Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2027)
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Foreword

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) were first adopted in 2005 by the Ministers responsible for higher education following the proposal of the E4 Group (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ENQA, European Students' Union - ESU, European University Association - EUA and European Association for the Applied Sciences in Higher Education - EURASHE).

A revised version was adopted in 2015, prepared by the initial authors together with Education International - EI, BUSINESS EUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR. At that time the ESG, as well as other Bologna action lines such as qualifications frameworks, recognition and the promotion of the use of learning outcomes, contributed to a paradigm shift towards student-centred learning and teaching.

The 2024 Tirana Ministerial Communiqué invited the authors to propose another update, given the necessity of keeping the ESG in line with ongoing developments, challenges and expectations of the higher education landscape. The revision also aimed to provide more clarity in the document in order to facilitate its implementation in practice.

The revision process included several consultation sessions involving stakeholders, the Ministers' delegates in the Bologna Follow-Up Group, as well as a public consultation. The revised version was developed by a Steering Committee and a Drafting Group, which thoroughly analysed and took into consideration the proposals and suggestions received from different stakeholders.

The ESG 2027 were adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in the European Higher Education Area in May 2027 at the Iași - Chișinău Ministerial Conference. As a result of the participative revision process, we are confident that they reflect a consensus among all the stakeholders and ministries involved on how to take forward quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area and, as such, provide the basis for successful and widely spread implementation of the ESG.

Introduction

Context, scope, purposes and principles

Context

Higher education, research and innovation play a crucial role in supporting social cohesion, economic growth and global competitiveness. Our societies need resilient higher education institutions that operate within a shared framework of quality assurance standards that enable international cooperation and recognition, ensure that learners achieve the relevant skills and competences to be active citizens in knowledge-based societies and economies, and support innovation through flexible and fit-for-purpose regulatory frameworks. The increasing demand

for skills and competences requires higher education to respond in new ways and this common framework should guide and support institutions in this endeavour.

Given the diversity of expectations for higher education, the student-centred approach to learning and teaching enables flexible learning paths, recognition of competencies gained outside formal curricula and through international cooperation, which is necessary to prepare students for life in multi-cultural societies and to find sustainable solutions together for current and future global challenges. Higher education institutions themselves also become more diverse in their missions, modes of educational provision and (international) cooperation.

Quality is mainly a result of the meaningful interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment, in close connection with external stakeholders and society as a whole. Ensuring quality education requires an operating context in which the social dimension of higher education[1] is actively supported and fostered, and the fundamental values[2] of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) are upheld.

Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities, services and facilities are fit for purpose, and take into account the diversity of the student body. Quality assurance is crucial in supporting higher education systems and institutions in responding to constantly changing societies, while ensuring the qualifications achieved by students and their experience of higher education remain at the forefront of institutional missions. The role of quality assurance becomes even more critical in view of the ambitions for international cooperation of higher education institutions and the support it can provide for recognition of qualifications. Moreover, the ambition of the EHEA to increase its attractiveness and further open up to international students must be backed up with reliable and well-developed systems that create trust in the quality and relevance of the offered programmes.

At the heart of all quality assurance activities are the twin purposes of accountability and enhancement. Taken together, these create trust in higher education institutions' performance. A successfully implemented quality assurance system will provide information to assure higher education institutions and the public of the quality of its activities (accountability) and provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement). Accountability and enhancement are thus interrelated. They can support the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all: from the students and academic staff to the institutional leadership and management, and recognised by external stakeholders.

A key goal of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) is to contribute to the common understanding of quality assurance for learning and teaching across borders and among all stakeholders. They have been and will continue to be an essential factor for developing national and institutional quality assurance systems across the EHEA and support cross-border cooperation both within the EHEA and globally. In addition, the ESG play an important role in ensuring the implementation of the key

[1] https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf
[2] https://ehea.info/Download/ANNEX-1-EHEA-STATEMENTS-ON-FUNDAMENTAL-VALUES%20(1).pdf

commitments of the Bologna Process higher education reform agenda and in creating the conditions for the implementation of the fundamental values. The ESG are used by institutions and quality assurance agencies as a reference document for internal and external quality assurance systems in higher education. Moreover, they are used by the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), which is responsible for the register of quality assurance agencies that comply with the ESG.

Scope

The ESG are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education, covering the areas vital for successful quality provision of learning environments in higher education. While implementation may vary, a broad acceptance of all standards is a precondition for creating a common understanding of quality assurance in the EHEA.

The focus of the ESG is on quality assurance of learning and teaching in higher education, including the learning environment and relevant links to research, innovation, and societal engagement. In addition, institutions should have policies and processes to ensure and improve the governance, organisation and quality of all their activities, also taking into consideration the digital transition and the use of artificial intelligence.

The EHEA is characterised by its diversity of political and higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, institutions, languages, aspirations and expectations. This makes a single monolithic approach to quality and quality assurance in higher education inappropriate. For these reasons, the ESG need to be at a reasonably generic level in order to ensure that they are applicable to all forms of provision and to all higher education contexts and systems.

The ESG apply to all higher education offered by institutions from the EHEA, regardless of the volume, mode of study, educational provider, place of delivery, or form of education, including but not limited to digitally enhanced provision, lifelong learning opportunities and short units of learning such as micro-credentials. In addition, the ESG also apply to transnational and cross-border provision of higher education within and outside of the EHEA.

Consequently, agencies' external quality assurance activities considered within the scope of the ESG are those that concern learning and teaching in higher education institutions or programmes that aim to assess quality dimensions defined in the ESG Part 1.

Higher education aims to fulfil multiple purposes including preparing students for active citizenship, for their careers (e.g. by contributing to their employability), supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation.[3] Therefore, stakeholders, who may prioritise different purposes, can view quality in higher education and quality assurance of higher education differently. The ESG take into account these different perspectives. The specific mention of certain stakeholder groups in some of the standards and guidelines is intended to encourage their meaningful

[3] Recommendation Rec (2007)6 by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on the public responsibility for higher education and research, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/News/pub_res_EN.pdf

participation and to ensure that relevant perspectives, that might otherwise be overlooked, are taken into account.

The ESG should be considered in a broader context that also includes qualifications frameworks, ECTS, and the diploma supplement, as well as the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, which contribute to promoting transparency and mutual trust in higher education in the EHEA, thus creating the conditions for closer international and cross-border cooperation. The ESG operate in a comprehensive framework that also includes the EHEA Fundamental Values and the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA.

Purposes

The ESG have the following core purposes:

- They set a core common framework for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching at European, national and institutional level;
- They enable the assurance and improvement of quality of higher education in the EHEA;
- They support diverse groups of stakeholders in higher education systems in continuously monitoring and enhancing the education provided;
- They support mutual trust, thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders and facilitating international cooperation;
- They provide information on quality assurance in the EHEA.

Principles

The ESG provide a framework at European level against which quality assurance agencies, and higher education institutions and their activities are assessed.[4] This ensures that quality assurance in the EHEA adheres to the same set of principles and that the processes and procedures are modelled to fit the purposes and requirements of their contexts, and are flexible to support innovation in higher education provision.

The ESG are based on and rely on the respect of the following 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 society and all stakeholders in higher education, in particular students.

Key terms

[4] Agencies that apply for inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) undergo an external review for which the ESG provide the criteria. Also, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) relies on compliance with the ESG when it comes to granting quality assurance agencies membership in the organisation.

In this document, the following terms are understood as described in this list of key terms.

Cross-border quality assurance	External QA activities of a QA agency carried out in a country other than the one in which it is based or primarily operates.
External quality assurance	Refers to the comprehensive set of evaluation activities relating to teaching and learning in higher education, carried out by peer reviewers using a predefined framework. The assessment of institutions is conducted by quality assurance agencies against set standards in line with processes as described in the Part 2 of the ESG, on a cyclical basis. Given the multiple needs of higher education institutions, external quality assurance may take various forms to achieve different objectives. These may include evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities, which may be carried out differently and at different levels (such as programme or institutional level), and may lead to judgements and formal outcomes, depending on the context.
Higher education	Education delivered/provided according to the descriptors of Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area[5] and corresponding European Qualifications Framework.
Institution	Refers to higher education institutions and other providers that deliver education aligned with the descriptors of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area[6] and corresponding European Qualifications Framework.
Internal quality assurance	The continuous process of monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of higher education provision within an institution, or to internal mechanisms of quality monitoring, evaluation and improvement within an agency. It refers to a set of systematic processes and practices implemented within an organisation to ensure the quality, consistency, and effectiveness of its products, services, or activities. It is an essential part of quality assurance.
Programme	Refers to all higher education provision, including that which is not leading to a degree, regardless of the volume, mode of study, educational provider, place of delivery or form of education (digitally enhanced provision, lifelong learning opportunities and small units of learning such as those leading to micro-credentials). It also refers to international provision such as joint, transnational and cross-border education.
Quality assurance	Refers to all activities within the continuous improvement cycle (i.e. assurance and enhancement activities).
Stakeholders	All actors directly or indirectly interested in or affected by an institution's or agency's activity. Internal institutional stakeholders include students, staff (teaching, research, administration, management, support), while external stakeholders include, but are

[5] Levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of EQF correspond to QF-EHEA cycles.
In some higher education systems, level 5 EQF is not considered higher education.
[6] Levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 of EQF correspond to QF-EHEA cycles.
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	not limited to, alumni, employers, professional bodies, civil society and public authorities.

Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education

The standards and guidelines for quality assurance have been divided into three parts:

- Part 1: Internal quality assurance
- Part 2: External quality assurance
- Part 3: Quality assurance agencies

It should be kept in mind, however, that the three parts are intrinsically interlinked and together form the basis for a European quality assurance framework. External quality assurance in Part 2 recognises the standards for internal quality assurance in Part 1 thus ensuring that the internal work undertaken by institutions is directly relevant to any external quality assurance that they undergo. In the same way, Part 3 refers to Part 2. Thus, these three parts work on a complementary basis in higher education institutions as well as in agencies and also work on the understanding that other stakeholders contribute to the framework. As a consequence, the three parts should be read as a whole.

The standards set out agreed and accepted practice for quality assurance in higher education in the EHEA and should, therefore, be taken account of and adhered to by those concerned, in all types of higher education provision. The summary list of standards for quality assurance is placed in the annex for easy reference.

The guidelines describe how standards might be implemented. They set out good practice in the relevant area for consideration by the actors involved in quality assurance. Implementation will vary depending on different contexts.

ESG Part 1 Internal Quality Assurance

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Institutions should have in place, publish and effectively communicate a clear policy for quality assurance of learning, teaching and assessment, and associated structures, all supporting a coherent system that forms an effective cycle of continuous improvement.

The quality assurance policy should be integrated in the strategic and operational management of the institution, ensuring links with the other institutional missions.

The development and implementation of the policy for quality assurance should include a structured, meaningful and visible role for students, staff, and other internal and external stakeholders. The core outcomes of the quality assurance processes and the measures taken should be shared with the stakeholders, including students and staff.

An effective internal quality assurance system — encompassing planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and enhancement — supports the development of a quality culture. Internal stakeholders share responsibility for quality and actively engage in quality assurance and enhancement at all levels of the institution.

Quality assurance policies are most effective when they reflect the relationship between research, learning, teaching and the societal mission of higher education.

The quality assurance policy supports the institutional mission as well as academic and non-academic organisational units in monitoring and improving the quality of learning and teaching.

It is aligned with other institutional policies, such as those supporting the social dimension of higher education and those safeguarding fundamental values, including but not limited to

- academic freedom
- academic integrity
- public responsibility of higher education.

The policy addresses the implications of digital transformation, including artificial intelligence, for learning, teaching, assessment, and quality assurance processes, also in relation to academic integrity.

The quality assurance policy also covers activities that are subcontracted to or carried out in cooperation with other parties nationally or internationally.

1.2 Design, approval, ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of their programmes to ensure that they are coherent, informed by the latest research, academic and professional developments, and reliable in leading to the intended learning outcomes. These processes should ensure that programmes respond to the needs of students, society and the labour market, supporting graduates' employability and active citizenship.

Institutions should involve relevant internal and external stakeholders, including students, staff and graduates, in the processes. The processes should lead to continuous improvement of the education provision.

Programmes should be revised based on the analysis of information collected during monitoring and periodic review, and any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

The programmes should be designed using the learning outcomes-based approach.

The qualification and learning outcomes should correspond to the correct level of national qualifications' framework for higher education which is aligned to the correct cycle of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, and to professional, sectoral or disciplinary standards. The qualification resulting from a programme should be specified and communicated.

Programmes are designed and delivered to enable students to acquire knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy. These include transferable knowledge and skills that support students' personal development, active citizenship, and future careers.

Students are equal partners in programme design, approval, monitoring and review. Other stakeholders, such as employers, professional bodies, graduates and external experts, are systematically and meaningfully involved to ensure relevance for society and the labour market.

Programmes

- are designed in line with the institutional strategy,
- have clearly defined learning outcomes;
- define the expected student workload in ECTS;
- are informed by the latest research and benefit from external expertise and reference points;
- include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate;
- include research-based learning experiences;
- support recognition of qualifications and graduate employability;
- are designed by involving students and other stakeholders, supporting student-centred learning and students' active engagement in the learning process, as well as participation of students in democratic societies;
- foster students' lifelong personal development;
- are regularly monitored and periodically reviewed.

Regular monitoring may include the evaluation of:

- the content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date;
- whether the programme responds to the changing needs of society and the labour market;
- the students' workload, progression and completion;
- the effectiveness of procedures for the assessment of students;
- the students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme**;**
- the learning environment and its fitness for purpose for the programme.

1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Institutions should ensure that programmes are designed and delivered in a way that fosters an active role of students in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach. Learning and teaching processes should support students in taking such an active role.

The use of digital tools, including artificial intelligence, in learning, teaching and assessment should be responsible, transparent, human-centred and subject to human verification.

Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment are supported by quality assurance processes that consider how learning, teaching and assessment practices stimulate students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process.

Quality assurance processes for student-centred learning, teaching and assessment:

- ensure that institutional approaches to learning, teaching and assessment respect and address the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths and supporting lifelong learning;
- verify that a variety of pedagogical methods and modes of delivery are considered and used, including the effective use of digital and technological tools to support learning outcomes;
- verify that learning, teaching and assessment practices encourage student autonomy, while ensuring appropriate guidance and support from teaching staff;
- promote a culture of mutual respect within the student–teacher relationship and ensure that this is reflected in institutional policies and feedback mechanisms;
- ensure that institutions regularly evaluate and adjust their modes of delivery and pedagogical methods, based on evidence and feedback from students, staff, and other stakeholders.

Quality assurance processes for student assessment take into account that:

- criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance;
- regulations for assessment also take into account mitigating circumstances;
- assessors are familiar with existing assessment methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field;
- where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner;
- assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students, and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures;
- assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.
- Students are given personalised feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process;
- a formal procedure for student complaints and appeals is in place. The procedures are visible, accessible, and include regular publication of anonymised outcomes and actions taken.

1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle": student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently, fairly, and in a transparent manner, and induction to the institution and the programme is provided.

Institutions put in place processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression.

Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study, work placements, and prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning, is essential for ensuring students' progress in their studies, and for promoting mobility.

Appropriate recognition procedures rely on:

- institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;
- cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the system.

Students receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed. This information is included in the diploma supplement or other relevant documents.

1.5 Teaching staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of all staff involved in education delivery.

They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment, development and evaluation of staff, in line with the required competences.

To ensure continuity in their activities, institutions should have an appropriate share of core staff under long-term employment.

Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the competences of their staff and for providing them with appropriate support, development opportunities, and regular review of teaching practice to carry out their work effectively.

These support processes for staff reflect the mission of the institution and the objectives of its programmes. They consider the evolving role of staff as well as the student-centred learning, digital technologies and internationalisation.

Incorporating student feedback into teacher evaluation, alongside other evidence, can provide valuable insights into teaching effectiveness and areas for professional development.

A supportive working environment:

- provides conditions of employment that recognise and value the importance of teaching;
- supports the well-being of staff, including their mental health;
- encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research and the societal mission of higher education;
- encourages the development of the teaching methods including the use of new technologies that support innovation and students' learning.

1.6 Learning environment and resources

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and should ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources, student support and physical and digital infrastructure are provided.

Institutions take into account the needs of a diverse student population and the principles of student- centred learning when allocating, planning and providing learning resources, student

support and physical and digital infrastructure.

Human support is essential for student learning and may be provided by teaching staff as well as technical, administrative and counselling staff. Support services are particularly important in facilitating student mobility within and across higher education systems.

Students are informed about the resources and services available to them, and are consulted in their planning and evaluation to ensure they are fit for purpose.

1.7 Information management

Institutions should periodically collect, analyse and use relevant, reliable and up-to-date information for the effective management of their programmes and other related activities.

Institutions have effective processes to collect and analyse information on learning, teaching and assessment activities and on graduate outcomes. These data feed into the internal quality assurance system and support evidence-based decision-making.

