ESG 2015, part 1:
a practical example from a quality assurance agency

Introduction and goals

Higher education institutions (HEI) and quality assurance (QA) agencies are currently facing the challenge of adapting their quality assurance models to the new version of the ESG [1], approved by the May 2015 Ministerial conference in Yerevan.

Part 1 of the ESG, standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance, has been revised substantially. Important new concepts, such as "student-centred learning, teaching and assessment" or "student life-cycle" have been introduced. At the same time, the new wording of ESG 2.1 stresses that the standards of Part 1 need to be addressed (not just "taken into account" as the former version of the ESG stated) in the processes and criteria used by quality assurance agencies when reviewing higher education institutions and programmes.

At the current moment, many QA agencies are probably adapting their external quality assurance processes (EQA) and criteria to make them consistent with the new version of ESG part 1.

Formally ensuring the correspondence (or at least the consistency) of the EQA model of the agency with the new ESG is a relatively straightforward operation; it implies comparing the documents containing the description of the EQA processes and criteria applied by the agency with the new ESG and probably introducing certain modifications.

However, this formal consistency does not necessarily guarantee that the new standards and guidelines are effectively assimilated by the experts in charge of conducting institutional and programme reviews and, consequently, that the new ESG are effectively addressed in practice.

Agencies need to develop tools to analyze and monitor the effective implementation of the new ESG part 1 in their reviews. The result of this analysis could be one of the components of the IQA system of these agencies.

The main contribution of this paper is to propose the systematic analysis of the recommendations found in the reports of a QA agency in the light of the new ESG as a possible tool to detect possible improvement opportunities in achieving the effective assimilation of ESG part 1.

As a practical example, this type of reasoning is applied to the analysis of the recommendations found in the reports published by a QA agency, the Commission des titres d'ingénieur (Cti), in its 2013 programme accreditation campaign.

Presentation of CTI (Commission des titres d'ingénieur)

CTI, established by the French law in 1934, is a nonprofit organization officially recognized as the independent body in charge of programme accreditation of engineering degrees in France.

CTI is composed of 32 members, appointed upon legislative order, coming from different origins (public and private higher education institutions, employer organizations, professional engineering associations and trade unions); it is thus an equitable organization in terms of professional and academic participation. Apart from the members, CTI also counts with an extensive network of experts.

The main missions of CTI are: the evaluation and accreditation of programmes in the fields of engineering and applied sciences; the development of quality in engineering education; the promotion of engineering curricula and careers in France and abroad.

Since 1997, all French engineering programmes must be periodically accredited every six years. Upon the result of CTI's accreditation, the engineering HEIs are authorized by the French ministry to deliver a particular engineering degree (Diplôme d'ingénieur). Upon demand of foreign institutions, CTI is also authorized by the French law to accredit engineering programmes abroad.

CTI plenary assembly (composed of the 32 members) is the main decision making body. CTI members also contribute to the programme reviews. As members, they help to define CTI's reference frameworks, they take into account the evaluation reports in order to produce the accreditation decisions. As experts, they normally serve as chairs of the expert teams, and assume the supervision of the report. They bring their knowledge of their agency's reference system and audit methods and they ensure the global consistency of the evaluations.

CTI is a full member of ENQA since 2005 and it is registered in EQAR since 2010. CTI is also a founding member of ENAEE (European Network for the Accreditation of Engineering Education) and is one of the agencies authorized to deliver the EUR-ACE label (a quality accreditation label for engineering programmes developed by ENAEE). CTI also participates in the works of ECA (European Consortium for Accreditation).

Description of the analysis of CTI recommendations

From January 2013 to December 2013, CTI has reviewed 150 engineering programmes in France, offered by 65 HEIs. 65 accreditation reports have been produced by the agency (one per institution as, according to CTI's EQA process, all programmes of the same HEI are reviewed during the same on-site visit). 391 recommendations were made (6 per institution on average). These reports are available on CTI's website [2].

The recommendations were analyzed and labelled according to the standard of part 1 to which they referred. The specific addressed item in the standard (or in

the guidelines) was also identified. Table 1 presents the number of recommendations addressing each one of the standards in part 1. Interestingly enough, just 264 out of the 391 recommendations refer to items from the ESG. This means that almost one third of the recommendations refer to issues that are not (at least explicitly) part of the ESG model and which are specific to CTI.

