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Gavra, Alina; Ivanova, Liliya; Stråhlman, Christian; Galan Palomares, Fernando Miguel

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

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The European Students' Union

QUEST FOR QUALITY FOR STUDENTS

GOING BACK TO BASICS

Lifelong Learning

QUEST FOR QUALITY FOR STUDENTS

IMPRINT

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GOING BACK TO BASICS
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EDITING
Christian Stråhlman

RESEARCH TEAM
Martina Vukasovic, Liliya Ivanova, Allan Päll, Fernando Miguel Galan Palomares, Karl Agius, Jens Jungblut

ADVISORY BOARD
Sonia Cardoso, Bjørn Stensaker, Mihai Paunescu

AUTHORS
Alina Gavra, Liliya Ivanova, Christian Stråhlman, Fernando Miguel Galan Palomares

CASE STUDIES
Julian Hiller, Megan McHaney

SITE VISIT TEAM MEMBERS
Liliya Ivanova, Alina Gavra, Emilia Todorova, Blazhe Todorovski, Fernando Miguel Galan Palomares, Karl Agius, Mari Simola

PROOFREADING
Christina Linza, George-K. Charonis

PRODUCTION
Linus Rowedda

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QUEST FOR QUALITY FOR STUDENTS

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Lifelong Learning

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1 FOREWORD

Quality assurance has been at the core of the construction of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) since the very beginning serving as a tool for trust, which enables comparability of degrees Europe-wide and will foster the societies by increasing mobility. Cooperation between European nations in the field of quality assurance has increased in recent years despite the specifics of each country. The modernization agenda of the European Union notes that quality assurance is a powerful tool for institutional change.[1] Additionally, the progress report in quality assurance (European Commission, 2009) stresses that the common European dimension in this field needs to be further developed. Nonetheless, a genuine student involvement in quality assurance often remains neglected. Students are rarely asked what their views on quality are when it comes to higher education reforms.

The European Students Union (ESU)[2] launched the *QUEST for quality for students'* project in 2010 and will bring it to a conclusion by 2013, co-funded by the European Commission. The QUEST project aims to identify students' genuine perception of what higher education quality is from a pan-European perspective. ESU seeks to define a concept of quality that gives a better answer to the learner-centred high quality model of higher education students in Europe. This idea of a student quality concept can bring change in the field of quality in terms of transcending the discussion surrounding quality assurance and information provision to reflect the views of students as the main benefactors rather than simply as other actors. The main innovation of the project, being pan-european survey of student opinion, will definitely change perceptions of policy makers and contribute strongly to building a common European

1 The Higher Education Modernisation Agenda

2 ESU—The European Students' Union—is the umbrella organisation of 47 national unions of students from 38 countries, and through these members represents over 11 million students. The aim of ESU is to articulate and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at a European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow-Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO. ESU was formerly known as ESIB—The National Unions of Students in Europe. *http://www.esu-online.org*

Higher Education Area by promoting availability of new modes of information and more evidence based policy making.

This publication presents the data collected through the first stage of the project research, which consisted of desk research, a survey among ESU's members, national site visits and focus group exercise focusing on the barriers towards student participation in QA processes. It outlines the main political and conceptual developments in quality assurance on national and European level in recent decades with a view to increasing student involvement within these processes. On the basis of the data compiled through the desk research, three countries were selected. The three site-visit reports focus on the national level, conducted to validate the information collected through the desk research. They are presented in this publication, together with two case studies delivered by our project partners, for the purpose of outlining good and interesting practice examples of where students are in the centre of quality enhancement and assurance.

Additionally, during the second workshop that was organized in the context of the QUEST project, a focus group exercise was conducted. The exercise aimed to define the main challenges that students face when being involved at different levels of student participation in quality assurance. The outcomes of the focus group exercise are also included as an annex to this publication.

Finally we would like to thank our partners in this project:

- *The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education—Aracis*[3] (Romania) is an autonomous public institution of national interest, whose main mission is the external evaluation of the Romanian higher education's quality, at the level of study programmes, as well as from the institutional point of view. ARACIS is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education—ENQA and is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education—EQAR.

- *Student participation in quality Scotland—sparqs* (UK) was created to support the greater engagement of students in the management of quality assurance and enhancement in Scotland's colleges and universities. The service is the responsibility of a consortium of partners consisting of the main stakeholders in higher education in Scotland. *Sparqs* supports effective student representation. They do this by providing appropriate training and support materials to the full range of student representatives within Higher Education Institutions

3 AgențiaRomână de Asigurare a CalitățiiînÎnvățământul Superior (Aracis)

and Colleges and assist institutions and their Students' Associations to make their systems more effective.

- *The free association of local student union bodies—fzs*[4] (Germany) is the umbrella organisation of student associations in Germany and a full member union of ESU. With approximately 90 member universities, fzs represents over a million students in the Federal Republic.

- ESU also owes a big debt of gratitude to our member unions SAMOK[5] and SYL[6] (Finland); LSVb[7] and ISO[8] (The Netherlands); and CREUP[9] (Spain) for facilitating the organization of the national site visits as well as all the individuals from different institutions and organisations with whom we met during the site visits.

ESU would also like to express its gratitude also to the QUEST project Advisory board and the QUEST project Research team, who were continuously supporting the research process.

4 FreieZusammenschlussvonStudentInnenschaften—fzs

5 Suomenammattikorkeakouluopiskelijakuntienliitto (SAMOK), Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences.

6 SuomenYlioppilaskuntienLiitto (SYL),

7 Landelijke Studenten Vakbond (LSVb),

8 InterstedelijkStudentenOverleg (ISO),

9 Coordinadora de Representantes de Estudiantes de UniversidadesPúblicas (CREUP), Spanish Union of Students of Public Universities.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As human beings we are constantly concerned about personal development and keeping a good standard of living on the one hand, as well as of progress on the other. Learning and education are obviously crucial both for attaining the desire of a >good life< and progress. Thus we have always been motivated to find ways of guaranteeing a high level of quality also in our learning process despite the versatile understanding of quality. Before talking about quality of higher education, we shall have a brief foray into the history of higher education from a conceptual perspective.

In most cases present trends in higher education have strong roots in the past. By this we refer to the sum of events that greatly affected today's economic, social and political contexts, especially with regards to the structure and ideology of the higher education system, or the concept of education in general. In fact, education is at the very core of all economic, social and political aspects.

In the past decade, higher education, at least when talking about the European case, has been affected by a number of metamorphoses, including higher rates of participation, internationalization, the growing importance of a quality higher education model for knowledge-based economies and increased global competition. These developments were reflected by two main European policies: the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy, discussed later in this chapter.

Historically, in its earliest forms quality assurance (QA) in higher education became widespread in the context of establishing a knowledge-based economy in United States of America, where »under conditions which stimulated and permitted it, the roots of extensive accreditation and programme review schemes appeared« (Kells 1995a, 18). The USA accreditation system is to some extent a forerunner of the External Quality Assurance (EQA) systems adopted in many countries (Brennan & Shah 2000).

Thus, this movement initiated in the USA was followed by a second wave of quality assurance systems development in the eighties in several countries in Europe. The first two countries to make quality an explicit issue on the political agenda were the United Kingdom and France. Westerheijden et al. (1994) noted that in the British model, higher education institutions had control over quality, while in the French-continental model the control over quality of higher education lied at government apparatus and ministries, through input (spending, enrolment requirements, opening and closing faculties, etc); process (content of curricula, content of examinations, etc); and output (state examinations). The third European country that developed quality assurance policies in the beginning of the eighties was The Netherlands, which borrowed heavily

from the USA. From these three countries the policy diffusion to the rest of Western Europe started (Westerheijden et al. 1994, 22).

As it can be noted, the discussions on what quality in higher education is, how we measure it, and how we can assure it, began before the Bologna Process. Since 1980, quality of higher education has become one of the most important debate topics, both in the institutional and national political agendas in Europe. At the same time, quality assurance as a Bologna Process action line has received increasing importance during the last decade, and more focused discussions have been taking place in the last 5 years. However, before discussing the latest developments, the initial actions in quality in higher education on the European continent before 1999 will be briefly illustrated.

2.1 EU INITIATIVES IN THE FIELD OF QUALITY ASSURANCE BEFORE THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

One of the first meaningful pan-European initiatives is the *Institutional Evaluation Programme* (IEP) that was launched in 1993 by the *Association of European Universities* (CRE), nowadays *European University Association* (EUA). The aim of the programme was to offer external evaluation mainly to their member institutions. This evaluation was specifically focused on assessing how institutions deliver on their mission, taking into account the environment in which they operate (Hofmann 2005).

The *European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education* in 1994 had as an aim to develop an evaluation culture within higher education in the then seventeen countries involved: 15 EU states together with Iceland and Norway (ESU 2010). The Council of the European Union and the European Parliament decided on the *Recommendation on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education* (EU 1998). Thus, in 1998 member states set up quality assurance systems in all higher education institutions, based on common principles. These included autonomy and independence of the bodies responsible for QA, adaptation of QA procedures and methods while respecting the autonomy of higher education institutions, use of internal and/or external QA, and involvement of the parties concerned and publication of the results of QA. Among the recommendations was that special attention should be given to the exchange of experience and cooperation with other member states, as well as international organisations and associations. Cooperation and networking between the authorities responsible for QA in higher education should be promoted. It was also stressed that the Commission, in close cooperation with the member states, should encourage this cooperation and networking (EU 1998).

2.2 QA AS AN ACTION LINE OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

High quality of provision has been one of the key aims of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy as a means to promote the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education. The Ministerial meetings within the Bologna Process have shaped the European quality assurance framework.

The *European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA, now the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*) was set up in 2000, following the above cited recommendation from the Council of the European Union from 1998 and the Bologna Declaration from 1999 (ENQA 2010).

The Salamanca Convention (EUA 2001) of European higher education institutions considered quality as a fundamental building block of the European Higher Education Area and made it the underlying condition for trust, relevance of degrees, mobility, compatibility and attractiveness.

The Prague Communiqué of European education ministers (2001) regards quality as a major factor in determining the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education. This communiqué, along with the Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) and Bucharest (2012) Communiqués, altogether set the European framework for QA.

With the occasion of the Bergen Ministerial Conference in 2005, the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) were adopted. This document was prepared by ENQA in collaboration with EUA, ESU and EURASHigher education, which are known as *E4 group*[10]. Since then a lot of the EHEA states have followed and implemented the ESG, introducing great reforms into their national quality assurance systems, even though not all of the standards or guidelines were fully implemented (ESU 2010, ENQA 2011). Today, a joint effort has been carried out by the E4 Group in order to track the impact of the ESG and measure its effectiveness and suitability for the original purpose. In this direction, through the *MAP-ESG project* conducted by the E4 group between 2010 and 2012, information on how the ESG have been implemented and applied in the 47 Bologna signatory countries, on national level, in higher education institutions (HEIs) and in QA agencies have been gathered. The main output of the project is a report on the application and implementation of the ESG (ENQA 2011). Based on this report, Ministers of Education of the

10 E4 Group—comprising the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHigher education)

Bologna signatory countries have decided to revise the ESG, as stated in the Bucharest Communiqué (2012).

The idea of a *European Quality Assurance Forum* (EQAF) was proposed by EUA to the E4 Group in 2003. The proposal to promote such a Forum annually grew from the observation that the dialogue among quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and students was happening at national rather than at European level. Thus, it seemed important to create an annual European event that gathered all actors in order to discuss matters of quality and quality assurance in the context of the changing higher education landscape, to examine European and international QA trends, and to improve the articulation between quality culture and external accountability (EUA 2009). The first edition of the forum took place in 2006, and since then there have been 5 editions.