The information gathered may depend on the type and mission of the institution. It will typically include data that is relevant for the student life-cycle and staff development, such as: profile of the student body; profile of staff; student progression; success and drop- out rates; student satisfaction with their programmes including support services and resources; career paths of graduates; and student and staff mobility rates.

Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.

1.8 Public information

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes and relevant outcomes of quality assurance processes. Information provided should be clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible to its intended audiences.

Information about programmes includes the admission criteria, the intended learning outcomes, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students as well as graduate employment information where available and appropriate.

1.9 Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG, on a cyclical basis, addressing, where relevant, the outcomes of the previous review.

Institutions should ensure that the external quality assurance procedures that they undergo meet the regulatory requirements, if applicable, especially in the case of cross-border quality assurance.

Institutions participate in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account of the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate. Therefore, depending on the framework, external quality assurance may take different forms and focus on different organisational levels (such as programme, faculty or institution).

Higher education institutions are encouraged to publish their self-assessment reports.

ESG Part 2 External quality assurance

2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes for learning, teaching and assessment, ensuring that all standards of Part 1 of the ESG are covered holistically for each institution, by one or more external quality assurance process(es) by the agency.

External quality assurance should verify the effectiveness of the institutional approaches to ensure that programmes correspond to the correct cycle of the QF-EHEA.

Depending on the type of external quality assurance, the standards included in Part 1 may be addressed differently.

External quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance.

2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

External quality assurance should be defined and designed to ensure that it achieves the aims and objectives set for it, including its dual purpose of accountability and enhancement in higher education.

The design of methodologies should take into consideration the relevant legal and regulatory context for higher education.

Stakeholders should be involved in the design and continuous improvement of external quality assurance.

The processes are designed so that they will:

- bear in mind the level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions;
- take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality;
- allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement;
- result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up.

The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.

2.3 Implementing processes

External quality assurance processes should be pre-defined, published, implemented consistently, and adapted to the methodology designed as described in standard 2.2. Processes should support the aims set for them.

The processes should be consistent whether they are applied at the national level or across borders and include the following specific activities

- **a self-assessment or equivalent;**
- **an external assessment normally including an in-person site visit by peer reviewers, including stakeholder interviews, to ensure input from various perspectives;**

- **a report resulting from the external assessment by peer reviewers;**
- **a consistent follow-up.**

The use of digital tools, including artificial intelligence, in external quality assurance processes should be responsible, transparent, human-centred and subject to human verification.

The nature of the specific activities within the process depends on the aims and design of external quality assurance.

Interviewing different stakeholder groups in the in-person site visit is strongly encouraged. However, to ensure that a wide range of perspectives is included, hybrid or online participation for interviewees can also be organised.

When working abroad, agencies communicate appropriately with the relevant authorities of the jurisdiction in which they operate**.**

2.4 Peer reviewers

External quality assurance should be carried out by competent groups of peer reviewers that include (a) student member(s). The selection of peer reviewers should take into consideration the aims and objectives of the process.

Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of agencies, e.g. as a peer reviewer, should be independent, act in a personal capacity and not represent their constituent organisation when working for agencies.

The agency should ensure that the peer reviewers receive appropriate training and preparation.

The peer reviewers contribute to the work of agencies through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners.

The involvement of international peer reviewers in external quality assurance is encouraged as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.

Agencies implement a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest.

2.5 Reporting

Full reports by the peer reviewers should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners, and other interested individuals.

The reports should be useful for the evaluated institution and provide recommendations for improvement.

The evaluated institution should be given an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the report before it is finalised.

The report by the peer reviewers is the basis for the institution's follow-up action. It also provides information to society regarding the activities of the evaluated institution.

To achieve this, the report needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover:

- context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific

context);
- description of the individual procedure, including peer reviewers involved;
- evidence, analysis and findings;
- conclusions;
- features of good practice demonstrated by the institution;
- recommendations for follow-up action.

To increase the accessibility and usability of the reports, agencies are encouraged to make them available in a searchable electronic format and publish them in DEQAR.

A summary of the report will increase its accessibility and transparency.

2.6 Processes and criteria for outcomes

Any outcomes, including formal decisions, that result from external quality assurance, should be based on evidence collected and analysed through the review process as documented in the review report by the peer reviewers. Outcomes should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently.

Agencies should provide transparent information on if and how the outcomes of the process may be recognised by relevant authorities.

The outcomes of the review process should be published. If the decision-making relies on additional evidence, assessment or recommendation beyond the review report, this should be published together with the decision.

Limiting the use of additional evidence, assessment or recommendation beyond the review report in agency decision-making strengthens the peer-review principle.

2.7 Complaints and appeals

Agencies should have complaints and appeals processes that are defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and they should be clearly communicated to the institutions.

Appeals should be considered by a different structure within the agencies than the one whose decision is appealed against.

Agencies need to handle issues of concern related to the conduct of the process or those carrying it out in a professional way by means of a clearly defined complaints procedure that is consistently applied.

Agencies may also have a policy for complaints from third parties.

In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcome of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, or that criteria or processes have not been correctly and consistently applied.

ESG Part 3 Quality assurance agencies

3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis.

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of agencies.

When agencies also carry out activities that are not in the scope of the ESG, they should clearly define these activities and ensure a transparent distinction between external quality assurance and other fields of work. This needs to be clearly communicated to the public.

Agencies should ensure the meaningful involvement of stakeholders, including students, in their governance and work.

The goals and objectives of the different quality assurance activities and the scope of agencies' work are described transparently and are published. This information also addresses the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions.

Depending on the structure and mission of the agencies, stakeholders may be involved in different ways.

The expertise in agencies may be increased by including international members in agencies' structures.

3.2 Independence

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without undue influence.

Agencies should have specific safeguards, checks and balances that ensure autonomy and independence so that no one stakeholder, entity, or individual has undue influence over the agencies.

The key elements of independence of agencies include:

1) **Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation**
2) **Operational independence in defining and implementing procedures and methods**
3) **Independence of formal outcomes of quality assurance processes.**

1) Organisational independence may be demonstrated in official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation). These documents clearly stipulate the independence of the agencies' structure from any party, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations.

2) Operational independence is safeguarded if the definition and operation of the agencies' procedures and methods are independent from any party, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders. Additionally, the nomination and appointment of peer reviewers are undertaken independently by the agency.

3) Independence of formal outcomes includes the principle that the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agencies, while the review

procedure itself is based on the assessment by peer reviewers from relevant stakeholder backgrounds.

3.3 Activities for enhancement

Agencies should regularly engage in activities, reflect on their experiences, and disseminate materials that support the enhancement of quality assurance and learning, teaching and assessment in the context in which they work.

In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system.

These findings can contribute to the reflection on developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulties, and can be used for the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in national and international contexts.

3.4 Resources

Agencies should have adequate resources to carry out their work professionally. These resources, both human and financial, should enable effective and sustainable implementation of the agencies' activities.

Agencies should provide their staff with appropriate support and professional development opportunities, including the use of digital technologies, to ensure a high level of competence.

The available resources enable the agencies to reflect on their practices, to improve them when needed, and to inform the public about their activities.

When managing resources, aspects of digital and green transition are taken into consideration.

3.5 Internal quality assurance and integrity

Agencies should have an internal quality assurance system that assures and enhances the quality and integrity of their activities. Agencies should have a published internal quality policy that defines the procedures and tools in use for continuous enhancement of their activities.

Agencies should act with transparency and have high professional standards to create trust in their work. Effective tools should be in place to ensure the integrity of their operations, both nationally and internationally, and to prevent conflicts of interest.

Internal and external feedback is collected by the agencies from their stakeholders. This contributes to continuous improvement of their activities.

Agencies ensure that all persons involved in their activities have adequate competencies and act professionally and ethically.

There are mechanisms in place that guard against intolerance of any kind or discrimination.

Responsibility for the quality of any activity carried out by partners on behalf of the agencies, lies within the agencies.

3.6 Review of agencies

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG, addressing, where relevant, the outcomes of the previous review.

Agencies reflect on their policies and activities continuously. A periodic external review assures the agencies and their stakeholders that they continue to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.

