

POLIS UNIVERSITY

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY/STRATEGY 2023-2027

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Introduction

Quality assurance is central to the activity of POLIS University, in line with the institution's mission and values that seek to promote excellence in teaching, research and innovation.

The aim of this document is to define a strategy for the quality assurance of POLIS University for the period 2023-2027, pursuant to the previous strategy 2017-2022.

The strategy is prepared based in the main international quality frameworks such as the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG-s 2015), International standards of professional networks in the academic fields of POLIS, the national Higher Education legal acts and the Albanian Quality Code.

Furthermore the development of the international dimension of POLIS especially in the last 5-6 years through offering joint study program with international partners, involvement in international accreditation processes (both at program and institutional level) and implementation of several international capacity building projects on quality assurance have provided the institution with a better understanding on quality assurance processes, mechanisms and instruments, which have informed the definition of new priorities for the internal quality assurance system as well as the design of appropriate and adequate policies.

In line with its objective to become a relevant actor in the region and with its internationalization agenda, the quality policy of POLIS University is designed according to international standards. Therefore the respective processes and procedures are also based on specific international guidelines for quality assurance of joint programs and transnational and transboundary education.

This policy document is prepared in compliance with the provisions for quality assurance in the Polis University Statute (Articles 66-69) and General Regulation (Articles 90-93).

Context and background

POLIS University believes that the responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies first and foremost with the higher education institutions themselves, as fundamental actors that shape and lead the academic, scientific and civic construct of the future generations. Such approach guides all the institutional activity in safeguarding the quality of the didactic, research and community engagement activities.

In implementing this major principle, drafting the right policies, establishing internal Quality Systems and running them on principles and models appropriate to purpose, is the most effective way to ensure the quality of higher education and sustain the development of a quality culture in the entire institution. Thus, POLIS University has in place quality assurance processes since its establishment in 2006. These processes have evolved together with the university reflecting the growth and dynamism of the institution, continuously redefining the quality policy role vis-a-vis the institutional development objectives and the ever increasing performance indicators.

Purpose and Objectives

The Quality Assurance of POLIS University is the set of structures, units, systematic processes, procedures, mechanisms and tools dedicated to evaluate, monitor and review performance, identify quality outcomes, and recommend improvement of the academic units and programs.

The main purpose of academic quality assurance is to ensure continuous review, analysis, improvement in all academic programs and institutional units, including research units, through a process of internal reflection, constructive, formative criticism performed by qualified internal personnel and external reviewers.

The Academic Quality Assurance Policy has four main goals:

- Ensure high academic standards and continuous improvement of the academic units and programs of the University.
- Set the main principles, objectives, procedures, structures and standardize the process of evaluating academic units and programs.
- Document and communicate the results of academic quality assurance processes.
- Ensure that all academic units and programs at the University are subject to the Quality Assurance Policy
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Quality Assurance: Principles

The fundamental principles for the Quality Assurance Policy at POLIS University are:

Accountability and Responsibility: The members of the University community are collectively responsible for maintaining and enhancing the quality of its academic programs, and for improving the quality of the student learning experience, of the research and other activities performed at POLIS.

Transparency: the findings and results of QA processes are communicated to all interested stakeholders and used to strengthen further the culture of transparency and accountability, toward third parties and the general public.

Integrated and systemic approach: quality assurance at POLIS adopts an integrated approach and appropriate processes intended to involve teaching-learning, and research, and the relation between them. Institutional/program quality will be judged based on a collection of evidence, and not on any single piece of evidence. Combined with an efficient and effective management at institutional level, the IQA system allows for continuous systemic analysis and integrated developments and progression for all academic activities.

Inclusiveness: quality assurance can not be assured if all internal stakeholders are not duly informed, aware of and assume responsibility, if they are not engaged in quality assurance at all levels of the institution including specific units (IQAU), departments, leadership at all levels, internal staff and students. The involvement of external stakeholders in quality assurance is also imperative to improve the study programs, bring them close to the labor market needs, and build partnerships that ease the student job placement and career.

Internal vs External Quality Assurance; The internal quality system must be benchmarked against and eventually reviewed to meet the external quality requirements. Harmonising the two makes not only for a more effective internal system but also facilitates the quality recognition by the authorities and the cooperation with fellow institutions.

Continuous improvement: POLIS continuously and cyclically conducts internal quality processes, through which the current situation is analyzed, the weaknesses are identified and the appropriate measures are proposed, with the involvement of actors at all levels, including students.

QA policy vs academic freedom and integrity: The quality policy of the institution should not limit or inhibit the integrity, diversity, innovation and freedom of academic creativity, however they need to be effective in preventing and condemning any form of academic fraud as well as safeguard against any form of intolerance or discrimination against staff, students or others.

