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REVIEW OF NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS WITH FOCUS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

“Reinventing University: The Digital Challenge in Higher Education”

10th International Conference on Higher Education Advances

Valencia, 18 June 2024

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METHODOLOGY



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We conducted a **comparative desk research** exploring data from existing documents and previous research - secondary data - to gather information over the topic of quality assurance for higher VET.

We used scientific articles, publications and institutional documents of European Commission, international associations and EQAVET National Reference Points.

Ahsan, K., Akbar, S., Kam, B., & Abdulrahman, M. D. A. (2023). Implementation of micro-credentials in higher education: A systematic literature review. *Education and Information Technologies*, 28(10), 13505-13540.

Bergan, S. (2019). The European Higher Education Area: A road to the future or at way's end?. *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*, 6(2), 23-49.

Kayyali, M. (2023). An Overview of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Concepts and Frameworks. *International Journal of Management, Sciences, Innovation, and Technology (IJMSIT)*, 4(2), 01-04.

Eaton, J. S. (2021). The role of quality assurance and the values of higher education. *The Promise of Higher Education: Essays in Honour of 70 Years of IAU*, 181-186.

Elken, M., & Stensaker, B. (2023). Bounded innovation or agency drift? Developments in European higher education quality assurance. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 48(3), 321-332.

Jungblut, J., Petó, A., & Stensaker, B. (2023). European values and external quality assurance: reflection on the past, pointers towards the future. MISC.



BACKGROUND



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Education as investment for the future of Europe

Innovation - Growth - Job creation

“Education is essential to the vitality of European society and economy. The European Education Area aims to bring to the education and training communities the support they need to fulfil their fundamental mission, in challenging and exciting times”.