Annex: Summary list of standards

Part 1

1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance

1.2 Design, approval, ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification

1.5 Teaching staff

1.6 Learning environment and resources

1.7 Information management

1.8 Public information

1.9 Cyclical external quality assurance

Part 2

2.1 Addressing internal quality assurance

2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

2.3 Implementing processes

2.4 Peer reviewers

2.5 Reporting

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Part 3

3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

3.2 Independence

3.3 Activities for enhancement

3.4 Resources

3.5 Internal quality assurance and integrity

Comparative table: ESG 2025, ESG Draft 3 (July 2026) and ESG Final Draft (Draft 4)

ESG Part 1 Internal Quality Assurance

ESG 2015	ESG 2027 Draft 3 (July 2026)	ESG 2027 final draft
[ESG 1.1] Policy for Quality Assurance	**[ESG 1.1] Policy for Quality Assurance**	**[ESG 1.1] Policy for quality assurance**
Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management.	Institutions should have in place, publish and effectively communicate a clear policy for quality assurance of learning, teaching and assessment, with associated structures and supporting a coherent system that forms an effective cycle of continuous improvement. The quality assurance policy should be integrated in the strategic and operational management of the institution, ensuring links with the other institutional missions.	Institutions should have in place, publish and effectively communicate a clear policy for quality assurance of learning, teaching and assessment, and associated structures, all supporting a coherent system that forms an effective cycle of continuous improvement. The quality assurance policy should be integrated in the strategic and operational management of the institution, ensuring links with the other institutional missions.
Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.	The development and implementation of the policy for quality assurance should include a structured, meaningful and visible role for students, staff, and other internal and external stakeholders. The core outcomes of the quality assurance processes and the measures taken should be shared with the stakeholders, including students and staff.	The development and implementation of the policy for quality assurance should include a structured, meaningful and visible role for students, staff, and other internal and external stakeholders. The core outcomes of the quality assurance processes and the measures taken should be shared with the stakeholders, including students and staff.
Policies and processes are the main pillars of a coherent institutional quality assurance system that forms a cycle for continuous improvement and contributes to the accountability of the institution.		

It supports the development of quality culture in which all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the institution. In order to facilitate this, the policy has a formal status and is publicly available.	An effective internal quality assurance system — encompassing planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and enhancement — supports the development of a quality culture. Internal stakeholders share responsibility for quality and actively engage in quality assurance and enhancement at all levels of the institution.	An effective internal quality assurance system — encompassing planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and enhancement — supports the development of a quality culture. Internal stakeholders share responsibility for quality and actively engage in quality assurance and enhancement at all levels of the institution.
Quality assurance policies are most effective when they reflect the relationship between research and learning & teaching and take account of both the national context in which the institution operates, the institutional context and its strategic approach.	Quality assurance policies are most effective when they reflect the relationship between research, learning, teaching and the societal mission of higher education.	Quality assurance policies are most effective when they reflect the relationship between research, learning, teaching and the societal mission of higher education.
Such a policy supports ● the organisation of the quality assurance system; ● departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units as well as those of institutional leadership, individual staff members and students to take on their responsibilities in quality assurance; ● academic integrity and freedom and is vigilant against academic fraud; ● guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination against the students or staff;	The quality assurance policy supports the institutional mission as well as academic and non-academic organisational units in monitoring and improving the quality of learning and teaching. It is aligned with other institutional policies, such as those supporting the social dimension of higher education and those safeguarding fundamental values, including ● academic freedom ● academic integrity ● public responsibility of higher education. The policy addresses the implications of digital transformation, including artificial intelligence, for learning, teaching, assessment, and quality assurance processes, also in relation to	The quality assurance policy supports the institutional mission as well as academic and non-academic organisational units in monitoring and improving the quality of learning and teaching. It is aligned with other institutional policies, such as those supporting the social dimension of higher education and those safeguarding fundamental values, including but not limited to ● academic freedom ● academic integrity ● public responsibility of higher education. The policy addresses the implications of digital transformation, including artificial intelligence, for learning, teaching,

	academic integrity.	assessment, and quality assurance processes, also in relation to academic integrity.
The policy translates into practice through a variety of internal quality assurance processes that allow participation across the institution. How the policy is implemented, monitored and revised is the institution's decision.		
The quality assurance policy also takes account of activities which are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties.	The quality assurance policy also covers activities that are subcontracted to or carried out in cooperation with other parties nationally or internationally.	The quality assurance policy also covers activities that are subcontracted to or carried out in cooperation with other parties nationally or internationally.
[ESG 1.2] Design and approval of programmes	**[ESG 1.2] Design, approval, ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes**	**[ESG 1.2] Design, approval, ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes**
Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes.	Institutions should have processes for the design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of their programmes to ensure that they are coherent, informed by the latest academic and professional developments, and reliable in leading to the intended learning outcomes. These processes should ensure that programmes respond to the needs of students, society and the labour market, supporting graduates' employability. They should involve relevant internal and external stakeholders, including students, staff and graduates, and lead to continuous improvement of the education provision.	Institutions should have processes for the design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of their programmes to ensure that they are coherent, informed by the latest research, academic and professional developments, and reliable in leading to the intended learning outcomes. These processes should ensure that programmes respond to the needs of students, society and the labour market, supporting graduates' employability and active citizenship. Institutions should involve relevant internal and external stakeholders, including students, staff and graduates, in the

	Programmes should be revised based on the analysis of information collected during monitoring and periodic review, and any action planned or taken as a result of monitoring and periodic review of programmes should be communicated to all those concerned.	processes. The processes should lead to continuous improvement of the education provision. Programmes should be revised based on the analysis of information collected during monitoring and periodic review, and any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.
The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes.	The programmes should be designed using the learning outcomes-based approach.	The programmes should be designed using the learning outcomes-based approach.
The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.	The qualification and learning outcomes should correspond to the correct level of the national qualifications' framework for higher education which is aligned to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, and to professional or disciplinary standards. The qualification resulting from a programme should be specified and communicated.	The qualification and learning outcomes should correspond to the correct level of the national qualifications' framework for higher education which is aligned to the cycle of the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, and to professional, sectoral or disciplinary standards. The qualification resulting from a programme should be specified and communicated.
Study programmes are the core of the institutions teaching mission.		
They provide students with both academic knowledge and skills including those that are transferable, which may influence their personal development and may be applied in their future careers.	Study programmes are designed and delivered to enable students to acquire knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy. These should include transferable knowledge and skills that support students' personal development, active citizenship, and future careers.	Programmes are designed and delivered to enable students to acquire knowledge, skills, responsibility and autonomy. These include transferable knowledge and skills that support students' personal development, active citizenship, and future careers.

	Students are equal partners in programme design, approval, monitoring and review. Other stakeholders, such as employers, professional bodies, graduates and external experts, are systematically and meaningfully involved to ensure relevance for society and the labour market.	Students are equal partners in programme design, approval, monitoring and review. Other stakeholders, such as employers, professional bodies, graduates and external experts, are systematically and meaningfully involved to ensure relevance for society and the labour market.
Programmes ● are designed with overall programme objectives that are in line with the institutional strategy and have explicit intended learning outcomes; ● are designed by involving students and other stakeholders in the work; ● benefit from external expertise and reference points; ● reflect the four purposes of higher education of the Council of Europe (cf. Scope and Concepts); ● are designed so that they enable smooth student progression; ● define the expected student workload, e.g. in ECTS; ● include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate; ● are subject to a formal institutional approval process.	Programmes • are designed in line with the institutional strategy, • have clearly defined learning outcomes; • define the expected student workload in ECTS; • are informed by the latest research and benefit from external expertise and reference points; • include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate; • include research-based learning experiences; • support recognition of qualifications and graduate employability; • are designed by involving students and other stakeholders, supporting student-centred learning and students' active engagement in the learning process, as well as participation of students in democratic societies; • foster students' lifelong personal development; ● are regularly monitored and periodically reviewed.	Programmes ● are designed in line with the institutional strategy, ● have clearly defined learning outcomes; ● define the expected student workload in ECTS; ● are informed by the latest research and benefit from external expertise and reference points; ● include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate; ● include research-based learning experiences; ● support recognition of qualifications and graduate employability; ● are designed by involving students and other stakeholders, supporting student-centred learning and students' active engagement in the learning process, as well as participation of students in democratic societies; ● foster students' lifelong personal development; ● are regularly monitored and periodically reviewed.

