Discussion on the Final Draft of the 2027 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA and the first draft of European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
CI BFUG meeting, Dublin, Ireland, 5-6 November 2026

1. Introduction, context and steps taken so far

Through the Tirana Ministerial Communiqué, the ministers gave the authors of the ESG mandate to revise the document ahead of the next Ministerial conference. The authors have been tasked with presenting a revision proposal by 2026, with the final version of the ESG to be adopted at the 2027 Ministerial conference. The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes[1] will also be updated, based on the revised ESG.

Revision of the ESG

At the XCIII Bologna Follow-Up Group meeting, hosted by Hungary in Budapest on 26-27 September 2024, a briefing note[2] on process and structures for the ESG revision was presented. At the XCV BFUG meeting, hosted by Poland in Warsaw on 24-25 February 2025, a plenary session[3] to discuss key issues for the revision was organised. The outcomes of the debates were summarised in the minutes[44] of the meeting.

An update[5] on the Draft 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for QA in EHEA was included on the agenda of the XCVI BFUG Board meeting, Vaduz (Lichtenstein), 4 November 2025. The minutes[6] of the meeting summarised the main conclusions of the BFUG Board.

A public consultation on the first draft of the ESG 2027 was launched on 17 November 2025 and closed on 9 January 2026. The survey was distributed through the EHEA Secretariat, all BFUG members and consultative members being strongly encouraged to disseminate it as widely as possible. Overall, 322 unique responses were recorded and analysed.

While the public consultation was open, at the XCVII BFUG meeting, hosted by Denmark in Copenhagen on 15-16 December 2025, a plenary session[7] was organised to collect direct feedback from the BFUG members and to discuss key issues present in the draft 1 of the revised ESG 2027.

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

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

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

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

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

[6] https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_Board_DK_LI_96_Minutes_03.12.2025.pdf

[7] https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_DK_LI_97_9_1_Draft_1_ESG_2027_17.11.2025.pdf, https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_DK_LI_97_9_2_Explanatory_note_Draft1_ESG_11.12.2025.pdf, and https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_DK_LI_97_9_3_Discussion_Note_Draft_1_ESG_01.12.2025.pdf

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Key points of discussion and the main outcomes were summarised in the minutes[8] of the meeting.

An update[9] on the results of the public consultation and the process for developing Draft 2 of the Standards and Guidelines for QA in EHEA was included on the agenda of the XCVIII BFUG Board meeting, Oslo (Norway), 5 February 2026. The minutes for the meeting are available here. Draft 2[10] was discussed at the online meeting organised by Cyprus on 9-10 March 2026, discussions being summarised in the minutes[11].

A new draft (draft 3) was prepared, which was sent to the BFUG members for written feedback during summer 2026. Contributions were received from 17 delegations. An update on the status of incorporating the comments and on further revision points was presented at the BFUG Board meeting that was organised in Podgorica, Montenegro, on 29 September. The minutes of the meeting are not yet available.

Revision of the European Approach

The work on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA) revision started in December 2025. Targeted consultations on Draft 0 were conducted with relevant members of the stakeholders organisations and with the European Commission. Some of the comments are still under discussion within the Steering Committee, as the revision structures focused on finalising the ESG.

2. Roadmap

The ESG revision Steering Committee has so far met twelve times (September and December 2024; March, June, September, October and December 2025; February, March, June, September, October 2026), while the Drafting Committee holds meetings and works online between the Steering Committee's meetings.

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

3. Main changes proposed in the Final Draft (Draft 4) of the ESG

The points below include the main revisions, additions or removals between **Draft 3** and **Final Draft**, following written feedback from the BFUG members on Draft 3 received by September 2026. An overall language check was also conducted by the Steering Committee Secretary (ENQA).

General Considerations and Context, Scope, Purposes and Principles

A reference to the need for finding sustainable solutions for current and future global challenges was added as part of the context. A new definition regarding agencies' external quality assurance activities considered within the scope of the ESG is included; it ensures that the issues of scope does not overlap with the content of the standards and that difference between being outside

[8] https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_DK_LI_97_Minutes_Final_13.02.2026.pdf
[9] https://ehea.info/Download/BFUG_Board_CY_NO_98_7_ESG_Presentation_30.01.2026.pdf
[10] https://ehea.info/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/BFUG_99_CY_NO_11_ESG_Draft_2_24.02.2026.pdf
[11] https://ehea.info/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/BFUG_99_CY_NO_Minutes_20.04.2026.pdf

the scope of the ESG and not being compliant with the ESG is clear and transparent. The introductory sections now also include an explanation why certain stakeholders are mentioned in different parts of the document and that this does not imply excluding other stakeholders. The definition of cross-border quality assurance was added to the key terms.