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA): Objectives

The principles and objectives for development and improvement of the Internal Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures in POLIS are integral part of the strategic management of the institution and in line with the provisions in the main regulatory institutional documents (Statute of University and Internal Regulation).

The main strategic development objectives at POLIS for the period 2023-2027 are:

- **Objectives for institutional organization:** strengthening and extending partnerships and relations with the labour market and support the employment of POLIS' graduates; further internalization of the institutions in order to transform POLIS into a regional/european academic and research platform for the Western Balkans and EU; widen and extending partnership with international institutions outside Europe participating in multi-partnership programs and projects
- **Objectives for the improvement of existing study programs:** revise and consolidation of existing study programs through effective QA processes including external market stakeholders and in line with the EU directives for education, integration and social impacts of HE; consolidate and upgrade the third cycle programs (existing international joint PhD programs in particular) through external QA processes against european standards, in order to increase the quality of research and future research capacities in POLIS;
- **Students and stakeholders;** collect students' and researchers' feedback on a cyclical and continuous basis, in order to identify needs and evaluate progress in the process of education and research, and undertake the appropriate measures accordingly.
- **Partnerships:** consolidate the existing membership of U_POLIS in international and professional organizations through a more active role and participation in academic activities organized by them and ; extend cooperations and partnership with other home and international HEI-s, organizations and associations si ne fushat.
- **Objectives for study programs:** increase the level of support for quality and talented students, in need special categories, through various incentive forms, scholarship programs; refine the procedures for programs revision and improvement, ensuring wide involvement of students, graduates, employers and on a regular basis and increase POLIS visibility to the wide public.

In this framework, the **Quality Assurance Objectives** are:

- Refine and improve procedures and mechanisms that assess the role of U_POLIS as an ecosystem actor, including academia, research bodies, students, alumni, the business community and policymakers
- Update and improve the processes of programs design, revision and improvement, addressing both teaching and learning components as well as teaching methodologies;
- Consolidate the assessment procedures and mechanisms of research and innovation as well as the interplay among research and learning&teaching, referring to international standards;
- Embed the internationalization component in the processes, procedures and IQA documents
- Initiate and complete a whole external/international review and accreditation process in compliance with the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG-2015)
- Engagement and involvement of external and international experts and expertise in the Internal Quality Processes of POLIS on a regular/permanent basis
- Consolidating and refining procedures which stimulate the creation of a quality culture embedded in the entire organization and its activities;

The organisation of the Internal Quality Assurance System

The Internal Quality Assurance System at POLIS covers processes and procedures related to all academic units (faculties, departments, research centers), the management and governing bodies of academic, governmental and managerial colleagues and the academic, auxiliary and administrative staff as well as the students. Each exercises its own individual or team responsibilities directly or indirectly in the various processes and procedures of assessment, control, monitoring or other mechanisms provided for quality assurance in compliance with the respective function at POLIS. These responsibilities each of these bodies, including students and alumni, are provided in the relevant regulations of POLIS or constituent units. But the main specific unit responsible for the processes and procedures of evaluation and quality assurance in U_POLIS is the Internal Quality Assurance Unit.

Internal Quality Assurance Unit is a permanent and autonomous body set up and responding to the Academic Senate of U_POLIS. IQAU is responsible for the processes and procedures of internal evaluation of all academic (teaching & learning, study programs), research, managerial and administrative activities that take place in POLIS. The adopted applied IQA mechanisms and instruments allow for a full representation and involvement of all groups of interests (academic staff, students, alumni, governing bodies, administration, external experts and other stakeholders).

The internal quality assurance unit (IQAU) operates in accordance with the provisions of the law on higher education in force, the by-laws, the relevant instructions of the Agency for Quality Assurance of Higher Education and the Strategy of the University Statute Polis.

The main procedure and mechanism for the quality assessment both at institutional level or for the study programs offered by U_POLIS is **the quality review** (institutional and/or program review, or the combination of the two). The review process must be carried out in compliance with the following standards:

- The process is fair, impartial, open, transparent and informed.
- Leaders, faculty, department, staff, and student involvement is crucial and critical.

- Institutional and program reviews must include peers/experts who are external to the University and who are selected according to specific and informed criteria in a fair and a transparent way.
- Review documents must be concise and easily understood, without excessive formal and bureaucratic burden for those involved directly or indirectly in the process.
- The POLIS units, management and the personnel in charge and other actors involved in the review processes are responsible for ensuring academic quality assurance reviews are performed in full accordance with the approved procedures and internal regulations and in due time.
- The Internal Quality Assurance Unit is responsible for ensuring all program and unit reviews follow the academic quality assurance process appropriately and consistently, and for monitoring and comparing the outcomes of reviews.

