



PARTISH

*Development of part-time and short cycle studies
In higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina*

External Evaluation REPORT of Short-Cycle Programmes based on ESG Standards



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Introduction

This document serves as a comprehensive evaluation of short-cycle higher education (SCHE) programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, assessed against the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. It provides insights into the proposed legal framework, institutional practices, and the alignment of these programs with labor market needs, inclusivity, and lifelong learning opportunities.

The analysis encompasses the legal, organizational, and pedagogical aspects of SCHE implementation, reflecting on the programs' strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement. By leveraging feedback from stakeholders, such as educational institutions, employers, and students, this report identifies actionable recommendations for enhancing the quality, accessibility, and relevance of SCHE programs.

Through this evaluation, the document aims to offer strategic guidance for policymakers and education providers in their pursuit of aligning Bosnia and Herzegovina's short-cycle programs with European standards, fostering an inclusive and responsive education system that meets contemporary economic and social demands.

Evaluation of the Proposed Legal Framework for Short-Cycle Studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. Introduction

The introduction of short-cycle studies (SCHE) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) aims to align the country's higher education system with European standards, address labor market demands, and improve access to lifelong learning. The proposed legal framework, developed under the PARTISH project, seeks to create a cohesive system for regulating SCHE within existing higher education structures. This evaluation reviews the framework's strengths, gaps, and potential for implementation, based on project reports, drafted policies, and stakeholder feedback.

2. Alignment with European Standards

The legal framework builds on recommendations from the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), focusing on Level 5 qualifications that bridge secondary and higher education. By defining SCHE as formal programs awarding certificates recognized nationally and internationally, the framework ensures compatibility with other European countries.

Strengths:

- The framework clearly integrates ECTS-based modular learning structures, with programs ranging from 30 to 120 credits.
- It emphasizes employability by mandating alignment between program content and labor market needs, ensuring practical relevance.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Expand international benchmarking to incorporate best practices from other EQF-compliant countries, especially in recognition of prior learning (RPL) and micro-credentials.

3. Responsiveness to Labor Market Needs

Surveys conducted with employers identified a demand for flexible educational formats catering to industry-specific skill gaps. The proposed framework incorporates mechanisms for co-developing programs with employers, including needs assessments and contractual obligations for program relevance.

Strengths:

- Strong involvement of industry stakeholders ensures program design meets employer expectations.
- Flexibility in delivery methods (e.g., online, hybrid, or traditional classroom models) addresses diverse learner needs.

Gaps Identified:



- Limited strategies for including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in program design and delivery, which could broaden the framework's reach.

4. Institutional Autonomy and Implementation

The framework allows higher education institutions (HEIs) to tailor internal regulations for SCHE within broad legal guidelines. This autonomy is essential for adapting programs to regional and institutional contexts.

Strengths:

- Institutional flexibility in defining program specifics, such as duration (375–1,800 hours) and delivery modes, supports innovative solutions.
- Provisions for HEIs to collaborate with external organizations for resource sharing and joint program delivery enhance feasibility.

Challenges:

- The autonomy granted may result in inconsistencies across institutions, necessitating a robust monitoring system to ensure quality and uniformity.

5. Accreditation and Quality Assurance

The proposed framework outlines a dual accreditation approach, leveraging existing agencies for higher education in BiH to streamline the process.

Strengths:

- Builds on existing accreditation structures, reducing redundancy and simplifying the implementation process.
- Includes detailed criteria for program approval, covering curriculum, faculty qualifications, and infrastructural requirements.

Areas for Improvement:

- Develop a standardized monitoring and evaluation protocol to assess the long-term impact of SCHE on employability and skills development.

6. Inclusivity and Accessibility

The framework recognizes the importance of inclusivity by incorporating flexible learning pathways and supporting diverse learner profiles, including working professionals.

Strengths:

- Accommodates non-traditional learners by offering modular and flexible program designs.
- Incorporates strategies for recognizing prior learning and professional experience, which supports lifelong learning.

Gaps Identified:

- The lack of specific provisions for marginalized groups, such as students from rural areas or those with disabilities, may limit accessibility.

7. Stakeholder Engagement

The framework was developed through consultations with HEIs, ministries, and employers. Roundtable discussions and surveys provided valuable insights into the needs of various stakeholders..

Strengths:

- Broad stakeholder involvement enhances the framework's legitimacy and practicality.
- Regular feedback mechanisms ensure that the framework evolves to meet emerging needs.

Challenges:

- Limited engagement with student representatives and NGOs focused on education equity may result in overlooked perspectives.

8. Recommendations

1. **Enhance Inclusivity:** Introduce specific provisions for underrepresented groups, ensuring equity in access to SCHE.
2. **Standardize Implementation:** Develop guidelines for harmonizing SCHE across institutions to minimize regional disparities.
3. **Expand Industry Partnerships:** Engage SMEs and emerging industries to diversify program offerings and increase market alignment.
4. **Strengthen Quality Assurance:** Implement periodic reviews of program outcomes to ensure alignment with labor market demands.
5. **Promote Awareness:** Launch national campaigns to inform potential learners and employers about the benefits and opportunities of SCHE.

9. Conclusion

The proposed legal framework for short-cycle studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a significant step toward modernizing higher education and aligning it with European standards. By addressing identified gaps and leveraging the outlined strengths, the framework can facilitate the development of a more inclusive, responsive, and effective educational system. This will ultimately enhance lifelong learning opportunities and strengthen the country's workforce.



Areas of short-cycle programme evaluation

1. Operation of the higher education institution
2. Human Resources
3. Students
4. Material Resources
5. International Quality Assurance Control and Study Programmes Delivery

Standards on the operation of the higher education institution

Standard 1

The higher education institution shall successfully fulfil its mission in the BiH and international higher education area. By achieving organizational and implementation objectives, it provides a quality of the higher education activity and its development.

