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Improving University Quality Assurance Resilient Strategies Toward Excellence

QA-SURE

WP3 - Deliverable 3.1

Establishment/Enhancement of Internal Quality Assurance Offices/Units

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the report

This report has been 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. 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). The primary purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the current status of each WB HEI's Quality Assurance Offices/Units, identify the needs for infrastructure improvements or the establishment of QA Offices/Units, present the requirements regarding QA Offices/Units and the implementation plan, assess the impact of training, and outline future actions.

It provides a detailed account of the steps taken to establish the Internal Quality Assurance Unit at WBU, a newly founded university, and to enhance and modernize existing QA Offices/Units at U_POLIS, LU, UIBM, and IBCM. This includes updates to their strategies, development of action and sustainability plans, modernization and unification of QA Manuals etc.

This report serves as the foundation for two other deliverables under Work Package 3 (WP3) – Establishment/Enhancement of Internal Quality Assurance Offices/Units:

- D3.2 Action and Sustainability Plan
- D3.3 Report on Quality Assurance Mechanisms

This report will assist partners in:

- Developing Quality Assurance Strategies, Action Plans, and Job Descriptions;
- Elaborating and adopting university strategies for QA development at each partner institution;
- Modernizing QA manuals for each partner university involved in the project;
- Improving Action Plans for further QA consolidation;
- Procuring equipment necessary to perform all expected activities.

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1.2 Importance of QA Offices/Units for HEIs

One of the main achievements of the Bologna Process is the enhancement of quality, transparency, and mobility within higher education across Europe. A specific objective of this project was to create and enhance quality assurance structures within partner HEIs, aligning with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance. These standards provide a common framework for European quality assurance systems, ensuring consistency and promoting trust in higher education.

A Quality Assurance (QA) Office/Unit is essential for maintaining academic excellence, operational efficiency, and a strong reputation within HEIs. By standardizing processes, ensuring compliance with accreditation standards, including those outlined in the ESG, and fostering continuous improvement, the QA Office/Unit plays a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of education, research, and administration. They promote accountability, support data-driven decision-making, and align university activities with strategic goals. Additionally, the QA Office/Unit contributes to better student outcomes, attracts talent, and safeguards the institution's long-term sustainability, making them indispensable components of a successful university.

Quality assurance remains critical as HEIs evolve by adopting innovative teaching and learning practices, developing new institutional models, engaging with emerging education providers, and expanding access and equity in higher education. The dynamic nature of higher education, especially in an increasingly globalized context, necessitates robust QA frameworks that are adaptable to change while maintaining high standards, in line with the principles set out in the ESG.

Based on a comprehensive literature review, the primary roles of the Internal Quality Assurance Office/Unit include ensuring compliance with national quality standards, supporting the achievement of institutional goals, defining and assessing learning outcomes, and enhancing the transparency and value of qualification systems. This unit is also tasked with increasing the overall quality of educational provision, offering opportunities for self-reflection and self-evaluation, and supporting ongoing quality enhancement through a continuous cycle of improvement. Furthermore, it provides essential information on quality both within and outside the institution, fosters student satisfaction, and supports informed decision-making processes within HEI.

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“Quality assurance is essential to sustaining these values in three significant ways: first, by reinforcing the vision that higher education is grounded in these core values; second, by serving as a critical support system for these values across thousands of universities and emerging educational providers worldwide; and third, by acting as a voice for students and society, highlighting how these values are integral to the provision of quality higher education. In this context, higher education in Europe is driven by three fundamental missions: learning and teaching, research, and service to society. These missions are deeply intertwined with the goals of QA, as they seek to ensure that higher education institutions not only impart knowledge but also contribute to the broader social good.” (Eatson, 2021)

Moreover, the role of QA Offices/Units extends to facilitating international collaboration and mobility, which are key components of the Bologna Process. By ensuring that academic standards are transparent and comparable across borders, in accordance with the ESG, QA Offices/Units help to create a more cohesive and integrated higher education environment, where students, faculty, and researchers can move freely and benefit from diverse educational experiences. This international dimension of quality assurance is increasingly important as HEIs strive to remain competitive and relevant in a global educational landscape.

In conclusion, the establishment and enhancement of QA Offices/Units within HEIs are not just about maintaining standards—they are about driving innovation, supporting institutional growth, and ensuring that higher education remains a powerful force for societal advancement. As HEIs continue to face new challenges and opportunities, the role of QA, guided by the ESG, will be ever more critical in shaping the future of education.

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2. Overview of Quality Assurance System Needs of WB HEIs

2.1 Pre-Project Needs for Establishing and Enhancing QA Offices/Units

Before the project's initiation, a comprehensive needs assessment was conducted by each HEI to identify the specific requirements of each Higher Education Institution (HEI) concerning the establishment or enhancement of their Quality Assurance (QA) Offices/Units. These needs, recognized at the time of the application, serve as the foundation for the targeted strategies and actions proposed in the project to build and strengthen QA structures, ensuring that each institution is well-prepared to achieve and sustain high standards in their academic and administrative practices. The findings of this assessment are outlined below:

- **WBU (New University):** As a newly established institution, WBU was in the early stages of developing its foundational structures and mechanisms. The assessment highlighted the necessity for WBU to establish a Quality Assurance Unit from scratch. Additionally, there was a recognized need for comprehensive training programs for academic and administrative staff, alongside active student involvement in QA processes. This involvement was deemed crucial for enhancing the relevance and quality of academic programs, boosting student engagement, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. The introduction of a digitalized system was also identified as a priority to elevate the overall quality of the university's operations.
- **Luarasi University:** The needs assessment for LU revealed the importance of enhancing student involvement in QA processes as a strategic move to strengthen the university's overall QA system. By involving students more effectively, LU aimed to improve the quality and relevance of its academic programs, increase student engagement and satisfaction, and solidify its commitment to continuous improvement. Furthermore, the assessment underscored the potential of digitalization and technology to enhance transparency, accountability, and trust in the university's QA processes.
- **Polis University:** For U_Polis, the assessment emphasized the need to enhance its existing QA Unit by expanding stakeholder involvement in QA processes. The university was advised to develop new action plans and strategies in line with ESG2015 standards, with a particular focus on internationalization to improve quality assurance. Additionally, increasing the level of student participation in various QA activities was identified as a key area for development.

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- **IBC-M:** The needs assessment for IBC-M pinpointed two main areas in need of improvement: closing the feedback loop and strengthening the participation of external stakeholders within the QA system. The assessment also highlighted the importance of involving students throughout the QA process, not just at its conclusion, to ensure a more comprehensive approach to quality assurance.
- **University Isa Boletini Mitrovica:** The university has developed QA regulations, guidelines, and a package of evaluation instruments in recent years. However, the assessment identified significant challenges, particularly related to a lack of capacity at the central quality office. There was a clear need to foster a stronger internal quality culture, develop robust processes and protocols for QA implementation, and provide targeted training for QA managers and officers. This training would focus on enhancing their understanding of reflective processes that lead to the achievement of quality standards.

The following table¹ illustrates the baseline values derived from the prior needs analysis for partner HEIs in the Western Balkans (WB) region, along with the target values set for the project. This data highlights the initial status and the goals aimed at improving Quality Assurance (QA) processes across the participating institutions.

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Baseline Value</i>	<i>Target Value</i>
No. of QA units from each university involved in the project	4	5
No. of staff from each university engaged in QA	15-20	25-30
No. of students from each university engaged in QA	5	10
No. of universities with capacity building on QA processes	4	5
No. of action plans for supporting HEI processes of QA in teaching, learning, and administration	0	5
Level of training for designing study programs and action plans within HEIs	0	5
Level of coordination of participating HEIs in preparation for international institutional collaborations	0	5
No. of policies and associated methodologies for strategies on internal quality assurance within HEIs	2	10-12

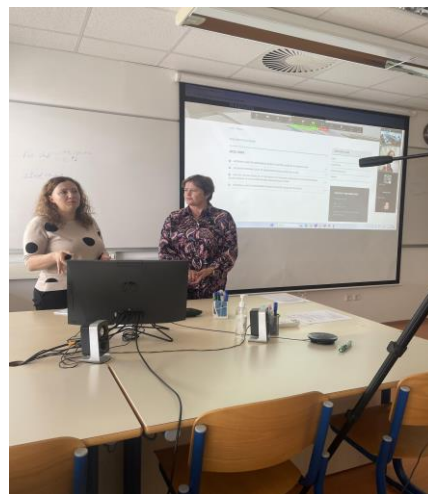
¹ **Note:** The data presented pertains exclusively to the partner HEIs from the WB region.