Ursula von der Leyen



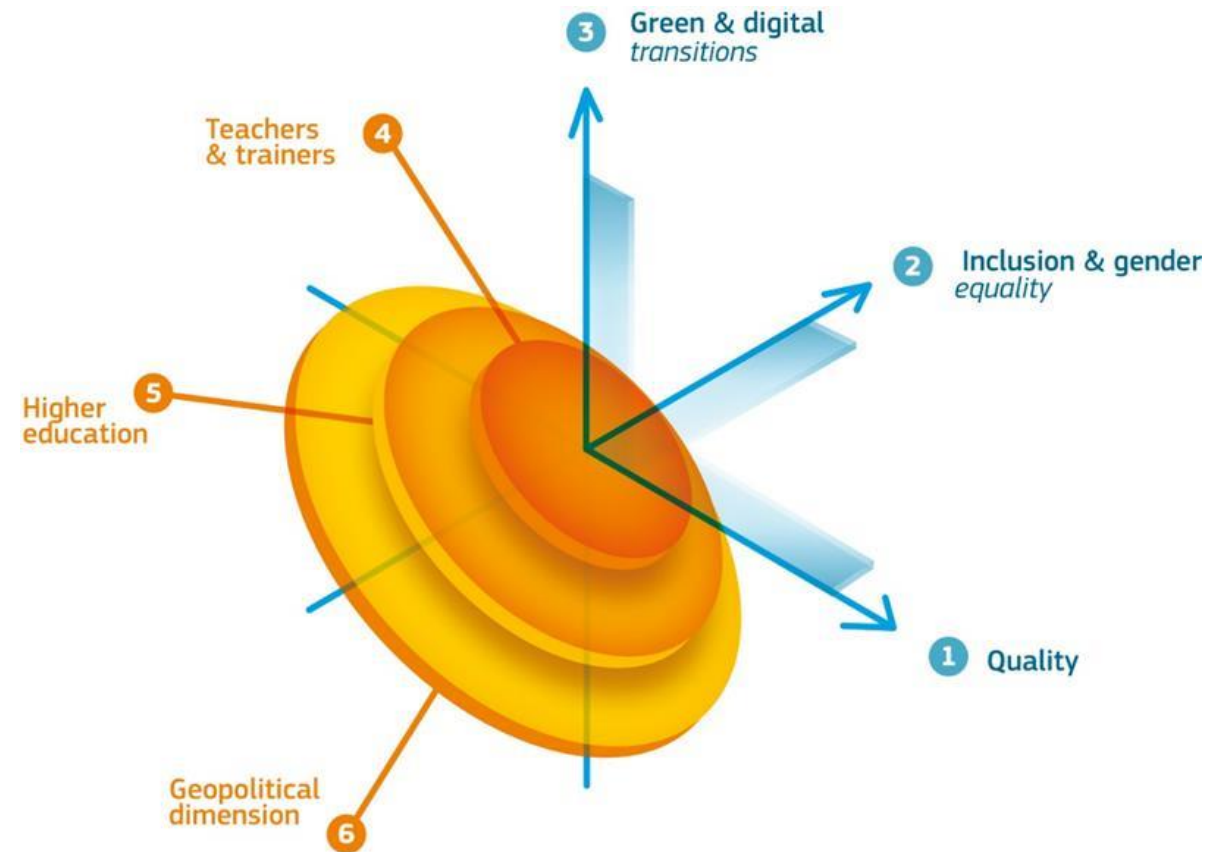
BACKGROUND

Social Summit in Gothenburg, 2017, establishment of a **European Education Area** in order to improve education to expand active citizenship, job creation and economic improvement, develop a quality culture of education.

It is underpinned in six dimensions.

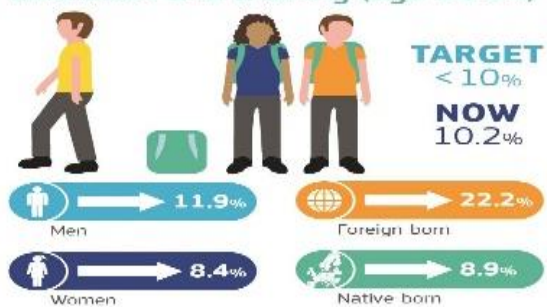


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BACKGROUND

Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS, 2019)

Early childhood education (age 4+)



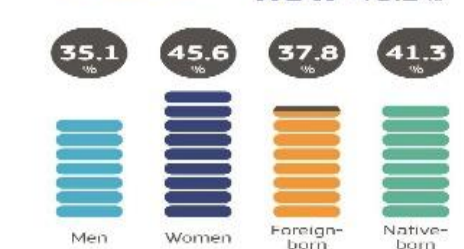
Source: Eurostat (UOE, 2018)

Employment rate of recent graduates (age 20-34)



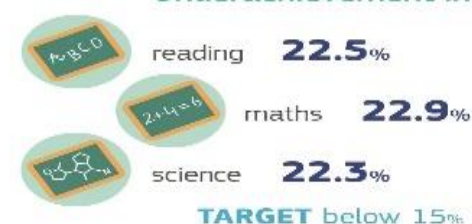
Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS, 2019)

Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS, 2019)

Underachievement in



Source: OECD (PISA, 2018)

Adult participation in learning (age 25-64)

Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS, 2019)
Illustrations: © European Commission



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The targets proposed are the following :

- the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%;
- the share of low-achieving eighth graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15%;
- at least 98% of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education;
- the share of people aged 20-24 years old with at least an upper secondary qualification should be 90%;
- the share of 30-34-year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 50%.



BACKGROUND



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Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)

To set education and training systems in line with the new digital era needs, by adopting a strategic and longer-term approach.

To face the challenges of digital era, the plan sets a few initiatives for high performing, accessible and inclusive digital education.

Its goal has two main priorities:

- to foster a high-performing digital and quality education ecosystem;
- to enhance digital skills and competences for the digital age.





Higher education initiatives

- ✓ **Erasmus+** supports students, academic staff and researchers to access in international exchanges, in order to build a fruitful cooperation among higher education institutions and public authority
- ✓ **Micro-credentials** a tool to certify short-term learning experiences in higher education certified in a digital badge



HIGHER EDUCATION INITIATIVES



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- ✓ **European student card** promotes student participation in educational and cultural activities and simplifies mobility in Europe
- ✓ **Development of national higher education programmes based on STEM** (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), disciplines incrementing creative problem solving
- ✓ **European University Initiative** supports university to deliver quality and relevant skills





Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Recommendation on Building Bridges For Effective European Higher Education Cooperation, 2022

“Deeper transnational cooperations between diverse and complementary institutions across Europe supports fair access to high quality and inclusive education training and research”

- ✓ Implementation of joint educational and research activities
- ✓ Enhance skills and employability
- ✓ Implementation of European Higher Education Area





Recommendation on tracking graduates (2017) tracking the career paths of graduates in order to improve skills planning and matching them with the needs of the labour market.

European graduate tracking network (2022)

- ✓ implement mutual learning and cooperation among member states,
- ✓ organize peer learning in the design and implementation of graduate tracking system data
- ✓ define a common approach in collecting and analysing tracking

National Graduate Tracking Points





The **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area** set a common framework ensuring accountability at European, national and institutional level, providing the context for internal and external quality assurance to support the interoperability and common understanding of mainly national quality assurance processes across Europe.

