

QUALITY PROCEDURES IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA AND BEYOND - VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Third ENQA Survey

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FOREWORD

Higher education reforms over the last decade, resulting in the establishment of the European Higher Education Area, with new social demands and expectations, have greatly impacted quality assurance in higher education. As a follow-up activity to two previous surveys on external quality procedures¹, ENQA conducted a third survey concentrating on good practice in external quality assurance in order to explore the changes that are taking place, as well as the future areas of focus and activities of quality assurance agencies.

The report presents a collection of current features of good practice in external quality assurance within the new priorities formulated by ENQA and following the Leuven/Louvain-la Neuve and Budapest/Vienna Communiqués, highlighting the connection between the practices and the expected benefits for higher education institutions and stakeholders. In addition, the present report identifies practices that are expected to be implemented by quality assurance agencies, as well as areas where progress needs to be made, thus proposing a vision of the future of quality assurance procedures. The purpose of the report is also to promote technical and strategic networks among ENQA members addressing future challenges.

We trust that the results of this project will benefit ENQA membership in providing new possibilities for partnerships and networking and that new steps will be taken in the field of quality assurance and quality enhancement in the higher education sector.

Achim Hopbach

President

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

¹ Quality Procedures in the European Higher Education Area and Beyond - Second ENQA Survey (ENQA Occasional Paper No. 14, 2008)
Quality Procedures in European Higher Education - An ENQA Survey, (ENQA Occasional Paper No. 5, 2003)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Variety and dynamism are two distinctive features of quality assurance in the EHEA. The second ENQA survey on quality procedures conducted in 2008 revealed that although the accreditation and evaluation of programmes are the most common approaches, followed at a significant distance by evaluation and accreditation of institutions and by audits, no single model for external quality assurance in European higher education is in place. Ninety percent of the quality assurance agencies were not confined to only one external quality assurance process but used more than one approach on a regular basis. At the same time, 75 percent of the agencies responded that they recently changed their approach or that they were about to do so.

In order to learn more about current and future developments at national level, ENQA conducted a third project on “Quality procedures: visions for the future” which was the follow-up of two previous projects on quality procedures conducted in 2003 and 2008. This third project took stock of the development of quality assurance in the EHEA and revealed that variety and dynamism will remain distinct features. In addition, the survey gave indications on the priorities in the future development of quality assurance agencies in the EHEA.

The agencies that are members or affiliates of ENQA consider the main priority to be the relationship between external quality assurance procedures and the development of mechanisms to enhance higher education. The relevant innovative practices currently implemented by the agencies show a high level of methodological variability, together with a certain confluence of processes around four forward-looking strategies. The selection and intensity with which these strategies are practiced vary from one agency to another.

- The first strategy involves promoting the QA systems managed by the HEIs and external review of their effectiveness in bringing about enhancement. This strategy is associated with a greater attention paid to institutional review and a resolve to optimise external review processes carried out by QA agencies, with the reduction of red tape and the main focus on results.
- To encourage comparability in external review processes and to foster the introduction of system-wide enhancements. The second strategy is based on benchmarking and the establishment of reference frameworks, for example, in learning outcomes and other areas of higher education. In relation to this point, QA agencies have identified the need for more international components, especially in relation to the quality of study programmes.
- Thirdly, there is the identification of excellence in higher education and the dissemination of good practice. This is an emerging area that stems from different lines of thinking, the aims of which are to generally improve the provision of study programmes, encourage innovation in teaching and promote the attractiveness of certain programmes at the international level.

- The fourth strategy involves intensifying the monitoring and follow-up of the quality of programmes and institutions through the availability of figures, data and indicators, in order to continuously measure improvement. There is an increasing amount of available quantitative data on higher education, although further progress and improvement at the instrumental and interpretative level is necessary.

These strategies will take into account that quality assurance of teaching and learning should always put the learner at the HEI into the focus of their activities.

Complementary to these strategies, the agencies consider that progress needs to be made regarding the international recognition of evaluation and accreditation practices being implemented at national level.

Last, but not least, it should be pointed out that the majority of agencies extend the scope of their activities sufficiently beyond the customary idea of what quality assurance and/or accreditation is. They increasingly provide QA services of an advisory nature to universities, policy makers and stakeholders, and in terms of methodological output. The knowledge and understanding that QA agencies have acquired from their establishment place them in a privileged position as think tanks. The actions implemented by QA agencies facilitate and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in the debate on the concept of quality in the higher education sector now and in the future..

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In the Prague Communiqué of 19 May 2001, the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA), together with the European University Association (EUA), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the European Commission, to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and disseminating good practices in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

As a response to this mandate, a first comprehensive ENQA survey on Quality Procedures in European Higher Education was carried out by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) in 2002. The evaluation methods used in Europe were detailed in a publication entitled *Quality Procedures in European Higher Education - An ENQA Survey*². The reported concluded that a major progress towards convergence had been made in the basic methods and procedures even if national agencies had not had the same priorities.

In May 2007, the Board of ENQA decided that ENQA should conduct, through project funding from the European Commission, a thorough update exercise of the 2002 findings by collecting and analysing information on external quality procedures of ENQA members, affiliates and associates. Indeed, European quality assurance had developed significantly since 2002, being increasingly influenced by the Bologna process and the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area³ (ESG) in 2005, which brought about extensive changes that had an impact on quality assurance procedures applied in Europe.

The second ENQA project on “Quality Procedures in European Higher Education” was launched in order to document and analyse the methodological state-of-the-art in general terms in all countries where ENQA members, associates and affiliates are located, laying emphasis on the types of quality assurance procedures used. In addition, part 3 of the ESG for the external quality assurance of agencies, as well as agencies’ external review plans and attitudes towards the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) were integrated into the survey. The results of the second ENQA survey are presented in a publication *Quality Procedures in the EHEA and Beyond - Second ENQA Survey*⁴.

In March 2010, the ministers of education participating in the Bologna Process officially launched the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Two years after the completion of the second Quality Procedures Project (QPP), the Board of ENQA wished to map the changes that are taking place in quality assurance (QA) due to the establishment of the EHEA, where new social demands and expectations have been laid for higher education.

2 European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, *Quality Procedures in European Higher Education - An ENQA Survey*, Occasional Paper No. 5, ISBN 951-98680-8-9, Helsinki, 2003

3 ENQA: *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, ISBN 952-5539-04-0, Helsinki, 2005

4 European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, *Quality Procedures in the EHEA and beyond - Second ENQA Survey*, Occasional Paper No. 14, ISBN 978-952-5539-31-8, Helsinki, 2008

Thanks to the funding of the European Commission through its Lifelong Learning Programme, the third Quality Procedures Project “Visions for the future” started in November 2010. Its objective is to collect features of good practice within the new priorities formulated by ENQA and following the Leuven/Louvain-la Neuve and Budapest/Vienna ministerial Communiqués, with a view to explore practices that are expected to be implemented by the QA agencies in the near future and to map existing developed procedures.

This project is a follow-up activity to the two previous surveys on quality procedures mentioned above. However, the focus of this third QP project has been on a development oriented approach, on the future of external quality procedures and new practices. The aim of the project is to provide results that can be exploited by stakeholders interested in enhancing a quality culture in the field of higher education.

The present final report will be presented at the meeting of the European ministers responsible for higher education in Bucharest in April 2012.

1.2 METHOD USED AND PROCESS

The project was divided into four phases. The first task undertaken by the Project group was to design and develop the third Quality Procedures survey (see Annex). The questionnaire was administered online through the SurveyMonkey tool and made available on the web. The link to the questionnaire was then circulated to the ENQA member agencies, associates and affiliates⁵.

Since the objective of the survey was to promote dialogue with different representatives on the relevance and impact of different QA procedures and their future evolution, the respondents were strongly encouraged to complete the questionnaire in consultation with as many members of their Agency (staff, Board/Council members, etc.) and stakeholders as possible.

The second phase of the project consisted in the analysis of the responses. The survey was divided into three sections covering:

- i. Introduction relating to general information about the agency and its relationship with ENQA; Methodology used for completing the questionnaire (5 questions);
- ii. Current and future practices in external QA in relation to the ENQA priorities and other complementary elements (32 questions);
- iii. Individual features of good practice implemented or expected to be applied in the near future (7 questions).

The project group was divided into three groups of two pairs who were assigned to analyse the procedures according to ENQA priorities and emerging trends.

The third phase resulted in the production and release of this report. The findings presented give a map of future visions on QA procedures for thoroughly chosen priorities, highlighting the identified expected benefits for HE institutions and stakeholders.

The purpose of the present report is not to give a comprehensive picture of future practices, but rather to analyse the data gathered. Such data is the result of a self-assessment and self-reflection of the agencies in the sense that the answers reflect the agencies’ opinions about their own approaches, trends and innovative quality procedures.

⁵ Since October 2011, the associate and affiliates statuses have been merged into one single category. All former associate and affiliate bodies are now Affiliates.