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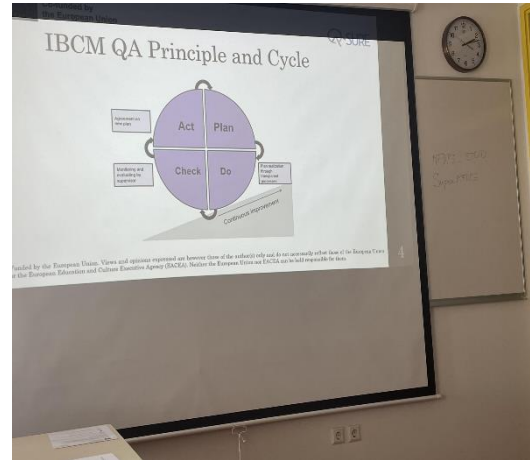
2.2 During-Project Needs for Establishing and Enhancing QA Offices/Units

During the preparation phase of Work Package 2, led by LU, a comprehensive analysis was conducted by the consortium partners based on pre-studies from the five participating HEIs (as detailed in Section 2.1). This analysis aimed to identify gaps and needs within the WB HEIs' Quality Assurance (QA) systems. As a result, a benchmarking system was introduced, aligned with ENQA standards and based on ESG 2015, to standardize and unify the QA Offices/Units across the participating institutions. This approach was crucial for developing QA processes that meet EU expectations and adhere to the standards and guidelines set out by ESG (2015). The system promotes continuous cooperation in areas such as professional development, qualitative education, research, and adaptation to modern trends. By establishing robust QA Offices/Units, HEIs can enhance their independence and effectiveness. Furthermore, maintaining strong connections throughout the Balkan region supports the transition to internationally certified institutions, fostering common goals and collaborative efforts to advance QA processes and support student development and future aspirations.

As a result, during the meeting held in June 2024, each partner was asked to re-present the actual status of the QA Offices/Units and the need for enhancing QA Offices/Units, now seen from another perspective.



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Luarasi University is focused on three key areas for improvement and future actions.

A. Involvement of external stakeholders.

External stakeholders such as employers, alumni, and professional bodies should be more involved through advisory boards and feedback mechanisms. Future Actions to further improve:

- To establish regular consultation meetings, create advisory panels, and integrate feedback from these stakeholders into the quality assurance cycle.
- To restructure internal committees to ensure they are adequately resourced and empowered to make decisions that impact quality assurance.
- To organize training sessions for staff involved in IQA to ensure they are updated on the latest quality assurance practices and standards.
- To share and co-create proposals with different stakeholder categories, in order to improve the quality and to increase the efficacy of their involvement.
- To involve stakeholders in reviews of the study programmes, quality assurance processes, and the analysis of the perspective of employment of the future graduates.
- To communicate regularly and to have transparency towards stakeholders, in order to create a climate of cooperation and sharing of knowledge and good practices.

B. Programme Design to Meet Objectives

Each programme should clearly define objectives and intended learning outcomes (ILOs) that should be regularly reviewed. Future Actions to further improve:

- To continuously review and align the curriculum with the latest industry standards and societal needs.

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- To utilize feedback from students, alumni, and employers to refine the ILOs and ensure they are meeting the desired educational and professional objectives.
- To introduce innovative teaching and assessment methods that support the achievement of the ILOs. Such as blended learning, experiential learning opportunities, and competency-based assessments.
- To continuously update learning materials, such as textbooks, and online resources, so that they are current, accurate and aligned with the learning objectives.
- To review academic assessment, in order to provide inclusive learning methods, and reach the right learning outcomes for all students.

C. Monitoring and Periodic Review

Luarasi University should improve the implementation of a systematic process for monitoring and reviewing its programmes, such as regular internal audits, feedback from students, and external evaluations. Future Actions to further improve:

- To enhance the frequency and depth of programme reviews. More detailed analysis of student performance data, employment outcomes, and societal impact.
- To foster a culture of continuous improvement by encouraging departments to regularly reflect on their practices and make necessary adjustments.
- To ensure that any actions taken as a result of reviews are effectively communicated to all stakeholders, through regular reports, newsletters, and meetings.

POLIS University

In this framework, POLIS University aims to:

- Refine and improve procedures and mechanisms that assess the role of U_POLIS as an ecosystem actor, including academia, research bodies, students, alumni, the business community and policymakers;
- Update and improve the processes of program design, revision and improvement, addressing both teaching and learning components as well as teaching methodologies;
- Consolidate the assessment procedures and mechanisms of research and innovation as well as the interplay among research and learning & teaching, referring to international standards;
- Embed the internationalization component in the processes, procedures and IQA documents;

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- Initiate and complete a whole external/international review and accreditation process in compliance with the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG-2015);
- Engagement and involvement of external and international experts and expertise in the Internal Quality Processes of POLIS on a regular/permanent basis;
- Consolidating and refining procedures which stimulate the creation of a quality culture embedded in the entire organization and its activities.

Western Balkans University

WBU would establish the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU). Also, will draft and develop a strategic document in which the goals, objectives and activities of the institution for the following years. The university aims to select strategic priorities or areas, mostly focus on:

- Excellence in teaching;
- Excellence in research;
- Excellence in Knowledge Transfer & Innovation;
- Excellence in Student Engagement;
- Human resources and Brain Circulation;
- Internationalization and Partnership;
- Modern Infrastructure and Digitization;
- Quality Assurance and Management;
- Public Relations and Marketing;
- Financial sustainability.

IBC-M

A. New QA Manual

- Revision of all QA Procedures and their “fit-for-purpose-ness”;
- Student, Staff and Stakeholder evaluation forms to be completely revised;
- How focus groups are revised and approached to be revised;
- How industry stakeholders are involved in feedback loops will be revised;
- How international feedback is included in data structures to be revised.

B. Strengthening of QA Office

- Further increase institutional capacities to have more QA understanding, experience and relevance at faculty levels rather than just central level;

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- Integrate QA into more administrative processes as well, rather than just academic ones, such as libraries, logistics, IT and more.

C. Accreditation 2024-25

- IBCM is currently starting the accreditation process for the institutional and 5 program accreditations with the international accreditation agency Evalag.

D. Equipment procurement

- Will further enhance the new impact of the structure towards the students and other relevant stakeholders with new equipment and software to be procured.

University Isa Boletini Mitrovica

Monitoring and evaluation are fundamental factors of the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the University Isa Boletini in Mitrovica, through which we aim to measure the progress achieved. The Governing Council of UIBM has established the monitoring group, whose duties are:

- Compile semi-annual action achievement reports in accordance with UMIBSP;
- Review the progress in the implementation of the UIBMSP, based on the information collected and the relevant recommendations;
- Review and approve additional measures to ensure the implementation of UIBMSP;

The monitoring group through the group coordinator for Coordination and Monitoring, which consists of a member of the Governing Council, a member from the Advisory Board (business community), two students (a current student and an alumnus), an official from the UIBM administration and two members of the academic staff (a teacher and an assistant) compiles performance reports on the implementation of UIBMSP. The strategic objective for Quality assurance at UIBM is: Quality Development. This strategic objective includes the following specific objectives:

- Strengthening the quality assurance system at UIBM;
- Monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement of the quality culture;
- Raising the culture of quality at UIBM;
- Advancement of internal quality assurance;
- Accreditation and external quality.

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3. Internationalization and Need for Establishment/Enhancement of QA Offices/Units

Internationalization of higher education is a central focus in the development of the European Higher Education Area. The Quality Assurance framework plays a pivotal role in achieving the goals of the Bologna Process. By implementing common tools and frameworks across all signatory countries, the EHEA aims to support mobility, recognition, and cross-border cooperation.

“According to the results of the QA-FIT surveys², there is a strong consensus among stakeholders on the significant value of this framework and the crucial role it plays. The QA framework is recognized as essential for facilitating international cooperation between higher education institutions, supporting international student mobility, ensuring degree recognition, and enhancing transparency and trust among higher education institutions across different countries. This objective is primarily accomplished through the application of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG). Specifically, with regards to the ESG, there is also a strong consensus that they play a crucial role in supporting various aspects of internationalization and largely meet the purposes set out by the framework: supporting trust in higher education qualifications (average of 96% across the surveyed stakeholders agree or somewhat agree), support the recognition of qualifications (91%) and support the mobility of students (87%). While the level of agreement with these statements was fairly similar for national unions of students (between 88% and 94%), a higher percentage of ‘somewhat’ agreeing rather than ‘agreeing’ is present in comparison with other stakeholders” (QA-FIT, EU, 2024).