In 2007, the Ministers that met in London discussed the achievements until then and supported the creation of the *European Quality Assurance Register* (EQAR) in the London Communiqué (2007). Under this mandate, EQAR has been established by the E4 Group.

The London Communiqué also mentions the enhancement of transnational education which should be in line with the ESGs, but also with the *UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education* (2005). The declared scope of these guidelines is that of assuring mutual trust and promoting international cooperation among the suppliers and beneficiaries of transnational education.

Bearing in mind the various forms of transnational education, the variety of ways in which an educational institution can function, the great variety of educational institutions themselves, but also the explosion of new abilities and competences needed by the labour market, the development and implementation of a coherent quality assurance mechanism becomes an imperative. The role of the ESG and of the UNESCO/OECD guidelines as such, is to ensure the fact that, regardless of their option for one institution or another for their studies, formation, professionalization, the student's quality in learning outcomes and certificate will be safeguarded.

This chapters' scope has been to provide an overview of the main political developments in the QA field that took place on both national and European level with regards to the specific historical background alongside with the transformation of the »European idea« of the higher education system itself. As an ending remark, it should be noted that quality assurance—as a concept, a policy area or a practice and process—has become a very complex mixture of a bail for quality education provision, a cost-efficiency indicator, a label for the idea of institutional transformation and progress, a prerequisite for common reference and mobility, and other expectations. In the fol-

lowing chapters we will come closer to the actual drivers of quality assurance, both from the perspective of stakeholders that benefit from QA and of the active forces that provide its outcomes.

3 DEFINING QUALITY

In the previous chapter the most significant developments in quality assurance (QA) as a process were outlined. The debates on the future progress of this process have always been inextricably linked to the conceptual debate of the genuine meaning of higher education quality as such.

This chapter aims to provide a review of the main conceptualisations of the »quality of higher education« that can be seen in the research literature.

Surveying the literature, various definitions of what quality is depending on the context can be found. It can be stated that they are as many definitions as there are quality assurance stakeholders in higher education. Quality has a different meaning for each stakeholder. However, the student view on quality has never been clearly defined. While exploring the available definitions and the on-going discussions in the literature on the understanding of ›quality‹ we shall try to define the place of the student quality concept within this discourse.

The discussions about the meaning of ›quality‹ can generally be divided into two groups:

- Discussion on the context-based meaning—quality perception in this discourse is based on the context topics such as quality of assessment, student intake, academic programmes, teaching and learning, student experience and programme design. In this course of discussion attempts to define quality are ignored, high quality is simply opposed to poor quality.

- Discussions on the stakeholder-specific meaning—here quality is considered with regards to a variety of stakeholders, each with a different understanding of quality.

The nature of the quality perceptions embodied in the different definitions can be quite controversial. These tensions are most obvious in the two extreme visions on quality: the Humboldtian and the consumerist theories. However it should be noted that these two contradicting theories outlining the two extremes of the quality concept, and students' involvement in QA processes, are presented here for analytical purposes. The reliable indicators for student involvement within these processes should be sought in-between these two extremes.

The aforementioned two perceptions reflect student involvement within QA processes in quite different ways as well. While Humboldt sees students as active participants in the learning process, contributing to the quality of the teaching and learning process, consumerist theory speculates on the role of students, seen as recipients of labour market relevant training whose role is to simply incorporate the knowledge passed to them. Students as consumers demand refund for their investment, which transforms the added value of their knowledge into money and prestige at the labour market. Thus the quality of higher education and the added value it brings are measured on the basis of the privileges it can ensure (Gibbs 2011).

On the contrary, in Humboldt's eyes the ideal quality of higher education is only related with the opportunities for the self-development of the individual it can bring. Looking into the Humboldt theory of education as an ideal, the freedom of research and teaching is upheld as imperative, which is necessary as a basis and result for qualified processes of education. He advocated »complete training of the human personality«, even for the poorest members of society at the elementary school level (Humboldt 1920, 226) as well as the possibility for pupils who lacked resources of their own to be able to attend higher educational establishments by drawing on newly created national funds. According to Humboldt, the role of the state in guaranteeing equal accessibility is essential. Serrano-Velardea and Stensakernotes (2010):

> *»Although Humboldt is still alive in the professional self-conception of academics and serves as Leitbild for universities, the conditions for the realization of the humanist ideal have changed dramatically. The concepts of accountability and transparency have found their way into the notion of institutional autonomy, and highlight the necessity of providing accounts for the performance and quality of publicly funded organizations. Quality assurance can be considered the main instrument to this effect«*

Harvey and Green (1993) in their paper explored the nature and usage of quality in relation to higher education. The five conceptualisations of quality proposed by Harvey and Green can be seen as generic concepts, whose perception on quality can be seen as in between the two extremes: as exceptional; as fitness for purpose; as value for money; as perfection; and as transformation.

Traditionally, quality is understood as equivalent to *special*. This concept of quality as is connected with the vision of quality as *exceptionality*, which is interrelated with the concept of quality as *excellence*. The criticism to these two conceptualizations is usually related to their overly generic nature: how can excellence and exceptionality actually be defined? Here logically also comes the conclusion that if only excellence can be accepted for quality, then quality cannot be reached in practice as in reality

there are no perfectly functioning systems, including that of higher education. If seen as >excellence< then quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed.

Defining quality as perfection draws the view of quality as a vision of achieving consistent or flawless outcome. In a way this view of quality is closely interrelated with its accessibility, as, if consistency can be achieved, then all can attain quality. Such openness in a way >democratizes< the concept of quality corresponding to a certain extent to the Humboldtian view. In his *Guiding Ideas on a Plan for the Establishment of the Lithuanian Municipal School System*[11] (1920), Humboldt explained, »this whole education system therefore rests on one and the same foundation. The commonest jobbing worker and the finest graduate must at the outset be given the same mental training, unless human dignity is to be disregarded in the former and the latter allowed to fall victim to unworthy sentimentality and chimera«

Many authors often define quality as »fitness for purpose«. However some authors are sceptical because this definition does not outline the true nature of quality clearly enough. They argue that such a conceptualization is quite dim. »Quality higher education often remains undefined in operational terms, because there is no single understanding of what is the purpose (or multiple purposes) of higher education in current society« (Westerheijden et al. 2007, 3). Harvey & Newton (2007) have also been critical about the >fitness for purpose< conceptualization:

> »*It is necessary to deconstruct the implementation for quality assurance processes within the wider context of the activities of academics, the institutional framework, national frameworks and international developments. Transforming quality evaluation involves understanding how academics and institutions respond to quality evaluation, how institutions manage the quality improvement enterprise, and how academics themselves engage with improvement practices*« (page 236).

Thus quality as fitness for purpose can be also operationalized in the context of the consumerist theories on quality in terms of fulfilling a customer's requirements, needs or desires. Theoretically, the customer specifies requirements. In education, fitness for purpose is usually based on the ability of an institution to fulfil its mission or a programme of study to fulfil its aims. In this regard Brennan and Shah (2000) observe that where an organisation emphasised interdisciplinary and consumerist values, external assessment served to strengthen academic values and disciplinary culture and securing that the Humboldtian values will be preserved.

Quality as value for money is a true consumerist theory, defining quality in terms of a profit generated from investment. If the same outcome can be achieved at a lower

11 Originally written in 1809.

cost, or a better outcome can be achieved at the same cost, or higher outcome can be achieved at a higher price, then the >customer< has a quality product or service. Public services, including education, are expected to be accountable to the funders. Increasingly students require a value-for-money approach from HEIs due to the increasing costs of higher education.

Quality as transformation is a classic view of quality that sees it in terms of change from one state to another. In educational terms, transformation refers to the enhancement of higher education quality and empowerment of students for being active in the creation of their own learning experience. Thus the concept of quality as transformation can be accepted as a modern operationalization of the Humboldtian values, which place students at the centre of the learning process, one that should be tightly connected to the research process.

The criticism to these concepts in the literature sources is usually based on their overly generic nature that can hardly be clearly defined and measured due to the multiple understandings of their meanings.

Harvey and Green (1993) conclude that it is not possible to perceive quality as a unitary concept since, in order to be understood, quality must be defined in terms of a range of qualities. Therefore perhaps the best way for quality to be defined as clearly as possible is to take into account the criteria that each stakeholder uses when accessing quality.

Being unique with its student centred approach, the QUEST project seeks to define the student quality concept, outlining the understanding of students as main higher education stakeholders of what quality is and what the measurable criteria for quality are. This can hardly happen without exploring student involvement in the QA processes and mechanisms. The next chapter looks into the outcomes of research exploring student engagement in teaching and learning activities.

4 STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

Up to this stage one referred to the term student engagement but never to student involvement. Astin (1984) has described student involvement as the amount of physical and physiological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience, a definition referring to behaviour and what students actually do rather than what they think or how they feel or the meanings they give to their experiences. Although student engagement and student involvement might seem to be the same, this is not the case. Although similar in meaning they have a qualitative difference between them. A student for instance might be involved but not actively engaged. The former refers to a situation whereby for example a student who runs for a role in an organisation attends a meeting and follows the discussion. The latter refers to a student who runs for a role in an organisation yet he attends meetings, voices his concerns and participates actively in the discussion (Kuh et al.2007).

4.1 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Kuh et al. (2007) described student engagement as the participation in educationally effective practices both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes. They also stated that student engagement represents two critical features:

- the time and effort students put into their studies and other educational purposeful activities; and
- how the institution deploys its resources and organises the curriculum, other learning opportunities and support services to encourage students to participate in activities that lead to the experience-desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning and graduation.

Empirical evidence has shown that engagement of student populations, with special reference to those with a problematic scenario, has a positive outcome (Kuh et al. 2007). For instance even if student persistence in obtaining a degree depends on various factors, and thus cannot be attributed to a single cause, it has been noted that students who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities both inside and outside the classroom, are more likely to persist in their education when compared to other disengaged peers (Kuh et al. 2007). Student engagement has in fact been posi-

tively correlated with persistence (Tinto 2000). According to Tinto (1987) high levels of integration into academic and social communities on campus lead to higher levels of institutional commitment, which in return leads to student persistence.

4.2 STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

Students usually have an intrinsic motivation for getting involved in quality assurance, as it is the improvement of their own education through the improvement of the study programmes and the university in general. Maximizing the benefits of their studies, this student idealism is thus often the basis for strategic faculty and curriculum development (Loukkola & Zhang 2009). However, the idealism of improvement is not just about enhancing the study conditions, but also about increasing the perceived quality from outside stakeholders, that could lead to an added value of their degree award.

Besides this, there are a variety of forms of conceiving quality, as seen in the previous chapter. The heterogeneity can be appreciated from the understanding of quality and the usefulness and/or purposes of QA to its mechanism.

