QA IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA)

THE EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EHEA

LUIS MIRANDA

31 JANUARY 2025

enqa 25

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

The EHEA was set up through the Bologna Process and is steered by the BFUG. IQA and EQA in line with the ESG is a key commitment of the Bologna Process. Primary authors of the ESG are the E4 Group (ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESU). The same organisations are the founding members of EQAR.

THE EHEA WAS SET UP THROUGH THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AND IS STEERED BY THE BFUG.

- European QA is an integral part of the Bologna Process, since 1999 (QA a key commitment of the process, and a success story!)

- Process steered by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), which prepares the ministerial conferences and implements the work plans

- Ministerial communiques set priorities and objectives for each working period

- And intergovernmental reform process to support interoperability, mobility, recognition, competitiveness

- Role of stakeholders is crucial

BOLOGNA PROCESS AND THE EHEA

- European QA is an integral part of the Bologna Process, since 1999 (QA a key commitment of the process, and a success story!)

- Process steered by the BFUG which prepares the ministerial conferences and implements the work plans

- Ministerial communiques set priorities and objectives for each working period

- And intergovernmental reform process to support interoperability, mobility, recognition, competitiveness

- Role of stakeholders is crucial
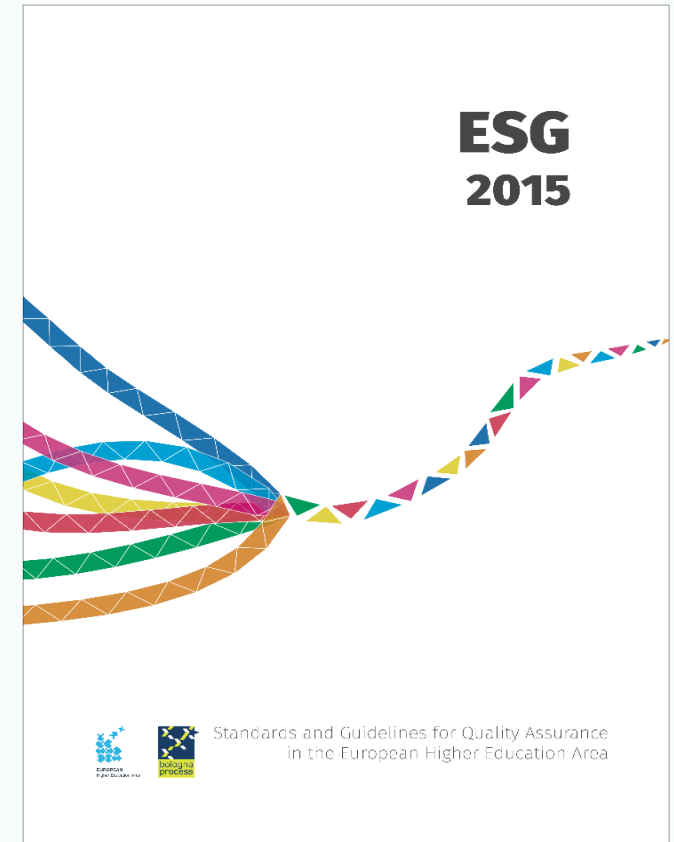
DIVERSITY IN EXTERNAL QA LANDSCAPE

THE E4 GROUP

THE ESG

- Reference framework for agreed practice in QA in Europe

- Introduction, followed by three parts:
  - Internal QA within HEIs
  - External QA carried by QAAs
  - Internal QA within QAAs

- Focus on quality assurance of higher education

ESG
2015

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
in the European Higher Education Area

https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

PART 1: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. Policy for quality assurance
2. Design and approval of programmes
3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
5. Teaching staff
6. Learning resources and student support
7. Information management
8. Public information
9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
10. Cyclical external quality assurance

PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. Consideration of internal quality assurance
2. Designing methodologies fit for purpose
3. Implementing processes
4. Peer-review experts
5. Criteria for outcomes
6. Reporting
7. Complaints and appeals

PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

1. Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance
2. Official status
3. Independence
4. Thematic analysis
5. Resources
6. Internal quality assurance and professional conduct
7. Cyclical external review of agencies

ESG: PRINCIPLES OF QA IN THE EHEA

- Higher education institutions have the **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.