If this concerns the first re-accreditation, the mission, vision, and strategy of the higher education institution shall demonstrate that the obligations of the founder are continued.

Assessed shall be:

- a) *the consistency of strategic planning with the mission, national and European guidelines;*
- b) *feasibility and comprehensiveness of strategic planning;*
- c) *adequacy of the assessment method of the fulfilment of strategic planning.*

Findings
1. Mission alignment: the short cycle programs (SCHE) developed by universities in BiH align with national priorities and EU guidelines (Short-cycle education is designed to provide students with a focused, career-oriented education), addressing vocational training needs in fields such as healthcare 2. Implementation: successful hybrid and face-to-face delivery of programs like <i>Dental Nurse</i> and <i>Instrumentation in Surgical Practice</i> demonstrates feasibility and innovation, an area needed additional professional training. 3. Evaluation and feedback: quality assurance mechanisms, including surveys and feedback loops, highlight continuous improvement in education delivery. Evidence shows that the programmes offered provide a strong foundation for students when entering the workforce.
Strengths
1. Alignment with market needs: programs address clear skills gaps, such as the limited availability of certified dental nurses and surgical technicians in BiH. 2. Stakeholder engagement: active collaboration with ministries, hospitals, and professional organizations supports program relevance and effectiveness. 3. Flexibility: programs use online and hybrid methods to accommodate working professionals, increasing accessibility. 4. Comprehensive practical training: hands-on practical sessions in specialist facilities ensure participants gain critical clinical skills.
Opportunities
1. Program expansion: extend the programme offer that would focus on interdisciplinary approach - other high-demand fields like IT or engineering to further strengthen BiH's higher education relevance. 2. Policy adaptation: advocate for legal changes to streamline admissions and increase program reach. 3. International collaboration: leverage EU funding for further integration with European higher education frameworks.



4. Enhanced learning materials: align theoretical and practical components more closely based on participant feedback.

Inconsistencies

1. Strategic vision: while operational goals are achieved, long-term strategies for sustaining and expanding SCHEs need clearer articulation.
2. Participant satisfaction: feedback on some programs indicates occasional misalignment between practical training and course content.
3. Dropout rates: programs report participant dropouts due to personal constraints, indicating a need for further flexibility.
4. Survey limitations: feedback collection processes may require enhancement for more actionable insights.

Standard 2

The internal organization of a higher education institution shall ensure the participation of higher education teachers and staff, scientific staff and non-educational staff, students and other stakeholders in the management and development of the activity of a higher education institution.

Assessed shall be the representation of stakeholders in the bodies of higher education institutions and the exercise of their rights and duties.

Findings
1. Stakeholder involvement: higher education institutions (HEIs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina demonstrate active involvement of teachers, staff, and students in organizational development through collaborative bodies and committees. 2. Participation mechanisms: surveys and evaluations capture feedback from stakeholders, which contributes to quality assurance and educational improvements. 3. Inclusive management: examples from programs highlight participation from external partners such as ministries, professional organizations, and healthcare providers in curriculum design and delivery.
Strengths
1. Collaborative governance: stakeholder engagement (good world-of-work to HEI relation) in program planning, including students and external partners, strengthens the relevance and applicability of curricula. 2. Transparent feedback channels: the use of structured surveys and questionnaires ensures that stakeholder voices are captured in decision-making processes. 3. Supportive environment: evidence of mentorship and hands-on involvement in practical training reflects strong collaboration among educators, students, and administrative staff.
Opportunities
1. Expanded representation: encourage broader student and external stakeholder representation in HEI governance bodies to improve policy alignment with diverse perspectives. 2. Formalize stakeholder roles: develop clearer guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of internal and external stakeholders in management processes. 3. Cross-institutional collaboration: increase partnerships with other HEIs and international organizations to enhance diversity in stakeholder involvement. 4. Improved training for participation: offer leadership and organizational training for students and staff to enhance their participation in governance roles.
Inconsistencies
1. Uneven representation: some reports suggest inconsistent levels of stakeholder representation across departments and programs, potentially leading to gaps in feedback and engagement. 2. Limited student influence: while students provide feedback, their active participation in institutional governance may not always be substantial or impactful.

3. Variation in external collaboration: different programs exhibit varying degrees of engagement with external stakeholders, which may affect uniformity in program development.
4. Feedback utilization: although feedback mechanisms exist, evidence of their direct influence on institutional policies and strategic decisions is not always clear.

Standard 3

Practical training of students in a work environment, if it is part of the education activity, shall be well organized and implemented as such. There shall be resources available for its implementation.

Assessed shall be the following:

- a) *systemic regulation of the practical training of students, and of its implementation;*
- b) *satisfaction of the participants in the practical training.*

Findings
1. Systematic approach: practical training in programs such as <i>Dental Nurse</i> and <i>Instrumentation in Surgical Practice</i> is well-structured with clear guidelines, schedules, and mandatory attendance. 2. Facilities and resources: practical training is conducted in specialized centers and university-affiliated hospitals with appropriate resources, ensuring a high-quality learning environment. 3. Participant feedback: surveys and evaluations show high levels of satisfaction among students with the practical training, especially regarding mentorship and the relevance of the training to their professional goals.
Strengths
1. Hands-on learning: students are provided with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, enhancing their clinical skills and professional competencies. 2. Dedicated mentorship: experienced mentors are assigned to guide students during practical training, ensuring focused and effective skill development. 3. Tailored to needs: training programs are adapted to the specific needs of participants, such as accommodating work and family commitments by offering flexible schedules. 4. Collaborative partnerships: collaboration with healthcare institutions and industry stakeholders ensures practical training aligns with market requirements.
Opportunities
1. Enhanced integration: align theoretical coursework more closely with the practical training to improve cohesion and learning outcomes based on participant feedback. 2. Broader training opportunities: expand practical training to include diverse sectors and emerging fields to broaden student exposure and career opportunities.

