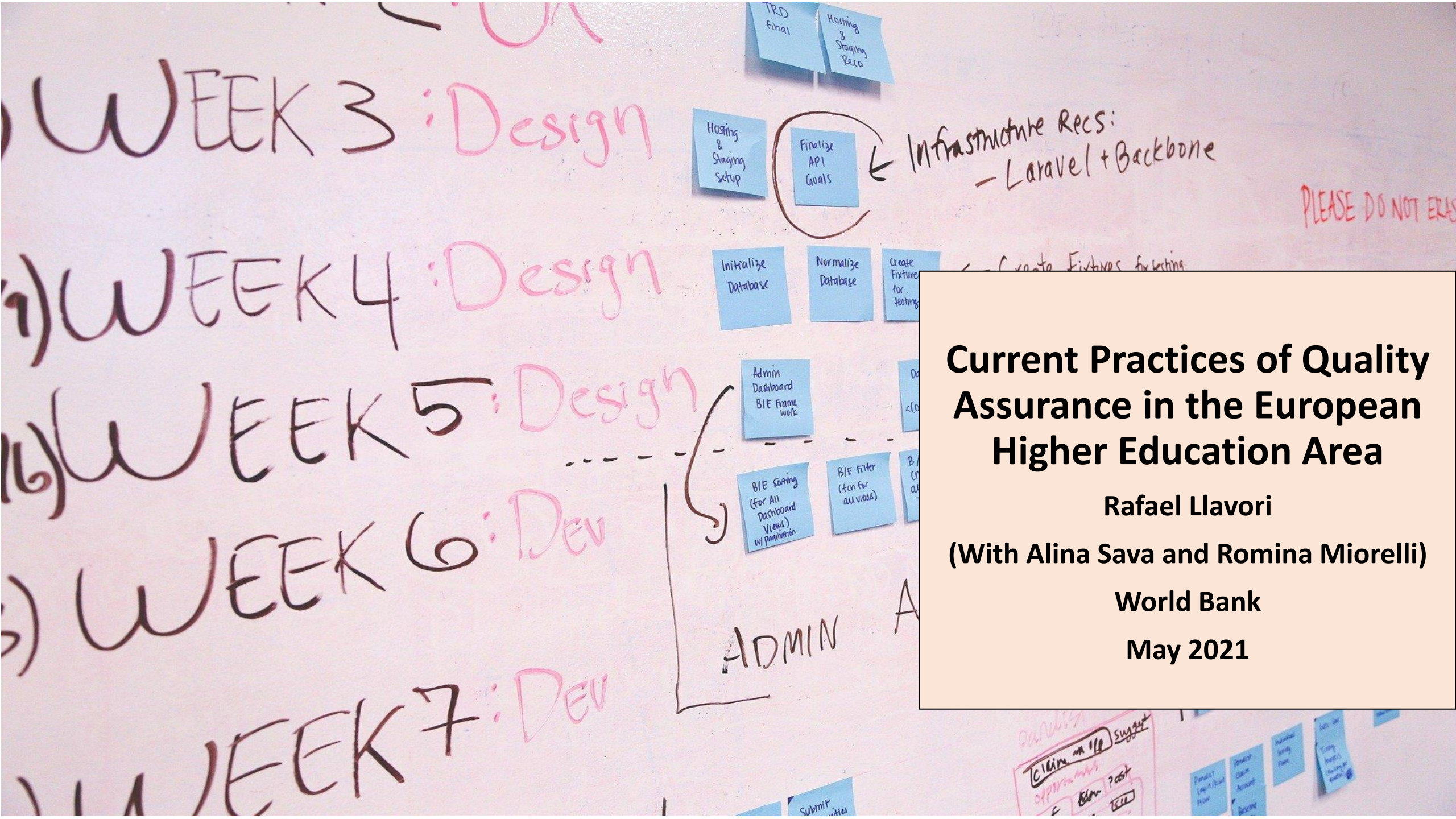


Current Practices of Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

Rafael Llavori

(With Alina Sava and Romina Miorelli)

World Bank

May 2021

World Bank as a partner

Alina Sava, World Bank

COVID-19 adaption & impact

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted project's activities in the last year of implementation, including capacity-building and dissemination activities. Most of the activities shifted to online, benefiting yet from the recent developments of online platforms and video conferencing tools.

It also showed that technology will be the primary resilience instrument for the higher education sector as well. At the same time, HEIs will need to operate more strategically as teaching, learning, and research embrace and adapt to remote delivery and online settings. Thus, higher education systems should invest in the development of their local digital infrastructure toward building more **agile and flexible systems**.

