Quality Assurance of Higher Education – Examples of the Quality Culture

Karl Holm
3 November 2015
Tbilisi, Georgia
QA for HE

- HE institutions are many – more than two thousand in EHEA only

- We do not live inside our national boarders – HE is global and mobile

- QA is a way of communication
Some terminology

• **Quality management** refers to the procedures, processes or systems that the HEI uses to maintain and develop the quality of its activities.

• **Quality culture** describes the environment and atmosphere in which the operations are developed, as well as the individual and collective commitment to the quality work. HEIs themselves define in concrete terms what quality culture means in their context of operation. Well-established quality culture is characterised by wide participation, commitment and transparency.
Different methods

• Main methods for QA are:

• Audits

• System and programme accreditations
AQ Austria

• Developing and carrying out external quality assurance procedures such as audits for higher education institutions and accreditation procedures for higher education institutions and degree programmes, according to national and international standards; continuously supervision of accredited higher education institutions and degree programmes regarding the accreditation requirements;
OAQ Switzerland

- OAQ is the only national agency active in the field of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. OAQ accredits institutions and study programmes and carries out evaluation procedures and institutional audits. It defines the quality standards and develops guidelines for assessing the quality of public and private higher education institutions.
NCPA Russia

• Recognising the best educational programmes, determined on the basis of the results of external evaluations as best in the particular region, and in regard to specific fields of study.
• Accrediting the best educational programmes in alignment with ESG-ENQA, federal state educational standards, and requirements of professional associations and the regional labour market.
• Providing Russian HEIs with information and methodological support on quality issues.
• Publishing information about the accredited educational programmes.
• Training experts in the field of higher education quality assessment in alignment with ESG-ENQA.
ASIIN Germany

• Organised as a membership-based, not-for-profit association under German law, ASIIN e. V. is carried by a broad coalition of academic and professional associations and higher education institutions. All activities of ASIIN e. V. are aimed at securing and further expanding high standards and the quality of higher education - within Germany and internationally. ASIIN operates internationally on a private-law base but is located in Germany.
FINEEC Finland

• To evaluate activities of education and training providers and higher education institutions

• To undertake evaluations of learning outcomes

• To audit quality systems

• To conduct thematic evaluations and evaluations of educational fields

• To support education and training providers and HEIs

• To develop evaluation of education
ENQA and ESG
European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA

- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
- Umbrella NGO for European QA agencies
- Network in 2000; association in 2004
- 44 Full Members in 25 countries
- 48 Affiliates in 27 countries
- Consultative member of the Bologna Follow-up group
- Membership criteria by large “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG) – adopted by the ministers in 2005
- Cyclical reviews of quality assurance agencies in the EHEA
- Revised ESG adopted by the ministers in Yerevan May 2015
ENQA at a glance - mission

Promoting **European co-operation in the field of QA in higher education** in order to develop and share good practice in QA and to foster the European dimension of QA.

Maintaining and enhancing the quality of European higher education at a high level

Acting as a major **driving force for the development of quality assurance across all the Bologna signatory countries**.
ENQA at a glance - purpose and activities

- **as a membership organisation, to represent members** at the European level in political decision making processes

- **to function as a think tank** for developing quality assurance further in the EHEA

- **to function as a communication platform** for sharing and disseminating information and expertise in quality assurance

- **ENQA** coordinates all ENQA members’ external review processes
ESG: purposes

- They set a **common framework** for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching at European, national and institutional level;

- They **enable the assurance and improvement** of quality of higher education in the European higher education area;

- They **support mutual trust**, thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders;

- They **provide information** on quality assurance in the EHEA.
ESG: principles for QA

• HEIs have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance

• QA responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students

• QA supports the development of a quality culture

• QA takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society
ESG: Scope

“The focus of the ESG is on quality assurance processes related to teaching and learning in higher education, including the learning environment and relevant links to research.

The ESG apply to all higher education offered in the EHEA regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery. While some of the standards refer to programmes of study that lead to a formal qualification, the ESG are also applicable to higher education provision in its broadest sense and to transnational, cross-border provision.”
ESG: structure

The overall structure of the ESG with three parts remains. No additional chapters for specific types of HEIs or programmes, or for specific modes of provision.

• The **standards** set out agreed and accepted practice for QA in HE in the EHEA and should, therefore, be taken account of and adhered to by those concerned, in all types of HE provision.

