

# Improving University Quality Assurance Resilient Strategies Toward Excellence (QA-SURE)

## QA-Sure Quality Assurance Plan

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Institutions	Western Balkans University POLIS University Luarasi University International Business College Mitrovica University “Isa Boletini” in Mitrovica International School for Social and Business Studies South East European University
Author(s)	Filloreta Kunoviku Demiri <sup>a</sup> , Merita Shala <sup>a</sup> , Lejla Abazi-Bexheti <sup>b</sup> , Arbana Kadriu <sup>b</sup> <sup>a</sup> University “Isa Boletini” in Mitrovica <sup>b</sup> South East European University
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EU	European Union
HEIs	Higher Education Institution
EHEA	European Higher Education Areas
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ISSBS	International Social Sciences Business School, Slovenia
IBC-M	International Business College Mitrovica
ITT	Indicator Tracking Table
LU	LUARASI University, Albania
QA	Quality Assurance
QAB	Quality Assurance Bord
QPM	Quality Monitoring Plan
PC	Project Coordinator
PMB	Project Management Board
SEEU	South East European University, North Macedonia
UIBM	University “Isa Boletini” of Mitrovica
U_Polis	Polis University Albania
WBU	Western Balkans University
WP	Work Package

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Purpose**

The Quality Assurance Plan was developed as part of the QA-Sure project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union under grant agreement no. 101129398-ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE-STRAND-1.

This plan outlines the core Quality Assurance (QA) protocols established by the QA-SURE project consortium. QA ensures the quality of project processes, outcomes, and impacts by providing value to beneficiaries, meeting requirements, maintaining efficiency and timeliness, and facilitating strategic decision-making throughout and beyond the project's duration.

The aim of the Plan is to delineate the quality control and quality assurance activities that will be executed throughout the project. Its primary objective is to ensure seamless implementation, ongoing monitoring, and the attainment of a high-quality standard for all project activities and outcomes.

The quality of the QA-SURE project heavily relies on partner quality and the robustness of the work plan. However, diligent monitoring of project quality at various stages is deemed vital for success. Hence, this plan offers a structured framework for partners and target groups to formally assess the project's various components. It delineates key guidelines and minimum criteria for seamless project management, encompassing tasks related to quality assurance, and encompasses internal and external QA processes.

The outcomes derived from this plan will serve as feedback for the QASURE coordinator and the project team to enhance operations wherever feasible. It's essential to recognize that partnership in the project entails specific responsibilities detailed in both the project application and the Partnership Agreement. It's anticipated that all project partners possess a thorough understanding of these documents.

### **1.2 Project Overview**

QA-SURE is a project that will focus on adapting modern and European quality assurance practices, instruments, methodologies, and thus aid the alignment of quality assurance standards of the project partners with those set out via the ESGs 2015 and European best practices. This will be achieved by:

- 1) Realignment of QA structures and mechanisms based on policy and regulations, QA cycles, and other institutional indicators, and widening of input into the systems by higher participation rates of students and external stakeholders,
- 2) Training of QA, administrative and academic staff, as well as, students, to ensure better preparation and inclusiveness of administrative and academic products within the partner HEIs, especially when it comes to service and study product design, and

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- 3) utilising internationalisation and digitalization as mechanisms for enhancing quality culture, while at the same time improving institutional transparency and accountability.

The project foresees the participation of a larger variety of participants into the QA systems as current Western Balkans HEIs struggle with this. More emphasis will be laid out for the input and participation of (1) students since often students find themselves placed only at the end of the quality assurance cycles as means to close it rather than considering them as productive sources of primary feedback and data, and, (2) external stakeholders (businesses, public institutions, civil society etc.), due to the high relevance of input that can be received for updating of study programs aiming to be based on the fit-for-purpose concept and employment. All of these processes, apart from the increase in quality culture practices and mechanisms, will also enable the HEIs to prepare for international accreditation procedures as a tool to further improve themselves within the European perspective.

