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The European Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance: an integrative approach to quality management in higher education?

Introduction

The literature shows that universities seem to be integrating their quality management practices at different levels (Horine and Hailey, 1995; Manatos, Sarrico and Rosa, 2015; Rodman, Biloslavo and Bratož, 2013; Rosa, Saraiva and Diz, 2001; Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2007). Integration is defined here as the development of quality management practices as part of wider management systems within the organisation. Such practices cover the different processes and organisational levels, whilst including the implementation of the whole set of principles that has come to be associated with the concept of quality management.

In particular, the case of quality management integration in universities can be considered more interesting than most other industries, as universities bring to the fore the issue of integration in traditionally fragmented and loosely coupled organisations (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972; Frølich, Huisman, Slipersæter, Stensaker and Botas, 2013; Orton and Weick, 1990; Weick, 1976). This is a different situation from for-profit organisations, which tend to be associated with more unitary strategies and stronger leadership; or even from other public services, which tend to have a strong unifying Weberian regime.

In this context, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (ENQA, 2009), enforced by the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA), appear as a reference model, providing guidance and assistance to universities in their internal quality assurance systems and to agencies in their external quality reviews.

In the business sector, quality management models, such as the ISO 9000 standards and the EFQM Excellence Model, have played an important role for companies, assisting them in developing and implementing quality management systems. The impact and the visibility of the ISO standards outweigh those of the EFQM, probably due to the fact that the latter does not grant certification, but only an 'excellence award' (Iñaki, Landín and Fa, 2006).

The ESG can be just as relevant to universities in the European higher education area as the ISO standards have been to industrial companies in their role of a 'facilitator' in the diffusion of quality management in organisations world-wide (Kaynak, 2003).

Indeed, and despite the fact that the ESG do not ensure certification, some of the national accreditation agencies are using Part 1 of the ESG (for internal quality assurance) to certify the quality management systems of universities. Moreover, the agencies must meet the standards

and guidelines of Part 3 of the ESG (for external quality assurance agencies) in order to be affiliated with ENQA.

Naturally, the ESG and the ISO 9000 standards play their roles in particular and different contexts, but in general they both emerge from a global world, and they are both a form of quality management for products or services. Indeed, in a global context, where companies establish relationships with several suppliers world-wide, ISO 9000 standards aim to provide a guarantee to companies that those suppliers are trustworthy. A similar story exists in the case of higher education with the emergence of the European Higher Education Area. The ESG that resulted aim to assure the quality of universities' processes, activities and services for all stakeholders involved.

The impact and success of the ISO standards are indisputable. For one thing certification leads to more competitiveness and external visibility, notwithstanding the fact that companies often have no alternative but to undergo ISO certification (Sampaio, Saraiva and Guimarães Rodrigues, 2010; Singels, Ruël and van de Water, 2001). In higher education, some of the accreditation agencies affiliated to ENQA, such as those in Portugal, Spain, Finland, Norway and Austria, have already started to audit, certify and accredit the internal quality management systems of universities, based on compliance with the ESG. The original goal was to provide guidance for universities to develop their quality management systems. In this regard, the national agencies developed audit processes in their countries, such as Spain, Finland and Norway. In other countries these processes even led to accreditation, as is the case in Germany (where the accreditation process is conducted by the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation), or certification of the internal quality management systems, as is the case in Portugal. This practice is not yet common to all the countries in the European higher education area, but it appears to be growing. In this sense, the ESG can play a similar role in higher education to that played by the ISO standards globally.

As such, we aim to understand whether the ESG reflect the trend in higher education towards the integration of quality management practices in higher education institutions. Concretely, we aim to understand whether the ESG cover the universities' main processes (teaching and learning, research and scholarship, third mission and support processes) (Barnett, 1990); the different organisational levels (programme, unit and institutional level) (Brennan and Shah, 2000); and the different quality management principles (ISO, 2012): customer focus, leadership, involvement of people, process approach, system approach, continuous improvement, factual approach to decision making and mutually beneficial supplier relationship.