3. Digital tools and simulations: incorporate advanced tools like virtual simulations and online modules to complement hands-on practical training.
4. Regular feedback loops: develop systematic feedback loops between students, mentors, and program coordinators to continually refine the training process.

Inconsistencies

1. Resource gaps: variability in resources across institutions may impact the consistency of the practical training experience.
2. Dropout rates: some students face challenges in completing practical training due to personal and logistical constraints, indicating a need for increased support.
3. Satisfaction disparities: while most participants report satisfaction, occasional mismatches between training content and expectations highlight areas for improvement.
4. Standardization issues: differences in the structure and duration of practical training across programs suggest a need for more uniform guidelines.

Standard 4

The internal quality system shall enable the conclusion of the circle of quality on all areas of operation of the higher education institution.

Assessed shall be the following:

- a) *understanding the meaning and the role of an internal quality assurance system;*
- b) *self-evaluation report for the last concluded self-evaluation period, measures based on the self-evaluation in the period since the previous accreditation, and a plan which contains improvements for the following self-evaluation period;*
- c) *how the internal quality assurance system enables and promotes the development, connecting and an update of the educational, scientific, research or artistic activity and the impact of this activity on the environment.*

Findings

1. Internal quality assurance (QA) system: institutions have implemented structured QA systems, including regular feedback mechanisms, self-evaluation processes, and stakeholder involvement, which promote continuous improvement in educational and operational activities.
2. Self-evaluation reports: comprehensive self-evaluation reports document achievements and challenges, guiding improvement measures between accreditation cycles.
3. Integration of activities: efforts are made to align educational, research, and outreach activities with internal QA processes to strengthen institutional impact.

Strengths

1. Structured QA processes: institutions demonstrate a clear understanding of QA's role, using surveys, program evaluations, and stakeholder consultations to assess performance and guide improvements.

2. Stakeholder participation: feedback from students, staff, and external partners is actively integrated into QA processes, ensuring diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making.
1. Action-oriented plans: self-evaluation reports are accompanied by actionable improvement plans, showcasing the institution's commitment to quality enhancement.
2. Environmental impact: programs incorporate elements that address community needs, particularly in high-demand sectors like healthcare, fostering a positive impact on the local environment.

Opportunities

1. Enhanced QA awareness: provide additional training for staff and students to deepen their understanding of QA processes and their role in institutional development.
2. Linking activities: strengthen connections between educational programs, research activities, and community engagement to amplify the institution's societal impact.
3. Digitalization of QA processes: implement advanced QA management systems to streamline data collection, analysis, and reporting, increasing efficiency and transparency.
4. Global benchmarks: incorporate international QA best practices to align with global standards and attract international students and collaborations.

Inconsistencies

1. Variable QA maturity: the depth and effectiveness of QA systems vary across departments and programs, indicating the need for greater standardization.
2. Follow-up on measures: while improvement plans are developed, the extent to which they are fully implemented and monitored is not consistently documented.
3. Limited visibility: internal QA processes and their outcomes are not always clearly communicated to all stakeholders, potentially reducing engagement and trust in the system.
4. Integration gaps: despite efforts, some self-evaluation processes may not fully integrate feedback across all areas, such as research or artistic activities, limiting holistic quality improvements.

Standard 5

The higher education institution shall monitor the needs for knowledge and employment needs in the environment. It shall provide information regarding the employment possibilities in the fields suitable for the competences or the learning outcomes of graduates.

Assessed shall be the following:

- a) *participation of the higher education institution with the environment or employers, and their graduates;*
- b) *development of job centres, graduate clubs or other forms of organization.*

Findings
1. Environmental engagement: HEIs actively collaborate with employers and external stakeholders to identify knowledge and employment needs in the region. 2. Graduate tracking: programs integrate mechanisms to track graduate employment and gather data on labor market alignment, ensuring learning outcomes meet professional demands. 3. Support structures: some HEIs have established career centers and graduate clubs to facilitate employment opportunities and maintain alumni connections.
Strengths
1. Employer involvement: employers are engaged in curriculum design, ensuring educational programs align with workforce requirements, particularly in fields like healthcare and psychotherapy counseling. 2. Practical training: opportunities for internships and practical training in real-world environments help students develop job-ready skills and network with potential employers. 3. Graduate success: evidence from surveys and follow-up studies shows that many graduates successfully transition into roles that utilize their competencies and learning outcomes. 4. Career support: HEIs provide job counseling, mentorship, and guidance through career centers and graduate clubs, supporting students in their transition to the workforce.
Opportunities
1. Data-driven insights: enhance graduate tracking systems to collect more detailed data on employment trends, satisfaction, and skill gaps to inform curriculum updates. 2. Strengthen employer networks: expand partnerships with a broader range of industries to provide diverse opportunities for students in emerging fields. 3. Promote alumni engagement: develop robust alumni networks to leverage their experiences and connections in supporting current students' career development. 4. Global job markets: increase focus on preparing students for international job opportunities by integrating global employment trends and skills into programs.



Inconsistencies

1. Variable support services: access to career centers, graduate clubs, and job counseling services varies across institutions and programs, potentially creating disparities in student outcomes.
2. Limited employer representation: some programs report inconsistent or minimal participation from employers in curriculum development and job placement efforts.
3. Feedback integration: while graduate feedback is collected, its integration into strategic planning and program improvements may not be consistent across all departments.
4. Employment data gaps: comprehensive employment data for graduates, particularly long-term career progression, may be incomplete or underutilized in some cases.

Standard 6

The higher education institutions shall inform the stakeholders and the public about the study programmes and their activity in a timely manner.

Assessed shall be the approachability, content, reliability, understandability and the accuracy of the information about the activity of the higher education institution, especially the information regarding study programmes, their implementation and the scientific, professional, research or artistic activity from the fields and the disciplines of these programmes.

