

The Quality supporting framework of the ESS Vision 2020

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Abstract

Members of the European Statistical System (ESS) defined their long term strategy and modernisation programme as the "ESS Vision 2020" and adopted it in May 2014. The area of quality has been identified as one of the strategy's five key areas – subsequently, it has been identified as one of the "supporting frameworks" of the Portfolio which has been set up to implement the strategy and which is composed of a limited number of projects and supporting frameworks.

The paper describes how the QUAL@ESS Vision 2020 has been constructed in order to reply to and fulfil the ambitious objectives of the Vision's Quality key area – it then explains how this supporting framework is also a vehicle for taking the quality work of the ESS forward and for modernising the entire ESS common quality framework.

The paper also presents the first results of the implementation of the coordination action of the QUAL@ESS Vision 2020 supporting framework and explains why this coordination role is of high importance with regard to the implementation of the ESS Vision 2020. It then concludes that the first lessons learned not only from the quality coordination of the ESS Vision 2020 Implementation Portfolio, but also from the second round of ESS Peer reviews, might lead to a second, and more in-depth, revision of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

Keywords: Coordination, ESS Vision 2020, Code of Practice

1. Introduction

1.1. The current quality framework of the ESS

The European Statistical System¹ (ESS) has got a well-established and well-rooted quality framework that is built, in particular, on the primary and secondary EU law, the ESS common quality framework (the European Statistics Code of Practice², CoP and the general quality management principles) and the underlying Quality Assurance Framework of the ESS³.

The CoP is a self-regulatory instrument which sets the standards, the 'good / best practices' for developing, producing and disseminating European statistics. It is not legally binding; its implementation is monitored through the ESS peer reviews⁴ – in this monitoring exercise, areas are identified where improvements should be achieved with regard to the implementation of the Code's Principles and Indicators. In this regard, the Code can be seen as the ultimate target, a set of exigent requirements.

The Quality Assurance Framework of the ESS (QAF) complements the Code of Practice in the sense that it provides methods and tools for its implementation – it is therefore a useful instrument for monitoring the Code compliance: the QAF was in fact used for the elaboration of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire used in the second round of ESS peer reviews.

¹ The European Statistical System (ESS) is the partnership between the Community statistical authority, which is the Commission (Eurostat), and the national statistical institutes (NSIs) and other national authorities responsible in each Member State for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5921861/KS-32-11-955-EN.PDF/5fa1ebc6-90bb-43fa-888f-dde032471e15>

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/64157/4392716/ESS-QAF-V1-2final.pdf/bbf5970c-1adf-46c8-afc3-58ce177a0646>

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/peer-reviews>

1.2. The modernisation program and strategy of the ESS: the ESS Vision 2020

In this robust legal and conceptual, quality and methodology framework the ESS adopted its modernisation program and strategy called ESS Vision 2020 in May 2014⁵. It describes where the ESS sees itself on the medium-long run as well as the ways it intends to get there. Quality was chosen as one of the 5 key areas of this Vision, together with the identification of user needs and cooperation with stakeholders, new data sources, efficient and robust statistical processes, dissemination and communication.

For the implementation of the strategy the ESS decided to use the ‘portfolio management approach’ in which separate projects and supporting frameworks guarantee the achievement of the Vision's ultimate objectives within the ESS Vision 2020 Implementation Portfolio. For the implementation of the ambitious goals of the Quality key area the ‘QUAL@ESS Vision 2020’ supporting framework has been constructed by Eurostat and the Working Group on Quality in Statistics in which each ESS member is represented by a responsible of the Quality area.

The paper describes how this QUAL@ESS Vision 2020 supporting framework is built, how it replies to the quality objectives of the ESS Vision 2020 and how at the same time it is the main vehicle for the modernisation of our current understanding and approach to quality in the ESS.

2. First action - Coordination

The first action of the QUAL@ESS Vision 2020 supporting framework consists of coordinating the quality elements of the entire ESS Vision 2020 Implementation Portfolio and being at the service of the different projects when it comes to questions and issues on quality. The objectives of these coordination activities are twofold: first, to assure coherence in the Portfolio projects in terms of quality, that the work carried out and the results achieved are in harmony with the current quality approach but, on the other hand, to learn and understand the possible impacts the strategic projects might have on the quality framework and our

⁵ Cf. Document ESSC 2014/21/7a/EN – 05.05.2014

understanding of quality, to ensure that they are duly considered and taken forward for their modernisation and evolution.

