CONTENTS

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE GUIDELINES COMMITTEE PROCEDURES POLICY .................................................. 3
   1.1. Definition of Guidelines Committee ................................................................................................. 3
   1.2. Definition of the policy ...................................................................................................................... 3
2. PROCEDURES FOR GUIDELINES ISSUED BY ESTRO ................................................................. 3
   2.1. Minimal consensus – procedures ...................................................................................................... 3
       2.1.1. Proposals for new guidelines .................................................................................................... 3
       2.1.2. Writing of guidelines ................................................................................................................. 4
   2.2. Minimal consensus – content ........................................................................................................... 4
       2.2.1. Rationale ....................................................................................................................................... 4
       2.2.2. Methodology ............................................................................................................................ 4
       2.2.3. Conclusion .................................................................................................................................. 4
       2.2.4. Limitations ............................................................................................................................... 4
       2.2.5. Review of guidelines ............................................................................................................... 5
       2.2.6. Publication strategy ................................................................................................................. 5
       2.2.7. Updating strategy ..................................................................................................................... 5
       2.2.8. Timeline ..................................................................................................................................... 5
3. PROCEDURE FOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY GUIDELINES ISSUED BY OTHER CONSORTIA .......... 5
   3.1 Joint initiative ...................................................................................................................................... 6
   3.2 Initiative from external society: ESTRO as collaborator ................................................................... 6
   3.3 Society with whom ESTRO has a signed MoU ................................................................................ 7
4. DOCUMENT HISTORY ......................................................................................................................... 7

This procedures policy applies to the Guidelines Committee of ESTRO. The policy is only in English.
1. OBJECTIVES OF THE GUIDELINES COMMITTEE PROCEDURES POLICY

1.1. Definition of the Guidelines Committee

The Guidelines Committee was formed in December 2012, with the aim of advising the ESTRO Board and respective ESTRO councils on the following key areas:

- Development and prioritisation of clinical and technical guidelines in the field of Radiation Oncology.
- Additional options for ESTRO to contribute to multidisciplinary guidelines involving other professional oncology societies both within Europe (e.g. ECCO) and internationally (e.g. ASTRO, UICC).
- The potential impact of emerging and draft legislation and/or advisory documentation from the EU that may impact on European Radiation Oncology.
- Highlight additional initiatives within the EU that may be important to the strategic development of European Radiation Oncology.
- Strategic assessment of any other documents, guidelines and miscellaneous information that may impact on clinical service development within the discipline of Radiation Oncology.

To achieve optimal integration of the Guidelines Committee into other relevant ESTRO committees and ensure proper exchange of information, the Guidelines Committee will automatically integrate at least one member of each discipline committee, plus one member from the Educational Council and the yESTRO Committee into its body.

1.2. Definition of the policy

This policy sets the standard operating procedures for the development of ESTRO guidelines and guidelines endorsed by ESTRO. It defines the process of guideline development from the commencement of a new guideline, through the prioritisation of guideline initiatives, financial support, benchmarking, reviewing, and proofreading, to the publication of a guideline. The policy also defines ESTRO’s involvement in multidisciplinary guidelines issued by other consortia.

2. PROCEDURES FOR GUIDELINES ISSUED BY ESTRO

2.1. Minimal consensus – procedures

2.1.1. Proposals for new guidelines

Proposals may be received from both ESTRO committees and individual ESTRO experts. The Guidelines Committee, in close co-operation with the ESTRO councils, will propose areas of high importance for development of guidelines and will actively foster the development of guidelines in focus areas highlighted within the ESTRO vision document.

An initial proposal should contain information regarding the need, rationale, and content of the proposed guideline. Furthermore, information regarding the Writing Panel, a suitable reviewing panel and timelines for defined deliverables should be provided. The Guidelines Committee will review the composition of the writing and the review panels and will make additional suggestions if deemed necessary. The group proposing the guideline should provide information regarding parallel or overlapping activities from other scientific societies or, other boards, to the extent they are aware. Similarly, the Guidelines Committee is responsible for checking if other similar activities are taking place.

All proposals will be collected by the Guidelines Committee and discussed during the regular Guidelines Committee meetings. Decisions will be made in close collaboration with other relevant ESTRO committees and, when appropriate, with other societies. Liaison people with other key societies should be identified and regular informal exchange should take place.

All key aspects of a guideline proposal will be checked by the Guidelines Committee, based on the present policy summarised in the Guidelines Committee check list. In case of a positive decision, the relevant ESTRO Scientific
Council and editors of the journal will be informed. At this stage, the editor of the journal will be informed about the proposed reviewing panel, to approve it or suggest some changes.

