

Students as drivers for change in quality assurance: from involvement to agency



What comes into your mind when you think of student participation in QA?

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Student participation in Higher education – the general framework

- Core stakeholder of HE systems
- Experts of their learning and producers of knowledge <-> mission of HE
- Guarding student rights and ensuring university democracy
- Maintaining co-ownership of the education system
- Focusing on student needs and interest - essential in defining what 'quality' is (evolving?)
- Learning democracy, participation and autonomy through hands-on engagement in leadership

Student participation in Higher education – the Bologna framework

Prague Communiqué (2001):

- students are full members of the higher education community
- involvement of universities and other higher education institutions and of students as competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area
- students should participate in and influence the organisation and content of education at universities and other higher education institutions

Berlin Communiqué (2003):

- participation of students in Quality assurance
- constructive participation of student organisations in the Bologna Process and underline the necessity to include the students continuously and at an early stage
- students are full partners in higher education governance
- call on institutions and student organisations to identify ways of increasing actual student involvement in higher education governance

Leuven Communiqué (2009):

- Student participation in lifelong learning, student-centred learning, designing learning outcomes

Student participation in Higher education – the Bologna framework

Budapest-Vienna Declaration (2010):

- We fully support staff and student participation in decision-making structures at European, national and institutional levels

Yerevan Communiqué (2015):

- Student involvement in curriculum design

Paris Communiqué (2018):

- Student participation as one of the 6 fundamental values

Rome Communiqué (2020):

- Safeguarding student rights through legislation
- Working closely with student and higher education associations and networks on the development and implementation of national reforms

Student participation in Higher education – the Bologna framework

Tirana (2024):

- have their views represented and taken into account;
- have the right to initiate debates and table proposals in all governing bodies and participate in the discussion of and decision on them,
- Rooted in clear and transparent regulations, provisions and procedures;
- Taking into account the diverse socio-economic conditions of different students;
- At various stages of decision-making and decision-taking processes, including setting agendas, drafting decisions, voting and veto, implementation and monitoring;
- Institutions as well as student and staff organisations should seek to stimulate participation in student and staff elections as well as encourage participation of students and staff and engage in the life of the institution;
- Higher education institutions and systems should provide support, including financial and other resources, for sustainable representation of students and staff and ensuring the independence of representatives and their organisations;

QA conceptualisation

Student participation in QA takes forms dependent on what QA is. QA in Europe emerged with two different narratives: consumeristic/neoliberal-based and Humboldtian-based.

Harvey&Green (1993): quality defined as

- Exceptional/excellence
- Consistency
- Fitness for purpose
- Value for money
- Transformative learning process

What for – public funding check, accountability, reliability of diploma, transparency, labour market?

Bologna Process: QA is the manifestation of the public responsibility of (HEIs perspective) and for (state perspective) higher education, in the context of institutional autonomy → a bit of a Pascal's bet

QA conceptualisation

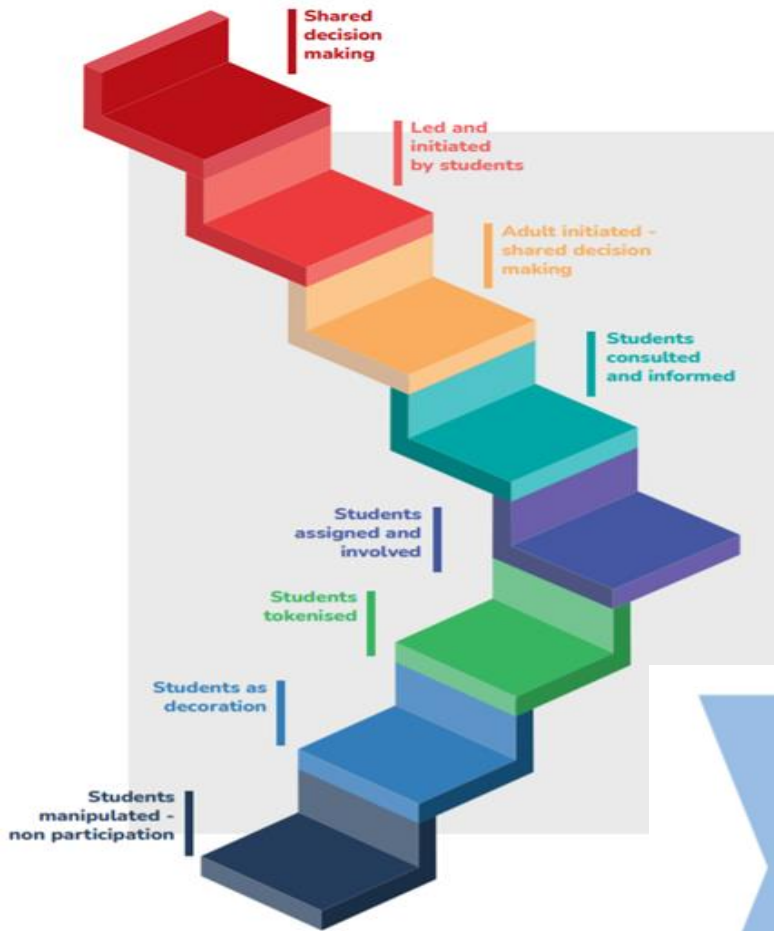
- Quality is a political concept which implies negotiation
- What is done via QA and what not: appropriateness, normativeness, functionality
- Principle of presumed, relative trust