Part I Standards and Guidelines for Internal quality assurance

1.1 POLICY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Stronger emphasis on effectiveness of the communication of the policy for quality assurance
- Clarification that the list of fundamental values safeguarded by institutional policies is non-exhaustive, through the addition of "including but not limited to"

1.2 DESIGN, APPROVAL, ONGOING MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES

- Addition of research alongside academic and professional developments as a basis for programme design, monitoring and review
- Expansion of the expected graduate outcomes to include active citizenship, alongside employability
- Clarification that the national qualifications framework for higher education should be aligned with the correct cycle of the QF-EHEA
- Addition of sectoral standards alongside professional and disciplinary standards;
- Minor wording adjustments

1.3 **STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT**

- Addition of transparency as a principle governing the responsible use of digital tools;
- Change in terminology from "testing and examination" to "assessment", broadening the terminology to cover all types of assessment
- Addition of reference to personalised feedback for students

1.5 **TEACHING STAFF**

- Expanding the sentence requiring staff recruitment, development and evaluation processes to reflect the institutional mission, programmes and objectives and moving it to the guidelines
- Change in terminology from "sufficient" to "appropriate" regarding the share of core staff under long-term employment
- Change in terminology from "quality" to "competences" of staff
- Addition of "in line with the required competences" for staff recruitment, development and evaluation
- Clarifying the 'evolving role of staff' with the examples of student-centred learning, digital technologies and internationalisation

1.6 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Simplification of the wording ("plays a crucial role" to "is essential")
- Reframing of the provision of human support from a focus on services to staff

1.7 **INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

- Addition of "related" to emphasise the need for data collection for activities relevant for learning and teaching (rather than institutional activities in general)
- Minor wording adjustments

1.8 **PUBLIC INFORMATION**

- Minor wording adjustments

1.9 **CYCLICAL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

- Addition of reference to cross-border quality assurance with regards to regulatory requirements
- Addition of examples of organisational levels ("programme, faculty or institution")

Part II: Standards and Guidelines for External Quality Assurance

2.1 ADDRESSING INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Clarified the requirement that all Part 1 standards are addressed by external quality assurance; now the requirement explicitly emphasises holistic nature of the standard and the possibility for the requirement to be met through one or more procedures by the agency in combination
- Made the requirement related to QF-EHEA cycles more precise; external quality assurance is expected to verify the effectiveness of institutional processes

2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

- Standard now includes explicit reference to the need for consistency when conducting quality assurance activities in a cross-border context
- Transparency added to the list of principles for using digital tools in external quality assurance
- Guideline on communicating appropriately with relevant authorities when working abroad moved from ESG 3.5 to ESG 2.3

2.4 PEER REVIEWERS

- Standard now includes a requirement that all persons involved in external quality assurance activities act in a personal capacity and independently, in order to ensure that conflict of interest is avoided
- The requirement on peer reviewers' training is modified so that the agencies are not obliged to organise trainings themselves, but need to be assured that the reviewers are well prepared and trained

2.6 PROCESSES AND CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

- Clarified the requirement on publishing the outcomes of external quality assurance in order to ensure that documents such as minutes, self-evaluation and similar are excluded, while any modifications or additions to the external review report are included
- Related to the above, a guideline now clearly emphasises that it is desirable not to use such methods and that it is encouraged to use only the external review report as basis for decision-making

Part III: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies

3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Reworded the standard in relation to activities of agencies that are in the scope of the

ESG, to clarify that the agencies are responsible for defining and clearly communication about such activities

3.2. INDEPENDENCE

- Requirement on operational independence now clarifies that it should manifest also in implementing procedures and methods, not only in defining them

3.5 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND INTEGRITY

- Transparency was added as part of expectations on how agencies should act
- The guideline regarding communication with appropriate authorities when working abroad was moved to standard 2.3

All changes can be consulted in the Final Draft of the 2027 ESG, which includes a comparative table with ESG 2015, Draft 3 (June 2026) and the final draft.

4. Main changes proposed in the Draft 1 of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes

- Introduction was rewritten in order to provide an up-to-date policy context to the document

SCOPE, CONTEXT AND APPLICABILITY

- Added as a new section of the document, and the scope is now defined more precisely.
- Formulation on partners from beyond EHEA is formulated in order to clarify requirements from consortia with institutions both from EHEA and from outside the EHEA.
- Three key methodological principles are outlined: external QA conducted by an EQAR-registered agency, no additional national criteria to be added, the European Approach is to be applied holistically, as a package.
- Clarified the applicability of the European Approach for so-called "self-accrediting" institutions, i.e. those that are not subject to mandatory external quality assurance at the programme level.
- Definitions of joint programmes and other relevant concepts will be moved to the glossary.
- Clarified that the external quality assurance decision resulting from the process should be accepted in all relevant systems without additional requirements imposed.

PART A. APPLICATION IN DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OF EXTERNAL QA

- The section now explains two application scenarios: where at least one cooperating institution requires external quality assurance at the programme level, and where all cooperating EHEA institutions are subject only to institutional-level external quality assurance and are not required to undergo programme-level external quality assurance.

PART B1. ELIGIBILITY FOR THE APPLICATION OF THE EUROPEAN APPROACH

- Eligibility section added in order to explain which programmes are eligible to use the European Approach. This section also provisionally replaces standard "Status" of the

joint programme in 2015 version.