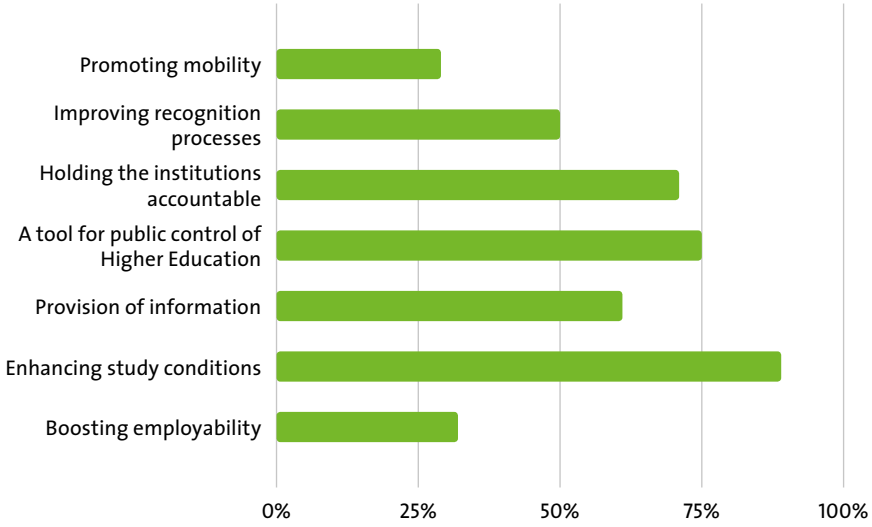
With the purpose of bringing some light to these topics and contributing to the aims of the QUEST project, the European Students' Union distributed a questionnaire among its members, which are national unions of students (NUS)[12].

The NUSes were asked on their perception of the usefulness/purposes of QA. The results are shown in figure 1. The respondents were able to select more than one answer. Responses indicate that a highly significant number of NUSes (89%) consider that QA is useful to enhance study conditions. This notion is in line with what several authors have pointed out.

QA as a means to render accountability of higher education institutions (71%) as well as public control (75%) are also perceived by the national unions to be important. Provision of information to students and society at large was also rated high (61%). Individual recognition, mobility and employability were not considered equally important.

12 By the end of December 2011, thirty-eight member unions of ESU, representing thirty-five countries, had completed the questionnaire used also for preparing Bologna With Student Eyes 2012 (ESU2012a).More details about the methodology could be consulted in the chapter 3 of this ESU publication. It is available on *http://www.esu-online.org/documents/publications/*

fig. 1 The usefulness/purposes of QA is generally seen by your national union of students (NUS) as:



A main motivating factor for being involved in QA, expressed during the focus group[13], is the genuine understanding of the transformation effects the QA processes can have on the education system, as they can develop ideas and practices that can enhance the quality of learning outcomes. Thus, it seems that everything points towards the enhancing of study conditions/improvement of education and institutions as the main motivation of students for being involved in quality assurance.

All the above could be related to the idea of why students are co-responsible for their education and the institution where they are enrolled. The report of the second part of the Examining Quality Culture project from EUA affirms that students are key stakeholders in the development of a quality culture within the institution (Sursock 2011). The ownership of QA systems by all members of the academic community contributes to its acceptance and to lead real improvement. Participation of students helps to ensure the legitimacy of the QA system itself as well as its results.

13 During the second workshop that was organized in the context of the QUEST project a focus groups exercise was conducted with the QA student experts who attended this workshop. This exercise aimed to define the main challenges that student face when being involved in the different levels of student participation in quality assurance. The report is available as annex to this publication.

4.3 STUDENTS' ROLE IN QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

Since the 1990s, the role of students in the quality assurance of higher education has become recognised across Europe as being both necessary and desirable (Cockburn 2006). The involvement of students has been in various forms and at various levels. Students are involved within the quality assurance processes of their own higher education institutions, as part of the quality assurance of institutions and programmes by outside bodies; but also in the review of the quality assurance of those bodies themselves (Williams 2006, 5).

Regarding the involvement of students in QA, there is not a single model, but some main levels can be identified based on the answers collected from the questionnaire, the case studies and a review of the literature, especially the monitoring reports of the Bologna Process (ex. *Bologna Process Stocktaking Report, Trends or Bologna With Student Eyes*).

Firstly, at institutional level, students could have three principal roles: providing information (by responding to surveys on a regular basis, focus groups, etc.); participating in the preparation of self-assessment reports (as members of the self-evaluation group, writing the report, providing feedback to the report etc.); and as members of the bodies responsible of internal quality assurance processes (either with or without voting rights).

Secondly, at external level two main roles have been identified: providing information (in consultation during external reviews), and as members of external review panels of higher education institutions and/or programmes, where students can play an observer role in expert teams, have full-member status while sometimes holding the positions of chair and secretary within the teams (Dearlove 2006), and a recognised role at the decision-making level (essentially in audits or accreditation of programmes). As examples, in Denmark, Finland, Poland and Scotland students sometimes also take the role of a chair and/or secretary of the external panel; however, in a number of countries such as Austria, the Czech Republic, France, Latvia and Slovakia, students are involved only as observers; and in a few countries, student involvement is only now being discussed, as is the case in Portugal for instance.

Finally, at the level of governance of national quality assurance agencies, students can be involved in three stages: as planners of the evaluation/accreditation programmes, as members of the consultative bodies and as members of the governance bodies (Galan Palomares 2012). In 21 national systems students are members of the governance bodies, with a full voting right in 15 of them.

Additionally, outside QA processes themselves, there are other kinds of student involvement in QA policy discussions: being consulted by policy makers (as governments), or as student representatives not directly involved in any process but providing information on the issues at stake, or having a particular role of dissemination. It contributes to develop awareness and to lend trust and credibility to the processes and its outcomes.

Developments in regulations have also helped students to become involved in quality assurance. However, the involvement of students in quality assurance differs greatly among all EHEA nations, leaving considerable room for improvement in several countries (ESU 2012a).

In some countries students have organised themselves in pools of QA experts. This is the case in 18 countries out of the 30 that answered the questionnaire. Five of these pools are run by the National Union. There is one case where it has its own independent steering committee (see annex VI, case study fzs). These pools offer trainings, promote student involvement, provide students for inclusion in QA processes, help to provide and disseminate information to the student body to raise awareness of quality assurance. Additionally, organisations such as sparqs (see annex V, case study sparqs) are interesting regarding all the work involving students in quality assurance. The European Students' Union has recently established an independent steering committee of their own QA student experts' pool created some years ago.

At European level, ESU has had a leading role for introducing student involvement in QA, for example when it comes to the involvement of students in evaluation of QA agencies. In fact in 2008 ESU took the initiative and performed the first QA agency audit entirely carried out by a student review panel (ARACIS 2008). This audit was carried out by ARACIS, the Romanian QA Agency.

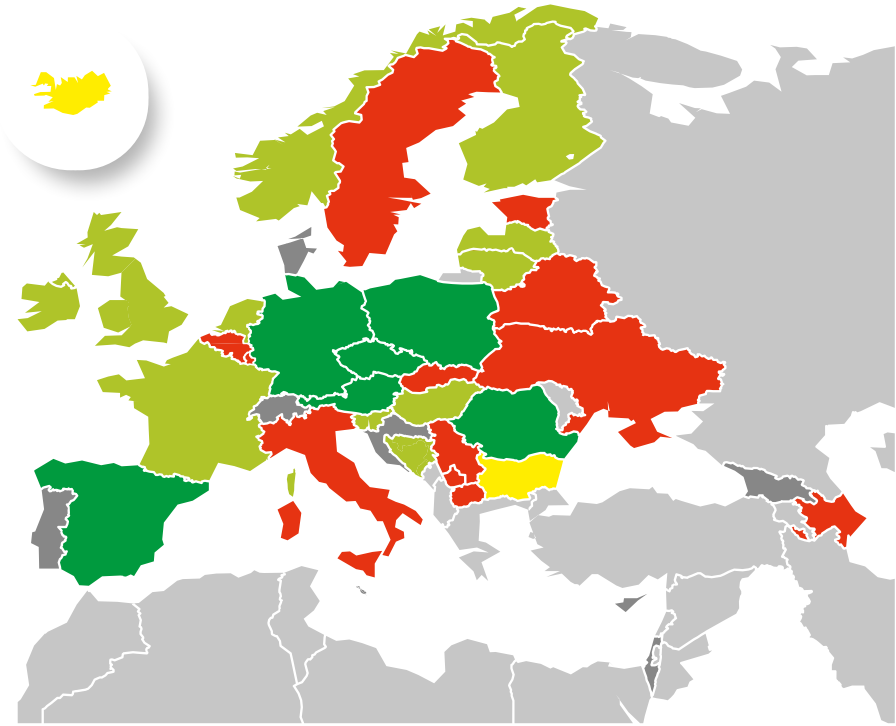
ENQA encourages the involvement of students in the external quality assurance processes of its member agencies. According to the Guidelines for national reviews of ENQA member agencies, the panels that are responsible to evaluate the quality of the QA agencies include students, together with other stakeholders such as quality assurance experts and representatives of higher education institutions. A student member proposed by the European Students' Union is always included in the expert panel of ENQA-coordinated external reviews of member agencies (Helle 2006).

In 2006 a survey was run among ENQA members. At the time it was run, the survey showed that 87% of ENQA members involved students in their evaluations. Those members who did not involve students said that they were aiming to start involving students. The majority of ENQA members provided training to students who served on these panels, yet some 37% did not provide any form of training. When training was

given, this was in most cases specific for students. Meanwhile only 36% of the members considered students as equal members of the panel (Dearlove 2006).

fig. 2 (MAP) Countries with a national QA student experts' pool

No Info	Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Georgia, Israel, Malta and Portugal
No pool	Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Estonia, Italy, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Serbia ,Slovakia, Sweden and Ukraine
Pool/No info	Bulgaria and Iceland
Pool/QAA	Bosnia & Herzegovina, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands. Norway, Slovenia and United Kingdom
Pool/NUS	Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Spain and Switzerland
Pool/SC	Germany



Furthermore, other self-initiatives by students' unions aim to enhance the quality of HEIs, despite the fact that they are not part of institutional quality assurance systems. An interesting case are the »Teaching Quality Awards« granted by student organisations/unions, initiatives that are sometimes also institutionalised, with the higher education institution itself granting the awards and the students' unions or students nominating the candidates.

4.4 BENEFITS OF INCLUDING STUDENTS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

In general, students contribute consistently to the reviews and most experts mention different examples of »added value« (Froestad, Grødeland & Redtrøen 2005). Students play a fundamental role in the assessment of quality of education.

Student involvement either in internal or external quality assurance processes provides an improvement of these processes. Students often provide new solutions, and it is reflected in an enrichment of the evaluation reports, expanding and including other aspects not previously taken into account, or which have not been addressed likewise. (Galan Palomares 2012).

Both institutions and QA agencies where students are involved appreciate their participation and commitment, perceiving it as inspiring and seeing good, solid results from their involvement, valuing the students as partners and a great resource in this work.

5 BARRIERS

As can be seen, quality and its assurance in Higher Education in Europe constitute a very complex world, where the *European Standards and Guidelines* (ENQA 2005) set up a common framework. But within this European Quality Assurance Framework there are very different ways of how QA takes place. Undoubtedly the Bologna Process has had a very strong impact through several actions including among others the work of the E4 group, the *European Standards and Guidelines*, the *European Quality Assurance Forums* and the *European Quality Assurance Register* (EQAR). Nevertheless, due to the very different backgrounds of countries, the European QA system is quite heterogeneous, where different models are working.

Regarding student involvement in quality assurance, in many countries students are still not involved at all levels. The ESG and the EQAR have had a positive impact ensuring the participation of students (Sursock & Smidt 2010), but despite the advancement that could be seen in the *Bologna With Student Eyes* publications (ESU 2005, 2007, 2009, 2012a) there is still considerable room for improvement, both at a national and institutional level. On the other hand, even if this student involvement is in place formally, it does not necessarily mean that there is active and genuine student involvement, as pointed out again in *Bologna At the Finish Line* (ESU 2010).

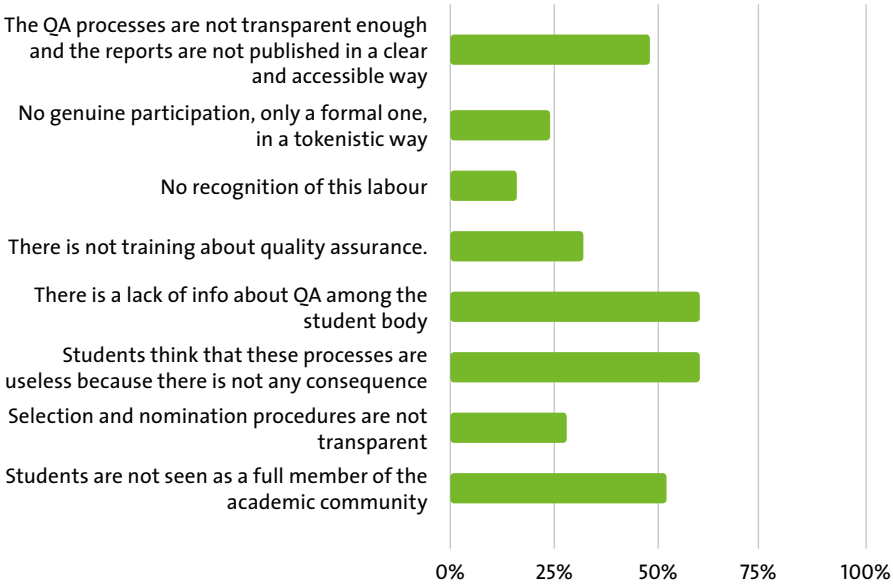
Despite the positive impact of the ESG regarding the involvement of students, through the mapping of the implementation and application of the ESG (*MAP-ESG project*), ESU found that »student involvement or student participation, or even student feedback, student engagement in QA can mean many different things to different people« (ESU 2012b). Thus a more explicit and consistent definition of student involvement, both as a principle and within different standards, should be provided during the revision of the ESG.

Sometimes students still face certain barriers even if they are considered one of the key factors that promote quality culture (Sursock 2011).

There is a close relationship between the countries with little involvement of students at internal level and the perception towards students from the rest of the academic community, such as in southern European countries where students are still not fully recognised as full members of the community (ESU 2012a)

In our survey, several National Unions of Students (NUSes) pointed out that the recent development or altogether lack of development of quality assurance systems, either internal, external, or even both, is one of the main reasons why students are

fig. 3 What are the main barriers that students find in their involvement?



not involved in quality assurance. In the questionnaire NUSes were asked to judge the main barriers they face in their involvement in QA. The responses are shown in figure 3.

According to the responses, two big problems from a student perspective are the lack of information about QA among the student body (60%) as well as a view that these processes are useless because there is not any consequence (60%). From the point of view of a significant number of NUSes, students are not seen as a full members of the academic community (52%). Forty-eight percent of the NUSes said that QA processes in their countries are not transparent enough. According to a point of view expressed during the focus groups, more information campaigns should be launched at the local level. Student selection and nomination procedures also lack transparency.

During the discussion within the focus groups, several participants shared that, in a way, a demotivating factor for students can be the slow pace of QA mechanisms either at institutional or national level, where any given cohort of students often does not see its consequences. This is not the only factor, but it could partially explain the answers in the questionnaire. Closing the feedback loop could improve not only the system, but also its perception from the students.

Trainings that enable students to participate actively are an important tool to develop further, as a way for overcoming tokenistic ways of involving students and achieving a genuine participation. Another important issue raised in the focus groups is the technical terminology in QA, which is not student-friendly and could result in a gap between those involved and the rest of the student body. Thus, not only specific training to those who will be involved is needed, but information and training should also be provided more broadly.

Involvement of students in QA agencies is no easy feat. There are several challenges that are encountered. Some QAAs stated that they do not manage to find students who are willing to be involved. In most cases such agencies do not invest energy in recruitment and training. Other agencies which recruit students say they were not satisfied with the service of students and this might be due to lack of communication of what was actually expected from the students (Wiberg 2006). In some countries such as the UK, tuition fees have restricted student involvement due to the fact that they have to work to pay for their studies. This has also been considered to be a challenge for the involvement of students in the evaluation of agencies.

The development of involved students is an important matter to keep in mind. This is also linked to recognition of the labour done by the students through any means (academic recognition, flexibility, etc.) as it was expressed both in the questionnaire to the NUSes and during the focus groups with students. It's necessary to provide the tools for effective student participation and to ensure that such participation does not jeopardise any aspect of student development (academic, social, etc …), since it requires additional effort from those who are involved.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Given the complexity of the European quality assurance panorama, despite sharing the common framework of the European Standards and Guidelines, there is not a unique way of promoting and generating student engagement in quality assurance. This fact is very closely correlated to the understanding of quality and what the role of the student in quality assurance should be. Nevertheless there are a few good practises, as shown in this publication through the site visit reports and the two cases studies, which are useful for exchanging experiences. The five case reports examine interesting practice examples of where students have a central role in quality enhancement processes.

Taking up the discussion about the understanding of quality, it seems that extremes are only useful when it comes to setting up the theoretical framework, but reality is much more complex, especially bearing in mind the barriers that students face for their involvement in QA.

According to the National Unions of Students members of ESU, students have big expectations from quality assurance, such as improving their own education among others, and they are willing to actively participate. Unfortunately there are still obstacles that students have to face in their involvement in quality assurance, while numerous authors affirm the benefits of student involvement, not only for the processes and its outcomes, but also for creating ownership amongst all members of the academic community as co-responsible stakeholders. This ownership and mutual trust are key factors in creating a quality culture.

Student participation in quality assurance has increased since the beginning of the Bologna Process, but especially since the adoption of the ESG in 2005. However there is still considerable room for improvement, because of the fact that formal student involvement within the structures does not always mean a genuine and active student participation in quality assurance. There are big differences regarding student involvement in some countries of the EHEA. A recently developed or still undeveloped quality assurance system in those countries is one of the possible causes, but not the only one. Another possible issue is how student involvement is outlined in the ESG; which is not defined very explicitly and consistently, both as a principle and within standards.

Some of the barriers highlighted from the students' point of view show problems not only in involving students, but also in empowering quality assurance to lead for real improvement.

It is also very interesting to see how some National Unions of Students have organized QA student experts' pools to address some of the perceived barriers and overcome these challenges.

This desk research has highlighted the complexity of the understanding of quality in Higher Education, and thus the different possible ways of putting quality assurance into practice as well as the barriers that students face. Therefore, it is extremely important to develop a student-centred concept of quality and to fit, as much as possible, the processes to its purpose.

The next steps of the project, institutional site visits as well as a pan-European survey addressing grassroots students, will be key in identifying students' views on quality of Higher Education more concretely.

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8 ANNEX I: METHODOLOGY FOR SITE VISITS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This is an excerpt of the guidelines for site visits provided to the arranging National Unions of students (NUSes) and site visit team. It explains the methodology to be used at the site visits. These guidelines give clarifications about the information needed, the meetings to be organized, and the structure of the site visit report. Due to country specifics, each site visit was different, as can be seen in the final reports.

8.2 METHODOLOGY

QUEST research aimed to provide answers of the following questions:

- What can be the students' role in quality assurance?
- How can students' participation be encouraged through quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms/systems/frameworks?

Site visits will look into various practices regarding:

- student involvement in quality assurance policy implementation on the national level and in external quality assurance
- student involvement in quality enhancement processes on the national level through external quality assurance

The site visits will employ the methods of active and passive observation. There will be interviews with student representatives involved in quality assurance/enhancement processes and the institutional officials they are communicating with on regular basis.

Site visits will be organized locally by the relevant national unions. The selection of these unions will result from a desk research identifying those most able to show good

practices for student involvement in the quality assurance/enhancement systems/mechanisms/frameworks.

The site visits will be conducted by a site visit team consisting of two elected representatives of ESU and one member of ESU's QA experts pool and will last an average of three days.

The team may be assisted by a QA expert from the selected country, who should be active in ESU's QA experts pool. These student experts should, during the organisation of site visits, provide the site visit team with consultancy on their national QA systems. Although they will not take part in the actual site visits, their expertise is a valuable and essential contribution to the preparatory work for the site visits.

The team will also be assisted in its work by a liaison person delegated by the host NUS, who will be in charge of arranging the necessary meetings.

After each site visit, a report will be produced.

The host NUSes will, if possible, send any research papers relevent to the national level student involvement which the NUS considers relevant and helpful to the site visit team. The site visit team will inform the host NUS of the approximate duration of each meeting. To ensure a good practical organisation of the visit, an hour-by-hour schedule shall be prepared by the host NUS and the site visit team. The schedule should be finalized and circulated least a week before the site visit. The host NUS will also be consulted regarding the meetings to be arranged. The required meetings may differ from country to country. The list below should be used as guidance for the meetings which should take place.

- A *representative of the national QA agency* who is familiar with student involvement in the national QA system and communicates with the students or the hosting union on a regular basis;

- in case the country has several QA agencies, further meetings should be organized in order to get a representative picture;

- A student representative/official responsible for the training and management of the student *QA experts pool*;

- An academic affairs responsible(s) for the development of *QA—related policies* from the executive structure of the NUS;

- Student representatives *of the NUS in the board of QA and quality control bodies* on the national level;
- Students *involved in evaluation or accreditation teams* (expert panels) which carry out site visits;
- *Students involved in the set up of internal QA systems in the institutions in which they study*, especially students that have been party to preparation of self-evaluation reports for external reviews;
- Representatives of *other organization involved in QA;*
- *A Ministry of Education official in charge of QA policy*;

The site visit team is required to produce a written report on the whole site visit.

This report should be finished 20 days after the site visit is conducted. The NUSes will also receive the site visit report once it's ready for comments.

- Each national QA system has country specifics and the structure of the reports might differ from country to country. However, it is desirable that the following are included in the report: Short descriptions of the hosting unions
- History of student involvement in QA
- Description of the National QA framework
- Description of the students' formal rights to influence evaluation at higher education institutions
- Description of the QA-related policies of the hosting unions and lobby tools for promoting those policies
- New challenges for the student involvement in QA
- Methods and initiatives for involving students in QA
- Student participation in defining priorities in QA on national and institutional levels
- Methods for developing quality culture

9 ANNEX II: SITE VISIT—FINLAND

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, Finnish students demanded a more significant role in the decision-making of their universities. As a consequence, there is now a tripartite system in operation at all the official decision-making levels within institutions. This arrangement was legislated in the University Act. The application of the tripartite system may vary between universities, but there are always representatives of professors, other staff (lecturers, administrative staff, etc.) and students at all decision-making levels.

As a consequence of the Bologna Process, by 2005 all Finnish universities adopted quality assurance systems. During the development of the QA systems, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) pointed out the importance of student involvement. FINHEEC also supported higher education institutions by offering training to develop a more student-oriented QA system. One example of this was a training project organised in autumn 2005 under the auspices of FINHEEC. Nine universities and polytechnics worked to produce innovative models for the role of students in their own context. The training project showed that universities' quality assurance systems can include multiple types of student participation.

9.2 NATIONAL QA FRAMEWORK AND STUDENTS' FORMAL RIGHTS TO INFLUENCE EVALUATION AND EDUCATION AT HIGHER EDUCATION

The Finnish higher education system consists of two parallel sectors—universities and universities of applied science (UAS). The National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL) represents students studying in universities and the Union of Students in Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (SAMOK) is representative of the students in universities of applied science.

Finland reformed the higher education awards framework and degree structure in accordance with EHEA standards in 2005, introducing a strategy for the internationalisation of its higher education institutions for 2009–15.

Universities confer Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees; UAS also confer Bachelor's and Master's degrees. All degrees carry ECTS credits. Research degrees are, to a large extent, conducted at doctoral schools. These are supported by the Academy of Finland, which also carries out peer review assessments of research performance. Higher Education Institutions receive most of their funding from the Finnish government. Resources granted consist of core funding and performance-based quantitative funding. The role of FINHEEC is to provide a qualitative external dimension which complements the quantitative assessment carried out by the Ministry. Research is largely funded through the Academy of Finland. In addition there are also other public and private funding sources.

higher educationI activities are governed by performance agreements signed with the Ministry of Education and Culture following assessment and performance negotiations. Institutional performance is monitored and steered through the maintenance of statistical databases maintained by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The most recent legislation on higher education is the Universities Act. According to it, institutions are responsible for Quality Assurance and FINHEEC is the only body in Finland that is responsible for the external evaluations of Quality Assurance in Higher Education. FINHEEC's main task is to take care of evaluation projects, QA OVEC—Evaluation of Quality Assurance systems in Higher Education, and to assist institutions in the development of higher education systems.

However, it is the Higher Education Institution's responsibility to assure the quality and development of education. Finnish HEIs decide on their own quality systems, which by law must be externally evaluated on a regular basis. The results of these evaluations must be published. The law does not state who can be involved in external evaluations. FIN higher education EC's audit approach corresponds with the Enhancement-Led Evaluation philosophy. According to the audit reports and feedback received from the HEIs, the audits aim to enhance the systematic development of the quality system and operating methods. An institutional audit is valid for 6 years.

FINHEEC was established in 1996 to replace the Finnish Higher Education Council. The central decision-making body of FINHEEC is its council. The council consists of 12 members, selected for a four-year term. Students nominate two of these members. One of them is delegated by SYL and the other by SAMOK, meaning one student representative from universities and one from universities of applied sciences. Students have been involved as full members in the governance of FINHEEC since its establishment. Since 2004, FINHEEC has worked in three main fields: audits of quality assurance systems; evaluations for centres of excellence; and thematic evaluations. Students delegated by the two national unions of students are involved in all of these three fields. Evaluation groups usually consist of 5 members and always have one full

student member. The officers in FINHEEC Council choose the members' profile with consideration for the gender balance of the evaluation group and the student's field of study, and ask the NUSes to find students that fit the profile. NUSes are responsible for nominating students—they send the nominations to FINHEEC. The choice is made by the organisations' education advisers in charge of the quality assurance. Currently the two unions are setting up a database of students which they aim to use as an experts pool for the panel reviews. Until the database is completed, the call is sent to local unions that then approach the education adviser with proposals.

Apart from the >standard< evaluations, FINHEEC also performs thematic evaluations. Thematic evaluations consider a specific theme—e.g. international study programmes or the Bologna process. The composition of the review panel in thematic evaluations is the same as for panel reviews; there is always one student included. Students are also involved at the planning stage of thematic evaluations. The process involves a planning group apart from the evaluation itself. In general, students take part in this group as well. The proposal for an evaluation theme may come from any of the higher education stakeholders, including from students. After a suggestion is given, a discussion within the FINHEEC Council follows. Students are equal partners in the planning process and can affect the decision-making as well. The agenda for the thematic evaluation is prepared for the next three years but can be changed if an urgent theme is presented. The FINHEEC Council takes the final decision on the agenda and any proposed changes. The national QA framework of Finland includes Centres of Excellence evaluations. Each higher education institution can nominate its units or programmes to apply for the Centres of Excellence award. After the evaluations are performed, the institutions can become a Centres of Excellence, awarded by FINHEEC, and receive additional funding. As this is a quality enhancement based approach, FINHEEC does not undertake take any restrictions against institutions if they do not meet any specific criteria during these evaluations. These reviews focus on the general quality of the institution. This process is currently changing; the Centres of Excellence may not continue. When the student experts are selected for these evaluations, a prerequisite for them is to possess a certain level of QA understanding.

9.3 STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE QA PROCESSES

The national students' unions (NUSes) are free in defining their own educational policies, including policies on quality assurance. This is done in correspondence to both the needs of the students and to the educational priorities set up at national levels by different authorities such as the Ministry of Higher Education, FINHEEC, et cetera.

Both NUSes have had a delegate with full rights in the Council of FINHEEC since its foundation, so having a strong role in the decision-making process regarding QA policies is expected.

When it comes to promoting and lobbying their positions on QA, SAMOK and SYL representatives discuss policies in the FINHEEC Council's formal monthly meetings. They present themselves as being informal in their communication with FINHEEC, hence communications between student representatives and FINHEEC is viewed as an easy and productive process. SAMOK and SYL are free to contact the decision-making bodies and hold meetings with key actors in any area connected to their educational priorities. Local student unions also take part in lobbying groups. Communication and influence is bidirectional: from top-down and also bottom-up, thus reassuring a full and comprehensive channel for discussions. With respect to continuity, alumni are considered a valuable resource for policy promotion and for sharing expertise and experience.

SAMOK and SYL have a huge responsibility to find the >perfect< candidate that fits the criteria. This can prove challenging as has been discussed in the previous chapter.

After a candidate has been selected, they are forwarded to FINHEEC. FINHEEC is responsible for training the evaluation panel. They hold a one-day training event before the evaluation, usually with more than one group of evaluators. The training covers the following:

- FINHEEC background;
- HEIs background;
- Evaluation practices;
- Levels of evaluation.

The purpose of this training is to ensure that all members have the knowledge to proceed with the evaluation. After the training, evaluators receive materials relevant to the institution they are about to evaluate and begin preparing their visit.

During the whole process of an evaluation, the student evaluator is a full member and is always a part of the decision-making, discussions, meetings, and report writing. The team usually consists of one student member, academic member(s), and member(s) from the work force.

One of the greatest achievements in promoting student involvement in QA is the establishment of the National Student Feedback System, with the purpose of measuring student perception regarding the overall quality of the education experienced in their study programmes. Students receive this questionnaire after graduation. The questionnaire has been in used in universities of applied sciences since 2003. An improved questionnaire is currently being piloted in 8 universities, and thus it might be developed further, depending on the results from this survey. In terms of its relevance, the feedback system could be part of the funding scheme for higher education institutions starting in 2015.

9.4 DEVELOPING QUALITY CULTURE

There is no magical formula for developing a quality culture, but there are some ingredients that Finnish students have identified.

Students' view on the quality of their education is that it relies in trust and not in papers. Example practices that illustrate the trust between students and academic professionals are practices such as »Complaining Hours« that allow students to discuss openly with professors about obstacles to their educational development and together they find ways of improving the situation. There are practices in which students can see directly that their feedback is meaningful and that it can make a difference. At the beginning of the semester, the professor shows the students the feedback he/she received from students the previous year, describes what has already been changed or improved, and asks students to pay attention to the >weak points< to help the professor improve.

There are different perspectives on what >quality culture< means and how it can be achieved. One perspective is that »you shouldn't know you're doing it« (QA)—in the sense that QA as a conscious process is usually burdensome and may be useless bureaucracy. It was argued that internal QA is a heavy process when you start putting it on paper. Students' perspective on internal QA is that it's not a series of routine activities, but something from which all can benefit.

As an example of this, a workshop has been conducted for students that were not student representatives nor involved in any student union. It appeared that although the students weren't familiar with the terminology or the QA practices, they were experts without knowing it. They also knew very well how to make themselves heard and how to work together in order to assure quality in their educational process.

This practice is quite widespread and it mostly aims at identifying what quality means for students, to define and discover more concrete measures that could improve the

students' educational experience. In other occasions, it is used as a preparatory exercise for the external audit that the higher education institution will have. It was argued that quality of education discussions require a switch in the way in the perceptions of education and this strengthens the importance of having the discussions in the first place. Helsinki Technical University (HTU) is a case when inclusion of all stakeholders in QA and exchanging practices between the university's departments were the ingredients for success. HTU had a FINHEEC external audit in 2007, which the university failed. Between then and the second external audit in March 2010—which the HTU successfully passed—the university conducted two internal audit processes. This led to a more informal exchange mechanism between departments that had the chance to learn from each other, which created a sort of quality circle system. These auditing teams contained student representatives, which were not previously involved in any QA-related work. A task force group was temporarily set up at the university level including the President of the Student Union. Student inclusion in building a new and better QA mechanism at the university and departmental levels has contributed significantly to the creation of a quality culture. The effects were reflected in the second external review.

From the structural point of view, there are different perspectives on the usefulness of QA units on both university level and on all departmental levels. Some prefer to keep the number of these official bodies as low as possible. For instance, Laurea University of Applied Sciences has QA bodies on all levels, but University of Helsinki has one QA Committee at the university level and the entities at lower levels are more or less informal groups.

From the student perspective, quality culture is not only a structural matter; no one specific structure of internal QA guarantees the development and promotion of a genuine quality culture. Rather, the key aspects are inclusiveness, participation, creativity, and trust.

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Site visit team:
Liliya Ivanova, Coordinator QUEST research team
Alina Grava, ESU QA student experts' pool
Emilia Todorova, sparqs

10 ANNEX III: SITE VISIT—SPAIN

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Spain is undoubtedly an interesting case when it comes to the student involvement in the quality assurance processes as, despite the lack of good traditions in this, it has shown a rapid positive development in the last six years. In many regions of Spain, students are genuinely involved at all levels of QA. This has two main factors: the positive effect that both the Bologna Process and ESG have by defining students as main stakeholders in the education process, and the hard work of the national students union on the promotion of quality culture on the national level and through its local committees.

The basic criteria for accreditation are set out in the Royal Decree[14] that regulates the *new ordainment of official Higher Education study programmes* (RD 1393/2007, of 29th October).

The passing of the University Reform Law (Ley de Reforma Universitaria) in 1983 resolves two issues in Spanish universities: internal democratisation and autonomy. One of the consequences of this new situation is the increase in academic and scientific relations with European educational institutions. However, nearly ten years had to pass before quality evaluation processes began to develop.

The evaluation of higher education started to change in 1992. Between 1992 and 1994 the Experimental Evaluation Program of University Quality started to develop driven by the Universities Council, which was followed shortly afterwards by the Pilot Project of the European Union. In 1995 the Universities Council approved the Institutional Evaluation Program for assessing the quality of universities, which led to the first National Plan for the Evaluation of the Quality of Universities the next year, developing over four annual rounds. Among the more significant results of the plan is the implementation of a culture of quality in the Spanish university system and the application of an evaluation methodology based on similar schemes to those already implemented in the rest of Europe. It was followed by a second Universities Quality Plan 2001–03 (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2001). However, only in

14 A Royal Decree in the Kingdom of Spain is a rule of law discussed and agreed by the Cabinet of Spain (also called the Council of Ministers) and later issued by the head of state (the King of Spain), according to certain procedures.

2002 did the Council of Ministers set up the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA).

As a result of the Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in Bergen 2005, possible options for the implementation of student participation in quality assurance are being explored in Spain. ANECA began working on student participation.

The Forum, *IV Forum ANECA: Students and Quality Policies*, was a meeting point for different stakeholders of universites and started the debate on student participation in quality assurance policies in higher education. In 2006, ANECA contacted CREUP and other national student organisations for the purpose of composing a working group. ANECA then founded the Working Group for Student Participation in Quality Policies (GATPEPC). In June 2007, during the process of the ANECA external evaluation carried out by ENQA, the three students who remained members of GATPEPC were interviewed by the External Evaluation Committee in order to assess the commitment that ANECA had towards students. In early July 2007 ANECA held, in conjunction with the Universities General Directorate of the former Ministry of Education and Science, a summer school at the International University Menéndez Pelayo (UIMP) that focused on »student participation in quality assessment.« Later, ANECA invited some students who attended the UIMP Summer School to participate in the Institutional Evaluation Programme (PEI) during the final quarter of 2007 (ANECA, 2007). In December 2007 ANECA, after the successful participation of students in PEI, appointed five of these students as full members of evaluation committees for the verification phase of the DOCENTIA programme (evaluation of teaching activity). This was the first time that students participated as full members of committees in a Spanish formal programme. In February 2008, several students were appointed full members of the evaluation committees of the VERIFICA Programme, whose task is to analyse and verify the new proposed degrees that Spanish universities intend to introduce. In March 2008, the Advisory Council of ANECA invited Spanish university students to attend its standing committee. In 2009, coinciding with the renewal of the Advisory Council, the chairperson of CREUP was appointed as a full member of this Council.

On the national level, students have one additional channel to influence the national higher education policy, through the University Students' Council of the State (Consejo de Estudiantes Universitario del Estado), a body within the Ministry, which was established by a Royal Decree which set up a Statute for University Students and also includes a Chapter of rights. The launch of the student council established a direct representation channel between the students and the Ministry, similar to the previously existing two: one for rectors through the Universities Council, and one for the regional governments called the University Policy General Conference. This student council strengthens the students' representation. However, it does not have decision-

making power as the other two bodies, just an advisory role. It is made up of three representatives of the Ministry of Education, five experts appointed by the Minister of Education, and one student representative per university, one student representative of each student association member of the Education Council of the State, three representatives of national students' associations and one representative per Regional Student Council (if any exists). it is chaired by the Minister of Education; his vice president is the Secretary General for Universities, the general director for university student support, participation and employability, and acts as secretary. Its second vice chairperson is a student elected from among its members. This representative body opens a parallel and supplementary communication channel to that of the student association, empowering CREUP further for political representation. However, is the University Students' Council of the State who nominates students to the governing and advisory bodies of ANECA, for example. These are two lobbying channels that the union successfully uses. The NUS is consulted by the Ministry on regular basis and believes it can communicate its positions freely.

A main political priority in QA for CREUP is the development of the national QA student experts' pool as an effective way of raising and promoting quality culture on both national and institutional levels.

10.2 QA PROGRAMMES AND STUDENTS INVOLVEMENT

INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION PROGRAMME (PEI)

ANECA has continued the Institutional Quality Evaluation Program begun by the Universities Council. University institutions voluntarily submit themselves to an evaluation process that comprises a self-evaluation phase, a second external evaluation, and a final phase that determines the improvement actions to correct any weaknesses detected. Currently nearly every university has submitted its qualifications for evaluation. Student involvement in the external review panel actually started exactly with their involvement in PEI as observers. The first students that had observation role in PEI were approached by ENQA after their participation in the International University Menéndez Pelayo summer school.

DOCENTIA

The DOCENTIA programme is performed in cooperation with regional QA agencies and evaluates teaching activity. This was the first program in Spain in which students participated as full members of committees.

VERIFICA

The main aim of the VERIFICA program is to analyse and verify the new proposed study programmes (Bachelor, Master and PhD) that Spanish universities want to introduce. It started on February 2008.

AUDIT

ANECA in cooperation with two other regional agencies, AQU and ACSUG, have developed the *Assessment of Internal Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education* (AUDIT programme). The purpose of this initiative, which is addressed to all the university colleges and faculties that offer university education, is to provide guidance in designing internal quality assurance systems integrating all the activities implemented up until the present time related to degree programme quality assurance. The aspects included in the AUDIT programme are part of the requirements of the VERIFICA program, which deals with the legal requirements for the authorization and official register of new study programmes (Bachelor, Master and PhD).

In Spain there are seventeen autonomous regions, 11 of them have a regional QA agency. Only four of these eleven regional QA agencies are full members of ENQA and registered in EQAR. This case study explores the good practice examples for student involvement in three of them.

10.3 STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN THE QA AGENCIES' BODIES

ANECA

ANECA is the first agency that started working for genuine student involvement in QA. In general, there is at least one student member in each evaluation team. Currently there are five students that are full members of the evaluation committees as part of the DOCENTIA programme. The evaluation teams always have one student member. As far as VERIFICA is concerned, currently there are 46 students as full members of the evaluation committees; one or two per team. Students are full members of the evaluation committees.

The Advisory Board of ANECA is composed of up to 20 members appointed by the Board of Trustees under its President's suggestion; two of them are students proposed by the University Students' Council of the State. The Board of Trustees is ANECA's governing body. The Board of Trustees consists of the Minister of Education, who chairs the board; seven representatives appointed by the relevant ministries; three

Rectors; three members of regional governments; three students elected among the members of the University Students' Council of the State; and seven experts, one of them nominated by the University Students' Council of the State.

ACSUCYL (CASTILLA Y LEÓN)

Students can be involved as members of the assessment commissions of the agency as external experts »when the assessment process so permits« according to the regulations for the composition of the assessment body of the QA agency. However, student involvement in these bodies of the agency is accepted to be an objective rather than a strict requirement. There are no students involved as members of either the advisory or governance board of the agency. ACSUCYL conducts evaluations through DOCENTIA, VERIFICA, and AUDIT programmes. Students are involved in all of the three programmes as full members of the external review panels. In 2008, the agency began involving students in university evaluations, evaluations of the teaching staff, and programmes evaluations. As far VERIFICA is concerned, students are involved as experts in the review committees (there are five scientific committees, one per each programme field). There is one student in each of these committees. The recruitment process for students includes a QA seminar organized by the agency where both students and academics are invited. The most active students are contacted afterwards by the agency and invited to attend the review panels. Later, they have another training consisting of several components: a general training session whose first part is related to the agency's work itself, outlining its role, aims, and objectives, collaboration with students, the role of the students as experts, the national QA system, student involvement in QA from European perspective, and their role in the Spanish national QA framework. In the second part the QA, VERIFICA invites representatives of the universities to give examples for the functioning of one QA system on local level. A third part of the training is on the specific evaluation programme in which the students will participate.

AQU (CATALUÑA)

In 2005, AQU began including students in the external stage of evaluation. In this respect, all institutional and programme reviews carried out by the Agency involve the participation of students. AQU conducts external reviews in DOCENTIA, VERIFICA, and AUDIT programs. Students are included as full members of the external review panel. There is at least one student member in each team. This student is selected from the students database maintained by the agency.

AQU, together with the universities, promotes the training of students in university quality through quality assurance courses/seminars. In these trainings, students obtain knowledge and skills that enable them to be involved in quality assurance systems

and university evaluation and enhancement processes. Students that pass the course are entered in the AQU database of experts and may be appointed to review panels. Students registered at a Catalan university who are interested in taking the course and becoming reviewers should contact the university's head of student services.

The AQU has recently set a Student Commission to widen and systemize the participation of students in AQU's review activities. This commission advises the agency on projects with a direct impact on the student body and participates in producing studies of interest to the student body. This commission, made up of students from Catalan universities, participates in projects involving training and information for the student body on the quality of the higher education system in Catalonia. However, students need to be nominated by the rectors of the HEIs where they study in order to become members of this commission.

10.4 PROMOTING QUALITY CULTURE

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CREUP QA STUDENT EXPERTS' POOL

The quality assurance pool of CREUP has been functioning for more than a year, proving to be an effective tool for raising both the quality culture and university students' involvement in QA processes.

The pool is managed by a steering committee delegated by the General Assembly of CREUP.

The pool is now working mostly with ANECA but it is plannedin conjunction with other regional agencies to sign training agreements with different HEIs.

Whenever an agency or institution issues a call for an external review, the pool committee is responsible for nominating students from the pool, taking into account the criteria set by the agency/institution, the student's background in QA, and other balance criteria such as gender, region, field of studies, et cetera. The agency then selects from among those nominated by the steering committee.

Training for the pool members is conducted on an annual basis. Currently the pool consists of 30 people. In order to apply for participation in the training, the students do not need nomination from the local student union. The selection criteria for participation in the trainings, as well as for becoming pool members, are their QA knowledge, background, current student status, current or previous status as a student representative, and other balance criteria such as gender, region, field of studies, et cetera.

The dissemination of information about training sessions is the responsibility of the local student organization of CREUP.

Most of the students who apply for the pool are student representatives that understand the role of student participation in QA as a way to improve the university and the study conditions all students.

Once selected as pool members, students must attend the annual training. The training consists of three parts:

- technical part, internal and external QA processes, national QA framework, ESG, legislation framework, et cetera;
- policy part, the role of CREUP within it, CREUP's QA related policies, sharing of students' experience;
- practical part, case studies, exercises, role-plays.

The pool is financially sustained by CREUP for now, but plans to start functioning as a completely independent body, remaining closely related to the NUS.

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Site visit team:
Liliya Ivanova, Coordinator QUEST research team
Karl Agius, QUEST research team
Mari Simola, ESU elected representative

11 ANNEX IV: SITE VISIT—THE NETHERLANDS STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN QA

11.1 HISTORY OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN QA

The Netherlands have 14 research universities (RUs) and 39 Universities of applied sciences (UAS). Following the publication of the policy paper entitled *Higher education: autonomy and quality* (Ministerie van Onderwijs en Wetenschappen, 1985), the main responsibility for the quality of education was delegated to institutions. Together with France and Great Britain, The Netherlands was among the first European countries to institute a formal performance model system in the mid-1980s. The approach combined self-evaluation with peer review by visiting expert committees. The focus was the program, rather than the institution.

In the 1990s quality assessment was conducted trough external review by a panel of experts who were organized by an umbrella organization. At the time there were two umbrella organizations, one of them responsible only for public universities, and the other only for private institutions. In this model of quality assessment students were involved in the process of quality assurance (QA) mainly as interviews. However, the system of accreditation in The Netherlands was much more informal from the 1980s until 2003. Even though students were partially involved in the QA process, this happened in a much more informal way and without being regulated by any legislative framework. In 2002 the legal system of QA was introduced by the Ministry of Education. Since then students have been included as reviewers in panels of experts that conduct external reviews in Dutch institutions. In 2005 the ministries of education of the Netherlands and Flanders created an independent QA agency that has been responsible for the coordination of the QA processes in the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium). NVAO is in charge of the accrediation of study programmes and institutions. Reviews as such are conducted by a panel of independent experts, hired by the agency. Thus the final decision for accreditation is based on the report submitted by the panel. Student involvement in the reviews as panel members is compulsory. Therefore NVAO has organised their own student experts' pool. The students in the pool are recruited by NVAO through an open call published on the Agency's webpage, thus providing open access and transparency regarding the selection process. The number

of students in the pool is approximately between 10-15 and they are trained as reviewers by the Agency on equal basis with the other review panel members.

Student representatives are also included on NVAO bodies. Although not yet included on the executive board of NVAO, students contribute to the decion-making process in the entity as members of NVAO's advisory board, which provides feedback to the executive board.

11.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL QA FRAMEWORK

The current Dutch and Flemish accreditation system is a three tiered system:

- Tier one is the institution: the principal responsibility for quality assurance lies here. In the process of (initial) accreditation the institution provides a Self Evaluation Report (or programme dossier).

- The second tier is the external quality assessment agency, which is the role of secretaries—After being certified and trained by NVAO these secretaries then organize panel reviews. Their task is to assess programmes using an independent panel, leading to a panel report.

- NVAO is the third tier. On the basis of the panel report, submitted by the institution, NVAO decides upon accreditation.

The self–evaluation report is the connection between the internal and external QA systems. Although it is not a legislative requirement, students are involved in the preparation of the self-evaluation report in almost all HEIs.

As a national QAA body NVAO is in charge of:

- recognition of new higher education institutions; NVAO looks at the potential quality of higher education provision of the new institution;

- institutional audits in which NVAO assesses the institutional quality assurance sytem;

- initial accreditation of new programmes (i.e. programmes that want to offer a recognised degree);

- accreditation of programmes that already offer a recognised degree;

- assessment of distinctive (quality) features of programmes and institutions at the request of the relevant institution;
- publication of decisions (and officially recognised degrees);
- internationalization activities related to quality assurance in higher education;

Accreditation in The Netherlands takes place both at the programme and institutional level. The focus is however placed on individual programmes.

The agency (NVAO) is an independently operating body. The board of NVAO however is elected by the board of ministries (Minister of Education of The Netherlands and Minister of Education of Flanders).

It should be pointed out that NVAO does not execute the actual quality assessments; these are done by separate quality assessment agencies and organized by coordinators after this date. These panels have to conduct the actual reviews in accordance with the national QA framework. NVAO investigates the report prepared by a panel secretary as part of the evaluation process. The review panel often includes international experts. In the case of initial accreditation however the system is also three tiered. The actual quality assessment is again conducted by an NVAO panel, organized and certified by the agency coordinator.

In The Netherlands, the legislative opted for an open system of quality assessment agencies. Given the open system, NVAO has been given the legal task to annually draw up a list of certified secretaries to organize quality assessments that are considered capable of producing assessment reports, which meet NVAO requirements. In order to be eligible for inclusion in the list, the secretaries must receive training and a certificate by NVAO. In each and every external review panel there must be at least one student representative.

The quality NVAO's work is reassured by another body—Education Inspection, which is part of the Ministry of Education. The Inspection monitors NVAO. At the moment a new law that will provide the Inspection with more power is under discussion in the Dutch parliament.

11.3 STUDENTS' FORMAL RIGHTS TO INFLUENCE THE QA PROCESSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

There are two student representatives in the advisory board of NVAO. In 2007 it was recommended in the self –evaluation report, prepared for the review of NVAO that the role of the board of should be strengthened, and this is currently in place. Thus students have the legal right to actually influence all of the decisions taken within NVAO. They are also able to provide feedback and comment on all of the QA-related policy papers from the Ministry of Education through their involvement in this body. From a legal point of view, the role of LSVb and ISO's (national unions of students in The Netherlands) QA experts within the advisory board is thus secured by the legislative system. The two unions are working further on raising genuine student involvement in QA, since although a necessity according to the formal legal framework it does not result in genuine student engagement being achieved in practice.

As mentioned above, students' formal involvement in the QA system in The Netherlands exists since 2003. According to the QA system, the external review panels are obliged to meet with the student body when visiting a particular higher educationI during the accreditation process. Thus through regulating an obligatory meeting with student representatives, the system secures that the voice of students is heard. The national students' unions (NUSes)—LSVb and ISO are completely independent in defining their own educational policies, including the ones related to QA. Their work in the QA field is performed in correspondence to both the needs of students and to the educational priorities set up at national level by other stakeholders as well—such as the national QA Agency NVAO, the Ministry of Education and so on.

When it comes to promoting and lobbying to achieve their priorities, ISO and LSVb representatives sustain good dialogue with other stakeholders. The two NUSes communicate with NVAO officials on regular basis. They have good communication with the Ministry and are consulted on a regular basis regarding planned changes in the education system. The most recent example of this is the five-year strategic framework prepared by the Ministry. LSVb and ISO submitted their comments to the Ministry as a regular part of the consultation process.

11.4 RAISING STUDENT QUALITY CULTURE

When it comes to methods for raising the quality culture effectively, it can be stated that these processes are well integrated within the Dutch QA system, starting from the institutional and going all the way up to national level.

As a result of the Bologna Process and the introduction of a new national quality assurance system based on the European Standarts and Guidelines as well as external evaluations and accreditation of study programmes, the HEIs in The Netherlands developed their own quality culture in education. Part of this is the broader inclusion of students in the QA processes. The broader involvement and engagement of students played a key role for raising the quality culture of students and enhancing the information provision regarding the QA processes on all levels. Both on institutional and on national level a good understanding has been fostered regarding the importance of student involvement in QA. Of course as far as HEIs are concerned, another implicit reason for working on developing a quality culture was to anticipate external reviews in the most effective way, regardless of whether they are based on the evaluation of the institution as a whole or individual study programmes.

Another tool for raising the quality culture of students is the QA student pool. Once students become part of the pool they becoming more heavily involved in the field of QA. Thus they enrich both their theoretical and practical knowledge with regards to QA, enabling them to become multipliers of the effects of NVAO trainings. The mandate of students involved in the NVAO students' pool lasts for two years. Students are selected on a basis of an open-call after being interviewed by NVAO. The training itself lasts for two days. It includes role play, explanation of the national QA framework, review of old reports/self evaluation reports, simulations/interviews, and open discussions QA-related issues.

A good practice example is the quality enhancement-based approach of all higher education stakeholders regarding the development of the educational system in The Netherlands. A recent example of this is the last reform that took place on January 1, 2010. Although the QA system in The Netherlands gives positive results, the upcoming reform in the Higher education sector that has been designed in consultancy with all stakeholders including students aims to ensure continued improvement of the national framework.

Site visit team:
Liliya Ivanova, Coordinator QUEST research team
Fernando Miguel Galán Palomares, QUEST research team
Blazhe Todorovski, ESU QA student experts' pool

12 ANNEX V: CASE STUDY—SCOTLAND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

12.1 SETTING THE SCENE

Quality processes in Scotland's university sector are characterised by two main features: firstly, a focus on enhancement rather than assurance and secondly, a strongly collaborative and student-centred approach. These factors manifest themselves in a number of features that are innovations not just within the United Kingdom but the world.

This paper outlines the key features of the quality processes in Scotland's university sector and the student role within them.

Scotland is a country of around five million people. Alongside England, Wales and Northern Ireland, it is one of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the UK, for short).

Scotland has a long university tradition: three of its universities were founded in the 1400s. When the Act of Union in 1707 united Scotland and England under one government, education was one of four areas where Scotland's distinct aspects of public life were protected (the other three being Scotland's national church, banks and legal system).

Since 1999, Scotland has had a devolved parliament and government which has responsibility for a wide range of internal affairs, including all tiers of education. The Scottish Government[15] sets annual budgets and ministerial guidance for its twenty

15 *http://www.scotland.gov.uk*

universities and forty-three colleges[16], and these are disbursed on its behalf by the Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education (SFC)[17].

The SFC is responsible for publicly-funded education beyond secondary school. This is delivered by two types of institution: universities and colleges[18]. The university sector is often known as the higher education sector. The college sector is often known as the further education sector, though colleges also deliver a large number of higher education courses. Combined, the two sectors are referred to as the tertiary education sector. There is somewhat closer harmony between the two sectors than in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Universities and colleges are obliged by law[19] to have bodies to represent students, and these bodies are entitled to at least one member on the institution's governing body (often called a Court or Board of Management). These student bodies are often called student guilds, students' representative councils or students' unions, but by far the most common term in Scotland is students' associations (SAs). They are led by student officers elected by the student population. Representatives of students at each level of each programme (usually called class or course reps) are also normally elected.

12.2 QUALITY PROCESSES AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN SCOTLAND

Some years ago, Scotland's higher education sector moved from an assurance model of quality to an enhancement-led approach, which was enshrined in a new Quality Enhancement Framework. This means that the key questions are less about whether institutions are achieving certain standards, and more about what institutions are doing to reflect on their work and identify ways of continually improving. There are five key elements to the Quality Enhancement Framework: Institution-led internal

16 The number of colleges may not remain at forty-three: there have already been some mergers in recent years, and in February 2012 the Scottish Government announced a restructure of the college sector. This created twelve new regional groups of colleges that will be expected to plan their work collaboratively. Some of them may go on to fully merge. More details are on the Scottish Government website at *http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2012/02/College01022012*

17 *http://www.sfc.ac.uk*

18 You can see a list of all the SFC-funded institutions at *http://www.sfc.ac.uk/about_the_council/council_funded_institutions/council_funded_institutions.aspx*

19 Under Part II of the 1994 Education Act: *http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1994/30/contents*

reviews; Enhancement-led institutional reviews (ELIR); Public information; Student engagement; and Enhancement Themes[20].

In addition to the Quality Enhancement Framework, which is unique to Scotland, there are other quality indications that the Scottish university sector must be mindful of. One of those external indicators is the UK Quality Code, which sets out a series of expectations that every Higher Education Institution in the UK must meet. The UK Quality Code is an overarching guidance which explains academic standards and what level they are at within the UK, as well as the quality of learning opportunities. More information about the code is available on the website of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education[21].

Beyond this, there are a number of features of the quality environment which are distinct to Scotland, and which are of frequent interest from abroad:

- A single funding body for institutions, rather than separate university and college funding bodies
- A national development agency for student engagement, called sparqs (student participation in quality Scotland)
- The Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework[22]—an integrated map of all Scottish courses and qualifications, showing students and potential students the inter-relation and progression routes between them.

In the spirit of the student engagement element, student representatives are engaged in a wide range of national bodies and committees, including sometimes as the chairs, ensuring that the student voice is at the heart of the strategic decisions being taken about the direction of higher education in Scotland.

12.3 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN QUALITY PROCESSES

A distinctive feature of the quality arrangements in Scotland is the importance of student engagement. Institutions are expected to engage students in the processes of review internally and externally AND review investigates how well the involvement

20 *http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/docs/publications/enhancement-themes-enhancing-the-student-learning-experience.pdf*

21 *http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Scotland/AboutUs/Pages/Quality-enhancement-framework-in-Scotland.aspx*

22 *http://www.scqf.org.uk/The%20Framework/*

of students throughout the institutions quality processes contributes to the enhancement of the student experience.

Through the self-reflection document institutions are expected to reflect on their arrangements for student involvement in internal quality processes and external review reports will comment on these arrangements.

In Scotland, students are recruited by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Scotland to be student reviewers. This is an interview process open to all students that have studied at a Scottish university for at least three years. Once the students have been successful in the interview process they go through an extensive training, which includes a two night residential with the other members of the review team. The student members are treated as full review panel members, and they are encouraged to play an active role in investigating the student experience at a university. This does not mean that the other review panel members cannot ask questions which are specifically related to the student experience, it simple acknowledges that the student members expertise lie in knowing what it is like as a student to be educated at a Scottish university, and this is where they can add a genuinely different perspective on the review panel. The external review process would expect to see evidence of students from the institution undergoing review being involved in all aspects of the review process. This would involve contributing to the self-reflection document, being part of the team preparing for review and contributing evidence to the review visit.

Student involvement in internal quality review processes is extensive. Students participate as reviewers on the formal internal reviews at departmental level, which take place on a 6 year cycle. External review will explore the effectiveness of these internal reviews. Students' associations work with their university to ensure that student representation is present on the Learning and Teaching Committee or Quality Assurance Committee and that this representation is informed by a wide range of student opinion. Student representation is influential in informing strategic change and enhancement. Such involvement is often mirrored in the quality assurance and enhancement activities within subject departments and other areas of University life.

Scotland has long recognised that students should contribute to the improvement of the students' experience at university, and for many years universities in Scotland, and the rest of the United Kingdom, have had some sort of class or course representation. This course representation systems, allows for one or two students to be elected by students on their course to raise matters about the course with the university. All the universities in Scotland have a very structured approach to utilise the input from their course reps. At the end of every course there is a specific meeting with the course reps and members of staff, which allows the course representatives to make changes to their course in time for the course to be run again. However, this structured approach

does not prevent course representatives from speaking to their lecturer or tutor about the course, its content, and learning and teaching issues, during the time they are taking the course. These opportunities allow for student representatives at the course level to make a relevantly quick change to their course for benefit of all students. The course representative system is also linked to representation with the students' association. As mentioned above, the students' association has representation within the university's learning and teaching committees. Ideally, concerns that are raised at the course level can be fed up through the representative structures of the students' association giving those student officers the correct knowledge and evidence at the committee meeting.

The process describe above requires a lot of effort and work from the students' association and the students that become course reps or student reps at any level. The Higher Education sector in Scotland, recognised that in order for student representation at these levels to work well together, there would need to be a good relationship between the students' association and the university, but also that there was need for external support to be given. It was in this context that sparqs (student participation in quality Scotland) was created. As an organisation, sparqs supports the students' associations and the institutions to increase student engagement in the decision making processes to do with learning and teaching within a university and at a national level. sparqs provides training and support to course reps and any student rep that deals with learning and teaching. Sparqs has been training course reps across Scotland since 2004, and sparqs provides training for students' associations to participate in the quality assurance and enhancement reviews, while using the processes of the reviews to inspire change at their university.

These representative systems do not exclusively focus on the learning and teaching experience at an individual university, but they are fed into the representative systems of the National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland. This collective voice is supported by sparqs to engage with the national aspects of the Quality Enhancement Framework; Enhancement Themes and Public Information.

The enhancement nature of quality in Scotland means that there have been many developments in the area of student engagement in the last 10years. Such developments continue. Universities within Scotland work with organisations like sparqs, the QAA Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council, to ensure that improvements are continually made to student engagement, so that student representatives can properly contribute to a lasting education vision within Scotland.

Megan McHaney
Student Participation in Quality Scotland (SPARQS)

13 ANNEX VI: CASE STUDY—GERMANY FREIE ZUSAMMENSCHLUSS VON STUDENTINNENSCHAFTEN—FZS

13.1 SETTING THE SCENE

As the responsibility for education in general and for higher education still remains at the federal level, there has been no centrally organized body responsible for quality assurance before 2001. The >Länder< (federal states of which there are sixteen in Germany) therefore founded the >Akkreditierungsrat< (Council for Accreditation within the system of higher education in Germany) in 2001.

- The duty of the accreditation council, which has the legal state of a foundation of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia since 2005, is now responsible for: interpretation and concretisation of the law and the rules of the >Kultusministerkonferenz< (KMK—Conference of the sixteen ministers of the states responsible for education),

- the accreditation of the quality agencies in Germany, deciding on cases of appeals, and to the control and improvement of the system of quality assurance in Germany.

Since the beginning of the development and implementation of the German QA system, there has been the strong will among the KMK to establish a market-based system with a competitive environment between the agencies responsible for the accreditation. This led to the present situation in which Germany has rating agencies allowed to conduct quality reviews, including two agencies from foreign countries.

The criteria for the process of accreditation was first set by the KMK in 2003 with one central document called >Ländergemeinsame Strukturvorgaben< (common guidelines for accreditation) and then adapted to actual developments through an ongoing process. It contains strict rules for the structure of study programs, some basic principles about access to study programs for both bachelor and master, guidelines for mobility, names of degrees, ECTS, and other topics. In addition to the common guidelines, every state is allowed to implement state-specific rules. The whole set of criteria is supplemented by a central document written by the accreditation council,

summarizing the criteria developed by the states and amended by general instructions for conducting reviews.

This document points out three types of accreditation. Firstly, the program-based accreditation, which focuses on specific questions in the context of each study program. These reviews can be combined into >clusters<, a combination of up to ten to twelve clearly related study programs. They are then conducted as one combined review. »Concept accreditation« is for future study programs. The reviews are based only upon documents provided. A site visit will only take place if necessary. The last type is the institutional accreditation, which is described in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance.

13.2 POSITION OF STUDENTS WITHIN THE GERMAN SYSTEM

Students are involved on all stages of decision-making concerning quality assurance, except in the Ministry. Although student influence is limited, they have the right to attend all relevant meetings, access documents, and influence decisions. Students also have full voting rights within the decision making process. A student is asked to attend all quality reviews as a members of the review team which, depending on the size of the review and the number of the study programs, should contain an adequate number of students. Students are also involved within the agencies and in the accreditation council at all relevant positions where decisions are made.

THE GERMAN QUALITY ASSURANCE EXPERTS POOL

Since 2001, the students involved in the QA system belong to an experts pool. The pool is the only legitimate body which is allowed to delegate students to every position connected to the German quality assurance system. It is responsible for training students for their positions. It should provided regular trainings to allow the students to keep themselves up to date and to share their experiences

It is maintained by three organisations: the unions of students of the federal states, the general assumblies of study programmes of Germany, and the fzs. As the fzs is the only one of these which has an official status as a registered organisation.

The pools most important body is its general assembly (>Poolvernetzungstreffen<). It is responsible for the general decisions and the overall focus of the pool and consists of representatives of the bodies mentioned above. The general assembly also elects the executive committee (>Koordinierungsausschuss des studentischen Akkreditierungspools—KASAP<), which consists of three to five students. The EC is responsible for day work, the decisions to be made between general assemblies, and representing the

interests of the pool to different stakeholders. The pool has two employees who are responsible for interaction and communication with the agencies, planning the study sessions and trainings, delegation of students to the quality reviews, and financing. Selecting students for the reviews is done on a random and gender equality based system. The pool database currently contains approximately 700 students who are trained to attend quality reviews. Nearly all study programs are represented by the students in the pool, although there are some imbalances between them. For example, students from the area of arts and music are often not connected to their representation and therefore are not confronted with the questions of QA. On the other hand, students of political sciences often are motivated by the context of their studies.

The pool is mostly financed by the agencies who commit themselves to a fixed amount of money on a two year contract. Additionally, some agencies and local student unions finance trainings and study sessions from time to time.

13.3 CONCLUSIONS

The German accreditation system is a complex and diverse structure. Due to the fact that the federal states are still responsible for the education system and that Germany has ten different agencies conducting accreditations and evaluations, the outcome and quality of the processes are often connected to the included persons. This is why the German accreditation pool emphasizes and fosters the quality of training for students. Students are often said to be the best prepared experts in the system.

Julian Hiller, fzs

14 ANNEX VII: FOCUS GROUP REPORT CHALLENGES IN FRONT OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN QA (QUEST WORKSHOP 2)

14.1 SETTING THE SCENE

The focus groups exercise was conducted at the second QUEST Workshop and aimed to outline the main challenges to student involvement in quality assurance. Focus group discussions were used as a tool for providing student feedback in this problematic area. This method provides more space and possibility for the students to give their feedback than the traditional feedback exercises, as it stimulates open discussion. The participants were divided into 3 small groups according to their experience in QA and balanced between the different levels of experience: internal, external, and QA agency governance level of involvement. An overall balance of geography and gender was arranged.

Students that participated in the working groups were student representatives. The majority of the participants became involved in QA after election to positions within their national student union.

14.2 STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN QA—DIFFERENT PATHS, DIFFERENT LEVELS SIMILAR MOTIVATION

Student involvement in QA often starts with the student being a member of the academic senate or other organisation in their institution, then continuing as an external student reviewer and in further work on the national level. Some of the participants were involved as board members in the QA board steering a programme on faculty level and later on in the university committee for QA, then the accreditation council, and only afterwards became involved in the national union. In other cases, students were introduced to quality assurance after being elected as student representatives on the national level, then they became involved in the QA processes on faculty and programme levels. Many of the students attended working groups and seminars initiated

by national agencies, information about which they received through the national student union. Still others became familiar with the opportunities for participating in the QA processes through working groups, workshops, and trainings initiated by the national student union. Students who have not been student representatives are rarely involved in the QA processes. Participants shared that a demotivating factor for the majority of students can be the slow pace of the QA systems/frameworks/mechanisms and the time over which recommended changes occur. This makes it difficult for students to see the benefits of their involvement. However, a clear understanding that the next students will reap the benefits of the work of the current students and that the next generation's experience will improve was a factor contributing to the sustainability of those processes.

Participants share the view that a main motivating factor for being involved in QA is the genuine understanding of the positive effects these processes can have on the education system and that they can contribute to the development of ideas and practices that will enhance the quality of the learning experience.

Information provision is a key challenge to student participation in QA. The role of the student union as a mediator and communicator between institutional governance and the students is essential. However, it is often the case that the information on QA practices and involvement opportunities for students in the internal QA systems are lost in the other communications students receive. In the students' view, more information campaigns should be launched at the local level. On the institutional level, the function of the quality assurance mechanisms should be explained in a more simple and accessible way. In all of the focus groups, the availability of information was defined as a key challenge that student face when it comes to their broader involvement in QA processes at all levels. The existing information sources such as the web sites of QA agencies and institutions do not motivate students to be involved. It is difficult to reach students that have not been involved before. Therefore the domain itself should be made more accessible. A major hurdle to clear is making students understand their role as active agents of change that can make real change in their education. Sometimes, the lack of means of communication or access to information creates a negative experience for students who would otherwise become involved. One of the goals of quality assurance is to prevent bad practices in higher education. Another issue is the specific terminology of quality assurance, which is not student-friendly. The inaccessibility of terminology prevents common students from understanding quality assurance the way student representatives might. Student representatives must be more aware of the underlying processes, but also must provide important informations in a student-friendly way. It is essential to know which information students need and to present the information in the context of institutional and national quality assurance framework. Understanding the frameworks, QA vocabulary, structures, and variations in the function of these elements at different levels remains a challenge to stu-

dents. Student unions should define the roles of each level, ensure that there is information from each of them, and make the information accessible and comprehensible for the average student.

Most of the students in higher education are focused on their learning considering the tools they have for making their voice and their opinions heard and changing their learning experience. Students believe that closing the feedback loop is very important as it helps students understand the point in providing feedback. It is also beneficial for the teaching staff. However, from the students' view there is still more to be done to close the loop. In order to help motivate and promote student involvement, the HEIs and QA agencies should create a proper setting. QA agencies must promote the acceptance of students as partners to set an example for higher education institutions that often do not share this view. QA agencies concentrate on management levels and academic staff; students do not seem to be a priority, and this should change. QA agencies should look for genuine student participation when evaluating institutions.

On the institutional level, it is important to assess learning outcomes with different pedagogical styles in mind, as this also feeds back into student participation.

Government support towards student engagement must be clearly stated and confirmed by actions outlined in a consistent national QA strategy. Consultancy on regular basis regarding the national QA framework should be provided to the national unions.

Once involved in the external review panels, students continue to face challenges.

The attitude of the other members of the review often can be destructive. There are still cases in which other review panel members or involved persons attempt to influence the opinion of the students. Participants commonly observed that, in many cases, the interviewees in external reviews could be prepared in advance by the institution under evaluation before the evaluation takes place, which compromises the quality of the evaluation. In some cases, gender balance within the review panel can be a challenge.

14.3 CONCLUSION

This report outlined the main challenges to students getting involved with quality assurance on different levels. The focus groups attempted to create an open discussion integrating the view points of students with different national backgrounds. The ideas presented are based on the experience of the participants, which they have obtained on national and institutional level. It is important to reiterate that the purpose of this

report is to present important questions for discussion, both for the NUSes and other stakeholders in higher education, on how to ensure genuine student participation in QA on all levels.