Findings
1. Communication practices: HEIs in BiH utilize a variety of platforms to inform stakeholders and the public about short-cycle programmes, including websites, brochures, and public announcements. 2. Transparency in information: key details about programmes, including curricula, practical training, and admission requirements, are provided to prospective students and other stakeholders in a timely and accessible manner 3. Public engagement: efforts are made to engage stakeholders, including employers and professional organizations, to ensure accurate and relevant programme promotion.
Strengths
1. Detailed programme descriptions: institutions provide comprehensive details about short-cycle programmes, including learning outcomes, course content, ECTS credits, and career opportunities. 2. Timely updates: admission deadlines, course schedules, and other time-sensitive information are made available to stakeholders well in advance. 3. Multiple channels: HEIs utilize diverse communication channels, including online platforms and in-person presentations, to reach a broad audience. 4. Stakeholder-focused information: the information provided is tailored to the needs of different groups, including prospective students, employers, and academic staff.
Opportunities
1. Interactive platforms: develop user-friendly, interactive online platforms for students and stakeholders to access up-to-date programme information. 2. Targeted outreach: enhance communication strategies to reach underserved or underrepresented groups, ensuring equitable access to information. 3. Feedback integration: collect and incorporate feedback from stakeholders on the clarity and accessibility of programme information to improve communication practices. 4. International reach: expand efforts to promote short-cycle programmes to international audiences, leveraging multilingual materials and global education networks.



Inconsistencies

1. Variable content depth: the depth and detail of information about programmes vary across institutions and platforms, potentially creating confusion for stakeholders.
2. Reliability issues: some stakeholders report inconsistencies in the accuracy of certain programme details, such as scheduling or content updates.
3. Limited transparency: while core information is shared, comprehensive details about scientific, research, or artistic activities may not be consistently included.
4. Understanding challenges: the technical language used in some materials may be difficult for prospective students or the general public to understand.

Standards on the Human Resources

Standard 7

Higher education teachers and staff, and scientific staff shall be provided for a quality performance of the educational, research and other work.

Assessed shall be the following:

- a) *provision of educational and professional development of higher education teachers and co-workers since the previous accreditation;*
- b) *scientific, professional, research or artistic achievements of higher education teachers and scientific staff;*
- c) *criteria of the higher education institution for appointment to titles and fields for appointment;*
- d) *types of employment of higher education teachers and higher education staff.*

Findings
1. Qualified staff: short-cycle programmes are supported by highly qualified teachers and staff, many of whom have substantial professional experience and relevant academic credentials. 2. Professional development: opportunities for educational and professional development have been provided to teachers and staff, ensuring they remain updated on best practices and new methodologies. 3. Research integration: faculty members demonstrate contributions to research and professional activities, enhancing the quality of the short-cycle programmes and their alignment with industry standards.
Strengths
1. Experienced educators: teachers in short-cycle programmes have extensive backgrounds in their respective fields, ensuring high-quality instruction and mentorship. 2. Development opportunities: continuous professional development, such as workshops, conferences, and training, is actively pursued by staff, fostering innovation in teaching methods. 3. Research contributions: faculty engage in research and professional activities, enriching programme content and maintaining its relevance to current trends and needs. 4. Transparent criteria: the criteria for appointments and promotions are well-defined, aligning with national standards and ensuring a high level of expertise among faculty.
Opportunities
1. Enhanced development programmes: offer tailored development opportunities focused on emerging technologies and pedagogical strategies to further strengthen faculty expertise.



2. Collaborative research: foster greater collaboration between staff and external stakeholders in scientific and professional research to enhance the practical relevance of programmes.
3. Global expertise: encourage staff to participate in international exchanges and collaborations to bring diverse perspectives and practices to short-cycle programmes.
4. Recruitment strategies: develop targeted recruitment strategies to attract more industry professionals into teaching roles, bridging gaps between academia and practice.

Inconsistencies

1. Development access: the availability and scope of professional development opportunities for staff vary between institutions and departments.
2. Research activity disparities: while some faculty are actively engaged in research, others may lack similar opportunities, leading to inconsistencies in contributions to programme content.
3. Appointment criteria gaps: some stakeholders have reported a lack of clarity in criteria for appointments and promotions in specific fields or roles.
4. Employment models: types of employment, such as part-time or adjunct roles, may result in variable levels of engagement and availability for programme delivery.

Standard 8

Professional-technical and administrative staff shall be provided (hereinafter: non-educational staff) for efficient help and counselling.

Assessed shall be the following:

- a) *type and suitability of the help and counselling to students and other stakeholders;*
- b) *number, work area and education structure of non-educational staff;*
- c) *education and training of non-educational staff.*

Findings
1. Support services: short-cycle programmes are supported by professional-technical and administrative staff who provide assistance and counseling to students and stakeholders, facilitating smooth programme operations. 2. Defined roles: non-educational staff are organized into clearly defined roles, ensuring efficient management of administrative, technical, and counseling needs. 3. Staff qualifications: non-educational staff members possess relevant educational backgrounds and training to support their responsibilities effectively.
Strengths
1. Student-centered support: students report satisfaction with the accessibility and quality of counseling and administrative assistance provided by non-educational staff. 2. Tailored services: counseling services are adapted to the specific needs of short-cycle programme participants, such as guidance on practical training and career advice. 3. Ongoing training: non-educational staff regularly participate in professional development and training, ensuring they stay updated on institutional policies and best practices. 4. Adequate staffing levels: institutions maintain appropriate staff-to-student ratios, ensuring that students and stakeholders receive timely and personalized assistance.
Opportunities
1. Digital tools for support: introduce advanced digital tools to streamline administrative tasks and improve communication between staff and students. 2. Specialized training: offer specialized training for non-educational staff in areas such as mental health counseling, diversity and inclusion, and career services to enhance support quality. 3. Increased visibility: improve awareness of available support services among students and stakeholders to ensure these resources are fully utilized. 4. Benchmarking best practices: collaborate with other institutions to adopt and implement best practices in student support and counseling.
Inconsistencies



Inconsistencies:

1. Variability in training: the frequency and quality of training for non-educational staff vary between institutions, potentially impacting service delivery consistency.
2. Limited career counseling: while general support is strong, some students report a need for more targeted career counseling specific to short-cycle programme outcomes.
3. Role clarity: there may be occasional overlaps or gaps in the roles and responsibilities of non-educational staff, leading to inefficiencies in service delivery.
4. Stakeholder feedback integration: the processes for collecting and incorporating feedback from students and other stakeholders about support services could be more robust and systematic.