There are **four main objectives** for a quality assurance review:

- identify areas of excellence and areas for improvement;
- demonstrate accountability and responsibility within the regulatory framework and appropriate regulatory bodies;
- identify, follow and monitor the measures taken to address the weaknesses and expected outcomes accordingly;
- follow up, monitor and ensure that the undertaken measures and actions are effective, focused and fit for and to purpose.

In terms of **methodology**, the Internal Quality Assurance System refers to the European Quality Assurance Standards in the European Higher Education Area, the Guide for the establishment of Internal Quality Systems in Higher Education Institutions and models of successful or best practices of the countries, academic networks or homologous western universities with which Polis has cooperation.

Referred to "Guidelines on the Establishment and Operation of the Internal Quality Assurance System in Higher Education Institutions - of ASCAL, the **approach to quality management** adopted by U_Polis is the one based on **processes and results**. This means that at U_Polis the framework for the continuous evaluation and observation makes use of three specific indicators suitable for the purpose such as: **input indicators** related to students entry level, staff and their qualification, the learning environment, **those of the process** such as the progress and quality of teaching, academic and research offers in content, facilities, infrastructure and support services as well as **output results**, such as the level of training and the skills of exiting students, the rate and quality of employment, their orientation and adaptation to the workplace, etc..

Regarding the quality management model (referred to the ASCAL guidelines) IQAS_Polis has applied the P-D-C-A scheme as follows:

- **P** (plan) – collecting data to identify and define the aspects/issues/problems that need to be improved and to identify the ways and methods to achieve this.
- **D** (do) – concrete implementation of the work plan using and exploiting the most suitable instruments to the purpose and the expected outcome
- **C** (check-control) – analyzing the result/outcome in terms against the initially aimed goal and recommend general or partial corrections or adjustments accordingly
- **A** (act) – act upon the outcome of the steps above

IQAU reports to the high governing academic and administrative decision-making bodies, but is an independent unit in terms of operation, the procedures it follows and the results it produces. The organization, tasks, responsibilities and activities of IQAU are defined in the IQAU Regulation, which is approved by the Academic Senate.

In the framework the European Standards and Guideline, specifically in compliance to Standards I.2, I.3, I.4, I.5, I.6 and I.7, the IQAU intends to foster further the following aspects and intends to amend its regulation to reflect them:

1. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards (Standard I.2-Part 1, ESG_2015)
 - Ensure that all study programs offered by POLIS are subject to a regular and cyclical institutional approval process
 - ensure that the programs' structure and content, have clear and explicit learning outcomes
 - ensure that the programs are designed in order to enable smooth student progression;
 - ensure that POLIS includes and provides well-structured placement opportunities for graduates;
 - the University and faculty internationalization strategies are implemented in the study programs and benefit from external and international expertise.
2. Student centered learning, teaching and assessment (Standard I.3-ESG_2015)
 - Ensure that the programs are designed delivered in a way that encourages students to
 - take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this
 - encourages a sense of autonomy in the learner, while ensuring adequate guidance and
 - support from the teacher
 - respects and adapts to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning
 - paths, considering novel and flexible use of delivery if needed
 - evaluating procedures will include use of and adjusting of a variety of pedagogical methods and flexible and effective modes of delivery during the teaching process.
3. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programs
 - Study programs should undergo cyclical review. As a rule, the curriculum and content is reviewed every 2 (two) years, but at least at the end of each complete study cycle.
 - Study programs responsible/faculties/departments' ongoing work is embedded in the individual procedures' annual cycles.
 - The biannual cycles involve internal and external quality-assurance requirements, pursuant to laws and regulations, general quality-assurance requirements formulated by POLIS and internal quality-assurance requirements adopted at faculty/program level.
 - The cyclic evaluations for the revision of curricula convert the results of quality-assurance work into follow-up activities.
 - The cyclical evaluations of the programs reports are largely synchronized with all parts of the quality-assurance process and the ongoing work with the individual study programmes. In this way, the annual cycle provides guidelines for the use of intake, drop-out rates, pass rates and course evaluations in quality assurance.
 - The course evaluations follows the general POLIS guidelines and includes systematic evaluation of the students' experience of all courses offered at the Faculty. For the purposes of systematic and targeted follow-up, course responsible/coordinators, heads of department/faculty provide feedback on the students' evaluation during each semester. Mandatory periodic evaluations of the whole course of study for newly established study programs are also conducted.

Approving and Revising the Academic Quality Assurance Policy

The new QA Policy for 2023-2027 will ensure that the policy and the process continue to effectively and efficiently ensure the quality and continuous improvement of POLIS as a higher education institution and its academic programs. The Quality Assurance Policy is approved by the Academic Senate of POLIS University. As a rule, the QA Policy can be revised every 5 (five) years, with the exception of special cases when circumstances require the revision, change or addition of special provisions, dictated by the mandatory general legislation or the needs of the institution. The review must include input from members of the University and external communities. The Faculties, departments and IQAU must reflect in their internal regulatory acts all changes and updates deriving from this document, upon approval by the Academic Senate.

Informing and communicating Academic Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance Policy will be published in the official website of POLIS University and be accessible to the wide public. Information Summaries of academic quality assurance reviews will be published online, in respect of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Law in Albania.

Implementation of QA Policy and Action Plan










The implementation of this policy document requires:






- The reflection of changes and updates of the QA Policy in the internal normative acts of POLIS that are directly or indirectly impacted by the provisions in this document, with a special focus on the regulation of the organization and operation of IQAU, the didactic regulation and the regulations of the study programs.
- Drafting and/or revision of evaluation procedures of the study programs, paying specific attention to the development of effective feedback loops from students, alumni and industry partners.
- Defining measures and interventions in institutional level to address new priorities, new challenges related to the internationalization of POLIS, aspects of cooperation with partners in the framework of study and research programs.
- Analyzing the internal quality assurance system against the European Standards, Part 1, Standards I.1-I.10 and making adjustments as needed to the normative acts in effect.
- The implementation of the corresponding **Action Plan in Appendix 1.**

APPENDIX 1

QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY - ACTION PLAN

IQA POLIS OBJECTIVES		ACTIONS	Responsible Body for implementation	Responsible body for supervision /decision	TIMELINE				
					2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
1	IQA of study programs (update, refine and improvement of IQA processes, procedures, internal capacities and novel teaching & learning methodologies)	1a. Revision of the procedure for the cyclical/continuous evaluation of running study programs introducing the active role of students (student center teaching and learning concept-Standard I.3) 1b. Guarantee the involvement of students, alumni, graduates in the process of design and evaluation of study programs in a permanent basis (Standard I.3) 1d. Elaborate an institutional document for introduction, monitoring and evaluation of novel teaching methods in the teaching-learning process and increase internal capacities among teachers 1e. Train the staff for new and novel teaching methodologies and techniques 1f. Involve external expertise/stakeholders in the actions 1a-1b on a regular basis	IQAU	Rectorate Academic Senate	→				
			Departments + IQAU	Deans	→				
			Departments + IQAU	Deans + Rectorate	→				
			IQAU; HR; International Office	Departments	→				
			IQAU	Departments / Deans	→				
2	Refine the evaluation process and	2a. Iterate and revise the evaluation methodology of the research activities/component	IQAU	Rectorate	→				

	indicators for the evaluation of the research and research dissemination of POLIS University	2c. Elaborate further the methodology for the evaluation of research outputs / publications against international standards	POLIS Press	Rectorate					
3	Embed the internationalization component in the processes, procedures and IQA documents	3a. Institutionalize specific joint academic bodies for the evaluation of joint international programs and provisions to overcome inter-national differences in terms of procedures, standards and decision making for accreditation 3b. Trainings for the internal staff with the appropriate knowhow and competences	Departments	Deans					
			Departments + IQAU	Deans					
4	Initiate and complete a whole external/international review and accreditation process in compliance with the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG-2015)	4a. Apply for an international external review procedure to an ENQA-EQAR member agency 4b. Conduct the international external review process 4c. Disseminate learnings and advocate to overcome inconsistencies between Albanian and European QA procedures and the related legal barriers for accreditation in Albania	Rectorate	Senate					
			IQAU / All	Senate					
			IQAU	Rectorate					
5	Engagement and involvement of external and international experts and expertise in the Internal Quality Processes of POLIS on a regular/permanent basis	5a. Elaborate specific criteria for the selection of external experts/expertise in the internal QA procedures 5b. Elaborate specific criteria for the selection of international external experts/expertise for the running joint /international programs in particular (joint PhD) and design of new joint programs 5c. Elaboration of a procedure for the selection of national and international experts of 5a and 5b above.	IQAU	Departments / Deans					
			IQAU	Departments / Deans					
			IQAU	Departments / Deans					

6	Consolidate and improvement of the procedures and activities which stimulate and aim at embedding of the quality culture in the entire institution, staff and students	6a. Ensure involvement of all staff in different quality assurance activities 6b. Spread the knowhow, experiences and responsibilities on Internal Quality processes among the leadership, academic and supporting staff of POLIS and students 6c. Integrate/include QA elements in every daily activity (teaching, research, practice, other) taken place in POLIS through formal and informal ways and means	IQAU Departments + IQAU All	Departments Rectorate Rectorate					
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