European Quality Assurance
Register for Higher Education

European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG): national alignment and upcoming revision in 2027

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European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)

Mission:

Enhance transparency and trust, promote international recognition

Role:

Official register of QA agencies that comply with the ESG

- Established by and for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)
- Founded by the E4 organisations (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE), jointly governed with HE ministries
- Non-profit, independent and acting in the public interest

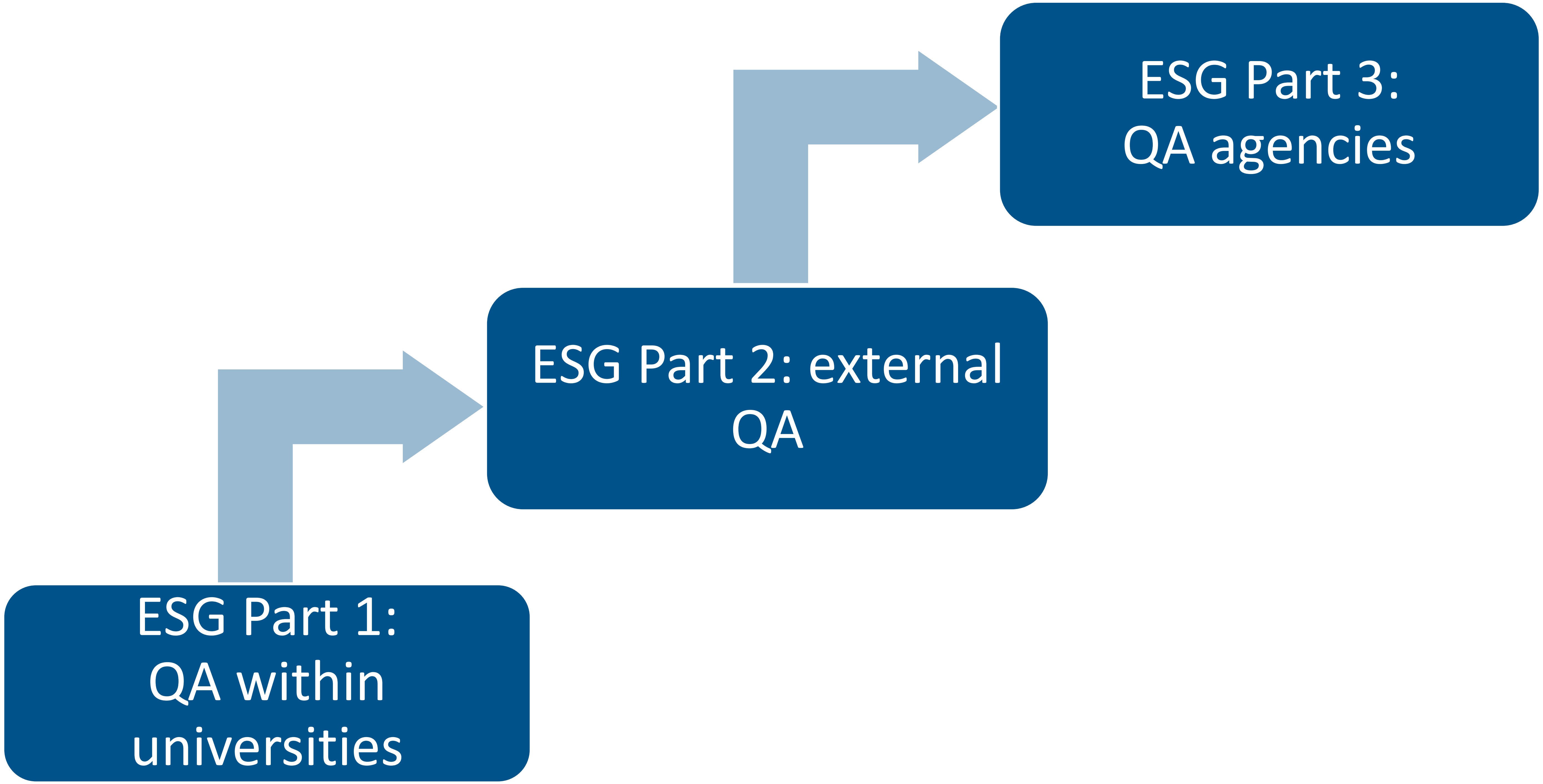
Governance of the organisation

Decisions on registration of agencies

Revision of the ESG

- ✓ Retaining the current structure: introductory section+3 parts.
- ✓ Maintain focus on learning, teaching (and assessment), but with stronger reference to links with research and the societal mission.
- ✓ Caution against overloading the ESG with too many topics.
- ✓ ESG are standards for quality assurance and should support different concepts of quality.
- ✓ Maintain applicability to all types of higher education provision.

Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)



ESG Part 1:
Internal Quality Assurance

ESG 1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance

Key changes:

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

ESG 2015	Revised version
Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management.	Institutions should have a published policy for quality assurance <u>of learning and teaching, with associated structures and procedures</u>, which <u>support a coherent system that forms an effective cycle of continuous improvement.</u> <u>The policy should be publicly available and be integrated in the strategic and operational management of the institution, ensuring thus links to the other institutional missions.</u>
Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.	<u>The development and implementation of the policy for quality assurance should include a structured, meaningful and visible role for students and all other internal and external stakeholders. The core outcomes of the QA processes and the measures taken should be shared with the stakeholders, including students.</u>

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

Key changes:

- Standards on programme design and programme review merged.
- Societal relevance/employability added to the standard
- Emphasise involvement of stakeholders in programme design/monitoring.
- Emphasise the importance of learning outcomes methodology.

ESG 2015	Revised version
Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes, which ensure that programmes are coherent, informed by most up to date academic insights and reliable in leading to relevant competency profiles of programme's graduates. The programmes should be designed so that the students are enabled to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The structure of the programme should be based on the learning outcomes methodology.	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 continue to achieve their objectives and respond to the needs of students, society and the labour market, supporting graduates' employability. These processes should involve relevant internal and external stakeholders, including students and graduates, and lead to continuous improvement of the provision. The information collected during monitoring and periodic review of programmes is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date. Revised programme specifications are published. The programmes should be designed based on the learning outcomes methodology.

ESG 1.3 Student-Centred-Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Key changes:

- Updated understanding of student-centred learning and focus on the role of QA in supporting this.
- Strengthening the reference, primarily in the guidelines, to students’ active role, quality assurance perspective and inclusivity.

ESG 2015	Revised version
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 for such an active role.

ESG 1.4 Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification

Key changes: None.

ESG 2015	Revised version
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.

ESG 1.5 Teaching Staff

Key changes:

- Updated understanding of the role of the teacher in higher education.
- Expansion of the standard to cover other staff involved in education delivery, not only teaching staff.

ESG 2015	Revised version
Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their academic staff.	Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teaching and other 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 the objectives set for them, as well as the evolving role of teaching staff.

ESG 1.6 Learning Environment

Key changes:

- Renamed to „Learning Environment".
- Expanded to cover the whole learning environment – learning resources, infrastructure and student support.
- Added reference to accessibility and inclusiveness in the guidelines.

ESG 2015	Revised version
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 ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources, student support and infrastructure are provided.

ESG 1.7 Information Management

Key changes: None, minor rewording only.

ESG 2015	Revised version
Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.	Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant and reliable information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

ESG 1.8 Public Information

Key changes: None, minor additions only.

ESG 2015	Revised version
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 <u>and the outcomes of quality assurance processes.</u> Information provided should be clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible for different target groups.

ESG 1.9 Cyclical External Quality Assurance

Key changes: None.

ESG 2015	Revised version
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.

ESG Part 2:
External Quality Assurance

ESG 2.1 Addressing internal quality assurance

Key changes:

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

ESG 2015	Revised version
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 and teaching, while assuring themselves that the education provision is at the correct level of higher education. All standards of Part 1 of the ESG should be covered by external quality assurance.

ESG 2.2 Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose

Key changes:

- Underlined the need to consider both accountability and enhancement.
- Added reference to relevant applicable regulations and reinforced that the involvement of stakeholders is required at all stages.

ESG 2015	Revised version
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 relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in the design and continuous improvement of external quality assurance.

ESG 2.3 Implementing Processes

Key changes:

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

ESG 2015	Revised version
External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published.	External quality assurance processes should be pre-defined, published and implemented consistently, 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 including a site visit; –a report resulting from the external assessment; –a consistent follow-up.	The processes include the following specific activities - a self-assessment or equivalent; - an external assessment normally including an in-person site visit by peer review experts, complemented with stakeholder interviews, ensuring input from various perspectives; - a report resulting from the external assessment by peer review experts; - a consistent follow-up.

ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

Key changes:

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

ESG 2015	Revised version
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 peer-review experts that include (a) student member(s). The selection of experts takes into consideration the aims and objectives of the process.