2.1.2. Writing of guidelines

Guidelines will be prepared by a guideline preparation panel (Writing Panel) reflecting the whole range of scientific and clinical expertise needed. When appropriate, the Writing Panel should reflect the diversity of possible approaches throughout Europe and internationally. Furthermore, it is mandatory that all members of the Writing Panel have a recognised expertise in their field (documented by relevant publications, participation in relevant study groups, clinical trial groups, other scientific panels, or similar activities). The number of participants is related to the complexity of the individual guideline. No definitive recommendations will be made.

The Writing Panel will appoint one of its members as chair. The Writing Panel is responsible for the preparation of the guideline and for defining the deliverables and timeline.

During preparation, the Writing Panel needs to consider that a guideline is different from an in-depth review article. A review article provides a detailed and concise overview regarding the scientific background of any given issue, whereas a guideline defines the hands-on approach. The scientific background must be considered as the foundation of any guideline; however, a lack of hard evidence will force any Writing Panel to provide pragmatic “best recommendations”.

A guideline, presenting the rationale, key guideline content and documentation of limitations and shortcomings, should not be more than 3-5 printed pages in the journal and, in no circumstance, exceed the maximum of 6 printed pages as per a full article. All other data may be included as an online supplement outside of the guideline text.

2.2. Minimal consensus – content

2.2.1. Rationale

Every guideline provides the necessary information regarding the underlying rationale for the guideline as well as the scientific background.

For target volume guidelines (TV-guidelines), the definition of a rationale is not mandatory. It should be replaced by an exact definition of which areas and clinical stages the guideline is addressing.

2.2.2. Methodology

The methodology for the selection of data, inclusion or exclusion of publications, as well as the research strategy should be indicated adequately. The Writing Panel should adhere as much as possible to standard terminology and, if necessary, include a legend where precise description of concepts, measures etc. are described to allow full understanding of recommendations and comparisons.

2.2.3. Conclusion

All guidelines should come to clear and balanced conclusions. The conclusions should be as widely applicable as possible and should cover different approaches. Whenever possible, the level of evidence should be indicated for any conclusion made.

In case of target-volume-guidelines, the suggestions should be as clear as possible using well-defined anatomical landmarks and margin sizes. Whenever possible, a distinction between evidence-based (results of trials) and consensus-based recommendations should be made clear.

2.2.4. Limitations

In addition to clear conclusions, any overt limitations, especially those that were actively accepted, should be made clear.
2.2.5. Review of guidelines

The Writing Panel will suggest individuals for an independent reviewing panel. The reviewing panel must be adequately balanced in terms of scientific and clinical competence as well as being geographically balanced. If deemed necessary, the Guidelines Committee can bring in additional reviewers.

The reviewing process may be a constant feedback process (already taking place during the preparation of the guideline) or a single review process (taking place after the finalisation of the manuscript). All open issues and critical points that have arisen during the review process will be adequately documented and stored centrally with ESTRO.

If the review process is based on a single review, the process follows the regular journal style procedure including a written review and a point-by-point response addressing all open issues. The review process will later be made available to the editors of the journal to which the guideline is submitted for their final decision.

To enhance the visibility of the reviewers, the Guidelines Committee can propose (in exceptional circumstances) to include active reviewers, who sensibly contribute to the shaping of a guideline, as authors of the guideline. The final decision on whether to include a reviewer as an author, rests with the Writing Panel of the guideline. An addendum to the guideline is strongly recommended, outlining the role of, and the specific expertise provided by, every author and reviewer in the drafting of the guideline.

2.2.6. Publication strategy

All ESTRO or ESTRO-endorsed guidelines will be published in one of the ESTRO journals (preferably as open access articles) allowing for a wide and free dissemination of the guideline. To avoid delays, the journal will not perform a further review and adopt the Guidelines Committee process (cfr 2.2.5). The reviewers’ comments and responses from the Writing Panel will be sent to the journal editors for their information.

The Guidelines Committee must submit, together with the manuscript, the documentation of the reviewing process which has taken place prior to submission. The editors of the ESTRO journal to which the guideline is submitted take the final decision on whether the manuscript is appropriate for publication in the journal.

The Guidelines Committee will consult with the Editors-in-Chief of the ESTRO Journal regarding its publication. The Guidelines Committee will inform the chair of the Writing Panel on where the guideline will be published.

2.2.7. Updating strategy

Any Writing Panel must provide realistic timelines and define responsibilities regarding regular updates and updates in case of paradigm-changing novelties.

All guidelines should have a putative “decay time” of 3 years after which the need for, and the content of, the given guideline will be re-checked. It is intended that the Writing Panel stays in place at least for the first three years.

