



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRISË
AGJENCIA E SIGURIMIT TË CILËSISË
NË ARSIMIN E LARTË

Overview of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Albania and its Challenges

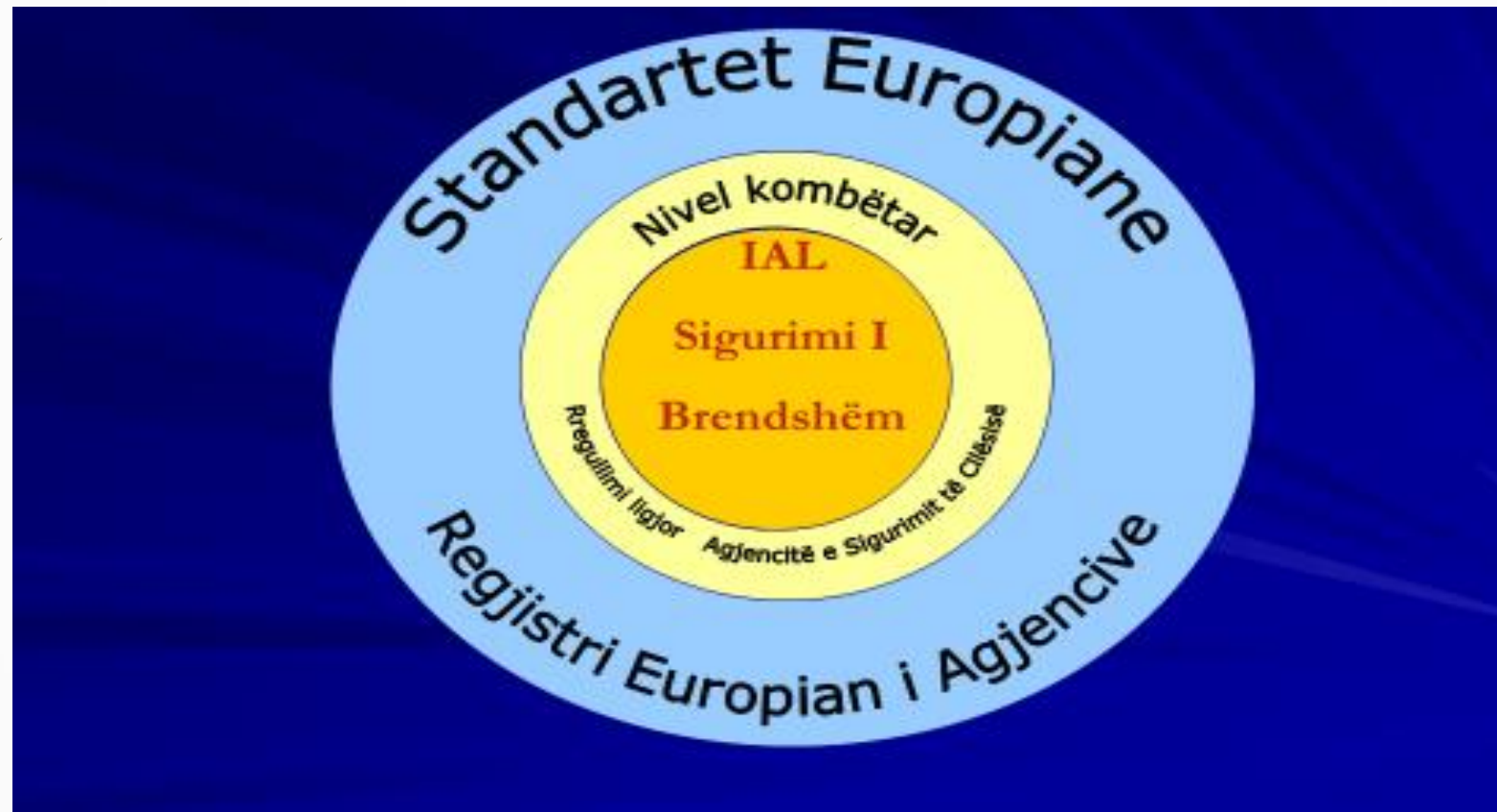
ASCAL WHO WAS, IS AND WILL BE?