**Project card**

<b>Project Title</b>	Improving University Quality Assurance Resilient Strategies Toward Excellence
<b>Projects acronym</b>	QA-SURE
<b>Projects budget</b>	EUR 398,444.00
<b>Funded by</b>	Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union
<b>Agreement number</b>	101129398-ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE-STRAND-1
<b>Project timeline</b>	30/12/2023- 30/11/2025
<b>Project Coordinator</b>	Western Balkans University (WBU), Albania
<b>Countries involved</b>	Albania; Kosovo, North Macedonia, Slovenia
<b>Project partners</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Western Balkans University (WBU), Albania</li> <li>2. LUARASI University (LU), Albania</li> <li>3. Polis University (U_Polis), Albania</li> <li>4. International Business College Mitrovica (IBC-M), Kosovo</li> <li>5. University "Isa Boletini" Mitrovica (UIBM), Kosovo</li> <li>6. International Social Sciences Business School (ISSBS), Slovenia</li> <li>7. South East European University (SEEU), North Macedonia</li> </ol>
<b>Working packages</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. WP1 - Management (<i>led by WBU</i>),</li> <li>2. WP2 - Preparation (<i>led by Luarasi University</i>)</li> </ol>

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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. WP3 - 3 Establishment/Enhancement of Internal Quality Assurance Units/Offices (led by <i>U_POLIS</i> and co-led by <i>UIBM</i>);</li> <li>1. WP4 - Engagement Model of Relevant Stakeholders (led by <i>ISSBS</i> and co-led by <i>IBCM</i>);</li> <li>1. WP 5 - Internationalization as a Tool for Quality Enhancement (led by <i>SEEU</i> and will be co-led by <i>Polis University</i>),</li> <li>2. WP 6 - Quality Assurance of the Project (WP6- led by <i>UIBM</i> and co-led by <i>SEEU</i>)</li> <li>1. WP 7 - Dissemination and Exploitation (led by <i>IBCM</i> and co-led by <i>WBU</i>)</li> </ol>
<p><b>Project logo</b></p>	

### 1.3 Importance of Quality Assurance

The Bologna Declaration emphasises quality assurance in higher education as a foundational element for creating the European Higher Education Area, focusing on rigorous standards for quality education and professional stability. In response, the Western Balkans University (WBU) and its partners, including several newly established universities in Albania, North Macedonia, and Kosovo, have adopted flexible institutional frameworks to integrate with European educational standards. These universities are committed to delivering high-quality education, modern teaching methods, and establishing a robust Quality Assurance System to ensure that their educational and research programs meet the highest standards. This initiative not only aims to enhance employment and social cohesion but also involves strategic planning, monitoring, and benchmarking processes to compare regional and EU data, driving continuous improvement in the Western Balkans' higher education landscape.

## 2. Quality Objectives

### 2.1 Alignment with ESG 2015

The objectives of the quality assurance framework are to assure the quality of the project and to ensure that stated deliverables can be realised. The purpose of each WP is to answer the following two questions:

- How well is the WP achieving what it set out to accomplish?
- Is it doing what it should be doing?

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The general objective of the project is to establish/enhance and support quality assurance structures and mechanisms for effective management and operation through teaching and learning processes in the Western Balkan region, including deeper integration into European Higher Education Areas (EHEA).

As emphasised in the Erasmus+ program guide, high quality and inclusive education and training of young people and participants of all ages not only supports citizens in the personal and professional development, but ultimately equips them with qualifications and skills needed for meaningful participation in a democratic society, through intercultural understanding and successful transition in the open labour market.

All Albanian and Kosovo partners, under the supervision, guidance and suggestions of EU partners, will ensure implementation of QA standards in their respective institutions based on European Standards and Guidelines (ESG2015), which provides a comprehensive set of standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education and is used as a reference by quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions across Europe. These standards provide guidance in the areas which are vital for successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education. The ESG are applied by HE institutions as a reference document for internal and external quality assurance systems. Main activities included in the project are aligning Quality Assurance Offices according to ESG 2015 standards and Quality Enhancement, Training for the QA Offices in HEI towards meeting the ESG 2015, and Switching from Quality Control to Quality Enhancement. All partners will be active in realisation of these project activities.

## 2.2 Specific Improvements

The project will focus on sustaining its outcomes for an indefinite period once it has been completed as well. One of the most important products/outcomes of the project for its post-completion significance is the creation of the digital platforms that would ensure a transparent and accountable display of QA data for internal and external stakeholders, but also policies, methodologies, update QA cycles which will remain with the partner HEIs but can also potentially be used as guidelines for other HEIs that are following on similar pathway.

On a per objective basis, it can be seen as following:

### **Objective 1**

Enhance quality assurance (QA) structures within partner Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by establishing or improving QA offices, aligning practices with European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs), and fostering inter-institutional cooperation and best practice sharing.