Student participation in QA: a conceptualisation

- Student participation in QA comes as a ladder:
 - a) Students as **data providers** in internal QA & external QA (evolution: from survey of **student experience** to **student engagement**)
 - conscientious involvement requires **belonging** + a sense of **efficiency**
 - b) Students being **consulted** in internal QA, external QA and QAA structures
 - risk of tokenism
 - c) Students in a **structured dialogue** in internal QA, external QA and QAA structures
 - d) Student **partnership** in QA – co-interesation
 - student **agency**

Student participation in QA: a conceptualisation

- Student agency is the **third layer of the student-centred learning** meta-concept (Klemencic, 2018) – pedagogical, learning environment, institutional
- Different role based **on focus** (accountability/enhancement), **type** (evaluation, audit, risk-based) and **indicators** (input/process/output)
- Does QA look into what students believe it's relevant for them? Issue of rights and **legitimate** interests
- In many countries in Europe, QA was a factor for increasing student participation overall
- StudPart lens for strategic decisions: centralised/decentralised, structural/cultural approach



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European Student Participation Index v2.1

Indicator

Indicator	ES	FR	NL
The student body has its own governing and participation bodies	●	●	●
The obligation to finance the governing bodies of the student body is established	●	●	●
The obligation to compensate (financially) for individual participation in student representation is established	●	●	●
Credits are recognized for student representation activities	●	●	●

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European Student Participation Index v2.1

Indicator

Indicator	ES	FR	NL
The possibility that student representatives may not attend class and / or change their evaluations due	●	●	●
The student body can participate in the academic bodies of the universities	●	●	●
Participation quota assigned to the students in the academic bodies of the universities	-	-	21-25%
The student body participates proactively in the governance structures of the country's quality agencies	●	●	●



Student participation in QA (benefits)

- Students participate as **general population** (essential data, community building)
- Students participate in QA as **experts** (expertise)
- Students participate in QA as **student representatives** (legitimacy, scrutiny, efficiency, transparency - at all levels!)

Benefits overlap - case study: student surveys

- Relevance for design and contextualisation
- Relevance for legitimisation & ensuring anonymity
- Relevance for reporting back to the student body
- Relevance for effectiveness
- Relevance for data interpretation

Student participation in IQA – key considerations

- Promoting of the culture of quality should take place from the beginning of the study cycle
- Students should be encouraged to be critical and reflective regarding their programmes, curriculum planning, assessment, learning environment, study conditions, support systems, promoting student-centred learning. Incentives: right to call meetings, co-interesation (veto player)
- The whole student body should be engaged through regular surveys (on different areas of relevance) and qualitative means, on institutional and subinstitutional level
- The whole student body should know the results of evaluations, the follow-up and the impact
- Formal participation in QA bodies that ensures a meaningful and impactful participation
- Student representatives should be engaged in the whole policy cycle of internal QA: preparation of IQA strategy/plans, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as in the outcomes of IQA: preparation, decision, implementation and evaluation of policies/strategies/measures

European case study

- ESGs (proposed by E4 + social partners): minimal standards, accountability. ESG is unique as a political commitment + stakeholder-driven + enforcement by ricochet
- Students needs taken into account by QA as a principle, full and equal partnership in QA - implications for IQA, EQA and QA agencies governance
- Stakeholders mentioned in 24 standards, students specifically in 6
- Empowerment through national QA Pools (QA agency/NUS/together) and other national activities (e.g. student engagement frameworks in UK nations, Ireland + sparqs, ESQA) → clear link between internal and external QA
- Context-based. Doesn't mandate institutional/programme level