- ASCAL was founded as an Accreditation Agency with DCM no. 303, dated 01.07.1999. In 2024 ASCAL had the 25th anniversary of its establishment.
- Over the years, it has had different names until 2017, where with DCM no. 109, dated 15.02.2017, is called and functions as ASCAL.
- Despite different names over the years, ASCAL has been and is the only institution in Albania that controls and evaluates quality in higher education, based on its internal regulatory acts and European best practices.
- ASCAL is independent, impartial and transparent in carrying out its activity.
- ASCAL is an associate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).
- ASCAL's goal is to be a full member of ENQA in the future.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- Internal Quality Assurance; through Internal Quality Systems in HEIs
- External Quality Assurance; through Quality Assurance Agencies and policy-making bodies in Higher Education

LEVELS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE



INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- The totality of processes, mechanisms, procedures, human resources of the relevant institutions and instruments for control, monitoring, quality assessment, identification of weaknesses, risks and obstacles and determination of ways and measures for continuous improvement, also ensuring implementation in practice and continuity of processes.
- The main instrument, the basis through which the identification and analysis of main activities and actors in HEIs is carried out, the strengths and weaknesses, obstacles and difficulties are determined and the measures through which the following improvement is carried out are identified.
- Periodic and continuous.

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Objectives, goals, main principles on which they operate.
- Internal Quality Structures (Units) in HEIs.
- How are they set up, who is part?
- How do they work?
- Field of activity of internal quality structures; relations with HEI and EQA.
- How is independence from other decision-making and executive institutional structures of HEI ensured?
- How are they regulated in the by-laws of the institution; statutes, regulations, codes, etc.

QUALITY AUDIT: EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF ISQA IN HEI

- It is assessed whether the ISQA in the HEI is established and functions according to the appropriate principles and meets the required national and international standards.
- The ISQA is assessed for quality assurance in the institution and if this is real and realistic, objective and impartial, comprehensive and transparent, and if it helps the HEI in quality assessment and improvement.
- It evaluates whether the system in the institution and operation cultivates the culture of quality in the institution.

EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- One of the main goals of accreditation is to ensure quality in higher education. By evaluating institutions and study programs in accordance with certain standards, the accreditation process helps to guarantee a high quality of education.
- The accreditation process uses certain quality standards to assess how well the higher education institution meets them. These include aspects such as the quality of teaching, learning, available resources, scientific research, administration and many others.
- Through the accreditation process, institutions are obliged to include high standards and fulfill certain criteria for the quality of the study program in the whole dimension that the word “learning” itself represents, as a process and as a culture.
- Accreditation affects the creation of a culture of continuous improvement in higher education institutions.

EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- ▶ Accreditation is now an integral part of our higher education system. Our system consists of public and non-public institutions of higher education with a wide range of types, missions, ranging from research universities to university colleges and community professional institutions.
- ▶ The “accredited” status opens the door for the institution to benefit from state funding sources. Also, most donors and private organizations prefer to invest in accredited institutions, thus giving the institution the opportunity to benefit from additional financial resources.
- ▶ Institutions use the results of the accreditation process to identify points for improvement and develop action plans to achieve the highest quality standards.

