



Policy Brief: Towards a Future-Ready Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Kosovo

Balancing Innovation, Stability, and Systemic Improvement in a Globalising Education Landscape

Note: This Policy Brief has been developed on the basis of the discussions held at KAA's 3rd Annual Conference on Higher Education and Quality Assurance with the topic: Internationalised Higher Education: Overcoming Borders and Bringing People Together

Executive Summary

Kosovo's higher education system stands at a crucial turning point. The establishment of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA), its (re)inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), and the progress made through the implementation of principles and action points resulting from the Bologna Process have positioned Kosovo as a credible actor with partners in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Yet, as the 3rd KAA Annual Conference on Internationalised Higher Education highlighted, quality assurance (QA) is a journey, not a destination. Continuous reflection, innovation, and stakeholder dialogue are required to ensure Kosovo's QA system remains responsive and future-ready.

This policy brief synthesises insights from the presentations and conference deliberations to outline a reform pathway that addresses seven interlinked priorities: joint and double degrees, online and blended programmes, technology in QA, diaspora engagement, regional cooperation, balancing national and international priorities, and system-level enhancement. It concludes with an overview of priority activities by key actors — the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), KAA, higher education institutions (HEIs), and international partners.

Key Messages

- Quality is a continuous process: The best QA systems never stand still — they evolve and learn.
- Dialogue before regulation: Kosovo should first agree on the purpose of policy directions and the QA concepts underpinning these (the 'why') before determining its mechanisms (the 'what' and 'how').



- Balance between change and stability: Institutionalising reform prevents fatigue while sustaining innovation.
- Digitalisation, regional cooperation, and diaspora engagement are key enablers of future quality.
- KAA's evolving role: From evaluator to knowledge hub and system developer.

1. Quality Assurance in Transition: From Compliance to Continuous Improvement

The good news is that Kosovo's QA system is internationally recognised, inclusive, and maturing. The challenge, however, is that progress must never stop. Quality assurance should be viewed as a dialogue — a collective responsibility among regulators, institutions, and society. As former KAA leaders noted, early QA efforts focused on translating international standards into national frameworks. The next phase must translate national priorities into globally credible practices.

A future-ready QA system must be systematic, evidence-based, and enhancement-oriented. This means building coherent links between the national QA framework, institutional systems, and internal mechanisms within KAA itself. Continuous improvement must be embedded in the DNA of all actors.

2. Joint and Double Degree Programmes: Aligning Standards and Responsibilities

Joint and double degree programmes exemplify Kosovo's internationalisation ambitions. Yet, as of today, there are no specific standards governing their accreditation. Existing procedures mirror those for regular programmes, which fail to address shared accountability and mutual recognition challenges. KAA should therefore develop dedicated criteria aligned with European best practices, clarify the interaction between Kosovo and partner-country agencies, and formalise cooperation agreements to ensure consistency and trust, taking into account the provisions of the European Approach¹. These arrangements will reinforce institutional capacity and provide legal clarity for both Kosovar and foreign HEIs.

3. Online and Blended Transnational Programmes: Ensuring Quality and Integrity

As higher education increasingly transcends borders and digital modalities, Kosovo must establish clear policies addressing these. This should include quality standards for online and blended transnational education. Key aspects include digital learning quality, academic integrity, platform inclusiveness, and data

¹ <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/>



security. KAA and HEIs should develop capacity to evaluate learning management systems, verify student identity, and assess accessibility for students with disabilities. Benchmarking these procedures against EQAR-registered agencies will strengthen credibility and alignment with European digital QA trends.

4. Leveraging Technology for Quality Assurance

Technology is reshaping QA globally — both within institutions and within agencies. Kosovo should embrace this transformation at two levels:

- Within HEIs: Institutions can deploy AI-assisted self-evaluation tools, integrate QA data systems with learning analytics, and use dashboards to monitor outcomes. Automation can help align learning outcomes, programme codes, and accreditation requirements.
- Within KAA: The e-Akreditimi platform currently facilitates submission of applications and staff records, but not evaluation or decision phases. Expanding it to support automated workflows, AI-supported data analysis, and report generation will enhance efficiency. KAA should introduce data governance and ethical standards for technology use, enabling staff to focus on substantive analysis rather than administrative data handling.

