

EQAR Policy on Transition to the Revised European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

(concerning registration of quality assurance agencies)

Register Committee

Ref. RC/11.1

Ver. 2.0

Date 2015-06-06

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Introduction

EQAR is responsible for the register of quality assurance agencies that comply substantially with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The EQAR Register Committee started in early 2014 to prepare arrangements for the transition from the current to the revised ESG as far as registration of quality assurance agencies is concerned. Following a consultation of EQAR's governmental and stakeholder members, registered quality assurance agencies, ENQA and other organisations that have coordinated reviews of registered agencies on a proposal for transitional arrangements the Register Committee has adopted the present policy.

The Revised ESG

The revision of the ESG has been taken forward by the E4 Group (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE) in consultation with BUSINESSEUROPE, Education International and EQAR since the Bucharest Ministerial Conference in 2012.

The [revised ESG](#) were prepared by the seven organisations and adopted by EHEA ministers in May 2015 in Yerevan.

Most substantial changes brought about by the revised ESG relate to their Part 1, addressing internal quality assurance organised by higher education institutions. That is, agencies will need to accommodate these changes in their standards and criteria used in reviewing higher education institutions or programmes (see ESG 2.1).

Furthermore, agencies might need to adjust their structures or processes to accommodate the changes in parts 2 and 3. The extent of these changes will depend on each individual agency, and while some agencies will need to make substantial changes, others might be able to accommodate the revised ESG with only minor adjustments.

While institutions will need time to tune their processes and activities to the revised ESG, agencies will need time to consult their stakeholders on adapting criteria and processes.

The Register Committee thus considers it realistic that agencies will need time until 2016 to accommodate the revised ESG.

Objectives

The objectives of this EQAR Policy are:

- To ensure that all agencies on the Register will have been admitted or renewed based on the revised ESG by 2020.
- To allow agencies to plan ahead and enable a swift transition, by giving them sufficient time to adjust their structures or processes to the revised ESG.

Considerations

The arrangements set out below are based on the following considerations:

- Since the official proposal for the revised ESG (endorsed by the BFUG) was published in October 2014, it is expected that agencies began to prepare for the necessary changes then, however on the condition of final approval of the revised ESG by ministers in May 2015.
- If agencies need to make significant changes to accommodate the revised ESG they will require a certain amount of time before they could properly be reviewed against the revised ESG. Consistent with the Practices and Interpretations they might need at least one year of implementation before an external review against the revised ESG. They could thus be ready for a review against the revised ESG by 2016, while some would be ready only later.
- In order to expedite the transition, it is preferable that registered agencies have their registration prolonged provisionally, so as to enable them to be reviewed against the revised ESG, rather than still being reviewed against the “old” ESG.
- It needs to be transparent whether an agency’s inclusion/last renewal was based on the “old” or the revised ESG. This will, therefore, be indicated on the Register until 2020.

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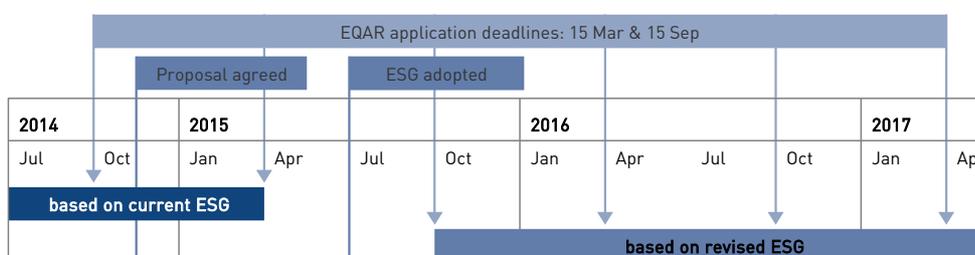
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Policy for Initial Applications



- EQAR continued to admit agencies to the Register on the basis of the current ESG until the official adoption of the revised ESG (mid-2015).

