TRENDS AFFECTING HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA)

29 March 2023
Elena Cîrlan, Senior Policy and Project Coordinator, ENQA

enqa.

HIGHER EDUCATION & QUALITY ASSURANCE FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTATION TO CHANGE
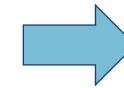
enqa.

Trends with considerable impact on HEIs

- Growing demand on HE
- Climate crisis and sustainability
- Growing prominence of research, innovation and education in geopolitics
- Social disparities and demographic changes
- Technological developments
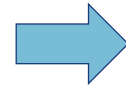
Demands on HE to adapt and change

- Adequate policies and strategies
- Greater responsibility for HEIs to ensure the quality of provision and services
- More learner-centred, flexible and interdisciplinary L&T
- Stronger engagement with society

QA supporting HEIs

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG)
- National QA agencies and EHEA structures (ENQA, EQAR)
- Strong and flexible internal and external QA systems that respond to the needs and changes in L&T (including digitalisation)

1. INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CAPACITY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

enqa.

Starting point

- The ESG apply to all forms of education provision, including online and distance learning

- HEIs have the primary responsibility for the quality assurance of their education provision

ESG 2015

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
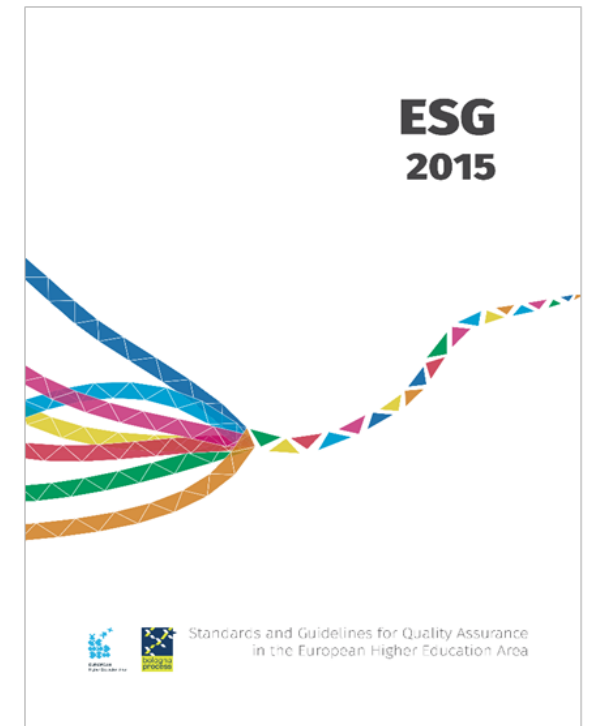
1.1 EXTERNAL QA APPROACHES

- Institutional & programme level
- Institutional level only
- Programme level only
- Institutional & sometime programme level

57% — 22% — 12% — 8%

EQAR's Knowledge Base
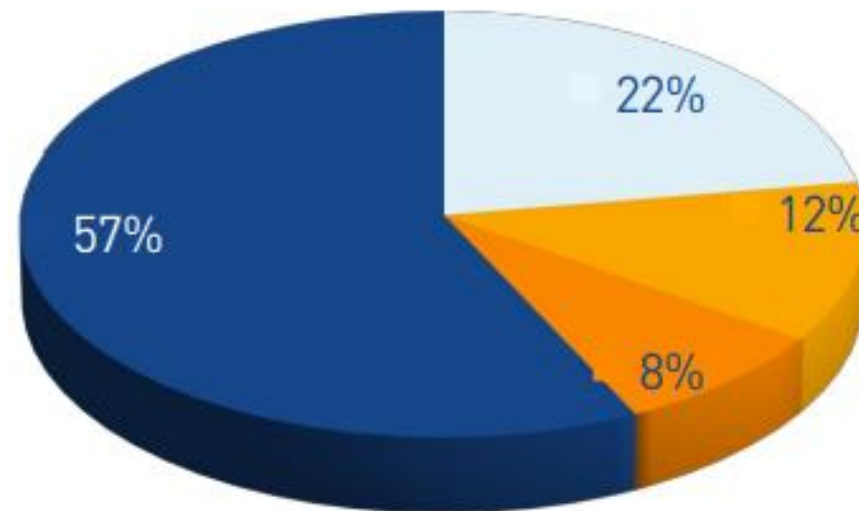
1.1 EXTERNAL QA APPROACHES

- 39 higher education systems within the EHEA require external QA at both institutional and programme level

- 11 other countries the external QA is carried out at institutional level and only occasionally at programme level

- clustered review of study programmes instead of an individual programme level accreditation/a lighter form of accreditation at programme level/occasional programme level external QA

- Institutional self-accreditation rights

enqa.