Indicators to Measure Objective:

1. Number of established or enhanced QA offices.
2. Degree of QA procedure alignment with ESGs.

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3. Frequency of QA reviews and updates.
4. Level of stakeholder inclusion in QA processes.

**Objective 2**

Improve internal quality assurance processes within HEIs to create self-improving structures, enhance study programs, and ensure long-term digitalization of systems.

Indicators to Measure Objective:

1. Number of staff trained in QA processes.
2. Creation and enhancement of study programs.
3. Level of digital system integration and usage.

**Objective 3**

Enhance the preparation and coordination of HEIs for accreditation processes, establishing sustainable quality assurance practices that extend beyond the project's completion.

Indicators to Measure Objective:

1. Number of HEIs implementing new accreditation preparation policies.
2. Frequency of coordination meetings among consortium members.
3. Adoption rate of QA processes and tools within HEIs.
4. Sustainability of QA practices post-project completion.

### **3. Quality Assurance Plan**

Project Quality Assurance plan is developed to facilitate the evaluation of the quality of the project during its execution. The central point of the project's quality assurance process is the Quality Assurance Plan, which functions as an implementation action plan as well as a normative and reference document. Specifically, the plan:

- a) describes the objectives and guiding principles of quality assurance;
- b) describes the methodology used;
- c) identifies the indicators, thresholds, and measurement tools for quality assurance;
- d) describes the function of the steering committee in quality assurance;
- e) explains the purpose, structure, and duties of the Quality Assurance Board;
- f) outlines the project partners' roles and responsibilities in quality assurance;
- g) specifies particular guidelines for internal and external processes of quality assurance;
- h) lays out additional pertinent project-level quality assurance guidelines and procedures.

The project steering committee approves the quality assurance plan. The Steering Committee's permission and the agreement of all partners are required for any changes or additions to the Plan.



#### 4. Quality assurance framework

To guarantee that all project quality assurance objectives have been met, a consistent, organized, and rigorous strategy and methodology will be established by the Quality Assurance Framework. The following components will be included in the framework:

- a) Quality Assurance goals as specified in the Project Proposal
- b) Quality Assurance Board
- c) Quality Assurance Lead Partner
- d) Quality Assurance Plan
- e) Quality assurance actions for individual project activities and deliverables
- f) Quality evaluation of Work Packages
- g) Internal quality evaluation
- h) External quality evaluation

The continuous improvement, accountability, openness, and application of policies and standards will always serve as the guiding principles of the QA-Sure project quality assurance strategy. Additionally, all activities, processes, and outputs of all WPs must be documented. When evaluating the existing frameworks, the Project Management must keep these crucial aspects in mind. QAP will assure the quality of the project's processes, outputs, and results in order to:

- to have a significant influence on the target groups;
- to fulfill the project donor's requests;
- to do operations with efficiency and discretion; and
- to assist in decision-making throughout the project's duration.

The purpose of the Quality Assurance Framework is to guarantee that project deliverables can be completed according to schedule. The steering committee, project management, and work package leaders' recommendations and proposals will form the basis for designing and debating the instruments used for the activities.

#### 5. Dimensions of Quality Assurance

QA-Sure will carry out quality assurance across the following dimensions:

- a) partner cooperation and collaboration
- b) implementation – project level
- c) implementation – WP level
- d) partner meetings
- e) deliverables
- f) sustainability

A designed and calibrated set of quality assurance components, indicators, and processes that are best suited for evaluating and guaranteeing the quality of certain actions and outputs within that dimension define each dimension.

## **6. Organizational Structure**

### **6.1. Roles and Responsibilities**

QA-SURE is a joint project composed of 7 partners, 3 from Albania, 2 from Kosovo, 1 from North Macedonia and 1 from Slovenia. In this consortium, WBU is the coordinator and all the other HEIs are beneficiaries.

All the tasks of the QA-SURE are structured in 7 work packages adequately covering the main action and named: Management (WP1- *led by WBU*), Preparation (WP2- *led by Luarasi University*), Development (WPs 3- *U\_POLIS and co-led by UIBM*; WP4- *be led by ISSBS and co-led by IBCM*; WP 5 - *led by SEEU and will be co-led by Polis University*), Quality Assurance of the Project (WP6- *led by UIBM and co-led by SEEU*) and Dissemination and Visibility (WP7- *led by IBCM and co-led by WBU*). Each work package is assigned to a competent lead partner responsible for its coordination and successful implementation in close cooperation with all partners of the consortium. In some of the cases where WPs have more weight, a co-leader is been assigned in order to distribute the workload and also to increase active participation of all partners in all work packages.