ESG as an integrated quality management model

The literature shows that a more integrative vision of quality management practices is being proposed and implemented (Horine and Hailey, 1995; Manatos et al., 2015; Rosa and Amaral, 2007; Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2007). From this perspective, quality management is part of an integrated organisational system which, according to Kettunen (2012, pp. 520, 521), “is representative of how an organisation is structured, and how each process is related to other processes (...) forming a total system”.

Similarly, universities seem to be working in order to integrate their main processes – research and scholarship, teaching and learning, third mission and support processes - and their management practices into their wider governance and management system (Melo *et al.*, 2010; Rodman *et al.*, 2013; Rosa *et al.*, 2001; Rosa, Saraiva and Diz, 2003; Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2002, 2005, 2007), reflecting practices in organisations from other sectors (Sousa and Voss, 2002). Moreover, we argue that there is a trend towards the development of holistic and comprehensive quality management frameworks (Rosa *et al.*, 2001; Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2002, 2007), which have been imported and adapted from industry into education, and to the implementation of national models, either for internal or external review purposes, or accreditation systems (Doherty, 1993; Hergüner and Reeves, 2000; Rosa, Cardoso, Dias and Amaral, 2011).

In fact, the pressures of society for greater accountability led governments and universities to implement organised quality assurance systems in higher education all over Europe. The adoption of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997), for the recognition of qualifications in the European higher education area, was a strong boost to these developments. Moreover, the Bologna process established the promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies as one of the main strands of work (Bologna Declaration, 1999). This became one of the main driving forces of quality assurance in Europe and resulted in the creation of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) in 2000 (Prikulis, Rusakova and Rauhvargers, 2013).

The ESG were developed by ENQA in co-operation with the European University Association (EUA), the European Student Information Bureau (ESIB) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) (ENQA, 2009). This initiative was a response to demands from the Berlin Communiqué (2003) to “develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance (and) to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies” (ENQA, 2009, p. 5). The result was the development of European standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance within universities (part 1 and 2 of ESG, respectively) and of European

standards for external quality agencies (part 3 of ESG) (ENQA, 2009). The goal of the ESG is “to provide a source of assistance and guidance to both universities in developing their own quality assurance systems and agencies undertaking external quality assurance, as well as to contribute to a common frame of reference, which can be used by institutions and agencies alike. It is not the intention that these standards and guidelines should dictate practice or be interpreted as prescriptive or unchangeable” (ENQA, 2009, p. 13). Thus, the ESG are a reference model providing guidance to universities for the implementation of their internal quality management systems and to the external accreditation and evaluation agencies (ENQA, 2009; Prikulis *et al.*, 2013).

In 2015, ENQA developed a revised version of the ESG, since “considerable progress has been made in quality assurance as well as in other Bologna action lines (...) all these contributing to a paradigm shift towards student-centred learning and teaching” (ENQA, 2015, p. 3). However, the present work focuses on the original version of the ESG which is presented in Table I.

Table I. European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions

Standards	Description
ESG1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance	“Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.”
ESG2 Approval, monitoring and periodic reviews of programmes and awards	“Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.”
ESG3 Assessment of students	“Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.”
ESG4 Quality assurance of teaching staff	“Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.”
ESG5 Learning resources and student support	“Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.”
ESG6 Information systems	“Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.”
ESG7 Public information	“Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.”

Thus, the ESG claim to be an integrated concept and framework for quality assurance with a broad applicability aiming to contribute to building the path towards a holistic quality

management approach to quality in higher education. This ideal goes beyond quality assurance and brings quality to the core of the management and governance systems, involving all stakeholders and all the organisational levels of universities, in an integrated way (Hopbach, 2013).