**ESG
2015**



Q12: Which groups of stakeholders are involved in the different type of quality assurance activities? Check all that apply in each column. (N=29)

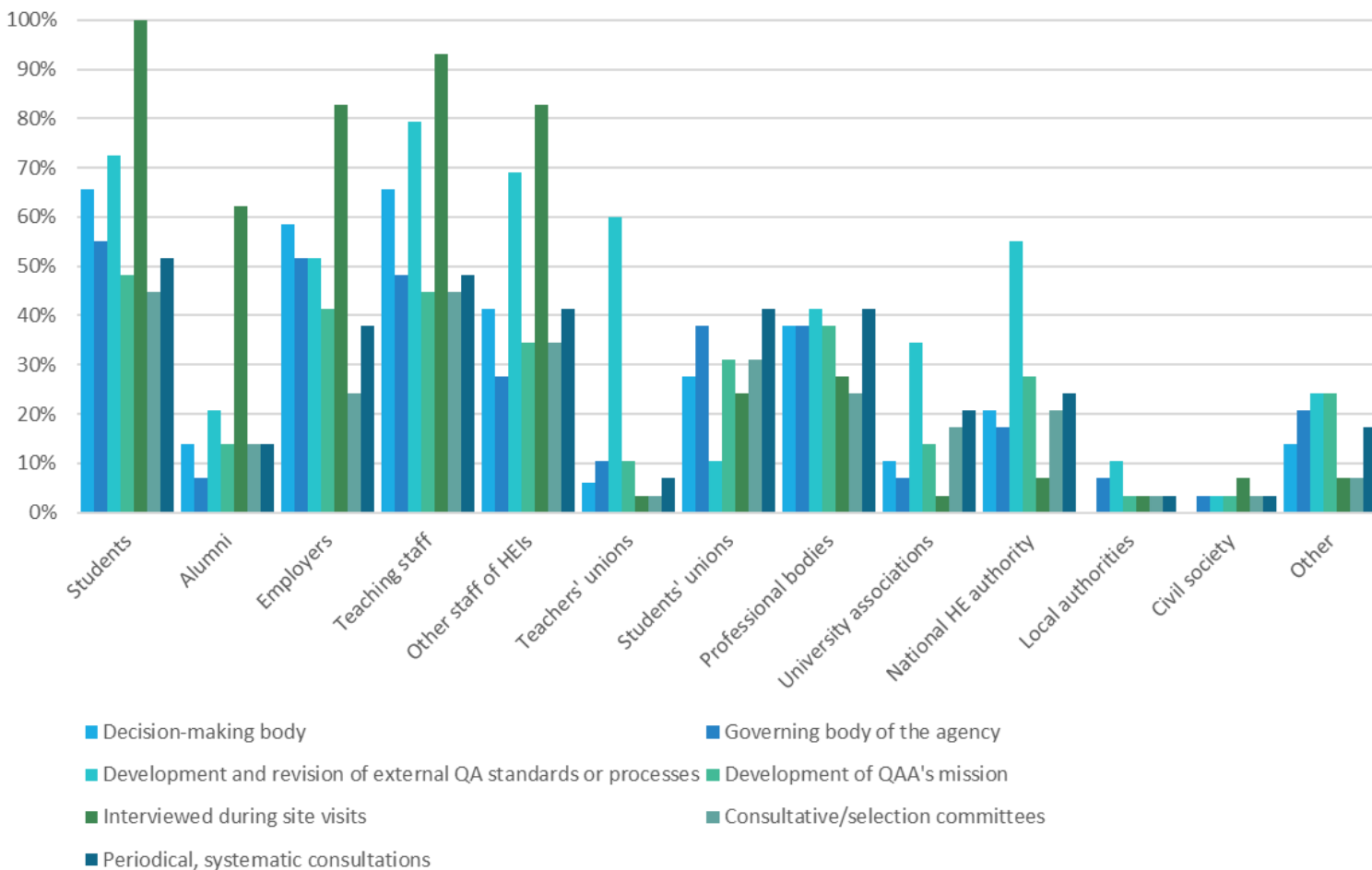
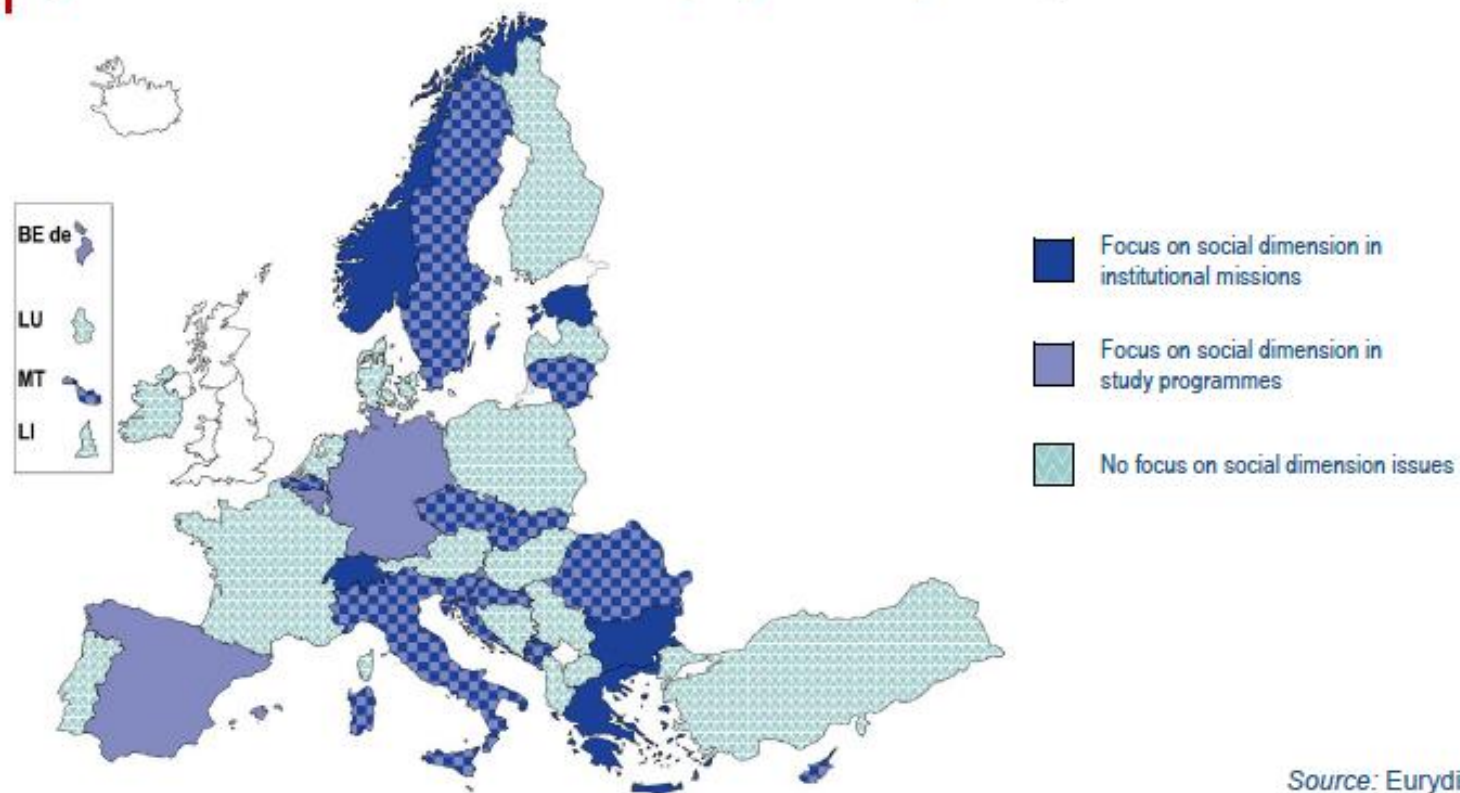