Finally, the results of the survey will contribute to the fourth phase of the project, which is the creation of a web resource for agencies' quality procedures. This database on the ENQA website will gather good and efficient quality procedures to be shared among QA professionals in Europe and beyond.

1.3 ORGANISATION OF THE PROJECT

The Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya) took the lead and responsibility of the project on ENQA's behalf. A Project Group was set up to conduct the survey and draft the report. The ENQA Secretariat conducted the technical and administrative responsibility of the project.

The project group was composed of experts representing five quality assurance agencies, including three ENQA Board members and two representatives of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). Full ENQA members were chosen to make sure that the agencies fulfil the ESG framework in their activities. The composition of the group also ensured a fair regional distribution within Europe.

- Josep Grifoll, AQU and ENQA Board member, Chair of the project
- Achim Hopbach, GAC and ENQA President
- Helka Kekäläinen, FINHEEC and ENQA Vice-President
- Christina Rozsnyai, Secretary General of CEENQA
- Todor Shopov, Vice President of CEENQA
- Nathalie Lugano, ENQA Secretariat, Secretary

The ENQA Secretariat was responsible for the production and publication of this report.

1.4 RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

A total number of 37 responses have been received. However, nine responses have not been considered due to a lack of substantial answers to the questions. Therefore, the findings presented in this report are based on 28 responses (from 19 countries) to the questionnaire, which was distributed to all ENQA members, affiliates and associates in March 2011 and had as a deadline 15 April 2011.

In cases where responses were not received from all respondents, the total given may be less than 28. For some questions, respondents had the opportunity to tick as many boxes as they wished. In these cases the total given may be more than 28.

Respondents had the option to request that the information they gave be reported anonymously in the final report. Six respondents chose this option. The name and the country of those organisations are therefore omitted in the report itself.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT RESPONDENTS

As shown in table 1⁶, a total of 28 organisations responded substantially to the survey.

| NAME OF AGENCY | COUNTRY |
|---|----------------------|
| Armenian National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA) | Armenia |
| Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA) | Austria |
| Austrian Accreditation Council (OAR) | Austria |
| Austrian FH Council (FHR) | Austria |
| European Council for Business Education (ECBE) | Belgium |
| National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) | Bulgaria |
| Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) | Croatia |
| The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) | Denmark |
| The Accreditation Institution | Denmark |
| Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA) | Estonia |
| Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) | Finland |
| Evaluation Agency Baden-Wuerttemberg (evalag) | Germany |
| Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (HQAA) | Greece |
| Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) | Hungary |
| Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) | Ireland |
| Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) | Ireland |
| Foundation "Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre" (HEQEC) | Latvia |
| Accreditation Organisation of Flanders and the Netherlands (NVAO) | Netherlands/Flanders |
| Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior (A3ES) | Portugal |
| National Accreditation Agency of the Russian Federation (NAA) | Russia |
| National Center of Public Accreditation (NCPA) | Russia |
| Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance and Career Development (AKKORK) | Russia |
| Commission for accreditation and quality assurance (CAQA) | Serbia |
| Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (ACSUG) | Spain |
| Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya) | Spain |
| Agencia Canaria de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación Universitaria (ACECAU) | Spain |
| Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ) | Switzerland |
| Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) | UK |

Table 1: Agencies participating in the Survey

A majority of Full members answered the questionnaire (17), followed by Associates (7), Candidate members (3) and Affiliates (1).

⁶ The names of the agencies in table 1 and in the report are referred to as they were written by those agencies to the survey. Some agencies are named by their national names while other agencies' names are translated in English.

METHODOLOGY USED FOR FILLING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Involvement of QA agency staff

Only two agencies did not consult their staff to fill in the questionnaire. It is therefore satisfactory to see that, in the wide majority of cases, the responses to the survey are the result of a cooperation between all staff members, or a restricted number of them. Most of the time, such participation was done through meetings or interviews organised specifically for the purpose of completing the survey. In some cases, a draft was compiled beforehand and served as a basis for discussion. In general, both management and technical staff have been involved.

Involvement of the Agency Board/Council

About one third of agencies (7 out of 24) have not consulted their Board/Council. The remaining ones have approached all or some of the Board members upstream of submitting the questionnaire.

The Executive board of NVAO was involved at the end of the agency's consultation process to approve the staff answers to the questionnaire. One agency did not directly consult the Board, but used their opinions (previously expressed during Board meetings) as a basis for completing the questionnaire.

Involvement of other agents (e.g. stakeholders)

Half of the agencies have asked other agents to collaborate (such as the National Council for Higher Education, external experts, ministries, universities, students, the Academic Infrastructure Evaluation Sounding Board in the UK). They were consulted through interviews, email or focus group discussions. Quality Directors from across the Irish university sector, were given an opportunity to contribute to the submission through the Irish Universities Association Quality Committee (IUAQC). AQU interrogated many stakeholders, but only one university answered and was, in general, of the same opinion.

CHAPTER 2:

CURRENT QA PROCEDURES IN RELATION TO ENQA PRIORITIES AND OTHER COMPLEMENTARY ELEMENTS

2.1 STAKEHOLDERS AND EXPECTED BENEFITS OF QA

The agencies were requested to identify a maximum of three relevant QA procedures currently implemented and that are connected with the priorities of ENQA. According to the information provided, most agencies cover all institutions in the national system. Private institutions are less covered than public institutions.

PROCEDURE IMPLEMENTED IN COOPERATION WITH ANOTHER AGENCY

In most cases, agencies implement the procedure by themselves, without cooperating with another QA agency.

PARTICIPATION OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROCEDURE

In the three mentioned procedures, students are the most involved stakeholders, followed by employers and public authorities. The trade unions are the worst represented stakeholders. They participate in the procedures of less than 10 agencies.

This draws a clear picture about stakeholder involvement in QA procedures. Participation of students and employers seems to be a standard in Europe notwithstanding the fact that four agencies do not use employers as peers out of which one (Associate) does not involve stakeholders at all.

EXPECTED BENEFITS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

In line with the findings in the previous paragraph, the expected benefits for stakeholders differ significantly.

Generally speaking, "Improvement of public information of HE" is considered to be the most important benefit for all stakeholders. An average of 17 respondents name this as a benefit for students, 15 as a benefit for employers, and 14 as a benefit for public authorities. Since Trade Unions are not considered as an important stakeholder, it does not come as a surprise that an average of 10 agencies consider this as a benefit for this stakeholder group.

The second important benefit at a significant distance from the first is "Improvement of teaching and learning processes". Unsurprisingly, this item ranks highest with the students (average of 19 responses), employers follow second with 13 responses, public authorities with nine and trade unions with four responses.

The benefit that is considered least important by the respondents is "Better connection between social interests and HE outcomes". Although this is considered to be

the second important benefit for employers and public authorities, the item ranks very low regarding the other stakeholders.

Also, only six (average) respondents felt that this would be of benefit for trade unions which again gives evidence about the fact that trade unions are not considered as important stakeholders.

If the analysis turns the perspective round and focuses on the various stakeholders, it is obvious that respondents consider students as the most important beneficiaries of institutional and programme oriented quality assurance. With 63 hits across the various benefits they rank before employers who cast 57 hits. At a large distance public authorities follow with 55 hits and trade unions with only 35 hits.

In the case of students, "Improvement of public information of HE" as well as "Improvement of teaching and learning processes" are considered to be the most important benefits, whereas the others cast more or less the same number of responses which are significantly less than the two most important.

The same pattern of two major important benefits appears with the employers. However, next to the public information function they seem to benefit more from the better connection between "social interests and HE outcomes".

As regards public authorities, it is not surprising that "Improvement of public information of HE" is considered to be the most important benefit. The others rank substantially lower.

In the case of trade unions, one must say that agencies seem not to consider them as important stakeholders at all; at least they cannot see that they really benefit from quality assurance procedures. If at all, it would again be the public information function of quality assurance.

In conclusion, one can say that, in line with the former outcomes, it is not surprising that public information on HE is considered to be the most important benefit for the two most important beneficiaries, i.e. students and employers. What is surprising is that the developmental aspect of quality assurance, which translates into the benefit of "Development of new indicators about the quality of HE; Enhancement of HE organisations and structures", is considered as an important benefit only for public authorities for the third procedure mentioned.

ACTION FOR PROMOTING BENEFITS FOR INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

The responses to this question make it quite clear that specific actions for promoting the benefits to international stakeholders are not well developed, other than collaboration in international networks or participation of international peer experts.

EXPECTED BENEFITS FOR HEIS

The responses give a clear picture which corresponds to the earlier answers: HEIs are considered to benefit most in terms of "Development of the primary responsibility of HEIs on QA" which was nominated by 13 respondents. Again, this clearly shows that, in the field of quality assurance, agencies see themselves as primarily supportive of HEIs. In line with this and considering the three procedures altogether, "Enhancement of HE organisations and structures" and "improvement of public information on HE" are considered to be the second most important benefit for HEIs.