Standards on Students

Standard 9

The higher education institution shall provide the students with adequate help and counselling.

Assessed shall be the following:

- a) *the consideration of the diversity and needs of students in the establishment and determination of the content of counselling or help;*
- b) *timely and efficient notification of students;*
- c) *monitoring of the satisfaction of students with the services;*
- d) *help with finding internships*

Findings
1. Tailored counseling services: HEIs offering short-cycle programmes provide counseling and support services designed to address the diverse needs of students, including academic and personal challenges. 2. Efficient communication: institutions ensure students receive timely and clear information about programme requirements, schedules, and available resources. 3. Internship support: support services include guidance for finding internships relevant to the programme outcomes, enhancing employability. 4. Feedback mechanisms: surveys and evaluations are conducted to monitor student satisfaction with support services, informing continuous improvements.
Strengths
1. Student-centered approach: counseling services consider the unique needs of short-cycle programme students, including those balancing work and family responsibilities. 2. Proactive communication: students are kept informed through multiple channels, ensuring they are aware of important deadlines, internship opportunities, and programme updates. 3. Internship facilitation: institutions actively connect students with industry partners and employers for internship placements, supporting practical learning and career readiness. 4. Satisfaction monitoring: student feedback on support services is systematically collected and analyzed, helping institutions address gaps and improve service delivery.
Opportunities
1. Enhanced career services: expand career counseling services to include guidance on job search strategies, and interview preparation tailored to short-cycle programme graduates. 2. Digital platforms: develop centralized digital platforms where students can access resources, schedule counseling sessions, and receive updates on internships. 3. Peer mentoring: introduce peer mentoring programs where current or former students can guide and support new students through their academic journey.



4. Diverse support options: offer specialized support for international students, students with disabilities, and those from underrepresented backgrounds to ensure inclusivity.

Inconsistencies

1. Variable support quality: the scope and quality of counseling services vary across institutions, potentially leading to uneven student experiences.
2. Limited personalization: while general support is provided, some students report that counseling services could be better tailored to their specific academic or career goals.
3. Internship challenges: access to internships may be inconsistent, particularly in smaller institutions or less-connected regions.
4. Feedback utilization: while feedback is collected, its use in implementing tangible improvements to counseling services is not always transparent or effective.

Standard 10

Students shall have appropriate conditions for a quality of study, of scientific, professional, research or artistic work and extracurricular activities.

Assessed shall be the following:

- a) *implementation of the study and its conditions according to the needs and expectations of students;*
- b) *enabling suitable professional, artistic and research work of students;*
- c) *conditions for extracurricular activity;*
- d) *enabling quality internship placements.*

Findings
1. Quality learning environment: HEIs offering short-cycle programmes provide students with suitable facilities and resources for effective learning and professional development. 2. Integration of practical work: programmes emphasize practical and research-oriented components, ensuring students gain hands-on experience and industry-relevant skills. 3. Extracurricular opportunities: institutions encourage extracurricular engagement, including participation in relevant professional events and activities. 4. Internship placements: structured internship programs help students apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, supporting their career readiness.
Strengths
1. Well-equipped facilities: institutions provide access to specialized facilities and laboratories that support professional, artistic, and research activities, tailored to short-cycle programme requirements. 2. Practical focus: curricula integrate practical training and internship placements as core components, ensuring students are well-prepared for the job market. 3. Extracurricular support: students have opportunities to participate in conferences, workshops, and other events that complement their academic experiences and broaden their professional networks. 4. Personalized guidance: institutions offer support in securing quality internships through dedicated career centers and collaborations with industry partners.
Opportunities
1. Enhanced resources: expand access to advanced technology and digital tools for research and professional work, keeping up with industry standards. 2. Diversified extracurricular options: develop more varied extracurricular activities, such as professional clubs, artistic workshops, and research competitions, to engage diverse student interests. 3. Internship matching: strengthen partnerships with a wider range of industries to offer internships aligned with students' career aspirations and academic focus.

4. Interdisciplinary opportunities: encourage cross-programme collaborations to expose students to interdisciplinary approaches and broaden their skill sets.

Inconsistencies

1. Facilities access variability: the availability and quality of facilities and resources can differ across institutions, affecting the uniformity of the student experience.
2. Internship availability: some students report challenges in finding internships that align with their career goals, particularly in regions with fewer industry connections.
3. Extracurricular engagement: participation in extracurricular activities may be limited due to time constraints or a lack of awareness among students.
4. Research opportunities: while some institutions promote research activities, not all short-cycle programmes provide adequate support for student-led projects.

Standard 11

The higher education institution shall protect students' rights.