Figure 7.4: Focus on social dimension in external quality assurance processes, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

Figure 9 - Indicators on social dimension used in external quality assurance

To what extent are the following aspects of social dimension covered by the external quality assurance procedures in your country?

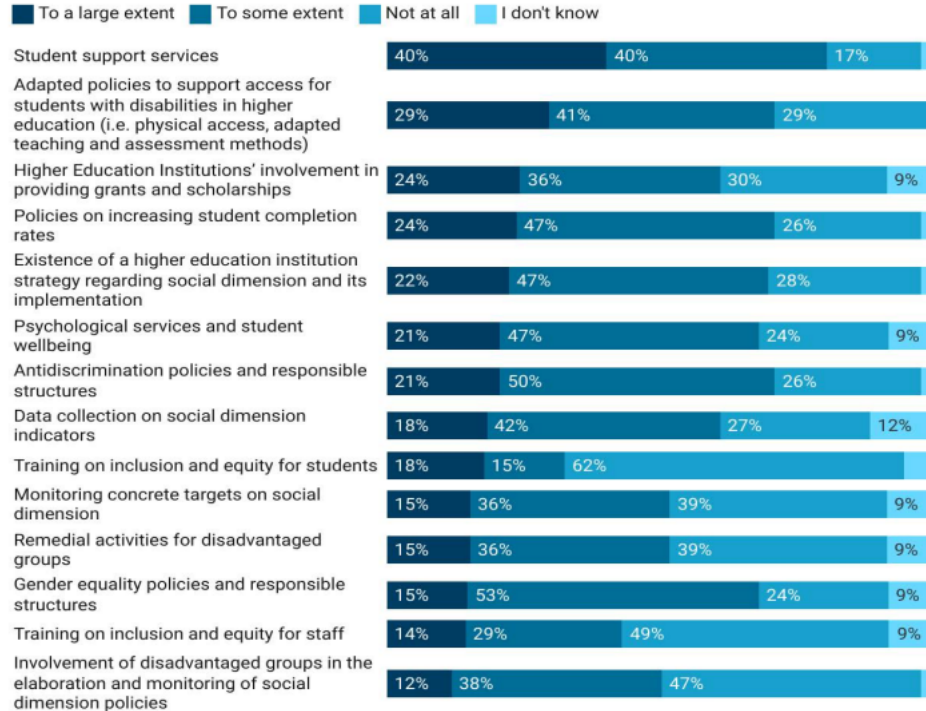


Chart: ESU • Source: QA FIT • Created with Datawrapper

How important do you consider these indicators as means to assess the implementation of student-centred learning?

■ Not important
 ■ Slightly important
 ■ Somewhat important
 ■ Fairly important
 ■ Very important

