INCREASING STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES IN KOSOVO

Research Report

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Project Background

Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) has successfully secured the support of the U.S Embassy in Kosovo for funding of the project *Increasing student participation in internal and external quality assurance processes in Kosovo*. The aim of the project is to encourage student participation in activities related to quality assurance which in turn contributes to the improvement of the teaching and the learning process. According to the project, increasing student's involvement in QA will promote the alignment of the Kosovar higher education sector with the EHEA countries and thus guarantee a participatory design and implementation of the learning process. Hence, increased awareness and involvement of students in internal QA processes, will facilitate student's involvement in external QA which will contribute to the fulfillment of KAA Strategic Plan and ENQA recommendations.

The goals of the project were defined as follows:
1. To increase awareness of students about the importance of student's involvement in internal QA processes;
2. To encourage and support Higher Education Institutions to actively involve students in QA processes;
3. To support the implementation of KAA Strategic Plan with respect to student's involvement in external quality assurance

The present document aims to provide the background, drawn from both theory and practice, grounding the *Guidelines for student engagement in internal and external quality assurance of Kosovo Higher Education*. In doing so, the present research report is based on an international benchmarking analysis of best practice in Europe, a national diagnosis assessment of the KAA accreditation reports and the legal requirements in place, as well as a national survey conducted amongst more than 1000 students from both public and private Kosovar higher education institutions (HEIs).

For the purposes of achieving the goals, a team of experts, both national and international, was contracted.

Anca Prisacariu holds a PhD in Educational Sciences from the University of Bucharest, Romania and was a Research Fellow within the Institute of Behavioral Sciences at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research preoccupations are around the quality assurance of higher education, focusing on enhancement-led systems and processes.
Apart from her studies, she has broad working experience with international organizations for higher education and acts as an expert for more than 30 national quality assurance agencies across Europe and outside of it. From these positions, she has been part of numerous review panels at study programme, institutional and quality assurance agency level. Her consultancy roles in different countries have given Anca extensive experience and expertise in quality assurance, regulation, the development and review of standards frameworks.
Her activity as Advisor to the Minister of Education in Romania has added up experience in formulating, reviewing and implementing policies on higher education at the national level. Her positions as Head of Quality Assurance at Wintec Saudi Arabia and, subsequently, Director of Quality Assurance at the African Leadership University in Mauritius and Rwanda, added to Anca's background expertise in vocational education and training, as well as in the development of internal quality management frameworks,

coordination of the policy-making and revision, monitoring and performance management of the strategic and operational plans, and ensuring institutional compliance in external accountability processes.

Anca was herself a student representative in the Faculty Council and University Senate and also served as Academic Affairs Officer of the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR) for two mandates during her studies; this background adds to her expertise topics like the Bologna Process, student centered learning, equity, equality and the social dimension of higher education, student engagement, and representation.

Furtuna Mehmeti has been working in the field of quality assurance in higher education, both internal and external quality assurance for 10 years. In the last 6 years she has actively been part of working groups at the policy level for drafting and reviewing quality assurance legislation, policies and other regulations related to higher education in Kosovo, and specifically quality assurance. She has worked at the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) for 5 years, of which she served as the Acting Director for three years. Currently she works in the Quality Assurance Office at AAB College and in addition she serves as national expert for several international projects in Kosovo which deal with Higher Education and quality assurance. She is currently undertaking her PhD studies at the Faculty of Education of University of Ljubljana and her research work deals with the impacts of the accreditation process in the strategic planning of HEIs.

Majlinda Mazelliu has been working in the education sector and quality assurance for upper secondary schools and higher education for 17 years. For three years and a half, she has been working with the British Council Kosovo, as National Coordinator of the 21st Century Schools project, aiming at improving the education system with focus on primary and lower secondary schools in Kosovo. She is an activist and board member of different Non-governmental organizations and private schools in Kosovo, aiming at supporting girls and women's education and realization of their full potential. She is a dedicated, resourceful and enthusiastic person and a researcher on education, economics and entrepreneurship.

Her executive and consultant roles in different donor funded projects in Kosovo, and the region, for advancement of education system, have given Majlinda an extensive expertise in strategic planning of education institutions, quality assurance in higher education, regulations, scientific research and analysis.

Majlinda holds a Master's Degree in Business Administration – MBA from Staffordshire University, UK and a bachelor degree in English Teaching for High Schools, from the University of Tirana, and is certified in a number of trainings and development programs in Strategic Planning and Fundraising (from the Forum for Civic Society in Kosovo), Good Governance and Leadership (grantee of Hope Fellowship Program, National Albanian-American Council), Women in Leadership (from National Democratic Institute in Kosovo), Entrepreneurship and Local Economic Development (TEMPUS programme - the University of Prishtina and AAB Riinvest).

Aleksandar Šušnjar is an expert associate at the Centre for Quality Assurance and Enhancement and a PhD student in Philosophy at the University of Rijeka (Croatia), where he also received his masters' degree in Philosophy and English language and literature. During his studies, Aleksandar was active in numerous student organizations and representation bodies at different levels, including serving as a president of the Croatian

Students' Council, an Executive Committee member of the European Students' Union (ESU) and a Steering Committee member of the Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool. Aleksandar is also a certified expert in external evaluation of quality assurance systems of the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education and has participated as a reviewer in over 15 national institutional reviews, international institutional and agency reviews, and thematic international evaluations on the topic of student-centered learning. Since 2021, he is a member of the Register Committee of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Aleksandar is currently an Institutional Coordinator of the University of Rijeka for involvement in one of the European Universities initiatives – Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE).

Introduction

In 1998, the *Recommendation on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education* (EU 1998) drafted by the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament brought a major wave of European Countries that are setting up quality assurance systems in all higher education institutions, based on the following features:
- to safeguard the quality of higher education within the specific economic, social and cultural context of their countries while taking due account of the European dimension and of a rapidly changing world;
- to encourage and help higher education institutions to use appropriate measures, particularly quality assurance, as a means of improving the quality of teaching and learning and also training for research, another important part of their task;
- to stimulate mutual exchanges of information on quality and quality assurance at Community and world level and to encourage cooperation between higher education institutions in this area.

This was, in fact, the first major policy document that brought quality assurance on the public agenda before it was introduced as an action line of the Bologna Process. Likewise, this was the first policy document that mentions *the involvement of the different parties concerned according to the purpose of the quality assurance* as one of the features the new systems of quality assurance should be based on. At the same time, this was the first reference in European policy of what we today call *stakeholder engagement*.

Subsequently, the Communiqués of the Ministers of Education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), initially referred to as the Bologna Process, have increasingly made commitments for student engagement determining therefore a major wave of European Countries that are scaling up student engagement in higher education generally, but also in quality assurance (QA) in particular.

Kosovo has restructured its education system according to Bologna principles and has, as all countries in Europe, developed a national quality assurance system. Kosovo higher education aims its integration to the European Higher Education Area and all stakeholders actively seek to be engaged in activities which contribute to this end. However, there is a continuous need to assess whether the system is being implemented according to the principles and values which have shaped the European higher education area where Kosovo aims to be integrated.

In principle, the higher education system promotes student-centered learning and takes into account the needs, requirements and feedback of students at every stage of the

learning process; however, at a closer look, neither the legislative framework, nor the actual practice are providing for an acknowledgement of students as real partners in the development of higher education generally and in quality assurance specifically.

In 2021, the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kosovo issued a *Platform for the Recovery of Kosovo Education*, which considers students to be as one of the main politicized stakeholders of higher education in Kosovo. According to this report, students serve a variety of interests, mainly to the interests of political parties and clans, who do not react when quality in higher education is impaired. Further, students' representatives are accused of allegedly being responsible for violating the provisions of the Statutes of public universities in order to gain personal benefits and thus damage the quality of the education. Through this platform, the Academy of Sciences calls for a depolarisation of student organizations and for strict professional and ethical requirements when electing student representatives.

Student Participation and Engagement

Klemenčič (2015) has observed that student participation in higher education (HE) governance within the European Higher Education Area – be it in formal terms or according to actual influence – is arguably the most developed in the world. Since the establishment of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) in 2005, student involvement in quality processes has been viewed as integral and has become more widely adopted across Europe (HEA, 2016). The level of student involvement and engagement can, however, vary on a continuum from students being informed (low-impact) to having decision-making roles (high-impact) (ibid.). Whilst students are in the main included in mainstream quality assurance and enhancement processes, critics argue that their involvement is still predominantly driven by a student-as-consumer view, focused on inviting students to give feedback on their experiences and to respond to staff/institutional agendas (Harrison, 2018).

The European Students Union - ESU (2013) makes a conceptual distinction between involvement and engagement of students in quality assurance:
- Astin (1984) has described student involvement as the amount of physical and physiological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience, a definition referring to behavior and what students actually do rather than what they think or how they feel or the meanings they give to their experiences;
- Trowler and Trowler (2011) define student engagement as: the investment of time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and the performance and reputation of the institution. Furthermore, Kuh et al. (2007) described student engagement as the participation in educationally effective practices both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes. They also stated that student engagement represents two critical features: the time and effort students put into their studies and other educational purposeful activities; and how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities and support services to encourage students to participate in activities that lead to the experience-desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning and graduation.

Although student engagement and student involvement might seem to be the same, this is not the case. Although similar in meaning they have a qualitative difference between them. A student for instance might be involved but not actively engaged. The former refers to a situation whereby for example a student who runs for a role in an organization attends a meeting and follows the discussion. The latter refers to a student who runs for a role in an organization yet he attends meetings, voices his concerns and participates actively in the discussion (Kuh et al.2007).

ESU (2013) also explores the intrinsic motivation students usually have for getting involved in quality assurance, as it is the improvement of their own education through the enhancement of the study programmes and the institution in general. However, the idealism of improvement is not just about enhancing the study conditions, but also about increasing the perceived quality from outside stakeholders, that could lead to an added value of their degree award. Besides this, there are a variety of forms of defining and perceiving quality assurance, and meanings that students attach to it, which are very strongly correlated to students' motivation of engaging with it; the heterogeneity can be appreciated from the understanding of quality and the usefulness and/or purposes of QA to its mechanism.

With the purpose of bringing some light to these topics in preparation for the Ministerial Meeting of 2020, the European Students' Union distributed a questionnaire among its members, which are National Unions of Students (NUS) and investigated their perceptions regarding the notion of quality assurance. A summary of the results is reflected in the figure below (BWSE, 2020).

What is the purpose of Quality Assurance?
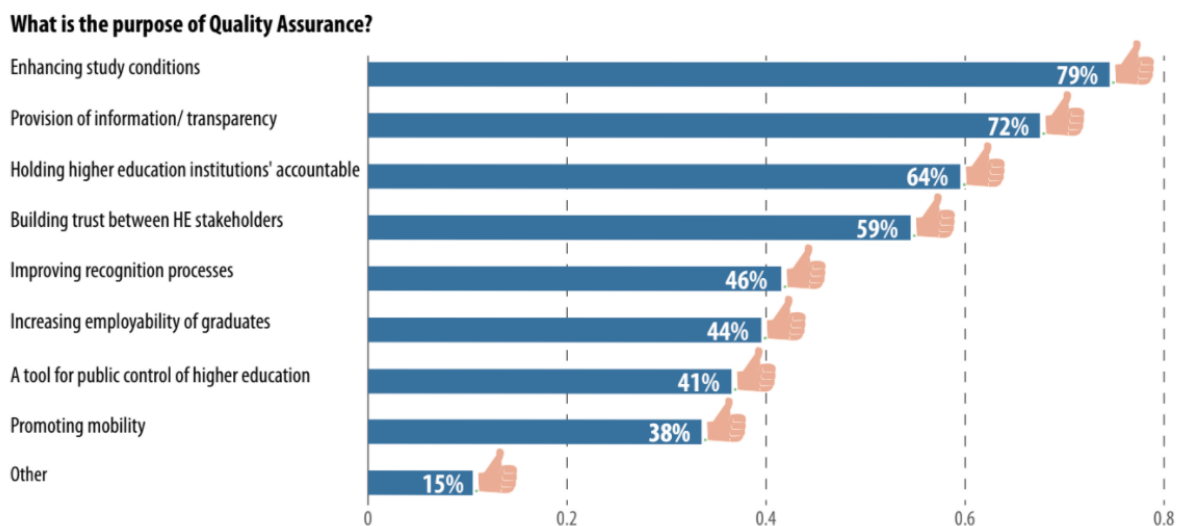
Student engagement culture is influenced by two competing ideological positions - the so-called market model that gives students the rights of the consumer, but also places them as outside purchasers of a future 'more-educated' version of themselves (HEA, 2010). In contrast, the developmental model identifies students as partners in a learning community that have both the rights and the responsibilities of citizens. The developmental model fosters a continuously evolving community with students contributing to the success of their institution as co-creators and democratic citizens of their own learning (Fielding, 2012).

Student engagement with all aspects of HEI life is now understood to be a two-way process (Klemenčič, 2015). Students need both the agentic possibility (power) and agentic orientation (will) to have meaningful engagement. While students are ultimately responsible for their own learning and level of engagement, student engagement is also dependent on institutions generating conditions, policies, and culture that enable and empower students to engage (Coates et al. 2014).

HEA (2016) presents the concept of student engagement as student involvement in decision-making processes in higher education institutions in relation to governance and management, quality assurance, and teaching and learning. The institution defines the concept of student engagement as: *The investment of time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and the performance and reputation of the institution.*

The same publication proceeds by defining three drivers of student engagement in higher education institutions, as follows:

The HEI as a site of democratic citizenship
Higher education plays an important role in building and maintaining democratic culture and democratic institutions. It is the responsibility of the institution from this perspective to foster a sense of civic responsibility in the student body. This is best done by institutional mechanisms which foster debate and enable participation in decision-making structures and processes.

The HEI as a learning community
Klemenčič argues that if genuine, conscientious students' engagement is to exist, 'students need to feel a certain degree of 'loyalty', defined as a strong feeling of allegiance and attachment to one's university or indeed to a collectivity or group of people within that university'. If such loyalty is fostered, students can voluntarily seek to improve structures within the institution for all students, present and future.

The HEI as a critical institution
Academic freedom is an essential principle of higher education institutions.Academic freedom guarantees the right to pursue knowledge without fear of sanction. Academics and universities have traditionally prided themselves on their ability, and duty, to speak truth to power. As key institutions in civil society, they are central to a culture of challenge, critique and free speech.

In its Student Union Development Handbook, the European Students Union (ESU) defines the pillars of the student movement which imply that, generally student engagement should be implemented as follows:
- independently - by the students themselves, without the involvement of the institution;
- openly - with all current students having the right to vote and be elected, regardless of their academic performance or any other discriminatory criteria;
- democratically - the representatives should be elected by all the students at the corresponding level – e.g. Students in the Academic Council to be elected by all the students at institutional level;
- with precise regulations that ensure the formality and transparency of the process – adopt a formal document (drafted by the students themselves) that provides the exact rights,

responsibilities and obligations for students' representatives, the length of the mandate for each position, mentions the exact percentage students have in all decision making bodies, etc.

Harrison (2018) presents the understanding of student as partner at the opposite end of the continuum where student as consumer is situated. This notion will be referred to later in this report.