Assessed shall be the following:

- a) *operation of the bodies of the higher education institution in this area;*
- b) *mechanisms for the recognition and prevention of discrimination of vulnerable groups of students and discrimination based on personal circumstances and beliefs of students;*
- c) *participation of student representatives in the bodies of the institution with other students.*

Findings
1. Rights protection framework: higher education institutions (HEIs) offering short-cycle programmes have established policies and bodies to protect students' rights, ensuring a fair and supportive environment. 2. Anti-discrimination mechanisms: systems are in place to recognize and prevent discrimination based on personal circumstances, beliefs, or vulnerabilities, promoting inclusivity. 3. Student representation: students participate in institutional bodies and committees, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making processes.
Strengths
1. Inclusive policies: institutions enforce policies to protect against discrimination, creating an inclusive environment for all students, including those from vulnerable groups. 2. Active student governance: student representatives are involved in governance structures, contributing to the development and enforcement of policies that affect their peers. 3. Awareness and training: staff and students are educated about rights protection and anti-discrimination practices, fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding. 4. Accessible complaint mechanisms: clear procedures exist for students to report grievances or discrimination, ensuring their concerns are addressed promptly and effectively.
Opportunities
1. Enhanced representation: increase the number of student representatives in decision-making bodies to ensure broader and more diverse perspectives. 2. Support for vulnerable groups: develop targeted support programs for students from disadvantaged or marginalized backgrounds, including financial aid and counseling services. 3. Monitoring and feedback: regularly evaluate the effectiveness of anti-discrimination policies and student rights protection mechanisms through surveys and focus groups. 4. Community building: foster student-led initiatives, such as clubs or awareness campaigns, to promote inclusivity and advocacy for student rights.

Inconsistencies

1. Variable policy implementation: the enforcement of anti-discrimination policies and rights protection mechanisms may vary across institutions and programs, leading to inconsistent experiences for students.
2. Awareness gaps: some students and staff may lack sufficient awareness of the available rights protection mechanisms, reducing their accessibility and effectiveness.
3. Disparities in support: vulnerable students may experience different levels of support, depending on the institution or specific program.
4. Limited participation: while student representation exists, not all students may feel adequately informed or engaged in governance and decision-making processes.

Standard 12

Students participate in the assessment and the update of content and the implementation of the higher education institution activity.

Assessed shall be the following:

- a) *participation of students in the drafting of the mission, strategic guidelines, self-evaluation of the higher education institution and study programmes as well as their transformation;*
- b) *methods of ensuring participation in the self-evaluation and update of the activity.*

Findings
1. Student engagement: HEIs offering short-cycle programmes involve students in the evaluation and development of study programmes and institutional strategies through surveys and focus groups. 2. Feedback mechanisms: structured mechanisms are in place for students to provide input on programme content, implementation, and institutional activities, promoting continuous improvement. 3. Self-evaluation participation: students participate in self-evaluation processes, ensuring their perspectives are considered in institutional assessments and transformations.
Strengths
1. Inclusive processes: students are invited to contribute to key institutional activities, such as the drafting of strategic plans and programme updates, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration. 2. Actionable feedback: institutions actively use student feedback to refine study programmes and align them with evolving educational and market needs. 3. Multiple participation channels: HEIs employ diverse methods, including surveys, committees, and workshops, to gather input from students, ensuring broad representation. 4. Transparent updates: Institutions communicate the outcomes of student feedback and the resulting updates to programmes and activities, building trust and accountability.
Opportunities
1. Strengthen feedback utilization: develop more robust systems to ensure that student feedback directly informs updates to programme content and institutional activities. 2. Empower student leadership: encourage greater involvement of student representatives in strategic planning and programme evaluation to foster leadership skills and engagement. 3. Real-time feedback tools: implement digital platforms that allow students to provide feedback on programmes and institutional activities in real time, improving responsiveness.

4. Focus on underrepresented groups: ensure feedback from diverse student groups is systematically collected and integrated into updates to enhance inclusivity.

Inconsistencies

1. Variable engagement levels: student participation in self-evaluation and programme updates may vary between institutions or programmes, resulting in uneven representation.
2. Feedback implementation gaps: while feedback is collected, not all institutions consistently demonstrate how it is used to effect meaningful change in programmes or activities.
3. Awareness of processes: some students may not be fully aware of the opportunities to participate in self-evaluation or updates, limiting engagement.
4. Limited channels in some areas: in some cases, participation mechanisms may not be accessible to all students, particularly those in remote or part-time settings.

Standards on the Material Resources

Standard 14

The institution shall provide suitable premises for the implementation of the higher education activity.

The premises shall be assessed upon the consideration of the educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activity, study programme proposals, human resources and the anticipated number of students enrolled.

Findings
1. Suitability of premises: the short-cycle programmes utilize modern facilities tailored to educational, practical, and professional activities, such as those available at the Specialist centers for dentistry and University hospitals. 2. Online and physical resources: programs incorporate e-learning platforms like Moodle for theoretical components and designated classrooms or laboratories for practical training. 3. Compliance with standards: institutions adhere to local regulations regarding the minimum standards for premises and facilities required for higher education activities.
Strengths
1. Specialized facilities: short-cycle programmes like <i>Dental Nurse</i> and <i>Instrumentation in Surgical Practice</i> benefit from purpose-built environments such as dental clinics and surgical practice centers, ensuring high-quality training. 2. Integration of e-learning: platforms like Moodle enable seamless online delivery of theoretical content, offering flexibility for working professionals. 3. Resource allocation: institutions provide students with necessary materials and resources, including access to labs, libraries, and digital tools, to support their learning needs. 4. Collaborative use of premises: partnerships with hospitals and other professional institutions enhance the availability and quality of training spaces.
Opportunities
1. Facility upgrades: invest in upgrading existing facilities to incorporate state-of-the-art technology, ensuring alignment with global standards. 2. Expanding digital infrastructure: enhance the digital learning infrastructure to improve access and interactivity for remote learners. 3. Diverse practical locations: partner with more institutions to offer students varied locations for practical training, exposing them to different professional environments. 4. Sustainability practices: integrate eco-friendly and sustainable solutions into facility management to align with global educational trends.
Inconsistencies



1. Access disparities: the quality and availability of facilities vary between institutions and regions, potentially affecting the uniformity of learning experiences.
2. E-learning limitations: while effective, e-learning platforms may not fully replicate the hands-on experience required for practical training.
3. Space constraints: some programs report limited access to physical spaces for practical training, particularly during peak usage periods.
4. Insufficient feedback integration: feedback from students regarding premises and facilities could be more systematically collected and acted upon to improve conditions.

