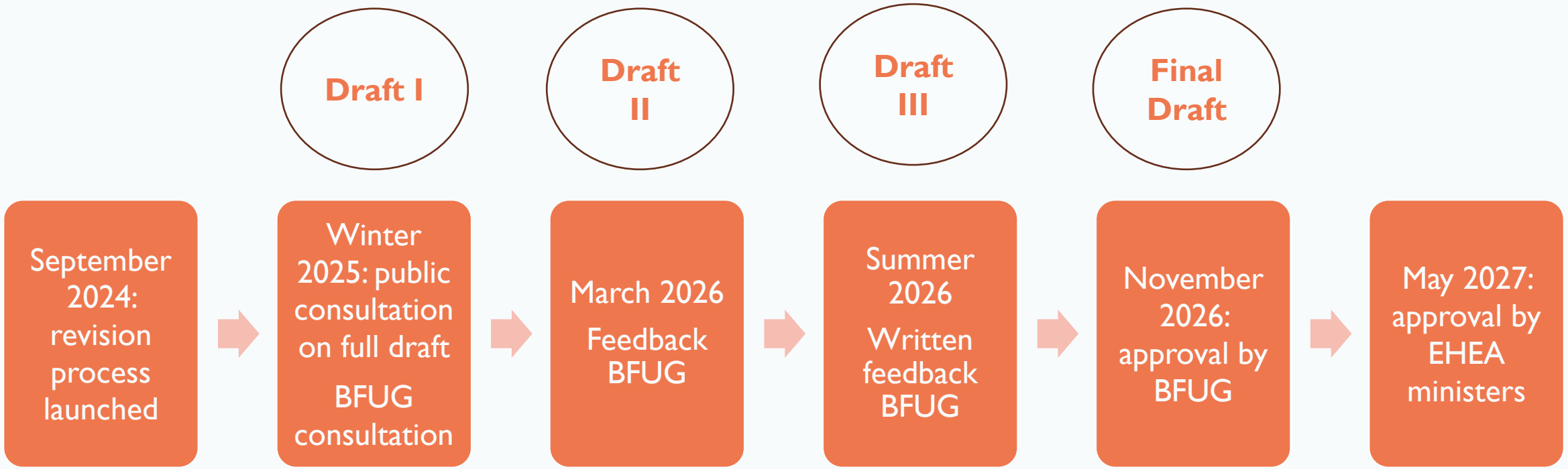
REVISION OF ESG AND EUROPEAN APPROACH

BFUG MEETING, DUBLIN (IRELAND), 5-6 NOVEMBER 2026

TIMELINE


Draft I
Draft II
Draft III
Final Draft
September 2024: revision process launched
Winter 2025: public consultation on full draft
BFUG consultation
March 2026
Feedback BFUG
Summer 2026
Written feedback BFUG
November 2026: approval by BFUG
May 2027: approval by EHEA ministers

RESPONSES

17 responses (16 systems + EC)

- Andorra
- Belgium - Flanders
- Czechia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Holy See
- Ireland
- Norway
- Poland
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- UK England
- UK Scotland
- European Commission

GENERAL COMMENTS

- Overall appreciation on progress
- Contradictions: Some criticisms that the standards and guidelines are too detailed, risk increased administrative burden. In parallel, many suggestions to add new requirements or more detailed text.
- Some comments revisit issues already decided upon
  - Focus on learning, teaching and assessment (with relevant links to other institutional missions, but no direct requirements for research e.g. research resources, research staff)
  - Specific inclusion of artificial intelligence
  - Explain scope in the introduction and do not repeat throughout the standards (e.g. cross-border higher education, definitions of institutions, programmes etc)
- Thorough language check, including:
  - QF-EHEA should refer to cycles not levels (but levels when referring to EQF)
  - Consistency in language for guidelines (take out descriptors 'it is important..', do not use 'should')
  - 'Programmes' instead of 'study programmes'

INTRODUCTION (1)

- Review wording in foreword for accuracy regarding the history and authors of ESG, and development of 2027 version
- Addition of 'sustainable solutions for global challenges' to reflect sustainability as a contextual issue
- New sentence to explain scope of agencies' external quality assurance activities considered within the scope of the ESG: 'those that concern learning and teaching in higher education institutions or programmes that aim to assess quality dimensions defined in the ESG Part 1.' (to be read in conjuction with ESG 3.1)
- Change from 'future careers' to 'careers' (to cover LLL etc)

INTRODUCTION (2)

- Addition of 'meaningful' in description of quality: 'Quality is mainly a result of the meaningful interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment'
- Addition of 'services' to the learning environment 'Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities, services and facilities are fit for purpose…'
- Edits to list of key terms
  - Remove 'joint programme' (not used in ESG)
  - Refer to 'cycles' not 'levels' of QF-EHEA
  - Edit reference to micro-credentials