2.2.8. Timeline

Guidelines should be submitted for publication approximately 1 year after a checklist has been accepted by the Guidelines Committee.

If there are no deliverables one year after a checklist has been submitted, the Guidelines Committee reserves the right to stop the activity or, to render the checklist invalid and to ask the chair of the Writing Panel to re-submit the checklist for consideration.

3. PROCEDURE FOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY GUIDELINES ISSUED BY OTHER CONSORTIA

This chapter gives an overview of the process for responding to requests from external stakeholders who might ask for ESTRO’s collaboration in drafting guidelines. In most instances, the preparation pathway for guidelines issued by other scientific groups will follow jointly determined rules and policies, often these accords are based on ad hoc agreements that should be discussed individually but keeping in mind the Guidelines Committee general procedures.
For this reason, it is necessary to define the process of communication within ESTRO, the prioritisation of the guidelines, the choice of ESTRO experts and the definition of an appropriate publication policy ensuring the protection of ESTRO's interests.

3.1 Joint initiative

In a joint initiative, ESTRO is an equal partner in the development of the guidelines. The name ESTRO should be included in the title of the guideline.

The Guidelines Committee receives and discusses the proposal (teleconferencing and e-mailing). The proposal and the Guidelines Committee initial feedback are transferred to the Scientific Council for insight. If deemed appropriate by the council and the Guidelines Committee, the ESTRO Board will be consulted.

Feedback will be collected within 2 weeks and will be given to the proposing society. The feedback should consider the following points:

- Rationale, content of the guidelines
- Proposed experts
- Proposed ESTRO internal reviewers
- Budget
- Publication policy

The budget must be discussed case-by-case with the societies included in the consortium. Being an equal partner, ESTRO can cover part of the expenses for the development of joint initiatives if previously agreed within the consortium. If the Guidelines Committee budget is not sufficient for covering the financial contribution to the guideline, the ESTRO Executive Council will be consulted.

Being a joint initiative, guidelines should be published by all partners in their official journals. Publication should happen concurrently whenever possible, agreeing on the publication schedule in advance. Dissemination of the guidelines should be a priority for all partners.

Once the final agreement within the Guidelines Committee has been taken, the ESTRO office will inform the proposing society, the Scientific Council and the ESTRO journal editors. The Scientific Council should receive regular updates on guidelines in process and their costs.

3.2 Initiative from external society: ESTRO as collaborator

We define ESTRO as a collaborator in the development of guidelines when an external society asks ESTRO to provide experts in a specific area. The name ESTRO can be included in the title of the guideline; the inclusion of the name ESTRO in the title of the guideline will be discussed case-by-case.

The Guidelines Committee receives and discusses the proposal (teleconferencing and e-mailing), taking the decision regarding involvement/participation, ESTRO experts to be appointed for contribution, and internal ESTRO reviewers to oversee the final work.

Feedback regarding ESTRO participation and suggestions of experts will be collected within 2 weeks and be given to the proposing society. The ESTRO office will contact the proposed experts beforehand, to ascertain their availability. Once the proposed experts have been accepted by the leading society, it is the responsibility of the leading society to keep contact with the proposed experts and co-ordinate the delivery of the work with them, always keeping the Guidelines Committee representative and the ESTRO office informed.

The budget should be discussed ad hoc with the leading society. In principle, expenses should be covered by the society leading the guidelines. If exceptions are requested, these should be approved by the Guidelines Committee according to its annual budget. If the Guidelines Committee budget is not sufficient to cover the financial contribution to the guideline, the ESTRO Executive Council will be consulted.
Clear suggestions regarding the publication policy should be provided by the leading society, if not, the Guidelines Committee and the Scientific Council will suggest a suitable publication policy.

Once the final agreement within the Guidelines Committee has been taken, the ESTRO office will inform the proposing society, the Scientific Council and the ESTRO journal editors. The Scientific Council should receive regular updates on guidelines in process and their costs.

3.3 Society with whom ESTRO has a signed MoU

The Society proposing the guidelines has a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ESTRO.

If the MoU in place does foresee the drafting of common guidelines, then the ad hoc arrangements included in the MoU should be respected.

If the MoU does not foresee the drafting of common guidelines, then the Guidelines Committee follows the procedure according to the type of guideline proposed, joint or with ESTRO as collaborator. It is recommended to pursue joint guidelines with those societies having a MoU with ESTRO.

4. DOCUMENT HISTORY

DOCUMENT HISTORY
First approved on 17 November 2014
Revision version approved on 28 February 2020

DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION
Document approver: ESTRO Scientific Council
Document owner: Manager Science Unit