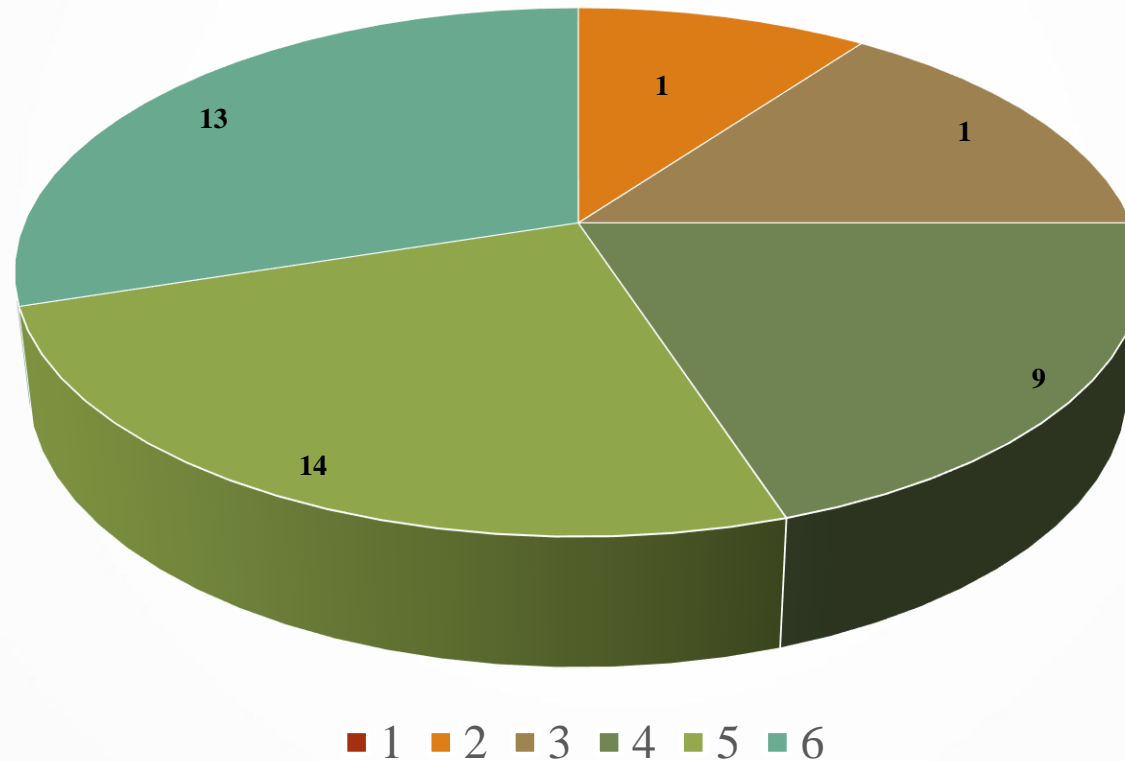
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

Currently, 40 institutions of higher education operate in Albania; 14 of them are public and 26 are non-public.

- ▶ The first accreditation of all public institutions of higher education was realized in 2017. This achievement came as a result of the cooperation of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASCAL) with the British Accreditation Agency (QAA), following of the initiative of the Albanian government for the Institutional Assessment of Higher Education Institutions in Albania.
- ▶ It is important to note that in the institutional accreditation process, ASCAL engages foreign and domestic external evaluation experts. Since 2020, the process of periodical institutional accreditations of public HEIs has begun.

INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

Years of accreditation



PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED IN ACCREDITATION PROCESSES

- Internal quality assurance offices should be more active in drafting reports for quality assurance and enhancement;
- Career and Alumni offices have a low activity, in some cases they do not even have data on employed students;
- More funding is required for professors for research;
- Study programs are often not in line with the needs of the labor market;
- Overload of academic staff;
- The social dimension is still at a low level.