• The **guidelines** explain why the standard is important and describe how standards might be implemented. They set out good practice in the relevant area for consideration by the actors involved in quality assurance. Implementation will vary depending on different contexts.
Expectations for HEIs

It is up to each institution to develop its own quality culture and to put in place policies, strategies and systems adapted to its situation, mission, context and ambition.

The HEIs’ quality assurance mechanisms have to satisfy their proper needs but also the expectations of their partners and stakeholders. The first set of standards clarifies the goals.
Main principles and values of the ESG

- Transparency and external expertise in QA processes
- Twin-purpose of QA: Accountability and enhancement
- Encourage culture of quality within HEIs
- HEIs have primary responsibility for quality and QA
- Processes to demonstrate accountability
- Efficient & effective organisational structures for provision and support of programmes
- Diversity and innovation
- Interests of society safeguarded
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old ESG – Part 1</th>
<th>New ESG – Part 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance</td>
<td>1.1 Policy for quality assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards</td>
<td>1.2 Design and approval of programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Assessment of students</td>
<td>1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff</td>
<td>1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Learning resources and student support</td>
<td>1.5 Teaching staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Information systems</td>
<td>1.6 Learning resources and student support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Public information</td>
<td>1.7 Information management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Public information</td>
<td>1.8 Public information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</td>
<td>1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</td>
<td>1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Audit framework and objectives
Premises for the audit

WHY?
• Bologna process: Need to demonstrate that functional QA procedures are in place in Finland both in HEIs and on the national level
• Aim to create a framework for the institutions’ continuous development

HOW?
• Institutional approach which covers all core duties of HEIs
• Based on the autonomy of HEIs and trust
• HEI responsible for the quality of its operations and may develop its quality system based on its own needs

DEVELOPMENT
• Continuous development of the audit method and process
• In 2015, an updated version of the Audit Manual (incl. refinement of the criteria) was published, a renewed disposition of the audit report was formulated

FEEDBACK + & IMPACT
• Enhancement of quality culture and management systems, more consistent and clarified procedures, dissemination of good practices within and between HEIs, improved results, fostering a sense of community
• 2nd round: Enhancement of study programmes
External assessment of internal QA Audit

• Assesses **whether the quality system of a HEI is fit for purpose and functioning** and whether it complies with the agreed criteria

• Focuses on the **procedures that the institution uses to maintain and develop the quality of its operations** – Does not evaluate, e.g., the mission of the HEI, strategy as such, results, quality of education, quality of research
Audit process

Higher Education Evaluation Committee appoints the audit team.

Agreement negotiation

Preliminary time frame for the audit

Self-evaluation

Compilation and submission of other audit material

Audit visit

Audit team’s report and recommendation regarding the audit result

Publication of the report

Quality label – valid for 6 years

Concluding seminar at the HEI

Next audit in 6 years

If the HEI does not pass the audit, re-audit in 2-3 years

Feedback from the HEI and audit team

Follow-up seminar 3 years after the audit
Enhancement-led evaluation
FINEEC’s definition...

"The goal of enhancement-led evaluation is to help HEIs identify the strengths, good practices and areas in need of development in their own operations. The purpose is, thus, to help HEIs achieve their strategic objectives and steer future development activities in order to create a framework for the institutions’ continuous development.” (Audit Manual)

• Aim to support HEIs in the enhancement of quality and establishment of quality culture by (1) producing information to assist HEIs to develop their activities, and by (2) exchanging and disseminating good practices among other HEIs

• Institutions are neither rewarded for a positive result nor punished for a negative one – there are no financial incentives or loss of degree-awarding powers

• No ranking among institutions is established on the basis of audits
... reflected in the audit model

- **Participation of various actors, multifaceted evaluation**
  - In the whole process: planning, implementation, decision-making
  - Variety of perspectives taken into account when gathering and providing information

- **Interaction**
  - Public events organised at the HEI prior and after the audit visit to discuss the audit process and results

- **Trust**
  - Between the party implementing the evaluation and evaluation participant

- **Impact – providing relevant information and support**
  - Reflective self-evaluation primarily a tool that HEIs can use to develop its operations
  - Site visit an interactive event
  - Autonomy and strategic development of HEIs supported by the institutions’ possibility to select some of the targets of the evaluation
  - HEIs participate in a follow-up seminar 3 years after the audit
Audit targets and criteria – What is reviewed and how is it assessed?
…Audit targets regarding the institution’s core duties
Quality management of the HEI’s core duties, including essential services supporting these (1/3)