*Management Plan*; Supervision of project milestones, and regular updates to ensure that activities are aligned with the project timeline and objectives; Financial management of the project; Organizing Steering committee/Management Board meetings.

HEI towards meeting the ESG 2015, and Switching from Quality Control to Quality Enhancement. All partners will be active in realization of these project activities.

### **6.2. Quality Assurance Board (QAB)**

At the kick off meeting, Quality Assurance Board (QAB) was established with a representative from each university and it is the main body dealing with high-quality project implementation.

The Project Quality Assurance Board (QAB) is composed of:

1. Eda Çela, WBU
2. Agim Alia, LU
3. Flora Krasniqi, POLIS
4. Gresa Ferri, IBCM
5. Zahir Çerkini, UIBM
6. Valerij Dermol, ISSBS
7. Veli Kreci, SEEU

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The Quality Assurance Board (QAB) was established in order to ensure the timely coordination and start of the activities between partners. It will ensure the overall quality management of the project in terms of coordination and strategic leadership to the project implementation partners.

UIBM in collaboration with SEEU will develop a Quality Monitoring Plan for the whole duration of the project. The monitoring plan will be endorsed by the QAB and will be notified to all partners in order to catch up with this plan. The monitoring plan will include:

- (i) the revised/contextualized logical framework matrix with a table of Indicators; Data Source; Data collection methodology; and the Responsible Partner(s);
- (ii) an Indicator Tracking Table (ITT) which will track the progress of achievement based on the indicator measurement Target Vs. Achieved ones.

## 7. Quality Management Procedures

### 7.1. Quality Reviews and Audits

Project Quality Assurance plan is developed to facilitate the evaluation of the quality of the project during its execution. The aim of this plan was to outline the main rules to be followed by the partners of the project to ensure the highest possible quality of project activities, outputs and outcomes and project management. All procedures defined in this plan were harmonized and are in full compliance with the QA SURE project Grant Agreement and Partnership Agreements. The plan defines also the quality expectations regarding the project deliverables, reports and documents, organization of events/workshops/ trainings/meetings as well as procedures for internal and external quality monitoring. It also provides the templates which are used for project documentation.

This Project Quality Assurance Plan describes the scope and objectives of the quality management within the project. Several tools for evaluation will be used: meetings and via e-mails, evaluation questionnaires after meetings and trainings by partners for the internal evaluation and evaluation questionnaires by the participants.

Both monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and quality assurance (QA) activities will be embedded into activities leading to deliverables provisions. Overall key criteria leading M&E and QA will be efficiency (summative purposes); effectiveness (operational purposes); quality (excellence purposes); sustainability (after the project end). Evaluation will always contain a learning component, to feed reflection of the consortium on process and outputs.

Quality Monitoring Plan (QMP) for the whole duration of the project will be endorsed by the QAB and will be notified to all partners in order to catch up with this plan. The monitoring plan will include:



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- (i) the revised/contextualized logical framework matrix with a table of Indicators; Data Source; Data collection methodology; and the Responsible Partner(s);
- (ii) an Indicator Tracking Table (ITT) which will track the progress of achievement based on the indicator measurement Target Vs. Achieved ones. Link of Quality Reporting:  
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1mVnuY5kic03X9A62B0CNpMjfupJdQWVFQx5X3aEpu4/edit#gid=1939644481>

## **7.2. Quality of the deliverables**

The main focus of quality assurance is on the deliverables. Deliverables come in two varieties: intangible deliverables, such planned activities like trainings, workshops, and meetings, and tangible deliverables like reports, minutes, and plans.

The purpose of quality assurance for all deliverables is to ensure that they are relevant to achieving both the overall and specific objectives, with an emphasis on their efficient and effective development. Delivery in accordance with the project work plan specified in the application form and action plans is anticipated on time.

The format and structure of the deliverables must adhere to the formal requirements stated in the templates that are supplied. They should fulfill their intended objectives within the WP and the project's broader framework and be consistent with the deliverable description included in the project proposal.