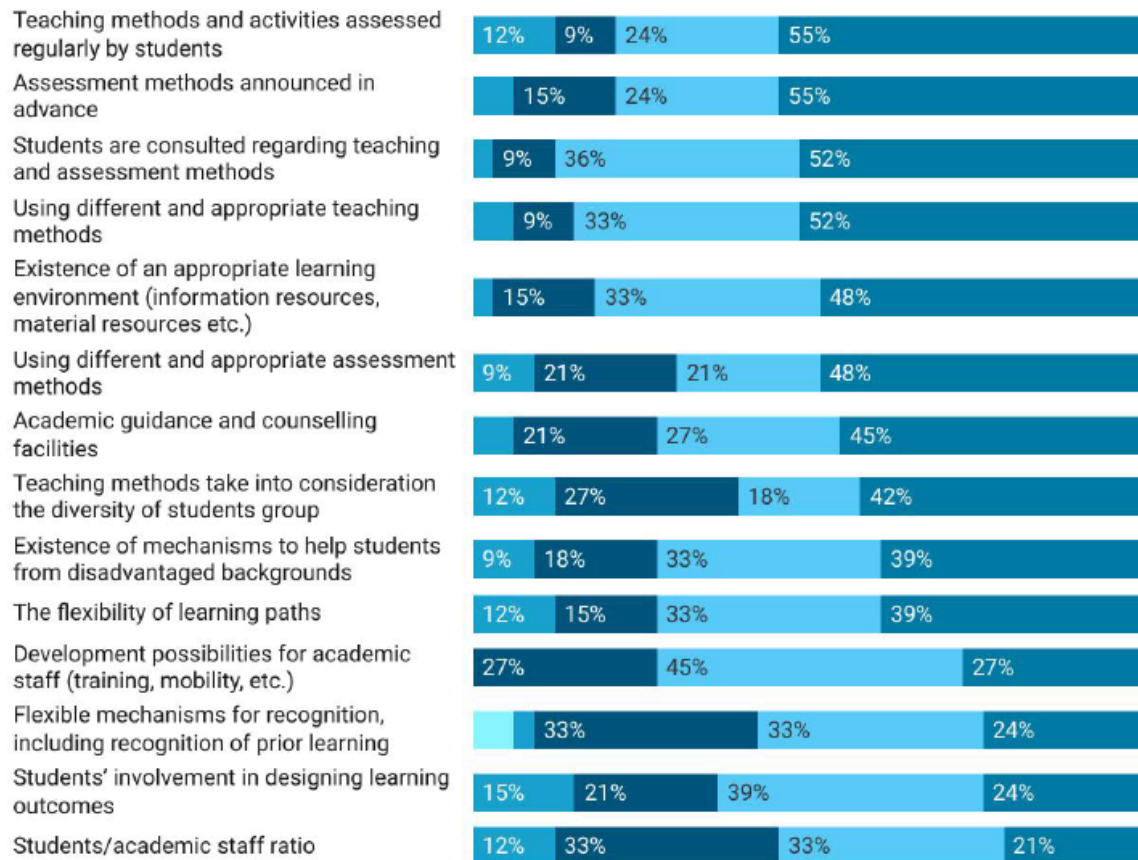
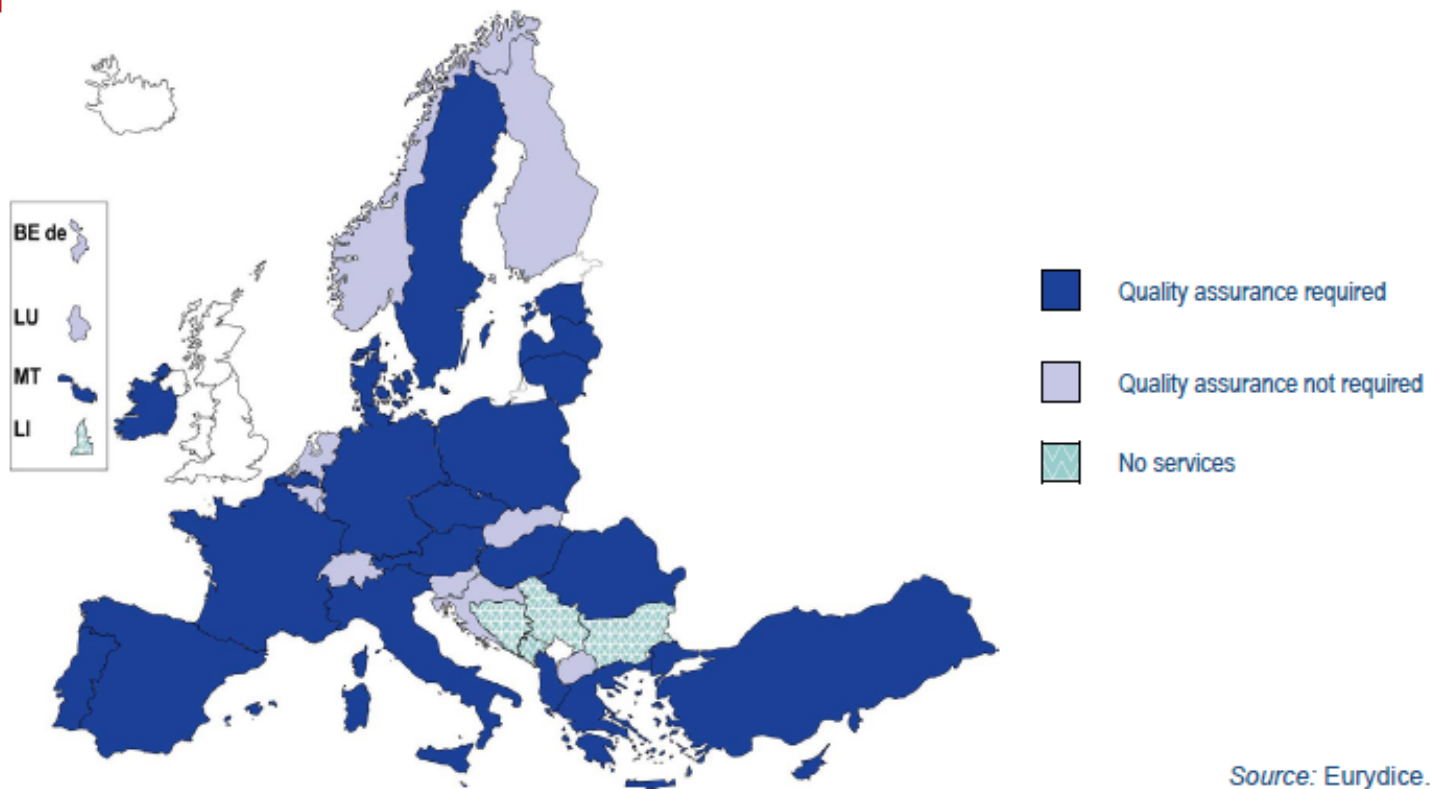
