these contributing to a paradigm shift towards student-centred learning and teaching.
- ▶ Given this changing context, in 2012 the Ministerial Communiqué invited the E4 Group (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE) in cooperation with Education International (EI), BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) to prepare an initial proposal for a revised ESG “to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope”.

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

- ▶ Higher education, research and innovation play a crucial role in supporting social cohesion, economic growth and global competitiveness. Given the desire for European societies to become increasingly knowledge-based, higher education is an essential component of socio-economic and cultural development. At the same time, an increasing demand for skills and competences requires higher education to respond in new ways.
- ▶ 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 (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.).

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

- ▶ 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 and innovation.
- ▶ In addition institutions have policies and processes to ensure and improve the quality of their other activities, such as research and governance.
- ▶ The term '**quality assurance**' is used to describe all activities within the continuous improvement cycle (i.e. assurance and enhancement activities).
- ▶ 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 could provide information to assure the higher education institution and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities (accountability) as well as provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement).
- ▶ **Quality assurance and quality enhancement** are thus inter-related. 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.

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

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

- ▶ - Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- ▶ - Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;
- ▶ - Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;
- ▶ - Quality assurance 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 (ESG)

The standards for quality assurance are divided into three parts:

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

Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance

- ▶ **1.1 Policy for quality assurance:** Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.
- ▶ **1.2 Design and approval of programmes:** Institutions should have processes for the 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.
- ▶ **1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment:** Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.
- ▶ **1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification:** Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance

- ▶ **1.5 Teaching staff:** Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.
- ▶ **1.6 Learning resources and student support:** Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.
- ▶ **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.
- ▶ **1.8 Public information:** Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.
- ▶ **1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes:** Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes 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.
- ▶ **1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance:** Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis

Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance

▶ **Policy for quality assurance**

Standard: Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. Guidelines:

- ▶ Policies and processes are the main pillars of a coherent institutional quality assurance system that forms a cycle for continuous improvement and contributes to the accountability of the institution. It supports the development of quality culture in which all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the institution. In order to facilitate this, the policy has a formal status and is publicly available.
- ▶ Quality assurance policies are most effective when they reflect the relationship between research and learning & teaching and take account of both the national context in which the institution operates, the institutional context and its strategic approach. Such a policy supports - the organisation of the quality assurance system; - departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units as well as those of institutional leadership, individual staff members and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance; - academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud; - guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff; - the involvement of external stakeholders in quality assurance.

Standards for external quality assurance

- ▶ **2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance:** External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance described in Part 1 of the ESG.
- ▶ **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, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.
- ▶ **2.3 Implementing processes:** External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include: a self-assessment or equivalent; an external assessment normally including a site visit; a report resulting from the external assessment; a consistent follow-up.
- ▶ **2.4 Peer-review experts:** External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).
- ▶ **2.5 Criteria for outcomes:** Any outcomes or judgments made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.
- ▶ **2.6 Reporting:** Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.
- ▶ **2.7 Complaints and appeals:** Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Standards for quality assurance 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.
- ▶ **3.2 Official status:** Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.
- ▶ **3.3 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.
- ▶ **3.4 Thematic analysis:** Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.
- ▶ **3.5 Resources:** Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.
- ▶ **3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct:** Agencies should have in place processes for, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities. internal quality assurance related to defining
- ▶ **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.

Good practices in quality assurance, evaluation and management in the South-West University “Neofit Rilski”

- ▶ <http://www.swu.bg/university-profile/strategies-and-regulations/quality.aspx>

System for assessing and maintaining the quality of education

- ▶ Quality Policy
- ▶ Instructions on the document flow
- ▶ Requirements for assessing the quality of training in separate majors (programs)
- ▶ Requirements for assessing the quality of a course
- ▶ Requirements for the design, preparation and implementation of a course
- ▶ Instructions on evaluation committees of a course
- ▶ Requirements for the evaluation of lecturers regarding what education quality they have achieved
- ▶ Instructions on developing new, renewal, approval and monitoring of curricula and syllabi

Good practices in quality assurance, evaluation and management in the South-West University “Neofit Rilski”

- ▶ Instructions on selecting and training in elective courses
- ▶ Instructions on the organization of training in optional courses
- ▶ Instructions on developing a study schedule and students' participation in this process
- ▶ Rules for the organization of the graduation ceremony
- ▶ Rules for student support, forming a product which does not conform to specified requirements
- ▶ Rules for surveys with students
- ▶ Documentation requirements submitted to the Department of “Assessment and Quality Maintenance” to accredit a new or renewed program
- ▶ Guidelines for Introduction and Inclusion of the New Students
- ▶ University system to assess the knowledge, skills and competences of students accepted at AC, Protocol № 18.05.2005
- ▶ Student opinion survey

BENEFITS FROM QUALITY STANDARDS

- ▶ Improving the quality of the educational product and services;
- ▶ Attracting motivated students;
- ▶ Enhancing competitiveness;
- ▶ Strengthening business confidence in the results achieved by the academics and faculties of University, above all in connection with the transfer of research excellence to real business;
- ▶ Reducing cases of poor student performance reporting;
- ▶ Facilitating communication at levels: student - lecturer; student - student; lecturer - lecturer and lecturer - administration;
- ▶ Increasing students' chances of success;
- ▶ Improvement and validation of a positive public image of the University.



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