Theoretical framework

We developed a framework to discuss to what extent the ESG represent a truly integrated quality management model for the implementation of internal quality management systems in European universities. This framework presents three different levels. Following the literature, these are the most significant levels in terms of understanding the different approaches to quality management in higher education, as well as for reaching conclusions about the degree of integration of quality management in universities (see Table II).

Table II. Framework of analysis

Levels of analysis	Dimensions
Processes level	Teaching and learning Research and scholarship Third mission Support processes
Organisational level	Programme Basic unit Institution
Quality management principles level	Customer focus Leadership Involvement of people Process approach System approach Continuous improvement Factual approach Mutually beneficial supplier relationship

According to the literature, universities have three main processes or missions (Scott, 2006): teaching and learning; research and scholarship; and the third mission, which in turn are augmented by the support processes to those three missions (Barnett, 1990).

The processes and the roles of universities have been evolving, as both the societal roles played by universities and their relationship to society evolve (Jongbloed, Jürgen and Salerno, 2008; Pinheiro, Benneworth and Jones, 2012). Universities started as teaching and learning organisations, but as Barnett (1990) states: their missions go well beyond teaching and learning. Universities have continually evolved to accommodate new tasks and functions (Pinheiro, *et al.*, 2012). In this context and in what Etzkowitz (2003) calls the first “academic revolution”, research and scholarship became also a core university process. More recently, the calls for a re-

engagement of universities in helping to tackle the great challenges facing societies and local communities and in contributing to societal and economic growth in general, gave rise to a second “academic revolution” and to the emergence of the third mission (Pinheiro *et al.*, 2012). The first mission of education inspires the second mission of research that in turn leads to a university’s third mission for social and economic development (Etzkowitz, 2008; Sam and van der Sijde, 2014).

Despite some “tensions” and “ambiguities” in the notion of the third mission (Pausits, 2015; Pinheiro, Langa and Pausits, 2015), it can be defined as “the generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments” (Molas-Gallart, Salter, Patel, Scott and Duran, 2002, pp. iii, iv). The third mission is then the engagement of universities in business-related activities, local and regional development, economic growth and societal development in general (Laredo, 2007), and simultaneously “the driving force to continue the opening of the universities, to initiate an exchange outside the scientific system, and to find answers to social issues” (Pausits, 2015, p. 272).

To these three main missions or processes of universities, we must add a fourth process which covers all sorts of services and processes, ranging from administrative services to other support processes and activities to the other three main missions: the support processes (Yeo and Lin, 2014).

The organisational levels we consider are the programme, as offered by universities; the unit (department, faculty or other basic unit) of universities; and institution, when there is a broader focus in terms of the organisational structure of universities (Brennan and Shah, 2000).

Finally, we consider the eight quality management principles that underline the ISO 9001 standards (ISO, 2012). Customer focus means the importance universities place on customer identification and on meeting their requirements. Leadership is related to the role of management bodies in universities, their work in defining the mission, the values and the goals of the universities, the promotion of a quality culture and the promotion of the involvement of people in quality management. Involvement of people is translated into the efforts to involve the people working in universities (academic and non-academic staff and students) in the quality management process. The process approach has to do with the management of the different missions of universities (teaching and learning, research and scholarship, third mission and support processes) as processes, i.e., as a set of interrelated activities which turn inputs into outputs. The system approach to management is related to the management of the different processes, units and services of universities in an integrated way. Continuous improvement translates the efforts of universities to continually improve their quality. A factual approach to decision making, as the name suggests, means that decisions in universities are based on the

analysis of data and information provided by different sources. Finally, the principle of a mutually beneficial supplier reflects universities' desire to develop relationships with suppliers, but as we consider this notion limitative, we consider all the external stakeholders, such as parents, secondary schools, future employers, local community and the society as a whole, similar to the proposals contained in the new version of the ISO 9000 standards (ISO, 2015).