As a first step, the ‘Key Quality Elements’ of the Portfolio projects have been identified and mapped to the existing quality framework in a close cooperation and discussion with the Project Managers. A governance mechanism is now being set up with the participation of some Member States to regularly monitor, report, advise and coordinate the Key Quality Elements of the Portfolio. Ultimately, proposals will be made for the possible revision and extension of the quality framework of the ESS.

The first lessons learned from this coordination action show that there are some important synergies amongst some Portfolio projects in terms of quality, for example in the domains of administrative and big data, and that these synergies shall be exploited. The governance mechanism will now be operationalised and made function until the end of the different Portfolio projects.

3. Second action – Quality assurance

The second action of the QUAL@ESS Vision 2020 supporting framework consists of investigating and concluding on what exactly differentiated or ‘fit-for-purpose’ quality assurance in the context of the ESS means and what impact it would have on our current understanding of quality. In other words, to understand where we are in terms of quality assurance and where we want to be in the coming years, how we could take this approach forward in order “*to confirm the ESS as the statistical conscience of the knowledge-driven society as well as to keep and strengthen quality as our key asset and competitive advantage*” – cf. the motto of the QUAL@ESS Vision 2020 supporting framework, as it was inspired by the Quality chapter of the ESS Vision 2020.

This action will therefore raise and give guidance on issues like labelling of statistics, communicating different quality profiles to different user groups, interaction with the stakeholders, agility of the system and analysis of strengths and weaknesses / possible

improvements of European statistics within the individual quality criteria, as defined by the Amended Regulation 223 of 2009 and the European Statistics Code of Practice.

4. Third action – Quality for the institutions as a whole

The third action of the QUAL@ESS Vision 2020 supporting framework replies to the Vision statement of “*We value quality not only for our core products and processes, but also for our institutions as a whole, for overall management, organization, and governance*”. It consists of analysing the quality framework of the ESS in the light of a holistic approach to quality, what a ‘common quality framework’ in the context of statistical institutes, as mentioned in the preamble to the CoP, really means.

In addition, the action will develop further the general quality management principles at the level of the ESS and will also address the issues of a possible integration of a risk management into the quality framework of the ESS.

5. Conclusions

The paper described how the QUAL@ESS Vision 2020 supporting framework is constructed to address and translate the ambitious Quality objectives of the ESS Vision 2020 modernisation strategy into concrete actions. All three actions identified will have an impact – although a different extent and/or in a different way – on our current understanding and approach to quality which then has to be translated in the underlying quality framework.

The experiences and lessons learned from the analysis of the quality elements of the Vision Implementation Portfolio, together with the lessons learned from the second round of ESS peer reviews and some other initiatives like the micro-data exchange for example, will pave the way to the evolution of the existing quality framework so that it can cope with the new challenges and the changing landscape of the production of official statistics.

In addition, the modernisation actions of the QUAL supporting framework will also open up the horizon and will address issues that might change the very status and nature of official

statistics by bringing more agility and dynamism in the system which produces them – and by looking at quality from a holistic point of view, the ESS will also be able to use opportunities and address threats in a more systematic way and will have effectiveness and efficiency gains at the level of the entire system.

Quality is seen as one of the key assets and competitive advantages of the ESS in a world which experiences a growing trend of instant information which often lacks the necessary proof or guarantee of quality. The emphasis and clear explanation of the official statistics' high quality remains therefore a pre-condition for maintaining public trust and use of these statistics – members of the ESS have therefore decided to stand up together s their own 'guarantor' for the high quality they assure through the existing robust legal and conceptual, quality framework and the related actions and initiatives. This guarantee will take the form of a 'Quality Declaration' which will build upon the existing quality safeguards, underlining the importance of the partnership between the members of the system and the urge for continuous improvement and innovation, and would explain to the users all what the ESS is deploying in order to assure the high quality of its products and services. This guarantee or 'certification' of the system will at the next stage lead to the 'branding' of the products of the system, i.e. the European statistics.