HERE NATIONAL BOLOGNA EVENT

Funded by
the European Union

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF QA IN EUROPE: TRENDS & POLICIES

25 SEPTEMBER 2025, ONLINE

ELENA CIRLAN, SENIOR POLICY AND PROJECT COORDINATOR

enqa.

HOT TOPICS FOR QA

- A lot of activity on micro-credentials
- ENQA and UNESCO shared concerns on transparency of QA of transnational education
- Academic integrity – essay mills, diploma mills, accreditation mills
- Cross border choice of QA agency
- Digital developments to support internal QA – learner analytics and student record systems - real time data for quality improvement. In some countries data is driving internal QA and informing external QA practice
- Artificial intelligence (AI) in learning, teaching and assessment – supporting students and staff readiness – employers want AI trained graduates

HIGHER EDUCATION IS CHANGING RAPIDLY

(Cross-border) collaboration, digitalisation, data and AI are transforming internal quality assurance and performance management of HEIs….

External QA cannot prevent this (nor should it) but how do we respond to it?

BOLOGNA PROCESS MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE TIRANA, ALBANIA 2024

ENQA's message to EHEA Ministers

Ensure that national legislative frameworks allow quality assurance agencies to operate in compliance with the ESG

Enable international collaboration by reducing national-level barriers in quality assurance and higher education while enhancing transparency

Maintain the relevance and added value of external quality assurance by allowing quality assurance agencies to implement flexible and enhancement-oriented approaches

ENQA President speech for the 2024 EHEA Ministerial Conference • ENQA

TIRANA COMMUNIQUÉ

- Reaffirmed the role of the three key commitments for the successful development of the EHEA.
- Gave the mandate for the revision of the ESG

*'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…'*

QA features in many other ways in the Communiqué

- *…the **seamless mobility** of students and staff…*
- *…supporting **transnational cooperation**…through better implementation of the key commitments…*
- *…continuing to promote the use of **quality assurance and transparency tools**, such as DEQAR.*
- *continue to develop and **strengthen dialogue and collaboration with macro regions**….This includes…alignment and mutual understanding of quality assurance principles.*
- *promote more **robust and transparent quality assurance of transnational education** delivered worldwide, in line with the ESG, to protect the interests of students*

PREPARATORY PROJECT: 'QA FIT FOR THE FUTURE'

Aims

- Mapping the state of play of quality assurance in the EHEA
- Explore perspectives for the future of quality assurance
- Provide an evidence base of a future revision of the ESG

Activities

- Surveys to main stakeholder groups
- Focus groups and consultations
- Papers and webinars to present the results

Co-funded by the European Union

RESOURCES

Material from the QA-FIT project is available here:

https://www.enqa.eu/projects/quality-assurance-fit-for-the-future-qa-fit/

Including

- Papers from each stakeholder organisation mapping the state of play and perspectives for the future
- Paper on QA and internationalisation
- Paper on the future of the ESG
- Policy brief and key considerations for the revision of the ESG
- Webinar recordings

Co-funded by the European Union

CONSULTATION OUTCOMES: WHAT WORKS?

- ✓Importance of a European QA framework
- ✓Strong agreement that the ESG are still needed
- ✓The ESG support development of L&T, trust in and recognition of qualifications, student mobility, quality culture
- ✓The basic principles remain relevant

These points are agreed by all main stakeholder groups

CONSULTATION OUTCOMES: WHAT NEEDS CHANGING?