	Regular monitoring may include the evaluation of: • the content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date; • whether the programme responds to the changing needs of society and the labour market; • the students' workload progression and completion; • the effectiveness of procedures for the assessment of students; • the students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme; • the learning environment and its fitness for purpose for the programme.	Regular monitoring may include the evaluation of: • the content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline, thus ensuring that the programme is up-to-date; • whether the programme responds to the changing needs of society and the labour market; • the students' workload, progression and completion; • the effectiveness of procedures for the assessment of students; • the students' expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme; • the learning environment and its fitness for purpose for the programme.
[ESG 1.3] Student-Centred-Learning, Teaching and Assessment	**[ESG 1.3] Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment**	**[ESG 1.3] Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment**
Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.	Institutions should ensure that the programmes are designed and delivered in a way that fosters an active role of students in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach. Learning and teaching processes should support students in taking such an active role. The use of digital tools, including artificial intelligence, in learning, teaching and assessment should be responsible, human-centred and subject to human verification.	Institutions should ensure that programmes are designed and delivered in a way that fosters an active role of students in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach. Learning and teaching processes should support students in taking such an active role. The use of digital tools, including artificial intelligence, in learning, teaching and assessment should be responsible, transparent, human-centred and subject to

		human verification.
Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. This means careful consideration of the design and delivery of study programmes and the assessment of outcomes.	Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment are supported by quality assurance processes that consider how learning, teaching and assessment practices stimulate students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process.	Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment are supported by quality assurance processes that consider how learning, teaching and assessment practices stimulate students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process.
The implementation of student-centred learning and teaching ● ● respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths; ● ● considers and uses different modes of delivery, where appropriate; ● ● flexibly uses a variety of pedagogical methods; ● ● regularly evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery and pedagogical methods; ● ● encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and support from the teacher; ● ● promotes mutual respect within the learner-teacher relationship; ● ● has appropriate procedures for dealing with students' complaints.	Quality assurance processes for student-centred learning, teaching and assessment • ensure that institutional approaches to learning, teaching and assessment respect and address the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths and supporting lifelong learning; • verify that a variety of pedagogical methods and modes of delivery are considered and used, including the effective use of digital and technological tools to support learning outcomes; • verify that learning, teaching and assessment practices encourage student autonomy, while ensuring appropriate guidance and support from teaching staff; • promote a culture of mutual respect within the student–teacher relationship and ensure that this is reflected in institutional policies and feedback mechanisms; ● ensure that institutions regularly evaluate and adjust their modes of delivery and pedagogical methods, based on evidence and feedback from students, staff, and	Quality assurance processes for student-centred learning, teaching and assessment ● ensure that institutional approaches to learning, teaching and assessment respect and address the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths and supporting lifelong learning; ● verify that a variety of pedagogical methods and modes of delivery are considered and used, including the effective use of digital and technological tools to support learning outcomes; ● verify that learning, teaching and assessment practices encourage student autonomy, while ensuring appropriate guidance and support from teaching staff; ● promote a culture of mutual respect within the student–teacher relationship and ensure that this is reflected in institutional policies and feedback mechanisms; ● ensure that institutions regularly

	other stakeholders.	evaluate and adjust their modes of delivery and pedagogical methods, based on evidence and feedback from students, staff, and other stakeholders.
Considering the importance of assessment for the students' progression and their future careers, quality assurance processes for assessment take into account the following: ● Assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field; ● The criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance; ● The assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process; ● Where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner; ● The regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances; ● Assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures; ● A formal procedure for student appeals is in place.	Quality assurance processes for student assessment take into account that: • assessors are familiar with existing testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field; • assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Students are given feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process; • where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner; • assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students, and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures; • criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance; • regulations for assessment take into account mitigating circumstances; ● a formal procedure for student complaints and appeals is in place. The procedures are visible, accessible, and include regular publication of anonymised outcomes and actions taken.	Quality assurance processes for student assessment take into account that: ● criteria for and method of assessment as well as criteria for marking are published in advance; ● regulations for assessment also take into account mitigating circumstances; ● assessors are familiar with existing assessment methods and receive support in developing their own skills in this field; ● where possible, assessment is carried out by more than one examiner; ● assessment is consistent, fairly applied to all students, and carried out in accordance with the stated procedures; ● assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. ● Students are given personalised feedback, which, if necessary, is linked to advice on the learning process; ● a formal procedure for student complaints and appeals is in place. The procedures are visible, accessible, and include regular publication of anonymised outcomes and actions taken.

[ESG 1.4] Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification	[ESG 1.4] Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification	[ESG 1.4] Student admission, progression, recognition, and certification
Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.	Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”: student admission, progression, recognition and certification.	Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”: student admission, progression, recognition and certification.
Providing conditions and support that are necessary for students to make progress in their academic career is in the best interest of the individual students, programmes, institutions and systems. It is vital to have fit-for-purpose admission, recognition and completion procedures, particularly when students are mobile within and across higher education systems.		
It is important that access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner. Induction to the institution and the programme is provided.	It is important that access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently, fairly, and in a transparent manner, and that induction to the institution and the programme is provided.	Access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently, fairly, and in a transparent manner, and induction to the institution and the programme is provided.
Institutions need to put in place both processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression.	Institutions put in place processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression.	Institutions put in place processes and tools to collect, monitor and act on information on student progression.
Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students’	Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study, work placements, and prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning, is essential for ensuring students’ progress in their studies,	Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study, work placements, and prior learning, including non-formal and informal learning, is essential for ensuring students’ progress in

progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on ● institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention; ● cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country.	and for promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on: • institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention; • cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the system.	their studies, and for promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on: ● institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention; ● cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the system.
Graduation represents the culmination of the students' period of study. Students need to receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.	Students receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed. This information is included in the diploma supplement or other relevant documents.	Students receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed. This information is included in the diploma supplement or other relevant documents.
[ESG 1.5] Teaching Staff	**[ESG 1.5] Teaching Staff**	**[ESG 1.5] Teaching staff**
Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers.	Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of all staff involved in education delivery.	Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of all staff involved in education delivery.
They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.	They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment, development and evaluation of the staff. These processes should reflect the institutional mission, its programmes and objectives, as well as the evolving role of staff.	They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment, development and evaluation of staff, in line with the required competences. To ensure continuity in their activities, institutions should have an appropriate share of core staff under long-term

	To ensure continuity in their activities, institutions should have a sufficient share of core staff under long-term employment.	employment.
The teacher's role is essential in creating a high quality student experience and enabling the acquisition of knowledge, competences and skills. The diversifying student population and stronger focus on learning outcomes require student- centred learning and teaching and the role of the teacher is, therefore, also changing.		
Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff and for providing them with a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively.	Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff and for providing them with appropriate support, development opportunities, and regular review of teaching practice to carry out their work effectively. Incorporating student feedback into teacher evaluation, alongside other evidence, can provide valuable insights into teaching effectiveness and areas for professional development.	Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the competences of their staff and for providing them with appropriate support, development opportunities, and regular review of teaching practice to carry out their work effectively. These processes reflect the mission of the institution and the objectives of its programmes. They consider the evolving role of staff, including in the context of student-centred learning, digital technologies and internationalisation. Incorporating student feedback into teacher evaluation, alongside other evidence, can provide valuable insights into teaching effectiveness and areas for professional development.
Such an environment ● sets up and follows clear, transparent and	A supportive working environment: • provides conditions of employment that	A supportive working environment: ● provides conditions of employment that

fair processes for staff recruitment and conditions of employment that recognise the importance of teaching; ● offers opportunities for and promotes the professional development of teaching staff; ● encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research; ● encourages innovation in teaching methods and the use of new technologies.	recognise and value the importance of teaching; • supports the well-being of staff, including their mental health; • encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research and the societal mission of higher education; • encourages the development of the teaching methods including the use of new technologies that support innovation and students learning.	recognise and value the importance of teaching; ● supports the well-being of staff, including their mental health; ● encourages scholarly activity to strengthen the link between education and research and the societal mission of higher education; ● encourages the development of the teaching methods including the use of new technologies that support innovation and students' learning.
[ESG 1.6] Learning Resources and Student Support	**[ESG 1.6] Learning environment and resources**	**[ESG 1.6] Learning environment and resources**
Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.	Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and should ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources, student support and physical and digital infrastructure are provided.	Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and should ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources, student support and physical and digital infrastructure are provided.
For a good higher education experience, institutions provide a range of resources to assist student learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries, study facilities and IT infrastructure to human support in the form of tutors, counsellors and other advisers. The role of support services is of particular importance in facilitating the mobility of students within and across higher education systems.	Institutions take into account the needs of a diverse student population and the principles of student- centred learning when allocating, planning and providing learning resources, student support and physical and digital infrastructure. Human support plays a crucial role in student learning. In addition to teaching staff, such support may be provided by technical and administrative personnel, tutors, and	Institutions take into account the needs of a diverse student population and the principles of student- centred learning when allocating, planning and providing learning resources, student support and physical and digital infrastructure. Human support is essential for student learning and may be provided by teaching staff as well as technical, administrative and counselling staff.

	counselling services. Support services are particularly important in facilitating student mobility within and across higher education systems.	Support staff are particularly important in facilitating student mobility within and across higher education systems.
The needs of a diverse student population (such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities), and the shift towards student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources and student support.		
Support activities and facilities may be organised in a variety of ways depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are fit for purpose, accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.	Students are informed about the resources and services available to them, and are consulted in their planning and evaluation to ensure they are fit for purpose.	Students are informed about the resources and services available to them, and are consulted in their planning and evaluation to ensure they are fit for purpose.
In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences.		
[ESG 1.7] Information Management	**[ESG 1.7] Information Management**	**[ESG 1.7] Information management**
Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.	Institutions should periodically collect, analyse and use relevant, reliable and up-to-date information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.	Institutions should periodically collect, analyse and use relevant, reliable and up-to-date information for the effective management of their programmes and other related activities.

Reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making and for knowing what is working well and what needs attention. Effective processes to collect and analyse information about study programmes and other activities feed into the internal quality assurance system.	Institutions have effective processes to collect and analyse information on learning, teaching and assessment activities and on graduate outcomes. These data feed into the internal quality assurance system and support evidence-based decision-making.	Institutions have effective processes to collect and analyse information on learning, teaching and assessment activities and on graduate outcomes. These data feed into the internal quality assurance system and support evidence-based decision-making.
The information gathered depends, to some extent, on the type and mission of the institution. The following are of interest: ● Key performance indicators; ● Profile of the student population; ● Student progression, success and drop- out rates; ● Students' satisfaction with their programmes; ● Learning resources and student support available; ● Career paths of graduates.	The information gathered may depend on the type and mission of the institution. However it will typically include data that is relevant for the student life-cycle and staff development, such as: profile of the student body; profile of staff; student progression; success and drop- out rates; student satisfaction with their programmes including support services and resources; career paths of graduates; and student and staff mobility rates.	The information gathered may depend on the type and mission of the institution. It will typically include data that is relevant for the student life-cycle and staff development, such as: profile of the student body; profile of staff; student progression; success and drop- out rates; student satisfaction with their programmes including support services and resources; career paths of graduates; and student and staff mobility rates.
Various methods of collecting information may be used. It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.	It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.	Students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.
[ESG 1.8] Public Information	**[ESG 1.8] Public Information**	**[ESG 1.8] Public information**
Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.	Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes and relevant outcomes of quality assurance processes. Information provided should be	Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes and relevant outcomes of quality assurance processes. Information provided should be

	clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible to its intended audiences.	clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible to its intended audiences.
Information on institutions' activities is useful for prospective and current students as well as for graduates, other stakeholders and the public.		
Therefore, institutions provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer and the selection criteria for them, the intended learning outcomes of these programmes, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students as well as graduate employment information.	Institutions provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer and the selection criteria for them, the intended learning outcomes of these programmes, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students as well as graduate employment information where available and appropriate.	Information about programmes includes the admission criteria, the intended learning outcomes, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students as well as graduate employment information where available and appropriate.
[ESG 1.9] On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes		
Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.		
Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programmes aim to ensure that the provision remains appropriate and to create a		

supportive and effective learning environment for students.		
They include the evaluation of: ● The content of the programme in the light of the latest research in the given discipline thus ensuring that the programme is up to date; ● The changing needs of society; ● The students' workload, progression and completion; ● The effectiveness of procedures for assessment of students; ● The student expectations, needs and satisfaction in relation to the programme; ● The learning environment and support services and their fitness for purpose for the programme.		
Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to- date. Revised programme specifications are published.		
[ESG 1.10] Cyclical External Quality Assurance	**[ESG 1.9] Cyclical External Quality Assurance**	**[ESG 1.9] Cyclical external quality assurance**

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.	Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG, on a cyclical basis, addressing, where relevant, the outcomes of the previous review. Institutions should ensure that the external quality assurance procedures that they undergo meet the regulatory requirements, if applicable.	Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG, on a cyclical basis, addressing, where relevant, the outcomes of the previous review. Institutions should ensure that the external quality assurance procedures that they undergo meet the regulatory requirements, if applicable, especially in the case of cross-border quality assurance.
External quality assurance in its various forms can verify the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance, act as a catalyst for improvement and offer the institution new perspectives. It will also provide information to assure the institution and the public of the quality of the institution's activities.		
Institutions participate in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account, where relevant, of the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate. Therefore, depending on the framework, this external quality assurance may take different forms and focus at different organisational levels (such as programme, faculty or institution).	Institutions participate in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account of the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate. Therefore, depending on the framework, external quality assurance may take different forms and focus on different organisational levels. Higher education institutions are strongly encouraged to publish their self-assessment reports.	Institutions participate in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account of the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate. Therefore, depending on the framework, external quality assurance may take different forms and focus on different organisational levels (such as programme, faculty or institution). Higher education institutions are encouraged to publish their self-assessment reports.
Quality assurance is a continuous process that does not end with the external feedback or		

report or its follow-up process within the institution. Therefore, institutions ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.		

ESG Part 2 External quality assurance

ESG 2015	ESG 2027 Draft 3 (July 2026)	ESG 2027 final draft
[ESG 2.1] Consideration of internal quality assurance	**[ESG 2.1] Addressing internal quality assurance**	**[ESG 2.1] Addressing internal quality assurance**
External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.	External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes for learning, teaching and assessment, ensuring that all standards of Part 1 of the ESG are covered holistically by the different applicable quality assurance processes for each institution. External quality assurance should verify that the evaluated programme corresponds to the correct level of the QF-EHEA.	External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes for learning, teaching and assessment, ensuring that all standards of Part 1 of the ESG are covered holistically for each institution, by one or more external quality assurance process(es) by the agency. External quality assurance should verify the effectiveness of the institutional approaches to ensure that programmes correspond to the correct cycle of the QF-EHEA.
Quality assurance in higher education is based on the institutions' responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision; therefore it is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance.		

To ensure the link between internal and external quality assurance, external quality assurance includes consideration of the standards of Part 1. These may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance.		
	Depending on the type of external quality assurance, the standards included in Part 1 may be addressed differently.	Depending on the type of external quality assurance, the standards included in Part 1 may be addressed differently.
	External quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance.	External quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance.
[ESG 2.2] Designing methodologies fit for purpose	**[ESG 2.2] Designing methodologies fit for purpose**	**[ESG 2.2] Designing methodologies fit for purpose**
External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.	External quality assurance should be defined and designed to ensure that it achieves the aims and objectives set for it, including its dual purpose of accountability and enhancement in higher education. The design of methodologies should take into consideration the relevant legal and regulatory context for higher education. Stakeholders should be involved in the design and continuous improvement of external quality assurance.	External quality assurance should be defined and designed to ensure that it achieves the aims and objectives set for it, including its dual purpose of accountability and enhancement in higher education. The design of methodologies should take into consideration the relevant legal and regulatory context for higher education. Stakeholders should be involved in the design and continuous improvement of external quality assurance.

In order to ensure effectiveness and objectivity it is vital for external quality assurance to have clear aims agreed by stakeholders.		
The aims, objectives and implementation of the processes will: - bear in mind the level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions; - take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality; - allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement; - result in clear information on the - outcomes and the follow-up.	The processes are designed so that they will: • bear in mind the level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions; • take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality; • allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement; • result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up.	The processes are designed so that they will: ● bear in mind the level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions; ● take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality; ● allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement; ● result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up.
The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.	The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.	The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.
[ESG 2.3] Implementing processes	**[ESG 2.3] Implementing processes**	**[ESG 2.3] Implementing processes**
External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published.	External quality assurance processes should be pre-defined, published, implemented consistently, and adapted to the methodology designed as described in standard 2.2. Processes should support the aims set for them.	External quality assurance processes should be pre-defined, published, implemented consistently, and adapted to the methodology designed as described in standard 2.2. Processes should support the aims set for them.
They include - a self-assessment or equivalent; - an external assessment normally	The processes should include the following specific activities • a self-assessment or equivalent;	The processes should be consistent whether they are applied at the national level or across borders and include the

including a site visit; - a report resulting from the external assessment; - a consistent follow-up.	• an external assessment normally including an in-person site visit by peer reviewers, including stakeholder interviews, to ensure input from various perspectives; • a report resulting from the external assessment by peer reviewers; • a consistent follow-up. The use of digital tools, including artificial intelligence, in external quality assurance processes should be responsible, human-centred and subject to human verification.	following specific activities ● a self-assessment or equivalent; ● an external assessment normally including an in-person site visit by peer reviewers, including stakeholder interviews, to ensure input from various perspectives; ● a report resulting from the external assessment by peer reviewers; ● a consistent follow-up. The use of digital tools, including artificial intelligence, in external quality assurance processes should be responsible, transparent, human-centred and subject to human verification.
External quality assurance carried out professionally, consistently and transparently ensures its acceptance and impact.	The nature of the specific activities within the process depends on the aims and design of external quality assurance.	The nature of the specific activities within the process depends on the aims and design of external quality assurance.
Depending on the design of the external quality assurance system, the institution provides the basis for the external quality assurance through a self-assessment or by collecting other material including supporting evidence. The written documentation is normally complemented by interviews with stakeholders during a site visit. The findings of the assessment are summarised in a report (cf. Standard 2.5) written by a group of external experts (cf.	The participation of different stakeholder groups in the in-person site visit is strongly encouraged. However, to ensure that a wide range of perspectives is included, hybrid or online participation for interviewees can also be organised.	Interviewing different stakeholder groups in the in-person site visit is strongly encouraged. However, to ensure that a wide range of perspectives is included, hybrid or online participation for interviewees can also be organised.