POLIS University has made significant strides in developing its international dimension over the past 5-6 years. The institution offers a joint study program in collaboration with international partners and has actively participated in international accreditation processes at both the program and institutional levels. Additionally, U_POLIS has implemented several international capacity-building projects focused on quality assurance. These initiatives have provided the institution with a deeper understanding of QA processes, mechanisms, and

² https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/QA-FIT_CrossCuttingPaper_Internationalisation.pdf

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instruments, which have, in turn, informed the definition of new priorities for the internal QA system and the design of appropriate and effective policies, such as:

1. U_Polis it's also part of The European University Alliance aims to support the internationalization of European Higher Education. The Alliance focuses its action on four pillars and aims to connect like-minded institutions ultimately adding value to their international activities and enhancing the overall student experience of international education.
2. POLIS University has obtained global accreditation after successfully completed QAA's [International Quality Review \(IQR\)](#)

International Quality Review (IQR) offers institutions outside the UK the opportunity to have a review by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The review benchmarks institutions' quality assurance processes against international quality assurance standards set out in [Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#)

The review team confirmed that the University meets all 10 of the internal quality assurance standards in the ESG, and identified the following features of good practice at POLIS University:

- the formal approach taken by the institution to actively support non-discriminatory practices, understanding that the emphasis the University places is fairly unique in the cultural context it embodies (ESG Standard 1.1)
- the involvement of students in programme design (ESG Standard 1.2)
- the approach taken by the University to nurture student progression through the maintenance of a culture of student and teacher partnership (ESG Standard 1.3)
- the participatory approach that aligns research objectives and institutional objectives (ESG Standard 1.5)
- the extensive range of learning resources that support learning, in particular the special IT facilities to enhance the learning opportunities for students with disabilities (ESG Standard 1.6)
- the comprehensive range of specialist facilities on offer which enhance the professional learning opportunities for students (ESG Standard 1.6).

WBU is increasingly seeking to position themselves in the global academic landscape, internationalization becoming a critical strategic priority. For the **Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU)**, this process involves adapting and aligning quality standards, procedures, and goals with international benchmarks to ensure academic programs are globally competitive

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and recognized. An effective internationalization strategy for QA units involves enhancing cross-border collaborations, adopting international quality framework ESG 2015, and fostering a global perspective across academic, research, and administrative processes. The internationalization strategy for achieving this goal:

- **Aligning with International Quality Standards**

WBU will adopt globally recognized quality assurance frameworks, such as the **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015)**, and align internal QA processes with these international benchmarks. To ensure that QA policies and procedures adhere to international standards such as ESG, ISO 21001 (Education Organization Management), or specific accreditation standards relevant to the institution's academic fields, it is crucial to implement comprehensive alignment measures. This involves regularly comparing internal quality assurance mechanisms with those of peer institutions globally, participating in international benchmarking exercises to identify areas for improvement and ensure alignment with best practices. Additionally, providing continuous professional development and training for QA staff on international quality frameworks and emerging best practices will strengthen the institution's capacity to maintain high standards and stay competitive in the global academic environment. The package of instruments for quality assurance implemented for the first time in WBU are listed and published in the website of the [Internal Quality Assurance Unit](#). The annual reports are regularly updated and uploaded to the [website](#). Meanwhile, IQAU has prepared the [activity plan](#), in order to implement these instruments and activities in various areas while aligning them with the overarching objectives of quality assurance will help a university continuously improve its educational quality and effectiveness. Regular review and adjustment of these processes are essential to staying responsive to changing needs and standards.

- **Enhancing International Partnerships**

Building strong partnerships with international institutions and quality assurance bodies is vital to fostering the exchange of best practices, co-developing standards, and enhancing global cooperation in maintaining academic quality. Collaborating with international QA networks, such as the **European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)**, will help the institution stay informed about global trends and engage with international experts. Additionally, establishing and assessing QA mechanisms for dual or joint degree programs with international partners will ensure that all collaborative programs meet the standards of both

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institutions, promoting consistency and quality across borders. Furthermore, participating in or initiating international QA audits, where partner institutions or accrediting bodies review internal quality processes, will enhance accountability and continuous improvement, aligning the institution with global best practices in quality assurance.

- **Developing International Curriculum**

To ensure that the Internationalization of the Curriculum (IoC) supports global competencies and adheres to international quality assurance standards, it is essential to align educational programs with the demands of a globalized world. This involves developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within the QA framework to evaluate how well the curriculum equips students with essential global skills, such as cultural awareness, language proficiency, and knowledge of international industries. Additionally, engaging international faculty in curriculum development and peer reviews will bring diverse perspectives and ensure that academic content reflects global trends and standards. Pursuing accreditation for key programs from recognized international bodies will further validate the institution's commitment to maintaining high-quality, globally competitive academic offerings.

- **International Student and Staff Mobility**

Promoting mobility of students, faculty, and staff to and from international institutions requires a robust Quality Assurance (QA) framework to ensure that academic and research standards are consistently maintained. Specific QA policies should be developed and implemented to govern student and staff exchange programs, ensuring that the quality of learning and teaching experiences remains high across various cultural and institutional contexts. Additionally, QA mechanisms for recruiting international faculty and staff must be established to guarantee that hiring practices and academic standards align with international expectations. Collaborating with globally recognized universities to establish exchange programs will help ensure that mutual QA expectations are met, regularly evaluated, and continually improved to enhance the international academic experience for all participants. In the framework of internationalization, the [International Relations Office \(IRO\)](#) mission is to develop and sustain comprehensive, effective internationalization channels that are academic, research and administration based to increase global engagement for students and staff.

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- **Technology and International QA Data Systems**

To support the internationalization of QA processes, it is essential to utilize advanced technologies and data management systems that enable efficient data collection, reporting, and analysis aligned with international standards. Implementing robust data systems capable of comparing institutional performance with international benchmarks will allow the institution to track Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) across different countries and academic contexts. Moreover, developing data collection mechanisms that capture quality-related metrics from international programs, such as student success rates, satisfaction levels, and learning outcomes, is crucial for comprehensive assessment. By leveraging digital platforms for cross-border QA processes, the institution can streamline the collection and sharing of data with international partners, accrediting bodies, and auditors. This technological integration will ensure that the institution manages its performance effectively and benchmarks against global standards, contributing to continuous quality enhancement in a global academic environment.

- **Cultural and Institutional QA Practices**

To ensure inclusivity and respect for the diverse cultural and institutional contexts of international students and partners, QA processes must be adapted to accommodate different educational traditions and expectations. This can be achieved by incorporating culturally sensitive methods into assessment and evaluation procedures, acknowledging the diverse backgrounds of both students and faculty. Training QA personnel on cross-cultural communication and the specific challenges of assessing quality in a globally diverse academic environment is essential to enhancing their ability to navigate these complexities. Additionally, developing tailored feedback mechanisms that allow international students and staff to provide input on their academic experience ensures their voices are heard and considered in the QA process, promoting a more inclusive and responsive quality assurance system.

- **Continuous Monitoring and Global Impact Reporting**

To effectively monitor the impact of internationalization within QA processes, the institution must regularly assess its global influence in areas such as academic quality, research collaboration, and student outcomes. This can be achieved by publishing an annual report on the internationalization of QA processes, which details key performance metrics, global partnerships, student mobility, and research output. Additionally, regularly tracking the institution's performance in international rankings will ensure that QA efforts are aligned with improving the institution's global standing. It is crucial to continuously review and adapt

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international QA strategies based on feedback, global trends, and the results of benchmarking exercises. By systematically evaluating the institution's global impact, internationalization efforts will make a meaningful contribution to academic quality and overall institutional success.

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4. Requirements to be fulfilled by QA Offices/Units

Quality assurance in higher education is a crucial process designed to ensure that the education provided by universities and other higher education institutions meets the standards set by accreditation agencies, governments, and professional organizations. Its primary goal is to deliver high-quality education that equips students for the workforce and further education while providing institutions with the tools and methods for continuous enhancement.

Key activities in quality assurance include:

- **Program and Institutional Evaluations:** Assessments of academic programs and institutional practices to ensure they meet established standards.
- **Academic and Curriculum Development:** Initiatives to improve and update educational programs and courses.
- **Student Assessments:** Evaluating student performance and learning outcomes to maintain educational standards.
- **Continuous Improvement Initiatives:** Ongoing efforts to refine and enhance educational processes and practices.

The general objective of the project is to establish or enhance quality assurance structures and mechanisms for effective management and operation through teaching and learning processes in the Western Balkan region, with a focus on deeper integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Drawing on a comprehensive literature review, best practices from European institutions such as Tetova (SEEU) and Slovenia (ISSBS), our accumulated experience, survey insights, and benchmarking results from WP2 of the project, we propose a series of enhancements to existing Quality Assurance (QA) Offices/Units. These enhancements aim to ensure that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) continue to uphold the highest standards of academic excellence and operational efficiency.

The proposed enhancements and establishment of Quality Assurance (QA) Offices/Units are grounded in the same key pillars to ensure consistency and effectiveness.

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The pillars are:

- **Legal Frameworks and By-Laws:** Ensuring that QA Offices/Units operate within the boundaries of relevant legal and regulatory requirements.
- **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education (ESG):** Aligning practices with established international quality standards to uphold academic excellence.
- **Institutional Strategic Goals:** Integrating QA practices with the specific strategic objectives of each Higher Education Institution (HEI) to support their mission and vision.