ESG: SCOPE

- Apply to **learning and teaching**, plus relevant link to research and innovation

- Apply to **all higher education** in EHEA regardless of mode of study or place of delivery

- Twin purposes of **accountability and enhancement**

- Standards for **quality assurance**, not for quality

- Generic enough to be applicable in **all contexts**

ESG IN PRACTICE

ESG
- Reference point for agencies

Agency standards
- Agencies incorporate the ESG into their own standards

Institutional policies and practices
- HEIs are accredited against agency's standards (thus also meeting the ESG)
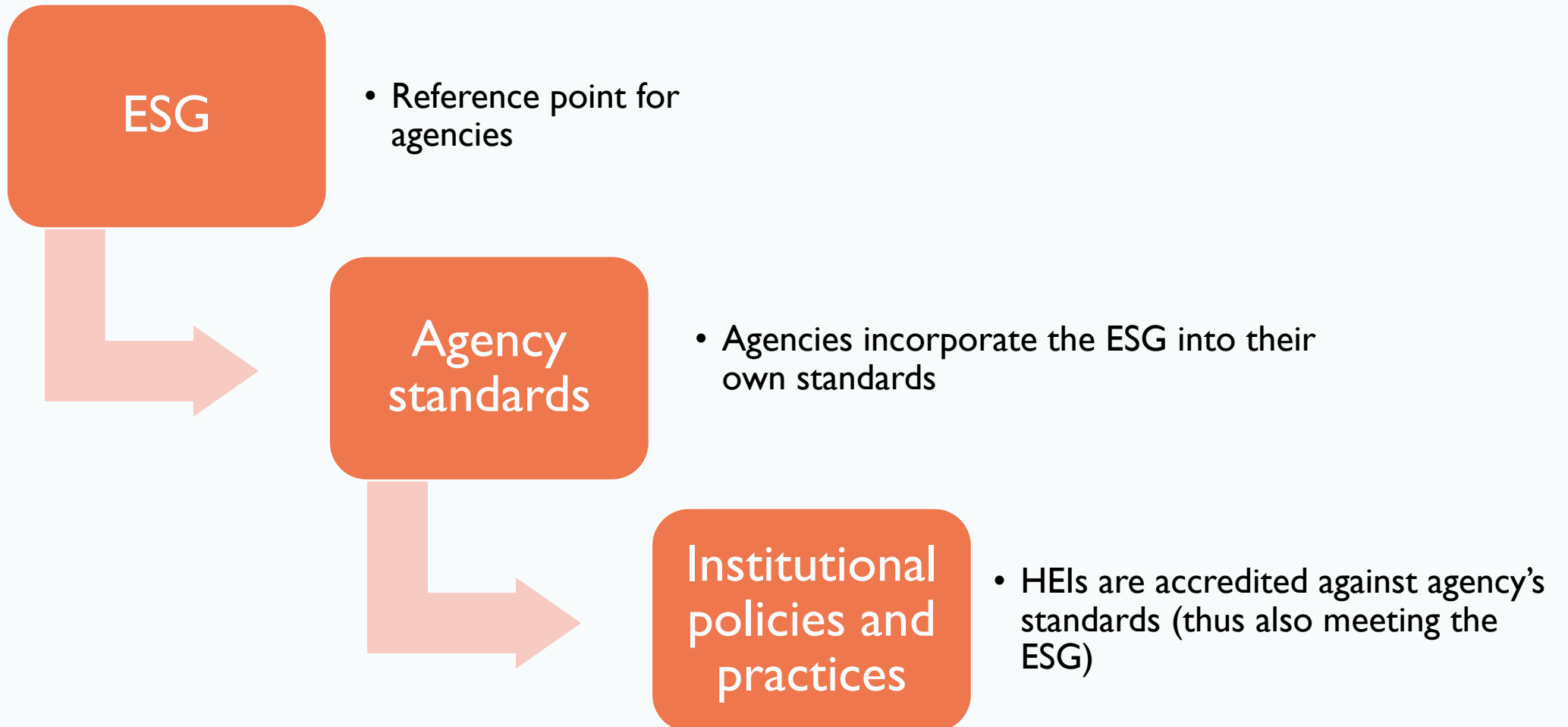
WHAT IS EQAR?

- Founded 2008 by E4 organisations at Ministers' request

- Mission: enhancing trust and confidence in EHEA

- Main role: to manage a register of QA agencies that comply substantially with the ESG

- Complementary activities to maintaining the Register:
  - Knowledge base of legal frameworks and cross-border QA
  - Database of external QA results by the registered agencies (DEQAR), now also including micro-credentials and alternative education providers

EQAR OR ENQA?

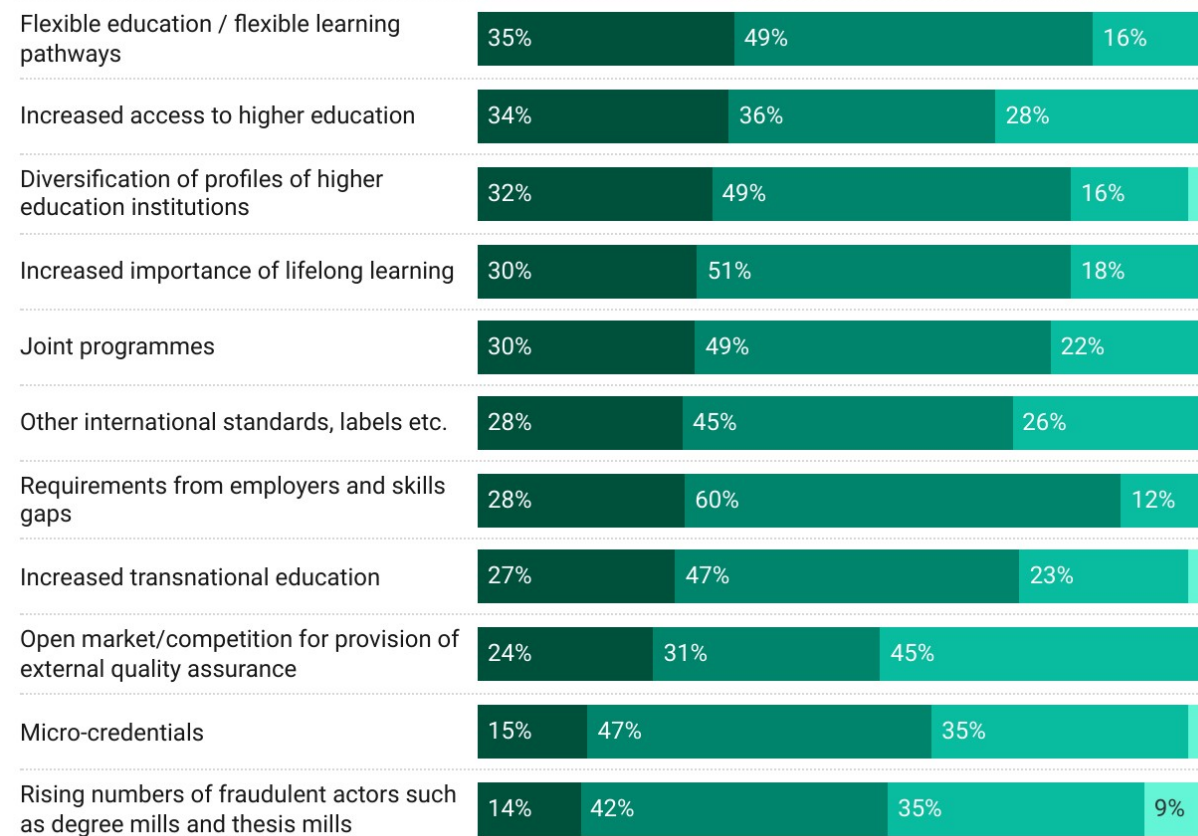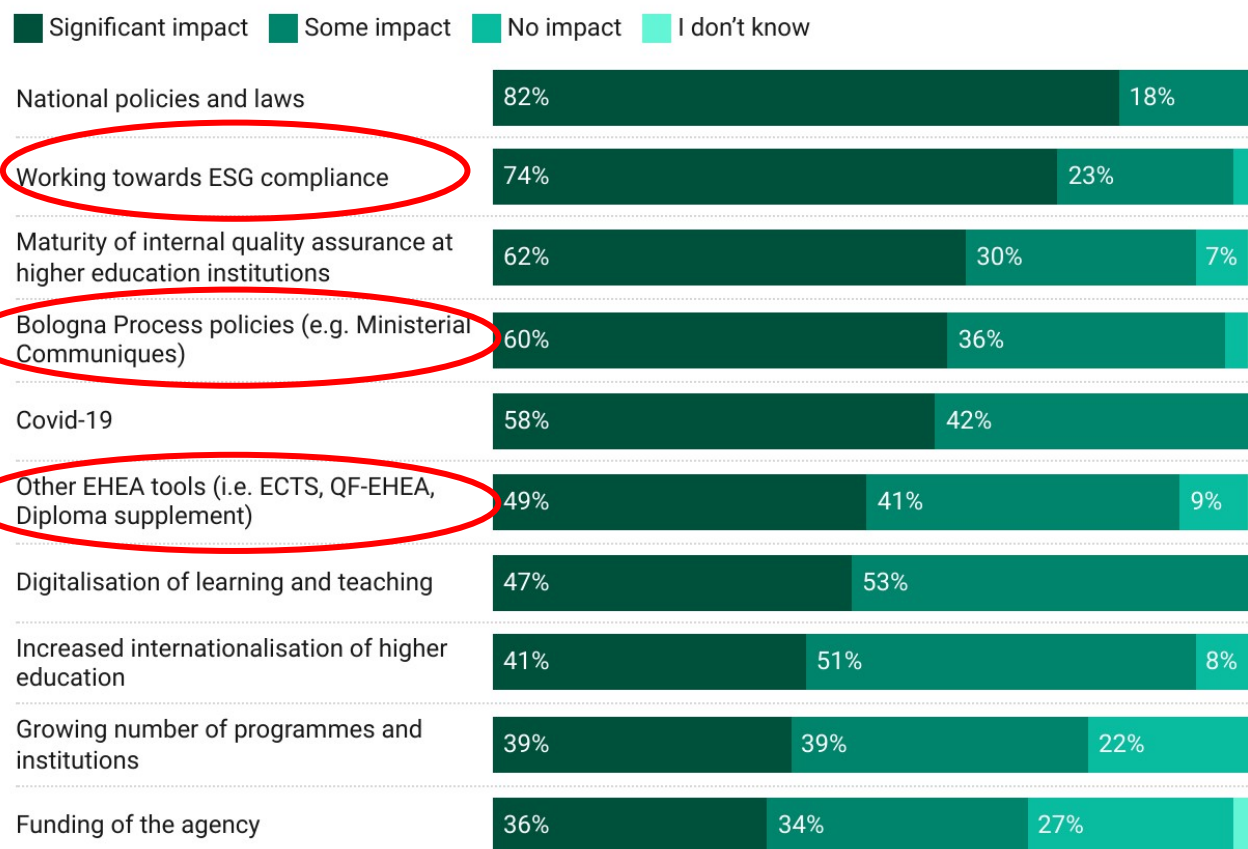| ENQA	EQAR
Members: EHEA QA agencies	Members: EHEA National governments and European stakeholder organisations
Founded by QA agencies (2000)	Founded by the E4, within the Bologna Process (2008)
Acts in the interests of its members	Acts in the "public interest"
Main activities: Representation in policy making, support to members, development of QA, reviews of agencies, etc.	Main activity: manage a public official register of ESG compliant agencies Also: provide reliable public information on EQA
Grew alongside the Bologna Process; a consultative members of the Bologna Process	Born out of the Bologna Process (the first – and only – legal entity)
ESG as criteria	ESG as criteria