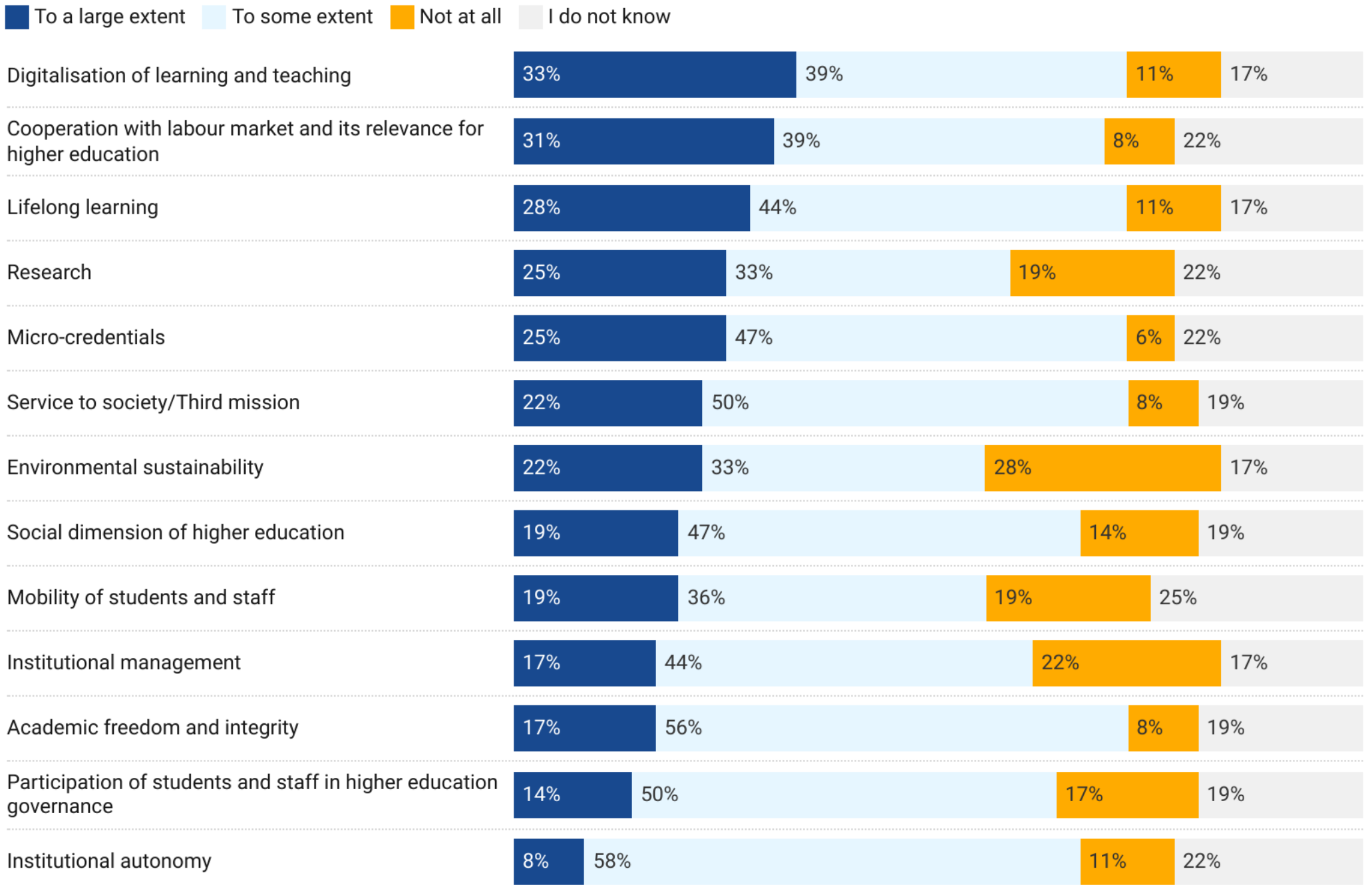
- Introduction: Update and make main concepts and messages clearer

- Internal QA: digitalisation, diversity of learners and academic staff, flexible learning pathways, links with other institutional missions, transversal topics (…)

- External QA: flexibility in QA methodologies while maintaining sufficient accountability (…)

If the scope of the ESG Part I were to be expanded, what should it cover in more detail?

(QA-FIT survey to ministries)



QA-FIT
Quality Assurance Fit for the Future

CONSULTATION OUTCOMES: KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE ESG REVISION

- Recognise the existing purposes of the ESG as relevant and valid
- Maximise the added value of EHEA standards
- Celebrate the diverse contexts and cultures in higher education
- Situate the quality assurance of learning and teaching in its broader context
- Balance current issues with long term relevance

REVISION STRUCTURES AND PROCESS

- ESG Steering Committee
  - Representatives of all ESG authors (ENQA, EUA, EURASHE, ESU, EQAR, Education International & Business Europe)
  - Coordinate the overall process, including main directions and consultations
- ESG Drafting Group
  - Representatives of primary ESG authors (ENQA, EUA, EURASHE & ESU)
  - Prepare drafts and identify issues for further discussion
- Consultation rounds with all key stakeholders, including BFUG
- Parallel revision of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes
- Final versions in autumn/winter 2026, ministerial approval in 2027