- Evolving terminology
- Increased impetus/attention on digital education (Covid-19, ongoing pedagogical developments, micro-credentials, policy motivations)
- Use, visibility & parity of esteem of digital education
- Blurring of distinction between digital education and onsite education
- Integration of digital education criteria into regular criteria
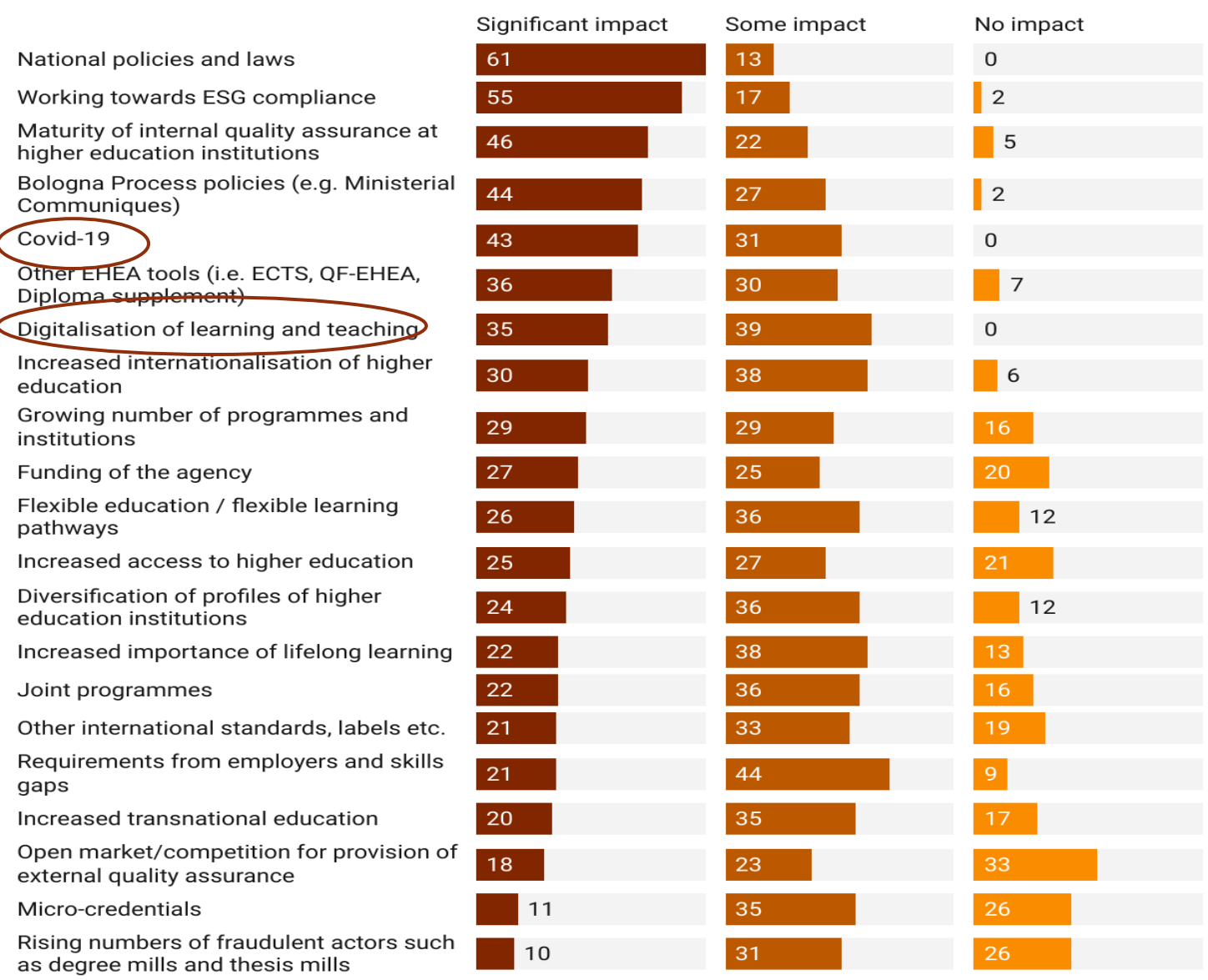- Legal reforms to recognise education delivered online