By adhering to these pillars, both the enhancement of existing QA Offices/Units and the establishment of new QA structures will be well-aligned with best practices and international standards, facilitating continuous improvement and integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This approach ensures that all QA efforts are cohesive and support the overarching goal of maintaining high standards of academic quality and operational efficiency.

4.1 Legal and by-laws requirements

Internal quality assurance is a legal obligation of higher education institutions, being responsible for the design of policies and procedures for quality assurance. This system is established by higher education institutions and operates through the internal quality assurance office/unit. The structure and functions of this unit are defined in the statute of HEIs. Meanwhile, in the case of WBU, as a new university, the primary need was to establish the QA office/unit. This means that WBU has to set up procedures, policies and regulations that enable their functioning. This will be done in line with the ESGs, as well as, European and local best practices, while at the same time, creating the quality assurance cycles that will ensure that continuous enhancement of those structures is possible.

The QA Office/Unit of each HEI drafts standards for internal quality assurance in accordance with the Quality Code. The unit carries out periodic evaluations for teaching and scientific research activity. An integral task of this unit is also the completion of the student questionnaire at the end of each semester, on the quality of teaching for the subjects of each program offered by the HEI. In the case of LU, U_POLIS, UIBM and IBCM, they have already established QA offices/units, so the main focus will be on enhancement. In these cases, the experts and institutions through the sharing of best practices, and revision of current QA frameworks will

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harmonize them more closely with those of highly ranked EU institutions. Enhancements will be made to the QA manuals/handbooks, institutional and programme update and improvement procedures and methods, and the institutional QA procedures, as well as, visualize and kickstart a higher rate of inclusion of the students and external stakeholders within these processes. In both cases, QA practices will be more closely matched between various institutions, also facilitating the possibility for cooperation between them, which in return enables practice exchanges, mobilities (virtual and physical), general cooperation and more to follow on. These are all practices and concepts that will remain functional post-project completion.

The process of carrying out the questionnaires and drawing up the report on its findings is in accordance with the following legal and by-laws as follows:

- Law No. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015, “On higher education and scientific research in higher education institutions in the Republic of Albania”, Articles 46, 103, 104 and 106;
- Quality Code in Higher Education, approved by the Council of Minister Decision-VKM no. 824, dated 24.12.2021, “On the approval of the Quality Code of Higher Education”;
- Statute of each HEI;
- Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASCAL) manual for the internal quality system.

4.2 Standards and guidelines for quality assurance requirements

The proposed intervention will capture the essence of the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). This particular focus will be complemented by the possibility of the international accreditation of leaders and relevant partner universities, now in terms of increasing the transnational cooperation of quality assurance in higher education in the Western Balkans.

To elevate the Quality Assurance (QA) Unit to meet the rigorous demands of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), we propose a comprehensive enhancement plan focused on key areas:

1. **Leadership and Governance:** Strengthen the leadership framework by expanding the QA Steering Committee to include diverse academic and administrative representatives.

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This ensures comprehensive oversight and aligns with ESG's emphasis on clear governance structures.

2. **Standardization and Policy Revision:** Review and update all QA policies and procedures to ensure they meet ESG standards. Implement a standardized evaluation framework across all academic Offices/Units to promote consistency and fairness, as recommended by ESG guidelines.
3. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Enhance stakeholder involvement by creating regular forums for students, faculty, and external partners to provide input on QA processes. This aligns with ESG's focus on transparency and the active involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance activities.
4. **Continuous Improvement and Innovation:** Establish robust feedback mechanisms to drive continuous improvement in academic and administrative processes. Encourage the adoption of innovative QA practices, such as digital tools and data analytics, to enhance efficiency, reflecting the ESG's commitment to continuous improvement.
5. **Training and Capacity Building:** Expand training programs to cover ESG standards, data-driven decision-making, and the use of digital QA tools. This ensures faculty and staff are equipped to meet evolving quality standards, in line with ESG's emphasis on supporting staff development.
6. **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Strengthen the use of data analytics to monitor performance, guide decision-making, and inform QA practices. This ensures that decisions are evidence-based, a key aspect of the ESG framework.
7. **Alignment with Institutional Strategy:** Ensure that QA activities are integrated with the institution's strategic goals. This alignment supports the ESG's requirement that QA processes contribute to the overall mission and vision of the institution.
8. **External Review and Accreditation:** Enhance the role of external review and accreditation processes to ensure continuous alignment with ESG standards. Regularly engage with external accrediting bodies to validate and refine our QA practices.

4.3 Integration with HEI's Institutional Strategy

The Academic Quality Assurance Strategy at each HEI must be comprehensive, encompassing all critical aspects of maintaining academic standards and ensuring continuous improvement. A key requirement of the ESG is the integration of this strategy with the institution's overall goals, focusing on two main areas:

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1. **Alignment with Strategic Goals:** ESG Standard 3.1 emphasizes that QA policies should be in harmony with the institution's broader strategic objectives. This ensures that all QA processes support and reinforce the institution's mission and vision.
2. **Collaborative Approach:** According to ESG Standard 3.2, QA should be integrated into the institution's overall operations. This integration promotes collaboration between the QA unit and other departments, fostering a unified approach to quality assurance across the university.

The Quality Assurance Strategy should identify 'quality review' as the primary procedure for assessing both institutional quality and the quality of study programs, using the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle. The strategy should be guided by the following goals:

- **Ensuring High Academic Standards:** Focus on continuously improving academic Offices/Units and programs to uphold and enhance the university's academic excellence.
- **Establishing a Standardized Evaluation Framework:** Develop clear principles, objectives, procedures, and structures to ensure consistent evaluation across all academic Offices/Units and programs.
- **Documentation and Communication:** Prioritize effective documentation and communication of the results from academic quality assurance processes.
- **Comprehensive Policy Implementation:** Ensure that all university offices/units and academic programs adhere to the Quality Assurance Policy.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Actively involve students, faculty, and external partners in the QA process to enhance transparency and ensure the policy addresses the needs and expectations of all stakeholders.
- **Alignment with Institutional Goals:** Align the QA policy with the broader strategic objectives of the HEI, integrating QA processes with the university's mission and vision.
- **Feedback and Continuous Improvement:** Implement feedback mechanisms to continuously refine and improve academic programs based on QA outcomes.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Provide ongoing training and development for faculty and staff to equip them to meet the standards set by the QA policy.

Finally, the strategy should be developed regarding major international quality frameworks such as ESG 2015, as well as national higher education legal acts and the Albanian Quality Code. This approach ensures a robust and comprehensive QA system that not only supports institutional goals but also aligns with regional integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

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5. Implementation Plan

The main steps for establishing the QA Unit at WBU as a newly university and the modernization of the four existing QA Offices/Units of LU, U_POLIS, IBCM and UIBM are summarized below:

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 (>150), as well as, students (>50), 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,
3. Utilizing internationalization 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 in the QA systems as current Western Balkans HEIs struggle with this.

Sections 5.1 and 5.2 explain in detail the steps done by each HEI to establish or enhance their QA Offices/Units.

5.1 Establishment of QA Unit at WBU

WBU has set as its objective to achieve the highest standards in research, teaching and contribution to society. WBU has policies, structures and procedures for the internal assurance of quality, in accordance with the legal and sub-legal provisions in force as well as with its internal acts. According to the WBU Statute, the Permanent Commission for Guaranteeing Institutional Quality Standards and Study Programs is the body responsible for drafting policies and procedures for internal quality assurance, acts which are approved by the Academic Senate. Through the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU), conduct periodic evaluations related to academic performance, student evaluation, academic staff evaluation, academic or administrative assistant. It also periodically assesses the needs of staff and students. This is accomplished through quality instruments. The reports are published on the website and at the end of the process IQAU gives the relevant recommendations. IQAU consists of its 5 members, a representative from each faculty, a student representative and an external expert. The activity of the unit is foreseen in the statute of the WBU (Article 37) as well as in the regulation of its organization and operation. In WBU, the Permanent Commission for Guaranteeing Standards

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has been established and is functioning as Institutional Quality and Study Programs. The Commission coordinates its work with the Internal Quality Assurance Unit, which conducts periodic evaluations regarding academic performance and evaluation of the study program. This is accomplished through quality instruments. The reports are published and at the end of the process IQAU gives the relevant recommendations. The fulfillment of the recommendations is realized through various activities. For the smooth running of the tasks and functions, the IQAU has drawn up the annual calendar of activities, in order to define the objectives and predict the activities for their achievement. The activities are organized by the academic and administrative structures of the institution.