- set a common framework for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching at European, national and institutional level;
- assure quality of higher education in the European higher education area;
- support mutual trust, thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders;
- provide information on quality assurance in the EHEA.





Tools

- ✓ **European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)**, official register of quality assurance agencies for higher education complying with the European Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education.
- ✓ **European Association for Quality in Higher Education (ENQA)**, 2000, to promote European cooperation in the field of quality assurance.





Comparison of quality assurance systems in Italy, Austria and Romania

Italy

The National Agency for the Evaluation of the University System and Research (ANVUR) is the designated quality assurance agency, in charge of defining criteria for accreditation and evaluation and has designed the quality assurance model, aimed at quality improvement and is composed by initial and periodic accreditation of courses.

- a system of initial and recurrent accreditation of courses
- a quality assurance (QA) system for universities relating to teaching and research activities operating under the responsibility of the quality teams;
- an internal evaluation system based on the activity of joint teacher-student committees and of the university evaluation committees;
- a system of external evaluation by ANVUR.



COMPARISON OF QA SYSTEMS - ITALY



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University courses may be accredited only if they have an internal Quality Assurance system

Initial Accreditation is granted on the basis of minimum quantitative teaching requirements and qualitative and quantitative requirements. The qualitative requirements are verified by ANVUR through the report of a Commission of Evaluation Experts (CEV).

Once initial accreditation has been acquired a periodic accreditation process starts, involving a broader assessment activities. The periodic evaluation deals with assessment of criteria and indicators aimed at measuring the efficiency of individual universities in terms of improving academic activities.





Austria

The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) is the one in charge for higher education quality. Higher education institutions are responsible for designing internal quality assurance systems. The Quality Assurance Council for Teacher Training (QSR) is to ensure quality- and needs-oriented academic support for the development of teacher training programmes.

The external quality assurance of these educational institutions must be fulfilled through:

- the accreditation of degree programmes;
- the certification of the quality management systems of educational institutions;
- the accreditation of educational institutions;
- supervision of accredited educational institutions and accredited degree programmes.



COMPARISON OF QA SYSTEMS - AUSTRIA



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The commitment to implement internal Quality assurance measures is stipulated for universities, private higher education institutions, universities of applied sciences, university teacher training colleges. AQ Austria is an agency in charge of external quality assurance for Austrian higher education.

Quality assurance procedures:

- Accreditation, a formal quality assurance tool, based on defined criteria and standards, leading to a recognition of a higher education institution,
- audit, dealing with the review and certification of institutions of higher education's internal quality system, as well as implementing its continuous development.

Every seven years public universities get certification of their internal quality management system through the quality audit process. Private higher education institutions must be institutionally accredited by AQ Austria at least every six years.





Romania

The quality assurance of higher education and university research is a commitment of the Ministry of Education, which cooperates with ARACIS which evaluates all programs, fields of studies, and higher education institutions every 5 years. The evaluation process is accomplished through internal evaluation within the respective higher education institution, and external evaluation accomplished by ARACIS.

Accreditation and evaluation processes are based on the following criteria:

- institutional capacity,
- educational efficacy,
- quality management.



COMPARISON OF QA SYSTEMS, CONCLUSIONS



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The three Countries that have been investigated present a solid higher education quality system. Austria and Romania, both members of EQAR since 2008, present a fully functioning quality assurance system where all higher education institutions are subject to regular external quality assurance by an agency that has successfully demonstrated compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) through registration on EQAR.

Italy is only partially aligned with ESG as only some higher education institutions are subject to regular external quality assurance by an agency registered on EQAR. the Italian System does not recognise foreign agencies as part of the national QA requirements.

It is clear that quality assurance in higher education is of great paramount value in the delivery of high-quality educational programs and for the attainment of higher professional standards.



CONCLUSIONS



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The interest of the European Commission in the quality of higher education has increased in last years, with a strong development of evaluation, accreditation and certification tools. Implementing frameworks like the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, or the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, provides institutions with the necessary guidance and uphold efficacy in quality assurance systems. Quality in higher education build a trained workforce and encourages ongoing development, making institutions ready to adapt to shifting student demands and new trends, improving educational opportunities. Quality assurance in higher education is apt to build a culture of excellence, and institutions sustain and improve the quality of education, preparing students for a successful future and advancing in the society, by effectively implementing quality assurance principles and frameworks.





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