Standard 2.4).		
External quality assurance does not end with the report by the experts. The report provides clear guidance for institutional action. Agencies have a consistent follow-up process for considering the action taken by the institution. The nature of the follow-up will depend on the design of the external quality assurance.		When working abroad, agencies communicate appropriately with the relevant authorities of the jurisdiction in which they operate**.**
[ESG 2.4] Peer-review experts	**[ESG 2.4] Peer reviewers**	**[ESG 2.4] Peer reviewers**
External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).	External quality assurance should be carried out by competent and independent groups of peer reviewers that include (a) student member(s). The selection of peer reviewers should take into consideration the aims and objectives of the process. The agency should organise appropriate training and preparation for the peer reviewers.	External quality assurance should be carried out by competent groups of peer reviewers that include (a) student member(s). The selection of peer reviewers should take into consideration the aims and objectives of the process. Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of agencies, e.g. as a peer reviewer, should be independent, act in a personal capacity and not represent their constituent organisation when working for agencies. The agency should ensure that the peer reviewers receive appropriate training and preparation.
At the core of external quality assurance is the	The peer reviewers contribute to the work of	The peer reviewers contribute to the work of

wide range of expertise provided by peer experts, who contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners.	the agencies through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers /professional practitioners.	agencies through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners.
	Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of agencies, e.g. as a peer reviewer, is acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisation when working for the agencies. Any procedure and decision may solely be based on expertise and evidence.	
In order to ensure the value and consistency of the work of the experts, they ● are carefully selected; ● have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task; ● are supported by appropriate training and/or briefing.		
The agency ensures the independence of the experts by implementing a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest.	The involvement of international peer reviewers in external quality assurance is desirable as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.	The involvement of international peer reviewers in external quality assurance is encouraged as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.
The involvement of international experts in external quality assurance, for example as members of peer panels, is desirable as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.	The agencies implement a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest.	Agencies implement a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest.

[ESG 2.6] Reporting	[ESG 2.5] Reporting	[ESG 2.5] Reporting
Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.	Full reports by the peer reviewers should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners, and other interested individuals. The reports should be useful for the evaluated institution and provide recommendations for improvement. The evaluated institution should be given an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the report before it is finalised.	Full reports by the peer reviewers should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners, and other interested individuals. The reports should be useful for the evaluated institution and provide recommendations for improvement. The evaluated institution should be given an opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the report before it is finalised.
The report by the experts is the basis for the institution's follow-up action of the external evaluation and it provides information to society regarding the activities of an institution.	The report by the peer reviewers is the basis for the institution's follow-up action. It also provides information to society regarding the activities of the evaluated institution.	The report by the peer reviewers is the basis for the institution's follow-up action. It also provides information to society regarding the activities of the evaluated institution.
In order for the report to be used as the basis for action to be taken, it needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover ● context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context); ● description of the individual procedure, including experts involved; ● evidence, analysis and findings; ● conclusions; ● features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution;	To achieve this, the report needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover: ● context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context); ● description of the individual procedure, including peer reviewers involved; ● evidence, analysis and findings; ● conclusions; ● features of good practice demonstrated by the institution; ● recommendations for follow-up action.	To achieve this, the report needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover: ● context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context); ● description of the individual procedure, including peer reviewers involved; ● evidence, analysis and findings; ● conclusions; ● features of good practice demonstrated by the institution; ● recommendations for follow-up action.

• recommendations for follow-up action.		
	To increase the accessibility and usability of the reports, they may be made available in a searchable electronic format and be published in DEQAR.	To increase the accessibility and usability of the reports, agencies are encouraged to make them available in a searchable electronic format and publish them in DEQAR.
The preparation of a summary report may be useful.	A summary of the report will increase its accessibility and transparency.	A summary of the report will increase its accessibility and transparency.
The factual accuracy of a report is improved if the institution is given the opportunity to point out errors of fact before the report is finalised.		
[ESG 2.5] Criteria for outcomes	**[ESG 2.6] Processes and criteria for outcomes**	**[ESG 2.6] Processes and criteria for outcomes**
Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.	Any outcomes, including formal decisions, that result from external quality assurance, should be based on evidence collected and analysed through the review process as documented in the review report by the peer reviewers. Outcomes should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently.	Any outcomes, including formal decisions, that result from external quality assurance, should be based on evidence collected and analysed through the review process as documented in the review report by the peer reviewers. Outcomes should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently.
	The agencies should provide transparent information on if and how the outcomes of the process may be recognised by relevant authorities.	Agencies should provide transparent information on if and how the outcomes of the process may be recognised by relevant authorities.
	The outcomes of the review process should be published. If the decision-making is based on	The outcomes of the review process should be published. If the decision-making relies

	additional documents beyond the review report by the peer reviewers, such documents should be published together with the decision.	on additional evidence, assessment or recommendation beyond the review report, this should be published together with the decision.
External quality assurance and in particular its outcomes have a significant impact on institutions and programmes that are evaluated and judged.		
In the interests of equity and reliability, outcomes of external quality assurance are based on pre- defined and published criteria, which are interpreted consistently and are evidence-based.		
Depending on the external quality assurance system, outcomes may take different forms, for example, recommendations, judgements or formal decisions.		
	Limiting the use of additional documents in agency decision-making strengthens the peer-review principle.	Limiting the use of additional evidence, assessment or recommendation beyond the review report in agency decision-making strengthens the peer-review principle.
[ESG 2.7] Complaints and appeals	**[ESG 2.7] Complaints and appeals**	**[ESG 2.7] Complaints and appeals**
Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.	Agencies should have complaints and appeals processes that are defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and they should be clearly communicated to the institutions.	Agencies should have complaints and appeals processes that are defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and they should be clearly communicated to the institutions.

	Appeals should be considered by a different structure within the agencies than the one whose decision is appealed against.	Appeals should be considered by a different structure within the agencies than the one whose decision is appealed against.
In order to safeguard the rights of the institutions and ensure fair decision-making, external quality assurance is operated in an open and accountable way. Nevertheless, there may be misapprehensions or instances of dissatisfaction about the process or formal outcomes.		
Institutions need to have access to processes that allow them to raise issues of concern with the agency; the agencies, need to handle such issues in a professional way by means of a clearly defined process that is consistently applied.	Agencies need to handle issues of concern related to the conduct of the process or those carrying it out in a professional way by means of a clearly defined complaints procedure that is consistently applied.	Agencies need to handle issues of concern related to the conduct of the process or those carrying it out in a professional way by means of a clearly defined complaints procedure that is consistently applied.
	Agencies may also have a policy for complaints from third parties.	Agencies may also have a policy for complaints from third parties.
A complaints procedure allows an institution to state its dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out.		
In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcomes of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, that criteria have not been correctly applied or that the processes have not been consistently implemented.	In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcome of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, or that criteria or processes have not been correctly and consistently applied.	In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcome of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, or that criteria or processes have not been correctly and consistently applied.