In accordance with WP3, WBU as a new university, has established with high quality standards its Internal Quality Assurance Unit and other quality-related mechanisms and structures. WBU has:

- Establish Internal Quality Assurance Unit;
- Developed Quality Assurance Strategy;
- Activity Plan;
- QA manuals preparation (ongoing modernization);
- Action plan for further QA consolidation (sustainability of the project);
- Purchase of equipment for performing all the expected activities (computers, laptops, databases and software for QA assurance)

In accordance with the objectives of the project, at Western Balkans University (WBU) was established the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU). IQAU is composed of 5 members, one from each faculty, representatives of the academic staff, 1 external expert and 1 representative from the Student Council. The members and the head of the unit are approved by the academic senate upon the proposal of the Rector. After the consolidation, IQAU proposed the Functioning Regulation, a document that regulates the relationship between IQAU and other Offices/Units at WBU as well as foreseen details about the calendar of meetings, minutes of the meetings, publications etc. IQAU members are gathered for a minimum of 4 times per month. The decisions are taken with the majority of votes.

Through the Internal Quality Assurance Unit, periodic evaluations related to academic performance, student evaluation, evaluation of academic staff, and academic or administrative assistants. It also periodically assesses the needs of staff and students. This is done through quality instruments. The reports are published on the website and at the end of the process

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IQAU gives the relevant recommendations. For the good running of the tasks and functions, the IQAU has drawn up the annual calendar of activities, to define the objectives and predict the activities to achieve them. At WBU, IQAU has coordinated the institutional and program accreditation process, by writing the report and discussing it in all units and structures and training. To create an internal Quality Assurance (QA) Unit at the Western Balkans University (WBU), several systematic steps were undertaken, as summarized by the following steps:

✓ **Planning and Strategy Development**

The first step involved defining the objectives for the Quality Assurance (QA) Unit to align with the university's mission and vision. This included setting the goals of improving academic and administrative processes and ensuring compliance with national and international QA standards. Engaging key stakeholders such as university management, faculty, and administrative staff to gather input and support for establishing the QA Unit.

✓ **Framework and Policy Development**

Developing a comprehensive quality assurance policy that outlines the standards, principles, and procedures the university will follow to maintain and enhance quality in education and administration. Creating standards and guidelines based on national and international quality frameworks, tailored to the university's specific context and needs.

✓ **Establishment of the QA Unit**

Formally establishing the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Unit with a clear mandate, scope of work, and responsibilities. Hiring qualified personnel to staff the QA Unit. This included recruiting a director of quality assurance and other supporting staff members. Training sessions were organized to build the capacity of the QA staff in quality management systems and best practices.

✓ **Development of Quality Assurance Processes**

Designing and mapping out key QA processes such as program review, course evaluation, and administrative audit procedures. This step ensured that all aspects of academic and administrative functions were covered under the QA framework. Introducing various tools and techniques for quality assurance, such as surveys, feedback mechanisms, internal audits, and self-assessment reports to continuously monitor and improve quality.

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✓ **Implementation and Integration**

Conducting pilot tests of the QA processes and tools to identify any gaps or areas for improvement before full-scale implementation. Gradually integrating QA processes into the daily operations of the university. This included working closely with faculties and administrative Offices/Units to ensure seamless adoption of QA practices.

✓ **Monitoring and Continuous Improvement**

Establishing a system for regular monitoring and evaluation of the QA processes to ensure they are effective and aligned with the objectives. Creating a feedback loop where findings from evaluations are used to make continuous improvements in the QA processes. This step also involved revising policies and standards as needed based on feedback and changing external conditions.

✓ **Communication and Reporting**

Developing a strategy for internal communication to keep all stakeholders informed about the activities, progress, and outcomes of the QA Unit. This included regular meetings, reports, and updates. Ensuring compliance with external quality assurance bodies by preparing and submitting necessary documentation and reports as required by national and international accreditation agencies.

✓ **Engagement with External QA Networks**

Engaging with external QA networks and institutions to share best practices, participate in benchmarking exercises, and stay updated on global trends in quality assurance.

✓ **Capacity Building and Awareness Raising**

Organizing workshops, seminars, and training sessions for faculty, staff, and students to raise awareness about the importance of quality assurance and how they can contribute to the process. Promoting a culture of quality throughout the university by recognizing and rewarding good practices, encouraging innovation, and fostering a commitment to continuous improvement.

By following these structured steps, Western Balkans University successfully established its Internal Quality Assurance Unit, which plays a critical role in maintaining and enhancing the quality of education and administrative services at the institution. The Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU) at Western Balkans University (WBU) was established to enhance and

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maintain educational quality through a structured approach involving stakeholder engagement, policy development, staff recruitment, and the integration of QA processes. The unit employs various quality instruments for regular evaluation and continuous improvement of academic and administrative functions. It also promotes a culture of quality and compliance with external standards.

5.2 Enhancement of Existing QA Offices/Units

5.2.1 Development of Quality Assurance Strategies

★ Luarasi University

The new Luarasi University Strategy for Quality Assurance is focused on 3 main pillars:

- International Standards and Accreditation
- International Recognition and Competitiveness
- Excellence in Teaching, Research, and Transfer

By focusing on these strategic areas, Luarasi University can enhance its quality assurance mechanisms, align with international standards, and improve its global competitiveness. This approach will ensure that the university remains attractive to both domestic and international students and faculty and that its graduates are well-prepared for the international job market.

★ POLIS University

U_POLIS Strategy for Quality Assurance has been updated based on the main international quality frameworks such as the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG-s 2015), International standards of professional networks in the academic fields of POLIS, the national Higher Education legal acts and the Albanian Quality Code.

In line with its objective to become a relevant actor in the region and with its internationalization agenda, the quality policy of POLIS University is designed according to international standards. Therefore, the respective processes and procedures are also based on

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specific international guidelines for quality assurance of joint programs and transnational and transboundary education and feedback provided by the QA-SURE project.

The fundamental principles of Quality Assurance Strategy of POLIS University are:

- Accountability and Responsibility;
- Transparency;
- Integrated and systemic approach;
- Inclusiveness;
- Internal vs External Quality Assurance;
- Continuous improvement;
- QA policy vs academic freedom and integrity.

★ **IBC-M**

The International Business College Mitrovica (IBCM) adopts a comprehensive strategy for quality assurance that is designed to uphold the highest educational standards and foster continuous improvement. This strategy is deeply embedded in the institution's core processes, from curriculum development to teaching methodologies, and student services to administrative procedures. IBC-M's approach to quality assurance involves regular review and enhancement of academic programs to ensure they meet the evolving needs of students and the labour market. This is achieved through stakeholder engagement, including feedback from students, faculty, employers, and external academic experts. By aligning its educational offerings with international standards, IBC-M aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for success in their future careers.

★ **University of Isa Boletini Mitrovica**

UIBM has an authentic system for quality assurance and evaluation, which is based on a sustainable policy. UIBM has officially approved quality assurance policy, which includes these documents: UIBM Statute, Regulation for quality assurance and assessment, Guide for Quality Assurance, Guide for ECTS, Document for the main performance indicators at the UIBM level and in each faculty, Package of instruments, Package of instruments for measuring quality from the project "Towards a system oriented towards quality of training of new teachers in Kosovo" (QATEK).

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The policy of quality assurance is foreseen in the Strategic Plan of UIBM 2022-2025. Strategic Objective 4: Quality development contains specific objectives for strengthening the quality assurance system; Monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement of study programs; raising the quality culture; Advancement of internal quality assurance and accreditation and external quality. Within these specific sub-objectives, more than 30 specific activities are planned to be developed, for which the time period, responsibilities and all the individuals and units involved in these processes, the indicators and the relevant budget have been specifically defined. The sustainability of the budget allocated for these activities, in the next three years, is a clear indicator of the sustainability of the system.

The activities of the strategic Plan 22-25 are also broken down into the work plans of the academic units and the quality office in the rector's, ensuring the function of the system and the cycle and strengthening the quality culture in all the activities of the academic life at UIBM. All these documents are published on the website of the academic units and UIBM, and with the publication on the web, the notification and the document are automatically sent to the email of all academic personnel, students, administrative personnel, and decision-making bodies in UIBM as well as the Advisory Board. According to the Strategic Plan of UIBM, the strategic objective for quality assurance is Quality Development. This strategic objective includes the following specific objectives:

1. Strengthening the quality assurance system at UIBM;
2. Monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement of the quality culture;
3. Raising the culture of quality at UIBM;
4. Advancement of internal quality assurance;
5. Accreditation and external quality.