WORLD BANK GROUP
Education

World Bank as a partner

Alina Sava, World Bank

Lessons Learned & Knowledge Spillovers

BUILD BETTER. Updating national and be aligned with European standards should improve learning outcomes, resilience, inclusion, and sustainability of the higher education ecosystem. Creating ownership for results, public consultations, and permanent strive for adopting modern tools will increase Romania's quality culture. **Quality also means improved equity and inclusion to better access to higher education.**

CREATE OPERATIONAL PARTNERSHIP. In Romania, the WB team worked closely, consistently, and at the same level of expertise. Foster a positive climate, provide timely response and consistent approach are key for a new generation of projects. The WB team had a close collaboration with QAFIN management, especially with ARACIS, an excellent and reliable partner - receiving regular, consistent, and constructive feedback, which has been instrumental in delivering high-quality reports and successfully implementing the activities.

SCALE-UP OR REPLICATE IN ECA COUNTRIES. The technical expertise supported informed analysis, dialogue, and evidence-based decision-making (implementation tools like methodologies, ROFs). In addition, learning during implementation identified innovations, possible solutions which can be scaled up or replicated in other European and Central Asia countries to strengthen institutions.

WORLD BANK GROUP
Education

Rationale of the presentation

Need to use the Higher Education (HE) Reform in Romania, and the Quality Assurance (QA) framework as a sound and strong basis for ARACIS to lead, with the support of the Romanian Higher Education Institutions (HEI), the way of a mature system to the future (already current) trends of QA not only at the national but also at the regional level.

1 Current context in Romania. Reform of HE and QA sector: The QA national system does not start from scratch, it is a **strong and experienced system**.

2 ARACIS and the Romanian higher education institutions (HEI) have travelled a long way in developing the tools and mechanism of QA in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA): **European Standards and Guidelines** (ESG)

3 Three current indicators of a **matured** QA System in Rumania:

- ARACIS is listed in the European Quality Register (EQAR) for more than 10 years
- ARACIS holds a vice-presidency in the ENQA Board (April 2021)
- Romanian HEI have been submitted to evaluations procedures and developed internal QA (IQA) systems in a wide range of depth and experience

WORLD BANK GROUP
Education



Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

An overview of the **current trends** in QA of HE in the EHEA in a **(post)pandemic world** possibly gives the following set of "hot topics" in the EHEA but also at the global level:

1. **Dialogue** between **Internal Quality Assurance** (IQA) **and External Quality Assurance** (EQA): Towards a new 'academic and social contract' between HEI and quality assurance agencies (QAA)
2. **QA** of **on-line and hybrid delivery**: Taking breath after the disruption of the pandemic and thinking on the classic QA trade: student achievement and assessment
3. **QA of short educational packages** (SEP) and the recognition of their **(micro)credentials**, badges or (micro)qualifications
4. **European University Strategy** (European Commission): From a joint-programme to a multi-institutional programme - and its corresponding (multi)national or 'European' qualification
5. **Employability and HE or 'the elephant in the room'**: How can QA contribute to its success

Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

1. **Dialogue** between **Internal Quality Assurance** (IQA) **and External Quality Assurance** (EQA): Towards a new 'academic and social contract' between HEI and quality assurance agencies (QAA)

   - A strong part of the QA Reform Project in Romania have dealt with IQA within HEI and the EQA procedures to be carried out by ARACIS
   - The purpose of this 'dialogue' is twofold:
     - To reinforce the IQA of the Romanian HEI to assume more responsibilities in the management of their QA policy and strategy ('risk strategy' of QA)
     - To focus ARACIS' efforts in a more enhancement-led accreditation procedure taking the HEI holistically as the independent object of analysis

Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

1. **Dialogue** between **Internal Quality Assurance** (IQA) **and External Quality Assurance** (EQA): Towards a new 'academic and social contract' between HEI and quality assurance agencies (QAA)

   - The new national institutional accreditation approach can turn into a point of reference to define an international (at the regional level y Central and South-Eastern Europe)
   - ARACIS and the Romanian HEI should play a significant part as a leading QAA and HE system at the regional level and also beyond thinking to become an actor in Transnational Higher Education (TNE) in terms of cross-border HE
   - Such role could easily be played by means of international cooperation with organisations in countries of the former Soviet Union in Central Asia

Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

1. **Dialogue** between **Internal Quality Assurance** (IQA) **and External Quality Assurance** (EQA): Towards a new 'academic and social contract' between HEI and quality assurance agencies (QAA)