Student-as-consumer	Student-as-participant	Student-as-collaborator	Student-as-partner
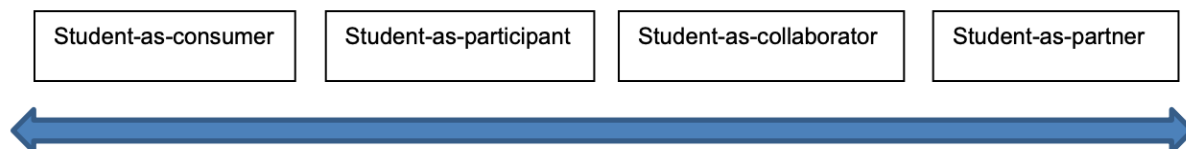
The Evolution of Quality Assurance and Student Engagement in European Policy

The roots of quality assurance as a notion can be traced back to the United States of America, where »under conditions which stimulated and permitted it, the roots of extensive accreditation and programme review schemes appeared« (Kells 1995a, 18). In Europe, the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands were the first countries to introduce different systems of quality assurance in the 1980s: in the British model, higher education institutions had control over quality, in the French-continental model the control over quality of higher education lied at government apparatus and ministries, through input (spending, enrolment requirements, opening and closing faculties, etc); process (content of curricula, content of examinations, etc); and output (state examinations), while the Netherlands borrowed heavily from the USA system (Westerheijden et al. 1994).

Starting with 1999, with the adoption of the Bologna declaration, *the promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies* has been defined as a priority. The subsequent Ministerial meetings have shaped the European quality assurance framework. In preparation for the meetings of the Ministers of Education for the Bologna Process signatory countries, ESIB and later on ESU was responsible of elaborating a publication called Bologna with Students Eyes (BWSE) that takes stock of progress against each action line through the eyes of the students, as observed usually through surveys conducted with the members of the organization.

The Prague Communiqué of European education ministers (2001) introduces quality as having a contribution to the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education. At the same meeting, the ministers described students as competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area.

In the Berlin Communiqué (2003) ministers commit themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They stress the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance (mandate the development of the ESG). They also stress that consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework. Lastly, they make the

commitment for the future that the evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results. Ministers note the constructive participation of student organizations in the Bologna Process and underline the necessity to include the students continuously and at an early stage in further activities. Students are full partners in higher education governance. Ministers note that national legal measures for ensuring student participation are largely in place throughout the European Higher Education Area. They also call on institutions and student organizations to identify ways of increasing actual student involvement in higher education governance.

With the occasion of the Bergen Ministerial Conference in 2005, the ESG were adopted. Since then a lot of the EHEA states have followed and implemented the ESG, introducing great reforms into their national quality assurance systems, even though not all of the standards or guidelines were fully implemented. The ESG contribute substantially to the enhancement of student engagement by introducing guidelines on two fronts: internally, higher education institutions are to develop policies and procedures for quality assurance and ensure they also include a role for students and other stakeholders; externally, the processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies were expected to include an external assessment by a group of experts that had as student members in their composition.
In preparation for the Bergen meeting, BWSE 2005 notes that only very few countries involve students in all steps and at all levels of quality assurance.

In 2007, the Ministers that met in London discussed the achievements until then and supported the creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) in the London Communiqué (2007). Under this mandate, EQAR has been established by the E4 Group. The European Students Union (ESU) is recognised as a partner in the E4 membership, as well as in the EQAR governance and management.
In preparation for the London meeting, BWSE 2007 notes that some progress has been made regarding the involvement of students in quality assurance; yet students are not involved in quality assurance activities at all levels in most countries of the EHEA, and they are not always recognised as full and equal partners.

In the Leuven-Louvain la Neuve Communique (2009), the ministers ask the higher education institutions to pay particular attention to improving the teaching quality of their study programmes at all levels, and define this as a priority in the further implementation of the ESG.
In preparation for the Leuven meeting, BWSE 2009 observes that the overall student participation in QA has progressed however there are serious gaps in terms of formal participation in decision-making processes and a rather unequal rate of participation in the different processes associated with QA across different countries. ESU concludes that in spite of students being accepted as a part of the follow up rather than technical processes, they still face reluctance towards their involvement in the decision-making process.

The Vienna-Budapest Communiqué (2010) has the ministers recognise that, in a unique partnership between public authorities, higher education institutions, students and staff, together with employers, quality assurance agencies, international organizations and European institutions, they have engaged in a series of reforms to build a European Higher Education Area based on trust, cooperation and respect for the diversity of cultures, languages, and higher education systems. The ministers also reaffirm their support for

staff and student participation in decision-making structures at European, national and institutional levels.

The Bucharest meeting in 2012 sees new horizons in the internationalization of quality assurance, with the ministers committing that they will allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements, and aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes. In the same Communiqué, the ministers state their commitment to supporting the engagement of students and staff in governance structures at all levels.

In preparation for the Bucharest meeting, BWSE 2012 observes that a high number of national students' unions consider that in their countries students are equal partners or the level of student participation in QA is high enough, but still some students' unions affirm that students do not participate or this participation is very limited. The rest consider that there is some participation, but far from being enough.

Later in 2015 the European Standards and Guidelines were revised and adopted at the Yerevan Ministerial Conference. At the same conference, the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was adopted as a policy measure. The ministers also commit their support and protection of students and staff in exercising their right to academic freedom and ensure their representation as full partners in the governance of autonomous higher education institutions, as well as to actively involve students, as full members of the academic community, as well as other stakeholders, in curriculum design and in quality assurance. The revised ESG continue to reaffirm the guidelines for students to be engaged in both quality assurance fronts: internally, higher education institutions are to ensure that within their policies and procedures for quality assurance departments, schools, faculties and other organizational units as well as those of institutional leadership, individual staff members and students take on their responsibilities in quality assurance; the document also recognises that at the core of external quality assurance is the wide range of expertise provided by peer experts, who contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners.

The Communique adopted in 2018 in Paris underlines three Key Commitments essential for the functioning of the EHEA: the Qualifications Frameworks and ECTS, the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Diploma Supplement, and Quality Assurance according to the ESG. In this context also an initiative on Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR) taken by the EQAR promotes usability and accessibility of QA results. The ministers also reaffirm academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education as the backbone of the EHEA.

In preparation for the Paris meeting, BWSE 2018 notes that there has been no significant progress in student participation in QA. The publication notes that the goal to ensure student representation as full partners in the governance of autonomous higher education institutions is still a long way from being achieved, as national governments should focus on genuine implementation of this commitment.

Through the Rome Communique (2020), the Ministers commit to upholding institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education - this is
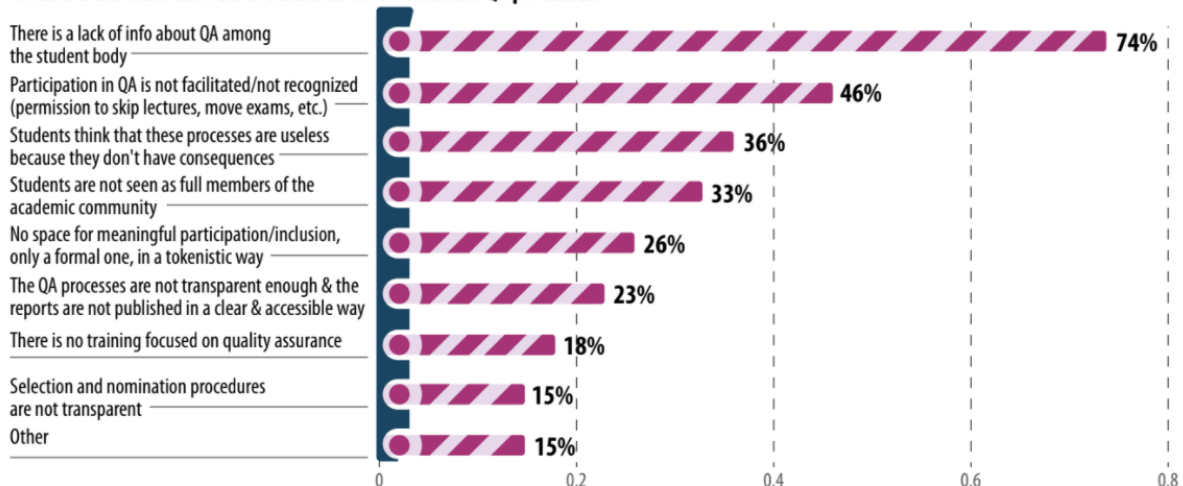
underlined as a fundamental value at the core of the EHEA. In the same document the Ministers acknowledge the progress made in the development of quality assurance systems aligned with the ESG, and commit to removing the remaining obstacles, including those related to the cross-border operation of EQAR-registered agencies and the application of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. They also commit to ensuring that external quality assurance arrangements cover transnational higher education in the EHEA with equal standards as for domestic provision.

In preparation for the Rome meeting, BWSE 2020 summarizes the state of affairs in regards to student engagement at all levels:

1. Internal quality assurance - 36 out of 38 NUSes state that their students are involved in internal QA. Less than half of the responding unions - around 46% - state that the students are involved in internal QA with voting rights and as full members of the bodies of internal assessment processes. 19% of the student unions indicate the students are only involved as a source of information. Around 5% of the respondents state involvement of students in the follow-up actions or only as observers.

2. External quality assurance processes - the majority of respondents reported that students are in some way included in external quality assurance. The roles they may have, though, vary - from full members of the panel till less committed ways of student engagement. When looking more closely at how the students are involved in external QA, BWSE notes that most of the countries involve their students as full members within the external review panel.

3. Governance of QA agencies and national decision-making - 74% of student unions reported that students are involved in the governance of QA agencies. 23 out of 28 unions, who reported involvement of students in the governance of QA agencies, indicate students are full-members of decision-making bodies, while 4 unions stated that in their countries students are members of consultative bodies. In regards to students being consulted on the national level decisions by the government about the QA matters, 53% of the respondents affirmed that they are being consulted on national level decisions, while 33% of unions reported not being consulted.

4. QA student expert pools - 27 respondents reported about the inclusion of students in quality assurance expert pools, while 10 stated that such pools do not exist or they do not include students. Out of the 27, 10 unions say the pool is operated by the national student union, and in 12 the responsibility belongs to the QA agency. The rest of the answers stated that there is a joint approach for managing the pools by an NUS and QA agency.

BWSE 2020 further investigates the obstacles that have a negative impact on students' involvement in quality assurance. 74% of respondents stated that the lack of information on quality assurance amongst the students' representatives is the main obstacle to their involvement; 46% of respondents reported that participation in quality assurance processes is not well facilitated and recognized by HEIs and nearly 36% of NUSes stated that lack of tangible results harms the belief, confidence and trust in a quality assurance process and this results in resistance from students to be meaningfully active in quality assurance, as they are convinced that their engagement will be fruitless. 33% of students' unions reported that students do not feel that they are seen as full members of their academic communities. The figure below expands on the obstacles to student engagement in QA, as perceived by the BWSE respondents:

What are the main barriers of students' involvement in QA processes?

Barrier	Percentage
There is a lack of info about QA among the student body	74%
Participation in QA is not facilitated/not recognized (permission to skip lectures, move exams, etc.)	46%
Students think that these processes are useless because they don't have consequences	36%
Students are not seen as full members of the academic community	33%
No space for meaningful participation/inclusion, only a formal one, in a tokenistic way	26%
The QA processes are not transparent enough & the reports are not published in a clear & accessible way	23%
There is no training focused on quality assurance	18%
Selection and nomination procedures are not transparent	15%
Other	15%

International Best Practice

Drawing from this data, the section below expands on individual country examples of good practice in terms of student engagement in quality assurance at national and institutional levels.

Denmark (Gønge, Kirketerp, 2018)

In 2014 the Danish Accreditation Institution (AI) established STAR - Studerendes Akkrediteringsråd – which translates as the Students' Accreditation Council, a network for Danish student organizations facilitated by AI, founded with a view to supplement the traditional and more formal perceptions of student involvement with the vision of students as co-creators in a mutually beneficial QA process. STAR is made of 16 active student organizations coming from universities and art institutions, as well as professional, vocational and maritime institutions. The concept of STAR is based primarily on the principle that students should be taken seriously and have direct influence on the quality assurance of their education.

To date, STAR has been engaged in the following types of activities:
-   *Getting difficult issues on the agendas of HEIs*
Together with the STAR Network, AI has launched a number of initiatives to strengthen the collaboration between educational institutions and their student bodies in connection with institutional accreditation. STAR helps AI bring items to the agenda that it would otherwise be difficult to encourage educational institutions to address. By allying with students and using STAR as a lever, AI can put sensitive items on the agenda and launch initiatives and projects at and with educational institutions that would otherwise not be open to this.
-   *Ensure and develop the role of students in accreditation*
There have been concerns as to whether the accredited institutions select students who are positive about the quality of their programmes but who do not necessarily represent the general sentiment of all students at the institution, as well as that the institutions instructed the students prior to the interview about which topics and perspectives to emphasize during the interview, and, more importantly, which topics or concrete cases to refrain from talking about. On the basis of this, STAR took the initiative to set up a working

group with representatives from all relevant stakeholder groups to discuss challenges and find a common solution, group tasked with discussing how students can actively participate in the accreditation process to a greater extent as well as how everyone can work together to ensure that students have a voice in these processes. The working group delivered ten ambitions for student involvement in accreditation which focus on how, in collaboration with the students, the educational institutions and AI can best select, recruit and prepare students for the accreditation process and, more specifically, for the interviews that will be the accreditation panels' source of knowledge about students' perception and experience of QA work at their institution.

- *Coffee vans as catalysts for engaging in talks with students about quality*

AI used to have only limited access to student organizations and to non-organised students at the institutions under accreditation. STAR has also helped strengthen the collaboration with students who are not organized in a student organization or otherwise involved in student politics. One result of this is the mobile three-wheeled coffee van, which visits all educational institutions on the verge of institutional accreditation. In recent years, students at around 20 different institutions have been visited by a coffee van and AI representatives who invited them for coffee and a talk about what accreditation is and how as a student you can influence the process. The concept allowed AI to talk with many students who would otherwise not have known that their institution was about to be accredited and that they could play an important role in this process.

- *Continuous development of the AI accreditation process through close contact with students*

Over the years, STAR has contributed several valuable ideas that have strengthened the students' voice in the accreditation process. These include having students show members of accreditation panels around when they visit the institutions, which allows the students to talk about their physical study environment and it gives accreditation panel members a more realistic insight into student life on campus than merely being presented with the management's latest prestige projects. Furthermore, STAR also contributes to identifying possible student representatives for the AI expert panels. STAR members appoint student candidates with relevant profiles from their organization. The fact that STAR takes part in identifying possible experts further helps ensure that students have broad influence in the accreditation process.

- *Facilitating a more fit for purpose communication with the students*

Communicating an accreditation process in a way that is both interesting and informative is difficult. STAR, however, is an opportunity to collaborate with students on how to target AI communication for students. STAR has therefore played a key role in terms of adapting both the content and form of the student-targeted communication. This applies to everything from the structure and content of the AI website to the wording of the information letters sent out to students who have been selected for interviews in connection with the accreditation of an institution. Amongst other things, STAR has contributed to the development of short films and animated films which – in a self-ironic tone adapted to young people – explain what accreditation is and what it is like to be a student representative during the various steps of the process. In addition, STAR has helped AI become more accessible and visible by using social media, and AI is now active on Twitter and Facebook.

In addition to STAR, students in Denmark are involved in the accreditation process in the following ways:
- There is a student representative on the expert panel that assesses the individual programme or educational institution;

- The expert panel's visits to programmes and institutions always include one or more interviews with students to verify and qualify the information received from management, lectures, etc;
- The Minister for Education and Research appoints two student representatives to sit on the Accreditation Council, which is the body in charge of making the final decision on accreditation.