Standard 15

The institution shall provide the suitable technical, technological and other equipment for the execution of the higher education activity.

The equipment shall be assessed upon the consideration of the educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activity, study programme proposals, anticipated manner of their implementation (e-study, remote study...), human resources and the anticipated number of students enrolled.

Findings
1. Technical resources: institutions offering short-cycle programmes ensure access to modern technical and technological tools, such as e-learning platforms and specialized equipment for practical training. 2. Tailored equipment: equipment is chosen based on the specific needs of each program, such as dental instruments for <i>Dental Nurse</i> training and surgical tools for <i>Instrumentation in Surgical Practice</i>. 3. Scalability: equipment availability generally matches the anticipated number of enrolled students, ensuring sufficient resources for both theoretical and practical components.
Strengths
1. Advanced e-learning platforms: platforms like Moodle are utilized for distance learning, enabling effective delivery of theoretical content and assessments. 2. Program-specific equipment: specialized tools and laboratories support hands-on training, providing practical experience aligned with program outcomes. 3. Accessible digital tools: students and faculty benefit from online resources, including digital libraries, simulation software, and other e-learning aids. 4. Compliance with standards: equipment and facilities comply with local and European regulations for higher education activities, ensuring quality and safety.
Opportunities
1. Technology upgrades: regularly update technical and technological resources to keep pace with industry advancements and emerging educational trends. 2. Integration of smart technologies: introduce smart classroom technologies, such as interactive boards and VR tools, to enhance learning experiences. 3. Broader access to equipment: expand access to high-end equipment for all enrolled students, including those in remote or smaller institutions. 4. Sustainable investments: invest in energy-efficient and eco-friendly technology solutions to align with global sustainability goals.
Inconsistencies
1. Resource disparities: equipment quality and availability vary between institutions, potentially leading to uneven learning experiences across programs.



2. E-learning gaps: while e-learning platforms are effective, some students report technical challenges, such as unreliable internet connectivity or outdated software.
3. Maintenance issues: in some cases, equipment maintenance and replacement cycles are insufficient, affecting reliability and functionality.
4. Capacity challenges: during peak periods, equipment shortages may occur, limiting the number of students who can access certain tools or facilities simultaneously.

Standard 16

Suitable adjustments shall be provided for students with various forms of disability.

Assessed shall be the adjustments of the premises and the equipment as well as communication and information accessibility.

Findings
1. Accessibility efforts: institutions offering short-cycle programmes have implemented measures to accommodate students with disabilities, such as physical access to premises and digital accessibility for e-learning platforms. 2. Inclusive communication tools: some programs ensure that information and communication channels are accessible to all students, including those with sensory or cognitive disabilities. 3. Partial equipment adaptation: while specialized equipment is available for practical training, its adaptability for students with disabilities varies.
Strengths
1. Physical accessibility: many institutions have taken steps to ensure their facilities, including classrooms and laboratories, are wheelchair accessible and comply with accessibility standards. 2. Digital inclusivity: e-learning platforms like Moodle are equipped with features that support students with disabilities, such as screen-reader compatibility and adjustable font sizes. 3. Inclusive policies: institutions have adopted policies promoting inclusivity and nondiscrimination, fostering a supportive environment for students with disabilities. 4. Stakeholder feedback: feedback from students with disabilities is collected to inform adjustments and improve accessibility measures.
Opportunities
1. Specialized training: provide training for faculty and staff on supporting students with disabilities, focusing on communication, accommodation strategies, and sensitivity. 2. Enhanced equipment: invest in adaptive technologies, such as Braille devices, speech-to-text software, and accessible laboratory tools, to better serve students with disabilities. 3. Accessible information design: ensure all course materials, websites, and communication are designed to be universally accessible, including captions for videos and simplified navigation. 4. Collaboration with advocacy groups: partner with disability advocacy organizations to identify best practices and improve institutional support systems.
Inconsistencies



1. Uneven implementation: accessibility measures, particularly physical adjustments to premises, are not consistently implemented across institutions.
2. Limited adaptations for equipment: while some programs include adaptive equipment, many still lack sufficient tools tailored for students with disabilities.
3. Digital gaps: not all e-learning platforms or digital resources fully meet accessibility standards, creating challenges for some students.
4. Communication barriers: some students report insufficient availability of alternative communication methods, such as sign language interpreters or text-based options.

By addressing these inconsistencies and leveraging identified opportunities, institutions can ensure that their short-cycle programmes are fully accessible, fostering a more inclusive learning environment that meets the needs of all students, including those with disabilities.

Standards 17

Adequate and stable financial resources shall be provided for the implementation and further development of the higher education activity.

Assessed shall be the financial plan for the following accreditation period or for the period for which an agreement has been concluded with the competent ministry, and the successfulness in meeting the financial plans in the last four years.

Findings
1. Stable funding: short-cycle programmes now receive funding from ERASMUS+ initiatives like the PARTISH project. 2. Financial planning: institutions develop detailed financial plans for short-cycle programmes that include resource allocation for teaching, infrastructure, and student support. 3. Grant utilization: programs have successfully leveraged grants and external funding to pilot and develop courses, such as the <i>Dental Nurse</i> and <i>Instrumentation in Surgical Practice</i> programmes.
Strengths
1. International project support: The ERASMUS+ PARTISH project and other international collaborations provide substantial funding for developing and implementing short-cycle programmes. 2. Efficient resource allocation: institutions have demonstrated efficient use of financial resources to enhance facilities, procure equipment, and support student services. 3. Transparent reporting: financial planning and implementation are systematically reported and monitored to ensure accountability and alignment with strategic goals.
Opportunities
1. Increased external funding: seek additional grants and partnerships with private sector stakeholders to expand program offerings and infrastructure. 2. Financial planning innovations: introduce dynamic financial planning tools to optimize resource allocation and respond to changing needs. 3. Sustainability initiatives: allocate resources for long-term sustainability projects, such as energy-efficient infrastructure and eco-friendly technologies. 4. Alumni contributions: establish alumni networks and encourage contributions to fund scholarships and program development.
Inconsistencies
1. Funding variability: the financial stability of short-cycle programmes may depend heavily on external grants, creating risks if such funding sources diminish. 2. Limited flexibility in public funding: government funding regulations may restrict institutions' ability to reallocate resources dynamically to meet emerging needs.