   - This region has developed a huge effort, heavily funded by European Commission initiatives, to adapt their HE sector to the EHEA tools and mechanisms
   - Beyond talking about any particular strategy concerning international cooperation, the crucial bit of the Reform and QAFIN Project is to think of the Romanian QA system as a matured one ready to operate in a **3.0 version** after more than 10 years being listed in EQAR
   - The position of ARACIS in the ENQA Board assuming last April one of the Vice-presidencies (and under the very dynamic presidency of Douglas Blackstock) should be taken as an opportunity for internationalisation as well

Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

2. QA of on-line and hybrid delivery. Taking breath after the disruption of the pandemic and thinking on the classic QA trade: **student achievement and assessment**

Due to the pandemic the debate in QAAs focused mainly on three axis:

- the quick response to HEI to maintain the QA procedures by on-line means ensuring the continuity of the evaluation processes
- the support to HEI in terms of guidelines and protocols concerning on-line delivery maintaining the requirements on learning outcomes achievements and student evaluation methods
- To reinforce support and particular training in changes in the methodology and e-platforms to external evaluators to face the new on-line accreditation site visits

Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

2. QA of on-line and hybrid delivery. Taking breath after the disruption of the pandemic and thinking on the classic QA trade: **student achievement and assessment**

Now, more than one year after the beginning of the pandemic and still in its process, QAAs should, in collaboration with HEI to:

- produce analysis and reports on the of the on-line delivery on the learning outcome achievements of students
- work out guidelines on student assessment techniques related to the different mechanisms to gather information about the assessment of competences in various disciplines and themes
- pay particular attention on the impact of the digital breach in student performances identifying indicators to be included in future institutional accreditation procedures on community engagement of HEI

Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

3. QA of short educational packages (SEP) and the recognition of their **(micro-) credentials**, badges or (micro-)qualifications

A plethora of reflections on QA of short courses and micro-credentials have been published:

From the perspective of QAA:

- CHEA (USA ,2019): '*Digitization of Credentials: Quality of Shorter-Term Educational Experiences*'
- ANECA (Spain, 2020): *'ANECA Statement on QA of Short Teaching and Learning Packages and the Recognition of their Credentials*'

From the perspective of employers and industry:

- Interamerican Development Bank (IDB/BID): *Digitization of Credentials: Quality of Shorter-Term Educational Experiences*

Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

3. QA of short educational packages (SEP) and the recognition of their **(micro-) credentials**, badges or (micro-)qualifications

From the perspective of HEI and MOOCs Platforms:

- USA: Colorado State University, Illinois State University, California Community Colleges…
- Coursera, EdX

From the perspective of governments and multinational organisations:

- Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020: The Undergraduate Certificate, a formal qualification recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework
- European Commission 2021: A European approach to micro-credentials. Public consultation.

Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

3. QA of short educational packages (SEP) and the recognition of their **(micro-) credentials**, badges or (micro-)qualifications

Universities as Lifelong learning institutions

Looking at the future from solid bases:

- Strong methodology, but flexible enough to adapt
- Fostering the consolidation of a quality culture, for dynamism
- Enhancing permeability and learning pathways
- Quality ensures motivation to learn and re-learn…

Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

4. **European University Strategy** (European Commission): From a **joint-programme** to a **multi-institutional programme** - and its corresponding (multi)national or 'European' qualification.

The QA of European Universities as the flagship of QA innovation in Romania

- A new European strategy requires a new QA innovative approach.
- Is the European Approach to Joint-programmes the best possible tool to address QA of the European University Strategy?
- Can the European Approach deal with such diversity and innovative HE proposal from the viewpoint of QA and qualification recognition?

What are the tools and experiences gathered by the QAFIN Project in Romania that could be used to address the QA of European Universities from the perspective of the QA agency of a university in charge of coordinate on of the consortiums?

Current Trends in QA in the EHEA: All quite in the Western Front?

5. **Employability and HE or 'the elephant in the room'**: How can QA contribute to its success

   Finally, the last trend included in this quick overview deals with the huge pressure HEI, and the HE sector as a whole, is holding on the impact in employability. Particularly in a context of worldwide economic crisis and facing the gloomy post-pandemic situation.

   HEI should commit themselves to achieving better mechanisms to improve flexible labour and professional profiles to graduates by means of strengthening their relationship with the appropriate stakeholders

   QA procedures and especially the programme accreditation ones should refine those guidelines directed to measure and merit successful performance indicators related to employability

Concluding remarks

- The Reform of QA of HE in Romania marked an important step forward
- ARACIS has to take part actively in the current debate on QA trends within ENQA and also as a key player in the Eastern and Central European setting
- ARACIS and Romanian HEI should agree on a shared international strategy on QA to promote the national IQA and EQA framework as a good practice at the regional level
- A more active Romanian HE and QA sector will result in a more balanced and diverse HE landscape in the European Higher Education Area





Thank you very much!