PART 1 CHANGES (1)

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

- Stronger emphasis on effectiveness of the communication of the policy for quality assurance
- Recognition that the list of fundamental values is not exhaustive: 'safeguarding fundamental values, including but not limited to…'

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

- Addition of link to research: 'programmes… are informed by the latest research, academic and professional developments'
- Addition of active citizenship to balance reference to employability: 'programmes respond to the needs of students, society and the labour market, supporting graduates' employability and active citizenship.'
- Addition of sectoral standards alongside professional and disciplinary standards

PART 1 CHANGES (2)

1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

- Add 'transparent' to the provisions on the use of AI
- Review the guidelines related to QA processes for student assessment
  - Change in terminology from "testing and examination" to "assessment", broadening the terminology to cover all types of assessment
  - Add 'personalised' feedback for students

PART I CHANGES (3)

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
- Move the sentence about 'evolving role of staff' to guidelines and expand with examples (SCL, digitalisation, internationalisation)
- Replace sufficient with appropriate: 'an appropriate 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

PART 1 CHANGES (4)

1.6 Learning environment and resources

- Reframing of the provision of human support from a focus on services to staff involved

1.7 Information management

- Clarified that information collection refers to 'programmes and other related activities'

1.9 Cyclical external quality assurance

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

PART 2 CHANGES (1)

2.1 Addressing internal quality assurance

- Updated text on holistic approach: '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.'
- Shift of responsibilities so that agencies should check that HEIs have approaches to check correspondence of programme with the right cycle of QF-EHEA

2.3 Implementing processes

- Explicit reference to the need for consistency when conducting quality assurance activities in a cross-border context
- Add 'transparent' to the provisions on the use of AI (mirroring 1.3)
- Guideline on communicating appropriately with relevant authorities when working abroad moved from ESG 3.5 to ESG 2.3

PART 2 CHANGES (2)

2.4 Peer reviewers

- Requirement on peer reviewers' training modified so that agencies need to be assured that the reviewers are well prepared and trained
- Requirement for peer reviewers to contribute in individual capacity moved from guidelines to standard.

2.6 Processes and criteria for outcomes

- Clarification of requirement to publish other documents: 'If the decision-making relies on additional evidence, assessment or recommendation beyond the review report, this should be published together with the decision.'
- Guideline emphasises that it is encouraged to use only the external review report as basis for decision-making

PART 3 CHANGES (1)

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 clarified to cover implementing procedures and methods, not only 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

REVISION OF EUROPEAN APPROACH



- Comments from European Commission
- Feedback from students
- Consultation with QA agencies that use the EA
- Consultation with HEIs that offer joint programmes
- Consultation with national authorities at EQAR Members' Dialogue

GENERAL CHANGES

- Updated introduction to reflect latest developments in policy context
- Updated all standards to be in line with changes to the ESG
- Additional emphasis on ‘jointness’ of programmes
- Some standards reorganised/combined for logic and to reduce overlaps
- Glossary to be added and terminology explanations to be moved there instead of being throughout the document

SCOPE, CONTEXT AND APPLICABILITY

- Clarification of 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 for "self-accrediting" institutions
- Clarified that the 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

- Section explains two application scenarios:
  - where at least one cooperating institution requires external quality assurance at the programme level
  - 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 EA

- Eligibility section with two requirements to be checked by the agency before an EA procedure can start
  - Existence of consortium agreement and key elements within it
  - Volume of study (including alignment with QF-EHEA cycles and the ECTS Users' Guide)

PART B2. STANDARDS FOR QA OF JOINT PROGRAMMES IN THE EHEA

- Expanded 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"
- New standard "Learning Outcomes" combines elements of three standards in the 2015 version: level, disciplinary field, and achievement
- Removed standard "Regulated Professions"
- New standard "Credits and Workload" merges two standards from the 2015 version and includes requirement for workload to be aligned with the ECTS allocation
- Standard on admission expanded into "Admission and Progression", and reworded to expand with expectations of joint policies and regulation on admission

PART B2. STANDARDS FOR QA OF JOINT PROGRAMMES IN THE EHEA

- Standard "Learning, Teaching and Assessment" modified to strengthen the notion of constructive alignment between intended learning outcomes, learning process design and assessment
- Standard "Student Support" 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 with and providing feedback to different stakeholders of the joint programme

PART C. PROCEDURE FOR EQA OF JOINT PROGRAMMES IN THE EHEA

- Standard "Review Report" now contains elements of standard "Reporting" 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
- Standard on reporting renamed into "Publication of Outcomes" and no longer deals with content of the reports, only with publication
- Standard on follow-up expanded with requirement that the agency is informed about any changes which might influence compliance with the European Approach standards

Stay in touch!

Sign up to receive
our quarterly newsletter:
https://www.enqa.eu/contact/#newsletter

Follow ENQA on social media: