



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH



ESQA
Effective involvement of Stakeholders in
External Quality Assurance Activities

Romanian Ministry of Education and Research
Unit for the Management of Externally financed projects

STUDY ON STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IN EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

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enqa.

European Association for
Quality Assurance in Higher Education



European Association of Institutions in Higher Education

BUCHAREST, 2020



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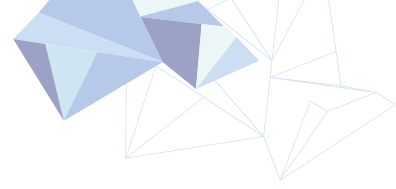


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Introduction

The Effective Involvement of Stakeholders in External Quality Assurance Activities (ESQA) project¹ aims to support the activity of the Peer Support Group C, established in the framework of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), on stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance². The project is framed by the Bucharest Ministerial Communiqué (2012), which affirms: “We commit to both maintaining the public responsibility for quality assurance and to actively involve a wide range of stakeholders in this development”³. In the Paris Communiqué (2018), the ministers of education stated that “fulfilling our commitments depends on the concerted efforts of national policy-makers, public authorities, institutions, staff, students and other stakeholders as well as coordination at EHEA level”⁴. The BFUG Peer Support Group C on Quality Assurance identified the theme “Role and engagement of stakeholders in internal and external quality assurance” as one in which further work is needed. The project builds on aspects of stakeholder involvement as established by the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG)⁵.

The project results and activities aim to increase knowledge at quality assurance agencies and national authorities at the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) level, which can be used to encourage actions that improve stakeholder engagement by making it more effective with enhanced quality assurance practices in the partner countries of the project and beyond.

¹ <http://esqa.ro/>

² In September 2018, the BFUG formally established the Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance (TPG C on QA) – more specifically on Key Commitment 3 (Quality Assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area) – based on the interests and needs indicated by the BFUG members and Consultative members in a survey conducted during the summer of 2018.

<http://www.ehea.info/page-peer-group-C-QA>

³ Bucharest Ministerial Communiqué. Available at:


http://www.ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/Bucharest_Communique_2012_610673.pdf, p. 12

⁴ Paris Ministerial Communiqué. Available at:

http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2018_Paris/77/1/EHEAParis2018_Communique_final_952771.pdf, p. 2

⁵ *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (2015). Available at: https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf





The consortium, led by the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research as the national authority for higher education, includes three European stakeholder organisations – the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) as the representative of quality assurance agencies, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) as the representative of higher education institutions and the European Students’ Union (ESU) as the representative of students – as well as five quality assurance agencies: the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres, France), the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA, Bulgaria), The Danish Accreditation Institution (DAI) and the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC, Republic of Moldova). The consortium is further strengthened by two international experts, Lucien Bollaert and Stefan Delplace.

The objective of the present study is to take stock of the current involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance across the EHEA. The study takes a comprehensive look at stakeholder engagement in external quality assurance activities by mapping the perspectives of quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and students on the topic. It also presents activities that quality assurance agencies of the ESQA project and beyond have implemented to engage their stakeholders.

The data presented in this report will be used to draft recommendations to quality assurance agencies and national authorities on effective stakeholder engagement in external quality assurance processes.





Methodology

The present study builds on six partially interlinked sources of information, namely 1) a survey sent to quality assurance agencies in the EHEA that are members or affiliates of ENQA; 2) an analysis of ENQA Agency Review reports; 3) interviews with quality assurance agency representatives; 4) outcomes of peer-learning activities by the ESQA partners; 5) a survey sent to National Unions of Students that are members of ESU; and 6) interviews with EURASHE experts.

The study takes into consideration aspects of stakeholder engagement as established by the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). Both higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies are expected to engage stakeholders in their work and activities according to the ESG. The focus of the study – and the ESQA project – is on stakeholder involvement in *external* quality assurance. As external and internal quality assurance processes are interlinked, the involvement of stakeholders is analysed in a holistic manner. Reflections on stakeholder engagement in internal quality assurance are included in the chapters by ESU and EURASHE.

The study was written by ENQA with the support of the consortium. The chapters on ESU's and EURASHE's constituencies' perspectives were written by the two organisations respectively.

Survey


With the objective of mapping the current state of stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance activities in the EHEA, ENQA distributed a survey, developed by the ESQA consortium, to its members and affiliates⁶. The survey received responses from 33 agencies from 20 EHEA countries⁷. Most of the respondents represent national or regional comprehensive quality assurance agencies, while a few of them are from discipline-specific agencies, working either nationally, regionally or at the pan-European level.

The survey included questions on various aspects of stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance activities. The majority of the questions were multiple choice questions with predefined stakeholder groups; however, respondents also had the possibility to list other stakeholder groups that were not already mentioned.

⁶ ENQA members and affiliates cover 44 of the 48 member countries of the EHEA.

⁷ The countries are Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.





In addition, the questionnaire included some open-ended questions allowing respondents to provide further information.

Analysis of external review reports of ENQA Agency Reviews

The mostly quantitative survey results are complemented by a more qualitative analysis of a collection of external review reports of ENQA Agency Reviews⁸. The focus of the analysis is on the recommendations and commendations of selected standards of parts two and three of the ESG that consider stakeholder involvement⁹. In ENQA Agency Reviews, recommendations for appropriate action(s) are made if an agency does not fully meet the ESG standard in question. The role of commendations is to highlight and promote good practice and excellence in external quality assurance.

In the analysis of reports, recommendations were studied to identify in which areas agencies are generally urged to act, thus identifying aspects where further work on stakeholder involvement is still needed from the agencies. Commendations were studied to present examples of approaches to involve stakeholders in different areas, identified as laudable practices (in the agency's national context) by the expert panels. The analysis of external review reports also aimed to validate the survey results.

The analysis covers those ENQA Agency Review reports that the ENQA Board approved in 2017-2019¹⁰, totalling 44 quality assurance agencies from 28 countries, including agencies working at the European level. Most of the agencies are comprehensive national or regional quality assurance bodies, while a few are subject-specific.

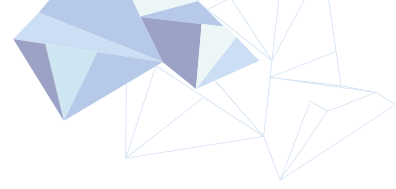
Interviews with quality assurance agencies

Further investigation on examples of practices to involve stakeholders, identified from the external review reports, was made possible by interviewing representatives of quality assurance agencies. One agency provided additional information in a written format. The contacted agencies are the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA, Armenia), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, United Kingdom). It should be noted that the selected examples describe only one aspect of these agencies' stakeholder engagement process, and that they also have other ways of ensuring stakeholder involvement.

⁸ External review reports of ENQA Agency Reviews, available: <https://enqa.eu/index.php/reviews/review-reports-and-decisions/>

⁹ In the analysis of the recommendations and commendations the following ESG were examined: 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6

¹⁰ For the analysis, reports from partial reviews were excluded.



Partner QAAs' stakeholder engagement and peer-learning activities

The quality assurance agencies that are partners in the project conducted a self-assessment activity describing and analysing the ways stakeholders are involved in external quality assurance activities in their own countries. These self-assessments, which can be found in annex 1 of this report, formed the foundation for the two peer-learning activities where each agency's analysis was shared and discussed. During the peer-learning activities, the consortium also invited stakeholders of the host countries, Denmark and Romania, to share their perspectives on stakeholder involvement in quality assurance activities.

ESU's and EURASHE's constituencies' perspectives on stakeholder involvement in quality assurance

The present study mainly examines stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance from the perspective of quality assurance agencies. However, the consortium is aware of the fact that, in order to build effective stakeholder involvement, it is crucial to reflect the issue from stakeholders' perspectives as well. Therefore, ESU and EURASHE, the two other stakeholder organisations in the consortium, present their constituencies' views on stakeholder involvement in quality assurance in their respective chapters of this study. To explore the topic, ESU sent a survey to its member National Unions of Students. EURASHE investigated the matter by interviewing its working group "Learning and Teaching" members.







Stakeholder involvement in EQA activities in the EHEA

Stakeholder categories and roles

According to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), stakeholders are understood to cover all actors within an institution, including students and staff, as well as external stakeholders such as employers and external partners of an institution. Involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance is part of the four principles for quality assurance in the EHEA, as established by the ESG, specifically: “Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society”.¹¹

When preparing the survey for quality assurance agencies in the EHEA, the consortium decided to select the following stakeholder categories for the survey’s multiple-choice questions:

- Students
- Alumni
- Employers
- Teaching staff
- Other staff of HEIs
- Teachers' unions
- Students' unions
- Professional bodies
- University associations
- National HE authority
- Local authorities
- Civil society
- Other

The option of “other” was included to ensure that any potential stakeholder category was not overlooked. Other stakeholder groups mentioned by respondents include – depending on the question – researchers and research institutions, trade unions, other ministries besides the ministry of higher education, national councils of rectors, educationalists and international experts. Unlike some of the respondents, the consortium decided not to treat international experts as a separate stakeholder group, as was done for the national experts participating as panel members.

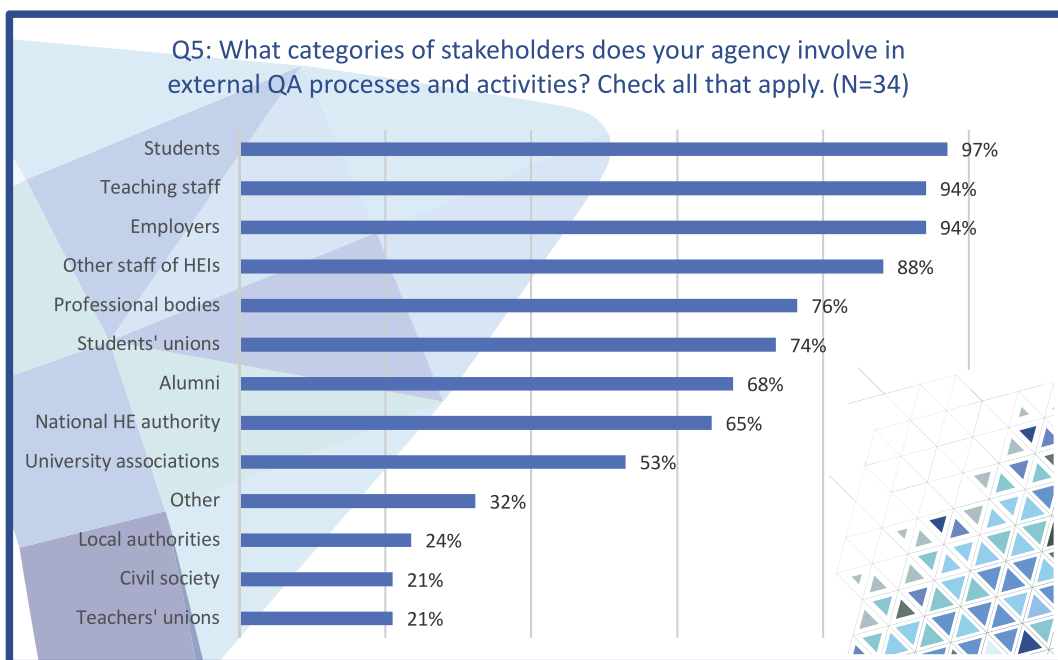
¹¹ *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). Available at: https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf, p. 7-8



Drawing from the survey results, figure 1 shows which stakeholder categories quality assurance agencies involve in their external quality assurance processes and activities in general. The results reveal that students, teaching staff and employers are involved – in one way or another – by almost all agencies. The majority of the agencies also involve other higher education institution staff, professional bodies, students’ unions, and alumni, thus further consolidating the perspectives of institutions, the world of work and students.

About two-thirds of the agencies involve national higher education authorities, whereas local authorities have a smaller role. Likewise, only one-fifth of the agencies involve civil society in their processes and activities. A bit over half of the agencies involve university associations in some way.

Figure 1: Stakeholder involvement in agencies’ external QA processes and activities (% of agencies)



Objectives and benefits of stakeholder involvement

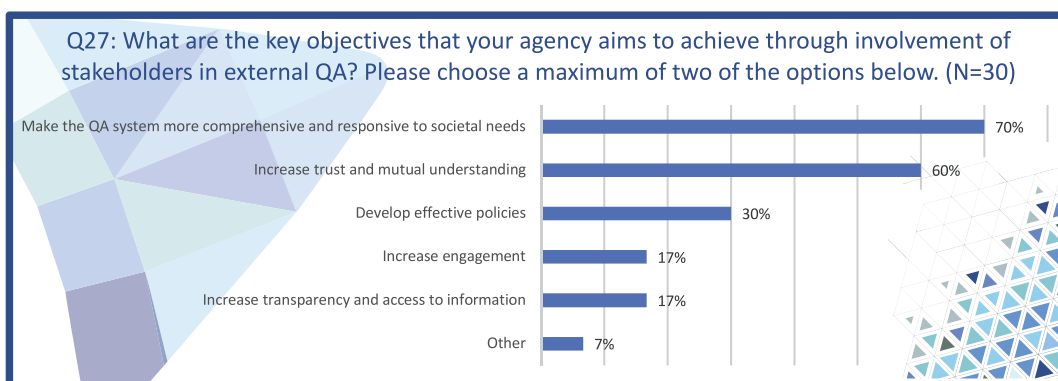
In the survey, the respondents were asked about the main objectives their agency aims to achieve through stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance. The results show, as illustrated in figure 2, that 70% of the respondents consider making the quality assurance system more comprehensive and responsive to societal needs as one of the key objectives.

In addition, 60% of the respondents consider increasing trust and mutual understanding as a main aim for involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance.

Developing effective policies, increasing engagement, as well as increasing transparency and access to information were considered as main objectives by smaller percentages of respondents.

The survey also allowed respondents to suggest other aims, but this option was used only by two respondents with the proposals of including different perspectives and developing effective external quality assurance processes.

Figure 2: QA agencies' key objectives for stakeholder involvement (% of agencies)



In the survey, respondents were also asked what they consider as their agency's most successful activities in involving stakeholders (within the past two years), and why. Some of the responses mirror the results above. For instance, one respondent explained that the successful activities, which include the development of the agency's self-evaluation report for external review as well as a cycle of seminars for representatives of different stakeholders, have helped to build and empower the higher education sector and to create the feeling of collective ownership for the quality of education.

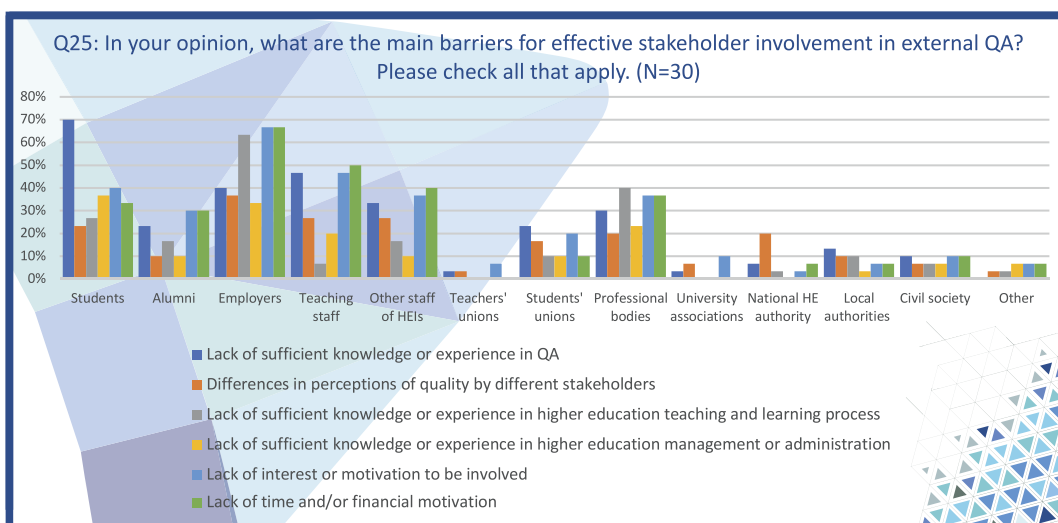
Another respondent considered that, as a result of active involvement of different categories of stakeholders, the external evaluation results are becoming increasingly credible for higher education institutions. The same respondent noted that the involvement of business representatives in the external evaluation processes in review panels and interviews during site visits helps to identify the most appropriate actions for improving the quality of study programmes and that students are becoming more aware of the importance of active involvement in institutional quality assurance processes.

A few respondents mentioned that expert training and including stakeholders in an agency's bodies help the stakeholders to learn about external quality assurance, and that their participation also contributes to the increase and spread of quality assurance culture and engagement with students, teachers, and other staff in higher education institutions.

Barriers for effective stakeholder involvement

In order to build and ensure effective stakeholder engagement in external quality assurance, it is important to know and understand the reasons why this may be hindered. Thus, the survey of quality assurance agencies in the EHEA also examined what respondents consider as the main barriers for stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance (figure 3).

Figure 3: Main barriers for effective stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance according to QA agencies (% of agencies)



Student and employer engagements have been identified as areas that still need further work¹². This also comes across from the survey results as the respondents identify these two groups as those with the most obstacles for participation. 70% of the respondents consider that the main barrier for the effective involvement of students is the lack of sufficient knowledge or experience in QA. This is clearly regarded as the main obstacle regarding student involvement; other options do not get nearly as many votes.

¹² European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018. The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.



For employers, the reasons respondents consider preventing participation seem to be more diverse. Nearly 70% of the respondents consider that the main reason hindering employer participation is one or several of the following: lack of interest or motivation to be involved; lack of time and/or financial motivation; lack of sufficient knowledge or experience in the higher education teaching and learning process.

For teaching staff and other staff of higher education institutions, the three main barriers for effective involvement are the lack of time and/or financial motivation, the lack of interest or motivation to be involved and the lack of sufficient knowledge or experience in quality assurance.

Stakeholder involvement in external QA activities

The survey results above show that almost all agencies involve students, teaching staff and employers in their processes and activities, and many of them involve several other stakeholders. The following section looks at the scope and level of stakeholder engagement in terms of specific external quality assurance activities.

Stakeholder involvement in evaluations

The survey explored stakeholder involvement in institutional and programme assessments separately. Nearly all respondents' agencies perform programme assessments and almost as many carry out institutional evaluations. The results, which are illustrated in figures 4 and 5, show that there are no big differences in the participation of different stakeholder groups between these two activities. Students, teaching staff and employers are respectively the most involved stakeholder groups in both types of assessments. In institutional evaluations, a bit more than half of the agencies also involve other staff of higher education institutions, and almost half of the agencies involve professional bodies in evaluation panels. In programme assessments, these groups are also involved but not as largely. Other stakeholder groups than the above-mentioned do not have a significant role in institutional or programme assessments.

Figures 4 and 5 also show that stakeholders mostly participate in evaluations as full members of the panel with voting rights and contribute to the elaboration of the evaluation. Participation as observers with no voting rights is not a common practice.



Figure 4: Stakeholder involvement in institutional assessments (% of agencies)

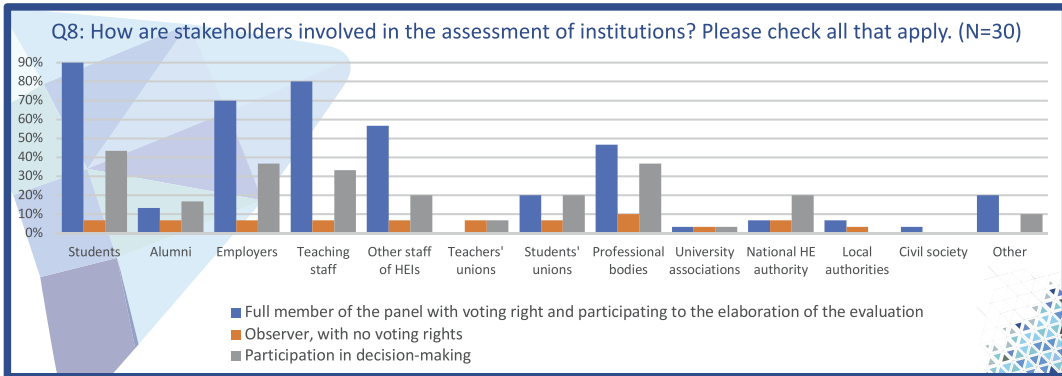
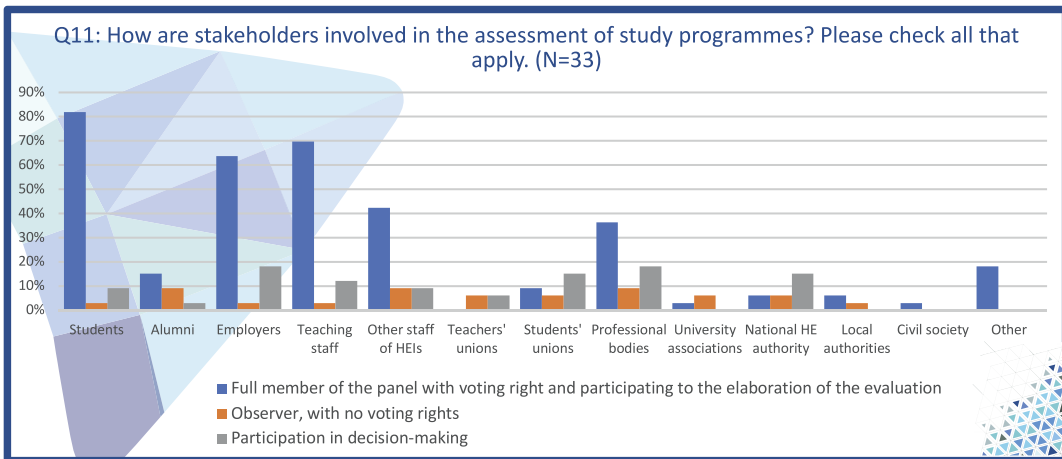


Figure 5: Stakeholder involvement in programme assessments (% of agencies)



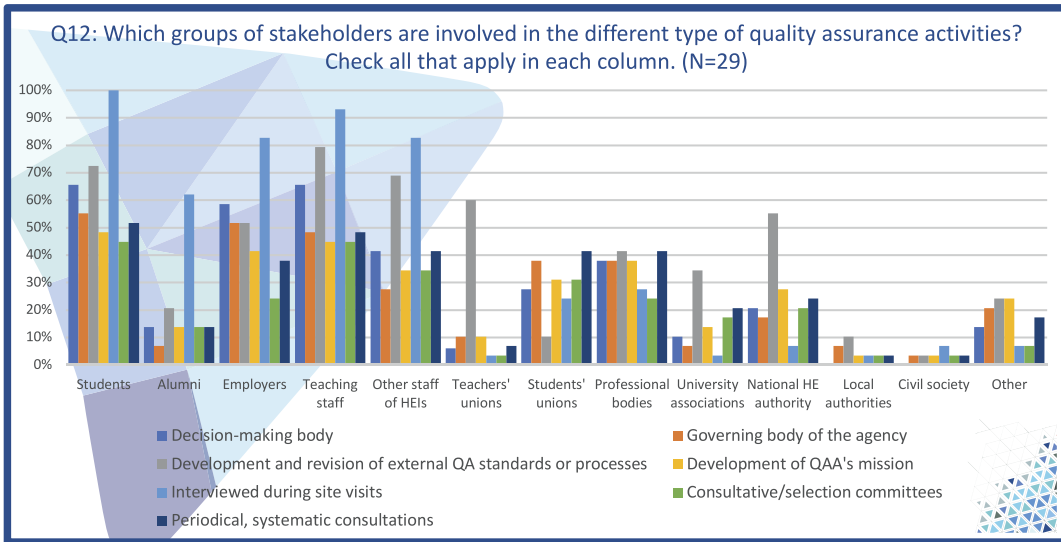
Even though the survey results show that agencies largely involve students as full members of the panels in evaluations, not all the agencies do, despite it being a requirement in ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts¹³. Also, the analysis of ENQA Agency Review reports reveals that over one-fifth of the reports included specific recommendations on ensuring student participation in evaluations. The recommendations highlight the importance of students being involved in all agency's external quality assurance activities as equal panel members without reservations and special clauses as well as contributing beyond aspects considered to be strictly student matters. The recommendations indicate that students' full participation in external quality assurance activities may not always be guaranteed and that they do not take part in all the evaluation activities of every agency.

¹³ ESG 2.4 Standard: External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

Other types of stakeholder involvement


The survey also examined stakeholder involvement in decision-making bodies, governing bodies of the agencies, the development and revision of external quality assurance standards or processes, interviews during site visits, periodical/systematic consultations, the development of the quality assurance agency's mission as well as consultative/selection committees. The results are shown in figure 6.

Figure 6: Stakeholder involvement in different type of QA activities (% of agencies)



Once again, students, teaching staff, employers and other staff of higher education institutions are the most represented groups across all the different activities and processes. Being interviewed during site visits is the most common activity for all the four groups by a large majority of agencies. The development and revision of external quality assurance standards and processes is an activity which gathers the most varied stakeholder representation with majority of agencies involving the following groups in this order: teaching staff, students, other staff of higher education institutions, teacher's unions, the national higher education authority, and employers.

In general, agencies involve alumni less often, but almost two-thirds of agencies include them for interviews during site visits. Teachers' unions and national higher education authorities are also generally less involved. The exception to this is the development and revision of external quality assurance standards or processes where teachers' unions and national higher education authority are involved by 60% and 55% of agencies, respectively.



Stakeholder participation in agencies' decision-making bodies is slightly more common than participation in the governing bodies. A further question in the survey regarding stakeholders' roles in the agencies' governing structures reveals that most of the involved stakeholders are participating as full members with voting rights. Including stakeholders as observers without voting rights in the governing structures is not a common practice among the agencies.

ESG 3.1. Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance requires agencies to ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work. Still only about half of the respondents have reported their agency involving the main stakeholder groups in the agency's governing structures. This aspect can be seen from the analysis of ENQA Agency Review reports as well. Nearly one-fifth of the agencies received specific recommendations on increasing stakeholder participation in their governing bodies.

Overall, nearly half of the reports include recommendations regarding stakeholder involvement under ESG 3.1. Most of them do not specify the stakeholder group but rather urge the agency to increase or widen stakeholder participation in the work, decision-making or governing bodies of the agency. Those recommendations that identify specific stakeholder groups mostly address student involvement, but a few also include employers and staff of higher education institutions.

Table 1: Example on student engagement activities

ANQA, Armenia: Students' Voice project

The National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA, Armenia) was commended for its Students' Voice project in the agency's 2017 ENQA Agency Review report. Under ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance, the panel considered that the Students' Voice project helps to promote the participation of the students in institutions and prepare students for ANQA expert panels. Moreover, under ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts, the panel found the project to be a commendable source of student experts, and that the selection system of the students contributes to the dissemination of a quality culture among students in a larger way.

ANQA launched the Students' Voice project in 2011 to enhance student involvement in QA activities. The project is a platform for students across Armenian higher and vocational educational institutions, which aims to:

- increase students' awareness of current developments in the education system;
- establish a student network;
- reveal main issues of concern for students by conducting research activities.

Moreover, the project functions as a resource for student experts and provides trainings that prepare them for internal and external quality assurance activities.

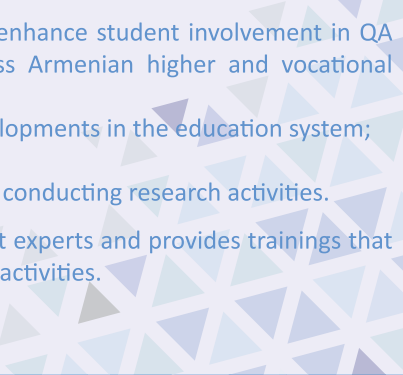


Table 1: Example on student engagement activities (cont.)

The Students' Voice project launches a call 2-3 times per year for new students who would want to participate in the training. The duration of the training is approximately two months: two meetings per week for 2-3 hours. The training is implemented in a real work environment: reviewing real self-evaluation reports from different HEIs, preparing questions and issues for the desk-review, conducting role plays with experts, preparing the panel report, evaluating the institution with the focus on students' perspective, and having meetings with the IQA units of different institutions.

Students that performed the training successfully receive a certificate and are included in ANQA's pool of experts. Normally, before working as full student panel members, students participate in the external review process as observers.

ANQA promotes the Students' Voice project during accreditation processes and disseminates information in IQA departments of tertiary-level institutions. Additionally, student experts share their experience in the project with other students.

The Students' Voice project organises annual conferences to present research results conducted by students, share the success stories of the student experts as well as discuss the challenges of institutions from the students' perspective. The project also promotes yearly meetings with the students of the Education Management academic programme who are potential employees of ANQA. These students implement their master thesis based on the trends and topics proposed by ANQA.

ANQA provides facilities for Students' Voice participants at the agency's office, and the project is coordinated by a dedicated ANQA staff member.

The main benefit that ANQA sees in the Students' Voice project is the created network where the multidisciplinary students communicate with different specialists, discuss student issues and add their perspective to better understand developments in HEIs. This co-operation and feedback help ANQA to periodically enhance its procedures.

ANQA makes efforts to find ways to ensure the participation of students from all regions of Armenia and representation from all study fields.

More information on ANQA's Students' Voice project is available in its ENQA Agency Review report¹⁴ and Self-assessment report for its ENQA-coordinated review¹⁵.

ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose requires agencies to involve stakeholders in the design and continuous improvement of quality assurance. Approximately 30% of the analysed review reports include recommendations to improve stakeholder engagement under this standard.

¹⁴ External review report of ANQA. Available at: https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/External-Review-Report-ANQA_FINAL.pdf

¹⁵ ANQA Self-assessment report. Available at: http://www.anqa.am/media/1923/anqa-sar - 13072016_approved.pdf

Some of these urge agencies to improve stakeholder involvement in general without specifying certain groups or ways for involvement, while others are more specific. For instance, student involvement is called for in a few recommendations, and some recommendations require agencies to establish more formal and/or systematic ways for stakeholder involvement in designing methodologies.

Table 2: Example on involving stakeholders in the development of policy and methodologies

QQI, Ireland: Stakeholder involvement in developing policy and external quality assurance methodologies

In 2019, the ENQA Agency Review report for Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) commended the agency on the way in which policy and external quality assurance methodologies are developed through comprehensive and engaging consultation with stakeholders. The panel noted that the discussions with various stakeholder groups showed that QQI's consultation model of Green Papers and White Papers is welcomed by stakeholders and provides them with a clear, robust and staggered approach to consultation, which brings "no surprises" and engenders trust in the system.

Stakeholder consultation is part of QQI's Comprehensive Policy Development Programme, which aims to:

- Unify and rationalise the policies of QQI's predecessor agencies;
- Develop policy to meet emerging needs;
- Provide a sound policy basis for the functions of QQI.

QQI's policies are generally based on research. After the need for a policy has been identified, QQI develops and publishes a Green Paper setting out issues and seeking feedback from stakeholders. Following the consideration of the feedback received and its publication, the following stage is usually the publication of a White Paper that sets out draft policy for consultation. The style of Green and White Papers varies depending on the topic. In addition to written feedback, QQI may arrange workshops to facilitate discussion with and between stakeholders. The policy development concludes with the publication of the policy.

QQI often publishes the feedback (or a summary of it) arising from a policy consultation along with the agency's response. QQI considers it important to actively and openly communicate back to the stakeholders how their feedback has or has not been implemented, typically on a thematic basis. This is appreciated by stakeholders as they can see how their views have been considered.

Depending on the topic and target group, QQI selects the appropriate consultation campaign. This may include a request to provide feedback on QQI's website to prescribed questions or direct one-to-one feedback or both with additional formats for larger sets of stakeholders. To ensure they receive a sufficient amount of responses, QQI may extend feedback deadlines, organise consultation workshops or, in cases where the content of the policy is difficult or sensitive involving significant change, organise information seminars around the country.

Table 2: Example on involving stakeholders in the development of policy and methodologies (cont.)

Moreover, if policies are complicated and sensitive, before proceeding towards drafting, QQI uses its Consultative Forum, made up of representatives from further, higher and English-language education and training as well as industry representatives. QQI's consultation process is guided by a Consultation Framework that applies to initiatives on which formal input and feedback from stakeholders is sought.

In general, QQI considers that the system is quite reactive due to its established relationship with its many diverse stakeholders. However, QQI is conscious that it needs to monitor its consultation process regularly to ensure that engagement with stakeholders stays active and dynamic and stakeholders remain engaged. Thus, QQI is reviewing how to keep stakeholders interested and bring in new forms of stakeholder engagement. QQI emphasises the importance of building mutually-beneficial partnerships and agreements, interactive dialogue and demonstrating the impact of engagement with stakeholders as ways of motivating participation.

More information on QQI's stakeholder consultation process is available in its ENQA Agency Review report¹⁶, Self-assessment report for its ENQA-coordinated review¹⁷, and on the QQI website .

Please note that the above summary describes only one aspect of QQI's stakeholder-engagement process, the poster referred to below gives an overview of the many different approaches to stakeholder engagement which are employed by QQI.

As a new initiative, QQI has sought to enhance the impact of its own work and to reaffirm the position of the agency as an authoritative voice through more strategic and collaborative engagement with key stakeholders such as government departments, public funders, agencies, social partners and professional recognition bodies. QQI presented this position at the poster session of the ENQA General Assembly in 2019¹⁸.

Recruitment of stakeholders

Quite logically, the involvement of those stakeholder groups that have been identified to be most involved in external quality assurance activities – i.e. students, teaching staff, employers and other staff at higher education institutions – is also more regulated, as shown in figure 7. Results indicate that the involvement of these groups is regulated both at the national and at the agency level, while for most stakeholder groups, regulation at the agency level is somewhat more common than at the national level.

¹⁶ External review report of QQI. Available at: <https://engq.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/QQI-External-Review-Report.pdf>

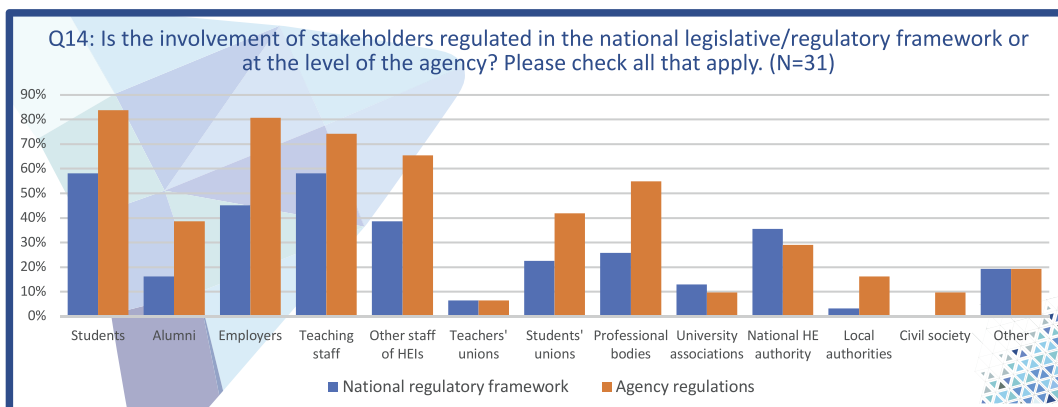
¹⁷ QQI Self-assessment report. Available at: <https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/ENQA%20SAR%2018%20December%202018.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Policy-Development-Process-.aspx>

¹⁹ QQI poster on Stakeholder engagement and collaboration as a strategic priority for agencies. Available at: <https://engq.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/QQI-1.pdf>

In the case that there were national laws or regulation on the involvement of stakeholders, respondents were further enquired to describe them. Those responses indicate that for many agencies, national laws or regulations set the requirements for the compositions of decision-making and/or governing bodies and/or they set – directly or indirectly – which stakeholders are involved as experts in evaluations. The agency regulations, in turn, set further and more specific regulations.

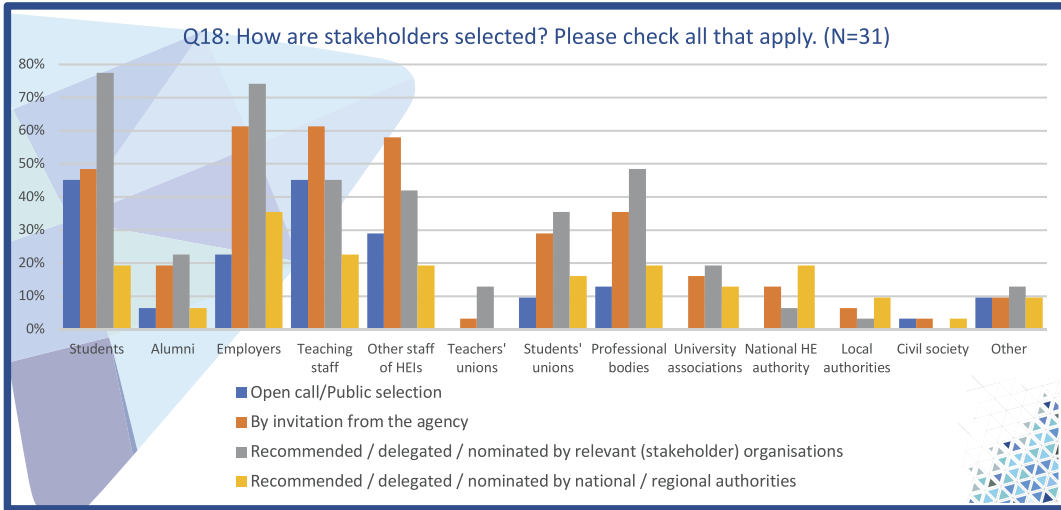
Figure 7: Regulation of stakeholder involvement at the national and agency level (% of agencies)



The survey also mapped the ways in which agencies recruit stakeholders (see figure 8). The results show that agencies largely involve stakeholders through recommendation, delegation or nomination by relevant (stakeholder) organisations and by invitation from the agency. Open calls and nominations from national or regional authorities are also used by the agencies but not as widely as the two other means. The most common selection method slightly varies between the different stakeholder groups.

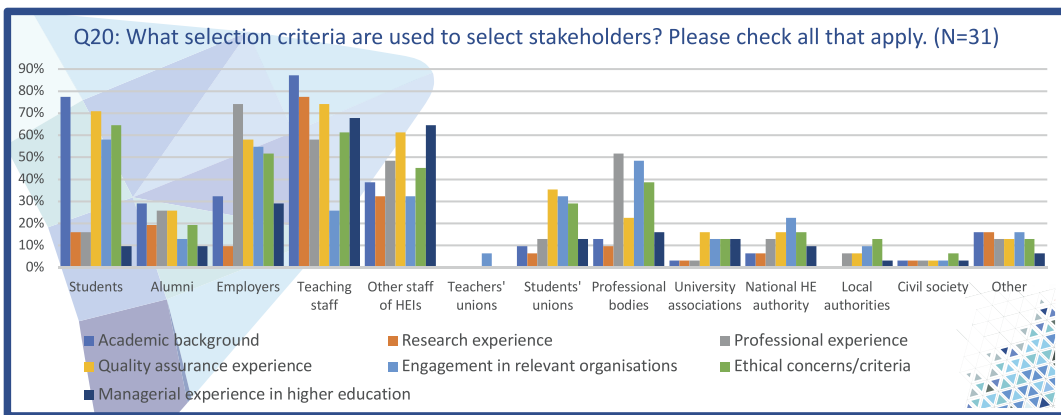
Survey results also indicate that the selection method depends on the type of quality assurance activity in which the stakeholders are to be involved. The answers suggest that it is more common for the review experts to be recruited by invitation from the agency or through an open call, whereas for governing body roles, the recruitment is done through a nomination by a relevant stakeholder organisation.

Figure 8: Selection of stakeholders (% of agencies)



In the survey, respondents were asked to specify what selection criteria their agency uses for the selection of stakeholders (see figure 9). Naturally, the main selection criterion varies between the different stakeholder groups as they represent different perspectives to higher education. Agencies' main selection criterion for students and teaching staff is academic background (77% and 87% respectively), whereas for employers it is professional experience (74%), and for other staff of higher education institutions it is managerial experience in higher education (68%). Quality assurance experience and ethical concerns are shared selection criteria for all the four stakeholder groups. In addition to the given criteria, one respondent mentioned language proficiency for the selection of evaluation team members.

Figure 9: Selection criteria for stakeholder involvement (% of agencies)



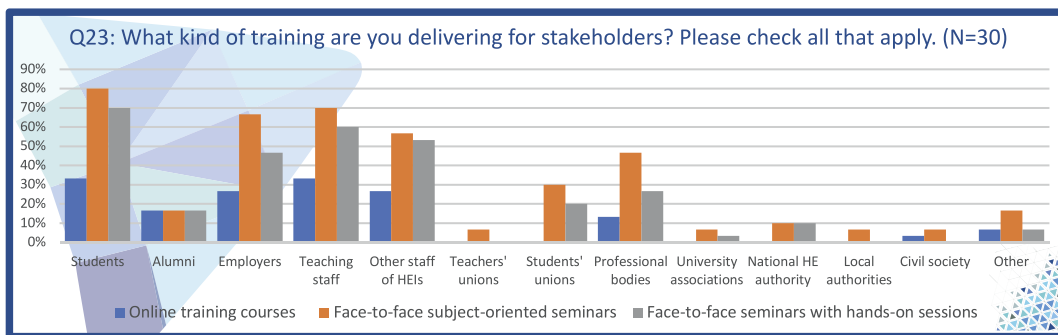
Stakeholder recruitment is mentioned in some of the recommendations of the analysed ENQA Agency Review reports. Regarding stakeholder involvement in the governance, it is recommended to ensure that stakeholders can be nominated only by the relevant stakeholder organisation and that there is a specific system for proposing candidates. Concerning expert recruitment, recommendations discuss the need to increase transparency (e.g. having formalised and published criteria and selection procedure) and widen accessibility (e.g. having sufficiently diverse pool of experts and publishing an expert call annually).

Training of stakeholders

Nearly all survey respondents' agencies deliver training for stakeholders engaged in the agencies' external quality assurance activities. Figure 10 shows that the most common training type for all the different stakeholder groups is face-to-face subject-oriented seminars. Face-to-face seminars with hands-on sessions are also commonly used. In addition, some of the agencies offer online training courses. The replies indicate that agencies may use several different types of trainings.

The duration of trainings ranges from a few hours to several days. Most commonly, agencies offer trainings of 2-4 hours as well as one- or two-day seminars. Some agencies also offer briefings which are organised just before site visits.

Figure 10: Types of training for different stakeholder groups (% of agencies)



About one-fifth of the analysed ENQA Agency Review reports include recommendations regarding expert training under ESG. 2.4 Peer-review experts. Agencies are recommended to: provide training seminars for each type of review; standardise the method of training according to the purpose and type of evaluation activity; and make trainings compulsory for all expert panel members. The importance panels have put on trainings comes across from the recommendations which require agencies to enhance, increase, strengthen and intensify the existing trainings and to keep experienced experts' skills up to date with further and regular trainings.

Table 3: Example on expert training

QAA, UK: Expert training

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, United Kingdom) was commended for its training of reviewers in the agency's 2018 ENQA Agency Review report. The panel noted that the training and further professional development of reviewers remains an outstanding feature of QAA work, which is appreciated by providers and reviewers themselves.

Experts – usually called reviewers by QAA – can be nominated by higher education providers and other institutions or apply directly to QAA by themselves. Student reviewers can also be nominated by a student union or a representative organisation. QAA screens all applications against the criteria specified in the review methods. All selected reviewers need to successfully complete a training programme before participating in any review, and after this, depending on the review method, reviewers may be expected to be available for several site visits during a year.

QAA has developed several documents pertaining to the training and development of reviewers, including a relevant policy for review team members and guidance documents on reviewer roles for separate methods. Training usually consists of “generic” aspects that cover skills required for all review methods and “method-specific” aspects that are tailored to the review method. These can be combined into one event or conducted separately. The generic elements are delivered over 1-1.5 days, and the method-specific ones are normally a day per method. Training normally includes elements that simulate the activities undertaken in an actual review. Students are full members of review teams, and they are expected to complete the same training.

At the end of each review, there is also an evaluation where feedback is gathered from QAA staff, providers, and reviewers themselves on the review process and the professional conduct of those involved. The feedback is used to identify both underperforming and excellent reviewers. In the case of weaker evaluators, QAA provides developmental support. For example, where further development with report writing is identified, this may result in additional support being provided by a QAA Officer on early drafts during their next allocated review. In the case of excellent performance, reviewers may be invited to share their practice with others. These evaluations also help to verify the review methods' fitness for purpose and that it meets its specified objectives.

Reviewers are trained in each method, so when a method changes, they will be required to undertake a further “method-specific” training event. Depending on the extent of change or deviation from methods that they have been trained in, this may be face-to-face training or facilitated online. QAA uses evaluation feedback and other mechanisms, such as focus groups, for provider facilitators, student representatives and reviewers to provide input on their experience of the process and method.

More information on QAA's training for reviewers is available in its ENQA Agency Review report²⁰ and Self-assessment report for its ENQA-coordinated review²¹.

²⁰ QAA external review report. Available at: <https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/External-review-report-QAA-FINAL.pdf>

²¹ QAA Self-assessment report. Available at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/news/enqa-2018-self-assessment-report.pdf>



Independence vis-à-vis stakeholder involvement

The *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA* look at aspects relating to independence under several standards. ESG 3.3 Independence requires that agencies be independent and act autonomously, and that they have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence. The guidelines of this standard further explain that:

“in considering independence of an agency the following are important:

- Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation) that stipulates the independence of the agency’s work from third parties, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations;*
- Operational independence: the definition and operation of the agency’s procedures and methods as well as the nomination and appointment of external experts are undertaken independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders;*
- Independence of formal outcomes: while experts from relevant stakeholder backgrounds, particularly students, take part in quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency. Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency (e.g. as expert) is informed that while they may be nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency. Independence is important to ensure that any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise.*

Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency (e.g. as expert) is informed that while they may be nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency. Independence is important to ensure that any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise.”

The standard 2.4 Peer-review experts requires that external quality assurance be carried out by groups of external experts. The guidelines under this standard explain that the independence of experts is ensured by the agency by implementing a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest.



ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct in turn requires that agencies have processes in place for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities. The guidelines further explain that for the agencies to be accountable to their stakeholders, high professional standards and integrity in the agency's work are indispensable. An agency's internal quality assurance policy ensures, among others, that all persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically.

Many of these aspects are mentioned in the survey responses to the question on how the respondents' agency guards its independence while involving stakeholders in its activities.

Organisational independence is ensured, for instance, through legislative acts or the agencies' statutes. Agencies also make a structural separation between the governing and operational bodies with clear and distinct functions.


Operational independence is ensured by recruiting external experts. Several agencies explain that they recruit experts through a public call with predefined criteria, and that experts need to be nominated by an appropriate stakeholder organisation. Some agencies that operate regionally ensure independence by recruiting experts from outside the region. Another national agency explains that it composes panels of experts who live and work outside the country.

Independence of formal outcomes is ensured by having specific bodies (e.g. evaluation committees, commissions, a governing body etc.) with the decision-making powers and independence from other bodies of the agency.

Several respondents also mention that their agency's stakeholders need to commit to the code of ethics and sign a declaration of confidentiality, impartiality and absence of conflict of interests. A few respondents noted that involving a variety of stakeholders in expert panels and in different bodies of the agency ensures that no single perspective is favoured over others. One respondent adds that the different stakeholders are involved in equal terms, and another explains that during the site visit the agency staff member makes sure that all experts have equal rights and opportunities. One respondent also mentions periodic evaluations of experts as a way of safeguarding an agency's independence.

Five recommendations under ESG 3.3 of the analysed ENQA Agency Review reports relate to stakeholders. One recommendation highlights the need for clearer and more explicit and transparent regulations regarding the agency's members and stakeholder percentages. This agency was urged to make sure that its members are not involved at any other stage of the external quality assurance procedure.





It was recommended to one agency that it balances the composition of its steering board by not only having members coming from higher education institutions, and especially not those in leadership positions at their institution. Another agency received the recommendation to consider involving higher education institution representatives out of the region the agency operates. One agency was recommended to consider further developing its procedure for non-conflict-of-interest in order to help easily detect and prevent potential conflicts of interests. The panel noted that expert independence can be reinforced by providing written guidance on what may constitute a conflict of interest in an evaluator's work and how it can be detected and avoided, including examples from the agency's practice.

There were also a few commended practices which related to having specific processes to ensure independence, including a code of conduct and an internal integrity code as well as including panel members out of the country or region that the agencies operate.

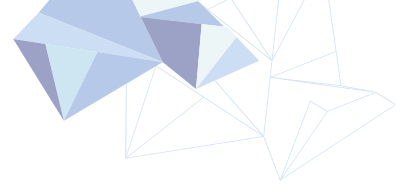
Communication with and towards stakeholders

One of the four principles for quality assurance in the EHEA, as established in the ESG, is that quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society. ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct requires that agencies "have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities". The guidelines further explain that agencies need to be accountable to their stakeholders and that "the review and improvement of their activities are on-going so as to ensure that their services to institutions and society are optimal". Agencies' internal quality assurance policy, among other things, "includes internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to a continuous improvement within the agency".

ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis in turn requires that agencies publish regularly reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities. The guidelines explain that:

"in the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts."

Furthermore, ESG 2.6 Reporting requires that full reports by the experts are published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals.



A part of ensuring the above-mentioned aspects is the establishment of a dialogue and effective communication channels with and towards stakeholders – features that are also noted by the expert panels in the analysed ENQA Agency Review reports. About one fifth of the analysed reports include recommendations that relate to stakeholders under ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct. These recommendations concern the creation of formal, structured and systematic mechanisms for the collection and analysis of stakeholder feedback; the intensification of the communication with stakeholders in order to collect greater feedback; and informing the stakeholders about the survey results and actions taken by the agency. On the other hand, one agency was recommended to reduce the number of surveys carried out, or to space them in the time, in order not to saturate the system with an excess of surveys.

Furthermore, almost one fourth of the analysed reports include recommendations that consider stakeholders in relation to thematic analysis (ESG 3.4). In these recommendations, panels note the importance of developing reports which are useful and informative for stakeholders; considering stakeholders' proposals for specific topics of thematic analysis; engaging in active discussions with other stakeholders beyond those in higher education institutions when preparing thematic analysis; ensuring that the reports are available for stakeholders in a coherent way; and maintaining a system for the dissemination of reports that are relevant to stakeholders. In a few of the recommendations and commendations, the importance of informing not only agencies' stakeholders but also society was highlighted.

Six reports include recommendations which regard stakeholders under ESG 2.6 Reporting. All these recommendations note the importance of agencies making the reports accessible to not only to the academic community but in a wider manner, including students and potential students, employers, external partners and other interested individuals. A few agencies are also recommended to develop new ways to reach the readership as well as to make the information available in a clearer and more accessible manner. One agency was recommended to issue summary reports on the evaluations which are more easily read and understood by non-professionals.



Table 4: Example on communication with and towards stakeholders

NOKUT, Norway: building dialogue with stakeholders through collecting and disseminating information on higher education

In the 2018 ENQA Agency Review report of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), the agency was commended for the way it has developed its role as a promotor of higher education quality through collecting and analysing data on higher education and organising numerous public events and fora for HEIs and other stakeholders it cooperates with (ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and, and processes for quality assurance). NOKUT also received a commendation under ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis with the panel noting that NOKUT does exemplary work in collecting information on higher education quality through surveys, interviews and data gathering exercises, and disseminating it to the institutions and the public through publications, portals and communication with the policy makers and the media. This also includes reflections on NOKUT's work presented in various publications and public presentations. In addition, NOKUT was commended for the plain language initiative which improves the readability of the reports, and the fact that they are all accessible from a single page on the NOKUT website (ESG 2.6 Reporting).

As reflected in the agency's ENQA Agency Review report as well as in the discussion with agency's staff, NOKUT puts high importance on building its work on trust. The agency considers that stakeholder engagement is a major aspect of agency's legitimacy and competence.

Formal methods of involving NOKUT's stakeholders include public hearings and reference groups with Norwegian and international experts, including students, regarding new regulations and ongoing evaluation activities, as well as regular surveys on their experience of working with NOKUT. Another formal method of building dialogue with stakeholders is NOKUT's extensive use of experts in audit panels.

In addition to these, NOKUT engages in dialogue with its stakeholders by organising several meetings, seminars, workshops, and events. NOKUT considers it important to give the floor to the stakeholders themselves during events it organises in order to have the stakeholders' voice heard. The agency has observed that stakeholders appreciate when they can hear experiences from their peers. The goal of establishing peer processes is also emphasized in NOKUT's enhancement driven projects and evaluations. Finally, NOKUT is also attending different events, sometimes as invited speakers, and sometimes as participants.

NOKUT has a dedicated department of Evaluation and Analysis which runs several large surveys, maintains data portals and conducts analyses to assess various quality dimensions in Norwegian higher education. NOKUT ensures that this data is available on multiple data portals, and that institutions get direct access to the raw data from the surveys. This data is used to conduct structured analysis of critical issues related to educational quality. Major surveys that NOKUT conducts include the national student survey and the HEI staff survey.

NOKUT also collects additional data through interviews with academic staff, administrators, and students. The agency publishes all these analyses as reports on its website and arranges public breakfast meetings to launch and disseminate these reports.



Table 4: Example on communication with and towards stakeholders (cont)

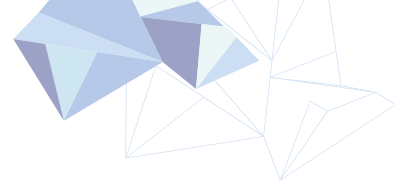
In addition to the reports and events, NOKUT's communication towards stakeholders include social media channels, short videos on survey results, a newsletter, and a podcast. Covering various themes, the podcast targets HEI faculties, especially those teachers wishing to improve their practices.

NOKUT publishes full reports on its procedures, including those with a negative outcome, online, in Norwegian and, where available, in English. NOKUT aims to write reports that are clear and accessible not only to those within the sector, but also to a non-specialist readership. To this aim NOKUT staff are able to annually attend a "plain language" course which provides tools and exercises to learn how to write in an accessible and clear manner. NOKUT notes that writing in plain language is a constant learning process. Information on NOKUT's activities under ESG 3.1, 3.4 and 2.6 is available on its ENQA Agency Review report²² and Self-assessment report²³ for the purpose of its ENQA-coordinated review.

²² NOKUT external review report. Available at: <https://enga.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/External-Review-Report-NOKUT-FINAL.pdf>

²³ NOKUT Self-assessment report. Available at: https://www.nokut.no/contentassets/02c019a4a8824e5db0d5c34fc5523122/nokuts_self-assessment_report_2017.pdf





Outcomes of the ESQA peer-learning activities

As part of the ESQA project activities, the consortium organised two peer-learning activities²⁴ which aimed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the stakeholder involvement activities of the five quality assurance agencies that are partners in the project. Both peer-learning activities also included specific workshops with participation of different stakeholder groups from the host countries with the objective to hear about stakeholder perspectives to external quality assurance, and to identify ways for improving their involvement.

Prior to the peer-learning activities, the quality assurance agencies conducted a self-assessment activity by filling in a structured form²⁵ which helped them to systematically identify their different stakeholder groups and activities in which stakeholders take part as well as to reflect the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relating to these. This self-assessment exercise was used as a starting point for the discussions during the peer-learning activities.

One of the outcomes the consortium obtains from the peer-learning activities is the importance of taking into account the setting in which stakeholder involvement is reflected. Stakeholder engagement should be considered against the backdrop of the national context of higher education and quality assurance systems and frameworks, external quality assurance cycles and practices, the maturity of the agencies as well as mutual trust and cultures.


Breakout sessions with stakeholders helped to identify the main barriers as well as motivations for their involvement in external quality assurance activities. The consortium learnt that stakeholders in attendance of the two peer-learning activities consider the same issues as barriers for engagement that were identified by the quality assurance agencies in the survey, including lack of interest or motivation, lack of knowledge, and lack of time.

The peer-learning activities also showed that different stakeholders have different views on and aims for their engagement and external quality assurance. Thus, training and information as well as communication and feedback are important aspects to consider as means for enabling involvement. The consortium notes that real and mutual dialogue is something beyond the simple consultation of stakeholders – rather it is important to create co-ownership through co-creation.

²⁴ The first peer-learning activity took place on 30 October-1 November 2019 in Bucharest, Romania and the second on 2-4 December 2019 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

²⁵ The forms can be found in annex 1 of this report.





Effective engagement of stakeholders in such processes requires an early involvement that enables stakeholders to influence the design and scope of the process. On the other hand, engaging in co-creation and partnerships implies a trade-off where one has to let go of control – to some extent – in order to ensure a fruitful and rewarding process.

Another important aspect of communication – as gathered during the workshops – is to be clear about the impact of stakeholder involvement. Stakeholders should be well informed on how their input can and will be used, which will help to motivate them to invest their time and resources for the process. Also, finding common ground is pivotal to effective stakeholder involvement. Every participating stakeholder needs to have an investment in the subject that can motivate their participation in the process. Moreover, the consortium notes that effective involvement is a continuous process that also encompasses feedback and consultation even after the process or project is finished.





ESU's constituency's perspective on stakeholder involvement in quality assurance

Student participation in QA - ESU

With the objective of mapping the current state of student involvement – one of the key stakeholders in external quality assurance in the EHEA – ESU distributed a survey to its members. The study gathered 38 responses from National Unions of Students (NUS) from 37 EHEA countries²⁶. The respondents are the National Student Unions' representatives who focus on the topic of quality assurance of higher education and student involvement in the quality assurance processes.

The survey included questions on various aspects of student involvement in external and internal quality assurance activities. Despite the fact that the ESQA project aims to provide recommendations for the enhancement of stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance, linking it to the state of play of student participation in internal quality assurance processes is essential to understand its implications on their external involvement.

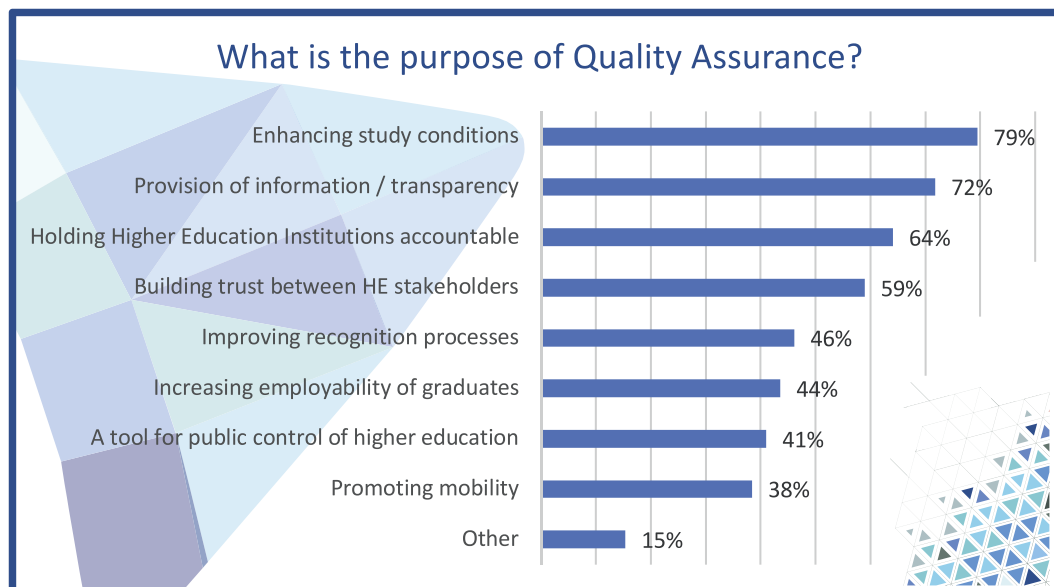
Purpose of QA from the students' perspective

Students, as one of the key stakeholders, believe that quality assurance of higher education should have multiple purposes. The role that quality assurance plays as a policy and improvement tool has changed significantly in recent years.

Figure 11 presents the views that National Unions of Students have on the purpose of quality assurance. Among all responses, the highest value of quality assurance is enhancing study conditions (79%), which proves that amongst students there is a belief in a continuous improvement of programmes. The next two highly valued answers are very much in line with the purposes of the revised *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education (ESG)*, which aim to make higher education more transparent and accountable: information provision and transparency (72%) and holding higher education institutions accountable (64%).

²⁶ The countries are: Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Israel (outside of EHEA).

Figure 11: According to your NUS what is the purpose of quality assurance (multiple answers were possible)

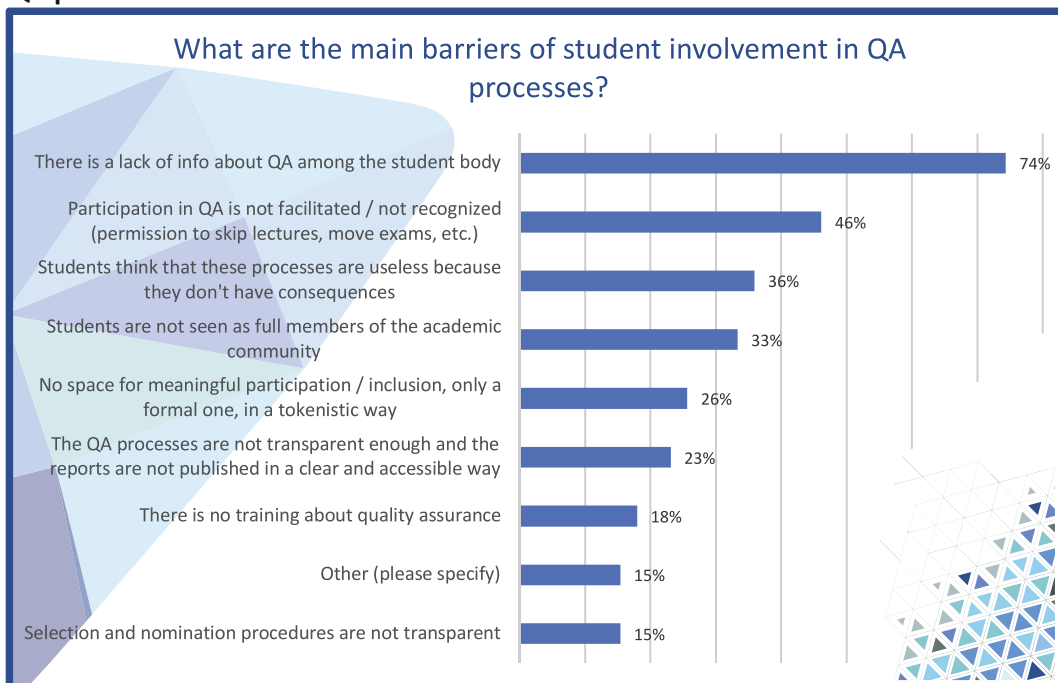


To successfully meet these purposes, the external quality assurance systems should focus on a combination of institutional evaluation and programme accreditation, where the latter might operate more flexibly if institutions could demonstrate the effectiveness of their internal quality assurance. The application of both complementary approaches seems to be the most common and popular solution among European countries.

Barriers in student involvement in QA processes


There are many obstacles that have a negative impact on the enhancement of student involvement in quality assurance. For all levels and structures, thorough and consistent work should be dedicated to ensuring the equal, fair and meaningful engagement of students. The position of students has been empowered on the policy level, but the real involvement is not yet a reality. The maintenance of standards from the ESG has been mainly achieved, although according to the real-life implementation, it is not yet fully supported by the accomplishment of the guidelines. The figure below presents the obstacles to student involvement in quality assurance processes that the respondents from student unions find significant.

Figure 12: According to your NUS what are the main barriers of student involvement in QA processes



The majority of respondents (74%) stated that the lack of information on quality assurance among the student representatives is the main obstacle to their involvement. The provision of information plays a crucial role in quality assurance processes. The lack of relevant information causes either the exclusion of students or diminishes meaningful participation. Moreover, it harms the involvement of any stakeholder group, causing inequalities in their access to information. When students lack information about procedures or programmes, or when they are not supported enough to be involved in the decision-making process, they are left out of having any ownership of and enthusiasm for the process and consequently are not able to ensure any meaningful student perspective in the quality assurance processes.

Next, 46% of respondents reported that participation in quality assurance processes is either not facilitated well or recognized by higher education institutions (HEIs) and 36% of NUS stated that the lack of tangible results harms the belief, confidence and trust in a quality assurance process. This in turn results in resistance from students to be meaningfully active in the quality assurance, as they are convinced that their engagement will be fruitless. Closing the feedback loop to ensure that students see their contribution is taken into account and improvements are made is one of the solutions that will ensure some real impact and will prove in the eyes of students that quality assurance can really bring positive change.



33% of the student unions reported that students do not feel that they are seen as full members of their academic communities. While analysing the responses to all the above-mentioned questions, it may be observed that the lack of an equal position for students is experienced at all levels of quality assurance, from institutional involvement to the participation in review panels.

State-of-play regarding student involvement in QA

External QA processes

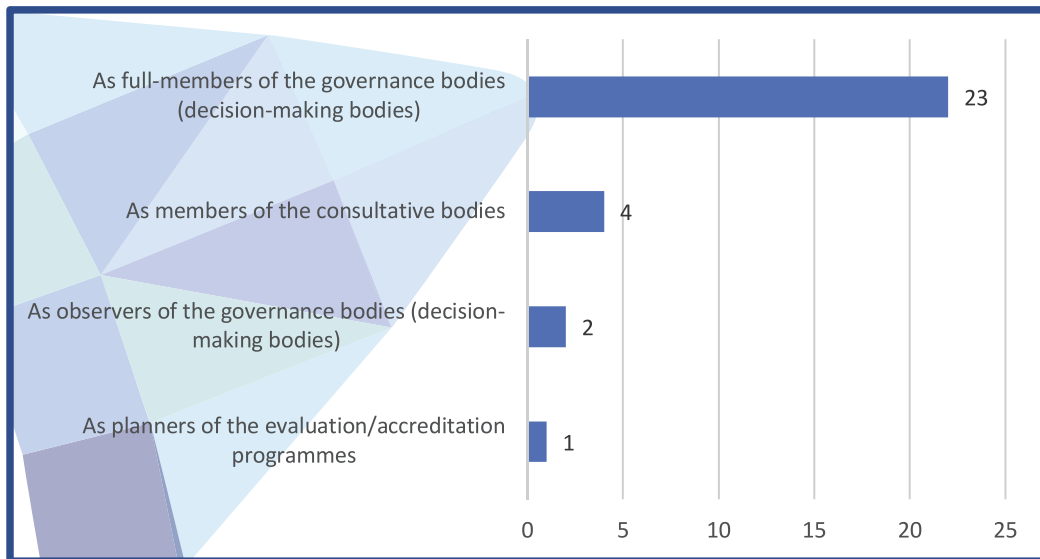
For student involvement in external quality assurance, the ESG adopted in 2015 offer a firm guarantee. Accordingly, a majority of respondents of the survey (over 90%) reported that students are included in external quality assurance as full panel members; the remaining answers indicate less committed ways for student participation. According to the rest of the responses, this involvement is limited to either being an observer or a source of information. In some countries, students can take the position of a chair or a secretary in external review panels. The involvement of students within external quality assurance processes seems to be ensured by agencies' compliance with the ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts; however, meaningful participation of students varies amongst the countries.

Governance of QA – student involvement

In the survey, student unions were asked to indicate what role students have in the governance of quality assurance agencies (figure 13). 74% of the student unions reported that students are involved in the governance of quality assurance agencies. 23 out of the 28 unions that reported involvement of students in the governance of quality assurance agencies indicate that students are full members of decision-making bodies, while four unions stated that in their countries, students are members of consultative bodies. However, there are two unions that reported student involvement in both governance and administrative bodies (in Romania) and governance and planning of the programmes (in the Czech Republic). The role of students as an observer was the case in Switzerland and Sweden. Only one union from the Czech Republic indicated that students were involved as planners of evaluation/accreditation programmes. The gathered responses show that there is still room for improvement, especially in the countries where student involvement in the governance is not the case (26% of respondents).



Figure 13: According to your NUS what is the involvement of students in QA governance processes




The survey also examined how students are consulted by the government on the national level about quality assurance matters. These results indicate a concerning situation. Twenty respondents (53%) affirmed that they were consulted, while 13 unions reported that they were not being consulted. Six unions did not know if the government consults students on the national level or not, which can mean that in recent times there have not been any consultations. The ways of consulting students differ between countries. Usually, students are members of consultative bodies (through quality assurance agencies or led by a ministry), and they provide direct feedback from national unions of students, attend consultation meetings and workshops for the sector etc. Some unions reported that there is no regular consultative process applied. Instead, the students are consulted only when governments change laws and are obliged to get the opinions of stakeholders. As in other cases, unions indicated here again that even when consulted, the students' voice is not often heard or valued, and usually the consultation is conducted at a late stage of the law-making process when negotiations around major changes is no longer possible.

Selection of experts and training for students

The well-functioning process of selection and training of student experts plays a crucial role for a positive and meaningful engagement of students in quality assurance. Student experts involved by quality assurance agencies are also usually directly linked to the student unions on the local level, which often brings indirect impact on enhanced student participation in internal quality assurance at universities.





Students that receive training from agencies are often capable of transferring the knowledge to students involved at the local level. Due to the natural student life cycle, students are usually interested in and capable of becoming quality assurance experts for a shorter period in comparison to other stakeholder group representatives. A well-organised recruitment and training process is essential for ensuring the smooth transfer of knowledge, capabilities and skills that are required from experts within the assessment panels. Well-functioning student expert pools play a crucial role in providing organisational possibilities to facilitate a platform where students and quality assurance agencies can mutually support each other. 27 respondents reported on the inclusion of students in quality assurance expert pools, while 10 stated that such pools do not exist, or they do not include students. In 10 cases the pool is operated by the national student union, and in 12 the responsibility belongs to the quality assurance agency. The rest of the answers stated that there exists a joint approach for managing the pools by a National Union of Students and a quality assurance agency. In a few cases (Slovakia, Hungary, Montenegro), the establishment of a pool is currently ongoing.

Lessons learnt

In order to enhance the student involvement in quality assurance processes, the main focus needs to be put on building an environment of mutual trust in HEIs and quality assurance agencies. Quality assurance should be treated as a tool for building the quality culture in higher education institutions rather than a set of formal procedures. As there is no one-size-fits-all solution, individual approaches should be applied at each institution, both in internal and external quality assurance systems. In order to ensure active participation, stakeholders need to acknowledge the role of quality assurance and see the measurable outcomes for all parties involved. A diversity of approaches should be ensured. Trust-building, access to information and transparency are being perceived as increasingly important purposes of quality assurance, so a focus should be given to these issues to ensure equal opportunities in quality assurance. Students want to be a part of the governance, decision-making, and improvements, but their roles have to be meaningful; therefore, further reforms in quality assurance have to place students in a position that ensures partnership and possibilities for real involvement. The outcomes of student participation in quality assurance, such as enhancing study programmes, learning methodologies, assessment procedures, support systems etc. that are implemented through the follow-up procedures should be more visible for a broader student body. Quality assurance tends to be introduced just for the sake of procedures, while its impact is crucial, so students want to see real results from quality assurance and their involvement.



Student participation in higher education governance is one of the fundamental values of the EHEA; therefore, any quality assurance reform has to include the students' voice in the process, ensure their meaningful engagement and effectful cooperation with other stakeholders involved.







EURASHE's constituency's perspective on stakeholder involvement in quality assurance

EURASHE's Working Group "Learning and Teaching" (WG L&T) members were interviewed to share their opinion regarding the involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance. Most of the members were and are involved in extensive collaboration with the world of work and have substantial experience in higher education institutions' (HEIs) and employers' common efforts for quality assurance. EURASHE's constituency sees quality assurance as one integral system, where internal and external processes are interrelated, and where a synchronised and balanced approach between the two ensures the best outcomes for learning and teaching in higher education.


Stakeholder involvement in QA – good practices and challenges

The involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance activities is very important. Stakeholders can participate in various quality assurance activities, including programme committees, examination panels, university councils, final paper defence committees, twin teaching and the preparation of internships, as well as various consultations for the content of study programmes. Possible areas for fruitful cooperation between academia and stakeholders could be the joint elaboration and improvement of quality assurance procedures for practical placements, and quality evaluation of generic competencies (autonomy, responsibility etc.).

Structural consultations with stakeholders often result in comments and advice with a certain quality-enhancing effect. However, they rarely result in fundamental changes. Rather, in most of the cases, the changes could be described as minor improvements. The agenda of stakeholder consultations are often too general and too broad. On the other hand, organising meetings with stakeholders with a very specific agenda and outlining their contribution to specific issues can be very fruitful.

Due to time constraints and insufficient resources or practical knowledge, decision-makers may not always devote enough time or energy to looking at their plans from the different perspectives. However, systematic structural consultations with stakeholders are in this regard a valuable instrument to perform, for instance, a final quality check before the launch of a new plan.

Stakeholders can be involved in both internal and external quality assurance activities. What is important for both cases is first to determine very precisely the role of stakeholders and what is expected from them so that they understand the logic of the system, the rules etc., and then to have a common language to ensure mutual understanding and to ask the right questions.



Diversity is a challenge, not in the sense that the plurality of experience is an obstacle, but rather it can be difficult to homogenize these experiences to come up with a workable quality assurance system that is not too disparate to navigate and implement.

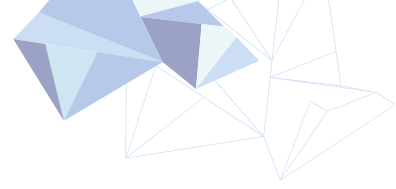
A good practice or approach is to take into account the varying levels of legitimacy of stakeholders and their different “stakes”. For instance, a national government may have a different viewpoint on quality assurance from that of students, faculty, administrators etc. The prioritization of issues or key themes with quality assurance stakeholders is also a challenge. At the same time, good practice allows for issues that transcend the system across the board to be singled out and prioritized and treats smaller, less frequent issues as having “less weight”. There needs to be a willingness from HEIs and from a variety of stakeholders to understand and value the sector’s diverse priorities.

To optimize the involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance, it is important that HEIs involve them as early as possible in the process. Stakeholder involvement from the first moment (i.e. involving them already during the first brainstorming sessions and the first drafts of new plans) is necessary to maximise the effect of stakeholder consultations.

In the context of professional higher education (PHE) institutions, the term “stakeholder” is very broad. The regional engagement of those institutions is – or should be – very strongly connected to all stakeholders, at local and regional levels. Each region has its own ecosystem, so the relations and priorities of who is the most important stakeholder may differ from region to region, as well as from institution to institution.

Usually, the very start of stakeholder involvement is quite hard. From PHE institutions’ perspective it may be hard to have employers articulate what to expect in five or ten years, or to define new, necessary competences. The employers, on the other hand, may feel that the institutions are not cooperative and do not provide graduates with useful competencies. Thus, the dialogue between the two may be challenging. However, in all societies, everyone is in a relationship and dependant on each other. The regional situation at any given moment usually mirrors the communication and collaboration among all the stakeholders, so it should be in all parties’ interest to have a closer cooperation.

One of the easiest ways for a PHE institution to broaden its cooperation with the region is to employ an experienced, regionally well-respected professional who has spent at least 20 to 25 years working in regional companies and is an expert in a relevant scientific field. The companies will see such a person as one of their own, and the invisible walls between HEIs and stakeholders may start to fall. This approach broadens the horizon for fruitful cooperation, and when other PHE staff is introduced to employers by the expert, they are warmly welcomed.



Co-operation between companies and PHE institutions can also be established through teaching staff undertaking placements in companies. An annual or biannual placement of a few weeks can help to keep teaching staff's knowledge up to date and contribute to their professional development.

Ways to improve the co-operation between HEIs and stakeholders to tackle future challenges

It is always difficult to involve people from the world of work in quality assurance processes. One practical solution for a study programme could be to establish a permanent group of at least five people, including an alumnus. The group should meet periodically and demonstrably show what they think. Each HEI should also have a group that constantly monitors developments in the labour market and passes them on to the management of higher education programmes.

It is also useful to create networks and organise study days and workshops. Stakeholders often do not know where to turn to with questions. Thus, there should be a structure at the HEI for discussions and networks involving the stakeholders. Each member of the team for a study programme (or a department) should be responsible for one of the stakeholders. Once a year there could be a one-day session for the stakeholders during which the team member reports on the most recent developments.


In the near future, themes such as the European Green Deal and the responsibility of higher education on matters such as democracy, civil responsibility, defence of Western values – emancipation, freedom of speech and religion – will be very important. In order to succeed in meeting those types of future challenges, it will also be very important to consult more indirect stakeholders like the civil society, future students and the local environment.

The productive involvement of stakeholders means that HEIs should organise consultations with a mix of the different stakeholder groups, as well as separate meetings with specific stakeholder groups. Meetings where the internal stakeholders meet the external ones are rarely organised. On the other hand, to discuss certain themes in-depth, it is necessary to have separate meetings with certain stakeholders.

Co-operation may also be improved by the creation and development of co-operation platforms. For instance, the Sectoral Skills Councils²⁷, created in Poland, allows entrepreneurs to influence the educational services of schools, universities and training institutions. Entrepreneurs know what qualifications and skills are needed in their industries and the Sectoral Councils enable them to share this knowledge.

²⁷ <https://en.parp.gov.pl/#training-and-skills-improvement>





As a result, the educational and economic sectors learn about their mutual needs, and the skills acquired at schools, universities, and training courses are more likely to respond to the real needs of employers.

Carefully-designed and shared governance can also improve co-operation between HEIs and stakeholders to tackle future challenges. This is not to be said as a new “creative” way to go about managing the changing needs of HEIs, but in the sense of assigning more accountability to different parts. Another method could be a project-based approach that engages stakeholders in projects that essentially offer an efficient framework of operation and co-operation. Co-operation and performance may also be facilitated by sharing or rotating the centre of co-operation, and as such changing who is considered an internal stakeholder and who an external one. If, for example, an HEI is at the centre (where a project starts/is carried out etc.), then industry and government are external. This may affect the engagement to varying degrees. A rotation that includes government-encouraged projects with stakeholders from other areas or industry-based initiatives could help balance out this disparity.

Co-operation benefits all parties involved. PHE institutions can offer local/regional stakeholders the know-how and research opportunities and in return the companies offer real experience regarding tools, developments, innovations etc. in the relevant professional field. PHE staff is regularly upskilled not only theoretically but also practically and has regular contact with the local/regional companies in the relevant scientific area. PHE institutions provide students with real up-to-date cases of in-company problem-solving issues, in the relevant scientific area. Moreover, PHE staff can identify opportunities for the development of new curricula, modules or programmes. Employers can share their newest technology with PHE staff (to include it in their teaching) and gain a high-level professional that might propose out-of-the-box innovations for their existing routine. Thanks to the co-operation between PHE institutions and companies, employers may be more likely to support their employees in their decision to join upskilling or reskilling courses in a PHE institution, and employees may be more motivated to take those courses. Both PHE institutions and employers might identify research, development and innovation opportunities. Such systemic co-operation brings endless benefits to all stakeholders, but most of all to the local and regional community and society as a whole.

Interview participants

1. **Hans Daale.** General manager of LEIDO, an independent network in the Netherlands, involved in lifelong learning. Former Dean of Faculty in the HES Amsterdam School of Business (until 2005). He was also a Project manager in the University of Applied Sciences of Amsterdam (until 2007).



Since 2013, he has chaired CHAIN5, the community of practice for level 5. Member of the EURASHE Working Group on Learning and Teaching.

2. **Carol Costley.** PhD, Professor of Work and Learning, Director of the pan-university Work and Learning Research Centre in the Department of Education, Middlesex University, London.
3. **Danutė Rasimavičienė.** Lecturer at the School of Management of Vilnius University in Lithuania. Former Dean of the Faculty of Business Management of Vilnius University of Applied Sciences. Former member of the EURASHE Working Group on Learning and Teaching.
4. **Johanna Baeyens.** Former Dean of the Department of Social Work at Arteveldehogeschool in Ghent, Belgium. Former Senior Policy Advisor of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), The Hague. Member of the EURASHE Working Group on Learning and Teaching
5. **Marek Frankowicz.** Prof., Dr. Hab. in Theoretical Chemistry and expert on Higher Education reforms. Coordinator for Quality and Internationalization at State Higher Vocational School in Tarnow and Associate Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. Member of the Development Cooperation Working Group of the Coimbra Group. Member of the Working Group for Polish National Qualifications Framework.
6. **Themis Kaniklidou.** Dr., Associate Professor of Translation Studies at Hellenic American University. Associate Director of the PhD program in Applied Linguistics and Coordinator of the MA in Translation. Director of Hellenic American College.
7. **Alicia-Leonor Sauli-Miklavčič.** Head of Development of Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges (HVC). Member of the EURASHE Board and Working Group for Learning and Teaching. Project for the Short Cycle Higher Education in Europe.
8. **Jan Beseda.** Ph.D., research fellow at the Higher Education Studies of Czech Republic (CHES), specialist of Distant Education and Media Technologies.







Conclusion

The results of the survey for quality assurance agencies confirm that quality assurance agencies involve various stakeholders in various ways. The most well-known stakeholders – students, teaching staff, employers and other staff at higher education institutions – are the ones involved the most across all the surveyed agencies, whereas civil society and local authorities are involved only by a small part of the agencies.

The level of involvement of the different stakeholder groups varies depending on the type of external quality assurance activity. For instance, the main stakeholder groups as identified above are largely involved in evaluations – although work remains for full engagement – while they are not as extensively represented in the agencies' different bodies (e.g. decision-making and governing structures).

Similarly, the ESU and EURASHE chapters indicate that effort remains for full and meaningful stakeholder engagement – beyond formal requirements – and that there are still barriers hindering effective engagement in both internal and external quality assurance activities. For instance, students report that a lack of information about quality assurance among student bodies is the main barrier for student involvement in quality assurance processes. The interviews with EURASHE's members, in turn, reveal that finding a common dialogue with employers and higher education institutions remains a challenge.

It is noteworthy to remember that different stakeholders have different views on and aims for their engagement and quality assurance. Thus, when considering stakeholder involvement, it is important to acknowledge that it cannot be treated in a homogeneous manner. Different stakeholder categories have their own characteristics, which need to be kept in mind when searching for new ways of effective involvement.

What seems to be common to all groups is, however, the importance of seeing the impact of one's involvement. Therefore, it is vital to communicate clearly about the results of stakeholder engagement.

Moreover, it is important to remember the national context where stakeholder involvement is considered. The study results indicate that national contexts of higher education and quality assurance systems and frameworks, as well as the maturity of agencies, the degree of mutual trust and the cultural dimensions, are important aspects to consider when reflecting the ways to build and ensure effective involvement of stakeholders.







Annex 1 – Partner QAAs present their stakeholder involvement

ANACEC, Republic of Moldova

1. General description of the QA agency

a) Name and country of agency National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research, Republic of Moldova
b) Number of employees 38 employees (of which 2 employees in the Department of Evaluation in Higher Education)
c) Number of HEIs in the country in question 26 (17 public universities/9 private universities)
d) Number of students in HEIs in the country in question 2018-2019 – 60,600 students
e) Scope of activities: How many quality assurance activities has your agency undertaken in the last two years? In the last two years, ANACEC (formerly ANACIP) has undertaken the following major activities: I. Elaboration of normative and methodological acts – 35; II. Evaluation of the study programmes in Higher Education in order to authorize them for provisional operation and accreditation – 291; accreditation – 229; provisional operation – 62; III. Certification of scientific staff.
f) Is your agency involved in quality assurance of higher education abroad? The President of ANACEC, Andrei Chiciuc, has participated in study programme assessments abroad as an international expert, appointed by other quality assurance agencies.



2. Agency's main QA activities with stakeholders

QA activity	Stakeholder groups involved in the activity	Formal or informal?	Frequency (how often?)
Institutional evaluation	Teaching staff, Students, Business representatives	Formal	Upon request by the HEI / founder / MECR
Study programme evaluation	Teaching staff, Students, Business representatives	Formal	Upon request by the HEI / founder / MECR
Governing Board of the Agency	Teaching staff, Students, Business representatives	Formal	At least once a month
Development and revision of external QA standards and procedures, QA tools	Teaching staff, Students, Business representatives, National HE authority (Ministry of Education, Culture and Research – MECR), Others (National Council of Rectors), Higher education institutions	Formal	Periodically, as needed
Interviews during and after site visits	Teaching staff, Students, Business representatives, Higher education institutions	Formal	Twice a year
Members in the external assessment panels	Teaching staff, Students, Business representatives	Formal	At least twice a year
Dissemination of results of external assessments	Teaching staff, National Council of Rectors), Civil society, Higher education institutions	Formal	Twice a year
Development of the national regulatory framework	National HE authority (Ministry of Education, Culture and Research – MECR)	Formal	As needed
Approval of Governing Board decisions on external assessment results	National HE authority (Ministry of Education, Culture and Research – MECR)	Formal	At least twice a year



Public discussion of QA tools: methodologies guidelines, procedures etc.	Others (Civil society)	Formal/ Informal	Periodically (by publishing on agency's website, social networking sites, national public consultation website www.particip.gov.md)
Organisation of seminars, conferences, round tables, joint events etc.	Higher education institutions	Formal	Periodically

3. SWOT-analysis of stakeholder involvement in external QA activities

a) Strengths in the current level of activities (what do you succeed in and why?)

1. Awareness of the need for external evaluation by all higher education institutions by requesting the external evaluation of a large number of study programmes during the submission periods of the self-evaluation files;
2. Increasing the satisfaction of the main stakeholders – educational institutions – for all categories of evaluators – the results confirmed by the answers to the biannually applied surveys;
3. Working tools (external evaluation guidelines, visit sheet) – facilitates the process and understanding of the particularities of the study programme;
4. Recognition and validation of the results of the external evaluation of the assessment panels by the Governing Board of ANACEC and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research;
5. Involvement of international experts in the evaluation of study programmes (field of Education Sciences - ARACIS);
6. Permanent questioning of beneficiaries: evaluated institutions, evaluators, and undertaking measures to continuously improve the external evaluation process;
7. The interest of the evaluated institutions in the delegation and involvement of their teaching staff in the external evaluation process;
8. The positive impact of the involvement of the evaluators in the external assessment panels on the programmes / institution of origin of the evaluator.





b) Difficulty in the current level of activities (what is not succeeding and why?)

1. The content of the self-evaluation reports for the study programmes by the higher education institutions is narrative, without the SWOT analysis of the performance indicators, the information partially meets the evaluation standards;
2. Identification of experts / evaluators (representatives of teaching staff / students) for educational institutions in the fields of Medicine, Military, Arts, Cinematography, etc.;
3. Gaps in the legal framework - the external evaluation methodology revised on 28.12.2018;
4. The over-demanding workload of the employees of the Department of Evaluation in Higher Education as a result of the large number of evaluated study programmes, coordinated assessment panels;
5. The lack of student associations;
6. The lack of professional associations.

c) The biggest challenges (obstacles)

1. Involvement of experts from the private sector;
2. Remuneration of expert evaluators;
3. Improving the content of the external evaluation report;
4. Proposals to improve the legal framework are partially taken into consideration by the decision makers;
5. Involvement of ANACEC experts in evaluating study programmes abroad at other agencies.


d) Possibilities and opportunities (in a future perspective)

1. Random questioning of students / teaching staff during the external evaluation visit to the institution;
2. Identification and involvement of international experts in the external evaluation process;
3. Continuous completion and renewal of the database of evaluators with different categories: employers from different fields, international experts;
4. Participation in international projects with other quality assurance agencies;
5. Ensuring visibility on the media channels of the agency and in various events of the representatives of the business environment ("free marketing").

4. Prioritization and outcome

a) What is your agency's main purpose of involving stakeholders in external QA?

One of the major objectives of ANACEC is to evaluate study programmes and the capacity of organisations providing vocational education and training, higher education and continuous education in order to meet quality standards.



In this sense, ANACEC developed, in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) and national education standards, and published its own *Methodology of external quality evaluation for provisional authorization and accreditation of vocational education and training, higher education and continuous education study programmes and institutions* which was approved by Government Decision no. 616 of 18.05.2016, and subsequently amended by Government Decision no. 1270 of 26.12.2018.

According to the provisions of the *Regulation on the organization and operation of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research*, approved by Government Decisions no. 201 of February 28, 2018 (subsequently amended by GD 248 of April 24, 2019) and the *Methodology of external quality evaluation for provisional authorization and accreditation of vocational education and training, higher education and continuous education study programmes and institutions*, the study programmes and higher education institutions will be evaluated by the external assessment panels formed by expert evaluators (teaching staff, students, and business representatives) with competencies in the field of professional training of the study programme, selected from the agency's own register of evaluators.

Also, these three categories of stakeholders are involved in institutional evaluations, study programme evaluations, the Governing Board of the agency, the development and revision of external QA standards and procedures, interviews during and after site visits, the external assessment panels, and dissemination of results of external assessments.

Other categories of stakeholders mentioned above are mainly involved in the development and revision of external QA standards, procedures, dissemination of results of external assessments, development of the national regulatory framework, approval of Governing board decisions, and public discussion of QA tools.

b) What is important to you regarding stakeholder involvement in quality assurance activities?

Teaching staff:

- to know the provisions of the normative acts in the field, the national strategies in the field;
- to be objective, impartial in the external evaluation process;
- to have the relevant teaching and / or research experience in the evaluated field;
- the results of the didactic and / or research activity to be recognized at national / international level.

Students:

- to have good academic results in the study programme in which they study;
- to be objective in the process of external evaluation;
- to participate actively in projects of academic mobility, student scientific conferences, academic life.

Employers:

- to have relevant experience in the professional field;
- to know the features / peculiarities of the higher education system;

Higher education institutions:

- to prepare the self-assessment report in accordance with the requirements formulated in the agency's working instruments;
- to know the recommendations and provisions of the QA legal framework in force, both national and international.

National authorities/MECR:

- to approve the decisions regarding the external evaluation of the study programmes / educational institutions made by the Governing Board of ANACEC;
- to know and take into consideration the recommendations in the field of QA at European and international level in the development of national legal framework.

c) What would you describe to be your most successful activities of involving stakeholders in the last two years?

Teaching staff: active participation in the assessment of study programmes, dissemination of good QA practices in their home institutions.

Students: active participation in the assessment of study programmes, dissemination of results among peers and faculties.

Employers: good feedback in formulation of recommendations for improving the quality of study programmes.

Higher education institutions: multiple requests for external evaluation in order to accredit, to authorize the provisional operation of the study programmes, the desire to obtain maximum results in the evaluation, the desire to take up good practices during the evaluation, the continuous improvement of the quality of the studies and of the quality assurance processes.

National authorities/MECR: Approval of external evaluation results.

d) How could you make stakeholder involvement (even) more relevant to the stakeholders?

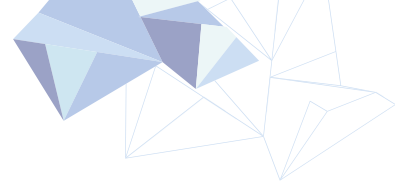
Teaching staff: participation in more than one external assessment panels, involvement and participation in various events for disseminating good practices at the institutional, local, national, regional and international levels, recognition of their expertise.