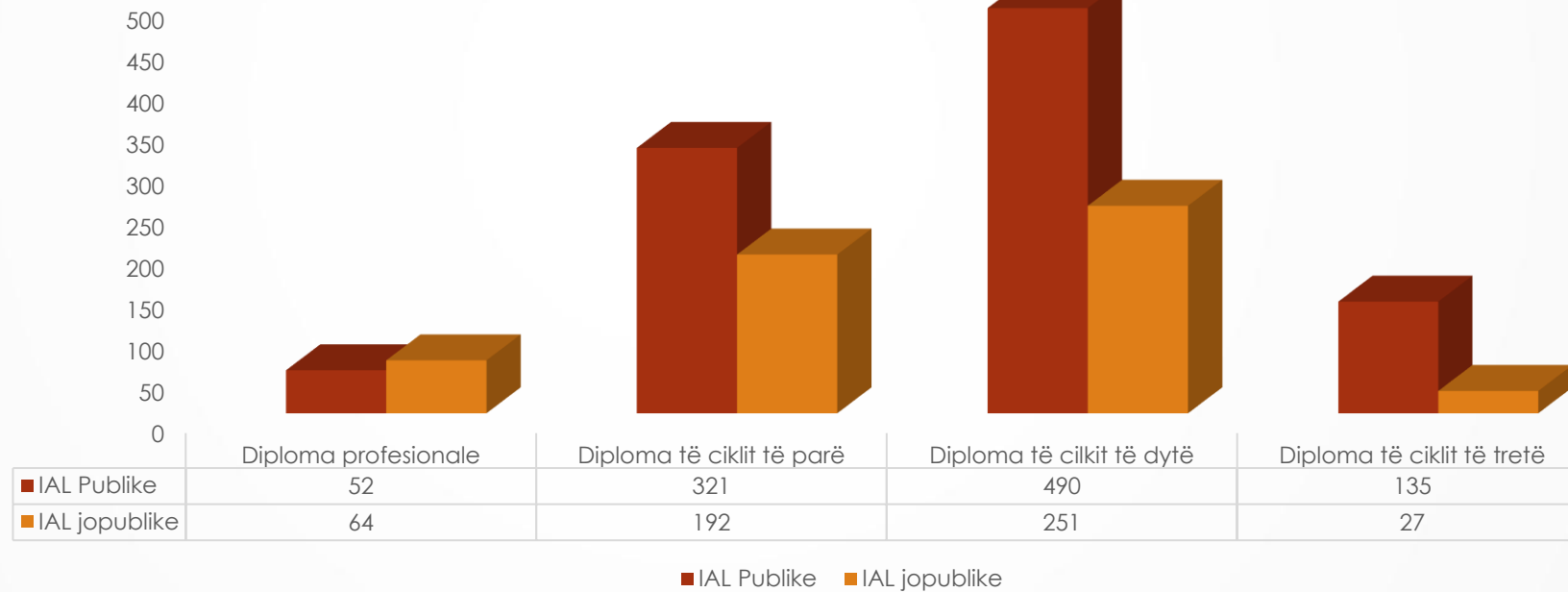
STUDY PROGRAMS

Regarding the number of study programs, in total, there are 1532 in both public and non-public HEIs, of which:

- **998 in public HEIs** (52 professional diplomas, 321 first-cycle diplomas, 490 second-cycle diplomas and 135 third-cycle diplomas);
- **534 in non-public HEIs** (64 professional diplomas, 192 first-cycle diplomas, 251 second-cycle diplomas and 27 third-cycle diplomas).