What must concern is the fact that agencies consider themselves not to contribute to the promotion of innovation in HE. At least this is seen as the second least important

benefit for HEIs, only topped by “better connection between social interests and HE outcomes”. These results can also mean that agencies think that HEIs do not consider these items as important functions.

2.2 POLICY EVALUATION

ACADEMIC MOBILITY AND ACCESS, RESPECTIVE INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE MINISTRY/NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

Although the topics of student mobility and access to higher education are on top of the political agendas, there is no clear indication that ministries would call upon agencies to evaluate the success in these fields or specifically focus on these topics in the procedures.

The picture as regards instructions from ministries is quite clear: various agencies take into account the issues related to mobility of students (such as recognition of modules, etc.) and access to HE, but the ministries do not stipulate specific or even additional quality criteria for these fields. In most cases, governments implement strategies or framework conditions for the enhancement of academic mobility and equitable access to HE and such strategies are simply followed by agencies. Two thirds of the responding agencies state that there are no direct instructions to develop procedures for promoting academic mobility. In most cases, equitable access to HE is the prerogative of the government which plays an important role by providing a legislative framework in this respect. Equitable access is therefore often not part of the quality assurance agencies’ function.

2.3 PRACTICES OF QA AGENCIES ACCORDING TO ENQA PRIORITIES

This section is based on three questions addressed to agencies concerning their external quality assurance.

- a. Which area does your agency cover (i.e. in which area does it conduct external QA evaluation)?
- b. Which areas do you consider as a priority in your Agency? Rate each area 1 to 5.
- c. Considering the priorities of ENQA, in which area are you currently most effective and successful?

The three questions were responded by all agencies (28).

The questions were linked to nine ENQA priorities on external quality assurance. Those priorities were inspired by the ENQA Position Paper on Quality Assurance in the EHEA⁷.

The analysis of the responses compares what is considered as a priority for the QA agencies with the actions taken to advance them. The result of this analysis is a first picture of possible directions on external QA in Europe that is complemented with the identification of relevant and advanced practices described by QA agencies in the survey.

The survey identifies three different groups of priorities. The first group encompasses “QA and enhancement mechanisms”, “QA and learning outcomes” and “QA and public information”.

⁷ ENQA Position Paper on Quality Assurance in the EHEA in view of the Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve meeting of ministers responsible for higher education of 28-29 April 2009. ENQA. http://www.enqa.eu/files/ENQA_position_paper%20%283%29.pdf

It is noteworthy that the majority of QA agencies agree that the areas of this first group are important or very important priorities. In fact no agency answered that these areas were not at all a priority.

A second group of ENQA priorities comprises “Excellence in higher education”, “QA and employability” and “Qualifications Frameworks and QA”. The areas of this group are also mostly considered as important or very important priorities. Contrary to the first group, some QA agencies reported that these were not at all a priority for them. For example, two agencies mentioned that the area of excellence in higher education and the area of qualification frameworks were not at all a priority and one agency answered likewise for “QA and employability”.

Finally, a third group of priorities is composed of “QA in online education”, “lifelong learning and QA” and “QA and transnational programmes”. In this group, the areas are perceived in a completely different way from the first two groups. In fact, there is no unanimity in ranking those areas as priorities, although a significant number of QA agencies cover those areas in their external QA evaluation procedures, for example transnational education. Moreover, a high number of agencies ranked those areas 1 or 2 (not a priority) in a scale of 5 grades. This is the case for “QA in online education” with 48 percent of the agencies and for “QA and transnational programmes” with 40 percent of the agencies.

Among these three groups, the three highest priorities are “QA and enhancement mechanisms” (96.4%), “QA and public information on HE” (53.6%) and “Excellence in HE” (44%).

In line with the findings regarding the areas covered by the agency, it is not surprising that “QA and enhancement mechanisms” rank by far highest.

Although almost all agencies also cover “QA and public information on HE” in their procedures, this item ranks significantly lower as far as the priorities are concerned; only seven agencies nominated this item as a priority. This might be considered as a lack of awareness of the role of QA in the field of transparency.

One could expect a high response rate also for the item “Excellence in HE”, but there is a significant difference from the enhancement aspect, and surprisingly enough the item “QA and public information on HE” ranks even slightly higher than the notion of excellence.

On the other side, those items which closely relate to teaching and learning and even to areas which are still new phenomena to some of the agencies, such as “QA of transnational programmes” and “QA in online education”, rank very low in the priorities of agencies.

The survey requested quality assurance agencies to define the concepts of excellence and lifelong learning. The interpretation of other concepts such as the employability or the priority areas was left open in the questionnaire, but they can be interpreted in the analysis of relevant and advanced practices.

2.3.1 FIRST GROUP OF PRIORITY AREAS

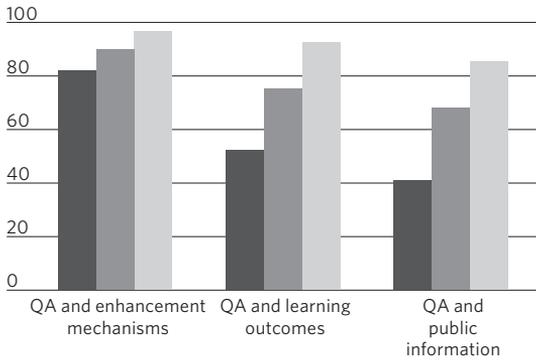


Table 2: Comparison between priorities and activities performed by the agencies (in percentage)

- QA agencies having a most effective mechanism
- Covered by QA agencies
- Priority for QA agencies (4-5)

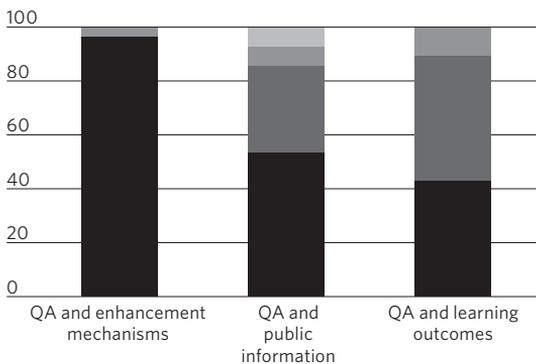


Table 3. Intensity of the priorities (in percentage)

- Very important priority (5)
- 4
- 3
- 2
- Not at all priority (1)

a) QA and enhancement mechanisms

This is clearly the top European external QA area in terms of priority, activities developed and perception of effectiveness by QA agencies. The great majority of agencies (26 out of 28) cover “QA and enhancement mechanisms”. Taking into account the development of QA in Europe since the nineties, it cannot surprise that those agencies which (among others) conduct institutional oriented QA procedures have a developmental approach.

The establishment of the European Model for QA in Higher Education, including follow-up processes and recommendations to HE institutions, was mainly thought to promote the implementation of improvement plans within institutions. To some extent, the use of the European Model for more than a decade can be seen as a solid explanation for the strong position of enhancement mechanisms and the perception the QA agencies have of it.

When looking at the relevant practices on QA and enhancement mechanisms, it is interesting to see that QA processes are usually designed for different purposes; in other words, there are very few QA processes designed to specifically address enhancement mechanisms in higher education. This multipurpose orientation of QA processes together with the dynamics of the EHEA and the external QA strategies, in constant evolution, makes it difficult to measure the impact the QA processes of agencies have on institutional enhancement.

The survey suggests some tendencies or methodology reformulations in the QA processes for enhancement objectives. For example, some agencies use the concept of effectiveness of internal QA at the institutions. The ESG and the development of

the institutional QA systems are both used as a background for that approach. This effectiveness is based on the expectation that the HE institutions have a key strategy in place (according to the ESG principles) demonstrating that their internal QA is well fitted for a systematic improvement of study programmes.

The accreditation of effectiveness and/or the reduction of burden in external QA, in particular in programme accreditation processes, can be seen as an incentive for HE institutions. This approach underpins the autonomy of the HE institutions and introduces a new distribution and balance of QA tasks between the agency and the institution. NVAO states that “this approach leaves the teaching staff free to devote their attention to expert suggestions for improving relating to the core of their teaching rather than spending time on institutional aspects”.

Other agencies are working with the identification of reference points, e.g. subject benchmark statements. In fact, the definition of reference points goes with the description of new thresholds (goals) or the identification of good practices that are disseminated.

In this regard, it is interesting to mention that half of the respondent agencies think there is a major need for further development of current international benchmarks for QA. Whereas the ESG seem to be a good tool for implementing processes for internal QA effectiveness and permanent enhancement, the identification of reference points probably needs a major progress of elements, such as national and European qualifications frameworks, currently in the process of development in some countries.