ESG 2.5 Processes and Criteria for Outcomes

Key changes:

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

ESG 2015	Revised version
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, <u>including formal decisions,</u> made as a result of external quality assurance, should be based <u>on evidence collected and analysed through the review process,</u> and on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently. <u>The agency provides transparent information about the formal recognition of outcomes of its external quality assurance processes.</u>

ESG 2.6 Reporting

Key changes:

- The standard was expanded with the need to publish all documents used to reach the outcome of the review, in addition to the reports by the experts, if the case.
- Reinforce, as part of the standard, the usability of the reports by the institutions, including recommendations, as well as the need to provide the opportunity to institutions to fact-check the reports (moved from guidelines).
- The need for digital accessibility and usability of reports was included.

ESG 2015	Revised version
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.	All full reports by the peer - review experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners, and other interested individuals. Any other evidence and documents used in the decision-making should be published with the report written by the peer - review experts. 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.

ESG 2.7 Complaints and Appeals

Key changes:

- The need for appeals to be considered by a different entity than the one that took the decision was added to the standard.
- Further clarify though the guidelines the difference between complaints (process) and appeals (related to outcomes).

ESG 2015	Revised version
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 clearly communicated to the institutions. Appeals should be considered by a different entity than the one whose decision is appealed against.

ESG Part 3:
Quality Assurance Agencies

ESG 3.1 Activities, Policy and Processes for Quality Assurance

Key changes:

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

ESG 2015	Revised version
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 agency.
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.

ESG 3.2 Official Status

Key changes: Standard deleted.

ESG 2015	Revised version
Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.	

ESG 3.2 Independence

Key changes:

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

ESG 2015	Revised version
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 from any single party. The agency should have specific safeguards, checks and balances that ensure autonomy and independence so that no one stakeholder, entity, or individual has a dominant role over the agency. The key elements of independence of agencies include: 1) Organisational independence 2) Operational independence 3) Independence of formal outcomes

ESG 3.3 Activities for Enhancement

Key changes:

- Standard is renamed from „Thematic Analysis” to „Activities for Enhancement” and broadened to cover enhancement activities more generally.

ESG 2015	Revised version
Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.	Agencies should regularly engage in activities and publish results that support the enhancement of quality assurance and learning and teaching in the context in which they work.

ESG 3.4 Resources

Key changes:

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

ESG 2015	Revised version
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 <u>professionally</u>. These resources, both human and financial, <u>should enable effective and sustainable implementation of the agency's activities.</u> <u>Agencies should provide professional development opportunities to ensure the high level of competencies of its staff.</u>

ESG 3.5 Professional Conduct and Integrity

Key changes:

- New standard.
- Added requirement of having and maintaining high professional standards and tools for ensuring integrity in order to facilitate trust.
- Specific requirement for international activities of agencies added.

ESG 2015	Revised version
	Agencies should have high professional standards to create trust in their work and credibility. Effective tools should be in place to ensure the integrity of their operations on national and international levels and to prevent conflicts of interest. 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.

ESG 3.6 Internal Quality Assurance

Key changes:

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

ESG 2015	Revised version
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.

ESG 3.7 Review of Agencies

Key changes:

- Requirement for development since the previous review was added.

ESG 2015	Revised version
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.

Public consultation

17 November 2025 until early January 2026

Full draft text of the ESG (introduction and 3 parts)

Online survey

Open to all interested parties
(individual and organisational)