The project will assess and evaluate the quality of the following deliverables:

- a) Documents and reports for publication
- b) Online/digital resources
- c) Trainings (with academic staff, administrative staff and students), events and activities
- d) Dissemination events
- e) Capacity building actions
- f) Project (internal) documents and reports
- g) Project management deliverables

## **8. Feedback Mechanism**

- *Evaluation Forms:*

Evaluation forms will be used as a primary tool for gathering direct feedback from participants, enabling the assessment of satisfaction and identification of areas for improvement.

- *Evaluations and Reports:*

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Internal/External evaluations and reports will be used to provide an objective analysis of project outcomes, offering valuable insights that guide strategic adjustments and enhancements.

## **9. Documentation and Reporting**

### **9.1. Documentation Standards**

Set the standards for documenting QA activities, decisions, and outcomes to ensure transparency and accountability.

### **9.2. Reporting System**

Develop a system for regular reporting on QA progress to the project consortium and the Erasmus+ Programme, highlighting achievements and areas for improvement.

## **10. Evaluation and Monitoring**

### **10.1. Performance Indicators**

Utilize specific quantitative and qualitative indicators mentioned in the project document to monitor and evaluate the performance of QA activities.

### **10.2. Evaluation Schedule**

Plan for regular internal and external evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the QA framework and make necessary adjustments.

## **11. External quality assurance**

An External quality expert will be selected, based on an open call, to pass an independent judgement on the quality, efficiency and sustainability of the project by using formative and summative assessment instruments. He/she will prepare and submit to the coordinator of the Project the interim evaluation report and recommendations before December 2024 and prepare and submit the Final Evaluation Report before November 2025. The interim report will be analysed and required actions will be taken to answer recommendations. The final report will assess the overall effectiveness and the impact of the project.

## **12. Risk Management**

Quality control deals with the identification of the risk factors that can influence negatively the implementation of the project activities. There are different risks in projects, which are at the same time challenges that can be highlighted by quality control. To prevent conflicts the project foresees the signing of internal agreements among the partnership to clearly distribute responsibilities and tasks and establish the responsible partner for the proper realization of project activities and the achievement of project objectives. The project is based on a cooperative methodology and all the decisions will be agreed and shared within

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the project partnership. Great importance will be given also to a clear and correct management of the communication within the partnership.

The consortium adopts a co-responsibility approach: to this respect, the Project Management Board (PMB), composed of one representative of each partner, will be established; this group will be in charge of supporting the Project Coordinator (PC) in major/strategic decisions and for risk management.

The Project Management Board (PMB) members are:

1. Albana Halili, WBU
2. Dael Dervishi, LU
3. Emi Hoxholli, U\_POLIS
4. Flamur Abazaj, IBCM
5. Fatbardha Hoxha, UIBM
6. Nada Trunk, ISSBS
7. Lejla Abazi Bexheti, SEEU

The PMB will meet during project meetings or in online coordination meetings organised for the purpose.

### **13. Conclusion**

The QA-SURE project has the main focus on establishment/enhancement of quality assurance strategies and mechanisms at WB HEIs. Each partner country needs support and trainings in order to succeed in implementation of best methodologies.

The influence of the project we would describe as below:

- Short term impact: Improved training processes for designing study programs of HEIs based on labour market needs, including the Action Plans for supporting the processes of QA in teaching, learning and administration.
- Medium term impact: Established/enhanced Quality Assurance Units/Offices of HEIs in Albania and Kosovo and provide capacity building on quality assurance processes within networks of HEIs.
- Long term impact: Improved coordination through a long-term policy and associated methodologies, for strategies on internal quality assurance in WBU and its partners, in preparation for international institutional accreditation of WBU and relevant partners.

The target group is composed of academic staff, administrative staff and students in the HEIs participating in the consortium. Each HEI will train at least 20 academic staff, 5 administrative staff and 10 students. The target group will benefit from the proposed intervention in terms of gaining insight and supportive action to increase access to QA features of HEIs participating in the consortium, as well as generate feedback and fulfil their needs for individual and collective supervision in addressing the QA needs prior to the full deployment of QA mechanisms.

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More specifically, the long-term impact will address:

- Recognition of WB HEIs in EU and beyond
- Internationalization of the involved universities in terms of international staff and students
- Increases exchange practices among partners
- Increased number of double or joint degree diplomas.

In line with the long-term impact: Improved coordination through a long-term policy and associated methodologies, for strategies on internal quality assurance at WBU and other Albanian and Kosovo partners, in preparation for their international institutional accreditation, the three main approaches to quality are accreditation, assessment and audit. The project deliverables and outputs will be available at the dedicated project website.