During the first year of the QASURE project, several key documents were developed, including a Benchmarking system for UIBM; the Action and Sustainability Plan for Quality Assurance, the Financial Sustainability Plan for Implementing the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. The package of quality measurement instruments has also been reviewed and enhanced. The improvement plan for this academic year outlines activities to be undertaken, building on previous developments and focusing on continuous improvement and the internalization of quality processes at UIBM. <https://www.umib.net/en/quality-assurance-office/>

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5.2.2 Action and Sustainability Plan

Another crucial document to be updated and consolidated for each WB HEI involved in the consortium is the Action and Sustainability Plan for QA consolidation. All partners have worked on this document and already implemented it in their institutions. For details, please refer to Deliverable 3.2 Action and Sustainability Plan. Briefly, the new Action and Sustainability Plan of each HEI is described below:

★ **Luarasi University**

Luarasi has updated the Action and Sustainability Plan (D 3.2). The Action and Sustainability Plan at Luarasi University will focus on the following areas:

- a) Quality Assurance and Enhancement;
- b) Curriculum Development and Innovation;
- c) Faculty Development and Training;
- d) Student Engagement and Support;
- e) Infrastructure and Technological Advancement;
- f) International Collaboration and Networking.

★ **POLIS University**

U_POLIS has updated the Action and Sustainability Plan (D 3.2), together with The Financial Sustainability Plan (FSP) for Quality Assurance of POLIS University is a key document for the Quality Assurance Unit to ensure that we can support and deliver aims and objectives. Clear goals, timelines and accountability measures will shape how new resources of revenue are sought within the university for quality purposes. A Financial Sustainability Plan (FSP) for Quality Assurance is to support the strategic plan's other initiatives by providing valuable information about the financial implications of decisions. By so doing, the University will be in a stronger position to make realistic, mission-driven decisions.

★ **IBC-M**

IBC-M has updated the Action and Sustainability Plan (D3.2). Public International Business College Mitrovica (IBCM), we are committed to upholding the highest standards of teaching, learning, and research through a robust implementation of quality assurance measures.

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Recognizing the critical importance of financial stewardship in supporting these standards, we have developed a comprehensive financial sustainability plan. This plan outlines strategic budgeting, resource allocation, and diversified funding initiatives essential for sustaining and enhancing our quality assurance activities over the long term. It is designed to ensure that our commitment to educational excellence is both achievable and continuously improved upon.

★ **University of Isa Boletini Mitrovica**

University of Isa Boletini Mitrovica has updated the Action and Sustainability Plan (D 3.2), together with The Financial Sustainability Plan (FSP). As supplementary documents to those currently approved by UIBM, these additions reinforce the commitment to undertake activities directly related to quality assurance. By clearly defining specific activities, UIBM can effectively establish its priorities. The successful implementation of these activities is closely tied to the success of ongoing programs, the development of new programs that meet current requirements, and the enhancement of quality in both teaching and learning, as well as in scientific research. Their budgeting, deadlines and the clear assignment of responsibilities ensure an impact on the growth of the quality culture in general at UIBM.

5.2.3 Modernizing of QA manuals

★ **Luarasi University**

Luarasi have recently completed the development and update of key quality assurance documents, including two new documents and updating one existing document, as follows:

New Documents:

- **Quality Assurance Policies:** This document sets forth the fundamental policies that will guide all quality assurance processes within the institution. It establishes the principles, objectives, and standards that align with both national and European quality frameworks to ensure ongoing alignment with higher education quality standards.
- **Quality Assurance Plan:** The plan details the strategies and processes for implementing quality assurance measures. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, including students, faculty, and external

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partners, to promote comprehensive engagement in quality enhancement initiatives.

Updated Document:

- **Quality Assurance Manual:** The manual has been updated to include new elements reflecting the latest standards in quality assurance. It provides a structured framework for self-assessment, internal audits, and continuous improvement processes across all academic and administrative units within the university.

The recent updates to the **Quality Assurance Manual** bring a deeper level of detail, structure, and accountability to our university's quality assurance processes. These improvements aim to enhance oversight, introduce new performance evaluation tools, and foster a collaborative culture in academic program development. Key updates include:

1. **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):**

- Newly incorporated KPIs target specific quality metrics for teaching effectiveness, learning outcomes, and administrative performance. These indicators provide clear benchmarks aligned with European standards, facilitating regular assessments and fostering continuous improvement.

2. **Structured Roles and Responsibilities:**

- Clearer definitions and structured responsibilities have been established for internal quality assurance stakeholders, including academic and administrative staff, quality assurance committees, and faculty members. This refinement promotes cohesive application of quality standards across the institution.

3. **Engagement of External Stakeholders in Program Development:**

- External stakeholders such as industry representatives and other partners are now integrated into the program development process. Their input ensures that new programs align with labor market needs and enhance graduate employability.

4. **Detailed Timeline and Procedures for Program Quality Review:**

- The manual now provides a structured timeline and procedures for quality reviews of academic programs, including steps for new program approvals and periodic evaluations. This clarity ensures that programs remain relevant, competitive, and aligned with educational and professional standards.

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5. New Performance Evaluation Instruments for Academic Personnel:

- The introduction of peer review as a formal evaluation instrument offers a comprehensive approach to assessing academic performance. This instrument complements existing evaluation tools and supports professional growth among faculty through constructive feedback.

6. Approval by the Academic Senate:

- The Academic Senate now oversees the formal approval of the evaluation instrument package. This step ensures a unified, institution-wide approach to performance evaluations, enhancing accountability and consistency in quality standards.

★ **POLIS University**

The modernization of QA Manual of POLIS University consists in two main directions:

1. Annual Program Monitoring and Review (APMR)

Annual Programme Monitoring and Review (APMR) is the process whereby courses, syllabi, and programme regulations are reviewed through self-evaluation and peer review. It is designed to give the University confidence in the ongoing standards, the coherence and relevance of a course's/module's provision and that all students achieve their intended learning outcomes. This procedure adheres to the Albanian Higher Education Quality Code and the European Standard and Guidelines (ESG) provisions. The opportunity to periodically reflect on students' achievements and academic experience, academic standards, and the coherence and relevance as key for the institution's quality assurance and programme enhancement processes and ensuring that programmes provide a high-quality academic experience and successfully facilitate further study and professional employment. APMR is undertaken by the responsible department and faculty, internal and external academics, student representatives, and external stakeholders and is chaired by the Curricula Revision Committee.

2. Program Modification Process (PMP)

Program modification should be undertaken as part of the Program Monitoring and Review Process (PMRP) so that the modification may draw on the self-reflection and scrutiny process

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associated with that procedure. Faculties should seek to modify their program in the interests of:

- a. the student's academic experience;
- b. preserving of academic standards;
- c. statutory or regulatory bodies requirements;
- d. developments in the relevant academic or professional field in line with legislation.

Program modification should occur every six (6) years at the end of each year of the accreditation period. This process adheres to the Albanian Higher Education Quality Code and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) provisions.

★ IBC-M

The Quality Assurance (QA) Manual at IBCM has recently undergone a thorough revision, receiving approval from the IBCM Academic Council. This update reflects IBCM's commitment to continuous improvement in quality management, aligning institutional processes with evolving standards and best practices in higher education. The revised manual introduces new sections, guidelines, and instructions designed to strengthen the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) processes at IBCM. These additions support a more cohesive and structured approach to quality management across all academic and administrative units, promoting transparency and accountability at every level.

Among the new sections, the manual now includes detailed protocols for working with and collecting data from external stakeholders, including industry partners, governmental bodies, and academic institutions. This addition aims to build a more robust framework for capturing and integrating external feedback into our quality processes, helping to ensure that IBCM remains responsive to the needs and expectations of its partners. The manual outlines methods for systematic data collection, enabling IBCM to leverage insights from stakeholders for program development, curriculum design, and the alignment of graduate skills with market demands.

Furthermore, the manual enhances procedures for tracking and collecting feedback from international partners, highlighting the importance of internationalization in the institution's quality strategy. By focusing on the impact of global engagement, IBCM aims to enrich the educational experience for students and staff alike, fostering a culture of diversity and cross-cultural understanding. These new guidelines ensure that international collaborations

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contribute directly to quality improvement initiatives, further embedding internationalization as a core component of the institution's mission and values.

★ **University of Isa Boletini Mitrovica**

The quality assurance manual at UIBM has been enhanced and supplemented with three additional documents. The improvements include detailed procedures for program revision, outlined in a relevant document available on the UIBM website. Another enhancement focuses on the syllabus review process, for which the document "Guidelines for Designing and Reviewing Syllabuses" has been created.

Significant attention was also given to revising the document titled "Assessment of Learning Outcomes - Guideline." A key component of the manual is the new document "Guidelines for Program Development, Implementation, and Evaluation Process." This guide provides comprehensive information on the mechanisms for developing academic programs, including key principles of program design, development, approval, and review. It also outlines the responsibilities of academic units in these processes, the program lifecycle, procedures for suspending or withdrawing a study program, and the quality review process.

The review of the package of instruments for quality assurance was also done, as well as the analysis of the data collected by KPI at the level of academic units. Completed KPI and related reports are part of the planning process of program improvement at the faculty level.