STEERING COMMITTEE PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS (1)

- The current **structure** should be maintained (introduction, 3 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 remain **focused on L&T**, but with stronger reference to the links to the research and societal missions of HEIs
- The ESG should maintain **applicability** to all types of higher education provision (and revision should keep in mind "other/alternative providers" and smaller units of learning smaller e.g. micro-credentials)

STEERING COMMITTEE PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS (2)

- Re-writing of **introduction** to revise the structure and eliminate overlaps, update the context, make the key messages clearer
- The ESG should support different **concepts of quality**
- The ESG are **standards for quality assurance** and not for quality itself
- The existing **principles remain valid**, but discussion on whether additional ones are needed
- Reflection on whether **definitions** should be in the text versus a separate section (glossary)

BFUG CONSULTATION FEBRUARY 2025

- 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 research and societal missions
- Divergent views on
  - If and how references to values and social dimension should be strengthened
  - Extent of convergence needed between ESG/EA and European Degree criteria

KEY MILESTONES FOR 2025

- June, September & December 2025: Steering Committee meetings to prepare drafts of Parts 1, 2 and 3.
- December 2025: BFUG consultation
- Winter 2025/26: Public consultation on complete draft

(+ start work on revision of the European Approach)

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

Official Journal of the European Union — EN C series

C/2025/3006 — 28.5.2025

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

of 12 May 2025

on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education

(C/2025/3006)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 165 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

1. Quality assurance systems are instrumental in establishing high quality standards for education and building trust among higher education systems and institutions across the European Education Area and beyond. They constitute a key building block of transnational cooperation. Ensuring quality of higher education is the foundation for mutual trust, which enables transnational cooperation and seamless learning mobility.

2. The main responsibility for the quality of their educational provision lies with higher education institutions, which should make the attainment of the highest standards a key institutional priority and develop quality assurance strategies and processes to ensure the achievement of that objective.

3. The implementation of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) has been a fundamental step in the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), supporting the creation of a quality culture in higher education systems and institutions across Europe; however, the ESG have not yet been fully implemented in all Member States.

- Improving all quality assurance systems
- Exploring the development of a dedicated framework for quality assurance for alliances of higher education institutions
- Making programme or combined approaches to external quality assurance more agile
- Building the foundations towards the joint European degree label
- Implementing automatic recognition of qualifications

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

- Annex I sets out the building blocks for exploring the development of a dedicated framework for quality assurance for alliances of higher education institutions.
- Annex II sets out the European criteria for a joint European degree label.
- The Council Resolution: outlines the Member States' vision for a joint European degree label and proposes a roadmap towards a possible joint European degree, with three phases to be carried out by 2029.

ENQA'S VIEW

- ENQA commits to offering support to its members and the European Commission
- Emphasises the importance of the existing Bologna Process tools and the need to implement these fully as a pre-condition for the success of the EU initiatives
- Encourages robust internal quality assurance systems both within individual institutions and jointly across European University alliances
- Recognises the importance of stakeholder cooperation across the sector

CHALLENGES FOR THE AGENCIES

- The increased workload for quality assurance agencies, limited financial and human resources, and the need for peer-learning and exchange opportunities
- The limited remit of quality assurance agencies to assess label criteria that fall outside their usual scope
- The difficulty of defining the object and scope of an alliance-level evaluation and therefore also the extent of potential exemptions from national level requirements
- The requirement for significant national level concessions and legal changes for such exemptions
- The impact of an overall shift from programme accreditation to institutional level quality assurance
- A possible contradictory pressure to move to institutional level quality assurance but with an expectation of transparent public information about joint degree programmes.

ENQA CALLS FOR

- National authorities to ensure that legislative frameworks allow them to comply with the ESG and use the European Approach (where applicable)
- Agencies to be given the resources and time to develop the relevant expertise and to integrate new responsibilities into their work
- Agencies to be given the remit to effectively implement the new activities in a way that makes use of synergies with existing approaches so to minimise the bureaucratic and resource burden
- ENQA encourages the monitoring and evaluation of the demand for and added value of the joint European Degree label and alliance-level external quality assurance

THANK YOU

enqa.