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

The EHEA was set up through the Bologna Process and is steered by the BFUG. IQA and EQA in line with the ESG is a key commitment of the Bologna Process. Primary authors of the ESG are the E4 Group (ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESU). The same organisations are the founding members of EQAR.

INFLUENCE OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

From 2015, what impact have had the following aspects on the EQA activities performed by QA agencies?

Legend: ■ Significant impact ■ Some impact ■ No impact ■ I don't know

Aspect	Significant impact	Some impact	No impact	I don't know
National policies and laws	82%	18%		
Working towards ESG compliance *(circled)*	74%	23%		
Maturity of internal quality assurance at higher education institutions	62%	30%	7%	
Bologna Process policies (e.g. Ministerial Communiques) *(circled)*	60%	36%		
Covid-19	58%	42%		
Other EHEA tools (i.e. ECTS, QF-EHEA, Diploma supplement) *(circled)*	49%	41%	9%	
Digitalisation of learning and teaching	47%	53%		
Increased internationalisation of higher education	41%	51%	8%	
Growing number of programmes and institutions	39%	39%	22%	
Funding of the agency	36%	34%	27%	

Aspect	Significant impact	Some impact	No impact	I don't know
Flexible education / flexible learning pathways	35%	49%	16%	
Increased access to higher education	34%	36%	28%	
Diversification of profiles of higher education institutions	32%	49%	16%	
Increased importance of lifelong learning	30%	51%	18%	
Joint programmes	30%	49%	22%	
Other international standards, labels etc.	28%	45%	26%	
Requirements from employers and skills gaps	28%	60%	12%	
Increased transnational education	27%	47%	23%	
Open market/competition for provision of external quality assurance	24%	31%	45%	
Micro-credentials	15%	47%	35%	
Rising numbers of fraudulent actors such as degree mills and thesis mills	14%	42%	35%	9%

LOOKING AHEAD (ESG 2027)

enqa.

GENERAL QA TRENDS IN THE EHEA

- Shift from programme to institutional level QA – most systems used a mixed approach

- Maturity of (many) internal and external QA systems

- Quality assurance of variety of educational approaches – online/blended provision, flexible learning pathways, micro-credentials

- Increased pressure on QA to cover many broader topics

- Renewed impetus for cross-border HE and cross-border QA

- Attention to links between QA and recognition – to make automatic recognition a reality

→ **revision of the ESG in 2024-2026**

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 qualifications, student mobility, quality culture

✓The basic principles remain relevant

These points are agreed by all main stakeholder groups

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

Follow ENQA on social media:

Stay in touch!

enqa 25

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS