

ESG revision

- briefing note October 2025 -

1. Introduction and policy context

In 2025, the Tirana Communiqué reaffirmed the role of the three EHEA key commitments for the successful development of the EHEA and gave the mandate for the revision of the ESG.

“The application of the ESG promotes trust and transparency within and between higher education systems and facilitates accountability and enhancement. To keep them in line with ongoing developments, challenges and expectations, we invite the authors of the ESG to propose a revised version by 2026 to the BFUG, to be adopted by us at our 2027 Ministerial conference, as well as an adjustment, where required, of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.”

Two bodies were formed in order to conduct the revision process: the Steering Committee (composed of representatives of ENQA, EUA, EURASHE, ESU, EQAR, Education International and Business Europe), which coordinates the overall process, including consultations, and takes decisions on the revision directions, and the Drafting Committee (composed of E4 representatives), which prepares drafts and identifies issues for further discussion.

These bodies began their work in September 2024, and the activities will continue according to the following timeline:

Autumn 2025 - Winter 2026	Public consultation on full draft
End 2025	Work on revision of European Approach starts
Autumn 2026	Approval by BFUG
May 2027	Approval by EHEA ministers

2. Preparatory consultations and initial input

Broad preparatory consultations on a potential ESG revision were conducted between 2022-2024 within the QA-FIT project. As a part of this project, different stakeholders were consulted: higher education institutions, students, ministries and quality assurance agencies.

Outcomes of the project and specifically analysis of stakeholders' input can be found here:

- [QA FIT in general](#)
- [Input from higher education institutions](#)

- [Input from students](#)
- [Input from ministries](#)
- [Input from quality assurance agencies](#)

A first round of consultation within the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) were conducted in February 2025¹, with the following outcomes:

General agreement on

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

Divergent views on

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

3. Initial conclusions of the ESG revision Steering Committee

When outlining the initial conclusions of the ESG Steering Committee, it is crucial to consider that these conclusions are **tentative**. **The proposals contained in this document are still under discussion within the Committee.** In November 2025, when the draft is finalised, it will be put out for public consultation and for consultation within the BFUG.

A. ESG Introduction and overall structure

- The current **structure of the ESG should be maintained** (introduction, three interconnected parts).
- There should be further work on **ensuring that the standards are self-explanatory**, while the **guidelines support implementation** in different contexts.
- The ESG should **maintain applicability to all types of higher education provision**, including also smaller units of learning (e.g. micro-credentials).
- The ESG should **remain focused on Teaching & Learning**, but with **stronger reference to the links to the research and societal missions of higher education institutions**. Countries and agencies

¹ [Background paper](#) and [presentation](#)

can, of course, include other aspects in their quality assurance procedures.

- References to **stakeholders and fundamental values** should be made in introduction and in standards where appropriate.
- The ESG should **support different concepts of quality**. They are to be **standards for quality assurance**, with an implicit or indirect reference to quality itself.
- The **principles outlined in the Introduction are still valid** as they emphasise that:
 - Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
 - Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;
 - Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;
 - Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.
- Structure of the Introduction might be revised to **eliminate overlaps and ensure clarity**, in the last phase of the drafting process.

B. ESG Part 1

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

- Require that the internal QA policy **reflects the links between learning and teaching and other institutional missions and activities**.

1.2 Design and approval of programmes

- Reference to societal relevance to be added
- Emphasise **involvement of stakeholders**, including students, in programme design.

1.3 Student-centred learning

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

1.5 Teaching staff

- Updated understanding of the **role of a teacher in higher education**.
- Standard to be **expanded to cover all staff involved in learning and teaching**, not just teaching staff.

1.6 Learning resources and student support

- Standard renamed to 'Learning environment' and **scope expanded to cover learning resources, infrastructure and student support**.

- Reference to **accessibility and inclusiveness** to be added.

1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

- The Steering Committee will further discuss **whether this standard and standard 1.2 can be merged** (with removal of overlaps).

1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

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

C. ESG Part 2

2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

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

2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

- Dual purpose of accountability and enhancement to be highlighted.

2.3 Implementing processes (“4-steps-procedure”)

- The standard will retain the steps currently included (self-assessment, site visit, report follow-up) but also **make clear the possibility for justified alternative approaches**.
- To better clarify that **site visits refer to in-person activities** (unless otherwise justified).

2.4 Peer-review experts

- To be emphasised that the agencies are to assure themselves of the **competences and professionalism of their experts**.
- To be required that the **panel composition reflects the aim and scope of the process**.

2.5 Criteria for outcomes

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

2.6 Reporting

- The need for **digital accessibility and usability of reports** will be included.

2.7 Complaints and appeals

- The standard and guidelines will be revised to further clarify the **difference between complaints** (process) **and appeals** (more related to outcomes).

D. ESG Part 3

3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

- Involvement of stakeholders to **be kept flexible, in terms of category and type of involvement**, as appropriate in terms of intended impact, assuring involvement whenever relevant.
- Requirement to **include stakeholders in the structures of the agencies** to be emphasised.

3.2 Official status

- To be deleted but to include in ESG Part 2 transparent information on how, and by whom, the outcomes of reviews can be used and/or recognised.

3.3 Independence

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

3.4 Thematic analysis

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

3.5 Resources

- No significant revisions.

3.6 Internal QA and professional conduct

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

3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

- Requirement for improvement since the last review to be added.

4. Next steps in public consultation on the ESG revision

Public consultation on the ESG revision draft will be open from 17 November 2025 until early January 2026. As a part of this consultation, the full draft of the revised ESG will be made publicly available, in the interest of collecting feedback. All interested parties will be able to provide input into the process via an online survey.