- 42% of the respondent agencies cover also online providers of education
- When evaluating the internal quality assurance systems, QA agencies cover to a large and some extent the following aspects of online learning:

enqa.
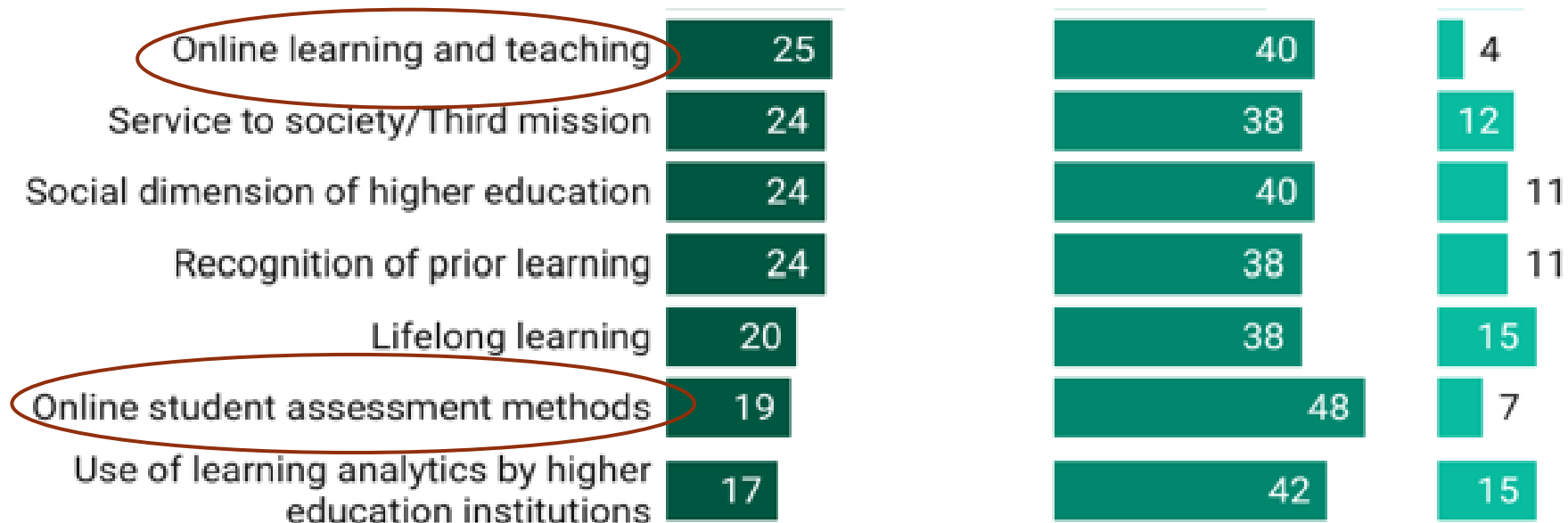
Since 2015, the following aspects had the highest impacts on the agencies' external quality assurance activities

	Significant impact	Some impact	No impact
National policies and laws	61	13	0
Working towards ESG compliance	55	17	2
Maturity of internal quality assurance at higher education institutions	46	22	5
Bologna Process policies (e.g. Ministerial Communiques)	44	27	2
Covid-19	43	31	0
Other EHEA tools (i.e. ECTS, QF-EHEA, Diploma supplement)	36	30	7
Digitalisation of learning and teaching	35	39	0
Increased internationalisation of higher education	30	38	6
Growing number of programmes and institutions	29	29	16
Funding of the agency	27	25	20
Flexible education / flexible learning pathways	26	36	12
Increased access to higher education	25	27	21
Diversification of profiles of higher education institutions	24	36	12
Increased importance of lifelong learning	22	38	13
Joint programmes	22	36	16
Other international standards, labels etc.	21	33	19
Requirements from employers and skills gaps	21	44	9
Increased transnational education	20	35	17
Open market/competition for provision of external quality assurance	18	23	33
Micro-credentials	11	35	26
Rising numbers of fraudulent actors such as degree mills and thesis mills	10	31	26

Source: QA-FIT • Created with Datawrapper

Recognition that additional guidance needed

- 2018 report from ENQA working group
- Provided additional considerations for internal and external QA

3. COMING SOON

ENQA guidance statement on QA of digital education

- 2018 report remains valid
- But… some further reflections and guidance to take into account new context

Consultation on European QA framework – QA-FIT project

- Fitness for purpose in changing higher education environment
- Recommendations for future development of the ESG

3.1 ENQA GUIDANCE STATEMENT ON QA OF DIGITAL EDUCATION

- Terminology: digital education rather than online or e-learning, and education rather than learning

- Integration of considerations for digital education into regular criteria, rather than creation of separate criteria for digital education
  - Implications for training of experts
  - Site visits

- Need for guidance on assessment.
  - Alignment of assessment method with teaching/learning methods (specifically in relation to digital education)
  - Assessment security (methods, academic integrity, data/privacy protection)

- Social dimension of digital education
- Digital education brings even more potential for use of learning analytics

3.2 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ESG

enqa.

- 73% of agencies answering to QA-FIT survey indicated that if the scope of the ESG Part 1 were to be expanded, digitalisation of learning and teaching should be covered

- Calls for revision but not revolution of the ESG

- Careful consideration about what needs regulation at EHEA level

- Timing for possible revision: after the 2024 Tirana Bologna Process Communique

THANK YOU

WWW.ENQA.EU

enqa.