Implementing the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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From the 2003 Berlin communiqué:

- 'At the European level, Ministers call upon ENQA through its members, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005.'

From the 2005 Bergen communiqué:

- 'We adopt the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area as proposed by ENQA.'

What are 'standards'? What are 'guidelines'?

- 'Standards' in this context are not meant to imply 'standardisation' or 'requirements'

- 'standards' are statements of basic good practice; they are short and general

- 'Guidelines' are meant as illustrations of the standards in action; they provide additional information and explain why the standards are important

European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) - 2005

- 3 parts:
  - Internal quality assurance
  - External quality assurance
  - Peer review of quality assurance agencies

- http://www.enqa.eu/files/ENQA%20Bergen%20Report.pdf

Objectives of the ESG

- to encourage the development of higher education institutions which foster vibrant intellectual and educational achievement;

- to provide a source of assistance and guidance to higher education institutions and other relevant agencies in developing their own culture of quality assurance;

- to inform and raise the expectations of higher education institutions, students, employers and other stakeholders about the processes and outcomes of higher education;

- to contribute to a common frame of reference for the provision of higher education and the assurance of quality within the EHEA.

The ESG: What they ARE

- Generic, not specific, standards and guidelines
- A view of what should be done, not how it should be done
- A source of assistance and guidance

The ESG: What they are NOT

- Prescriptive
- A checklist
- A compendium of detailed procedures
- A European quality assurance system

ESG Part 1: internal quality assurance

1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance

1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards

1.3 Assessment of students

1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff

1.5 Learning resources and student support

1.6 Information systems

1.7 Public information

ESG Part 2: external quality assurance

2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

2.2 development of external quality assurance processes

2.3 Criteria for decisions

2.4 processes fit for purpose

2.5 Reporting

2.6 Follow-up procedures

2.7 Periodic reviews

2.8 System-wide analyses

ESG Part 3: external quality assurance agencies

3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

3.2 Official status

3.3 Activities

3.4 Resources

3.5 Mission statement

3.6 Independence

3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies

3.8 Accountability procedures

Major challenges for the HEIs

- Formalisation of quality assurance systems
- Student assessment (including comparability, consistency and fairness)
- Information systems
- QA of teachers

Major challenges for the QA agencies

- The language of the ESG
- Clarity of purpose
- Professionalism of expert panels
- Use of students
- Reporting
- Independence

Implementation questions

- Organic development or external imposition?
- Support or hindrance for autonomy and 'quality culture'?
- Total compliance or acceptable variations?
- Consequences of 45 local interpretations?
- How to limit the burden on institutions?
- Deadline 2010?