A third approach in this area is aiming to connect QA and enhancement through the establishment of consolidated cyclical procedures. Some agencies established annual monitoring systems for study programmes. This strategy makes it easier to follow, in real time, the evolution of the programmes and promotes a constant use and development of quantitative indicators. This follow-up scheme is also used to record the actions taken to improve the study programmes.

This scenario leads the reader to reflect on how the strategies of agencies can be organised to foster the quality enhancement of higher education. Which is the most effective balance between internal and external QA or between programme and institutional approaches? To what extent does the diversity of HE systems justifies a diversity of external quality assurance?

b) QA and learning outcomes

This second area is covered by three-quarters of the respondent agencies and is ranked as a very important priority. However, only half of the agencies report they are currently most effective and successful in this area.

The prominence of the item “Learning outcomes” gives an indication of the impact of the Bologna process on institutional quality assurance. Whereas it would be natural for this item to rank high in programme oriented approaches, it is noteworthy that also in institutional and rather developmental approaches this feature of the Bologna process plays an important role. This shows how important this topic has become. However, the item “Qualifications Frameworks (QF) and QA” ranks last (together with QA of TNE programmes and Lifelong Learning), although they are closely linked. The reason might rather be the early stage of development and implementation of QF in national HE.

The survey collects numerous examples of accreditation procedures. QA agencies are conducting ex-ante or ex-post programme assessments. One can assume that learning outcomes are included in those assessment procedures in one way or another.

From the description of the relevant and innovative practices identified in the survey, different approaches can be observed.

First of all, an increasing importance is placed on learning outcomes in the methodology. There are examples of evaluation tools in which the definition and validation of intended learning outcomes are a central focus. In fact, the validation process is linked with a further elaboration and/or permanent update of the National Framework of Qualifications.

It is interesting to mention the description of subject benchmarks as a clear orientation to be used by HEIs in designing new study programmes, but also as a fundamental information for enriching National Framework of Qualifications.

Another interesting proposal, perhaps not sufficiently explored, concerns the role of international experts in the process of learning outcomes validation.

Further steps are starting to be developed. An agency is working on a procedure ensuring that learners may achieve the learning outcomes specified and that these are consistent with relevant standards including the National Framework of Qualifications.

Finally, measuring individual achievement of learning outcomes at international level is experienced by NCPA which promotes an internet based-Olympiad in which students from different countries participate. It is a wide-scale assessment of achieved learning outcomes.

In conclusion, the work of QA agencies seems to be concentrated in the validation of learning outcomes. The new frontier is now how to measure their achievement by a group of graduates from the same study programme or by the students individually.

c) QA and public information on HE

It is noteworthy that the "QA and public information on HE" also ranks in the first group. Although the majority of respective procedures are rather developmental oriented evaluation or audit procedures, they serve this rather accountability driven purpose of QA. This is a first hint to the transparency function of QA which has gained importance through the last years and also a hint to the combination of different purposes to be served by a single QA procedure.

An interesting question relates to the kind of information that is provided as a result of these procedures. Is it purely developmental oriented or rather about achieved standards? The question cannot be answered within this survey but at least it reveals that agencies consider the information important for serving the transparency function of QA.

As for the area of learning outcomes, this third priority shows another gap between the number of agencies covering this field (71.4 percent) and the number of agencies feeling they have effective and successful mechanisms (42.9 percent). It is interesting to mention that, in some cases, this gap may have originated from legal frameworks restricting the publication of assessment reports. In fact, some countries are adapting their legal frameworks, as a consequence of the process of reviewing QA agencies against the ESG, in order to facilitate the publication of the results of the external QA activity performed by the agencies.

According to the survey, it is possible to identify some directions for the future. Obviously, the accumulation of review reports makes it necessary to reconsider the access to the results. QA agencies are developing databases or catalogues of reviews and make them available on their websites. This contributes to the objective of increasing transparency and making public information easily accessible.

A second strategy regards the contents of the reports. Accessible summary of the reports or the introduction of scales to rank the outcomes of the reviews is implemented by some agencies.

The inception of distinctive quality features in the external QA procedures is used to provide stakeholders with additional public information on HE. For example, the introduction of the quality of internationalisation for study programmes is done with the objective to facilitate an easier transfer of information between agencies and stakeholders, at national or international level.

A complementary strategy concerns the publication of follow-up reports which aims at confirming actions undertaken as a result of the review.

Besides the system-wide analysis, some agencies provide information about the national HE system; in particular, they link the evaluation outcomes with the National Framework of Qualifications. Greater transparency of the nature of the qualifications provided enables learners to make better and more informed choices.

Finally, it is interesting to mention an emerging triangle consisting of external QA procedures of agencies, the use of quantitative indicators and easier public access to that information. An increasing use of quantitative and computerised information systems lead to the scenario where different stakeholders have access to the raw data and compose their own rankings. Moreover, an easier access to the data is generating new opportunities to deal with the quality of HE not only for QA agencies or ranking makers, but also for other civic society institutions.

2.3.2 SECOND GROUP OF PRIORITY AREAS

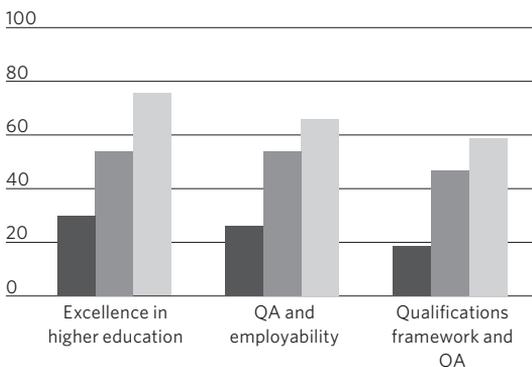


Table 4. Comparison between priorities and activities performed by agencies (in percentage)

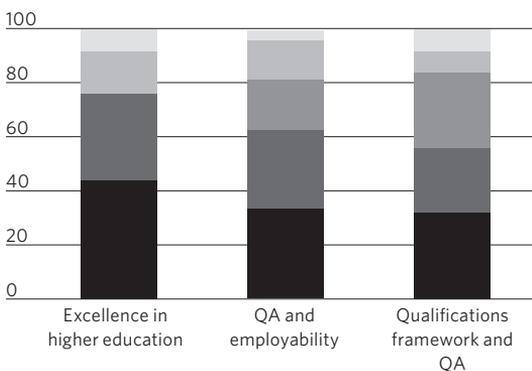
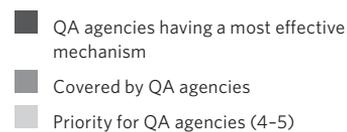
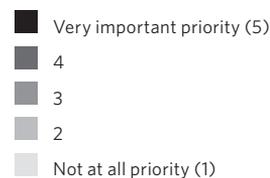


Table 5. Intensity of the priorities (in percentage)



a) Excellence in higher education

Almost half of the agencies answered that their external QA processes cover the area of excellence in higher education; 70 percent consider it as a very important or quite important priority. However, the answers reveal that excellence can be understood in various ways.

Excellence of higher education is, for some, seen as the overall goal of all external QA mechanisms. All activities are oriented towards excellence in higher education. Excellence seems to be a general notion instead of being a distinctive feature of activity. Sometimes the word “excellence” is not used, but the agency’s work on enhancement and the dissemination of features of good practice from review processes can be linked to striving towards excellence. After reaching the minimum standards, the idea of excellence is a way to motivate HEIs for self-improvement and further development.

The counterpoint to this view of seeing excellence as an overall goal of external QA is the idea that external QA is a means to ensure a threshold level of quality is reached. About 25 percent of the agencies consider excellence not being a priority at all or a low priority.

An agency defines excellence as the “possession of good quality to an unusual degree”. For NCPA, excellence in HE is a level of quality which surpasses the threshold standards. Some agencies that gave information on the way they deal with the notion of excellence in their procedures mainly refer to the fact that they give recommendations.

More specific examples identify ways to make the difference between average and excellent. In these approaches, excellence is a distinctive and particular feature. In institutional processes, outstanding practices or particularly good achievements are highlighted in the review reports in various ways. For EKKA and QAA, excellence is linked to the agency’s work on enhancement, where features of good practice are recognised and disseminated. Wordings like “worthy of recognition”, “best practice” and “commendation” are used to bring out excellence. The application of a four-point scale (excellence, good, sufficient, insufficient) on the level of programmes and on the level of standards of the framework is a systemic way to single out excellence. NVAO carries out assessments of internationalisation at programme level. In the Netherlands and Flanders, successful higher education programmes can get recognition for the quality of their internationalisation by obtaining the hallmark “distinctive quality feature internationalisation”. Excellence in students’ achievements and learning outcomes is measured by NCPA in open international Internet-Olympiad in different subject fields.

Besides identifying excellence, agencies can steer HEIs towards excellence by setting the standards, definitions or frameworks for excellence. IUQB plays a central role in defining the national excellence criteria through the production of a series of good practice guidelines and also the development of a national framework for internal and external quality processes. Three agencies base their reviews on defined criteria for excellence (among them IUQB and HAC).