Students: recognition of students as active actors with full and equal rights in the external evaluation process, involvement in more than one external assessment panel.

Employers: free marketing, development trainings.

Higher education institutions: dissemination of results to all departments / faculties, ranking of assessment results, revision of the external evaluation approach through the process of internalization.

National authorities / MECR: communication.



ARACIS, Romania

1. General description of the QA agency

<p>a) Name and country of agency Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS – Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior), Romania</p>
<p>b) Number of employees 72 permanent staff positions (34 occupied) 21 Council members 1347 External evaluators (academics - peer-reviewers, registered in the <i>National Register of Evaluators - RNE</i>) 261 student evaluators (registered in the National Register of Evaluators - <i>Students - RNE-S</i>) 105 employers (registered in the <i>Register of Employers</i>) 39 international experts</p>
<p>c) Number of HEIs in the country in question Academic year 2019-2020: TOTAL: 97 State: 54 (all accredited) Private: 43 (34 accredited)</p>
<p>d) Number of students in HEIs in the country in question Academic year 2018-2019: Total number of students: 538,900 (54.2% female students)</p>



e) Scope of Activities: How many quality assurance activities has your agency undertaken in the last two years?

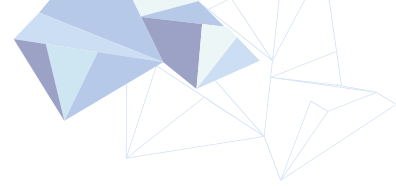
Year	Study programs		Institutions	TOTAL
	Bachelor	Master		
2018	238	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 65 Programs 11 Domains with 55 Programs 	5	319
2019	393	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 89 Programs 284 Domains with 915 Programs 	11	777

f) Is your agency involved in quality assurance of higher education abroad?

ARACIS was involved in the evaluation of study programs in the Republic of Moldova between 2014 and 2017. Moreover, members of the ARACIS staff or Council were involved in evaluations in Slovenia, Montenegro, France, Turkey, Spain, the Republic of North Macedonia and Brazil.

2. Agency's main QA activities with stakeholders

QA activity	Stakeholder groups involved in the activity	Formal or informal?	Frequency (how often?)
Periodic consultations	National HE authority, National Rectors' Conference, Teachers' unions, the Romanian Agency for Quality assurance in Pre-university Education - ARACIP.	Formal	Usually 4-6 times /year
Participation in the governing body of the agency	Teachers' unions, students' unions, employers	Formal	Meetings once/month, but the activity is permanent
Development and revision of QA standards and processes	National Rectors' Conference, teachers' unions, students' unions, national HE authority.	Formal	Each time a new procedure is developed
External evaluations for institutional, study programs and masters' domains evaluations	Students' unions	Formal	Every panel



Evaluation of engineering study programs requesting EUR ACE Label	Representatives of employers as panel members	Formal	At the request of the university
Participation in the Permanent Commissions on fields of studies	Students' unions – all commissions, employers – only in the Engineering Commissions	Formal	Meetings once/month, but the activity is permanent
Ethics Commission	Students' unions, teachers' unions	Formal	As needed

3. SWOT-analysis of stakeholder involvement in external QA activities

a) Strengths in the current level of activities (what do you succeed in and why?)

Example 1: Collaboration with the National Rectors' Council (NRC)

The ARACIS President and other members of the Executive Body of the agency are participating at all meetings of the NRC. During those meetings, issues related to the HE system in general are discussed, and the representatives of the agency can bring in the QA perspective. Moreover, representatives of the higher education institutions can express points of view related to the activity of the agency, to different procedures or on-going processes, but also associated with different methodologies, guides or procedures, before being adopted.

The latest example is related to the development of the Methodology for Evaluation of doctoral studies that have been elaborated within a working group established with representatives of the NRC, students' unions and the HE authority; the different drafts were discussed in several NRC meetings.

The constant dialogue with the HEI and the openness showed by the representatives of the agency regarding the improvement of different procedures help build trust that ultimately made the switch from consultation processes to co-creation processes possible.

Example 2: Involvement of students

Students are involved in all evaluation panels and at all levels of decision. This was made possible by consistently adapting all procedures.



b) Difficulty in the current level of activities (what is not succeeding and why?)

Example 1: Engagement of employers

It is difficult to find employer representatives that would accept to be constantly involved in the activities of the agency. Moreover, in some cases, the implication is formal, lacking relevance and effectiveness. Even for those in the engineering field – in which the collaboration has worked better for a few years already – in some circumstances, it is challenging to identify experts willing to participate in the site visits. These are mainly due to lack of time and support from their company, as well as to lack of motivation and enough knowledge regarding the higher education system and QA processes. Moreover, HEIs do not require in all cases the award of the EURACE label, which would automatically determine the involvement of one employer representative in the panel as per current procedures. This might be because of lack of information and awareness regarding the advantages that an international label is bringing in. The information sessions conducted by ARACIS on the matter have thus proved inefficient.

Example 2: Engagement of other stakeholders, such as NGOs, society at large

ARACIS is not sufficiently active on media or at different events where we could explain our role, the activities and the impact of QA, and the agency in the HE system. These might be due to a lack of specialized staff.

Example 3: Effective engagement of students

In some cases, students are not considered to be equal partners by the other members of the panel. Students became members of all evaluation panels recently, and we believe that some peer-review experts need to adapt to the new situation.

c) The biggest challenges (obstacles)

Example 1: Lack of sufficient knowledge or experience in higher education of external stakeholders, as well as motivation or interest to be involved in the time-consuming quality assurance activities, such as training sessions, participation in evaluation panels, makes their engagement in quality assurance activities persistently difficult.

Example 2: Even for those cases where stakeholders are present, the impact of their involvement is not clear.

d) Possibilities and opportunities (in a future perspective)

Example 1: New evaluation methodology and guides to be developed in 2020.



Example 2: Developing new training programs, including modules in which different categories of stakeholders can participate together with the peer-review experts.

Example 3: Involvement of employers, from fields other than engineering, in the activities of the other 10 Permanent Commissions.

Example 4: Organising regular meetings with stakeholders, including those who are not directly involved in HE.

Example 5: Raising awareness in HEIs about the importance of involving all stakeholders in their internal quality assurance processes, including in curricula design and even for the content of some courses and disciplines.

Example 6: Involving stakeholders in the follow-up activities, both by the agency and the HEI.

4. Prioritization and outcome

a) What is your agency's main purpose of involving stakeholders in external QA?

- Enhancement of the agency procedures and processes – they are continuously monitored and revised following recommendations of different stakeholders/beneficiaries or actors in HE;
- Increased relevance of external QA outcomes, by bringing in the perspectives of different stakeholders;
- Increased credibility of QA in general;
- Increased trust in the HE system.

b) What is important to you regarding stakeholder involvement in quality assurance activities?

- Raising awareness of stakeholders and of society at large, regarding the role of QA processes and in particular of ARACIS, in what concerns increased quality and relevance of the national HE system;
- Increased adequacy of QA standards and procedures;
- Provides co-responsibility with stakeholders and increases legitimacy of assessment procedures and their results.

c) What would you describe to be your most successful activities of involving stakeholders in the last two years?

- Involvement of students in all QA activities of the agency and at all levels of decision;
- Involvement of employers in QA activities in the engineering field;



- The active presence and participation of stakeholders in the Agency Council, especially students and teachers' union representatives;
- Development of the Methodology for evaluation of doctoral studies in collaboration with the National Council of Rectors representatives, students' unions and HE authority.

d) How could you make stakeholder involvement (even) more relevant to the stakeholders?

- Participation of stakeholders from the early stages in the development and revision of different standards and procedures, moving from consultation type processes to co-creation processes;
- Constant involvement of various categories of stakeholders in workshops and trainings organised by the agency, including those for the peer-review experts; to be able to discuss their ideas and perspective on HE and QA;
- Providing constant feedback to stakeholders regarding how their proposals and ideas have been taken into consideration and implemented by the agency, including by a dedicated chapter in the ARACIS annual report;
- Participation of ARACIS representatives at meetings of professional organisations, trade unions and other stakeholder events;
- Developing and applying specific questionnaires, addressed to stakeholders, aiming to better understand what the interests of stakeholders in the field of QA and HE are, including the acquired competencies and the curricula design.

DAI, Denmark

1. General description of the QA agency

<p>a) Name and country of agency Danish Accreditation Institution (DAI), Denmark</p>
<p>b) Number of employees 37 FTEs</p>
<p>c) Number of HEIs in the country in question There are 42 HEIs in Denmark, in total. (levels 5-7 in the European Qualification Framework)</p> <p>7 University Colleges 8 Academies of professional higher education</p>



<p>8 Universities 4 Police, defence and military educational institutions 3 Artistic education institutions 7 Artistic education institutions 5 Maritime Educational Institutions</p>
<p>d) Number of students in HEIs in the country in question There were 272,226 students in HEIs in 2018</p> <p>Academies of professional higher education: 24,991 Police, defence and military: 1,986 Artistic education programmes (KUM + UFM): 4,680 Maritime Educational Institutions: 3,578 University Colleges: 78,340 Universities: 158,651</p>
<p>e) Scope of Activities: How many quality assurance activities has your agency undertaken in the last two years? In the last two years (2017-2018), there were 100 quality assurance activities in total. 18 of them were institutional accreditations and 82 of them were programme accreditations.</p>
<p>f) Is your agency involved in quality assurance of higher education abroad? Not currently.</p>

2. Agency's main QA activities with stakeholders

QA activity	Stakeholder groups involved in the activity	Formal or informal?	Frequency (how often?)
Accreditation panels involvement in the process	Accreditation panels	Formal	During every accreditation process
Ongoing dialogue with QA management at the institutions throughout the accreditation process	HEIs	Formal and informal	Ongoing/during the accreditation process



STAR (The Students' Accreditation Council)	Student representatives from the national student bodies	Formal	Twice a year
Development of the revised concept for institutional accreditation (IA 2.0)	HEIs (rector conferences, QA managers other administrative staff)	Formal	Once (a period from Spring 2018 until Fall 2019)
Analysis projects	Labour market representatives, HEIs, Students, organisations	Formal and informal	Ongoing as needed (approx. once a year)

3. SWOT-analysis of stakeholder involvement in external QA activities

a) Strengths in the current level of activities (what do you succeed in and why?)

Example 1 – student involvement

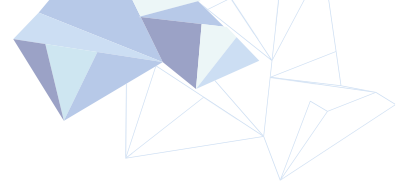
Student representatives have been included in the accreditation panels from the very establishment of the accreditation system and students are always interviewed during site visits. With the transition to institutional accreditation, we saw a need for further formalisation of the ongoing dialogue with the student organisations on issues related to quality assurance and to gather their views on the usefulness of the methodology applied in the accreditation work. When we organised the Students' Accreditation Council (STAR) it was with the purpose of getting a formal dialogue with students to give them a voice in accreditation and to learn more about the student perspectives on accreditation. Through STAR many good initiatives have been introduced and it has strengthened our dialogue with students both formally and informally. STAR has also played a key role in providing input to the revised guidelines for institutional accreditation.

Example 2: From formal involvement to co-creation with stakeholders

One initiative taken in this regard was establishing a dialogue group consisting of IQA officials appointed by the HEIs and representing the different sector and levels of HE in Denmark. The dialogue group worked closely with us on designing, defining and developing the new guidelines for institutional accreditation (see above). Another relevant initiative was hosting a conference on Student-Centred Learning, where participants from all HEIs in Denmark were invited to discuss the expectations on student-centred learning stipulated in the ESG.

Example 3: Thematic analysis projects

DAI takes stakeholders' perspectives into account through its analysis projects, where stakeholders are invited to discuss proposed subjects for analysis and to participate in the analysis as informants.



b) Difficulty in the current level of activities (what is not succeeding and why?)

Example 1: Can('t) have it both ways? Balancing the roles as both advisor/expert and decision-making body

We experience that our ambition to disseminate and distribute knowledge between HEIs on a more informal level in the role as advisor or expert in QA is difficult at times. Two perspectives can explain our challenges:

- 1) The two-faces of control and development: We are by law obligated to control the institutions quality assurance work, but we still want to involve the HEIs as dialogue partners. How can we fulfil our obligation to evaluate the HEIs, and at the same time advise the institutions on how to develop their quality work? This balance is continuously debated within our agency and with the institutions as well.
- 2) Institutions are reluctant/hesitant to share concerns or obstacles in their QA work with DAI. This issue is closely tied to the perspective above. The institutions know that we will have to assess their IQA practice at some point; thus, they are hesitant to share problems and concerns with DAI.

Example 2: Labour market representatives

We find it difficult at times to establish an ongoing dialogue with labour market representatives. EQA might not be of their main interest and often we find that they are more interested in broader political topics that reaches beyond the scope of DAI's core task.

c) The biggest challenges (obstacles)

Example 1: Finding common grounds within a tied framework.

Compared with many of the other European quality assurance agencies DAI's core tasks are defined in a quite narrow framework. We need to address topics related to EQA and cannot address issues related more widely to HEIs – even if these issues might be linked to or relevant for quality assurance. A narrow activity portfolio provides fewer opportunities to engage with stakeholders.

Example 2: Direct dialogue with the local level at HEI

We have a close collaboration with top management and IQA management at the HEIs, but engaging directly with relevant levels of local management and teachers is difficult at times.





d) Possibilities and opportunities (in a future perspective)

Example 1: Meetings with labour market representatives

DAI is in the process of developing a new strategy for our work on collecting, disseminating and sharing knowledge between HEIs. We are planning to conduct a number of so-called “coffee meetings” with labour market representatives to receive input on possible subjects for analysis and input for communicating the results more effectively. Also, we would like to discuss the role that DAI can/should play in developing the HEI from a labour market perspective.

Example 2: Redefining our role

We want to strengthen our position as experts of quality assurance and promote our role as potential advisors/consultants on quality assurance issues. We do not have specific activities planned to address the ambition, but we believe that a closer dialogue and collaboration with the HEIs will enable us to achieve this ambition.

4. Prioritization and outcome

a) What is your agency’s main purpose of involving stakeholders in external QA?

- Improving methodology and processes
- De-bureaucratization
- Identifying blind spots
- Empowering stakeholders
- Legitimacy
- Transparency

b) What is important to you regarding stakeholder involvement in quality assurance activities?

We find that stakeholders, especially students and the HEIs, are very valuable partners when developing DAI’s methods and processes. They contribute with practical experiences (the daily life of teaching and learning and quality assurance) that is important for assuring that our EQA activities are as efficient and relevant to the institutions as possible. DAI finds that a continuous dialogue with stakeholders is pivotal for ensuring that the accreditation system remains fit-for-purpose.

c) What would you describe to be your most successful activities of involving stakeholders in the last two years?

Institutional accreditation 2.0 – stakeholder involvement in revising the guidelines

The involvement in stakeholders in the development of the new guidelines for institutional accreditation is one of the most significant steps that DAI has taken to strengthening the involvement of stakeholders in recent years. The dialogue group (consisting of representatives from IQA management at different institutions) has provided us with a much deeper understanding of the needs and wishes of the HEIs. The process has ensured a mutual adjustment of expectations, pointing out ambiguities in the guidelines and secured a much greater buy-in from the HEIs.

