

## *1<sup>st</sup> Topic: QA in French after the le HCERES has been deleted*

### **European overview**

European universities are witnessing an increased push towards transnational cooperation and collaboration accompanied with the quality assurance procedures. The end goal would be alignment of European universities and implementation of European joint degree and European joint degree label. The idea is to maintain the focus on quality improvement and to assure that aligned universities recognize and build trust in quality of other universities. It is not surprising how this trend is rarely questioned since everybody want quality in higher education and procedures which will guarantee that quality and improvement. When we look at the overall goal of these policies which is defined in European Union's documents as "boosting Europe's competitiveness and the attractiveness of European higher education" maybe we will stop and think whether this goal leads us to what we consider quality in higher education. Also, it is worth pointing out the dilemma whether QA procedures improve academic freedom, self-regulation and autonomy, which are core principles of universities, or they are changing the way of their functioning by introducing concepts that comes from managerial and neoliberal ideology.

Even if we agree with this goal, it is interesting to see what recommendations European Union gives to its Member states in order to effectively implement these policies. Particularly interesting is "removing quality assurance criteria added at national level or any other potential administrative or regulatory barrier". A good question is if we will loose some great solutions and practices by simply removing any specifics that exist in certain country. Maybe some policies and regulations are of huge importance for the context of that particular country and will not be of use in any other context, but play an important role in the one they exist. Maybe some would be of use in different countries and make their practices better. Is it desirable or even possible to uniformize universities in Europe which is characterized by plurality of cultures, histories and values? Does quality really lie in abandoning one's own identity and specifics?

### **French context**

In order to better understand why France is the first country that abandoned Quality Assurance procedures it is worth to briefly mention the socio-political and historical context of the country. Through history, French people were quiet progressive and active in shaping conditions of lives in France. French Revolution introduced a concept of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" which became a core value of its political culture. What is also considered as an important French socio-political aspect is participation in public demonstrations and public activism which shows how for French citizens transparency, social justice and democratic values are of huge importance and worth fighting for. What can be noticed is how France has its own values and knows how to fight and protect what considers best for itself and its citizens regardless of what is a dominant state of affairs.

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## QUANTITY OR QUALITY?

In an era in which higher education is increasingly governed by measurement and reporting logics, “Quantitativism” - the tendency to focus exclusively on numerical data and performance indicators (Power, 1997; Ball, 2003) - has ended up conforming national evaluation systems to standardised procedures based on rankings and metrics. This imbalance has created a self-referential circuit, in which universities and external evaluators certify “quality” through scores, almost to the exclusion of students' views and the qualitative value of the educational experience. The French case offers a case in point: due to criticism of the “bureaucratisation” and “standardisation” imposed by the HCERES - the evaluation agency abolished by the Assemblée nationale on 10 April 2025 -, the voice of the learner has remained marginal, while uniform criteria have penalised humanities disciplines and peripheral universities. At the same time, the literature on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) calls for a reversal of this paradigm: by aligning curricula with the Sustainable Development Goals, higher education institutions are called upon to integrate holistic and multidisciplinary approaches (Leal Filho et al., 2020), using technical, organisational and pedagogical levers to transform teaching processes (Zhao et al., 2002). Interdisciplinary pedagogies enable students to develop critical sustainability skills - from systemic thinking to anticipatory and normative skills (Wiek et al., 2011) - giving them an active role in the assessment process. Indeed, HEIs that have embraced this perspective equip themselves with mechanisms for stakeholder engagement, participatory monitoring and the development of civic and accountability skills (Abo-Khalil, 2024; QAA & HEA, 2014; Ramísio et al., 2019; Andersen & Ponti, 2024; Vargas-Merino et al., 2024).

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