

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

XCVII BFUG meeting, Copenhagen (Denmark), 15-16 December 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 key issues for the revision 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 of the ESG 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

An [update](#)⁵ on the Draft 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for QA in EHEA was included on the agenda of the XCVI BFUG Board meeting, Vaduz (Lichtenstein), 4 November 2025. The minutes for the meeting are not yet available.

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

⁵ https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_Board_DK_LI_96_7_Update_on_Draft_1_ESG_22.10.2025.pdf and https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_Board_DK_LI_96_7_2_ESG_Presentation_27.10.2025.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.

[Public consultation](#) on the [first draft](#) of the ESG 2027 was launched on **17 November** and will be open until **9 January**. This timing will allow the Steering Committee to analyse the input and prepare a new version in time for the BFUG meeting on 9-10 March 2026. The consultation survey was 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 the expected large number of contributions.

An updated roadmap for the continuation of the process is included in the Annex to this paper.

3. Main changes proposed

The main changes presented in the first draft of the ESG are described in the [explanatory note](#) for the public consultations and below.

The revision process was based on the following [general principles](#):

- The current structure is appropriate (introductory section, 3 parts),
- Caution against overloading the ESG with too many topics, since it would risk diminishing its strength,
- The ESG should focus on learning, teaching (and assessment), but with much stronger reference to links with research and the societal mission,
- ESG are standards for quality assurance and not for quality itself (with few exceptions), and should support different concepts of quality,
- It needs to be ensured that the standards are self-explanatory, while the guidelines support implementation in different contexts instead of explaining concepts mentioned in the standards,
- The ESG should maintain applicability to all types of higher education provision (including “other/alternative providers” and smaller units of learning e.g. micro-credentials).

[General Considerations and Context, Scope, Purposes and Principles](#)

The introductory part was restructured, to avoid overlaps and to address in a logical order the concepts of quality, quality assurance, as well as the ESG's focus, scope, purpose and principles.

The context was updated so that it reflects the changes in the higher education systems in the last ten years, while the need to foster the social dimension and the fundamental values of higher education was underlined, as part of quality education. While the focus of the ESG remains on learning and teaching, societal engagement was added to the areas that should be considered when linked to learning and teaching, in addition to research. Other areas underpinning learning and teaching are governance and organisation of higher education. An additional purpose: *The ESG support diverse groups of stakeholders in higher education systems*



in continuously monitoring and enhancing the education provided, and an additional principle: Quality assurance supports and enables international cooperation based on trust were added.

Part I Standards and Guidelines for Internal quality assurance

1.1 POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Require the internal quality assurance policy to reflect links between learning and teaching and other institutional missions and activities.
- Explicit reference to the involvement of students and other stakeholders in the development and implementation of the policy.
- Reference to the societal mission of higher education, the social dimension and fundamental values of higher education in the guidelines.

1.2 DESIGN AND APPROVAL OF PROGRAMMES

- Standard merged with standard 1.9.
- Societal relevance and employability are added to the standard
- Emphasise involvement of stakeholders, including students, in programme design/monitoring.
- Emphasise the importance of learning outcomes approach.

1.3 STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

- Updated understanding of student-centred learning and focus on the role of QA in supporting this.
- Strengthening the reference, primarily in the guidelines, to students' active role, quality assurance perspective and inclusivity.
- Use of digital and technological tools added to guidelines as an example of good practice.

1.4 STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION, RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION

- Guidelines now include a specific reference to the diploma supplement.

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.
- Societal mission of higher education added to the guidelines as an important element for the scholarly activity.

1.6 LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT

- Renamed to Learning environment.
- Expanded to cover the whole learning environment – learning resources, infrastructure and student support.
- Added reference to accessibility and inclusiveness.
- Learning resources such as databases, dedicated software, simulation facilities added to the guidelines.

1.7 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

- Guidelines now include reference to collecting data on student satisfaction.

1.8 PUBLIC INFORMATION

1.9 ON-GOING MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES

- Merged with 1.2 (with removal of overlaps).

1.10 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Part II: Standards and Guidelines for External Quality Assurance

2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- The focus on learning and teaching of the internal quality assurance processes in general is underlined, and also the need to verify that the considered education provision is higher education and developed in line with requirements specific to the declared level of qualification offered.
- The need to consider all standards described in Part I of the ESG was moved from the guidelines to the standard.

2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

- Underline the need to consider both accountability and enhancement, as well as relevant applicable regulations; and that the involvement of stakeholders is needed at all stages.

2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

- The need to have consistency between the processes and the methodologies for which they are set is underlined, also concerning adaptation to the established aims.
- It is clarified that a site visit normally takes place in person (unless otherwise justified), it is realised by the peer-review experts and includes interviews with different types of stakeholders (moved from guidelines).
- As a result of the external quality assurance processes, the report is developed by the experts (moved from the guidelines).

2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

- The requirement for the experts to be competent and independent, and that their selection should be adapted to the specific quality assurance process, was moved from the guidelines to the standard.

2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

- Change the name of the standard to cover also the processes to reach the outcomes.
- Reference to the evidence base for decision-making is strengthened (link between criteria, evidence in reports, outcomes of the procedure, and decision-making processes to reach the outcomes).
- While standard 3.2 on Official status of quality assurance agencies was deleted, the need to transparently communicate how and if the outcomes of the process are formally recognised was moved to this standard.

2.6 REPORTING

- The standard was expanded with the need to publish all documents used to reach the outcome of the review, in addition to the reports by the experts, if the case.
- 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 (moved from guidelines).
- The need for digital accessibility and usability of reports was included.

2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

- The need for appeals to be considered by a different entity than the one that took the decision was added to the standard.



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

Part III: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies

3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

- It is emphasised that involvement of stakeholders in the work and governance should be meaningful, while the students are now explicitly mentioned as one of the stakeholders to be involved.

3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

- To be deleted, but the need for transparent information on how the outcomes of the reviews can be used and by whom they are recognised was included in ESG Part II (2.5).

3.3 INDEPENDENCE

- It is 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 includes the three dimensions of independence - organisational, operational, and formal outcomes - which are currently in the guidelines.

3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

- Standard is renamed to “Activities for enhancement” and broadened to cover enhancement activities more generally.

3.5 RESOURCES

- Stronger emphasis on human resources, including the added requirement to ensure continuous professional development of the staff.

NEW PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT AND INTEGRITY

- Reference to the need for having and maintaining high professional standards and tools for ensuring integrity in order to facilitate trust.

3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

- Requirement for the existence and application of an internal QA policy is added to the standard.
- Professional conduct (including in cross-border QA) moved into a separate standard.

3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

- Requirement to address development since the previous review was added.

In detail, all changes are described in Annex 2 to the [explanatory note](#).

4. Conclusions

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

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