

Update on Draft 1 of the 2027 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA

XCVI BFUG Board meeting, Vaduz (Lichtenstein), 4 November 2025

1. Introduction and context

Through the Tirana Ministerial Communiqué, the ministers gave the authors of the ESG mandate to revise the document ahead of the next Ministerial conference. The authors have been tasked with presenting a revision proposal by 2026, with the final version of the ESG to be adopted at the 2027 Ministerial conference. The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes¹ will also be updated, based on the revised ESG.

At the XCIII Bologna Follow-Up Group meeting, hosted by Hungary in Budapest between 26-27 September 2024, a [briefing note](#)² on process and structures for the ESG revision was presented. At the XCV BFUG meeting, hosted by Poland in Warsaw between 24-25 February 2025, a [plenary session](#)³ to discuss the process of revising was organised. The outcomes of the debates were summarised in the [minutes](#)⁴ of the meeting, and the main conclusions were:

General agreement on

- The need for a revision, but building on the existing version
- The current structure is appropriate
- Caution against overloading the ESG with too many topics and risk diminishing its strength
- No need to (re-)define the concept of quality
- The ESG should focus on learning, teaching (and assessment), but with much stronger reference to links with research and the societal mission

Divergent views on

- If and how references to fundamental values and social dimension should be strengthened
- Extent of convergence needed between ESG/EA and European Degree criteria

¹https://ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/73/1/European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_613731.pdf

²https://ehea.info/Download/ESG%20revision%20process%20and%20structures_for%20BFUG%20Sept%202024.pdf

³ https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_PL_AL_95_7_1_ESG_discussion_background_paper_11.02.2025.pdf and https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_PL_AL_95_7_2_ESG_presentation_19.02.2025.pdf.

⁴ https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_PL_AL_95_Minutes_05.05.2025_final.pdf

2. Roadmap

The ESG revision Steering Committee has so far met five times (September and December 2024; March, June and September 2025), while the Drafting Committee held several meetings between the Steering Committee's meetings.

The first draft of the ESG 2027 will be available as part of a public consultation to be launched on **17 November**. Therefore, the full draft will be available in advance of the BFUG meeting hosted by Denmark in Copenhagen on 15-16 December 2025. The consultation will be closed in early January. An updated roadmap for the continuation of the process is included in the Annex to this paper.

3. Discussions and outcomes so far

All changes presented below are tentative, as the proposals are still under discussion within the Steering Committee.

General Considerations and Context, Scope, Purposes and Principles

- The current structure of the ESG should be maintained (introductory section, 3 parts)
- There should be further work on ensuring that the standards are self-explanatory, while the guidelines support implementation in different contexts and do not explain all concepts mentioned in the standards
- Should remain focused on L&T, but with stronger reference to the links to the research and societal missions of HEIs
- Should maintain applicability to all types of higher education provision (and revision should keep in mind "other/alternative providers" and smaller units of learning smaller e.g. micro-credentials)
- Should support different concepts of quality
- Are standards for quality assurance and not for quality itself (with few exceptions)
- The existing principles⁵ remain valid, but discussion on whether additional ones are needed
- Re-writing of Context, Scope, Purposes and Principles section to revise the structure and eliminate overlaps, update the context, make the key messages clearer
- Reflection on whether definitions should be in the text versus a separate section (glossary)

⁵ "The ESG are based on the following four principles for quality assurance in the EHEA:

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;
- Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;
- Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society."

Part I STANDARDS FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

1.1 POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Require the IQA policy to reflect links between L&T and other institutional missions and activities
- Explicit referral to the involvement of students and other stakeholders in the development and implementation of the policy
- Referrals to the social dimension and fundamental values of HE in the guidelines

1.2 DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF PROGRAMMES

- Societal relevance/employability to be added to the standard
- Emphasise involvement of stakeholders, including students, in programme design/monitoring.

1.3 STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

- Updated understanding of student-centred learning and focus on the role of QA in supporting this

1.4 STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION

1.5 TEACHING STAFF

- Updated understanding of the role of the teacher
- Expansion of the standard to cover other staff involved in education delivery, not only teaching staff

1.6 LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT

- Renamed to Learning environment
- Expanded to cover the whole learning environment – learning resources, infrastructure and student support
- Add reference to accessibility and inclusiveness

1.7 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

1.8 PUBLIC INFORMATION

1.9 ON-GOING MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES

- To be merged with 1.2 (with removal of overlaps).

1.10 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Reference to the need for demonstrating improvements between external QA activities to be included in the standard (currently in the guidelines).

Part II STANDARDS FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- To clarify that the standard refers to external QA covering all the standards of ESG Part 1, and that it should also consider the internal QA system of an institution in general.

2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

- Dual purpose of accountability and enhancement to be highlighted.