Ireland (HEA, 2016, NStEP, 2019)

Students contribute to the quality assurance of the higher education system in Ireland in multiple ways.

Firstly, the National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) is a collaborative initiative of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Higher Education Authority (HEA), the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). NStEP supports student engagement in Irish Higher Education Institutions, seeking to champion a strong culture of partnership between students and staff through practice-based activities, informing policy developments, and underpinning the national landscape. Student engagement is underpinned by the idea that students are partners and co-creators within a learning community, and NStEP aims to actively embed these principles within higher education through its work. Involvement in NStEP requires a partnership between HEI staff and student representatives, with HEI leadership and Students' Union leadership signing partnership agreements to participate. NStEP was an ambitious statement of commitment to enabling and supporting the student voice in Irish higher education when it was launched in 2016. Since then NStEP has built a body of practice through the student training programme and institutional support streams, evidenced in particular by references to the programme's work throughout both system performance compacts and institutional quality reports.

Secondly, the National Student Quality Assurance Reviewers Pool was established by QQI and the USI in 2017, as a source for allocating students to QQI review panels across higher education; institutions who are involved in QQI review processes can also request a reviewer from the pool. Since then the NStEP has worked to support the pool through a bespoke training programme for reviewers. The Pool is made up of students trained to sit on review panels and ensure the student perspective is evident throughout quality assurance in Ireland. As full members of the review panels, the involvement of student reviewers is a crucial and valuable part of the process. Reviewers gain experience and insights into issues of higher education governance.

NStEP has developed the training to support student reviewers to understand the importance of their role in ensuring a high quality system of higher education in Ireland, ultimately benefiting thousands of students. USI outlines the importance of the student voice and providing effective feedback. QQI takes the reviewers through their roles on review panels, how quality assurance processes operate in Irish higher education, and the impact that it can have.

Thirdly, another student engagement avenue is their membership of the Board and committees of QQI; the Board of ten members is to include 'At least two learner representatives; one nominated by the USI'. This includes consultations with students in quality enhancement processes; feedback from students is an explicit requirement of QQI's statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines.

Lastly, Ireland is one of six countries to have developed a national survey on student engagement; these surveys have student learning at their heart, and seek to help higher education institutions to improve their engagement with the student body. The Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) is the first national systematic effort in Ireland, to measure the quality of the student experience in Irish HEIs. The decision to develop and implement this survey was influenced by both the Bologna Process, as one of the Bologna Process priorities for 2012-2015 is 'to involve students and staff in governance structures at all levels', and the National Strategy for Higher education to 2030, which stated that; 'higher education institutions should put in place systems to capture feedback from students, and use this feedback to inform institutional and program management, as well as national policy.'

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement is managed as a collaborative partnership between the HEA, IOTI, IUA and the USI. This survey was first run on a pilot basis in 2013, and is now taken by first and final year undergraduate students and postgraduate students in taught postgraduate programmes. The survey 'collects information on how students engage with their learning environments. Students' engagement with college life is important in enabling them to develop key capabilities such as critical thinking, problem solving, writing skills, teamwork and communication skills.' The survey measures levels of student engagement with their learning environment.

Representation is just one strand of student engagement, and not sufficient on its own, if there is to be a culture of engagement. Students in Ireland can engage in the decision-making structure of their institutions as they concern the three domains of teaching and learning, governance and management, and quality assurance at a number of different levels.

Romania (ANOSR, 2021)

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) includes several structures in which at least one student representative is a full member.

Firstly, two representatives nominated by student unions sit on the decision-making body, the Council, for one-year mandates based on:
- their experience within the student movement;
- their active participation in the management structures within the higher education institutions;
- the experience in the field of quality assurance of higher education;
- the academic results and the moral prestige;
- the level of knowledge of a foreign language of international circulation.

Each student representative which is a member of ARACIS' Council chooses a department to be part of, namely the Department for Accreditation and the Department for External Quality Assurance. Furthermore, one of them is chosen to represent the students' interests in the Ethics Committee of ARACIS.

Secondly, ARACIS is composed of thirteen Permanent Committees of Experts, each responsible for a different field of study or a cluster of fields of study. Each committee has a student representative as a full member, along with teaching staff and, in two committees, employers' representatives.

The student unions maintain a pool of student experts, updated at least twice a year. Student experts which are members of the pool are provided with QA initial and further

training and development. Any student can apply for membership in the pool, and the selection process for the experts pool is a thorough one, including several selection stages.

Regarding the evaluation process, students take part in all types of reviews:
- Institutional evaluations;
- Evaluations for undergraduate programs;
- Evaluations for master's university fields;
- Evaluations for psycho-pedagogical training programs for the teaching professions;
- Evaluations for Romanian language preparatory programs for foreign citizens;
- Evaluations of doctoral studies.

For the institutional evaluations, students submit their own report, separately from the rest of the team. For the other types of evaluations, students work within the team for a single report that includes the inputs of all members. Students are paid equally within the team and have the same rights and obligations.

Regarding public policies and standards that legislate the quality assurance process of the Romanian higher education system, students are usually consulted. Moreover, each Permanent Committee of Experts adopts and amends, when necessary, a list of specific standards for each cluster of fields of study, with a permanent involvement of the student representatives.

Students are also acknowledged by the law as full partners in the internal quality assurance process. At the level of each institution providing higher education in Romania, a Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance is established. The institution shall draw up and adopt the strategy and rules of procedure of the Commission.
The Commission comprises of:
- 1-3 representatives of the teaching staff, elected by secret ballot by the university senate;
- a representative of the syndicate;
- a student representative appointed by the student organization.

A representative of the employers may also be part of the commission. The commission may also include a representative of minorities among teachers or students.

Students are directly involved in the tasks of the Commission, which include:
- coordinating the application of quality assessment and evaluation procedures and activities, approved by the management of the education provider;
- preparing an annual internal evaluation report on the quality of education of the institution; the report should always be published, according to the law.
- formulating proposals to improve the quality of education;
- filling out satisfaction surveys regarding different subjects.

Scotland (sparqs, 2012)

The Student Engagement Framework for Scotland is a document published by student partnerships in quality Scotland (sparqs) in December 2012, and endorsed and owned by all the sector agencies and representative bodies in the university and college sector - Education Scotland, the Higher Education Academy Scotland, National Union of Students Scotland, Quality Assurance Agency Scotland, Scotland's Colleges, Scottish Funding Council, Universities Scotland. The framework consists of five key elements of student engagement, and it offers a coherent and detailed way of understanding student

engagement that can be helpful to institutions and students' associations as they attempt to develop and plan their student engagement activities.

The five key elements of student engagement are:
1. *Students feeling part of a supportive institution*

This element of engagement includes the range of activities and approaches that encourage students to come to, feel part of, feel supported by and participate in, an institution. Ideally, this begins with providing activities and approaches that encourage students to enter education at a stage appropriate for them and continues all the way to completion. Students end their studies having had such good experiences that, essentially, they become ambassadors for their institutions. It includes aspects of widening participation and removing barriers to participation. While some barriers will be dealt with through the curriculum, in this section we focus on the type of activities at an institutional level that may contribute to this objective. This could include approaches to providing support at an institutional level and offering activities which create a sense of community. It is about striving to provide a positive all-round student experience in addition to the academic experience. Many of these services and activities can benefit from being student-led or student-shaped. Examples would include the students' association organizing events, student-led support programmes and peer-mentoring programmes, or students' involvement in the design and delivery of induction.

2. *Students engaging in their own learning*

This element of engagement is about supporting students to take responsibility for successful learning, enabling them to shape their own experience and the outcomes they want to achieve. It is about encouraging students to be active partners in the learning process. In this section we focus on the ways institutions provide effective learning opportunities and support for students to develop skills in independent learning. This, in turn, encourages deeper levels of engagement with the educational experience. Initially, this may (for example) involve providing support and activities to encourage students to access formal learning successfully, perhaps after a substantial period of absence or after unsuccessful learning experiences in the past. It is also about students developing an enthusiasm for learning and a commitment to a subject or vocation; encouraging students to be part of an academic or learning community alongside the HEI staff. This is likely to include activities beyond the immediate classroom, such as academic-related societies, work placements or simulations and independent study. Overall, activities will help students to see learning as something more than what is assessed and accredited. This element ranges from encouraging students to attend and be interested in learning, to developing students' participation in learning through their own voluntary engagement with activities designed to make learning active. It includes students having opportunities for choice within learning programmes and encouraging their active participation in class, thereby shaping their own individual experience. Many activities that are successful in this element might be student-led, (e.g. peer mentoring or academic societies), but are distinct from those which aim to gather students' feedback on the learning experience. Other aspects of student engagement, that encourage students to comment on and work with others in shaping the direction of learning, are important in contributing to the successful development of activities which make learning more engaging. There is also evidence to suggest that when students are involved in other areas of student engagement this involvement can help these students develop stronger engagement in their own learning.

3. *Students working with their institution in shaping the direction of learning*

This element of engagement relates to the ways in which students can comment on their learning experiences either individually or as a group. It builds on the idea of students working in partnership with academics and other staff at the subject level to bring about enhancements in their learning experience. This might simply be about responding to student feedback on learning, teaching and assessment (or other matters) raised through surveys, student committees or even complaints. It is about ensuring that students know what actions have been taken as a result of their feedback. At its most engaging, this element includes the processes and activities which give students appropriate opportunities to influence the way in which curricula are designed and implemented. Importantly, it is about students not just identifying problems, but working with staff to develop solutions, implement actions and explore/identify future developments. These activities can take place in the classroom and be about the relationship between a tutor and their students, or they might have a departmental or school/faculty level focus. Clear links between these subject-focused activities and institutional level learning and teaching development are important, as are clear links to the representative activities of the students' association. By definition, there will be links with the formal processes of quality assurance and enhancement.

4. Formal mechanisms for quality and governance

This element focuses on formal engagement with institutions through representative structures and processes operated primarily by students' associations. It is about ensuring that student representatives can work in partnership with their institutions to enhance the student experience at a strategic level, as well as representing individuals or groups of students in an effective manner. To be effective, activities need to develop the ability of the elected representatives to deliver a considered student viewpoint based on hard evidence, democratic processes and due attention to meeting the needs of all students. They must, therefore, link with the activities of students involved in commenting on and working with others in shaping the direction of learning. Importantly, it is about providing an independent student voice within the quality assurance and governance mechanisms of the institution to ensure that the student learning experience is central to decision-making, development and enhancement activities. It differs from simply gathering student opinion because a representative voice can take an informed position on issues, work to achieve compromise or settlement agreements, and own a jointly negotiated solution. It recognises that in developing a partnership with students the individual voice is less powerful than the collective, and therefore the need for students to have representatives. Whilst it is embodied by student membership of committees and involvement in processes, it is about more than a student simply being present when decisions are made. It is about an approach to student engagement which ensures student involvement in change, in partnership with staff at their institutions. Although the important feature of this element of engagement is the independent, collective student voice, responsibility for making the association and the representative structures work needs to be shared across the partnership.

5. Influencing the student experience at national level

This element of engagement is around the opportunities students have to shape the development of education policy at a national level, working with others to contribute to the success of the sector as a whole. It is also concerned, however, with the opportunity this affords students to develop an understanding of pertinent issues, how these might be addressed, and what contributions action at a local level can make to wider efforts. It helps

create student 'experts' who are able to comment on their own experience and also place it in the context of the wider educational experience.

Institutionally, Student Partnership Agreements were first outlined in the Scottish Government's 2011 paper, *Putting Learners at the Centre – Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education*, which, amongst other things, proposed the development of a document setting out how students and their institutions interact. Sparqs (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) subsequently published guidance in 2013 for the development of student partnership agreements for universities. A number of Scottish HEIs have since developed Student Partnership Agreements or are working towards their development, having the following main purposes:

- to serve to map and promote student engagement opportunities across the University;
- to act as a tool to reflect on the way in which staff and students interact and any improvements;
- to be used to monitor and review the effectiveness of student engagement;
- to provide tangible evidence of the partnership between students and staff.

Germany (Bach, 2015)

In the year 2000, the German Accreditation Council (GAC) adopted a resolution to include student participation in its external quality assurance processes. As a reaction, the German Student Accreditation Pool (GSAP) was founded in the same year to act as a source of trained students to be incorporated in all external quality assurance exercises. The GSAP is based on the common interests of a wide coalition of different parties (political parties (campus / youth organizations), fzs, unions of the general students committee for each of the 16 states (Landes-Studierenden-Vertretungen), several subject-related student bodies (Bundesfachschaftentagungen).

The GSAP administration receives and answers about 50 to 100 external requests per month, where all accreditation agencies in Germany send in their needs for students to be engaged in external QA; each request is forwarded to an internal mailing list. Each student member can apply to each request until a deadline. Each application will be processed by the administration, filtered by some pre-defined criteria and otherwise be selected by random (with some respect to gender distribution) and forwarded. This guarantees at least an equal workload for all applications. Each member must provide a justification why she is suitable for this specific request.
Universities too have started to request student experts from the GSAP.

Additionally, GSAP manages the process of nomination of Student Representatives in German Accreditation and Evaluation Bodies. There are about 54 positions for students in bodies from accreditation agencies and GAC in Germany. The GSAP tries to nominate for each position a qualified student.

The GSAP trained over 1200 students, participated in over 4000 program accreditations, 30 accreditation bodies, and also handled frequent discussion and interview requests.

The funding of GSAP also sends a strong message of the sector-wide awareness of its necessity and commitment for its development. From 2000 until 2006, the fzs financed the GSAP. Due to limited financial resources of the fzs the budget for the GSAP had to be

cut in 2006. In 2006, the GSAP together with the GAC and the accreditation agencies in Germany created a financing model that each agency gives a yearly basic amount and/or provides the funding for one seminar. Different student committees from multiple universities provide the second half of the necessary budget.

As a stakeholder in the QA field, the GSAP applies QA processes to itself. The GSAP has its own understanding of quality and it defines the expectations for good work:
- A specific body for complaints handles all complaints from student members or accreditation agencies and can enforce measures.
- Each seminar is evaluated to a predefined set of criteria (e.g. location, learning outcomes). The executive committee applies measures based on the results.
- Each new instructor candidate must participate under supervision before he can join the pool of instructors.
- The seminar informs the new student members about the current quality processes.
- On a regular basis, all pool members are informed about quality policies and measures. These tools helped the GSAP to improve and strengthen the adequacy of processes, even if they lead to intensive discussions.

Croatia (Šušnjar, 2022)

In regards to external quality assurance, the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) conducts training and workshops supporting student engagement. Two main platforms have been established for this: one is a network of QA practitioners, called CroQANet (link), which gathers all actors involved in QA in Croatian higher education. Students are encouraged to take part as well, therefore taking their place as part of the QA community. The second avenue is represented by targeted training just for students, which are conducted every few years. Furthermore, students appointed in the review panels are trained in a tailored manner before the review site visit itself.

On the operational side of the external QA, before the site visit which is a mandatory part of the re-accreditation procedure, ASHE enables the option of submitting anonymous, open-ended comments about the HEI undergoing review. The HEI is also under obligation to inform their students about this possibility. The survey invitation is publicly available on ASHE website, while the results are confidential and are only submitted to the review panel before the site visit.