Key success factor in national alignment with the ESG

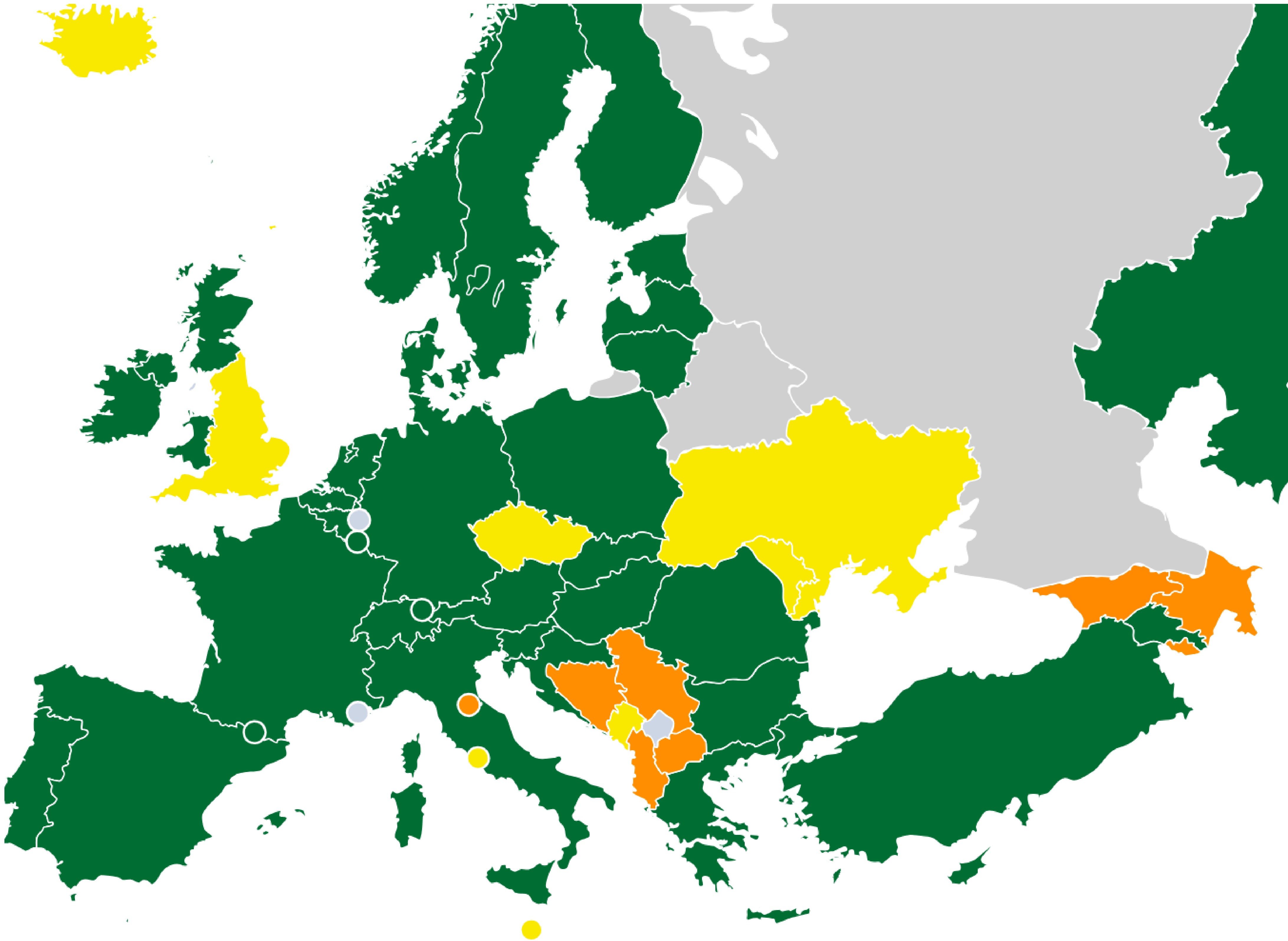
EHEA Key Commitment on QA

- 34 EHEA countries
  fully aligned with the ESG

- Remaining countries:

  Yellow: only some HEIs with
  external QA by an EQAR-registered agency

  Orange: national QA agencies not fully aligned
  with the ESG yet



Source: EQAR website

ESG Parts 2 and 3 – external QA (for QA agencies)

2.1 Adressing internal quality assurance

2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

2.3 Implementing processes

2.4 Peer-review experts

2.5 Criteria for outcomes

2.6 Reporting

2.7 Complaints and appeals

3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

3.2 Independence

3.3 Activities for Enhancement

3.4 Resources

3.5 Professional Conduct and Integrity

3.6 Internal Quality Assurance

3.7 Review of Agencies

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3.2 Independence

3.3 Activities for Enhancement

3.4 Resources

3.5 Professional Conduct and Integrity

3.6 Internal Quality Assurance

3.7 Review of Agencies

Key success factors

Governments / ministries…

- Create a reliable legislative framework for external QA
- Implement comeplementary tools and processes (e.g. qualifications frameworks, ECTS…)
- Respect and safeguard independence of the agency
- Collaborate with all relevant higher education stakeholders
- Provide stable funding

Key success factors

Agencies…

- Conduct external QA in line with the ESG
- Involve stakeholders in governance and design of external QA methodologies (criteria, procedures, processes…)
- Ensure that external QA is „fit for purpose", i.e. that it actually evaluates and enhances quality

Key success factors

Universities…

- Conduct internal QA in line with the ESG
- Collaborate with the agency on design of external QA methodologies
- Contribute to agency’s governance and operations
- Ensure that external QA is „fit for purpose”, i.e. that it actually evaluates and enhances quality

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Thank you!

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