Methodology

Drawing on our analysis framework, we developed a content analysis of the seven ESG using the NVivo software. In order to assure the credibility of our analysis, validation was carried out by 'investigator triangulation' (Bryman, 2004). In this sense, the three investigators participating in this study were involved in the analysis process, specifically in codifying the ESG according to the different levels and dimensions of analysis. The codification of the investigators was then compared and discussed until a consensual result was reached.

Thus, we analysed to what extent the three levels and their dimensions were reflected in the seven ESG with reference to the following scale: highly reflected, substantially reflected, partially reflected and insufficiently reflected. In the end, we made an overall analysis of how well the different levels and dimensions were represented in the ESG. This global perspective is important as it helps to show to what extent the levels and dimensions are covered in the ESG as a whole rather than focusing on each of the seven ESG individually.

Results

The ESG can be seen to reflect several quality management principles, organisational dimensions and processes (see Table III).

Table III. Analysis of ESG, according to 3 levels of analysis

ESG		ESG1	ESG2	ESG3	ESG4	ESG5	ESG6	ESG7	Overall
Processes	Teaching and learning	HR	HR	HR	SR	PR	PR	HR	Highly
	Research and scholarship	PR	IR	IR	IR	IR	IR	IR	Insufficiently
	Third mission	IR	IR	IR	IR	IR	IR	IR	Insufficiently
	Support processes	SR	PR	PR	HR	HR	HR	PR	Substantially
Organisational Level	Programme	PR	PR	PR	IR	IR	IR	PR	Partially
	Unit	PR	IR	IR	IR	IR	IR	IR	Insufficiently
	Institution	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR	HR	Highly
Quality management principles	Customer focus	PR	PR	PR	IR	HR	IR	HR	Substantially
	Leadership	HR	IR	IR	HR	HR	IR	IR	Substantially
	Involvement of people	SR	SR	IR	HR	IR	IR	IR	Substantially
	Process approach	PR	HR	HR	IR	IR	IR	IR	Substantially
	System approach	PR	IR	IR	IR	IR	IR	IR	Insufficiently
	Continuous improvement	HR	SR	IR	PR	HR	PR	IR	Substantially
	Factual approach	IR	SR	HR	PR	IR	HR	PR	Substantially
	Mutually beneficial supplier relationships	SR	PR	IR	IR	IR	IR	PR	Partially

Table caption:

HR – Highly reflected

SR – Substantially reflected

PR – Partially reflected

IR – Insufficiently reflected

Processes level: the focus on teaching and learning

The ESG are mostly focused on teaching and learning. This process is reflected in the majority of the ESG.

ESG 1, which represents a very general approach to the policy and procedures for quality management, is the only standard covering three processes. It mainly covers teaching and learning, and the “policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards”. It partially covers research and scholarship, since it states that “the policy statement is expected to include the relationship between teaching and research in the institution” (ENQA, 2009, p. 6). And it substantially reflects the support processes to teachers and learners that will help its students achieve the intended outcomes.

The other ESG combine teaching and learning and support processes. ESG 2 and 3 are highly focused on teaching and learning and only partially on support processes. ESG 2 mostly focuses on the “approval, monitoring and review of programmes and awards” but also points out that “the quality assurance of programmes and awards are expected to include (...) availability of appropriate learning resources” (ENQA, 2009, p. 17). Similarly, ESG 3 is mostly about the assessment of students, the associated criteria, regulations and procedures, but also highlights the importance of the support structures which support student learning, as well as the “administrative checks to ensure the accuracy of the procedures” (ENQA, 2009, p. 17).

ESG 4 is highly focused on support processes and substantially on teaching and learning. It is mainly focused on support processes and on the resources which assure the quality of teaching staff, but also stresses that teaching staff is “the single most important learning resource available to most students” (ENQA, 2009, p. 18).

ESG 5 and 6 are highly focused on support processes and only partially on teaching and learning. ESG 5 emphasises “the resources available for the support of student learning” which should be “adequate and appropriate for each programme offered”, and ESG 6 is related with the information systems, “which collect, analyse and use relevant information” (ENQA, 2009, p. 18, 19).