5. Engaging the Academic Diaspora: Turning Brain Drain into Brain Circulation

Kosovo's academic diaspora represents a rich and underutilised asset for capacity building and external review. There has been no systematic involvement of diaspora academics in KAA's expert panels or training. Developing a dedicated diaspora roster, in collaboration with the Ministry for Diaspora and MESTI, would allow Kosovo to access international expertise while maintaining contextual awareness. Diaspora engagement should also support funding acquisition for innovation projects and reinforce brain-gain strategies through visiting professorships, mentoring, and virtual participation. However, the use of international experts in KAA reviews has proven to be successful and remains a best practice in smaller countries.

6. Regional Cooperation and Harmonisation: Building Trust Across Borders

Regional cooperation within the Western Balkans is an essential mechanism for ensuring comparability and mutual trust. Kosovo should continue leveraging initiatives such as the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the SICA ESG project to harmonise QA standards. Joint evaluations, peer learning exercises, and bilateral recognition agreements with neighbouring QA agencies would strengthen regional credibility.



This is particularly important as academic mobility increases and as discussions on automatic recognition and shared accreditation intensify.

7. Balancing National Priorities and Global Competitiveness

Kosovo's QA framework must balance its responsiveness to international expectations with its commitment to national relevance. Adapting to ESG revisions is necessary, but these should be contextualised to address Kosovo's social, cultural, and economic needs. They should be understood as minimum objectives, not as the final goal. KAA's thematic analyses can play a pivotal role in informing reforms and ensuring alignment. QA should not be mistaken for a universal solution but recognised as a strategic instrument for continuous dialogue and improvement.

8. Strategic Recommendations

For MESTI:

- Develop a National Framework for Transnational and Digital Higher Education (NFTDHE) to set policy intentions, govern partnerships, recognition, and QA.
- Ensure alignment between higher education, employment, and innovation policies.
- Reward institutions for quality improvement and digital innovation through targeted funding.

For KAA:

- Align its standards with the revised ESG, once adopted
- Place stronger focus during institutional accreditations on a robust internal quality assurance framework, fostering the implementation of the ESG in HEIs
- Develop dedicated standards for joint and online degrees as well as for TNE.
- Expand e-Akreditimi into a fully digitalised, AI-assisted platform.
- Build cooperation modalities for regional and diaspora engagement.
- Increase the publication of thematic reports to guide national reforms and policy learning.



For HEIs:

- Institutionalise internal QA systems that link strategic planning, learning outcomes, and stakeholder engagement.
- Use digital tools to enhance transparency and monitor performance.
- Contribute actively to national and regional policy dialogues on QA evolution.

For International Partners and Donors:

- Support alignment of Kosovo's QA framework with ESG and digital QA standards.
- Invest in capacity building for KAA staff, reviewers, and HEIs.
- Promote long-term partnerships and collaborative research within regional frameworks.

9. Looking Ahead: A System That Learns

As noted during the KAA Conference, the best agency is one that constantly evolves and integrates improvement into its core. Future readiness will depend on Kosovo's ability to ask 'why' before 'what', balance innovation with institutionalisation, and use evidence to guide change. KAA is now positioned not only as a guarantor of quality but as a leader in system development and a convener of national dialogue. Through technology, cooperation, and trust, Kosovo can build a system that learns — dynamic, credible, and resilient.

10. Summary of Priority Activities by Actor

To operationalise the policy priorities outlined in this brief, each key actor must take a proactive role. The following overview summarises short- to medium-term activities that can translate strategy into practice:

MESTI should focus on policy coherence and system stewardship. It needs to initiate the development of a comprehensive framework for transnational, joint, and digital education, coordinate reforms with other ministries, and support evidence-informed decision-making. MESTI can also facilitate inter-agency dialogue, ensuring that higher education policy remains connected to labour-market and innovation strategies.

KAA should lead by example. Beyond maintaining compliance with ESG, it should institutionalise thematic analysis, produce regular system reviews, and integrate AI-supported data analytics into e-Akreditimi. KAA



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should also spearhead partnerships with EQAR-listed agencies, create a diaspora reviewer database, and champion regional harmonisation efforts.

HEIs must strengthen internal QA mechanisms, linking institutional missions with learning outcomes and stakeholder engagement. They should actively participate in shaping future standards, especially for digital and cross-border provision, while experimenting with technology-enhanced learning and assessment models.

International partners and donors can support Kosovo's next QA phase through targeted assistance — providing technical expertise, financing digital infrastructure, and supporting collaborative projects under Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and RCC frameworks. The goal should be to reinforce sustainability, inclusion, and international credibility rather than dependency.