The survey did not include questions related to whether financial incentives or rewards are connected to excellence. Despite that, ASHE explains that excellence and state funding will be connected when the new legislation is fully implemented: more funding will be allocated to excellent institutions. Another example of connection between excellence and funding is the selection of the centres of excellence in education. Based on international anonymous review of applications and a site-visit to selected units, the

agency then appoints 8-10 units to carry the title “centre of excellence in education” for three years. The ministry allocates performance-based funding to the rewarded units.

Another agency is developing its assessment activity in a governmental programme aiming to promote honours programmes and also to stimulate experiments with a wide variety of teaching and learning methods. In this case, the identification of excellence allows excellent programmes to select students and charge higher tuition fees. It is expected that only a very limited number of programmes will opt/qualify for this right.

b) QA and employability

Fifty percent of the respondent agencies report that they are currently conducting external QA evaluations which cover the issue of employability. A significant number of agencies consider the topic as a priority but, again, there is room for improvement since only 25 percent of the agencies declare having most effective and successful activities on QA and employability.

Among the relevant practices identified in the survey, NEAA is working in cooperation with HE institutions to develop an Employability Framework at HEIs which is expected to define criteria for institutional and programme evaluations. The framework highlights the skills and attributes that are valued by employers.

The external QA system starts the inclusion of the local employability expectations as a criterion to be considered for ex-ante evaluations and follow-up procedures. In this regard, AQU Catalunya conducted a survey for graduates as a tool to generate data on the employability of study programmes and the adequacy of learning outcomes in the labour market.

Finally, some agencies inform that representatives from the employers and trade unions are represented in their Board or are involved in controlling the quality of formation.

c) Qualifications frameworks and QA

Forty three percent of the respondent agencies conduct processes connecting QA and Qualifications Frameworks, but only seven agencies reported they are currently most effective and successful in this area. Among those agencies, some work in the definition of benchmark statements, and others on the validation of new study programmes.

This priority is well connected with the area of QA and learning outcomes. Considering that the approval of the Qualification Frameworks is not normally a task of QA agencies, the role the agencies play in this area seems to be the development of the use of national and European qualifications framework as tools for external QA procedures. This is the case for QA agencies validating new programmes, in particular for professional oriented study programmes.

The use of international Qualifications Frameworks is, at least in the survey, appearing as a pending issue for the majority of agencies. They are used to work with national Qualifications Frameworks only. Is this scenario an opportunity for the labels or similar organisations comparing qualifications and learning outcomes at international level to fill the vacuum?

2.3.3 THIRD GROUP OF PRIORITY AREAS

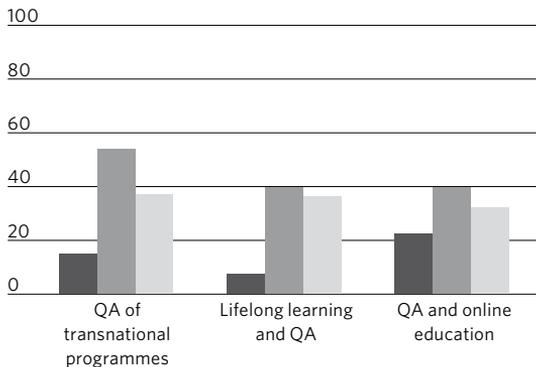


Table 6. Comparison between priorities and activities performed by the agencies (in percentage)

■ QA agencies having a most effective mechanism
 ■ Covered by QA agencies
 ■ Priority for QA agencies (4-5)

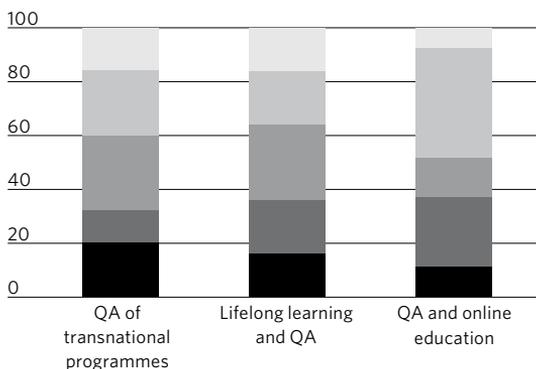


Table 7. Intensity of the priorities (in percentage)

■ Very important priority (5)
 ■ 4
 ■ 3
 ■ 2
 ■ Not at all priority (1)

a) QA of transnational programmes

This priority is covered by 43 percent of the agencies participating in the survey, but it is not seen as a top ranked priority. Although there is a strong European political support for the establishment of this type of programmes, the demand of national HE systems for external QA (quantitatively and qualitatively speaking) is taking the attention away from QA for transnational programmes.

In fact, only 19 percent of the respondents report this is a very important priority, and about the same number reports that the agency is effective and successful carrying out procedures in this area.

The relevant practices in this area are a fair reflection of a certain vacuum at the level of individual QA agencies. In fact, the field is currently explored by networks of QA agencies (like the European Consortium of Accreditation) or other bodies. Nonetheless, two agencies reported relevant practices on validation or assessment of collaborative and/or transnational programmes.

In the list of advanced practices, it is interesting to highlight the case of an agency developing national policy and criteria for accreditation/validation, delegation of authority, and making awards in the context of collaborative programmes, trans-national programmes and joint award programmes.

At European level, national perspectives on exporting and importing higher education and quality assurance procedures are still to be developed.

Not strictly linked to this area of transnational programmes, but in the field of developing internationalisation of higher education, is the advanced practice in which QA procedures are addressed to identify the internationalisation of study programmes.

Finally, it is interesting to mention that more than half of the agencies (56,5%) taking part in the survey think there is a major need for improvement in developing the international recognition of national QA processes. This is important to bear in mind when developing the European dimension of QA further.

b) Lifelong learning and QA

The development of specific QA strategies and procedures does not seem to match the increasing importance of the implementation of lifelong learning schemes in our societies.

Although 40 percent of the respondents reported to conduct external QA evaluation of lifelong learning, this area is not ranked as a very important priority. Moreover, there is a minority of agencies feeling effective and successful in this area. Some of them are accrediting or certifying this type of education and, to some extent, demonstrating that continuing education is comparable to the “regular” study programmes. In one case the external QA procedure reported in the survey was to be considered as a good practice. That concept of lifelong learning indicates that learning should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. In order to enable the individual to learn throughout life, equal value should be given to all these forms of learning regardless of source, how it is achieved or when in life it is achieved. A major objective of the National Framework of Qualifications is to recognise all learning achievements by supporting the development of alternative pathways to qualifications (or awards) and by promoting the recognition of prior learning.

Although there is a gap between the policies and QA implementation for lifelong learning, it is important to observe the definitions and interpretations of what the agencies mean by lifelong learning in their context. This is providing prospective themes in lifelong learning and new working fields for QA agencies.

The 13 respondents who answered the question “what you mean by lifelong learning in your context” mainly understand LLL as degree and non-degree courses offered by HEIs. In the UK, LLL might involve work-based learning and continuing professional development. An agency gives a more detailed definition which mentions informal learning, different access paths, etc.: “the concept of LLL should encompass the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. Learning occurs in many contexts that include work, involvement in social and community activities, or learning through life experience generally. In order to enable the individual to learn throughout life, equal value should be given to all these forms of learning regardless of source, how it is achieved or when in life it is achieved. A major objective of the National Framework of Qualifications is to recognise all learning achievements. It aims to do this by supporting the development of alternative pathways to qualifications (or awards) and by promoting the recognition of prior learning.”

There are two basic areas of possible development in QA of lifelong learning: how external QA procedures deal with the identification of lifelong learners’ profiles and expectations? And how external QA can be in line with HE systems which conceive new educational programmes responding to new lifelong learning schemes?

For QA agencies, lifelong learning goes beyond traditional learning. Lifelong learning relates to agendas on diversity and inclusivity and might involve work-based learning, formal access to higher education and continuing professional development.

As regards the second question, external QA procedures should be developed jointly with the Qualifications Frameworks for lifelong learning. This is an important issue that need to be clarified if agencies have to develop procedures in this field. Indeed, the procedures have to take into account the existence of a set of non-degree programmes, non-formal or informal learning or the combined educational programmes in which the work-based learning is relevant.

c) QA and online education

Half of the respondent agencies cover this area, although they do not consider this type of external QA as a priority. In fact, they do not mention this type of external QA for higher education as one of the most effective and successful practice.

Although two QA agencies (ECBE and ÖAR) report relevant practices connected with this ENQA priority - QA for online programmes and online education, the survey does not provide sufficient information on how different agencies include the quality of online education in their QA schemes for programme or institutional review. Only one answer states that the agency's procedure is designed to generate a positive impact for students in their teaching and learning.