ESG 7 mostly covers teaching and learning, with partial reference to the support processes. Here the focus is on the information which the institutions should provide “about the programmes they are offering, the intended learning outcomes of these, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, and the learning opportunities available to their students” (ENQA, 2009, p. 19).

None of the ESG cover the process of the third mission.

An overall analysis of the ESG, allow us to conclude that teaching and learning and support processes are highly and substantially represented, respectively, but research and scholarship and third mission are insufficiently represented.

Organisational level: the focus on micro and macro dimensions

Most of the ESG focus on the micro and on the macro dimensions of the organisational level. Consequently, the most important level is the institution, where the procedures regarding the teaching and learning process are defined. The next most important level is the programme, where all the processes which support the management of the programme happen.

ESG 1 is alone in covering all the dimensions of the organisational level. Despite being mostly focused on the institutional level, this ESG states that “the policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards” should involve all the levels of the institution. This effectively refers to not just the micro and macro levels, but also “the departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units and individuals” (ENQA, 2009, p. 16).

ESG 2, 3 and 7 provide in-depth coverage of the institution and partially cover the programme. The formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of programmes and awards are defined in ESG 2 at the institutional level, as well as the programme level. Here, ESG 2 pays attention to the “development and publication of explicit intended learning outcomes”, the “specific needs of different modes of delivery (...) and types of higher education (...)” and the “regular periodic reviews of programmes” (ENQA, 2009, p. 17). Student assessment procedures are defined at the institutional level in ESG 3. However, the programme level also plays a role, since “students should be clearly informed about the assessment strategy being used for their programme, what examinations or other assessment methods they will be subject to, what will be expected of them, and the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance” (ENQA, 2009, p. 17).

According to ESG 7, the responsibility to “regularly publish up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards” not only lies with the institution as a whole, but also with the programmes themselves (ENQA, 2009, p. 19).

Finally, ESG 4, 5 and 6 only cover the institutional level. The quality of the teaching staff is addressed in ESG 4, which stresses that the institution plays a crucial role in staff recruitment. As such, teaching staff must show a satisfactory level of competences. At the same time, it should be the case that “teaching staff (are) given the opportunities to develop and extend their

teaching capacity” and that it has the “means to remove them from their teaching duties if they continue to be demonstrably ineffective” (ENQA, 2009, p.18).

ESG 5 addresses the importance of the learning resources and the structures that the institution should develop in order to support the learning process in the different programmes.

Finally, information systems are covered in ESG 6, which notes the role of the institution in the collection, analysis, use and publication of relevant information, concerning the university as a whole and its programmes, in particular.

Globally, we observe that the ESG cover the institutional level very well, the programme level is only partially covered and the unit level is given insufficient coverage.

Quality management principles level: the lack of a systemic approach to quality management

Customer focus is one of the principles given most coverage. This is reflected in all the ESG, except for ESG 4 and 6. ESG 5 and 7 are the central standards covering this area. In ESG5 the focus is on the “learning resources and other support mechanisms (which) should be readily accessible to students, designed with their needs in mind and responsive to feedback from those who use the services provided.” ESG 7 focuses on publishing information for the main customers of the institutions. At the same time, the principle of customer focus is also touched upon in the other ESG. ESG 1 focuses on the students and notes that universities should have the mechanisms to “help ... students achieve those outcomes” and “should aspire to improve and enhance the education they offer their students” (ENQA, 2009, p. 16). Also, ESG 2 focuses on students and their needs, stating that “the quality assurance of programmes and awards are expected to include (...) specific needs of different modes of delivery (e.g. full time, part-time, distance learning, e-learning) and types of higher education (e.g. academic, vocational, professional)” (ENQA, 2009, p. 17). ESG 3, covering student assessment, highlights the need for students to “be clearly informed about the assessment strategy being used for their programme, what examinations or other assessment methods they will be subject to, what will be expected of them, and the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance” (ENQA, 2009, p. 18).