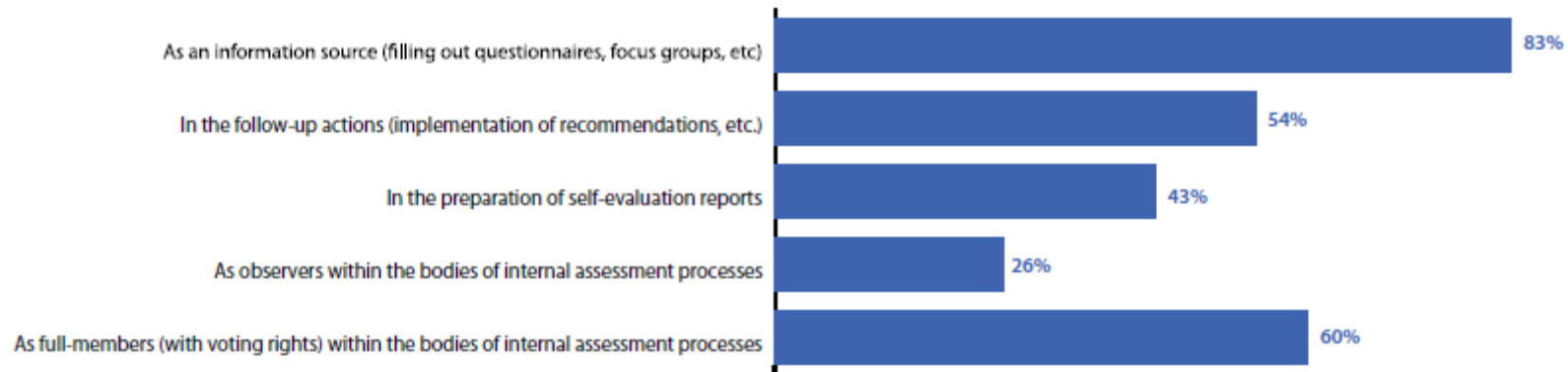