All decisions taken by the Register Committee (i.e. to include an agency until a specific date, five years from the review report) will, of course, remain valid and will not be changed retroactively (except for cases

foreseen in the Procedures for Applications, such as related to substantive changes). Thus, there might be agencies registered on the basis of the current ESG until the beginning of 2020 at most.

- In the interest of clarity, transparency and trust in the Register, **initial (new) applications based on the current ESG have no longer been accepted since the adoption of the revised ESG by ministers.**

All initial (new) applications now need to be based on the revised ESG.

For external reviews against the revised ESG, agencies are advised to time them carefully, so that they have had sufficient time to adjust their structures and processes to the revised ESG before the review. The Register Committee does not expect that applications based on the revised ESG could realistically be made before 2016.

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Policy for Renewal of QA Agencies' Registration

		Proposal agreed		ESG adopted							
2014		2015				2016				2017	
Jul	Oct	Jan	Apr	Jul	Oct	Jan	Apr	Jul	Oct	Jan	Apr
		based on current ESG									
		>>>		extension for review against revised ESG							
				based on revised ESG							

- Agencies that had their registration **expiring up to 31/12/2014** (external review report deadline up to 31/03/15) were expected to renew their registration **based on the "old" ESG**.
- Agencies that have their registration **expiring between 1/1/2015 and 31/12/2016** are expected to renew their registration **based on the revised ESG**.

In order to have sufficient time to adjust and prepare for a review against the revised ESG, these agencies can have their **registration provisionally extended¹ until 31/12/2016 at most**.

That is, they have to apply for renewal before 31/12/2016 and submit their external review until 31/03/2017 at the latest, while the Register Committee will decide on their renewal in May 2017.

Extension is granted based on a simple request, including a brief action plan for the agency's transition to the revised ESG and the timeline envisaged for their external review. The request should be sent to the EQAR Secretariat before registration expires.

Agencies are advised to time their review carefully, so that they are confident that they are "ready". They will have to explain precisely in

¹ During the provisional extension, all rights and responsibilities linked to registration remain fully in place, including, for instance, the requirement to report Substantive Changes.

their SER how they implemented the new ESG (consultation, information and actual implementation), and this will have to be checked by the external review panel.

While it is natural that not all HEIs or programmes will have been (re-)reviewed, it is **expected that agencies have implemented their new/revised criteria and processes at some HEIs/programmes before the agency is reviewed against the revised ESG.**

- Agencies that have their registration **expire on 1/1/2017 or later** are expected to renew registration **based on the revised ESG** and **following the regular deadlines** (i.e. application until expiry, external review report three months after expiry at the latest).

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Policy for Substantive Changes

If agencies change their organisational structure or their activities after the adoption of the revised ESG, it is reasonable to expect that such changes are designed and implemented with a view to the new standards.

Implementing changes based on the old version of the ESG after adoption of the revised version would not appear logical.

Substantive changes implemented by registered agencies after May 2015 will therefore be analysed with regard to what effect the changes have on the agency's compliance with the revised version of the ESG.

Policy for Complaints

The policy for renewal of agencies' registration is based on the expectation that agencies (with registration expiring during 2015/16) will implement the necessary changes by the end of 2015, commence their self-evaluation against the revised ESG in early 2016 so as to complete their external review by the end of 2016.

While some agencies only have to renew their registration later, EQAR considers it fair and reasonable to expect all agencies to start implementing the revised ESG instantly.

EQAR expects that all registered agencies will have made the necessary changes for implementation of the revised ESG by the end of 2015. Complaints against registered agencies will therefore be considered based on the revised ESG as from 1/1/2016.

Further Information

The revised ESG can be found at:

https://eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/e4/ESG_endorsedMay2015.pdf

For details about the renewal process in general, including the usual deadlines and information on timing of the external review, see:

<http://www.eqar.eu/register/reporting-and-renewal.html#c1578>