The principle of *factual approach* is also covered in all principles except two (ESG 1 and 5). ESG 6 is mostly about the factual approach principle since it emphasises the need to “collect, analyse and use relevant information” about “student progression and success rates”, “employability of graduates”, “effectiveness of teachers”, “profile of the student population”, “learning resources available and their costs” and “the institution’s own key performance indicators”, in order to allow institutions to effectively manage their “programmes of study and other activities” (ENQA; 2009, p. 19). Similarly, ESG 3 has a factual approach to decision making,

insofar as “students should be assessed using published criteria” and the assessment procedures should “be designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and other programme objectives” and “have clear and published criteria for marking” (ENQA, 2009, p.17). ESG 2 has a partially factual approach to decision making, as far as it relies on the “development and publication of explicit intended learning outcomes” and on the “monitoring of the progress and achievements of students” (ENQA, 2009, p.17). The quality of the teaching staff is covered in ESG 4, which states that the competencies and qualifications of teachers “should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports”. Moreover, teachers should “access feedback on their own performance”, and therefore practice a factual approach to decision making (ENQA, 2009, p. 18). Finally, ESG 7 partially integrates this principle, since an institution “should verify that it meets its own expectations in respect of impartiality and objectivity” (ENQA, 2009, p. 19).

Like the principles of customer focus and a factual approach to decision making, the principle of *continuous improvement* is also present across almost all the ESG (all except ESG 3 and 7). ESG 1 and 5 make strong reference to this principle. The first ESG states that “institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality”, that the policy for quality assurance must be “implemented, monitored and revised” and that “all higher education institutions should aspire to improve and enhance the education they offer” (ENQA, 2009, p. 16). ESG 5 also stresses that “institutions should routinely monitor, review and improve the effectiveness of the support services available to their students” (ENQA, 2009, p. 18). Similarly, ESG 2 highlights that institutions should guarantee “that programmes (are) well-designed, regularly monitored and periodically reviewed, thereby securing their continuing relevance and currency” (ENQA, 2009, p. 17). ESG 4 and 6 only partially cover the principle of continuous improvement. The teaching staff quality ESG states that “institutions should provide poor teachers with opportunities to improve their skills” and the information systems ESG emphasises that the collection, analysis and use of relevant information allows institutions to compare themselves with other similar organisations, which in turn “allows them to extend the range of their self-knowledge and to access possible ways of improving their own performance” (ENQA, 2009, p.18, 19).

The importance of the *involvement of the people* in the quality management area is emphasised by three of the seven standards in different ways. ESG 4 makes strong reference to this principle, highlighting the importance of the involvement of the teaching staff, as “the single most important learning resource” for students (ENQA, 2009, p. 18). ESG1 substantially stresses the “role for students and other stakeholders” in the strategy, policy and procedures for quality assurance of universities (ENQA, 2009, p. 16). ESG2 also emphasises that “the quality assurance

of programmes and awards are expected to include (...) participation of students in quality assurance activities”, who are not only seen as customers but also as internal members of the organisation which participate in the quality assurance of programmes and awards (ENQA, 2009, p. 17).

As with the previous principles, the principle of *leadership* appears primarily in three ESG: 1, 4 and 5. Actually, the first ESG is mostly about leadership; this is because the strategy, the policy and the procedures for quality come under its remit. Leadership is also strongly referenced in ESG 4, since institutions must assure the quality of their staff and “that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so” (ENQA, 2009, p.18). Similarly, the principle of leadership has a marked presence in ESG 5, since institutions must assure the resources for the smooth functioning of the institution.