CHAPTER 3:

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The survey invited agencies to identify a current good practice (only one per agency) in external quality assurance that could impact positively on the development and implementation of their activities in the future. In general, the answers to that question do not offer examples on long term and consolidated procedures, but on relatively new strategies and tasks for which QA agencies are supposedly most satisfied with. To some extent, this gives an opportunity to see on what type of activities the agencies concentrate part of their energy and interests.

Making a clear classification of the good practices reported in the survey was not easy, especially because some of them cover different objectives and areas. However, the answers suggest the following distribution:

- a. practices regarding external QA procedures;
- b. practices which enhance stakeholders' involvement in QA of HE;
- c. practices aiming at improving the infrastructure and resources of agencies; and
- d. other developments.

It is noteworthy that the enhancement of internal infrastructure could be considered as a good practice in internal quality assurance and development of agencies, rather than in external quality assurance.

The following chart shows the areas of good practice according to the above described distribution.

Table 8: Distribution of good practices



3.1 EXTERNAL EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES

Eleven agencies reported external QA procedures as a good practice. The variety of mechanisms is important. The nomenclature for the external QA procedures, used both at programme and institutional level, includes accreditation, certification, audit, validation and recognition⁸.

3.1.1 AT PROGRAMME LEVEL

Three agencies reported good practices in professional-oriented study programmes, thus demonstrating a willingness to improve the connection between higher education and the professional demands for graduates through particular external QA procedures.

Two of them accredit groups of study programmes included in a certain discipline. According to them, the benefits of such practice are the achievement of a higher focus

⁸ The report does not give a definition of these procedures on the grounds that this was not requested in the survey and that the interpretation of the terms differs from one country to another.

on quality issues and the establishment of connections between different units and programmes. They also believe that this approach improves the promotion of quality culture within higher education systems through the publication of evaluation reports which cover the assessment results in comparable programmes at the same time.

The examples of accreditation (validation) of collaborative programmes in Ireland or the accreditation of adult education programmes as part-time modularised studies in Denmark show how agencies are extending their accreditation procedures to new types of higher education.

Finally, as previously stated in the report, certification of good practice in internationalisation at programme level and recognition of good practice in HE are carried out by two agencies (NCPA and NVAO).

3.1.2 AT INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

The survey collects a good practice in institutional Audit which, as a general purpose, supports the internal QA system.

Another example characterised by a certain “back to basics” strategy was also detected. This is the case of institutional evaluations recovering the original values, for example by highlighting the external QA momentum as a promoter of dialogues between external reviewers and university responsible managers.

In the same direction, another example is provided by an agency which promotes meetings with higher education institutions in order to impulse the follow-up actions and good practice dissemination.

3.2 INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

Practices attempting to increase the participation of different stakeholders in external QA procedures could be observed throughout the survey, but at this stage, the agencies had the opportunity to highlight one good practice. One quarter considered their work with stakeholders as sufficiently relevant to be reported as a good practice.

The collaboration with students, as stakeholders, has been recorded in the survey and provides two innovative cases: a) the promotion of students' involvement as a global strategy for external QA and quality enhancement in higher education and b) the creation of an Advisory Committee in an agency composed by students.

The work with experts in education and the creation of focus groups composed by representatives of academic communities has been stated in the survey.

In general, respondents mainly gave examples of good practices connecting stakeholders with the agency's governance structures.

In Croatia, an interesting case is the involvement of the civil society working in the field of higher education, through a NGO representative in the Accreditation Council of ASHE. Without voting rights, this NGO representative is seen by the agency as a possibility to increase public monitoring of decision-making by the Accreditation Council. There is another example provided in the survey by HQAA where trade unions are involved in the Board of the agency.

The inclusion of employers in the process of control over the quality of HE was mentioned by one agency and could be seen as a similar process of connecting social interests with the work of the agencies.

Involving international stakeholders in the governance structure is referred to as another good practice whereby international members (who can be considered as

international stakeholders) are included in the accreditation body. This strategy is done with the purpose of increasing the visibility of the agency's independence.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the interest of AQA to collect feedback on a regular basis from HEIs, peer experts and other stakeholders. This feedback feeds into the evaluation of AQA and facilitates the development of its QA activities.

3.3 INTERNAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF AGENCIES

In connection with the growing importance of the use of information, there is an effort to generate electronic platforms and software tools to deal with the external QA procedures of agencies. The use and management of information is seen as an important element for an efficient organisation of external evaluations and for public information purposes.

There is also a good practice of developing pools of experts (including students) for accreditation and external quality control. It was not reported in the survey, but this practice gains attention for different reasons. The international cooperation in this matter seems still underdeveloped.

3.4 OTHER ELEMENTS

Two cases were grouped in this category. In the first case, an agency provides advice and support to HE institutions for the design and implementation of their internal QA systems. The good practice emphasises the importance of the well-known Quality Assurance scheme PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act); in other words, the agency cooperates with the HE institutions to design their internal QA system.

Developing consultation services and conducting accreditation procedures at the same time (i.e. giving advice and then evaluating what has been advised) need to be treated carefully, since in many countries there is a tendency to avoid mixing the two functions to avoid conflict of interest.

The second case is the development of a set of quality indicators for the whole HE system.

In conclusion, the reported good practices draw up a group of strategies focused on the promotion of the quality culture within HEIs, and characterised by a greater participation of stakeholders and the civil society in general. The exchange and access to reliable information is at the heart of that group of strategies.

CHAPTER 4:

PROSPECTIVE PROCEDURES AND FUTURE AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

4.1 INTRODUCTION OF MAJOR CHANGES ON QA PROCEDURES

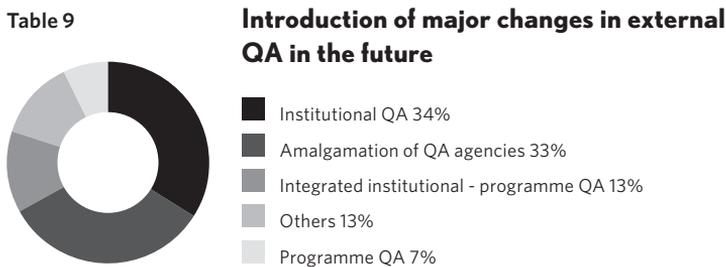
Sixty percent of the respondents (15 agencies) answered yes to the question “Does your Agency plan to introduce major changes in external QA procedures in the future?” and 16 provided a description of the prospective change or procedure.

Besides the amalgamation of QA agencies in Austria and Ireland driven by political and regulatory changes, the main focus on prospective procedures is to reinforce and/or reformulate the external QA procedures at the institutional level.

It is important to make clear that the use or the introduction of institutional QA procedures does not necessarily mean that external QA procedures for study programmes are inexistent. Actually many countries are doing both types of evaluations or have integrated both dimensions in comprehensive schemes.

The following chart shows that programme and institutional QA are not two different worlds but integrated realities. There is a tendency to emphasise the procedures at institutional level, but this seems to be connected with the purpose of looking for the most effective and efficient QA procedures that would promote the enhancement at both levels, in particular at programme level.

Table 9



In fact, if we look at the current relevant procedures reported in Part 1 of the survey, it is possible to observe the tendency to report relevant external QA procedures both at programme and institutional level (14 agencies), while 11 agencies reported having relevant procedures in one of those dimensions (seven for programmes and four for HEIs).

In the first part of the survey, the agencies were invited to inform about three relevant QA procedures. Given that many respondents mentioned only one or two best practices, it can be presumed that the first procedure was considered as the most relevant one, with a decreasing relevance for the second and third procedures. The following chart shows a certain prevalence of external QA procedures for study programmes.

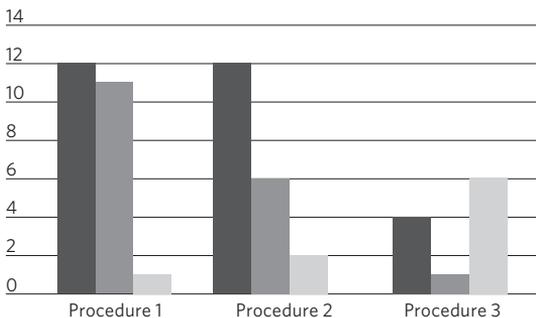


Table 10 (in number of procedure)

Relevant procedures on external QA

■ Programme level
 ■ Institutional level
 ■ Other developmentsr

4.2 PROPOSED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The survey proposed nine different pre-defined areas for possible improvement or development (cf. chart below). The number of areas selected by agencies does not follow a clear pattern: 10 of them chose two or three areas only, and 12 reported four or more areas. The final outcome shows a great homogeneity in the distribution of interests. While the area “QA of HE and research” scores low, the rest of the areas score quite similar.