Standard ESG part 1	Number of recommendations	%
1.1. Policy for quality assurance	22	8,3
1.2. Design and approval of the program	121	45,8
1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	19	7,2
1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	28	10,6
1.5. Teaching staff	27	10,2
1.6. Learning resources and student support	6	2,3
1.7. Information management	17	6,4
1.8. Public information	11	4,2
1.9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	12	4,5
1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance	1	0,4
TOTAL	**264**	**100**

Table 1. Number of recommendations addressing the standards of ESG part 1

As shown in table 1, all ESG were addressed by at least 1 recommendation. Almost half of 2013 CTI's recommendations referred to ESG 1.2 (Design and approval of the program);

Two standards were addressed by more than 10% of the recommendations:

  ESG 1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

  ESG 1.5. Teaching staff

Between 5 and 10% of the recommendations referred to the following three standards:

  ESG 1.1. Policy for quality assurance

  ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

  ESG 1.7. Information management

The rest of the standards were addressed less frequently:

  ESG 1.6. Learning resources and student support

  ESG 1.8. Public information

ESG 1.9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

ESG 1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance

In the following section, a more detailed analysis of the results together with some interpretation keys are provided.

Standards of part 1 very frequently addressed by CTI

ESG 1.2 (Design and approval of programmes) was thoroughly covered in 2013 CTI's recommendations (which is not surprising in a programme accreditation exercise).

Some recurrent topics were:

- The need to fully implement or revise students work load according to the ECTS;

- Formal issues around the implementation of the competences/learning outcomes approach (the need to better define the intended learning outcomes of the programme level; some problems in deploying the learning outcomes approach at the level of each study unit, etc.).

- The need to revise the intended learning outcomes of the programme according to the industry/market needs. This issue, which is not particularly stressed by ESG 2.1 apart from a general reference to the "four purposes of HE of the Council of Europe", is a major issue in numerous CTI's recommendations.

- Finally, many of the recommendations refer to the consistency of the contents or pedagogical methods used with the programme profile defined by CTI. This programme profile, which is compatible with the standards defined by the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE) [3], has the following main components:

  1. Long term adaptability and analytical capabilities (which results in recommendations concerning the enlargement of the science knowledge base of the students).

  2. Short term adaptability to professional activity within a branch of engineering (which translates in frequent recommendations so as to introduce placement opportunities in industry).

  3. Research and innovation (recommendations on the introduction of different lab activities and projects)

  4. Business culture and economic, social, environmental and ethical awareness (recommendations for introducing some contents in humanities)

  5. Communication skills and international awareness (recommendations on the language level achieved by the graduates, in-bound and out-bound student mobility, etc.).

Standards of part 1 addressed by more than 10% of the recommendations

ESG 1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Most CTI recommendations in this area concentrate in the certification phase. Particularly, they refer to the content and format of the documentation received upon graduation (diploma, diploma supplement, etc.) as well as to some issues regarding graduation conditions (mainly, problems for achieving the needed English language level for obtaining a "Diplôme d'ingénieur").

The different regulations or conditions concerning the rest of the stages of the student life-cycle are seldom (or not at all) mentioned. No mention is made to the application of the principles of the Bologna convention, such as automatic recognition, in the recognition of prior education.

ESG 1.5. Teaching staff

As stressed in the standard, many recommendations refer to the competence of the teachers or the importance of their developing a scholarly activity along with their teaching. However, CTI also stresses other aspects, such as the number of teachers or the ratio among students and teachers; and the importance of hiring teachers with extensive industry experience.

Standards of part 1 addressed by between 5 and 10% of the recommendations

ESG 1.1. Policy for quality assurance

Most of the aspects mentioned in the standard can be found in CTI's recommendations, such as the need for establishing a policy for quality assurance and its deployment by creating suitable processes and structures at all organizational levels.

CTI gives a special importance to the participation of students and professionals in the internal quality assurance system.

ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

The recommendations which address this standard refer to the following issues:

- The need for adapting teaching methods according to different student profiles (inductive vs. deductive, etc.)

- Recommendations for reducing the number of traditional face-to-face lectures so as to introduce other pedagogical methods (projects, seminars, etc.)
- Recommendations for encouraging or developing structures to support individual initiatives, such as the so-called "Junior enterprises" (companies managed by the students on-campus).

The assessment methods, which are particularly stressed in the standard, are rarely mentioned in CTI's recommendations, with the exception of some recommendations regarding the assessment of the internships in industry.

No mention is made to the procedures for dealing with students' complaints.

ESG 1.7. Information management

Several recommendations refer to the collection and analysis of relevant information for the effective management of the programme.