There is a board legislative arrangement nurturing student engagement in internal quality assurance as well:
- According to article 2 of the *Act on student councils and other student organizations,* Students participate in governance of a higher education institution (HEI) through the Student Council as a representative body of HEI's students. Article 5 of the same document details that the Student Council of a HEI appoints student representatives in the University Senate and other university bodies, as well as the Council and other bodies of non-university HEIs. These provisions ensure that students are represented in university bodies, which also includes bodies responsible for internal QA, typically QA Committees and Committees for Accreditation of Study Programmes;
- As per Article 88 of the Science and Higher Education Law, HEIs conduct student evaluation of their studies through surveying or other suitable methods. Evaluation results are to be used in planning educational and scientific programmes at HEIs;

- According to Article 4 of the *National Decision on Necessary Requirements for Assessment of Educational and Scientific Activities in the Selection Process for Academic Positions,* Applicants in the process of selection for a higher academic position must submit positively rated results of institutional research of teaching quality or positively rated results of student surveys, administered by the HEI;
- Sections 2 and 3 of the *Standards for Re-accreditation of HEIs,* strongly integrate the requirement of collecting and reacting to student feedback

This legislative framework has created a context in which student surveys at the end of a course are a standard which is respected and adhered to across all Croatian HEIs. External QA processes conducted by ASHE pay special attention to how the results are used.

Another area of good practice is represented by the internal audits conducted by the HEIs themselves. Some Croatian HEI also conduct their own internal audits (QA self-assessments) which essentially mimic the external QA procedures. Through these procedures, constituents of a HEI (faculties or departments) are visited and assessed by a review panel composed at the central HEI level; one member of these panels is always a student.

Finland (National Union of University Students, 2017)

The National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL), is a student organization which represents approximately 130,000 students in Finland. All student unions in Finnish universities are members of SYL. A student union is a public corporation which is governed by the Universities Act.

In general, the Quality Assurance System in Finland is guided by the Ministry of Education, audits are conducted by the Evaluation Centre and Higher Education (FINEEC/KARVI) and institutions take part in planning. The evaluation criteria is centered around confirming the functionality of the quality system, whereas the quality of teaching is not evaluated.

Student have several avenues of engagement:
   1. *Student participation through feedback:*
First and foremost, the notion of student engagement in quality assurance at institutional level starts with the mindset that students are part of the academic community. In all universities, students are represented in every part of the administration and their opinions are frequently collected, in particular institutions collect feedback from every course, in addition to other feedback collection tools integral part of the QA system.
Student feedback is analyzed and compared to the previous feedback cycles in the same course, which aims to reveal if the same/similar issues are still a concern. One of the responsibilities of the QA system is to target recurring issues on courses. Students receive a summary of the feedback and, most importantly, the teacher's response.

   2. *Course development*
Secondly, students have a direct involvement in course design: student representatives are members of all course development working groups. Students have direct impact and can monitor the extent to which feedback is actually acted upon, whereas teachers get a sparring companion. If in the previous point, the role of the student was to give feedback, there is now a second component which gives students an active role in ensuring the feedback is used. The QA system puts special emphasis on issues seen in the collected feedback such as learning targets or teaching methods.

In fact, the idea that students are part of the academic community brings a very high level of trust for their ownership for their own learning journey. In particular, students are seen as owners of their studies who know best what would supplement their studiesome; consequently, institutions sometimes offer students a small budget to develop their own courses and projects, to arrange speakers or to teach a topic by themselves if they are very good at it.

3. Student involvement in the audit process
- Before the audit

The local student union has a permanent place in the institutional QA workgroup and, from that position has the opportunity to constantly contribute to the development of the QA system and ultimately increase the quality of teaching. The Student Union is active in promoting student interests and usually also takes part in writing the self-evaluation documents, the QA manual and other institutional arrangements.
- During the audit

The Student Union is the one that selects the representative sample from the student body to take part in the interviews with the audit panel; it is also the Union that typically informs students what the audit is and how they can contribute.
- After the audit

The Student Union continues its work in the institutional QA workgroup with an even more practical approach and committed to quality enhancement.
- Designing the next audit process

National audits happen in cycles and are often themed. FINEEC contacts the students investigating questions such as "What should we measure to ensure x happens?", in order to assess the implementation of student centered learning and the functionality of the QA system in practice. Additionally, the National Student Union has a permanent place in the FINEEC workgroup, but other students are free to attend as well.

4. Student input in external quality assurance evaluation criteria
In order to best contribute to criteria development, students evaluated a list of things that make studying easier or were otherwise important to them; then they estimated what kind of QA structures would enforce as well as prevent these things from happening, and what kind of measurements would tell if these things are present at the level of institutional QA systems and functioning successfully.

All these suggestions are incorporated in the next audit cycle conducted by FINEEC, who checks institutional learning targets: if they exist and are in line with the degree program, if the course and teaching methods are chosen accordingly, if assessment methods are evaluated based on learning targets.

Université de Lausanne (Fuhrimann, Glayre, Kobel, 2015)

From designing the processes to implementing and evaluating them, students at Université de Lausanne (UNIL) participate in Quality processes in two different ways. On the one hand, they participate as beneficiaries of the Quality processes and on the other, they fully participate in steering the processes, having a role in designing and continually adjusting them, something which does not usually happen in student participation.

a) Designing the processes
As part of the faculty and curriculum evaluations, students participate in designing the processes through their four seats on the Committee for Teaching and Research

Enhancement (COVER). The COVER is a participatory committee, composed of 22 members, and it includes representatives from the Institution's various bodies and faculties. Its mission is to design and support the development of a quality system specific to the UNIL. Its mandate is therefore to design concepts and Quality processes as part of the faculty and curriculum evaluations. In the context of the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), students have one seat per Faculty on the Management Teaching Committee. This committee is particularly responsible for drawing up SET questionnaires. Students therefore have a role in drawing up these questionnaires, as well as in the guidelines for implementing the SET. Students have a steering role in these two points.

b) Implementing the processes

As part of the faculty and curriculum evaluations, responsibility for the process lies with the head of the entity being evaluated. However, he or she shall ensure that all the bodies concerned are involved. In this way, in order to get a clearer picture of the various facets and diversity of this complex reality, an advisory committee acting like a steering committee and representing all four bodies is involved in performing the self-evaluation. For students, this is a role in the steering of the process. On the other hand, during the self-evaluation stage, consultation with the different bodies is encouraged. In this context, students will have the role of beneficiaries by filling in questionnaires or participating in focus groups.

Another way that students are involved in steering the processes is by volunteering to participate in internal expert training workshops, then as voluntary internal experts (paid in the case of students) during curriculum evaluations. Internal experts have several roles, the first of which is to check that the process has been properly conducted according to the rules laid down by the COVER and also to assist external experts by helping them to understand the UNIL context. For the SET, students take on the role of evaluation beneficiaries by filling in questionnaires. Students are also engaged in the preparation of external quality assurance processes by AAQ through their membership in the Steering Committee. They were therefore able to have a role in steering the internal part of the Quality Audit.

c) Evaluating the processes

At the end of each faculty or curriculum evaluation, an evaluation of the process is carried out among stakeholders. For faculty evaluations, a questionnaire is sent to members of the Self Evaluation Steering Committee (SESC) and those who participated in the experts' visit and the experts themselves. For curriculum evaluations, a focus group is organized which also includes representatives from each body involved in the self-evaluation process. This evaluation will regularly check that the rules and mechanisms of the Quality processes still match the values and principles on which the Quality Culture is based, and also raises the needs and expectations which might not have been met by the process. In this context, student feedback clearly plays a key role in steering the evaluation. For the SET, every year the Education Support Centre prepares an assessment of the evaluations which have been performed. This assessment is discussed within the Management Teaching Committee in which students have one seat per Faculty. The questionnaires are therefore regularly reviewed in the light of this assessment and the feedback from the various bodies within the committee. So students also have a role here in steering the process.

National Context in Kosovo

Legislative Background

The Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo is the main regulatory document of higher education in Kosovo. Initially, article 2 of the LHE, defines that provision of higher education is based, among others, on the active engagement of students, in the individual aspect as well as collectively, in the life of their institution and in their own learning. As such, article 31 of the law defines the rights and obligations of students which should be specified under the Statute of each provider. According to the law, students are entitled to attend lectures and other educational activities, to use facilities of libraries and take part in elections for students positions in bodies established under the provider's Statute. Further, this article defines that each provider must guarantee the freedom of students to present new ideas and controversial opinions, guarantee students' freedom of speech and of association, protect students against any kind of discrimination and ensure fair and impartial mechanisms for handling disciplinary matters dealing with students. This article also defines the right of students to complain about the quality of the teaching or providers infrastructure as well as the right to challenge a decision or action of holders of higher education toward them.

The Administrative Instruction on Accreditation of HEIs No. 18/2015, article 25, paragraph 1.6., sub paragraph 1.6.3., defines that academic staff and students are involved in decision making processes, and the Accreditation Manual requires that student representatives should be members of all decisional, executive, and consultative bodies, the LHE foresees the participation of students in decisions relating only to academic matters and seeking their opinion about their learning experience.

Article 17 of the LHE defines that the Statute of each university should contain provisions that allow elected representatives of academic staff and students in the Senate, as the highest decision-making body on academic matters. Also, article 12 of the LHE, which foresees the establishment, accreditation, and licensing of private providers, defines that a private provider of higher education enjoys freedom in its status or other founding documents to approve any model of governance and management, on condition that, among others, it allows for the participation of teaching staff and students in decisions relating to academic matters.

None of the provisions of the LHE provide for the student participation in overall national policy making. The LHE and the AI provide no provision that the national unions of students are consulted by different state institutions when producing pieces of legislation. Also, through its provisions, the LHE does not explicitly emphasize the important role of students, as equal or reliable partners, in the design and delivery of higher education.

As concerns student organizations, the Law guarantees the right of students to establish student organizations and run for student positions in these bodies. Article 33 of the LHE defines that the Statute of the provider should foresee the creation of one or more organizations that represent students and that contribute to fulfillment of social, cultural, and academic requirements of students.

In terms of quality assurance, the Law on Higher Education does not clearly define aspects related to the involvement of students in internal quality assurance whereas involvement of students in external QA is completely missed from the text. Some provisions about internal QA are briefly mentioned within articles which regulate the aspects of higher

education and the functioning of HEIs, such as under article 16 of LHE, Academic Degrees and Diploma, which defines the right to award degrees and diplomas. Paragraph 6 of this article defines that the providers will require the provision of quality standards and implementation of curriculum through external review of evaluation schemes and will actively seek opinion of students about their learning experience.

The Administrative Instruction defines in Article 14 that at least one student representative should be engaged in all accreditation procedures (both institutional and programme) of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, appointed to evaluate student matters during the evaluation of a higher education institution.

Student Participation in Kosovar Higher Education

National Level

Aiming to bring together all students from Kosovo, a Student Union of the Republic of Kosovo (USRK) has been established, as an organization which guarantees the rights and freedoms of all Kosovar students. Based on an Administrative Instruction issued in 2015, MEST established the Student Union through the support of the TEMPUS project "Support for the Internationalisation of the Kosovo higher education through the establishment of the Kosovo Students Union – SIHEKSU". According to the AI, the USRK is the highest representative body of all students of the Republic of Kosovo whose objective is to represent the interest and opinion of all Kosovo students. The USRK is an independent student organization at the Kosovo level with a legal public entity according to the legislation into force which consists of all students of the Republic of Kosovo registered in accredited and licensed institutions of higher education.

The first constitutive meeting of the USRK was held on April 18th, 2016, whereas its first election procedure was held on July 10th, 2018, where the new structure of this body was elected. Although the AI provided for the financing of the Union through different budget lines, the functionalization of the Student Union was mainly supported through the SIHEKSU project. The project supported the active participation of the USRK in activities which aimed at promoting the student's role among higher education institutions as well as other relevant stakeholder groups in Kosovo. Through this support, USRK was actively engaged in activities which aimed at promoting the organization at an international level. This culminated with an application to the European Student Union (ESU) which was rejected due to formal requirements which were not met.

Besides a formal/ceremonial role, USRK was not able to push forward important agendas for students which relate to the improvement of their studies. In 2020, the mandate of the current elected students ended and since then USRK did not organize a new election procedure. Given the pandemic situation and the lack of support from the Ministry of Education, USRK currently is not functional.

Although not official representatives of USRK, students were invited to be part of two important policy working groups. In 2021 a student representative was asked by MEST to be a member of the working group for the drafting of the new Law of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency and another student representative was invited by KAA to be part of the working group for the revision of the Accreditation Manual. The selection criteria as

well as the formal capacity of the student present in these two working groups was not clear.

Institutional Level

The Statute of each public provider of higher education in Kosovo, regulates that student participation in the Steering Committees, as the highest policy making bodies, is possible in the capacity of observants only without the right to vote and only if student issues are discussed. They do however foresee the student participation in academic bodies such as the Senate and the Faculty Council, as equal voting members in line with the provisions of the LHE.

The Statute of the University of Prishtina, defines that its highest managerial authority is the Steering Committee. Paragraph 9 of article 18, defines the members of the committee and provides that the president of the Student Parliament may take part in the meetings of the SC, without the right to vote, only when students' issues are concerned. Similarly, six other public universities of Kosovo have the same provisions about the student participation in the SC.

The Statute of the University of Prishtina, defines that the Senate as the highest academic body of the university, consists of seven elected members from the Student Parliament from the ranks of full-time students. According to the statute, students' members of the Senate must be distinguished students with an average grade of eight (8) and should have not repeated their academic year. Students at the University of Prishtina are also represented in the Faculty Council with two student representatives elected from the Faculty's Student Council, in the Study Committee with two student representatives who have at least an average grade of eight (8) and in the Quality Assurance Committee, with at least one student representative. Similarly, six other public universities of Kosovo have the same provisions about the student participation in the academic bodies, with the main difference in the number of students being represented. Depending on the size of the student body, at all other public universities, two students are represented in the Senate, and one to two student representatives in the Faculty Council, Study Committee or Quality Assurance Committee.

Besides academic decision-making bodies, each faculty of the public universities in Kosovo, have their own student councils which represent all students within one Faculty. The Student Council reviews and decides on all issues related to the rights and responsibilities of students in the faculty. However, their functioning is not entirely independent. According to the Statute of each public provider, the number of members and the procedure for their election is determined by a regulation issued by the Steering Council in consultation with the Student Parliament. Likewise, the Rules of Procedures of the Student Council is also issued by the Steering Committee.

The Statutes of each university provides that all students admitted to the university should regularly take part in the meetings of the committees and bodies where they are assigned as members. Also, students have the right to complain about the quality of the teaching process or about the university infrastructure.

All institutions of higher education have their student unions which are together represented in the Student Union of the Republic of Kosovo. Student Parliaments at all

public universities in Kosovo are the highest student representation body; however, their election procedures are not entirely independent. The details about the election procedure are defined under a regulation which is issued by the Steering Committee in consultation with the Student Parliament. Also, the Rules of the Procedures of the Student Parliament is issued by the SC. This is in contradiction to the Accreditation Manual which requires that institutions are not involved in the process of electing student representatives.

According to the accreditation report of the University of Prizren "Ukshin Hoti", the expert team pointed out in 2019 that no student was represented in any of the statutory or advisory bodies of the university and therefore experts recommended not only to involve students at all levels but to also increase the percentage of their involvement. Since in 2019 University of Prizren failed to meet the accreditation criteria and thus received a negative accreditation decision, in the very next year the situation about student involvement seemed to be improved. In the external review report of 2020, experts noted that the revised regulations provided for the student representation in all main bodies of the university and that the election process to student bodies does not seem to be interfered with by the University.

Since the introduction of the new Accreditation Manual, and respectively the new standards for accreditation, there has been a change in terms of inviting students to contribute to different policy making levels. As per the KAA accreditation reports, it can be noted that the majority of public universities in Kosovo have invited students to become full members of standing committees, such as quality assurance committees, but also in the process of drafting the strategic plans and in other working groups for drafting important regulatory frameworks of the universities.

Student Engagement in Kosovar Quality Assurance

National Level

Students are not part of decision-making bodies of KAA or any other committee such as appeals or ethics, nor are they consistently invited to KAA activities. Although KAA has invited student representatives in a few workshops which aimed at revising certain policies and regulations, formal mechanisms which would ensure feedback from national students are absent. The lack of students' involvement in external quality assurance procedures and processes was highlighted by the ENQA review report in 2019 who considered that KAA should include students in the Board in order to further ensure the independence of its decisions. Further, KAA was recommended to involve students in the daily activities and the decision-making structure of KAA.

International students are invited to act as reviewers during the accreditation procedures organized by KAA; the agency does not provide any QA training for students prior to their engagement in accreditation procedures, other than a general session together with the rest of the panel aimed at getting the experts familiar with the Accreditation Manual. However, the involvement of international student reviewers remains low as KAA is not able to involve student reviewers in all its accreditation visits. KAA ensures that international students are always invited to institutional accreditation visits, but this is not the case with programme accreditation visits. The number of students that are part of the KAA experts pool is very low in comparison to the experts who hold a PhD degree. KAA does not publish its full list of expert's pool nor statistics about the number of invited

experts per year, however a quick overview of the external review reports published in the webpage points out that students are not members of the majority of panels in program evaluations. Another observation is that only a few student names appear in the majority of review reports meaning that KAA has not been able to diversify its list of student experts. Low participation of students in accreditation visits was also highlighted by the ENQA review report in 2019 which noted that only 4% of the total expert pool consist of students and that their participation has remained low for several years. Subsequently KAA was recommended that full students' participation in institutional reviews and program evaluations is guaranteed.

Students are one of the stakeholders invited to meetings with the external reviewers during the site visits of all accreditation procedures organized by KAA, without exception; they are given the opportunity to comment on the quality of their studies and their recommendations for future improvement. However, these students are chosen exclusively by the institution itself, with no mechanism of control from KAA.

Institutional Level

Students are traditionally asked for their feedback once per year or per semester about the quality of the teaching process and the administrative service. This instrument has been widely applied by all higher education institutions more as a formal requirement needed for the external assessment rather than an instrument which contributes to the improvement of the teaching process.

According to a study conducted in 2018 about the Impact of Accreditation Process on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Kosovo, students are involved only when asked to complete questionnaires, which is a technical request for the compilation of self-evaluation reports. Moreover, the study finds that students do not understand the importance of quality assurance as part of the institution's responsibility to them.

The KAA accreditation reports indicate that students are not very familiar with their role in quality assurance. According to the External Review Report of the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" of May 2020, international experts have noted that students are not very familiar with the processes in place of the internal quality assurance system. Further, they noted that even though students are members in different organizational structures of the University, they are not engaged in the design and implementation of quality assurance processes, mechanisms, and instruments. According to the expert team, student assessments are not made public, and their feedback is not provided in the procedures for academic staff advancement.
In the case of the University of Prishtina, experts have recommended involving students in the curriculum design/changes in a formal way and integrating their feedback into the academic staff promotion procedure.

During the external review process which took place in 2021 at the public University of Gjakova "Fehmi Agani", international experts have noted that formally the quality assurance process is organized through all institutional actors, starting from the management to the academic unit together with the student representatives. However, they recommended to provide regular training programs to students to better understand the quality assurance mechanism. Similarly, during the external review that took place at the public University of Peja "Haxhi Zeka" in 2020, experts noted that students were

invited to several working groups as well as contributed to the drafting of the QA Manual and reviewing the questionnaires. These improvements at this university took place mainly because of a previous negative accreditation decision in 2019 which pointed out several serious deficiencies of the university's functioning, including student representation mechanisms.

National Survey Analysis

Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) conducted a survey aiming at exploring different facets and understandings of student engagement in quality assurance in Kosovo, including students' conceptualisation of quality assurance specific terminology and processes, student awareness and understanding of the avenues for their involvement in quality assurance, as well as the extent to which students wish to be involved in quality assurance processes.

The methodology used to collect the data has been qualitative (survey) which included closed, structured and open ended questions. The survey was administered online through Google Forms. The survey was open to all the students enrolled with the Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo (public and private).

According to the Kosovo Education Statistics report 2020/2021 (MASHTI, 2021), 95,335 students were registered in the national higher education system, in both public and private HEIs, with a majority of 58.51% female students and 41.49% male students.

Out of the total number of students, 1,051 have participated in the survey and responded to the questionnaire; survey responses were checked to ensure whether all questions were provided with valid responses.

The survey of students' engagement in the QA processes in Kosovo was conducted in the fall semester of 2021 by the KAA. All the students enrolled in the public and private HEIs were emailed an invitation to participate in this online survey; participation was voluntary and the students were ensured confidentiality.

The students were asked to respond to 31 semi-structured questions: 20 structured 'Yes'/'No" or 'Multiple Choice', and 11 open ended questions.

The majority of the survey (four first sections) were completed by 1,051 respondents, while the last section (the fifth) was completed entirely by 941 respondents and partly by 967 respondents.

The survey results were grouped and presented in five sections, according to the theme of the information collected. The five thematics were aimed to evaluate students' awareness about the QA processes, as well as their involvement in the process, finding the gaps and collecting the needs and recommendations students have in order to increase their involvement in the QA processes.

The first section provides information about the demographics of respondents (students) focusing on age, gender, level of studies and type of Higher Education Institution they are enrolled in. The second section looks at the way students understand the terminology related to the quality assurance arrangements in Kosovo. The third section measures and analyzes the awareness of students of the internal and external QA processes. The next section looks at the involvement and engagement of students in the quality assurance processes in the Kosovar HEIs. Finally, the fifth section focuses on the benefits for and recommendations of students about their role in the QA processes.

Section I: Respondents demographics

This section presents the profile of respondents regarding gender, age, level of studies and type of the HEI they are enrolled in Kosovo. It also analyzes the correlation of the survey's respondents profile with the demographics profile of the total number of students enrolled in Kosovo HEIs.

Regarding the *gender* representation of the survey respondents, as reflected in *Figure 1*, the survey was responded by 703 female students and 344 male students out of a total of 1,051 respondents (66.9% female, 32.7% male, and 0.4% who refused to provide their gender). The data on gender distribution of respondents reflects the gender profile of students registered in HEIs in Kosovo, where, according to the Education Statistics Report 2020/21, published by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) of the Republic of Kosovo, 58.51% of the students are females, and 41.49% males.
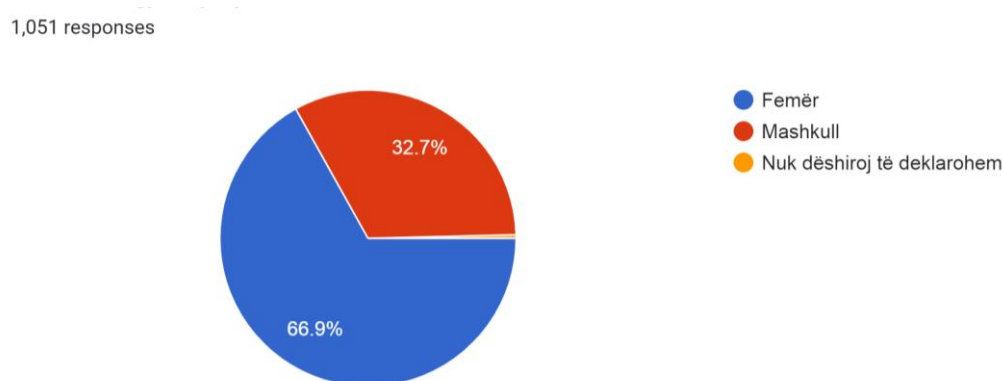
1,051 responses

Figure 1. *Gender representation of the survey respondents*

As presented in *Figure 2.,* the *age* distribution of respondents in the survey shows that 73.1% of the population belongs to the 18 – 24 age group, followed by 12.3% in the 25 – 29 age group, then 9.5% of the 30-39 age group, and lastly 5.1% of 40 years and older.
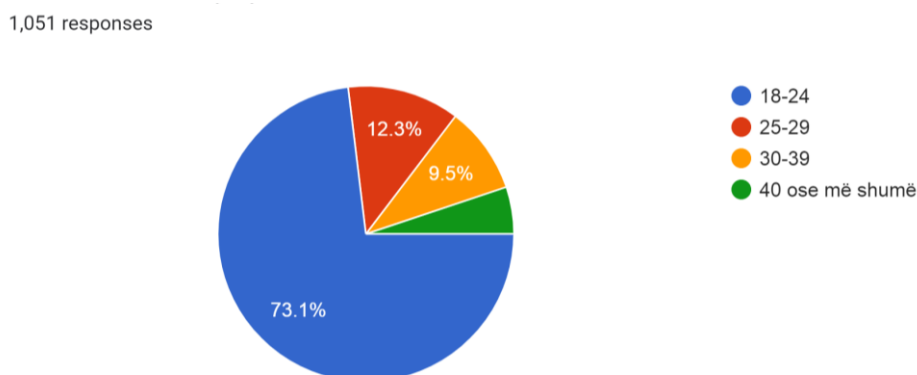
1,051 responses

Figure 2. *Age distribution of the survey respondents*

The above presented trend is also mirrored in the representation of students based on their level of studies. *Figure 3.* shows that 78.7% of the questionnaire respondents study at Bachelor level, followed by 20.7% at Master level and only 6 students (0.6%) coming from PhD level. This distribution again echoes the profile of student population enrolled in the Kosovo HEIs in each level. According to the MESTI's Statistical Report on Education

2020/21, 87.71% of the total number of enrolled students in public and private HEIs in Kosovo study at Bachelor level, 11.94% at Master level, and 0.35% at PhD level.
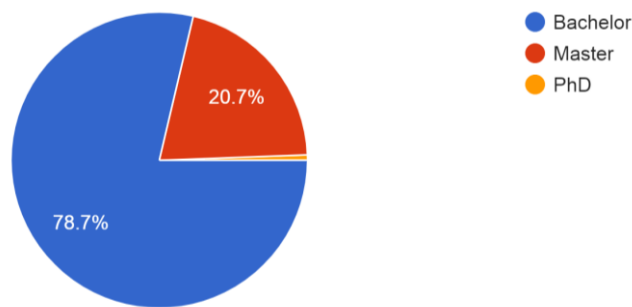

1,051 responses

Figure 3. *Level of study representation of the survey respondents*

As presented in *Figure 4.1*, 65.9% of the respondents come from public HEIs, while 34.1% come from private institutions.

Furthermore, *Figure 4.2* shows that 57.7% of the survey respondents come from public universities, 33.4% come from Colleges, 6.4% come from Higher Professional Schools, 17 students come from Institutes, and 7 students from different academies.

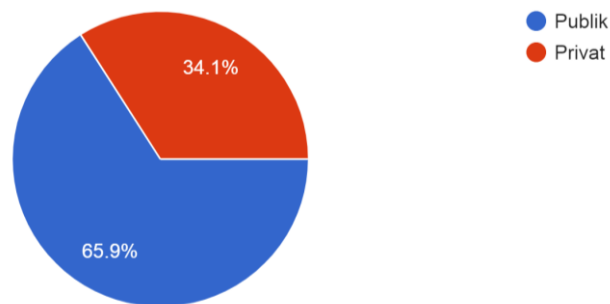**Figure 4.1** *Representation of students in the Survey as per type of HEI*
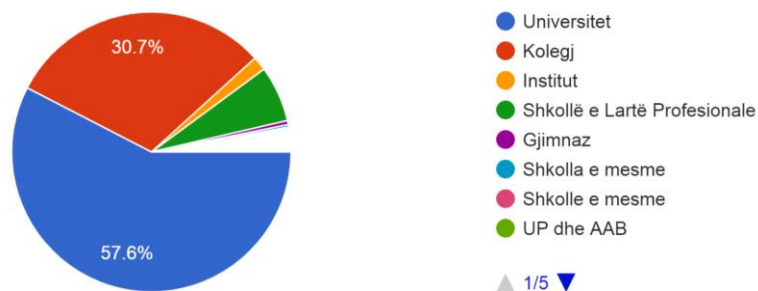

Figure 4.2 *Representation of students in the Survey as per type of HEI*

Section II: Conceptualisation of terminology

This section presents the way Kosovo students understand the terminology related to Quality Assurance. The questions addressed in this section of the survey have been open ended, therefore the responses are presented based on a few thematic trends.

All students who participated in this survey responded to the first question in the section, *"What do you think of when you hear the notion of 'quality education'?"*. Students' responses were grouped in seven thematic trends presented in *Table 1*.

Overall, the data shows that the majority of the students consider 'quality education' as *general improvement - teaching and learning conditions and methodologies, and implementation of the quality assurance standards - which leads to the creation of socio-economic values, active citizens and developed countries*. The vast majority of students show that they have a correct understanding of the term.

As presented in *Table 1*, the most popular thematic trends of how students understand the term "quality education" were "higher quality and adequate education in both teaching and learning processes" (42.8% of students), "respecting of education standards, focused on EU, USA and worldwide best practices (20.7% of students), "high level professionals who will contribute to a brighter future" (15.9% of students), "human rights and social value with focus on improvement of economy and social development" (12.5% of the students), "inclusive and equal education, including gender perspective" (3.6% of the students). Surprisingly, 1.62% of the students define the term "quality education" as "something that cannot happen in Kosovo".

What do you think of when you hear the notion of "quality education"?	Total Results	F	M	Not disclosed	Bachelor	Master	PhD	Public	Private
Higher quality and adequate education in teaching and learning	42.82%	27.69%	14.94%	0.19%	34.54%	8.09%	0.19%	25.69%	17.13%
Education standards focused on EU and US models	20.74%	13.99%	6.66%	0.095%	16.08%	4.66%	-	15.61%	5.14%
High level professionals	15.89%	9.99%	5.80%	0.095%	11.23%	4.38%	0.19%	11.61	4.28%
Human right and social value	12.55%	9.51%	3.04%	-	10.37%	2.10%	0.095%	7.99%	4.57%
Inclusive and equal education	3.62%	3.43%	0.19%	-	2.95%	0.67%	-	1.90%	1.72%
Something that cannot happen in Kosovo	1.62%	0.67%	0.95%	-	1.24%	0.38%	-	1.52%	0.19%
Nothing at all	1.14%	0.76%	0.38%	-	1.05%	0.095%	-	0.57%	0.57%
Invalid responses	1.62%	0.95%	0.67%	-	1.24%	0.29%	0.095	1.14%	0.48%
Total	100%								

Table 1. *Terminology - understanding of term "quality education"*

In the second question *"What do you think of when you hear the notion of "quality assurance"?* students correlate the term "quality assurance" positively with the thematic trends: *"boosting of studying conditions"*, *"increase of employability"* and *"having accountable HEIs that respect and implement the higher standards of education"*.

Table 2. shows that the vast majority of students (70.6%) relate the term "quality assurance" directly with the institutional guarantee for a high quality education, which ensures development of the HEI, employment of students and brighter future for them as professionals and society in general.

What do you think of when you hear the notion of "quality assurance"?	Total Results	F	M	None	Bachelor	Master	PhD	Public	Private
Guaranty for a high quality education that ensures development , employment and brighter future for students	70.60%	47.67%	22.55%	0.38%	53.95%	16.27%	0.38%	48.53%	22.07%
Reliability on values and information about HEIs	18.36%	12.65%	5.71%	-	16.07%	2.29%	-	10.37%	7.99
Legal obligation of HEIs to accredit their study programs and institutions	3.33%	2.47%	0.86%	-	2.38%	0.95%	-	1.52%	1.81%
Something missing in Kosovo	1.52%	0.86%	0.66%	-	1.05%	1.47%	-	1.33%	0.19
Rights protection	0.29%	0.29%	-	-	0.29%	-	-	0.29%	-
Nothing /I do not know	3.14%	1.71%	2.43%	-	2.76%	0.29%	0.38%	1.90%	1.24%
Invalid responses	2.66%	1.24%	1.43%	-	2.19%	0.38%	0.3%	1.90%	0.76%
Total	100%								

Table 2. Terminology - understanding of term "quality assurance"

Meanwhile, 18.3% of the respondents showed that they feel more secure about the information and the values of the institution they are studying in, when they hear the term (quality assurance).

The third question of this section was *"What do you think of when you hear the notion of 'accreditation'?"* and, as presented in *Figure 5*, the majority of the students think of the fulfillment of the set standards in order to be accredited both institutional and at study programme level (52.3%). Other students understand accreditation as HEIs' licensing (16.4%) and 10.2% of the students relate the notion (accreditation) with the validity of diplomas.
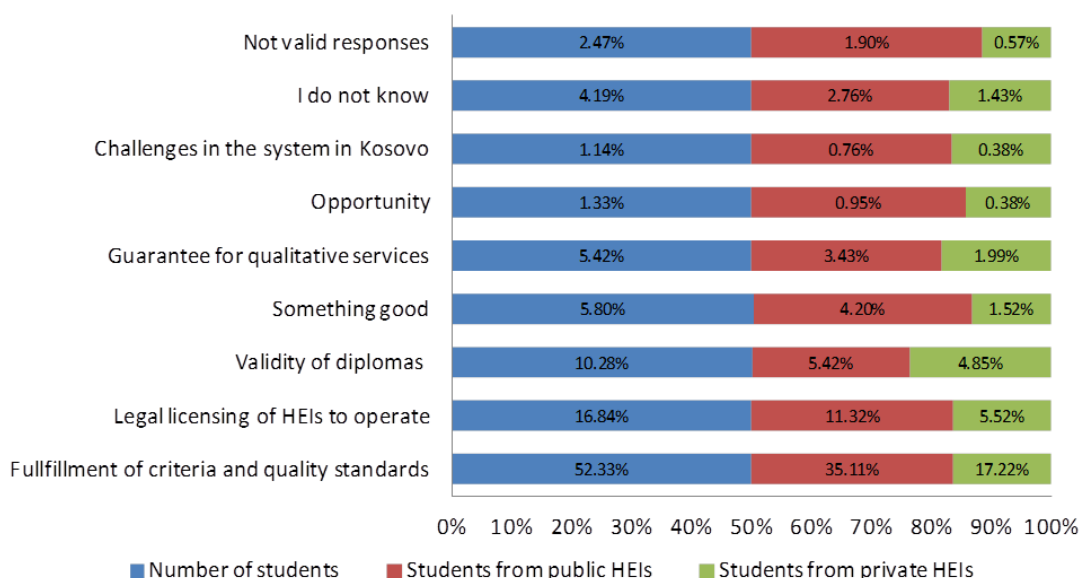

Figure 5. *Terminology - understanding of term "accreditation"*

The above presented data shows that the indicators of students' thoughts when they hear the notion "accreditation" are positive and in line with the international benchmarks.

In the last question of this section, *"What do you think of when you hear the notion of 'quality culture'?"*, majority of students relate it with the actions of HEIs and other relevant stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Education and the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, to

upgrade the quality of education standards in HEIs, improve institutional behavior and rules, create social values and implement the EU QA standards in the education system. Here, as presented in *Figure 6*, the number of students who have provided invalid responses or who said "I do not know" is higher compared to the previous questions, which is interesting because it indicates a lack of awareness of this notion.
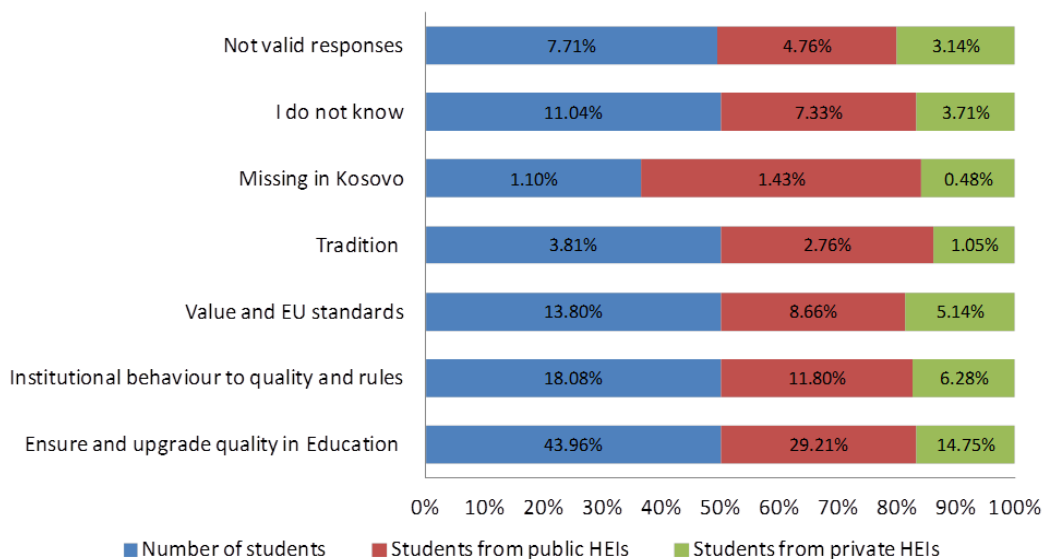

Figure 6. *Terminology - understanding of term "quality culture"*

The trends show that indicators are positive regarding the general understanding of the term *"quality culture"*. Majority of students responded that they are aware of the notion's relation to *institutional behavior, efforts to improve quality assurance processes in the country - internally and externally, education standards and upgrading of quality at all levels to enable competitive studies and diplomas with EU countries.*

Section III. Quality Assurance Awareness

This section presents the awareness of students about the Quality Assurance structures in their institutions. The survey has collected the data through three main structured questions, where all 1,051 students have responded.

As presented in *Figure 7,* 60.2% of respondents indicate that they "have not heard of any internal Quality Assurance structures" in their institution, while 39.8% affirm that they are familiar with such structure.
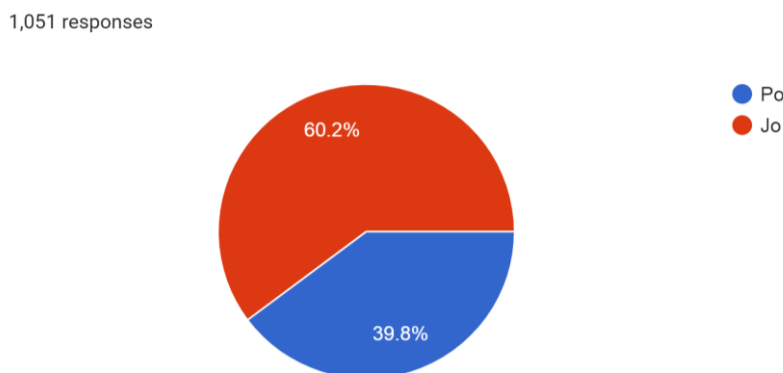
Figure 7. *Student awareness of QA internal structures in HEIs*

Of the students who responded "Yes" to the question regarding their awareness of QA internal structures, 40 to 45% indicate that there are Quality Assurance structures in their institutions of all types - department or office, committee, person in charge or unit within the faculty, as presented in *Figure 8*.
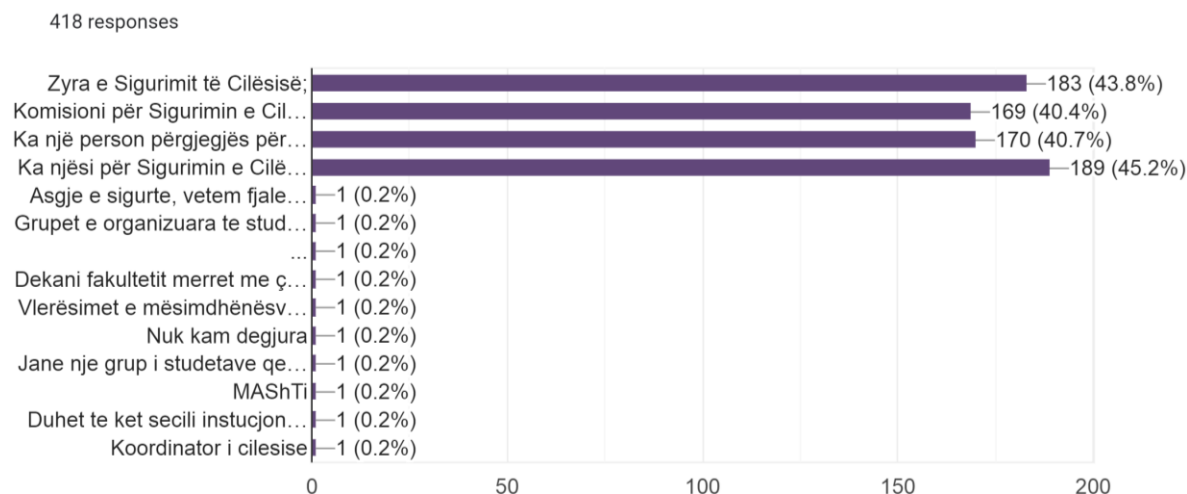

Figure 8. *Students' awareness of QA structures in HEIs*

On the other hand, out of the students who responded "No" to the question regarding their awareness of QA internal structures, 64.6% of the students specified that they were not informed by the institution about the Quality Assurance arrangements, followed by 34.1% of the students who claim that they have never showed interest on the topic, while 5.9% of the students consider QA as not useful.

Table 3 shows the extensive reasons why the students have not heard about the Quality Assurance arrangements in their institutions.

Reasons	Number of students	Percentage
Structured		
I was never interested	216	34.1%
I don't consider internal QA useful	31	4.9%
My institution did not inform me	409	64.6%
Other		
No information available	30	6%

I haven't understood the concept	4	0.8%
New student	2	0.4%
Don't like complicated structures	1	0.2%
Lack of trust	1	0.2%
Lack of recognized diplomas	1	0.2%

Furthermore, 70.1% of the students declare that they are not familiar with the Quality Assurance policies in their institutions, compared to 29.9% who claim the opposite. This is reflected in the chart below.
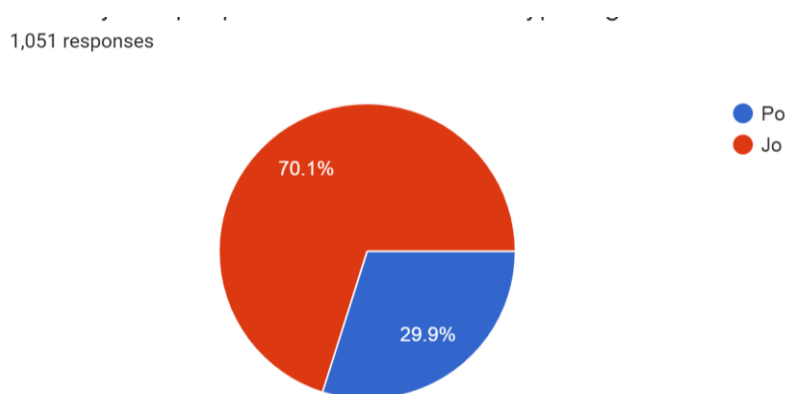
1,051 responses

Figure 9. *Familiarity of students with the Quality Assurance policy in their institution*

In addition, a high number of students (62.1%) claim that they were never informed about the importance of student engagement in QA processes by their institution, compared to 37.9% who claimed that they are informed. This is reflected in the chart below.
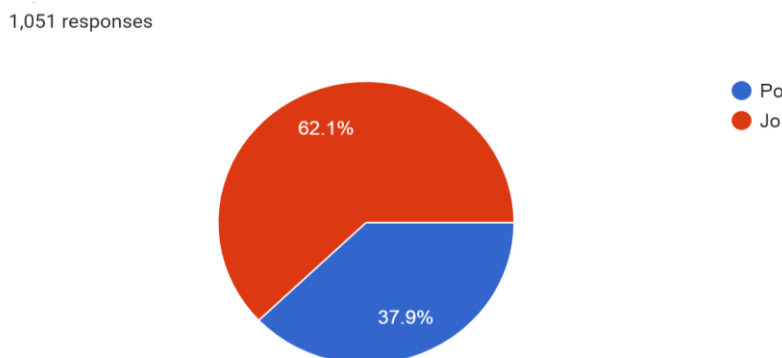
1,051 responses

Figure 10. *Familiarity of students with the importance of student engagement in quality assurance processes*

Section IV: Students Involvement and Engagement

This section focuses on the involvement and engagement of Kosovar students in the QA processes in their institution. For all figures in this section, some percentages will sum up to more than 100% because students were given the option of selecting more than one option as their answer to a question. All the 1,051 students participating in the survey responded to the questions below. The questions in this section are divided into two parts, one related to internal QA processes, and another one related to external QA processes.

Part I - Internal Quality Assurance processes

Following the trends of Section III, to the question whether the students themselves or anyone they know is engaged in internal quality assurance at their institution, 83.6% of the respondents answered NO.
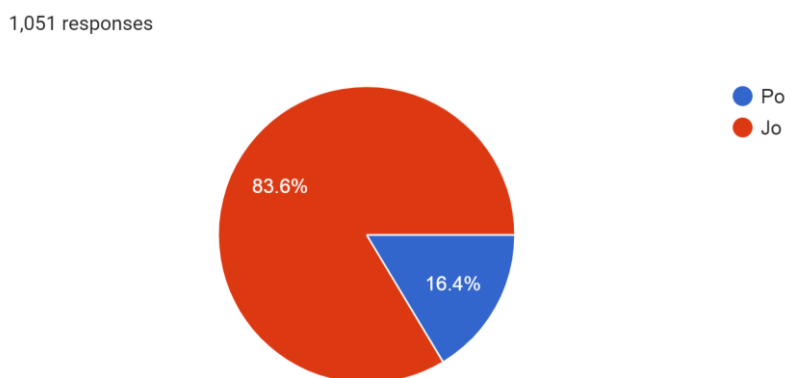
1,051 responses

Figure 11. *Students' engagement in internal quality assurance at their institution*

Out of the 172 students who responded yes to the question in Figure 11, 55.2% claimed that they represent students in decision making bodies, followed by 40.7% of the students who claimed that they fill out surveys, while 26% of them responded that they are members of QA working groups or committees; 23.3% claimed that they participate in the development of the strategic plan of the institution and only 16.9% claim to be members of self-evaluation teams.
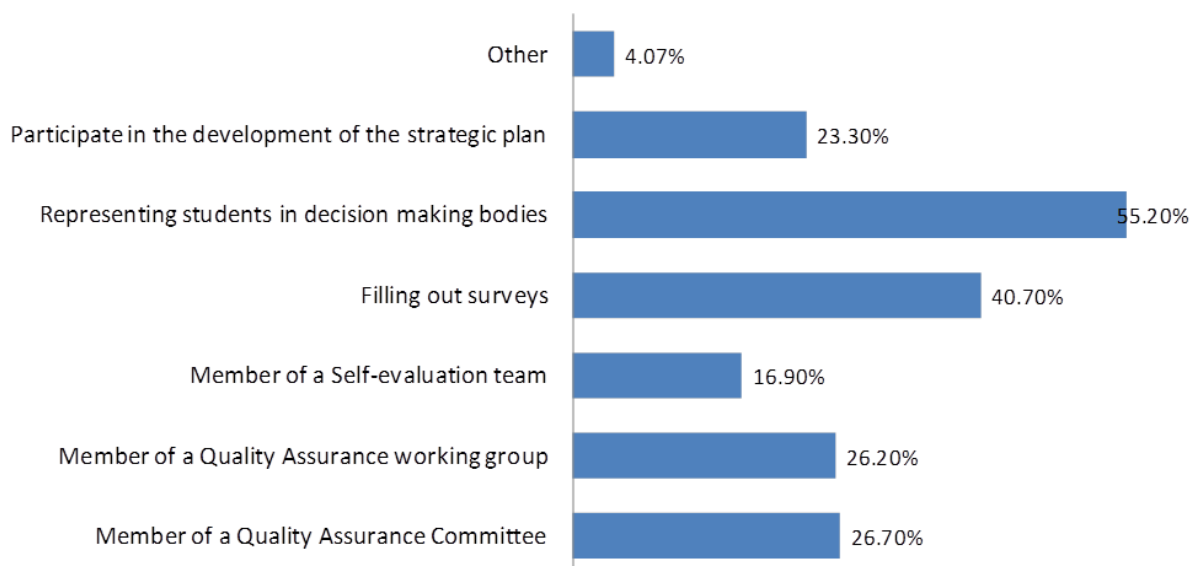
Figure 12. *The ways students are engaged in QA processes in their institution*

On the other hand, for the same question "Are you or anyone you know engaged in internal quality assurance at your institution?", out of the 879 students who responded "No", the majority claim that the reason for this is not having information and opportunities to engage in the internal QA structures; the extensive list of reasons is presented in *Table 4* below.

Reasons	Number of students	Percentage
Structured alternatives		
My institution has not presented me with the opportunity	300	34.1%
My studies have already been taking so much of my time	349	39.7%
It was never explained to me why this would be important or beneficial	450	51.2%
I don't see how this could produce any practical outcomes	99	11.3%
Other (open alternative)		
No information available	14	1.59%
Not interested	6	0.68%
Load of studies and work	7	0.80%
New student	2	0.23%
Lack of trust to professors, fear of revenge	2	0.23%
QA is not real	1	0.12%
Doesn't feel competent to respond	1	0.12%

| Family obligations | 1 | 0.12% |
| Not relevant responses | 4 | 0.46% |

Table 4. *Reasons why students in Kosovo do not engage in QA structures in their institution*

When asked "Would you be willing to be engaged in internal quality assurance processes of your institution?", 65.8% of students responded "Yes", while 34.2% did not show any interest.
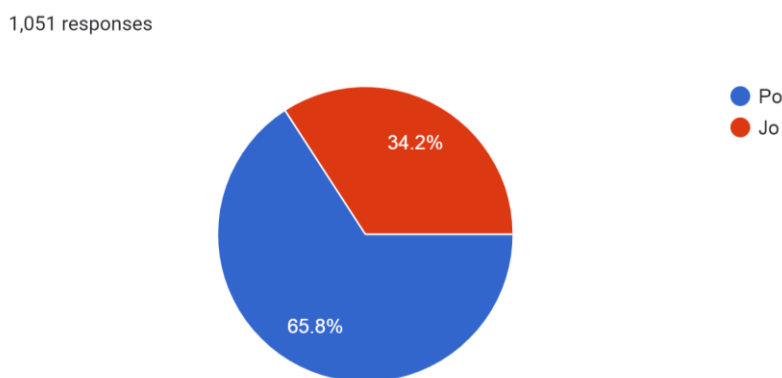

Figure 13. *Willingness of Kosovar students to engage in internal QA processes in their HEIs*

Out of 692 students who responded positively to the idea of engagement in the QA process in their institution, 61.27% of students indicated that they prefer to engage in whatever form, just to contribute to improvement of quality in the education process.

The way students want to engage in QA process in their institution	Total Results	F	M	None	Bachelor	Master	PhD	Public	Private
Whatever way, just to improve and ensure quality in education	61.27%	42.49%	18.79%	0.29%	47.40%	13.29%	0.5	43.35%	17.92%
Become part of existing QA structures in institutions	19.36%	13.15%	6.07%	0.15%	13.01%	6.36%	-	12.43%	6.5%
Have no idea	6.21%	4.92%	1.73%	-	4.77%	1.59%	-	3.76%	2.46%
Students to be first informed then to be engaged in QA Structures	6.94%	5.20%	1.73%	-	6.07%	0.87%	-	4.05%	2.89%
Volunteer work	0.14%	0.14%			0.14%				0.14%
Impossible in private colleges		0.14%			0.14%				0.14%
If they get paid		0.14%				0.14%		0.14%	
Invalid responses	5.9%	3.9%	1.59%		3.9%	1.45%	0.14%	3.9%	1.59%

Table 5. *The way students want to engage in QA process in their institutions*

The majority of them come from public HEIs and bachelor studies, and in terms of gender distribution, the number of respondents who have shown more interest to engage is higher for females compared to males. The data shows once again that there is a positive attitude of students to be engaged in the internal QA processes, in the HEIs they are enrolled with. However, 359 of the students responded that they are not willing to engage in the QA structures and processes in their institutions. As presented in *Table 6*, the majority of them have made this choice because of the overload in studies, work and other family or life issues.

On the other hand, 5.2% of the students have reported that they think they cannot make changes even if they would engage in QA processes, which is quite an alarming understanding; 2.23% of the students consider that the KAA, HEIs, professors and other administrative staff should deal themselves with the QA processes.

Reasons why students have chosen not to engage in QA process in their institution	Total Results	F	M	None	Bachelor	Master	PhD	Public	Private
Overloaded of life obligations , work and family	35.65%	28.38%	17.27%	-	27.30%	8.08%	0.28%	22.56%	13.09%
Focus on studies	22.56%	15.6%	6.96%	-	20.61%	1.95%	-	12.26%	10.31%
Have no interest at all	15.04%	9.47%	5.57%	-	12.81%	2.23%	-	8.91%	6.13%
Have no sufficient information to engage	8.64%	6.41%	2.23%	-	8.08%	0.56%	-	5.56%	3.07%
Think that cannot make a change through engagement in QA	5.29%	3.06%	2.23%	-	4.74%	0.56%	-	5.01%	0.28%
Do not know	2.51%	2.23%	0.28%	-	2.23%	0.2%	-	2.51%	-
KAA or HEIs should deal with QA	2.23%	1.39%	0.84%	-	1.95%	0.28%	-	0.84%	1.39%
My institution has good QA procedures and structures	0.56%	-	0.56%	-	0.56%	-	-	-	0.56%
Living abroad	0.56%	0.56%	-	-	0.56%	-	-	0.56%	-
Have finished studies	0.56%	0.56%	-	-	0.56%	-	-	0.56%	-

Table 6. *Reasons why students do not engage in QA processes in Kosovo*

The section continues with further understanding of the students' involvement in internal quality assurance processes in Kosovo HEIs. All the students (1,051) have responded to the questions through five structured multiple choice alternatives.

As presented in *Figure 14*, in the question "How often do you evaluate the quality of your teachers?" 57% of students showed that they evaluate the quality of their teachers at the end of each semester. On the other hand, 16.7% of the students responded that they "do not evaluate the quality of teachers". 13.9% of the students claim that the evaluation "does not happen regularly", while 12.4% claim that they perform "evaluation of teachers once per year".
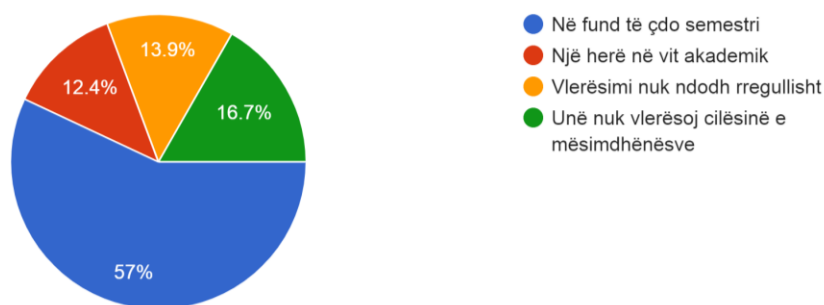
1,051 responses

- Në fund të çdo semestri
- Një herë në vit akademik
- Vlerësimi nuk ndodh rregullisht
- Unë nuk vlerësoj cilësinë e mësimdhënësve

Figure 14. *Frequency of teachers' quality evaluation in HEIs, in Kosovo*

In the question "How often do you evaluate the administration and student support services?" 38.2% students claim that they "do not evaluate the quality of the administration and student support services". Meanwhile, 23.6% claim that the "evaluation does not happen regularly"; 27.7% of the respondents claim that they participate in the evaluation of the administration and students support service at the end of each semester, while 10.5% once during one academic year.
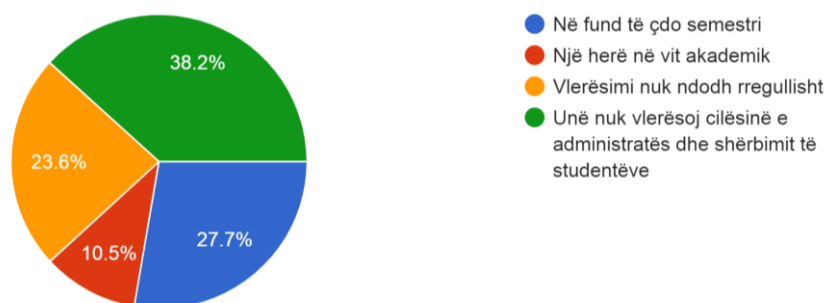
1,051 responses

- Në fund të çdo semestri
- Një herë në vit akademik
- Vlerësimi nuk ndodh rregullisht
- Unë nuk vlerësoj cilësinë e administratës dhe shërbimit të studentëve

Figure 15. *Frequency of student's involvement in evaluation of the administration and students support services in HEIs in Kosovo*

Similarly to the previous question, the data presented in *Figure 16* shows that 41.4% of students "do not evaluate the quality of infrastructure and learning resources", while 22.8% do it but "not regularly". Only 27.6% of the students indicate that they participate in "evaluation of infrastructure and learning resources" in their HEIs at the end of each academic year, and 8.2% do so once per academic year.
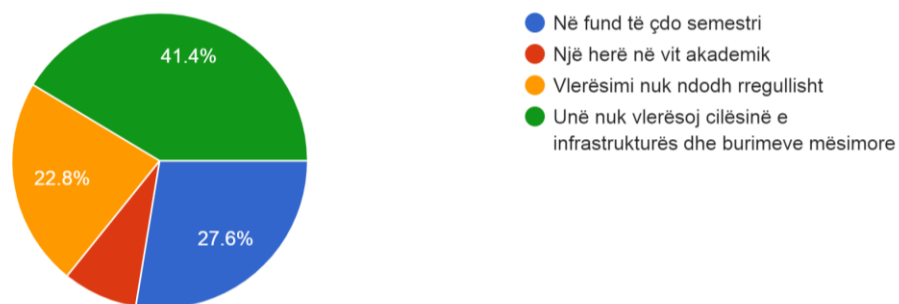
1,051 responses

Figure 16. *Frequency Kosovo students evaluate the infrastructure and learning resources in their institutions*

In the question "Are you informed about the results after filling out these surveys and how these results are used?" 48.4% of the students indicate that they are "NOT" informed, and 29% show that they "do not know" about the existence of such information.

Only 15.9% of the students claim that they have been informed and seen the results of surveys and they understand what they are used for; 29% claim that they have been informed about the results, but they do not know what they are used for.
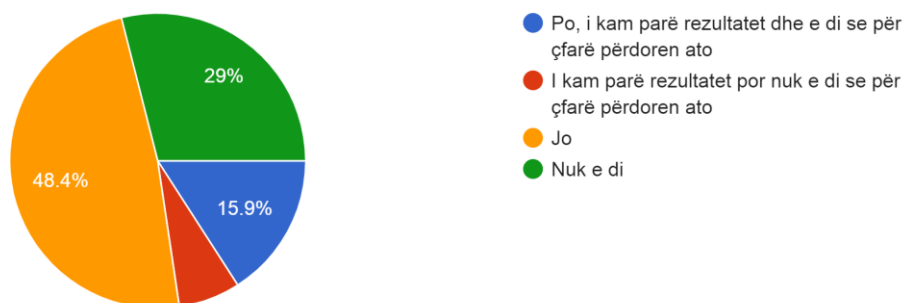
1,050 responses

Figure 17. *HEIs informing students about the result of surveys and their use. after they fill out the questionnaires*

In the final question regarding involvement of students in the internal quality assurance processes in HEIs, in Kosovo, "Do you see any changes after filling out the surveys?", as presented in *Figure 18*, 40.2% of the respondents claim that they "have never witnessed any changes after filling out the surveys", followed by 33.9% who responded "do not know".

Only 16.8% of the students claim that "the institution addresses my suggestions every time", while 9% claim that "the institution addresses my suggestions only sometimes".
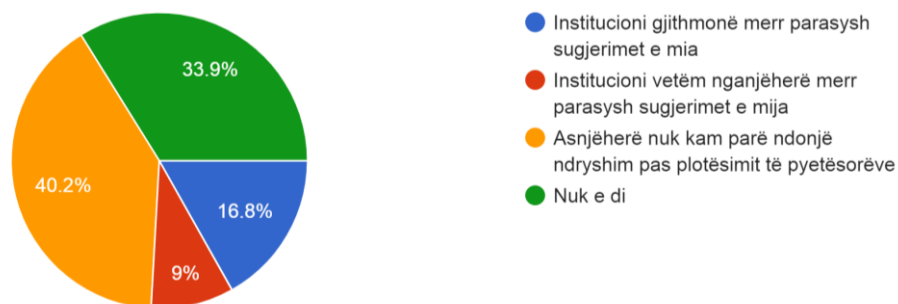
1,051 responses

- ● Institucioni gjithmonë merr parasysh sugjerimet e mia
- ● Institucioni vetëm nganjëherë merr parasysh sugjerimet e mija
- ● Asnjëherë nuk kam parë ndonjë ndryshim pas plotësimit të pyetësorëve
- ● Nuk e di

Figure 18. *How students experience the response of the institution to their inputs provided through surveys*

Part II - External Quality Assurance processes

The second part of the section dedicated to student involvement in quality assurance, looks into the specific engagement in the external quality assurance processes; 100% of the students (1,051) responded to six questions.

In the first question "Are you aware of the accreditation processes carried out by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA)?", 50.5% of the students responded "No", showing that they are not aware, while 49.5% are aware of the process.