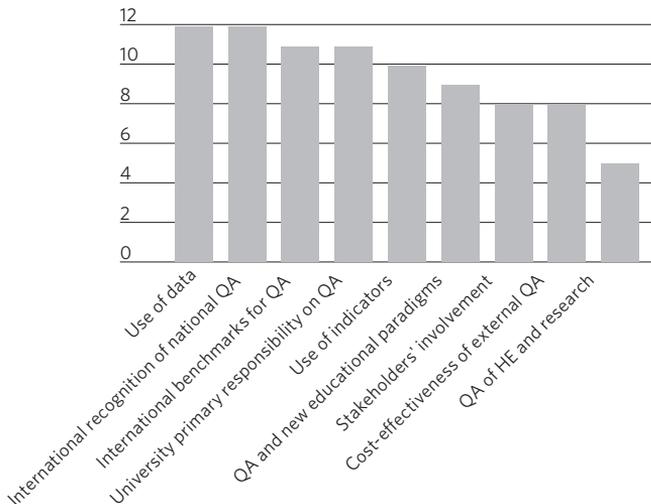


Table 11 (in number of agencies)

Areas where there is a major need for development

Even if certain priorities are identified among the answers from the 12 agencies who selected two or three areas, it is not possible to identify a clear pattern.

However, for the seven agencies which selected only two areas, the highest interest is on the “use of data in QA”.

The answers given by the group of four agencies selecting three areas were slightly different. Those agencies are more interested in the “development of international benchmarks for QA” and in the “international recognition of national QA processes”. In this second group, only one agency declared interest in the “use of data in QA”.

In conclusion, the answers show that the five areas where agencies see a major need for development in the coming years are: use of data in QA, international recognition of national QA, international benchmarks for QA, university primary responsibility on QA and use of indicators.

ANNEX: THE QUALITY PROCEDURES QUESTIONNAIRE

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

Purpose

The objective of this survey is to promote dialogue with different representatives on the relevance and impact of different *external* QA procedures and their future evolution. Therefore, **it is of utmost importance that the questionnaire is completed in consultation with as many members of your Agency** (staff, Board/Council members, etc.) **and stakeholders** as possible.

This project is funded by the European Commission through its Lifelong Learning Programme.

The proposed survey begins with an introduction relating to general information about the agency and its relationship with ENQA. It also inquires about the methodology used for working with the questionnaire.

The main body of the questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to obtain a general picture of what is happening about external QA procedures. To that end, the agencies are inquired about their current and future activities in relation to the ENQA priorities and other complementary elements.

The second part of the questionnaire tries to identify, in depth, individual features of good practice (implemented or expected to be applied in the near future). This part of the survey will help ENQA in mapping developed/advanced procedures.

One of the results of this project is the creation of an online tool for agencies' quality procedures. This database on the ENQA website will gather good and efficient quality procedures to be shared among QA professionals in Europe and beyond. The responses will be most valuable as they will contribute to the creation of this web resource.

The survey is being conducted by an ENQA project group composed of:

- Josep Grifoll, Chair, AQU and ENQA Board member
- Achim Hopbach, GAC and ENQA President
- Helka Kekäläinen, FINHEEC and ENQA Vice-President
- Christina Rozsnyai, CEE Network
- Todor Shopov, CEE Network
- Nathalie Costes, ENQA, Secretary

The responses will be analysed by the Project Group, and presented in the Third Report on Quality Procedures in European Higher Education, to be published by November 2011. The final report of the project will be considered for the preparation of an ENQA position paper to be submitted to the ministerial meeting of April 2012 in Bucharest, and will also be exploited by a wider audience interested in enhancing a quality culture in the field of higher education.

Your responses will not be used in any ENQA coordinated review of your agency or for any purpose other than that stated above.

The closing date for this survey is **15 April 2011**.

If you have any questions about the survey please contact Nathalie Costes (nathalie.costes@enqa.eu).

Introduction

1. Name of your Agency

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

2. What is your Agency's relation to ENQA

- Full member
- Candidate member
- Associate
- Affiliate

3. Name of respondent and contact information

Name:

E-mail:

Address:

City/Town:

State/Province:

ZIP/Postal Code:

Country:

4. Grant/refusal of permission to ENQA to publish your responses:

- I give permission for my Agency to be identified with the responses I give in the final report and web resource.
- I do not give permission for my Agency to be identified with the responses I give in the final report and web resource (your responses will be reported anonymously).

Methodology

1. How did you answer the questionnaire?

- a) Did you involve the QA agency staff? (Please give details)
- b) Did you involve the Agency Board/Council? (Please give details)
- c) Did you involve other agents (e.g. stakeholders)? (Please give details)

Part 1 - QA procedures in relation to ENQA priorities and other complementa...

A: ENQA priorities

The position of your Agency's activities regarding the priorities of ENQA, listed in the bullet points below.

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

1. Which area does your Agency cover (i.e. in which area does it conduct external QA evaluation)?

- QA and enhancement mechanisms
- QA of transnational programmes
- Lifelong learning and QA (Please specify > question 2)
- QA in online education
- Qualifications frameworks & QA
- QA and learning outcomes
- Excellence in higher education (Please specify > question 3)
- QA and Employability
- QA and public information on HE

2. If you answered "Lifelong learning and QA", please give us a brief definition of what you mean by lifelong learning in your context? (e.g. HE programmes for learners over 25 years old, non-degree HE programmes for adults, etc.)

3. If you answered "Excellence in higher education", please define the meaning of excellence in HE in your context and what are the purposes of connecting QA and excellence in HE?

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

4. Which area do you consider as a priority in your Agency? Rate each area 1 to 5.

| | 1 Not at all a priority | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 A very important priority |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| QA and enhancement mechanisms | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| QA of transnational programmes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Lifelong learning and QA | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| QA in online education | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Qualifications frameworks & QA | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| QA and learning outcomes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Excellence in higher education | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| QA and employability | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| QA and public information on HE | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

5. Considering the priorities of ENQA, in which area are you currently most effective and successful?

- QA and enhancement mechanisms
- QA of transnational programmes
- Lifelong learning and QA
- QA in online education
- Qualifications frameworks & QA
- QA and learning outcomes
- Excellence in higher education
- QA and Employability
- QA and public information on HE

Part 1 - QA procedures in relation to ENQA priorities and other complementa...

A: ENQA priorities

Identification of current QA procedures

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

1. Please identify a maximum of 3 relevant QA procedures implemented by your Agency and connected with the priorities of ENQA?

Procedure 1

2. Procedure 1:

A)

Name of the implemented procedure:

Please give a brief description of the procedure:

If possible, please give an example of the public report for that procedure (please provide a link):

3. Procedure 1:

B) Name(s) and contact details of the responsible project manager(s) in that/those area(s)?

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

4. Procedure 1:

C) Institutions involved

- A) all in the system
- B) some of them (how many, in % of total?)
- C1) types of institutions: private universities
- C2) types of institutions: public universities
- C3) types of institutions: private HEIs such as university colleges, applied universities etc. (please specify)
- C4) types of institutions: public HEIs such as university colleges, applied universities etc. (please specify)

If you chose B, C3 and/or C4, please specify:

5. Procedure 1:

D) Is the procedure implemented in cooperation with another QA agency?

- Yes
- No

6. Procedure 1:

E) Do external stakeholders participate in the implementation of the external QA procedure?

| | Yes | No |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Students | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Employers | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Public authorities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Trade unions | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Others (please specify)

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

7. Procedure 1:

F) Expected benefits for stakeholders (rate 1-5): This table should help the QA agency to reflect about the results of the procedure in providing benefits for the stakeholders. One or more benefits in axis x can be considered for the stakeholders in axis y.

| | Development of the primary responsibility of HEI's on QA | Better connection between social interests and HE outcomes | Improvement of teaching and learning processes | Increased relation between teaching-learning and research | Development of new indicators about the quality of HE of HE organisations and structures | Promotion of innovation in higher education | Improvement of public information on HE | Better connection between national and international standards for HE | Other benefits (please specify) |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|---|---|---|---------------------------------|
| Students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Employers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Public authorities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Trade unions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Others (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Others / Other benefits? (please specify)

8. Procedure 1:

G) Do you have any particular action for promoting the benefits for international stakeholders?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe:

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

9. Procedure 1:

H) Expected benefits for HE institutions (rate 1-5)

| | 1 Poor | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 Excellent |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Development of the primary responsibility of HEI's on QA | <input type="radio"/> |
| Better connection between social interests and HE outcomes | <input type="radio"/> |
| Improvement of teaching and learning processes | <input type="radio"/> |
| Increased relation between teaching-learning and research | <input type="radio"/> |
| Development of new indicators about the quality of HE | <input type="radio"/> |
| Enhancement of HE organisations and structures | <input type="radio"/> |
| Promotion of innovation in higher education | <input type="radio"/> |
| Improvement of public information on higher education | <input type="radio"/> |
| Better connection between national and international standards for HE | <input type="radio"/> |

Other benefits (please specify):

Procedure 2

10. Procedure 2:

A)

Name of the implemented procedure:

Please give a brief description of the procedure:

If possible, please give an example of the public report for that procedure (please provide a link):

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"**11. Procedure 2:**

B) Name(s) and contact details of the responsible project manager(s) in that/those area(s)?