CTI particularly stresses the need to manage the following information:

- The career path of the graduates
- The profile of the student population in relation with the quality of the recruitment

Standards of part 1 not frequently addressed by the recommendations

ESG 1.6. Learning resources and student support

Very few references are made to the learning resources and the student support. No mention is made to the administrative staff or to the consideration of the needs of a diverse population (students with disabilities, etc.).

ESG 1.8. Public information

CTI addresses this standard in some recommendations, which mainly refer to the information published about the programmes in a standardized file ("fiche RNCP") which must be compulsory published in a data base by the French Ministry of Industy [4].

ESG 1.9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Some CTI recommendations mention the importance of implementing or achieving the periodic internal evaluation of the programme. However, specific or technical aspects on how this implementation could be achieved or improved are seldom mentioned (apart from the need to revise the programmes in the light of the needs of the labour market).

1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance

Only one recommendation refers to this standard, which is not surprising as the external review of engineering programmes is compulsory in France since 1997 and there are normally no issues regarding this aspect.

Additional aspects included in CTI's EQA model

Interestingly enough, almost one third of the recommendations refer to issues which lay outside the ESG model:

- Economic model and economic feasibility of the programmes
- Governance of the programmes and faculties (structures, participation of external stakeholders)
- Communication and notoriety of the programmes/institution
- Composition and coherence of the pedagogical offer of the institution (number and type of programmes offered, continuous education offer)
- Global strategy of the institution
- International dimension of the programmes and the institution
- Multi-site strategy of the institution
- Internal communication, organizational climate and other human resources issues
- Institutional strategy regarding diversity and selectivity of the student recruitment
- Student life, sense of belonging to the institution, alumni linkages and extracurricular activities.

Discussion and conclusions

The analysis developed above has enable to identify the issues that were particularly stressed by CTI experts and members when applying CTI's EQA model during the 2013 accreditation campaign. We need to be cautious before coming up to practical conclusions. The fact that a standard is not (or seldom) mentioned in the recommendations is not subject to just one interpretation.

Indeed, it could be the sign of a lack of attention or focus of the panel members regarding this issue (requiring thus specific extra documentation to be developed and probably specific training actions to increase awareness); on the other hand, the fact of providing recommendations regarding a particular standard could be just an indicator that this aspect is well handled by the institutions and no improvement opportunities could be identified by the panel. The clarification of this would require further investigation.

In any case, the results of this analysis shed light on the areas that- following the Pareto principle- could we worth exploring in priority so as to improve the

alignment between CTI's EQA practices and part 1 of the ESG in an efficient way; these are:

ESG 1.1. Policy for quality assurance (in particular, it would be good to test the degree of knowledge and awareness of the experts regarding internal quality assurance matters)

ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment (in particular, regarding the consideration of the assessment methods and the methods to collect and address students complaints)

ESG 1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification (particularly, the consideration of the stages of student admission, progression and recognition)

ESG 1.6. Learning resources and student support

ESG 1.8. Public information

ESG 1.9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Furthermore, the analysis has provided an image of the "weight" or comparative importance given to the different ESG by CTI as well as the particular aspects emphasized by the agency. The importance given by CTI to the links between the programmes and the socio-economic world/industry, links that are dimly mentioned in ESG part 1, is worth noticing. This importance is obvious in several recurrent CTI recommendations, such as the need to adapt the intended learning outcomes of the programme to the needs of society; the importance of hiring teachers with industry experience; the importance of introducing industry placement opportunities in the cursus; the importance of monitoring the career path of the graduates, etc.

Finally, this analysis clearly shows some additional issues that are part of the EQA model of CTI and that are not (at least explicitly) part of the ESG model. This is consistent with the logic of the ESG, which are meant to be a set of minimum standards, allowing thus room for including other aspects.

To sum up, this case provides some insights on how a diversity of agencies can coexist within the same paradigm (the ESG) and in which sense we can assert that "there is more to quality assurance than the ESG".

References:

[1] Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (revised version 2015). Available at: http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/

[2] CTI reports are available at: http://www.cti-commission.fr/-Avis-et-decisions-d-accreditation-

[3] EURACE framework standards and guidelines. Available at: http://www.enaee.eu/eur-ace-system/eur-ace-framework-standards

[4] Information on the RNCP file can be found at: http://www.rncp.cncp.gouv.fr/

Communication transmise à EQAF à l'automne 2015 dans le cadre d'un appel à article