5.2.4 Equipment purchase and tendering procedure

In line with WP3, which focuses on enhancing infrastructure at five Western Balkans Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and updating existing quality assurance (QA) mechanisms at these universities, all partners are in the process of acquiring the required equipment as outlined in the QA-SURE project.

★ **Western Balkans University**

Western Balkans University (WBU) adhered to all tendering procedures as required by national legislation, under the supervision of the **Albanian Public Procurement Agency (APPA)**.

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Preparation and Tender Announcement

The process began with a request from the project coordinator to the Rectorate to initiate the tender. The WBU Administrator ordered the formation of a working group tasked with drafting the technical specifications and setting the budget limit for the procurement. A procurement order was subsequently created based on these requirements. The Procurement Office prepared the necessary tender documents in accordance with APPA procurement regulations. The call for tender was opened for a period of one month, allowing interested operators to submit their bids.

Evaluation Process

After the tender closed, a second working group was formed to evaluate the operators' bids over a period of 10 days. In line with transparent procurement processes, they evaluated at least three offers. However, all three offers exceeded the budget limit set in the project proposal. In response, the **Operator Evaluating Committee (OEC)** decided to proceed with purchasing the **Turnitin license** directly from the vendor, while obtaining the other two licenses from different operators. To maintain transparency, a one-week period was provided for any appeals from competing operators. After addressing potential concerns, a second procurement order was issued based on revised budget and requirements. The Procurement Office prepared a new set of tender documents, again following APPA regulations, and the second tender call was opened for one month. Upon the conclusion of the second open call, the OEC decided to purchase the **Turnitin license** directly from Turnitin and the remaining two licenses from **Master IT**.

Contract and Delivery

The winning operator was officially notified of the decision, and a contract was prepared and signed between WBU and the operator. A group was formed to oversee the delivery and inspection of the equipment provided. Once received, the equipment was registered into the university's inventory. This process ensured compliance with national procurement laws and maintained transparency throughout the tendering and evaluation stages.

★ Luarasi University

The procurement of laptops and the CALMS software is essential for improving quality assurance at the Luarasi University as part of the QA-SURE project. The laptops, distributed among personnel working with quality assurance, allow staff to manage quality-related processes more efficiently by enabling remote access to academic systems and real-time

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monitoring of institutional performance. This facilitates data-driven decision-making, enhances collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, and ensures compliance with quality standards such as the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The CALMS software, in turn, integrates course management, assessments, and administrative processes, providing a comprehensive platform that supports continuous monitoring, reporting, and improvement of academic quality. Together, these tools enhance transparency, accountability, and the institution's readiness for external accreditation and benchmarking, ultimately supporting the university's goals of maintaining high standards of education.

Procurement Process

The procurement followed a formal process approved by the university boards, complying with Erasmus+ regulations. Both tenders were released with detailed technical and financial criteria for potential vendors:

- **For laptops:** The primary criterion was cost-effectiveness within the Erasmus+ project budget while ensuring compatibility with the university's digital needs.
- **For software:** Vendors were required to provide detailed technical proposals that aligned with the specific functionalities needed for CALMS, including integration and ongoing support.

Evaluation and Selection

Procurement committees for both the laptops and software were tasked with:

- Reviewing bids based on technical specifications
- Ensuring alignment with Erasmus+ principles for transparent and competitive processes.

★ POLIS University

In the framework of ERASMUS CBHE Project: Improving University Quality Assurance Resilient Strategies Toward Excellence / QA-SURE, with reference publication: QA-SURE 101129398, Polis University has done improvements regarding digitalization in two directions as mentioned above:

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- **“Software system to enhance the Quality Assurance processes necessary for increasing infrastructure at POLIS University”** that will help tracking and generating reports for Scientific Research and updating the existing QA-related mechanisms. The software system is going to contribute to ensuring better preparation and inclusiveness of administrative and academic products within the University, especially when it comes to service and study product design. The purchasing of this software is necessary for updating study programs aiming to be based on the fit-for-purpose concept and employment, which will also enable the University to prepare for international accreditation procedures as a tool to further improve themselves within the European perspective.
- **“Laptops that will be used for the installation of the software system, a system that will improve the quality assurance processes needed to increase the infrastructure at POLIS University”**. The laptops are going to contribute to ensuring better preparation and inclusiveness of administrative and academic products within the University, especially when it comes to service and study product design. These laptops are necessary for updating study programs aiming to be based on the fit-for-purpose concept and employment, which will also enable the University to prepare for international accreditation procedures as a tool to further improve themselves within the European perspective.

Winner selection/ Evaluation/ Announcement

<https://universitipolis.edu.al/invitation-to-tender-for-purchase-of-software-system-to-enhance-the-quality-assurance-processes-necessary-for-increasing-infrastructure-at-polis-university/>

<https://universitipolis.edu.al/en/invitation-to-tender-for-purchase-of-laptops-that-will-be-used-for-the-installation-of-the-software-system-a-system-that-will-improve-the-quality-assurance-processes-needed-to-increase-the-inf/>

An evaluation committee of three persons has been set up to evaluate the offers of this tender.

- The opening of the Tender for Laptops was done on 14.08.2024, at 11:00, on the premises of POLIS University.
- The opening of the Tender for the Software was done on 30.05.2024, at 11:00, on the premises of POLIS University.

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The Evaluation Committee used the administrative compliance grid included in the tender dossier to assess the compliance of each of the tenders with the administrative requirements of the tender dossier.

Signature of the Contract

- The contract for the laptops between POLIS University and iTeam sh.p.k was signed on 28.08.2024.
- The contract for the software between POLIS University and RASH was signed on 17.06.2024.

★ IBC-M

Due to an organizational transformation of IBCM in 2024, where the college moved from a private system to a state financed system (becoming a public institution under the Kosovo Law on Higher Education). Initially this posed some challenges regarding the initiating of the tendering procedures due to the need for a new registration under the public procurement system, and unfortunately resulted in some delays. Ultimately however, IBCM was able to complete all planned procurement procedures within the newly set deadline. The procurement of the equipment and software was completed in October 2024, and included a purchase of hardware equipment (Laptops and SmartScreen), as well as, a new plagiarism system. Attached to this report is the documentation regarding the preparation of the tendering procedure.

The recent acquisition of laptops, a smart screen, and plagiarism detection software under the project initiative is intended to enhance the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the Quality Assurance (QA) Office at IBCM. The laptops and smart screen will enable QA staff to streamline workflows, facilitate data collection and analysis, and improve collaboration within the office and with external stakeholders during presentations, workshops, and training sessions. The plagiarism detection software, on the other hand, supports academic integrity by enabling faculty and QA staff to assess and maintain originality in student work, ensuring that the institution upholds rigorous standards in line with international academic practices. These tools together equip the QA Office with essential resources to maintain high-quality education and institutional accountability. The laptops have been distributed to key staff of the college for QA processes, such as, the vice-rector of academic and quality affairs, QA Officer, deans of faculties, as well as, administration staff.

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★ **University Isa Boletini Mitrovica**

Tender Preparation and Announcement: The project coordinator at UIBM initiated the tender process by submitting a request to the procurement office. The office then prepared the necessary tender documents, and a public call for tenders was officially opened.

Process Overview: Following the tender closing, specific committees were established, including the evaluation commission, acceptance commission, contract manager, and supervisor, all appointed through decisions from the UIBM general secretary's office. The evaluation was conducted within the designated timeframes, and all deadlines for appeals were adhered to.

Contract and Delivery: The winning bidder was officially notified of the decision, and preparations for the contract between UIBM and the operator commenced. The relevant commissions accepted the equipment, which was verified by members of the acceptance commission. After confirming the functionality of the devices, they were registered in the university's inventory. The laptops were subsequently distributed to members of the central office for quality assurance and other university staff involved in quality processes at the academic unit level.

The entire process was conducted transparently and in full compliance with the relevant legislation in both UIBM and Kosovo. Documentation for the Equipment purchase and tendering procedure at UIBM:

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/13f-1e2Nv8ZcW0GpmBC5K5Gi2bDKul_yX

The acquisition of the AI checker and laptops through the QASURE project is expected to enhance the efficiency of not only the Quality Assurance Office (QA) at UBM but also other administrative and academic staff in academic units directly involved in quality improvement efforts within the faculties.

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6. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and metrics

To effectively monitor the impact of the activities related to developing and enhancing Quality Assurance (QA) strategies, action plans, and related processes, the following table shows Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and metrics that can be used:

KPI Category	Metric	Description	Data Collection	Implementation	Monitoring	Outcome
Developing QA Strategies, Action Plans, and Job Descriptions	Completion Rate	% of QA strategies developed and approved	Strategy development reports	All partner institutions	Monthly progress reports	QA strategies implemented effectively
	Quality of Action Plans	Evaluation scores from reviews	Peer reviews and stakeholder surveys	QA teams at each university	Bi-annual reviews	High-quality action plans
	Job Description Alignment	% of job descriptions aligned with QA policies	HR and QA records	HR departments	Annual assessments	Clear roles and responsibilities
Elaborating and Adopting University Strategies for QA Development	Adoption Rate	% of institutions adopting new QA strategies	Adoption reports from universities	QA Offices/Units and institutional leadership	Quarterly reports	Consistent QA practices across institutions
	Strategy Integration	Degree of alignment with institutional goals	Strategy documents and institutional plans	Strategic planning teams	Annual strategy review	QA strategies support institutional goals
	Stakeholder Engagement	Number of stakeholder consultations	Consultation logs	QA Offices/Units and stakeholder committees	Monthly stakeholder meetings	Inclusive QA strategies

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Modernizing QA Manuals for Each Partner University	Manual Update Frequency	Frequency of QA manual reviews and updates	Review schedules and update logs	QA Offices/Units	Annual manual review	Up-to-date QA manuals
	Compliance Rate	% of processes compliant with updated QA manuals	Internal audits	Compliance officers	Annual compliance checks	Full compliance with updated standards
	User Satisfaction	Survey results on satisfaction with QA manuals	Staff and faculty surveys	QA Offices/Units and HR departments	Bi-annual surveys	High satisfaction with QA manuals
Improving Action Plans for Further QA Consolidation	Action Plan Implementation Rate	% of actions completed on time	Implementation logs and timelines	QA teams	Monthly progress tracking	Timely implementation of action plans
	Impact Assessment	QA outcomes (accreditation results, student satisfaction)	Accreditation reports, student surveys	QA Offices/Units	Annual impact assessments	Improved QA outcomes
	Review Cycle Efficiency	Time reduction in the review cycle	Review cycle data	QA teams	Quarterly efficiency analysis	Faster and more efficient reviews
	Resource Allocation	Budget adherence and resource utilization rates	Financial reports and resource allocation logs	Finance and QA teams	Quarterly financial reviews	Efficient resource use
Procuring Equipment Necessary to Perform All Expected Activities	Procurement Timeliness	% of equipment procured and operational within a timeline	Procurement records and timelines	Procurement departments	Monthly procurement reports	Equipment procured on time
	Equipment Utilization Rate	Extent of effective use in QA processes	Usage logs and QA process evaluations	QA Offices/Units and IT departments	Bi-annual usage evaluations	High utilization of new equipment

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	Impact on QA Processes	Improvement in outcomes (data accuracy, process speed)	QA process metrics and outcome reports	QA teams and institutional leadership	Annual impact analysis	Enhanced QA process effectiveness
	Stakeholder Feedback	Feedback from faculty, staff, and students on the new equipment	Stakeholder surveys and feedback sessions	QA Offices/Units and stakeholder committees	Quarterly feedback collection	Positive stakeholder engagement

The table provides a detailed framework for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of quality assurance (QA) activities within higher education institutions (HEIs), aligning with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). It includes key performance indicators (KPIs) and metrics for assessing progress in areas such as developing QA strategies, action plans, job descriptions, modernizing QA manuals, and procuring necessary equipment. Each KPI category, such as QA Strategy Development and Equipment Procurement, is paired with specific metrics to track progress, set targets, and collect data. This systematic approach ensures that QA processes support institutional goals and adhere to ESG requirements by fostering alignment with strategic objectives, enhancing transparency, and promoting continuous improvement. By closely monitoring these metrics, HEIs can effectively implement and refine their QA Offices/Units, demonstrating their commitment to maintaining high academic standards and meeting the expectations set out in the ESG.

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7. Follow up

The WB HEIs are currently developing the D3.3 Report on Quality Assurance Mechanisms. This report evaluates current QA practices and proposes improvements across the participating institutions. It assesses the effectiveness of existing procedures, identifies any gaps, and offers recommendations for strengthening quality assurance systems. The report is essential for ensuring that QA mechanisms are both effective and aligned with best practices.

Training of QA, administrative and academic staff (>150), as well as students (>50), 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.

- Training for academic staff from Republic of Kosovo and Albania in August 2024 in Albania
- Training for academic staff from Republic of Kosovo and Albania in October 2024 in Republic of Kosovo
- Student Training in Albania in August 2024
- Student Training in Republic of Kosovo in August 2024
- Student Training in Albania in October 2024
- Student Training in Republic of Kosovo in October 2024
- Administrative Training for administrative staff from the Republic of Kosovo and Albania in August 2024 in Republic of Kosovo
- Administrative Training for administrative staff from the Republic of Kosovo and Albania in August 2024 in Albania
- External Stakeholders Roundtable in October 2024; Albania
- External Stakeholders Roundtable in October 2024; Republic of Kosovo

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8. Conclusions

The "Establishment/Enhancement of Internal Quality Assurance Offices/Units" report provides a comprehensive overview of the progress and challenges faced by the Western Balkans Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in establishing and enhancing their Quality Assurance (QA) processes. The initiatives outlined in this report underscore the critical importance of robust QA mechanisms to align with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) standards and improve academic and administrative excellence.

The main points concluded in this deliverable are:

1. **Successful Establishment and Enhancement of QA Offices/Units:** The project has successfully facilitated the establishment of a new QA Unit at Western Balkans University (WBU) and enhanced the existing QA Offices/Units at U_POLIS, LU, UIBM, and IBCM. These efforts have strengthened the capacity of these institutions to maintain high standards of education and align more closely with the ESG (European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance).
2. **Alignment with International Standards:** All participating institutions have made significant strides in aligning their QA practices with international standards, particularly the ESG 2015. This alignment is essential for fostering international cooperation, mobility, and recognition of qualifications across borders.
3. **Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement:** A major accomplishment of this project is the increased engagement of internal and external stakeholders, including students, faculty, and industry partners. This engagement has been critical in ensuring that QA processes are transparent, inclusive, and reflective of diverse perspectives.
4. **Capacity Building and Training:** The project has prioritized capacity building by organizing extensive training sessions for academic and administrative staff, as well as students. These sessions have been instrumental in enhancing the understanding and implementation of QA processes and promoting a culture of continuous improvement.
5. **Innovative Approaches and Digitalization:** The integration of digital tools and innovative practices has been a key focus area. These advancements have not only improved the efficiency and effectiveness of QA processes but also supported the broader institutional goals of modernization and digital transformation.

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The following table³ illustrates the baseline values derived from the prior needs analysis for partner HEIs in the Western Balkans (WB) region, along with the target values set for the project and achieved results after the WP3 has completed as explained in the report and especially detailed on section 5 “Implementation plan” of this report. This data highlights the initial status, the goals and improvements of the Quality Assurance (QA) processes across the participating institutions.

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Baseline Value</i>	<i>Target Value</i>	<i>Achieved results</i>
No. of QA units from each university involved in the project	4	5	5
No. of staff from each university engaged in QA	15-20	25-30	25
No. of students from each university engaged in QA	5	10	10
No. of universities with capacity building on QA processes	4	5	5
No. of action plans for supporting HEI processes of QA in teaching, learning, and administration	0	5	5
Level of training for designing study programs and action plans within HEIs	0	5	5
Level of coordination of participating HEIs in preparation for international institutional collaborations	0	5	5
No. of policies and associated methodologies for strategies on internal quality assurance within HEIs	2	10-12	10

Insights and Recommendations

1. **Continuous Improvement and Adaptability:** The dynamic nature of higher education necessitates that QA frameworks remain adaptable to evolving educational models and practices. HEIs should continue to refine their QA processes to meet emerging challenges and opportunities, leveraging digital tools and stakeholder feedback.
2. **Sustained Engagement with Stakeholders:** Ongoing dialogue with stakeholders is vital for the sustained success of QA initiatives. HEIs should establish regular forums for

³ **Note:** The data presented pertains exclusively to the partner HEIs from the WB region.

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feedback and consultation, ensuring that the perspectives of all stakeholders are integrated into QA practices.

3. **Focus on International Collaboration:** As HEIs continue to integrate into the EHEA, fostering international collaborations through joint programs and shared QA practices will be crucial. This collaboration not only enhances educational quality but also promotes a cohesive and interconnected higher education landscape.
4. **Strategic Alignment with Institutional Goals:** QA activities should be strategically aligned with the overall goals of each institution. This alignment ensures that QA processes are not just compliance-driven but also contribute to the institution's mission and long-term vision.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regular monitoring and evaluation of QA processes are essential to identify gaps and areas for improvement. HEIs should implement robust mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of their QA Offices/Units and use these insights to drive continuous enhancement.

In conclusion, the establishment and enhancement of QA Offices/Units within the Western Balkans HEIs have been pivotal in fostering a culture of quality, transparency, and accountability. As these institutions continue to evolve, maintaining a focus on quality assurance will be crucial in achieving academic excellence and operational efficiency, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of the European Higher Education Area.

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