12. Procedure 2:

C) Institutions involved

- A) all in the system
- B) some of them (how many, in % of total?)
- C1) types of institutions: private universities
- C2) types of institutions: public universities
- C3) types of institutions: private HEIs such as university colleges, applied universities etc. (please specify)
- C4) types of institutions: public HEIs such as university colleges, applied universities etc. (please specify)

If you chose B, C3 and/or C4, please specify:

13. Procedure 2:

D) Is the procedure implemented in cooperation with another QA agency?

- Yes
- No

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

14. Procedure 2:

E) Do external stakeholders participate in the implementation of the external QA procedure?

| | Yes | No |
|------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Students | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Employers | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Public authorities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Trade unions | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other (please specify) | <input style="width: 200px; height: 20px;" type="text"/> | |

15. Procedure 2:

F) Expected benefits for stakeholders (rate 1-5): This table should help the QA agency to reflect about the results of the procedure in providing benefits for the stakeholders. One or more benefits in axis x can be considered for the stakeholders in axis y.

| | Development of the primary responsibility of HEI's on QA | Better connection between social interests and HE outcomes | Improvement of teaching and learning processes | Increased relation between teaching-learning and research | Development of new indicators about the quality of HE Enhancement of HE organisations and structures | Promotion of innovation in higher education | Improvement of public information on HE | Better connection between national and international standards for HE | Other benefits (please specify) |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|---|---|---|---------------------------------|
| Students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Employers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Public authorities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Trade unions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Others (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Others / Other benefits? (please specify)

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

16. Procedure 2:

G) Do you have any particular action for promoting the benefits for international stakeholders?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe:

17. Procedure 2:

H) Expected benefits for HE institutions (rate 1-5)

| | 1 Poor | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 Excellent |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Development of the primary responsibility of HEI's on QA | <input type="radio"/> |
| Better connection between social interests and HE outcomes | <input type="radio"/> |
| Improvement of teaching and learning processes | <input type="radio"/> |
| Increased relation between teaching-learning and research | <input type="radio"/> |
| Development of new indicators about the quality of HE | <input type="radio"/> |
| Enhancement of HE organisations and structures | <input type="radio"/> |
| Promotion of innovation in higher education | <input type="radio"/> |
| Improvement of public information on higher education | <input type="radio"/> |
| Better connection between national and international standards for HE | <input type="radio"/> |

Other benefits (please specify):

Procedure 3

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

18. Procedure 3:

A)

Name of the implemented procedure:

Please give a brief description of the procedure:

If possible, please give an example of the public report for that procedure (please provide a link):

19. Procedure 3:

B) Name(s) and contact details of the responsible project manager(s) in that/those area(s)?

20. Procedure 3:

C) Institutions involved

- A) all in the system
- B) some of them (how many, in % of total?)
- C1) types of institutions: private universities
- C2) types of institutions: public universities
- C3) types of institutions: private HEIs such as university colleges, applied universities etc. (please specify)
- C4) types of institutions: public HEIs such as university colleges, applied universities etc. (please specify)

If you chose B, C3 and/or C4, please specify:

21. Procedure 3:

D) Is the procedure implemented in cooperation with another QA agency?

- Yes
- No

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

22. Procedure 3:

E) Do external stakeholders participate in the implementation of the external QA procedure?

| | Yes | No |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Students | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Employers | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Public authorities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Trade unions | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Others (please specify) | <input type="text"/> | |

23. Procedure 3:

F) Expected benefits for stakeholders (rate 1-5): This table should help the QA agency to reflect about the results of the procedure in providing benefits for the stakeholders. One or more benefits in axis x can be considered for the stakeholders in axis y.

| | Development of the primary responsibility of HEI's on QA | Better connection between social interests and HE outcomes | Improvement of teaching and learning processes | Increased relation between teaching-learning and research | Development of new indicators about the quality of HE Enhancement of HE organisations and structures | Promotion of innovation in higher education | Improvement of public information on HE | Better connection between national and international standards for HE | Other benefits (please specify) |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|---|---|---|---------------------------------|
| Students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Employers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Public authorities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Trade unions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Others (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Others / Other benefits? (please specify)

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

24. Procedure 3:

G) Do you have any particular action for promoting the benefits for international stakeholders?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please describe:

25. Procedure 3:

H) Expected benefits for HE institutions (rate 1-5)

| | 1 Poor | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 Excellent |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Development of the primary responsibility of HEI's on QA | <input type="radio"/> |
| Better connection between social interests and HE outcomes | <input type="radio"/> |
| Improvement of teaching and learning processes | <input type="radio"/> |
| Increased relation between teaching-learning and research | <input type="radio"/> |
| Development of new indicators about the quality of HE | <input type="radio"/> |
| Enhancement of HE organisations and structures | <input type="radio"/> |
| Promotion of innovation in higher education | <input type="radio"/> |
| Improvement of public information on higher education | <input type="radio"/> |
| Better connection between national and international standards for HE | <input type="radio"/> |

Other benefits (please specify):

Part 1 - QA procedures in relation to ENQA priorities and other complementa...

B: Policy Evaluation

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

1. What is the position of the ministry/national authorities on the relevance of external QA processes for promoting and safeguarding academic mobility?

2. Has your Agency received instructions in order to develop procedures for promoting academic mobility?

Yes

No

If yes, what kind of development has been put in place?

3. What is the position of the ministry/national authorities on the appropriateness of QA agencies to deal with the objective of equitable access to Higher Education?

4. Has your Agency received instructions in order to develop procedures for evaluating/promoting equitable access?

Yes

No

If yes, what kind of development has been put in place?

Part 1 - QA procedures in relation to ENQA priorities and other complementa...

C: Prospective procedures and future areas of improvement

1. Does your Agency plan to introduce major changes in external QA procedures in the future?

Yes

No

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

2. If yes, please give details on what kind of procedures are expected to be introduced:

Name of the prospective procedure

Main purpose

Contact person

3. In which areas does your Agency think there is a major need for improvement and development?

- Use of data in QA (collection, management...)
- Use of indicators in your QA processes
- Stakeholders' involvement in QA processes
- QA and new paradigms for teaching and learning (e.g. student as co-producer)
- QA of HE and research
- Cost-effectiveness of external QA
- Promotion of university primary responsibility on QA
- Development of international benchmarks for QA development
- International recognition of national QA processes

Part 2 - Identification of a current good practice (one per agency)

This part is specifically addressed to describe, in depth, a good practice in external QA that could impact positively on how QA agencies develop and implement their activities in the future.

Good practice is defined as a positive action that must:

- **be successful**: it provides positive results for the objective of enhancing a quality culture in the field of higher education;
- **be innovative**: something different has been implemented. Innovative means providing new or different solutions to existing ones in the region or sector. Solutions can be completely new or incorporated by transference from other contexts. Innovation can be found in the process (measures, contents, methods, approaches, tools), in the object (new areas of interest, new social groups) or in the context (adaptation or improvement on the current conditions, starting-up of networks);
- **have a possible multiplying effect or transference to other areas**: it should be visible, communicable and shareable (dissemination) and/or integrated and applicable to systems and regulations;
- **be sustainable**: it is self-supporting both currently and in the future.

1. Name of the practice /procedure / prospective procedure:

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2. Name of the responsible manager of the practice (if already identified) / position at the QA agency:

3. Description of the procedure:

(If possible, please provide the web link where public information about the procedure is available)

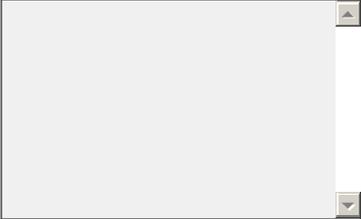
4. What positive results do you expect from that procedure with respect to the enhancement of a quality culture in your HE system?

5. To what extent is this procedure providing new solutions to existing QA procedures in the region or in the sector?

Note: innovation can be found in the processes (measures, contents, methods, approaches, tools), in the object (new areas of interest, new social groups) or in the context (adaptation or improvement on the current conditions, starting-up new networks)

QUALITY PROCEDURES PROJECT "VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE"

6. To what extent is the procedure transferable to other areas or realities?



7. Is the practice sustainable currently and in the future?

Yes

No

Please explain why:





THE PRESENT PUBLICATION is the result of the third ENQA survey on quality procedures of quality assurance agencies across Europe and beyond. This report presents a collection of current features of good practice in external quality assurance within the new priorities formulated by ENQA and following the ministerial Communiqués, highlighting the connection between the practices and the expected benefits for higher education institutions and stakeholders. In addition, the present report identifies practices that are expected to be implemented by quality assurance agencies, as well as areas where progress needs to be made, thus proposing a vision of the future of quality assurance procedures.



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