3. Uneven financial performance: not all institutions consistently meet their financial plans, with some experiencing shortfalls or delays in funding allocation.
4. Dependency on tuition fees: some programs rely significantly on tuition fees, which may limit accessibility for students from lower-income backgrounds.

Standard 18

The library of the higher education institution shall have suitable study, professional and scientific literature and shall provide quality library services.

Assessed shall be the following:

- a) *suitability of the study, professional and scientific literature;*
- b) *the library stock, availability of the material, information bibliographic support and access to databases;*
- c) *professional assistance by library employees;*
- d) *development of the library activity.*

Findings

1. Library resources: libraries associated with institutions offering short-cycle programmes provide a range of study, professional, and scientific literature relevant to the disciplines covered, such as healthcare and adapted physical activities.
2. Digital access: many libraries support access to digital resources, including e-books, journals, and academic databases, enabling students to engage in research and study remotely.
3. Professional support: library staff offer professional assistance to students, including research support, bibliographic services, and training on database usage.

Strengths

1. Relevant stock: libraries maintain a curated stock of materials tailored to the needs of short-cycle programmes, including specialized texts and manuals.
2. E-library services: digital platforms and access to international databases ensure students can access up-to-date research and literature anytime, anywhere.
3. Professional expertise: library employees are well-trained and provide guidance on literature searches, citation practices, and academic writing support.
4. Student engagement: libraries actively promote resources through workshops, tutorials, and orientation sessions, helping students maximize the available services.

Opportunities

1. Expanding digital libraries: increase access to international databases and e-books, ensuring comprehensive coverage of emerging disciplines and topics.
2. Improved accessibility: invest in adaptive technology and resources to ensure library materials are accessible to students with disabilities.
3. Interlibrary collaborations: establish partnerships with other institutions to expand the range of resources and databases available to students.
4. Library modernization: upgrade physical library spaces to include modern amenities like quiet zones, collaborative areas, and advanced IT support.

Inconsistencies

1. Stock limitations: some institutions report limited availability of specific professional or scientific literature necessary for certain short-cycle programmes.
2. Variable digital access: while e-resources are available, not all institutions offer access to the same range of databases, leading to disparities in resource availability.
3. Support gaps: in some cases, library staff availability and expertise in specialized fields may not fully meet student needs.
4. Activity development: efforts to develop library services, such as integrating advanced search tools and expanding stock, are inconsistent across institutions.

By addressing these inconsistencies and leveraging the opportunities, institutions can ensure that their libraries meet the needs of short-cycle programme students, fostering academic success through high-quality resources and professional support.

Standards on the International Quality Assurance Control and Study Programmes Delivery

Standard 19

The higher education institution shall evaluate and update the content, composition and implementation of the study programme.

Assessed shall be the following:

- whether the self-evaluation of a study programme enables its development and update by keeping its actuality and creating a quality of the educational environment;*
- methods and procedures of collecting information or proposals for the transformation of a study programme and its analyses;*
- appropriateness of informing the stakeholders on achieving the planned tasks or the findings and results of the self-evaluation of a study programme.*

Findings
- Self-evaluation mechanisms: institutions offering short-cycle programmes conduct systematic self-evaluations to ensure programme content remains relevant and aligned with market and educational needs. - Stakeholder input: feedback from students, faculty, and industry stakeholders is regularly collected through surveys, focus groups, and evaluations to guide programme updates. - Transparency: institutions communicate self-evaluation findings and updates to stakeholders, ensuring clarity and accountability.
Strengths
- Relevance and flexibility: study programmes are designed to respond quickly to industry trends and workforce needs, as demonstrated by updates to practical components in programs like <i>Dental Nurse</i> and <i>Instrumentation in Surgical Practice</i>. - Diverse feedback methods: institutions use multiple channels to gather input, including questionnaires, informal discussions, and performance analyses, ensuring comprehensive data collection. - Continuous improvement: self-evaluation findings lead to actionable updates, such as curriculum revisions, enhanced resources, and improved teaching methods. - Stakeholder communication: institutions provide regular updates on programme changes, enabling transparency and fostering stakeholder trust.
Opportunities
- Real-time feedback systems: implement digital tools that allow students and stakeholders to provide ongoing feedback on programme components, improving responsiveness. - Enhanced industry collaboration: strengthen partnerships with employers to ensure programme updates align with emerging job market requirements.

3. International benchmarking: compare short-cycle programmes with similar international offerings to incorporate global best practices and enhance competitiveness.
4. Increased stakeholder engagement: involve a broader range of stakeholders, including alumni and external experts, in programme evaluation and updates.

Inconsistencies

1. Variable update frequency: the frequency and thoroughness of programme updates differ across institutions, potentially affecting programme quality.
2. Insufficient stakeholder awareness: while institutions communicate updates, not all stakeholders are consistently informed or engaged in the self-evaluation process.
3. Limited use of feedback: some programmes underutilize feedback from evaluations, resulting in slower implementation of necessary updates.
4. Inconsistent analysis methods: the methods used to analyze feedback and evaluate programmes vary, leading to inconsistencies in the quality and scope of updates.

By addressing these inconsistencies and leveraging the identified opportunities, institutions can ensure that short-cycle programmes are regularly evaluated and updated to remain current, relevant, and aligned with stakeholder needs. This will enhance the overall quality of education and better prepare graduates for professional success.