Student involvement in revising the new guidelines

DAI has worked to ensure a close involvement of students in revising the new guidelines as well. One initiative was inviting STAR members, student representatives from expert panels and student representatives from the Accreditation Council to a seminar in autumn 2018 to provide input on an overall framework for the new concept and, more specifically, how student-centred learning can be included in the institutional accreditation concept. Specific elements of the new guidelines have been a recurring item on the agendas for the STAR meetings over the past year.

SCL-conference – inviting stakeholders to discuss expectations and requirements.

In spring 2019, DAI hosted a conference on student-centred learning (SCL) that brought together management, QA officials, teachers, professors, students, and the Ministry of Higher Education and Research. Based on presentations, panel discussions and general debates, participants shared their experiences with SCL initiatives and discussed what requirements and expectations to incorporate in future accreditation processes.

d) How could you make stakeholder involvement (even) more relevant to the stakeholders?

Expressing how activities are relevant and input is used

Regarding the involvement of labour market representatives, we expect that the “coffee meetings” (see description above) may serve as inspiration, showing how EQA is relevant and how input can be used to develop HEI from a labour market perspective as well.

From collaboration to collaborative partnerships

The close partnership with the dialogue group in revising the guidelines for institutional accreditation showed that stakeholders could contribute to the development of guidelines, memorandums, etc. more directly. Collaborative partnerships are not easy to establish or control, but the payoffs have been very positive, and they are important to maintain a fit-for-purpose approach to EQA.

Facilitate knowledge sharing and communicate stakeholder perspectives relevant for the internal discussions at DAI

The conference on student-centred learning provided a departure point for discussions with external stakeholders and communicated a stakeholder perspective in the internal discussions of DAI on how to measure and assess student-centred learning in the second round of institutional accreditation. More importantly, it showed us that we can assume the role of facilitating knowledge sharing among stakeholders who are not solely representing IQA officials and top management at HEIs. Also, it showed that we do not need to be experts to engage in discussions about specific topics closely related to teaching and learning. We would consider holding a similar conference within the next couple of years with a relevant theme related to quality assurance, given our limited mandate.

Hcéres, France

1. General description of the QA agency

a) Name and country of agency High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres), France
b) Number of employees 120 administrative staff and 107 scientific staff
c) Number of HEIs in the country in question 3,500 public or private HEIs (among them 70 universities)




d) Number of students in HEIs in the country in question 2,610,000 students registered in France (2016-2017)
e) Scope of Activities: How many quality assurance activities has your agency undertaken in the last two years? 3,240 in two years (HEIs, research units, programmes and doctoral schools)
f) Is your agency involved in quality assurance of higher education abroad? Yes: 45 reports published (HEIs and programmes)

2. Agency's main QA activities with stakeholders

QA activity	Stakeholder groups involved in the activity	Formal or informal?	Frequency (how often?)
Involvement in the evaluation panels	Students	Formal	Always
Involvement in the evaluation panels	Representatives of the socio-economic world	Formal	Always
Involvement in the decision-making process (Board-members)	Students' unions	Formal	1 per trimester
Involvement in the decision-making process (Board-members)	Professional bodies	Formal	1 per trimester
Involvement in the decision-making process (Board-members)	Teaching staff	Formal	1 per trimester
Involvement in the decision-making process (Board-members)	University associations	Formal	1 per trimester
Involvement in the decision-making process (Board-members)	Representatives from the Parliament	Formal	1 per trimester
Involvement in the decision-making process (Board-members)	Representatives from another QAA	Formal	1 per trimester





Meetings, conferences	Representatives from the ministries	Formal and Informal	Monthly basis
Meetings, conferences	Rectors' conferences	Formal and Informal	Monthly basis

3. SWOT-analysis of stakeholder involvement in external QA activities

<p>a) Strengths in the current level of activities (what do you succeed in and why?)</p> <p>Example 1: Students and representatives of the socio-economic world take part in all evaluation panels</p> <p>Example 2: Hcéres Board is composed of several kind of stakeholders (diversity, representativeness, responsibility)</p> <p>Example 3: Training for all experts including video and webinars</p>
<p>b) Difficulty in the current level of activities (what is not succeeding and why?)</p> <p>Example 1: Attract the stakeholders to our activities and demonstrate their added value (to them, to the institutions, to the public)</p> <p>Example 2: Have a general policy at the Hcéres level on stakeholder involvement (very decentralized, no global objective)</p>
<p>c) The biggest challenges (obstacles)</p> <p>Example 1: Identify the stakeholders and have regular contacts with them (fruitful dialogue and cooperation)</p> <p>Example 2: Renew the activities that involve stakeholders (some have worked in the past, some not, but still need to diversify the activities)</p> <p>Example 3: Find a balance between different objectives: information, accountability, involvement etc.</p>
<p>d) Possibilities and opportunities (in a future perspective)</p> <p>Example 1: New decree for involvement of entrepreneurs in the Board</p> <p>Example 2: New legislation on Education and Research in 2020</p> <p>Example 3: New Hcéres President in 2020</p>

4. Prioritization and outcome

a) What is your agency's main purpose of involving stakeholders in external QA?

The involvement of stakeholders is based mainly on three pillars:

- Respect for the ESG: Hcéres has to involve stakeholders and to make sure that Hcéres procedures will be recognized worldwide;
- The evaluation in France is designed to serve stakeholders. The activities of Hcéres reflect the public authorities' dual commitments to:
 - ✓ making a single body responsible for evaluating clusters of higher education and research institutions, individual institutions, research units and study programmes, or, where applicable, for verifying the quality of the evaluations carried out by other bodies;
 - ✓ providing a dedicated evaluation tool for higher education and research institutions or their groupings and stakeholders in general at the national level in France.
- The strategy of Hcéres: the aim of the evaluation is to guide institutions or their groupings in their QA approach. Hcéres acts as a partner of the institutions, helping them to progress and achieve their strategic objectives. Its evaluation provides them with a key tool for defining their scientific and educational policy and their continuous improvement processes. This is the reason why involving stakeholders is a key of success in this process.
Strengthening the country's trust in its higher education and research system is based on the peer system with involvement of all in the evaluation process.

b) What is important to you regarding stakeholder involvement in quality assurance activities?

What is important for Hcéres is:

- to strengthen the link between evaluations and the socioeconomic/cultural world, that is with society and the country in general, and to ensure that the work of experts can be directly useful not only to the evaluated entity but also to the whole society and the country;
- to match stakeholders' expectations.

c) What would you describe to be your most successful activities of involving stakeholders in the last two years?

For Hcéres, what has been important in the last two years has been to involve student experts at all level of assessments. It was also important to involve experts from these new sectors (hospital practitioners, nurses, architects, artists, etc.) in assessments of new sectors (medicine, arts, architecture, etc.)

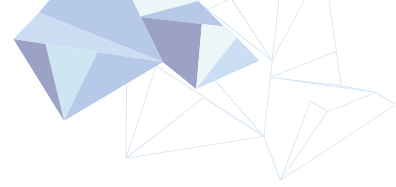
d) How could you make stakeholder involvement (even) more relevant to the stakeholders?

- selecting experts directly proposed by the professional branches, trade unions, etc.;
- a better communication targeting them; evaluation reports are not so appropriate for this;
- proving the added value that an evaluation report can have.

NEAA, Bulgaria

1. General description of the QA agency

a) Name and country of agency National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA), Bulgaria
b) Number of employees 30
c) Number of HEIs in the country in question 51
d) Number of students in HEIs in the country in question Students by Educational-Qualification Degree in the higher schools in 2018/2019 academic year – total number 222,997 (https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/4895/students-educational-qualification-degree-citizenship-mode-attendance-and-sex-higher)



e) Scope of Activities: How many quality assurance activities has your agency undertaken in the last two years?

Since 2017 up to now:

- 24 quality assurance activities by post-accreditation monitoring and control on the implementation of the internal quality evaluation and assurance system for training and academic staff of higher schools;
- 28 quality assurance activities on the institutional evaluation of higher schools;
- 156 quality assurance activities on programme evaluation of professional fields.

f) Is your agency involved in quality assurance of higher education abroad?

Some members of Standing committees by areas of higher education and some members of expert groups were involved in quality assurance of higher education abroad.

2. Agency’s main QA activities with stakeholders

QA activity	Stakeholder groups involved in the activity	Formal or informal?	Frequency (how often?)
Example 1 Participation in expert groups at Institutional accreditation	undergraduates, doctoral students, representatives of employers of graduates with higher education; representatives of occupational and branch organisations and of employers’ association; representatives of the teachers' union; researchers from scientific organisations	formal; Art. 88, para 2 of the Higher Education Act	One of them in every expert group – 16 institutional evaluations in 2019



<p>Example 2 Participation in expert groups at Programme evaluation of professional fields</p>	<p>undergraduates, doctoral students, representatives of employers of graduates with higher education; representatives of occupational and branch organisations and of employers' association; representatives of the teachers' union; researchers from scientific organisations</p>	<p>formal; Art. 88, para 2 of the Higher Education Act</p>	<p>One of them in every expert group – 95 Programme evaluation of professional fields in 2019</p>
<p>Example 3 Participation in expert groups at Programme evaluation of majors from the regulated professions</p>	<p>undergraduates, doctoral students, representatives of employers of graduates with higher education; representatives of occupational and branch organisations and of employers' association; representatives of the teachers' union; researchers from scientific organisations</p>	<p>formal; Art. 88, para 2 of the Higher Education Act</p>	<p>One of them in every expert group – 17 Programme evaluation of majors from the regulated professions in 2019</p>
<p>Example 4 Participation in expert groups at Programme evaluation of doctoral programmes</p>	<p>undergraduates, doctoral students, representatives of employers of graduates with higher education; representatives of occupational and branch organisations and of employers' association; representatives of the teachers' union; researchers from scientific organisations</p>	<p>formal; Art. 88, para 2 of the Higher Education Act</p>	<p>One of them in every expert group – 255 Programme evaluation of doctoral programmes in 2019</p>



<p>Example 5 Participation in expert groups at Programme evaluation of scientific majors from the regulated professions</p>	<p>undergraduates, doctoral students, representatives of employers of graduates with higher education; representatives of occupational and branch organisations and of employers' association; representatives of the teachers' union; researchers from scientific organisations</p>	<p>formal; Art. 88, para 2 of the Higher Education Act</p>	<p>One of them in every expert group – 71 Programme evaluation of scientific majors from the regulated professions in 2019</p>
<p>Example 6 Participation in expert groups at the evaluation of projects for: opening or transformation of a higher education institution; opening or transformation of primary units and/or branches of a higher education institution; opening a professional field or a major from the regulated professions</p>	<p>undergraduates, doctoral students, representatives of employers of graduates with higher education; representatives of occupational and branch organisations and of employers' association; representatives of the teachers' union; researchers from scientific organisations</p>	<p>formal; Art. 88, para 2 of the Higher Education Act</p>	<p>One of them in every expert group – 9 project evaluation procedures in 2019</p>
<p>Example 7 Members of Standing Committees by Areas of Higher Education and of Standing Committee on Post Accreditation Monitoring and Control</p>	<p>undergraduates, doctoral students, representatives of employers of graduates with higher education; representatives of occupational and branch organisations and of employers' association; representatives of the teachers' union; researchers from scientific organisations</p>	<p>formal; Art. 88a, para 1 and Art. 88, para 2 of the Higher Education Act; on an equal footing with other members</p>	<p>Planned meetings - at least twice a month</p>



<p>Example 8 Members of the Committee on quality assurance of NEAA's activity - consultative, operative organ</p>	<p>Representatives of the national representation of students' councils; of occupational and branch organisations and of employers' associations; of the National Trade Union for Higher Education and Science at CITUB; of the Ministry of education and science</p>	<p>formal; decision of the Accreditation council</p>	<p>Planned meetings - they meet 4 to 5 times a year, but members are in constant communication</p>
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3. SWOT-analysis of stakeholder involvement in external QA activities

a) Strengths in the current level of activities (what do you succeed in and why?)

Example 1: Formal inclusion of stakeholders in external QA activities according last amendments in HE Act in Bulgaria – Art. 88, para 2 of the Higher Education Act; they work on an equal footing with other members of EG.

Example 2: Formal inclusion of stakeholders as members of Standing Committees on Area of Higher Education (one of the decision making bodies of the NEAA) and of Standing Committee on Post Accreditation Monitoring and Control – Art. 88, para 2 of the Higher Education Act; they work on an equal footing with other members of SQs.

Example 3: Most professional organizations in Bulgaria have undergone processes for formulating the knowledge, skills and competencies that should be possessed by professionals working in the relevant professional field.

Example 4: Most professional organizations in Bulgaria have undergone processes for formulating the knowledge, skills and competencies that should be possessed by professionals working in the relevant professional field.

Example 5: Some of the lecturers in the HE institutions are associated with professional organizations as members and participants in collaborative projects.

Example 6: It is observed that an increasing proportion of research activities in HEI are being funded by companies.

b) Difficulty in the current level of activities (what is not succeeding and why?)

Example 1: Not enough motivation to participate in NEAA's activities due to lack of time or insufficient financial resources

Example 2: Contradictions in the requirements for their representatives in the views of different stakeholders.

Example 3: Offering ineligible persons for experts and committee members to NEAA on behalf of stakeholders.

Example 4: Rapid student rotation.



c) The biggest challenges (obstacles)

Example 1: Increased commitment and more effective stakeholder involvement.

Example 2: Keeping track of the results from the involvement of stakeholder representatives.

Example 3: Defining the necessary knowledge, skills and competences of the stakeholder representatives.

Example 4: A changing labour market in which it is challenging to provide professionals with the necessary professional skills and competences

d) Possibilities and opportunities (in a future perspective)

Example 1: Strengthening stakeholder requirements regarding the qualities and competencies of their representatives in higher education quality assurance processes.

Example 2: Sufficient financial support for higher education quality assessment activities.

Example 3: Organizing regional meetings, discussions, seminars on problems of quality of HE with NEAA, higher schools and stakeholders.

4. Prioritization and outcome

a) What is your agency's main purpose of involving stakeholders in external QA?

- To provide the necessary knowledge, skills and competences that are acquired in the learning process in the academic documentation, depending on the views of the relevant stakeholders.
- Availability of different perspectives on the quality assessment process that are to ensure greater objectivity and publicity of evaluation of quality of higher schools.

b) What is important to you regarding stakeholder involvement in quality assurance activities?

- Defining the necessary knowledge, skills and competences of the higher education professionals that they should acquire as a result of the entire training cycle.
- Searching for common understanding when discussing with different stakeholders. Interrelationship between scientific research, education and needs of labour market.
- Increasing the requirements for the practical applicability of the acquired knowledge, skills and competences of the higher education professionals which are obtained as a result of the entire training cycle.
- Increasing the capacity for corrective actions to improve the system of internal quality assurance in higher education.





c) What would you describe to be your most successful activities of involving stakeholders in the last two years?

- Successful involvement of student representatives and other external stakeholders in all NEAA higher education quality assurance activities.
- Legal regulation of the involvement of external stakeholders in higher education quality assurance activities.

d) How could you make stakeholder involvement (even) more relevant to the stakeholders?

- By raising the stakeholder requirements for their representatives in the Higher Education Quality Assurance Bodies at NEAA.
- Accounting for the results of the involvement of stakeholder representatives in NEAA's activities.



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