Figure 5.4: Requirement for psychological counselling services to be subject to quality assurance, 2020/2021



Source: Eurydice.

8.3. Type of involvement of students in internal QA processes



10. Main barriers for students regarding their involvement in internal QA

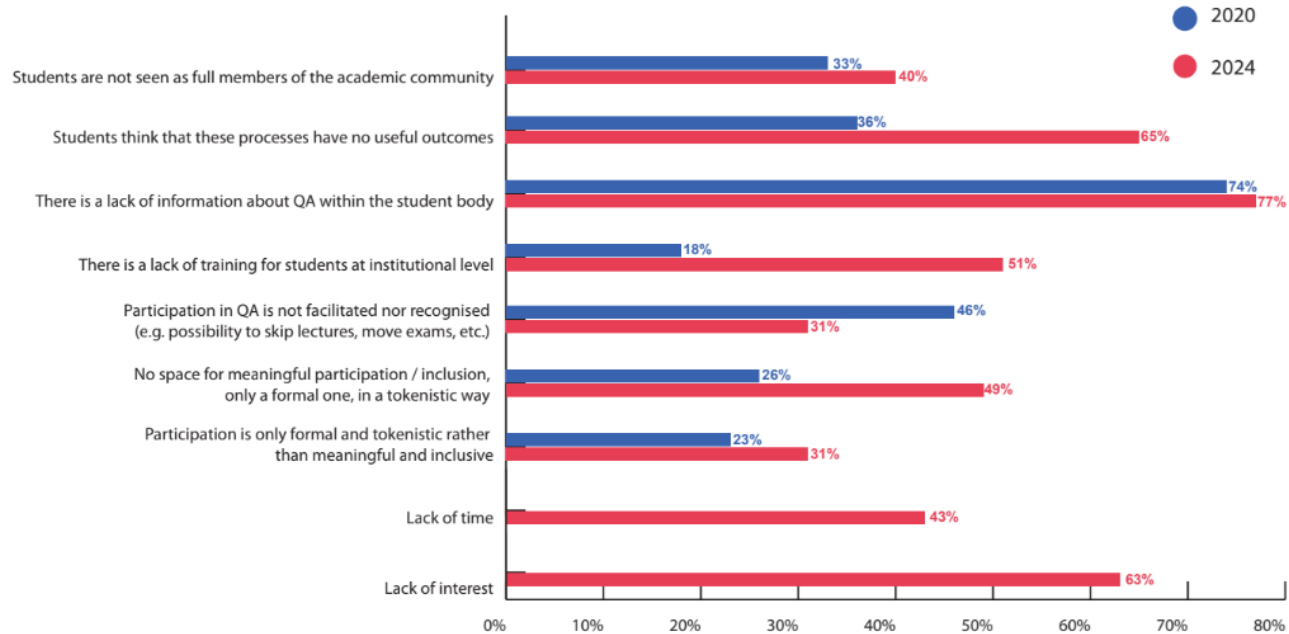
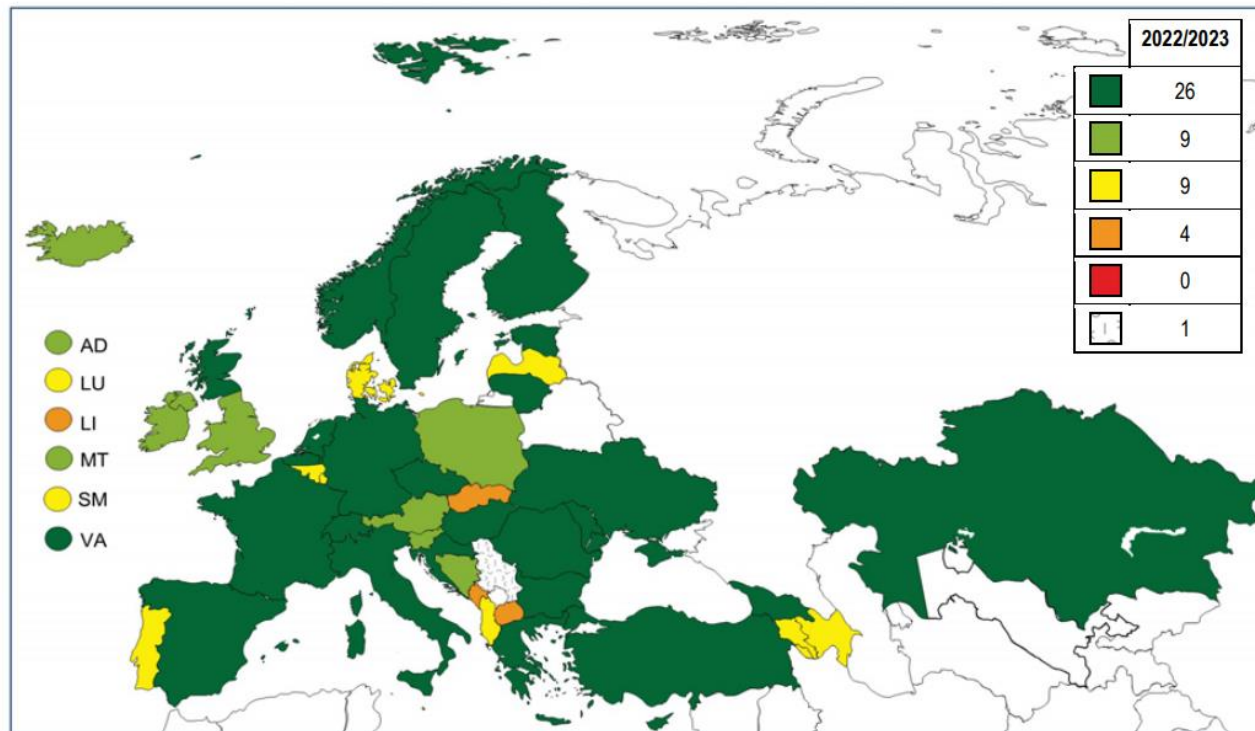


Figure 2.18: Scorecard indicator n° 7: Level of student participation in external quality assurance, 2022/2023



Source: BFUG Data Collection .

Future or persistent challenges

- Tokenism and peer aversion
- Domestication in a consensualist environment
- Flexibility and recognition of students' involvement in QA
- Diverse QA student experts
- Short span of QA student expert life
- QA of short and flexible learning opportunities, QA of lifelong learning
- QA of (open) online education
- Advantages and risks of learning analytics
- Mystification of QA and hype of measuring organisational change rather than changes in quality
- Focus on new without cementing the old
- 'The devil lies in details' – indicators



Student participation: impact and effort

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Thank you!

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