- Two requirements, which can be assessed through desk analysis, are placed under the Eligibility section: key elements of the consortium agreement and volume (including alignment with QF-EHEA cycles and the ECTS Users' Guide).

PART B2. STANDARDS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES IN THE EHEA

- Added standard "Joint Ownership and Responsibility", stating more precisely which elements of the programme need to be joint if the programme is to fulfil its character of a joint programme.
- Added standard "Programme Quality Assurance" which addresses internal quality assurance of a joint programme.
- New standard "Learning Outcomes" includes elements of three standards in the 2015 version: level, disciplinary field, and achievement. The standard emphasises the central role of intended learning outcomes in programme design.
- Provisionally removed standard "Regulated Professions" since it is likely outside the scope of quality assurance.
- New standard "Credits and Workload" merges two standards from the 2015 version. It now includes a requirement for the workload to be appropriate (i.e. aligned with the ECTS allocation). Expectations on ECTS volume of programmes has been moved to the Eligibility section.
- Standard on admission expanded into "Admission and Progression", and reworded to expand with expectations of joint policies and regulation on admission.
- Standard "Learning, Teaching and Assessment" has been modified to strengthen the notion of constructive alignment between intended learning outcomes, learning process design and assessment.
- Standard "Student Support" now more strongly emphasises the joint character and responsibility of providing students with relevant support.
- Standard "Staff" expanded with expectations on professional capacities and training of staff involved in the joint programme.
- Standard on quality assurance now includes references to engaging and providing feedback to different stakeholders of the joint programme.

PART C. PROCEDURE FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES IN THE EHEA

- Standard "Peer Reviewers" terminologically aligned with the revisions of the ESG.
- Standard "Review Report" now contains elements of standard "Reporting" in order to address overlaps in content.
- Standard "Formal Outcomes and Decision" expanded with considerations on provision of information important for the decision's acceptance in different higher education systems.
- Standard "Complaints and Appeals" replaces a standard only on appeals by adding elements on complaints and aligning with the ESG formulations.
- Standard on reporting renamed into "Publication of Outcomes" and no longer deals with content of the reports, only with publication. It has also been updated to align with the ESG

- Standard on follow-up expanded with requirement that the agency is informed about any changes which might influence compliance with the European Approach standards.

Note: after the BFUG provides initial input on the European Approach revision, the Glossary will be updated and included in the next draft.

5. Conclusions and next steps

The BFUG is invited to reflect on the main proposed changes to the ESG and EA and to approve the final draft of the ESG.

The Steering Committee will meet again on 9 November 2026 to discuss the outcomes of the BFUG discussion and work further on the European Approach.

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

Date	Meeting/actors	Action
2024		
30 September 2024	SC meeting	Agree roadmap and have first discussion on structure, scope and principles
4 December 2024	SC meeting	Discuss draft introduction, main directions for the standards, and prepare session for BFUG meeting in February 2025
2025		
24-25 February 2025	BFUG meeting in Poland	Session for discussion on key issues for the ESG revision
12 March 2025	SC meeting	Discuss input from BFUG, draft introduction and directions for Part 1
10 June 2025	SC meeting	Discuss draft of Part 1 and directions for Part 2
11-12 September 2025	SC meeting	Discuss drafts of Part 2 and 3, and critical issues for Part 1
21 October 2025		Deadline for documents for BFUG Board meeting
27 October 2025	SC meeting	Decide on pending issues for full draft
17 November 2025		Launch public consultation
1 December 2025		Deadline for BFUG documents
9 December 2025	SC meeting	Launch work on the EA
15-16 December 2025	BFUG meeting in Denmark	Session on draft ESG
2026		
9 January 2026		Close public consultation.
3-4 February 2026	SC meeting	Discuss outcomes of consultation and decide on changes to draft ESG Prepare for BFUG
23 February 2026		Deadline for BFUG documents
9-10 March 2026	BFUG meeting in Cyprus	Session to discuss ESG
25 March 2026	SC meeting	Further work on ESG and EA, including discussing outcomes of BFUG
10 June 2026	SC meeting	Further work on ESG and EA, finalising the ESG for written consultations with the BFUG
July – September 2026	BFUG members	BFUG consultations ESG
July – September 2026	Members of stakeholder organisations involved in the revision, EC	Targeted consultation EA
25 September 2026	SC meeting	Further work on ESG
1 October 2026	SC meeting	Further work on ESG
29 September 2026	BFUG Board	Update on the ESG revision
5 – 6 November 2026	BFUG meeting in Ireland	BFUG approve the final version of the ESG and discuss draft of EA

9 November 2026	SC meeting	Further work on EA, including discussing outcomes of BFUG
2027		
February 2027	BFUG meeting in Lithuania (first meeting)	BFUG approve final version of the EA
26-27 May 2027	Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in Romania/Moldova	EHEA Ministers adopt the ESG 2027 and EA 2027