The principle of a *process approach* is also covered in three ESG: 1, 2 and 3. The first ESG only partially refers it when it states that the programmes should “have clear and explicit intended outcomes” (ENQA, 2009, p. 16). ESG 2 refers to a process approach, since it focuses on the logic of the management of the process of teaching and learning, which should be monitored and periodically reviewed. ESG 3 can also be seen to adopt a process approach, if we consider student assessment as a process, which must follow “regulations”, “procedures” and “criteria” (ENQA, 2009, p. 17).

The principle of *mutually beneficial supplier relationships* is, overall, only partially reflected in the ESG. As stated above, if we consider that this principle embraces all the external stakeholders of universities, then ESG 1 makes it a central theme since it provides a role for students and other stakeholders in the policy and procedures for quality assurance. ESG 7 partially covers the principle, since the information which institutions should regularly publish, should be available to all the stakeholders. ESG 2 also mentions the stakeholders, stating that “the confidence of students and other stakeholders in higher education is more likely to be established and maintained through effective quality assurance activities” (ENQA, 2009, p.17).

Finally, the principle of a *system approach* is only partially included in ESG 1. In this respect, emphasis is given to the relationship between two main processes of higher education: “the relationship between teaching and research”, which should be included in the policy statement of the universities (ENQA, 2009, p.16).

Globally, the quality management principles addressed by the ESG indicate that they represent a quality management model, particularly focused on its customers; concerned about informed decisions, continuous improvement and involvement of people; based on a process approach and on a strong leadership. The ESG also focus on the involvement of external stakeholders in universities, but only partially. Furthermore, they do not represent a truly

integrated quality management model, since the principle more directly linked with a systemic and holistic approach (the principle of system approach) is insufficiently represented in the ESG. The ESG seem to mainly represent a collection of procedures and not a set of integrated processes. If we analyse this last result in light of the new quality management principles, we conclude that this gap may no longer exists, since the principle of a system approach is no longer explicitly stated in the new principles. However, the conclusions regarding the principle of a process approach would also be different since the new principle of a process approach states that the activities of the organisations should be “understood and managed as interrelated processes that function as a coherent system”, which as we mentioned above does not happen in the ESG (ISO, 2015, p. 6). Thus, the absence of the idea of a system approach (i.e. the management of a university as a coherent and interrelated whole) still stands out in the ESG.

Conclusions

The integration of quality management practices in universities seems to be a trend in the higher education literature, partially translated into the development of quality management frameworks, internal quality management systems and national accreditation and assessment systems (Melo *et al.*, 2010; Rodman *et al.*, 2013; Rosa *et al.*, 2001; Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2002, 2007).

In this context, the ESG appear as a reference model in higher education, helping universities to implement their internal quality management systems and guiding national accreditation agencies (Prikulis *et al.*, 2013).

In this paper, we sought to understand whether the ESG are an integrated quality management model, i.e., whether they address the four main processes of universities, the different organisational levels and also the eight quality management principles.

Assessing the ESG according to the aforementioned levels of analysis shows that they are not a truly integrated quality management model, since there are some gaps in the different dimensions of analysis. Naturally, we were not expecting that all the levels and dimensions were present in all the ESG, but we would expect that overall the levels and dimensions were addressed by the ESG as a whole.

For the process level, it is clear that the ESG are focused on teaching and learning and, in general, do not integrate the other processes of universities. In this sense, the ESG are clearly a teaching and learning oriented model. It is true that the support processes are substantially reflected in the ESG, however they often relate to the processes which support teaching and learning. This is an important gap in the ESG, which some European accreditation agencies are

addressing by introducing new standards and guidelines concerning research and scholarship, third mission and internationalisation, as is the case with A3ES in Portugal (Santos, 2011).

Indeed, there is a clear separation between teaching and learning and the other processes of universities. This it is not surprising, since the ESG were actually developed for teaching and learning. Thus, despite claims that the ESG serve as a holistic model (Hopbach, 2013), they are, admittedly, teaching and learning oriented. Consequently, research and scholarship, and the third mission are mostly missing from the ESG. Research and scholarship get a brief mention in ESG 1, but the third mission is totally absent.

At the organisational level, the ESG provide significant coverage of the micro and the macro dimensions (i.e. programme and institution), and little coverage of the intermediate level of the constituent units. It is true that often the constituent units have autonomy, and some act in fact as the institution. Nevertheless, the ESG do not seem to take into consideration how institutional policies and practices are translated and deployed until they reach the programme level.

Taking into account the quality management principles, we observe that, generally, there is a positive 'representation' of the quality management principles in the ESG, even if they are not homogeneously integrated in the different standards and guidelines. Most of the principles are given substantial attention, with the exception of the principle of mutually beneficial supplier relationships, since the involvement of the external stakeholders seems to play a minor role in the ESG, and the principle of system approach, understood as an effective interrelationship among the different institutional processes, is not foreseen in the ESG.

In summary, the ESG seem to be a quality management model, going beyond quality assurance, as they are also based on continuous improvement and not only based on planned procedures, discipline, control, monitoring and feedback. However, they seem to be failing in effectively working as global model to guide universities, in integrating all the core processes of universities, and in working more as a systemic quality management model and less as a collection of quality management procedures.

We tend to believe that this situation will prevail. If we look into the new version of the ESG, it seems that it introduces some changes mainly at the level of teaching and learning, but does not seem to change their focus, since it does not make particular reference to other processes, organisational dimensions or quality management principles (ENQA, 2015; Hopbach, 2013). Indeed, it looks like teaching and learning remains the main focus of the ESG and that the other processes remain neglected. At the organisational level, the standards also seem to remain mainly targeted at the micro and macro levels. One of the quality management principles that seems to continue to receive most attention is *customer focus*, with a stronger emphasis on students as the main customers. Two, instead of one ESG are now dedicated to student learning,

i.e., ESG 3, centred on “student-centred learning teaching and assessment” and ESG 4, focused on “student admission, progression, recognition and certification” (ENQA, 2015, p.12, 13). *Continuous improvement* seems to continue to be a theme of interest, particularly since the new version has two ESG in this area (9 and 10) focused respectively on “on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes” and on “cyclical external quality assurance” (ENQA, 2015, p. 9, 10). Moreover, these new ESG seem to continue to highlight the importance of *facts* for the decision making process. In fact, one important principle of the new version – which we believe has increased from a minor to a major facet in the new ESG – is the *process approach*. Nevertheless, the *system approach* principle seems to remain almost totally absent.

Final considerations and recommendations

We firmly believe that the ESG should evolve towards a more integrated approach to quality management inside the universities, be more robust and more capable of doing what the ISO standards have done in their corresponding sector, i.e., assuring the quality and guaranteeing the credibility of the institutions (Kaynak, 2003), while also contributing for their continuous improvement.

We must emphasise what seems to be an important change in this new version of the ESG: the focus on integrating quality management into the broader management context of the universities. Indeed, ESG 1 states that “institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management” (ENQA, 2015, p. 8). This seems to be something new which the ESG never focused on before. We believe that it might be an important development towards a more integrated vision of quality management in higher education, and particularly, of the ESG as a more integrated quality management model.

The need to integrate quality management into a broader management context is also stressed by the literature covering the ISO 9000 standards. This reflects the idea that organisations can take full advantage of the ISO 9000 standards benefits if they articulate the certification with the development of a solid quality management system (Gotzamani and Tsiotras, 2002). In the same way, universities who are now undergoing certification of their quality management systems would benefit from integrating their quality management system into their more general management and governance context. In fact, this integration is already an important criterion taken into account by some certifying agencies, and it is consequently a criterion which universities must meet to receive certification of their quality management systems (A3ES, 2013).

A useful advance would be for further work to repeat this study with the new version of the ESG and with the new quality management principles. This would be particularly fruitful exercise when both standards and principles have become more consolidated and better researched.

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