



European Association for  
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

## ENQA President speech for the 2024 EHEA Ministerial Conference

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I thank our Albanian hosts for their generous hospitality. My first visit to Tirana was to launch with the Minister and Prime Minister a joint Albania-UK quality assurance exercise for Albanian universities. My most recent visit was with EQAR to offer support to the Albanian quality assurance agency (ASCAL) on their journey to ESG alignment.

Europe is hugely respected globally in quality assurance, and stands out on issues such as the central involvement of students at all levels, the independence of quality assurance agencies, and the transparency of public reporting.

We have heard many contributions in this conference about the dynamic changes and challenges in higher education. Quality assurance needs to enable and facilitate the adaptation of our higher education systems, and underpin recognition and mobility.

A growing number of agencies are now aligned to the ESG. Many have matured and have completed four or more cycles of reviews. Yet, we have around 20% of EHEA countries that have fairly new bodies working towards ESG compliance.

We thank in advance the Ministers for the mandate to the authors of the ESG to draft a revised version. As we take the ESG forward, we should consolidate our successes. The new ESG need to be flexible and bring to life the second pillar of the ESG – quality enhancement – adding value through the enhancement of agency and institutional practice with a focus on two areas.

First, building trust in our institutions and quality assurance agencies:

- Recognising that not all institutions pose the same level of risk
- Enabling universities to offer joint degrees without having to run an Olympic hurdles race
- Increasing trust in self-accrediting institutions

Second, protecting the interests of students:

- Giving greater consideration to how good quality assurance can lead to better outcomes for students
- Protecting the interests of students with more transparent quality assurance of trans-national education

Governments are a key enabler by creating the legislative conditions to allow quality assurance agencies to operate according to the ESG, in a way that is responsive to the realities of higher education today.

I realise that political accountability is very important. But the over-emphasis on accountability, or even worse, conformity, can be a barrier to institutional health and diversity. Accountability is necessary, but it is not sufficient. If we aspire to a dynamic, trust-based system of quality assurance, then to help European higher education thrive we should create the platform for those institutions, agencies and systems that are ready for more enhancement-oriented approaches to be able to create a genuine culture of quality.