STUDY PROGRAMS

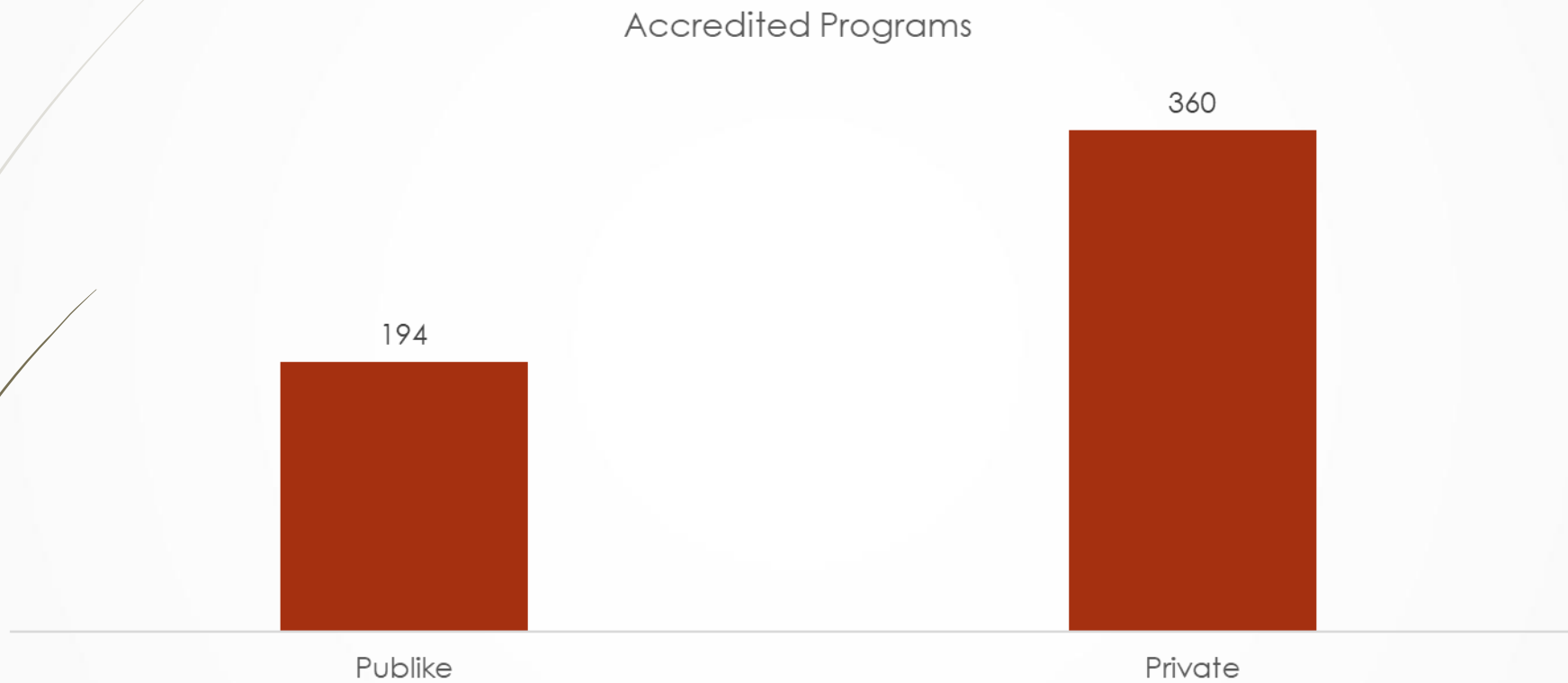
Diploma types



STUDY PROGRAMS

- One of the recent added procedures, but also one of the challenges of ASCAL has been the accreditation of study programs of public institutions of higher education.
- The process of external evaluation of study programs within the framework of accreditation started in 2019. Currently speaking, all public higher education institutions in the country have applied for the accreditation of study programs.
- In 2024, a total of **255 new applications** for accreditation from public and non-public HEIs were submitted to ASCAL.

STUDY PROGRAMS



THE CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY THE ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ALBANIA

The process of accreditation of higher education institutions is in itself a complex challenge and requires constant attention to ensure quality and high standards in education.

- **Firstly**, it is important that quality standards are constantly aligned with the needs of society and are appropriate for the local and global context.
- **Secondly**, quality assurance in higher education is not a one-time process that guarantees the quality forever. Institutions should establish continuous mechanisms to supervise and evaluate the quality of services and study programs.
- **Thirdly**, it is very important to build a culture of quality through continuous improvement.
- **Fourthly**, investment in the training of academic staff, infrastructure, technology and development of study programs.
- To address these challenges, a holistic approach and the use of good international practices are essential in the process of accreditation of higher education institutions in Albania.



THANK YOU!

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS