

Multi-Level, Multi-Stakeholder Frameworks for Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Accountability

Background and development



QAMA

QUALITY ASSURANCE, MONITORING
AND ACCOUNTABILITY



EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

MULTI-LEVEL, MULTI-STAKEHOLDER FRAMEWORKS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE, MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Background and development



The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) is an independent and self-governing organisation. EASNIE is co-funded by the ministries of education in its member countries and by the European Commission via an operating grant within the European Union (EU) education programme.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.

The views expressed by any individual in this document do not necessarily represent the official views of EASNIE, its member countries or the European Commission.

© European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2025

Editor: Diana Murdoch

This publication is an open-access resource. This means you are free to access, use and disseminate it with appropriate credit to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. Please refer to EASNIE's Open Access Policy for more information: www.european-agency.org/open-access-policy.

You may cite this publication as follows: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2025. *Multi-Level, Multi-Stakeholder Frameworks for Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Accountability: Background and development*. (D. Murdoch, ed.). Odense, Denmark



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

You may not modify or translate this publication without EASNIE's approval.

With a view to greater accessibility, this report is available in accessible electronic format on EASNIE's website: www.european-agency.org

ISBN: 978-87-7599-131-0 (Electronic)

Secretariat

Østre Stationsvej 33
DK-5000 Odense C Denmark
Tel.: +45 64 41 00 20
secretariat@european-agency.org

Brussels Office

Rue Montoyer 21
BE-1000 Brussels Belgium
Tel.: +32 2 213 62 80
brussels.office@european-agency.org



CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
1. BACKGROUND	6
1.1 Introduction to the Thematic Country Cluster Activities	6
1.2 QAMA activities: Framework development for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability	6
<i>Overall aim of a framework for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability</i>	7
1.3 Integrating all Thematic Country Cluster Activities work	7
2. FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT	10
2.1 Exploring key terms	10
2.2. An overarching vision	10
2.3 An inclusive framework	11
2.4 Working towards a framework with a different focus	12
2.5 The QAMA Tree: a framework for continuous improvement in inclusive education systems	12
<i>Sections of the framework</i>	16
3. IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK	18
3.1 Exploring three key areas within the framework	19
<i>School improvement</i>	19
<i>Accountability</i>	19
<i>Data collection and use</i>	20
CONCLUSIONS AND KEY QUESTIONS	21
Conclusions	21
Key questions	22
REFERENCES	23



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Six country groups, or ‘clusters’, involving the majority of member countries from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE), participated in the [Thematic Country Cluster Activities](#) (TCCA) from early 2024 to mid-2026. The TCCA were designed to transition from broad thematic projects with EASNIE member countries, to more focused clusters of countries, allowing for flexible partnership and tailored support for policy development.

The clusters concentrated on three thematic areas: monitoring and evaluation; cross-sector collaboration; and developing frameworks for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability.

This report provides information on the work of the Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Accountability ([QAMA](#)) cluster, and is part of a suite of linked resources. The QAMA cluster countries were Austria, Belgium (Flemish community), Greece, Italy, Spain and United Kingdom (Northern Ireland).

Many countries have processes in place for monitoring, evaluation, quality assurance and accountability of some aspects of their education systems. However, evidence from international research indicates that few countries have a coherent system to map information gathered against system-wide objectives to plan future data collection. Even fewer countries follow up their education reforms by evaluating their impact.

Multi-level, multi-stakeholder frameworks enable each element and strand to be approached systematically, bringing together data from, and forming synergies between, all sectors and levels of the system. This creates a rounded picture of system and school development.

This report presents the conceptual background to the purpose and development of a framework for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability. The framework underpins and brings together the work of all six thematic activities developed during TCCA cycle 1.

A multi-level, multi-stakeholder framework aims to support the implementation of high-quality inclusive education policy and practice, in a system of continuous review and development. To achieve this aim, and to be effective, the framework must:

- align with international, European Union (EU)-level and national commitments and EASNIE’s [Key Principles](#) (2021);
- be built on a fluent dialogue between school- and system-level actors and stakeholders, both internal and external to education;
- be adaptable to different country contexts;
- be applicable to the full range of stakeholders across education and in all other sectors that impact on the provision of high-quality inclusive education for all learners.

The [TCCA Literature Review](#) (EASNIE, 2024a) concluded with the presentation of a draft framework for a system of continuous improvement and accountability across the



education system, incorporating the main aspects identified as essential to create and sustain an effective and coherent system. This current report presents QAMA's exploration of these aspects and their role within a system framework.

QAMA countries explored the TCCA framework as a whole, the different aspects within it, the processes described and the flow of information, to develop a different style of framework which itself was inclusive and centred on the outcomes for all learners. The essential starting point to develop policy and practice for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability is stakeholder agreement on the underlying values and principles of inclusive education, expressed as a shared vision.

During the work, key terms were explored and the placement of the elements within the whole framework were discussed. As a result of these discussions, three topics emerged as central to the framework's effectiveness, on account of the range of purposes and practices present across all levels, leading to a variety of outcomes. These are:

- School improvement
- Accountability
- Data collection and use.

It became clear that, for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability to be unified and effective, a range of processes must be in place across all aspects of the education system and at all levels. For this, cross-sector collaboration – explored in the [Advancing Collaboration in Education](#) (ACE) and [Collaborative Action for Inclusive Education](#) (CAFIE) TCCA clusters – is essential, with a continuous flow of information through the system, both from and between national, regional, community and school levels. Engagement with sectors outside education, but which interact with and impact on education at all levels, must also be incorporated, aligned with the vision and working towards the same aims.

As a result of their collaborative work, QAMA countries redesigned the TCCA framework, incorporating the key elements and processes for an effective and coherent system for continuous improvement in inclusive education systems. The countries applied the framework in different ways within their systems. The new framework is referred to as the [QAMA Tree](#). The [Guidelines for use](#) (EASNIE, 2025), which complement this document, provide examples and reflections on the framework development and its uses.

This report concludes with a series of [key questions](#) that policy-makers may wish to address as they explore the framework, as a starting point for developing and improving their quality assurance, monitoring and accountability systems.



1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction to the Thematic Country Cluster Activities

Country groups, or ‘clusters’, involving the majority of member countries from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE), participated in the Thematic Country Cluster Activities (TCCA) from early 2024 to mid-2026.

The TCCA were designed to transition from broad thematic projects with EASNIE member countries, to more focused clusters of countries, allowing for flexible partnership and tailored support for policy development. Six clusters were established, each under the guidance and support of EASNIE team members. The clusters concentrated on three thematic areas: monitoring and evaluation; cross-sector collaboration; and developing frameworks for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability. The activities were organised according to country priorities and placed a strong emphasis on peer learning and experience exchange, with collaborative work forming a core element.

This report provides information on the work of the Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Accountability (QAMA) cluster, and forms part of a suite of [linked resources](#).

1.2 QAMA activities: Framework development for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability

EASNIE’s Key Principles indicate that one of the five key requirements of the single legislative and policy framework for inclusive education systems is:

A comprehensive quality assurance and accountability framework for monitoring, review and evaluation that supports high-quality provision for all learners, with a focus on equitable opportunities for those at risk of marginalisation or exclusion (2021, p. 16).

Education systems are increasingly complex and incorporate many different levels and sub-systems. Research shows that, while many countries have processes in place for monitoring, evaluation, quality assurance and accountability of some aspects of their education systems, few countries have a coherent system **to map information gathered against system-wide objectives to plan future data collection** (UNESCO, 2016). Even fewer follow up their education reforms by **evaluating their impact** (OECD, 2015). Existing elements in many countries’ legal frameworks have developed over time and can lead to different types of evaluation (European Commission, 2015).

EASNIE’s [Country System Mapping](#) activity found that a high number of EASNIE member countries were at the stage of **‘developing integrated quality assurance and accountability plans’**. In some countries, monitoring and evaluation units operate in silos, where management and information systems work independently of policy analysis. Disparity also occurs at regional and local levels through data collection by different agencies and service providers (Golden, 2020).



Multi-level, multi-stakeholder frameworks enable **each element and strand to be approached systematically**. They bring together data from, and form synergies between, all sectors and levels of the system, creating a rounded picture of system and school development. A coherent system framework is needed to realise **continuous improvement** through consistency of approach and clarity of communication of the goals, procedures and measures used and the expected outcomes. This type of model requires **input from sectors other than education** to ensure **an integrated approach to accountability**, which is appropriate for **cross-sector working** (Hudson, 2016).

Overall aim of a framework for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability

A multi-level, multi-stakeholder framework aims to support the implementation of high-quality inclusive education policy and practice, in a system of continuous review and development.

To achieve this aim and to be effective, the framework must fulfil these main criteria:

- align with international, EU-level and national commitments and EASNIE’s Key Principles;
- be built on a fluent dialogue between school- and system-level actors and stakeholders, both internal and external to education;
- be adaptable to different country contexts;
- be applicable to the full range of stakeholders across education and in all other sectors that impact on the provision of high-quality inclusive education for all learners.

The TCCA Literature Review (EASNIE, 2024a) shows that many countries lack a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation that can examine:

- the extent to which all learners are present in the system, fulfilling their right to education (in the wake of COVID-19);
- whether all learners really participate and are engaged in the full range of opportunities – that any barriers are overcome so rights within education are also fulfilled;
- the extent to which all learners make the best possible progress in all areas of development towards positive outcomes and successful futures, supporting the right to community participation and lifelong learning.

The multi-level, multi-stakeholder framework’s holistic overview should make it possible to **look back** at successful policies, **look across** to avoid overlaps and possible conflicts, and – importantly – **look forward**, streamlining work for efficient use of scarce resources but keeping sight of the importance of a high-quality, inclusive education for all learners.

1.3 Integrating all Thematic Country Cluster Activities work

The TCCA Literature Review (EASNIE, 2024a) concluded with the presentation of a draft framework for a system of continuous improvement and accountability across the education system, incorporating the main aspects identified as essential to create and



sustain an effective and coherent system. This *Background and development* document presents QAMA's exploration of these aspects and their role within a system framework. The [Guidelines for use](#) present the application and some proposed uses of the framework (EASNIE, 2025).

As part of the collaborative work undertaken during TCCA cycle 1, QAMA countries worked towards a second version of a 'draft framework'. This was based on the draft framework from the literature review, but incorporated some changes and additional features that the QAMA countries considered necessary, based on their current work, to make it widely adaptable for countries with different systems or contexts. This report presents this second framework, the [QAMA Tree](#), as part of the outcomes of QAMA work.

The framework both informs and is informed by the work of all six TCCA clusters. Central to a coherent and effective system are monitoring and evaluation and cross-sector collaboration. These two overarching themes have been the basis for work in five TCCA clusters. Three clusters undertook detailed investigation into monitoring and evaluation:

- Learner Participation in Inclusive Education ([LPIE](#))
- Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in Inclusive Education Policy ([MESIEP](#))
- Learners and Families Shaping Action ([LFSA](#)).

[ACE](#) and [CAFIE](#) focused on more detailed processes involving cross-sector collaboration at different levels of an inclusive education system.

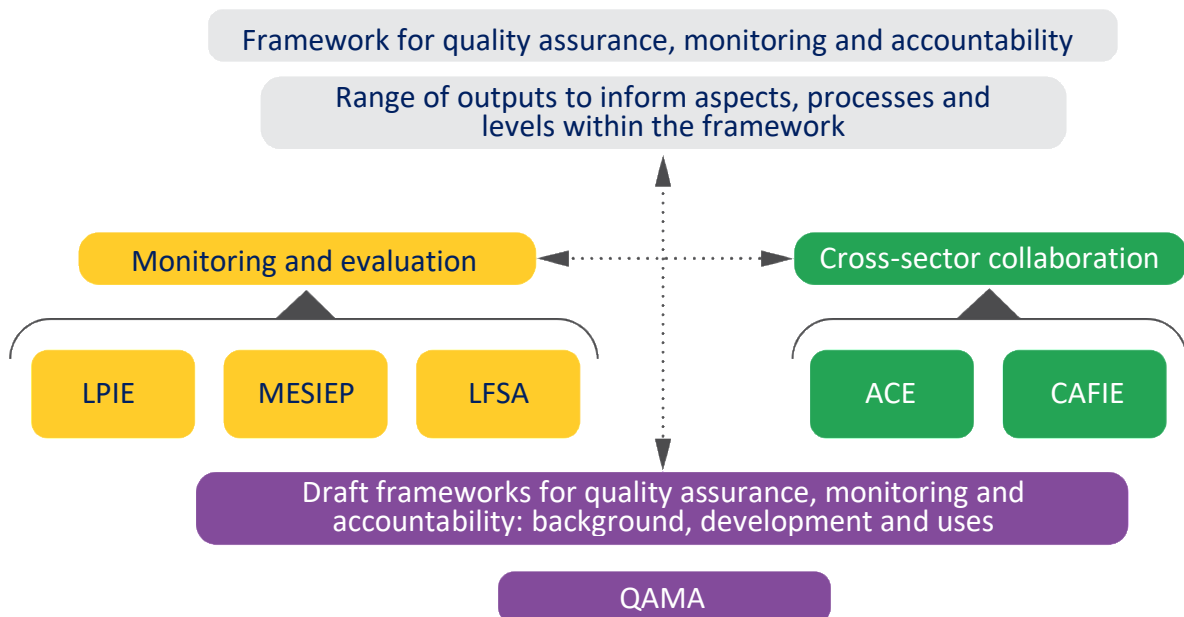


Figure 1. The relationship between TCCA clusters and the framework

Framework development also drew on current and previous EASNIE work around monitoring and evaluation, and a range of collaborations at many levels within education, as well as across sectors, systems and countries. Several examples of this previous and on-going work are indicated below.

A Technical Support Instrument (TSI) project on [Combating Disparities in Access to Inclusive Education in Portugal, Italy and Spain](#) explored monitoring and evaluation. It



provided [guidelines and frameworks](#) for accountability, which can be adapted to different country or regional contexts (EASNIE, 2024b).

EASNIE's [Country Policy Development Support](#) activity provides a Standards and Indicators Framework within its [Methodology Report](#) (EASNIE, 2024c), which details the essential elements and processes to follow.

At the national level, Structural Reform Support Programme [work in Portugal](#) focused on designing a system to monitor progress in implementing Decree Law 54/2018 on inclusive education.

At the school level, an EASNIE [webinar](#), held as part of the TSI project on [Fostering Inclusive Quality Education in Finland and Ireland](#), provided expert input on collaborative working and thinking in and across schools.



2. FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Exploring key terms

The title of the framework, and of this report, incorporates the terms '[quality assurance](#)', '[monitoring](#)' and '[accountability](#)'. Definitions of these key terms are drawn from the EASNIE [Glossary](#) (EASNIE, no date), which is a collection of terms and operational definitions that are used extensively in international educational literature, policy and practice.

An early task for QAMA countries was to explore the range of meanings, interpretations and uses of these key terms and others used in the framework.

It is important to note that using the terms 'multi-level' and 'multi-stakeholder' indicates that the framework is inclusive. It also indicates that the framework is intended to encompass all levels and aspects of a national and regional education system and other sectors that interact with and inform education, and to include stakeholders within each level and aspect.

It was noted in discussions that the terms chosen for the framework may not always be those used by all countries. However, this issue was overcome by intentionally developing the framework as a flexible tool, adaptable to different contexts and systems. The elements of the framework can be moved within the structure and the terminology changed, but the essence of the whole should be retained, to enable development of an effective and coherent system for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability.

Where terminology used in the framework is defined in the EASNIE Glossary, it is linked on its first use in this report.

2.2. An overarching vision

The essential starting point for developing policy and practice for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability is **stakeholder agreement on the underlying values and principles of inclusive education**. Research evidence indicates that where accountability and quality assurance mechanisms are based on shared responsibility and stakeholder engagement, they are more likely to support real gains in education. This is particularly true of inclusive education, where not only 'the process of collaboration itself reflects what inclusion is all about' (Adams, Harris & Jones, 2016, p. 67), but where **all aspects** of the underlying processes of monitoring, evaluation, quality assurance and accountability should themselves be inclusive.

To develop a model for a coherent framework for quality assurance and accountability across the whole inclusive education system, an overarching long-term vision for inclusive education, shared with stakeholders to inform system goals, must be in place. This means developing a 'common language' across the whole system, as a basis for dialogue across sectors and stakeholders.



This vision should be in line with international and European definitions or, for EASNIE member countries, it may align with EASNIE's [position on inclusive education systems](#):

All learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers (EASNIE, 2022, p. 1).

It must be clarified with all stakeholders, in every sector, what is meant by 'meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities', alongside agreement that 'all learners' includes all those who may have previously been marginalised or excluded from aspects of those educational opportunities. In a multi-stakeholder system, there must also be agreement on 'who' stakeholders are, in terms of individuals, groups or organisations, within and external to education systems. The European Commission (2015) recognises the importance of the national and local context and suggests that countries need to explore the role of different stakeholders and the processes followed at different system levels.

Every aspect inherent in quality assurance and accountability processes across all sectors of the education system must align with the vision and the stated goals. This includes all stakeholders at every level within the education system and, where there is cross-sector collaboration, with stakeholders outside education. If a vision and goals are not in place, different sectors and levels will continue to work in silos, towards different ends.

2.3 An inclusive framework

Any framework for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability within inclusive education systems **must itself be inclusive** (Save the Children, 2016). To this end, monitoring and evaluation should be functionally, methodologically and operationally inclusive, in the following ways:

- Functionally inclusive: collect information about the inclusiveness of policy and practice with inclusive indicators and disaggregated data.
- Methodologically inclusive: allow people usually excluded from monitoring and evaluation processes to participate.
- Operationally inclusive: a data collection process that contributes to fostering inclusion (for example, information from participatory assessments on school inclusiveness is shared back to the community to increase awareness of exclusions).

The QAMA framework presents all aspects of the system, in a continuous flow of **system improvement** and [capacity building](#), to incorporate information for **monitoring, evaluation, quality assurance** and **accountability**, under a **shared vision and goals** for the education system and every sector and stakeholder working within and for education. All processes, actors and stakeholders must be aligned under the shared vision and goals and **share responsibility** as actors for the framework to function and be effective.

An effective system for continuous improvement should place learners at the centre. All improvement is focused on the experience and outcomes of all learners in the education system.



2.4 Working towards a framework with a different focus

During collaborative working and discussion sessions, QAMA countries explored the different elements of the draft framework, as presented in the TCCA Literature Review (EASNIE, 2024a), their placement within the overall structure and their relative importance in a system for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability. As part of this process, each country used the framework to map its own current systems and to discover how well the framework aligned with its own priorities for quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation. The *Guidelines for use* (EASNIE, 2025) present the outcomes of this work.

One outcome of QAMA work was the decision to present the draft framework in a different format. Following discussion, it was agreed that the framework presented in the TCCA Literature Review appeared more hierarchical, with tenuous links between different sections and levels of education. More importantly, learners were not represented as central to the system. As the TCCA Literature Review indicates, all system improvement should improve the experience and outcomes of school for all learners.

It was also decided that the importance of the twin aspects of shared responsibility and shared accountability of all stakeholders should be more prominent in the framework. These, together with the notion of stakeholder ‘buy-in’ to decisions and agreements through shared agreement, were seen as key elements to developing and sustaining effective school and system improvement. This approach is seen as essential to avoid continuing siloed ways of working by some sectors, and a lack of willingness or awareness of the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

The cluster discussed several different ways of making some changes to the framework, including one based on an ecosystem model, as suggested in the TCCA Literature Review (EASNIE, 2024a). These discussions uncovered the hidden complexities within a coherent system for quality assurance, monitoring and accountability. The discussions led to the development of the QAMA Tree, which allows for a different interpretation of the interaction between the elements.

The QAMA Tree framework is presented as a working model that countries can adapt for their own systems, or to explore sections of their systems. The framework allows for growth and extension by adding associated work, such as examples of practice in implementation with groups of stakeholders, or greater exploration of more detailed aspects of policy or cross-sector collaboration. The QAMA *Guidelines for use* present a fuller description of some proposed uses of the framework, with examples and reflections from QAMA cluster countries (EASNIE, 2025).

2.5 The QAMA Tree: a framework for continuous improvement in inclusive education systems

The framework is presented in two sections: [Figure 2](#) presents the framework as a whole, while [Figure 3](#) provides more detail of the top section of the framework.



The QAMA Tree

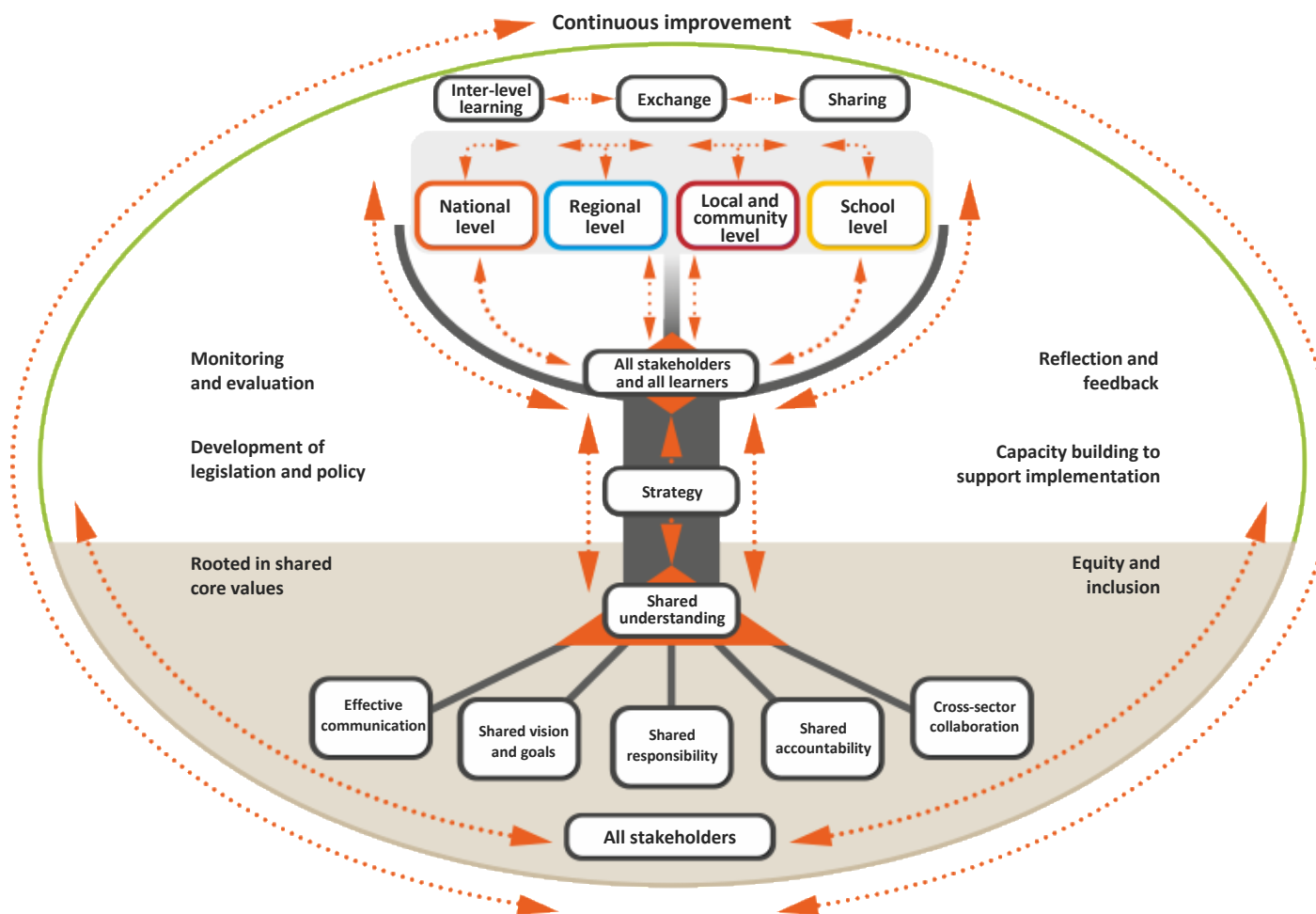


Figure 2. The QAMA Tree – a framework for continuous improvement in inclusive education systems



The QAMA Tree, as its name suggests, presents a circular system, rooted in a set of **core values** to drive **equity and inclusion** for continuous improvement, to build capacity at all levels and to integrate the flow of information for improvement to and from all aspects of the system.

All stakeholders share these core values. Without these values of **effective communication, shared vision and goals, shared responsibility, shared accountability** and **cross-sector collaboration**, it is unlikely that an effective system of quality assurance, monitoring and accountability will be developed or sustained.

The tree trunk represents the second stage of the system, enabling growth and development in a continuous process of renewal. Core values develop a **shared understanding** among all stakeholders, leading to **strategy for effective implementation of decisions** across the system, which is developed through and focused on stakeholders at all levels and all learners.

Strategic decisions are made in the development of **legislation and policy**, to enable **capacity building** or strengthening to support **implementation**. Processes are in place for **monitoring and evaluation** and **reflection** with and **feedback** to stakeholders at different stages and levels, to inform change and improvement.