2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

- The standard retains the steps currently included (self-assessment, site visit, report follow-up) but also makes it clearer the possibility of justified alternative approaches.

- To better clarify that site visits refer to in-person activities (unless otherwise justified).

2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

- To emphasise that the agencies are to ensure themselves of the competencies and professionalism of their experts.
- To be required by the standard that the panel composition reflects the aim and scope of the process.

2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

- Change the name of the standard to include also processes to reach the outcomes.
- The reference to the evidence base for decision-making to be strengthened (link between criteria, evidence in reports, outcomes of the procedure, and decision-making processes to reach the outcomes).

2.6 REPORTING

- Reinforce, as part of the standard, the usability of the reports by the institutions, including recommendations, as well as the need to provide the opportunity to institutions to fact-check the reports.
- The need for digital accessibility and usability of reports to be included.

2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

- Further clarify the difference between complaints (process) and appeals (more related to outcomes).

Part III STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Involvement of stakeholders to be kept flexible, in terms of category and type of involvement, as appropriate in terms of intended impact, assuring involvement whenever relevant.
- Discussion within the Steering Committee to reinforce the need to include stakeholders in the structures of the agencies.

3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

- To be deleted, but including transparent information on how the outcomes of the reviews can be used and by whom they are recognised in ESG Part II.

3.3 INDEPENDENCE

- To be clarified that the agencies have to act without undue influence from any single internal or external party, and that safeguards should be in place to prevent this.
- Standard to include the three dimensions of independence - organisational, operational, and formal outcomes - which are currently in the guidelines.

3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

- Standard to be broadened to cover enhancement activities more generally.

3.5 RESOURCES

3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

- Requirement for the existence and application of an internal QA policy to be added to the standard.
- Discussion on whether to move professional conduct (including in CBQA) into a separate standard.

3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

- Requirement for development since the previous review to be included.

4. Consultations

The public consultation will be launched on **17 November**, using an **online survey**, and closed on **9 January**. This will allow the Steering Committee to analyse the input and prepare a new version in time for the BFUG meeting in March 2026.

The text will be divided per standard, so answers referring to each standard could be collected and analysed more easily. The survey will allow categorisation of the respondents, including per stakeholder group and whether it is an individual response or on behalf of a whole institution/organisation.

The survey will be distributed through the EHEA Secretariat, all BFUG members and consultative members being strongly encouraged to disseminate it as widely as possible.

A proposal of support to summarise the consultation results was received from the EHEA Secretariat and EQAR, as the Steering Committee itself does not have the capacity to manage a large number of results, as expected.

5. Conclusions

The BFUG Board is invited to reflect on the proposed changes and the next steps.

A plenary session will be organised within the Denmark BFUG to discuss overall changes proposed by ESG Draft 1, to be released on 17 November. Eventual specific aspects to be discussed by the BFUG will be established based on the draft document.

Annex: Roadmap for the revision of the ESG (2024-2027)

The Roadmap below has been updated according to the planning agreed in the Steering Committee meeting on 11-12 September 2025.

Date	Meeting/actors	Action
2024		
30 September 2024	SC meeting	Agree roadmap and have first discussion on structure, scope and principles
4 December 2024	SC meeting	Discuss draft introduction, main directions for the standards, and prepare session for BFUG meeting in February 2025
2025		
24-25 February 2025	BFUG meeting in Poland	1.5 hour session for discussion on key issues for the ESG revision
12 March 2025	SC meeting	Discuss input from BFUG, draft introduction and directions for Part 1
10 June 2025	SC meeting	Discuss draft of Part 1 and directions for Part 2
11-12 September	SC meeting	Discuss drafts of Part 2 and 3, and critical issues for Part 1
4 November	BFUG Board meeting in Vaduz	Update on Draft 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA
17 Nov		Launch public consultation
1 December		Deadline for documents for BFUG meeting
9 December	SC meeting	Launch work on the EAJP
15-16 December	BFUG meeting in Denmark	1,5 hour session to discuss overall Draft 1
2026		
9 January		Close public consultation
4 February	SC meeting	Discuss outcomes of consultation
9-10 March	BFUG meeting in Cyprus	Session to discuss ESG and EAJP standard by standard
25 March	SC meeting	

Spring/summer 2026		Additional meetings to finalise ESG and EAJP
Autumn 2026	BFUG meeting in Ireland	BFUG approve the final versions of the ESG 2027 and the EAJP 2027
2027		
May 2027	Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in Romania/Moldova	EHEA Ministers adopt the ESG 2027 and EAJP 2027

Abbreviations

- ESG Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
- EAJP European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
- SC Steering Committee for revision of ESG
- DG Drafting Group for revision of ESG
- EHEA European Higher Education Area
- BFUG Bologna Process Follow-up Group