ESG Part 3 Quality assurance agencies

ESG 2015	ESG 2027 Draft 3 (July 2026)	ESG 2027 final draft
[ESG 3.1] Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance	**[ESG 3.1] Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance**	**[ESG 3.1] Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance**
Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis.	Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis.	Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis.
They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency.	Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agencies.	Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of agencies.
	When the agencies also carry out activities that are not in the scope of the ESG, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and other fields of work is needed. This needs to be clearly communicated to the wide public.	When agencies also carry out activities that are not in the scope of the ESG, they should clearly define these activities and ensure a transparent distinction between external quality assurance and other fields of work. This needs to be clearly communicated to the public.
Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.	Agencies should ensure the meaningful involvement of stakeholders, including students, in their governance and work.	Agencies should ensure the meaningful involvement of stakeholders, including students, in their governance and work.
To ensure the meaningfulness of external quality assurance, it is important that institutions and the public trust agencies. Therefore, the goals and objectives of the quality assurance activities are described and	The goals and objectives of the different quality assurance activities and the scope of the agencies' work are described transparently and are published. This information also addresses the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in	The goals and objectives of the different quality assurance activities and the scope of agencies' work are described transparently and are published. This information also addresses the nature of interaction between agencies and relevant stakeholders in

published along with the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the scope of the agencies' work.	higher education, especially the higher education institutions.	higher education, especially the higher education institutions.
	Depending on the structure and mission of the agencies, stakeholders may be involved in different ways.	Depending on the structure and mission of the agencies, stakeholders may be involved in different ways.
The expertise in the agency may be increased by including international members in agency committees.	The expertise in the agencies may be increased by including international members in agencies' structures.	The expertise in agencies may be increased by including international members in agencies' structures.
A variety of external quality assurance activities are carried out by agencies to achieve different objectives. Among them are evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities at programme or institutional level that may be carried out differently.		
When the agencies also carry out other activities, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and their other fields of work is needed.		
[ESG 3.2] Official status		
Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.		

In particular when external quality assurance is carried out for regulatory purposes, institutions need to have the security that the outcomes of this process are accepted within their higher education system, by the state, the stakeholders and the public.		
[ESG 3.3] Independence	**[ESG 3.2] Independence**	**[ESG 3.2] Independence**
Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.	Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without undue influence. Agencies should have specific safeguards, checks and balances that ensure autonomy and independence so that no one stakeholder, entity, or individual has undue influence over the agencies. The key elements of independence of agencies include: 1) Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation 2) Operational independence in defining procedures and methods 3) Independence of formal outcomes of quality assurance processes.	Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without undue influence. Agencies should have specific safeguards, checks and balances that ensure autonomy and independence so that no one stakeholder, entity, or individual has undue influence over the agencies. The key elements of independence of agencies include: 1) Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation 2) Operational independence in defining and implementing procedures and methods 3) Independence of formal outcomes of quality assurance processes.
Autonomous institutions need independent agencies as counterparts.		

In considering the independence of an agency the following are important:		
1) Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation) that stipulates the independence of the agency's work from third parties, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations;	1) Organisational independence may be demonstrated in official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation). These documents clearly stipulate the independence of the agencies' structure from any party, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations.	1) Organisational independence may be demonstrated in official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation). These documents clearly stipulate the independence of the agencies' structure from any party, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations.
2) Operational independence: the definition and operation of the agency's procedures and methods as well as the nomination and appointment of external experts are undertaken independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders;	2) Operational independence is safeguarded if the definition and operation of the agencies' procedures and methods are independent from any party, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders. Additionally, the nomination and appointment of peer reviewers are undertaken independently by the agency.	2) Operational independence is safeguarded if the definition and operation of the agencies' procedures and methods are independent from any party, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders. Additionally, the nomination and appointment of peer reviewers are undertaken independently by the agency.
3) Independence of formal outcomes: while experts from relevant stakeholder backgrounds, particularly students, take part in quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.	3) Independence of formal outcomes includes the principle that the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agencies, while the review procedure itself is based on the assessment by peer reviewers from relevant stakeholder backgrounds.	3) Independence of formal outcomes includes the principle that the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agencies, while the review procedure itself is based on the assessment by peer reviewers from relevant stakeholder backgrounds.
Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency (e.g. as expert) is informed that while they may be		

nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency. Independence is important to ensure that any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise.		
[ESG 3.4] Thematic analysis	**[ESG 3.3] Activities for enhancement**	**[ESG 3.3] Activities for enhancement**
Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.	Agencies should regularly engage in activities, reflect on their experiences, and disseminate materials that support the enhancement of quality assurance and learning, teaching and assessment in the context in which they work.	Agencies should regularly engage in activities, reflect on their experiences, and disseminate materials that support the enhancement of quality assurance and learning, teaching and assessment in the context in which they work.
In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system.	In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system.	In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system.
These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts.	These findings can contribute to the reflection on developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulties, and can be used for the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in national and international contexts.	These findings can contribute to the reflection on developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulties, and can be used for the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in national and international contexts.
A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent		

difficulty.		
[ESG 3.5] Resources	**[ESG 3.4] Resources**	**[ESG 3.4] Resources**
Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.	Agencies should have adequate resources to carry out their work professionally. These resources, both human and financial, should enable effective and sustainable implementation of the agencies' activities. Agencies should provide their staff with appropriate support and professional development opportunities, including the use of digital technologies, to ensure a high level of competence.	Agencies should have adequate resources to carry out their work professionally. These resources, both human and financial, should enable effective and sustainable implementation of the agencies' activities. Agencies should provide their staff with appropriate support and professional development opportunities, including the use of digital technologies, to ensure a high level of competence.
It is in the public interest that agencies are adequately and appropriately funded, given higher education's important impact on the development of societies and individuals. The resources of the agencies enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance activities in an effective and efficient manner. Furthermore, the resources enable the agencies to improve, to reflect on their practice and to inform the public about their activities.	The available resources enable the agencies to reflect on their practices, to improve them when needed, and to inform the public about their activities.	The available resources enable the agencies to reflect on their practices, to improve them when needed, and to inform the public about their activities.
	When managing resources, aspects of digital and green transition are taken into consideration.	When managing resources, aspects of digital and green transition are taken into consideration.
[ESG 3.6] Internal quality assurance and professional conduct	**[ESG 3.5] Internal quality assurance and integrity**	**[ESG 3.5] Internal quality assurance and integrity**

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.	Agencies should have a published internal quality policy that defines the procedures and tools in use for continuous enhancement of their activities. The internal quality assurance system should assure and enhance the quality and integrity of the agencies' activities. Agencies should have high professional standards to create trust in their work. Effective tools should be in place to ensure the integrity of their operations, both nationally and internationally, and to prevent conflicts of interest.	Agencies should have an internal quality assurance system that assures and enhances the quality and integrity of their activities. Agencies should have a published internal quality policy that defines the procedures and tools in use for continuous enhancement of their activities. Agencies should act with transparency and have high professional standards to create trust in their work. Effective tools should be in place to ensure the integrity of their operations, both nationally and internationally, and to prevent conflicts of interest.
Agencies need to be accountable to their stakeholders. Therefore, high professional standards and integrity in the agency's work are indispensable. The review and improvement of their activities are on-going so as to ensure that their services to institutions and society are optimal Agencies apply an internal quality assurance policy which is available on its website. This policy ● ensures that all persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically; ● includes internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to a continuous improvement within the agency; ● guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination;	Agencies ensure that all persons involved in their activities have adequate competencies and act professionally and ethically. There are mechanisms in place that guard against intolerance of any kind or discrimination. Internal and external feedback is collected by the agencies from their stakeholders. This contributes to continuous improvement of their activities. Responsibility for the quality of any activity carried out by partners on behalf of the agencies, lies within the agencies. When working abroad, the agencies	Internal and external feedback is collected by agencies from their stakeholders. This contributes to continuous improvement of their activities. Agencies ensure that all persons involved in their activities have adequate competencies and act professionally and ethically. There are mechanisms in place that guard against intolerance of any kind or discrimination. Responsibility for the quality of any activity carried out by partners on behalf of the agencies, lies within the agencies.

• outlines the appropriate communication with the relevant authorities of those jurisdictions where they operate; • ensures that any activities carried out and material produced by subcontractors are in line with the ESG, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance activities are subcontracted to other parties. allows the agency to establish the status and recognition of the institutions with which it conducts external quality assurance.	communicate appropriately with the relevant authorities of the jurisdiction in which they operate.	
[ESG 3.7] Cyclical external review of agencies	**[ESG 3.7] Review of agencies**	**[ESG 3.6] Review of agencies**
Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.	Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG, addressing, where relevant, the outcomes of the previous review.	Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG, addressing, where relevant, the outcomes of the previous review.
A periodic external review will help the agency to reflect on its policies and activities. It provides a means for assuring the agency and its stakeholders that it continues to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.	Agencies reflect on their policies and activities continuously. A periodic external review assures the agencies and their stakeholders that they continue to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.	Agencies reflect on their policies and activities continuously. A periodic external review assures the agencies and their stakeholders that they continue to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.