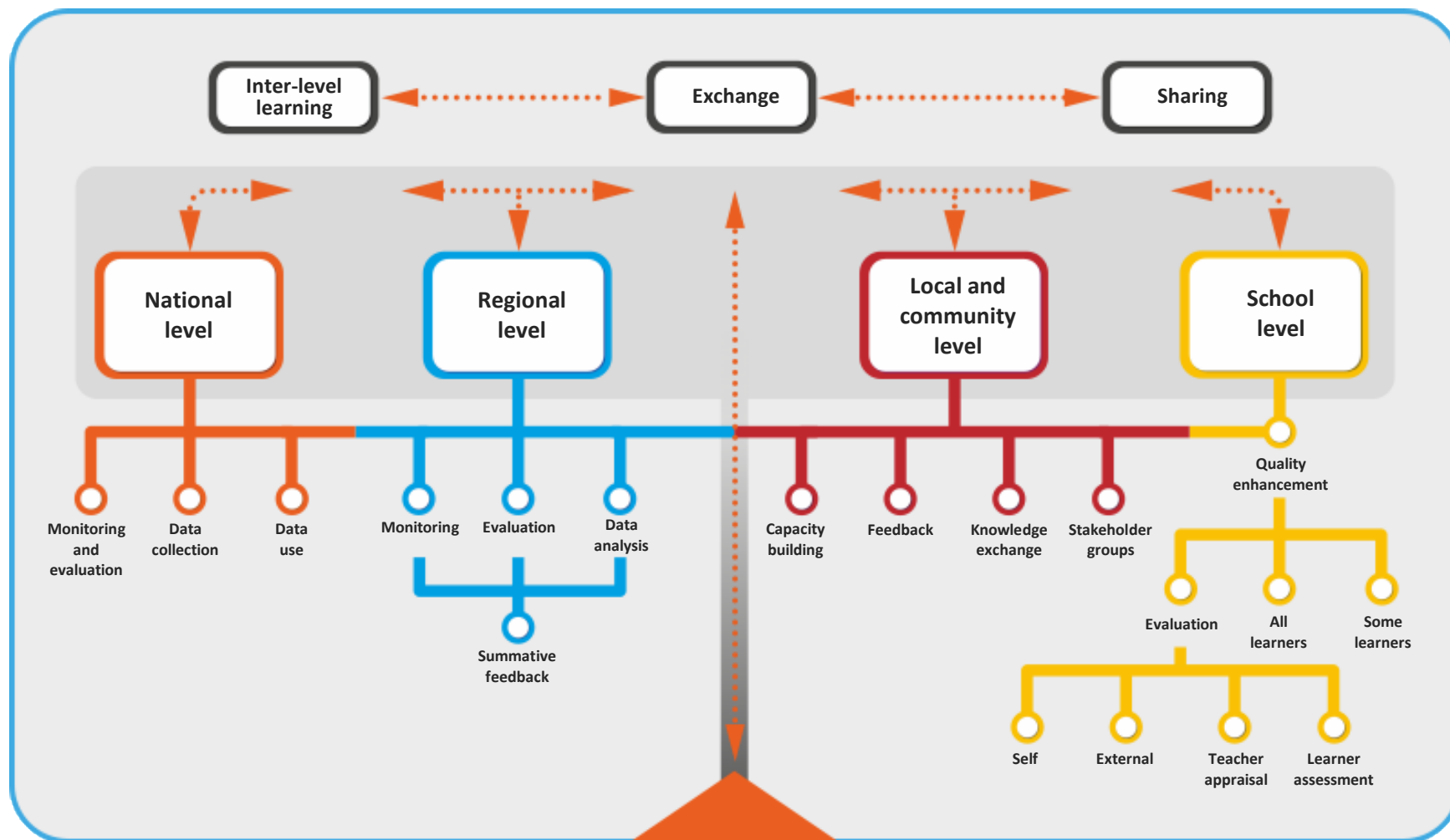


Figure 3. Detail of the upper section of the QAMA Tree



The top of the tree presents the **four levels of the education system**: national, regional, local and community, and school. Where some systems do not operate at regional levels (for example), those sections will be subsumed into national or community levels.

Information (both qualitative and quantitative data) flows between all four levels directly, in two directions, through the overarching processes of **inter-level learning, exchange and sharing**. Information flows back through the system to drive change and development in legislation, policy and practice, arising from shared core values and shared understanding. This enables a cycle of continuous improvement and progress.

Processes, aspects or stakeholder activities linked to different levels of education emerge from each level. In this draft version of the framework, these are intended as examples for individual countries to explore or expand, as appropriate to their own systems or contexts.

Information for improvement in the education system derives from many processes and is reliant on the open and effective collection, analysis, sharing and use of data. Data sharing across school and regional/national levels enables formative feedback and reflection, to generate and receive information for improvement.

To be effective, all sectors within education must work together and also engage with sectors beyond education. This is particularly important to ensure that system, regional, local and school improvement is equitable and for all learners.

Sections of the framework

Roots of the tree – shared core values for equity and inclusion:

- Shared vision and goals
- Shared responsibility
- Effective communication
- Shared accountability
- Cross-sector collaboration.

The tree trunk – shared understanding, leading to effective strategies for:

- developing and implementing legislation and policy;
- monitoring and evaluation;
- reflection and feedback;
- capacity building.

The trunk opens into branches:

All stakeholders and all learners are placed in the centre of the framework, to reinforce the notion that people are both the drivers and the focus of the education system. It indicates that the on-going improvement of outcomes for all learners must be the aim of a framework for quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation in an inclusive education system.



Strategic implementation occurs at four levels:

- National
- Regional
- Local and community
- School.

Essential processes are in place to enable multi-level, multi-stakeholder and cross-sector collaboration and to build capacity, from the school level upwards through the system:

- Inter-level learning
- Sharing
- Exchange.

Information for improvement at all levels and capacity building is integrated into the system, through:

- collaboration between all sectors and actors;
- knowledge exchange and inter-level learning;
- open dialogue;
- formative reflection and feedback processes.

To build capacity through the system, all stakeholders should be actively involved, to gain knowledge, understanding and experience of the different aspects of inclusive education systems. The term 'all stakeholders' means any person, actor or organisation involved in education, at any level. This should include, for example, policy-makers, teacher educators, teachers, school and community leaders, families, learners, specialists and experts and others. This list is by no means definitive and will vary according to countries and contexts. If essential processes are not in place, silos and gaps will continue to exist and act as barriers to developing more effective inclusive education systems.



3. IMPLEMENTING THE FRAMEWORK

The QAMA [Guidelines for use](#) provide more detailed information about applying the framework to country policy and practice, and explore some uses and potential barriers in its application to aspects of some systems (EASNIE, 2025). The Guidelines also suggest that countries explore aspects of the framework in greater depth, as a means of beginning a process of system-wide quality assurance, monitoring and accountability appraisal. This short section gives an overview of some activities and processes within the framework that are essential to its effectiveness.

Rooted in the framework are those aspects that are arguably the most difficult to achieve across a whole education system and with sectors that interact with and influence education: shared core values around vision and goals. The first task for countries may be to address these, to ensure that all those working in, for and with education agree on the purposes, aims, benefits and outcomes of the education system.

Following agreement with all stakeholders on the **vision and goals**, countries need to develop the following areas to implement a coherent model:

- **Legislation and policy** to support an inclusive education system, aligned with the agreed vision to ensure consistency across policies and a coherent approach to quality assurance and accountability, agreed with stakeholders
- **Strategic implementation plans** to enact the vision, clarify roles and responsibilities across stakeholders at different system levels and provide meaningful indicators to support the monitoring of progress
- **Coherent quality assurance activity in schools**, including self-evaluation, external evaluation, staff appraisal, learner assessment (formal/informal) and collaboration and consultation with stakeholders (from all sectors and across the local community)
- **Supportive networks** at local level between schools, municipality/local area support staff, cross-sector teams, etc., focused on developing the community's capacity to share and use data and information and take action for improvement
- **Effective national-level monitoring and evaluation** drawing on school- and local-level summative data to examine fulfilment of learners' rights and issues around equity and inclusion, and feed back into the policy and legislative review cycle, sharing responsibility with other sectors and ministries (EASNIE, 2024a, p. 65).

Each of these areas can be the subject of more detailed discussions around the processes inherent in developing a model framework, within the context of different countries, to enable them to work from within their existing systems.



3.1 Exploring three key areas within the framework

While exploring the different aspects of an effective framework, QAMA cluster countries identified three areas for further discussion:

- School improvement
- Accountability
- Data collection and use.

These areas were identified as key in country systems, in the sense that many different purposes, approaches and practices are frequently present. This leads to a variety of outcomes, a lack of co-ordination and collaboration between sectors or levels and, in some cases, siloed thinking and working. A [video](#) and short summary documents, available on the [QAMA activity web area](#), present the outcomes of the exploration of these topics.

School improvement

Improvement at school level, developed and evidenced through a coherent system of quality assurance, monitoring and accountability, plays a key role in improving the whole education system. The school may be seen both as the central element for improvement and as a microcosm of the education system. At both school and system levels, various elements and internal and external factors support or constrain different actors, structures and processes.

The system framework, the [QAMA Tree](#), indicates how the flow of information to and from schools is essential to support continuous improvement in an inclusive education system. In this framework, monitoring and evaluation are not intended to be seen as external instruments to evaluate schools. Rather, they are a set of interactive and collaborative processes to build capacity within schools and across all sectors of the education system, and other sectors which interact with education. The shared aim is to improve all learners' school experiences and outcomes.

The elements of the QAMA system-level framework may be adapted for a variety of uses at school level. The *Guidelines for use* elaborate on this and provide some suggested uses and examples from the cluster countries.

The guidelines and frameworks (EASNIE, 2024b) developed as part of the TSI project on Combatting Disparities in Access to Inclusive Education in Portugal, Italy and Spain provide further resources for school-level use.

Accountability

For both accountability and improvement purposes, governments (and, in turn, schools) must have a widely-agreed vision of what high-quality inclusive education 'looks like' at policy level and in practice, where national laws and policies on education impact directly on learners' experiences in schools and classrooms. All stakeholders, at every level of education, should be accountable for their role in implementing the vision and the concrete aims of the education system, clearly articulating what they have done and why.



Data collection and use

The processes involved in collecting and using quantitative and qualitative data must also be inclusive. Multiple types of data are needed to develop a rounded picture of system and school development – quantitative data to provide more uniform and comparable measures of outcomes and statistical correlations, and qualitative data to examine the processes underlying such hard data (Education Evaluation Centre/Te Ihuwaka, 2021). These processes allow the impact of policies on different stakeholders in schools, communities and families to emerge, placing learners at the centre of the framework.



CONCLUSIONS AND KEY QUESTIONS

Conclusions

The work undertaken by the six QAMA cluster countries aimed to address the need for a systematic and whole-system approach to quality assurance, monitoring and accountability, identified in the international literature. The countries did this by developing a framework, the QAMA Tree, as an effective and coherent approach to enabling continuous progress in inclusive education systems.

The proposed framework draws on international literature to identify those aspects of the education system that are key to progress, and to provide an overall view of how different sectors and levels within education may work together. The framework addresses three key criteria for effectiveness, in that it:

- aligns with international, EU-level and national commitments and EASNIE's Key Principles;
- is adaptable to different country contexts;
- is applicable to the full range of stakeholders across education and in all other sectors that impact on the provision of high-quality inclusive education for all learners.

However, the extent to which the framework may enable progress depends on the ways in which countries use it and engage with the processes of dialogue, collaboration and open exchange, underpinned by agreement on a shared vision and goals for education. This engagement will fulfil the remaining criteria for an effective framework, which are that it:

- is built on a fluent dialogue between school- and system-level actors and stakeholders, both internal and external to education;
- is inclusive – in function, methodology and operation – to ensure that work across sectors and levels has common goals and indicators, co-ordinated plans and clear outcomes, agreed with stakeholders who share responsibility within a continuous improvement culture;
- is resilient: a resilient system requires real connections between stakeholders and a focus on all learners with their multiple and intersecting identities, giving them and their families a voice through accessible decision-making structures and processes;
- includes inputs from a variety of professionals that must be valued, to ensure that a range of data and information is used to provide a balanced view of schools' development and a holistic picture of learners;
- supports lifelong learning with co-operation between all sectors of education to prepare all learners for full participation in the community and opportunities for continuing education and employment.



Key questions

Countries may wish to address the following questions as they explore the framework, as a starting point for developing and improving their quality assurance, monitoring and accountability systems:

- Do all stakeholders and actors in my country agree with the essential elements of a multi-stakeholder quality assurance and accountability framework?
- Which of these elements are currently in place in my country, and at which levels and sectors? To what extent are they effective, in need of development or overlooked?
- How can barriers and gaps be addressed, and effective practices shared?
- Who are the key stakeholders at different levels or sectors, and how may dialogue and effective collaboration be developed and sustained?

The framework encompasses the complexities of an inclusive education system, with learners at the centre. It provides a starting point for policy-makers and practitioners at all system levels to explore their mechanisms and processes for open and on-going evaluation, and to develop processes for collaboration between stakeholders within the education system and with those in other sectors that work with and impact on education. The framework presents a coherent whole, to enable quality assurance, monitoring and accountability to become integrated and effective.



REFERENCES

Adams, D., Harris, A. and Jones, M. S., 2016. 'Teacher-Parent Collaboration for an Inclusive Classroom: Success for Every Child' *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Sciences*, 4 (3), 58–71. eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1106456 (Last accessed October 2025)

Education Evaluation Centre/Te Ihuwaka, 2021. *Measuring Change in Education Systems: A Review*. Education Review Office: New Zealand. ero.govt.nz/our-research/measuring-change-in-education-systems-a-review (Last accessed October 2023)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2021. *Key Principles – Supporting policy development and implementation for inclusive education*. (V. J. Donnelly and A. Watkins, eds.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/key-principles-supporting-policy-development-implementation (Last accessed December 2025)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022. *EASNIE Position on Inclusive Education Systems*. Second edition. Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/easnies-position-inclusive-education-systems-second-edition (Last accessed December 2025)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2024a. *Towards a Multi-level, Multi-stakeholder Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Accountability Framework: Thematic Country Cluster Activities Literature Review*. (V.J. Donnelly, ed.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/tcca-literature-review (Last accessed December 2025)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2024b. *Combating Disparities in Access to Inclusive Education in Portugal, Italy and Spain: A concrete methodology and new tools to facilitate the monitoring and evaluation procedure*. (V. Donnelly, ed.). Odense, Denmark

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2024c. *Country Policy Development Support: Methodology Report*. (A. Kefallinou, D. Murdoch, P. Drál, P.Z. Topalli and B. Cucco, eds.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/cpds-methodology (Last accessed December 2025)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2025. *Multi-Level, Multi-Stakeholder Frameworks for Quality Assurance, Monitoring and Accountability: Guidelines for use*. (D. Murdoch and R. Svarinskaite, eds.). Odense, Denmark. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/qama-framework-guidelines (Last accessed December 2025)

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, no date. *Glossary*. www.european-agency.org/resources/glossary (Last accessed December 2025)



European Commission, 2015. *Comparative study on quality assurance in EU school education systems – Policies, procedures and practices: Final report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/422920 (Last accessed October 2023)

Golden, G., 2020. 'Education policy evaluation: Surveying the OECD landscape', *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 236. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/9f127490-en (Last accessed December 2025)

Hudson, A., 2016. *Simpler, clearer, more stable. Integrated accountability for integrated care*. London. The Health Foundation. www.health.org.uk/reports-and-analysis/reports/simpler-clearer-more-stable (Last accessed December 2025)

OECD, 2015. *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen*. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi.org/10.1787/9789264225442-en (Last accessed December 2025)

Save the Children, 2016. *Inclusive Education: What, Why and How. A Handbook for Program Implementers*. London: Save the Children. resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/inclusive-education-what-why-and-how-handbook-program-implementers (Last accessed October 2023)

UNESCO, 2016. *Designing effective monitoring and evaluation of education systems for 2030: A global synthesis of policies and practices. (Draft version)*. Paris: UNESCO

Secretariat:

Østre Stationsvej 33
DK-5000
Odense C
Denmark
Tel: +45 64 41 00 20
secretariat@european-agency.org

Brussels Office:

Rue Montoyer 21
BE-1000
Brussels
Belgium
Tel: +32 2 213 62 80
brussels.office@european-agency.org