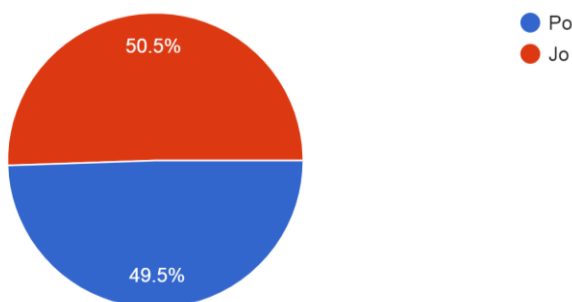1,051 responses

- ● Po
- ● Jo

Figure 19. *Awareness of students in Kosovo HEIs about the accreditation process completed by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency*

The 520 students who responded "Yes" to the above question were further asked how they understand "the purpose of the accreditation process". 37.5% of the students chose not to respond to the question.

Understanding of the accreditation purpose by the students in Kosovo HEIs.	Total Results	F	M	None	Bachelor	Master	PhD	Public	Private
Ensure implementation of legal standards and best practices to improve quality of academics and institutional operation.	19.04%	10.77%	8.08%	0.19%	15.38%	3.46%	0.19%	10%	9.04%
Improve quality of study programs in HEIs	4.81%	2.88%	1.92%	-	3.65%	1.15%	-	3.46%	1.35%
Better future and employability	2.12%	1.54%	0.58%	-	2.12%	-	-	1.15%	0.96%
Recognition of diploma abroad and enabling of post graduate studies	3.85%	3.08%	0.77%	-	3.46%	0.38%	-	2.31%	1.54%
Better administer number of students enrollment in study programs	0.58%	0.38%	0.19%	-	0.58%	-	-	-	0.58%
Useless and political process	0.39%	0.19%	0.19%	-	0.19%	0.19%	-	0.19%	0.19%
I do not know	0.58%	0.38%	0.19%	-	0.58	-	-	0.38%	0.19%
No response	37.5%	22.69%	14.81%	-	32.12%	5.38%	-		11.92%

Table 7. *Student understanding of the purpose of the accreditation process*

To the question "Have you ever been invited by your institution to take part in an accreditation procedure carried out by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA)?" 92.9% of the students responded "No"; only 7.8% of the students claim that they have been invited to take part in the accreditation procedure.
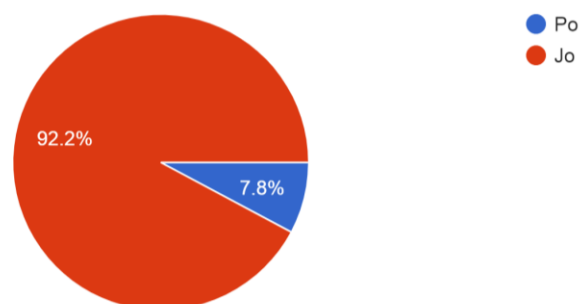

1,051 responses

● Po
● Jo

92.2%

7.8%

Figure 20. *Students' invitation to take part in accreditation processes organized by KAA*

Out of the 82 students, who responded "Yes" to the previous question, the majority claim that they have received general information about the accreditation process (date, time, possible questions and the importance) from their institution. When investigating further what type of information students receive in advance of their attendance in KAA accreditation exercises, 39.02% of the students responded that they receive all the needed information from their institution, 21.95% claim that they are told to be fair, objective and sincere, while 12.20% have claimed that they have received general information about the accreditation process such as time, date, that they are on the list etc. On the other hand, 8.54% of the students claim that they have had no information at all about the process, while 4.8% claim that their institutions have told them not to present the real situation, by hiding irregularities and prompting high levels of quality.

3.66% of the students have responded that they have not participated in the accreditation process because of personal reasons or being new in the institution, 2.44% do not remember anything about the process
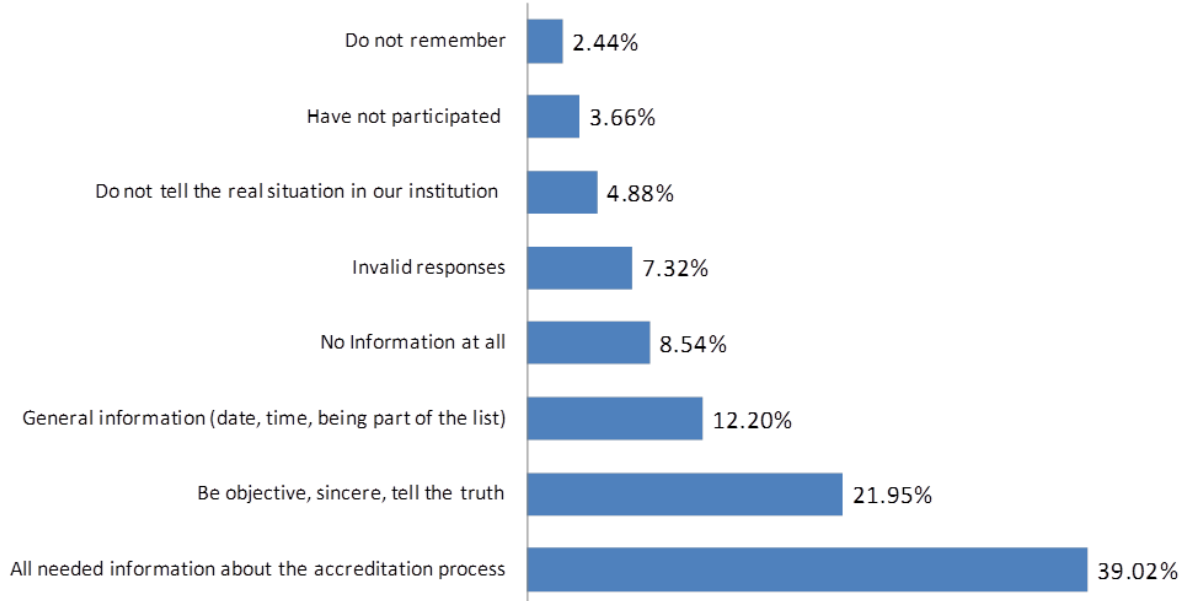

Figure 21. *Information the HEIs provide to students about the process of accreditation*

To the question "Do you think the accreditation process is important for the quality of your studies?"88.8% of the students responded "Yes", 10.6% responded "I do not know", while 0.7% responded "No".
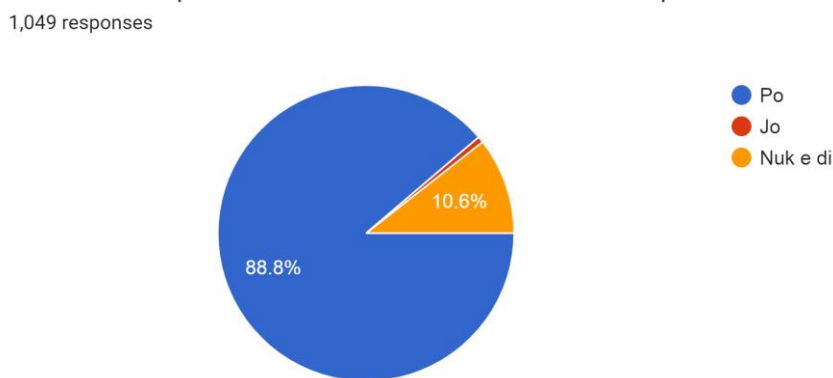
Figure 22. *Importance of accreditation process for students studies in Kosovo*

When asked about the reasons why they consider accreditation as important for the quality of their studies, 45.6% of the students responded that it "improves quality of education system" in general, highlighting that accreditation process is crucial for maintaining HEI institutions accountable in terms of institutional performance and their study programs, implementation of best international practices, enabling thus trustful enrollment of students.

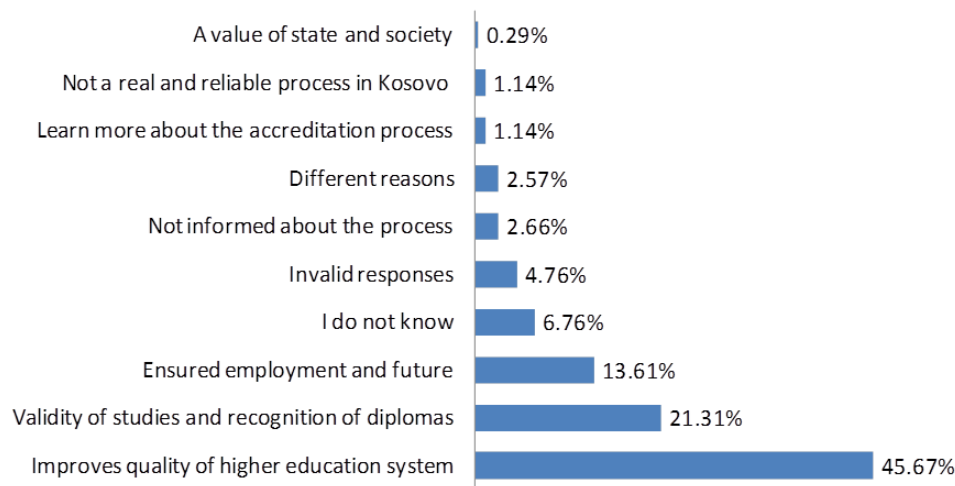|	
A value of state and society	0.29%
Not a real and reliable process in Kosovo	1.14%
Learn more about the accreditation process	1.14%
Different reasons	2.57%
Not informed about the process	2.66%
Invalid responses	4.76%
I do not know	6.76%
Ensured employment and future	13.61%
Validity of studies and recognition of diplomas	21.31%
Improves quality of higher education system	45.67%

Figure 23. *Why accreditation process is important for the quality of studies*

The data clearly shows that students are fully aware of the importance of the accreditation process for the quality of their studies and its impact on the improvement of the academic and other services, but based on the comments they are not familiar with the procedures, nor are they actively involved in the process.

Section V. Conclusion

The last section of the survey looks at how students see the benefits of engaging with the QA processes, as well as provide recommendations on how to improve such processes. The structure of questions was open ended and students have provided a variety of responses that show their willingness to be more engaged and involved in the QA processes.

50.36% of the students consider that their involvement in the QA process is crucial for the improvement of quality in HEIs and their study programmes, as they consider themselves to be the most objective voice about the strengths and weaknesses to be addressed. They also consider that involvement of students would bring positive benefits to further development of students not only academically but socially as well. This is further detailed in Table 8.

Students perspective on the benefits of their engagement in quality assurance	Total Results	F	M	None	Bachelor	Master	PhD	Public	Private
Increase of quality in higher education and ensure the voice if students is heard	50.36%	32.06%	17.99%	0.31%	37.85%	12.31%	0.21%	34.75%	15.62%
Positive benefits	11.69%	9.31%	2.38%	-	9.41%	2.17%	0.1%	7.65%	4.03%
Do not know	15.72%	11.27%	4.34%	0.10%	13.96%	1.65%	0.10%	9.31%	6.41%
Invalid	4.76%	3.31%	1.45%	-	3.62%	1.03%	0.10%	3.31%	1.45%
Experience and inclusion of students in all academic and institutional development processes	7.45%	5.48%	1.96%	-	5.17%	2.38%	-	5.69%	1.76%
Better skills for employment and career development	4.34%	2.69%	1.65%	-	3.41%	0.93%	-	2.17%	2.17%
Increase awareness and competence on quality assurance and accreditation process	3.00%	1.97%	1.03%	-	2.17%	0.83%	-	1.76%	1.24%
Few or no benefits at all	2.38%	1.24%	1.14%	-	2.17%	0.21%	-	1.86%	0.52%

Table 8. *Benefits of student engagement in QA process, as perceived by respondents*

To the last question of the survey *"What would be your recommendations to improve students' engagement in quality assurance generally?"* 941 responses were provided. Most students have provided recommendations to the HEIs to involve them more in the QA processes (27.21%), and provide more information about the QA process (16.47%). The extensive analysis of the recommendations is provided in Table 9 below.

Students recommendations to improve students' engagement in quality assurance	Total Results	F	M	None	Bachelor	Master	PhD	Public	Private
Higher and active involvement of students in all QA and institutional development processes	27.21%	17.43%	9.78%	-	19.87%	7.23	0.11%	18.49%	8.71%
More information and awareness campaigns on QA process	16.47%	12.96%	3.40%	0.11%	12.43%	3.72%	-	11.16%	5.31%
More activities, trainings and seminars related to QA processes	5.21%	3.83%	1.28%	0.11%	4.04%	1.17%	-	3.40%	1.81%
Have more regular surveys	4.04%	2.66%	1.28%	0.11%	2.76%	1.28%	-	2.76%	1.28%
Increase of cooperation between professors and students	3.93%	1.91%	2.02%	_	3.08%	0.85%	-	3.40%	0.53%
HEIs management to create discipline and be more open to accept students inputs and complaints, and address them	3.72%	2.13%	1.59%	-	3.19	0.53%	-	2.98%	0.74%
Create mechanisms to allow students be part of KAA QA processes and cooperate with international accreditation institutions	3.19%	1.17%	2.02%	-	2.44%	0.74%	-	1.91%	1.28%
More practical work during studies	1.81%	1.28%	0.53%	-	1.28%	0.53%	-	1.70%	0.11%
Teaching and learning materials to be ensured by HEIS	0.96%	0.64%	0.32%	-	0.85%	0.11%	-	0.74%	0.22%
Everything	0.53%	0.32%	0.21%	-	0.53%	-	-	0.21%	0.32%
Exchange visits with other HEIS in country and abroad	0.43%	0.11%	0.32%	-	0.21%	0.21%	-	0.32	0.11%
Do not know	22.32%	12.65%	6.70%	0.11%	19.55%	2.55%	0.21%	12.65%	9.67%

Table 9. *Recommendations to improve students' engagement in quality assurance*

22.32% of the students have not provided any recommendations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The present research report introduces the reader through the general background of student participation and engagement in higher education governance and quality assurance, as well as the evolution of this practice in the policy of the European Higher Education Area. The report also presents extensively examples of best practice in countries that have a more comprehensive history in student engagement in quality assurance, such as Denmark, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, among others.

Nationally, upon an analysis of the Kosovar legislation and context, the authors identify a general understanding in the academic community that students are not capable of contributing to any important process of the institutions. Moreover, in the majority of cases, student unions are regarded as organizations which only push forward political agendas and never deal with issues important to the study life. However, based on the survey conducted amongst the Kosovar students within the context of the present project, the majority of students have a strong will to contribute to the QA nationally and institutionally, but a lot of work remains to be done to increase their capacity to fully understand how the concept works and applies in the national system and individual higher education institutions.

Given the structural and organizational challenges, Kosovo students alone will not be able to reach their full potential in terms of representation and contribution. Primarily because students are only partly aware of the rights and the important role they have in influencing their student journey and secondly because of the lack of support by different institutional and national levels. As also confirmed by the survey, a considerable number of students claim that they are not informed about the existing QA structures by their institutions; surprisingly, one third of the students engaged with the survey claimed that they were never interested in the QA structures. The authors note that there needs to be a change of mindset primarily among institutions of higher education who consider that students' voice is heard enough through student questionnaires. Likewise, student representation in decision making bodies should not be limited to student matters only, but their right to vote should be equal to other members of the academic community.

On the other hand, national bodies need to work closely with students in order to improve the dialogue and policy about the role of students in higher education. Formal mechanisms which consistently engage students in different activities and ask for their formal feedback and contribution to different processes need to be established.

Students in Kosovo consider that their engagement in QA processes could be of high benefit to the entire HE system, as this is the only way their voice can be heard and quality assurance processes become functional and reliable. Therefore, HEIs and national bodies should take into consideration their recommendations on setting the roadmap for strengthening student engagement in the QA processes. In fact, the HEIs and national bodies in Kosovo are recommended to take the relevant measures and design action plans that ensure awareness and engagement of students in the QA processes, in alignment to the EHEA process generally and the ESG specifically.

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