The fulfilment of the criteria is **reviewed individually for each core duty and optional audit target**

a. **Functioning of** quality management **procedures and their impact** on the development of the core duty / optional audit target

b. Comprehensiveness, usability and utilisation of **the information produced** by the quality system

c. **Roles and involvement of different parties** in terms of quality work, as well as the workload

d. Functioning, workload and effectiveness of the quality management of **key support services**
Quality management of the HEI’s core duties, including essential services supporting these (2/3)

- As an **optional audit target**, an HEI chooses a function that is **central to its strategy or profile** and which the institution wants to develop in terms of its quality management.

- May also be an overarching feature of the institution’s core duties.

- The optional audit target **not taken into account when evaluating whether the audit will pass**.

- **Examples** of optional audit targets selected by HEIs:
  Undergraduate study guidance, working life integration into teaching, studies preparing for entrepreneurship and the promotion of innovation work and entrepreneurship from the students’ perspective, lifelong learning, internationalisation, staff recruitment, students’ well-being.
Developing stage:

• *Functional quality management procedures advance the development of the institution’s core duty / optional audit target and the achievement of goals set for the operations.*

• *The quality system produces relevant information for the development of the core duty / optional audit target, and the information is used for this purpose.*

• *Personnel groups and students are involved in quality work. External stakeholders also participate.*

• *The quality management of key support services functions relatively well.*
Samples of degree education  

- Primarily **3 degree programmes** chosen as samples of degree education
- **HEIs** choose **two of these themselves**
  - UASs: One programme leading to a bachelor’s degree and one programme leading to a UAS master’s degree
  - Universities: One study entity leading to a degree that includes both bachelor’s and master’s education, as well as one programme leading to a doctoral degree

- Based on the audit material, **the audit team chooses a third degree programme** – at the latest, six weeks prior to the audit visit

- The fulfilment of the criteria is reviewed **individually for each programme** – All programmes get individual feedback!

- Programmes also complement the evaluation of the quality management of education by providing detailed information at the level of degree programmes
Samples of degree education (2/3)

Planning of the programme

• Curricula and their preparation
• Intended learning outcomes and their definition
• Links between research, development and innovation activities, as well as artistic activities, and education
• Lifelong learning
• Relevance of degrees to working life.

Implementation of the programme

• Teaching methods and learning environments
• Methods used to assess learning
• Students’ learning and well-being
• Teachers’ competence and occupational well-being.

Developing stage:

• The quality management procedures related to the planning of educational provision are fully functional and support the planning of the programme.

• The quality management procedures related to the implementation of educational provision are fully functional and support the implementation of the programme.
Samples of degree education  (3/3)

**Participation**
- Participation of different personnel groups, students and external stakeholders in quality work related to the degree programme.

**Effectiveness of quality work**
- Suitability of key evaluation methods and follow-up indicators and their impact on the achievement of goals.

Developing stage:
- **Personnel groups and students participate** in quality work. **External stakeholders** also participate.

- There is evidence that quality work has an enhancement effect on the programme.
...Policy- and system-level audit targets
Quality policy

a. Objectives and rationale of the quality system
b. Division of responsibility related to quality management
c. Communication of the quality policy
d. Linking of the quality policy to the institution’s overall strategy

Developing stage:

- The quality policy’s rationale, objectives and division of responsibilities are clearly defined and the result of an inclusive process.

- The quality policy is accessible to all internal and external stakeholders, taking their information needs into account.

- The quality policy is clearly linked to the institution’s overall strategy.
Quality system’s link with strategic management

a. **Information produced** by the quality system for strategic management

b. Functioning of the quality system **at different organisational levels and units**

c. Functioning of the **division of responsibility and commitment** of various parties in the quality work

Developing stage:

- **The quality system and the information it produces serve strategic and operations management.**

- **Established procedures ensure that the information produced is put to use and communicated systematically** within the institution and to external stakeholders.

- **The system works evenly across** different organisational levels and units.

- **The division of responsibility is effective**, and roles and responsibilities in the institution’s quality work are executed with **commitment**.
Development of the quality system

a. Procedures for developing the quality system

b. Development stages of the quality system

Developing stage:

• *The HEI has in place well-functioning procedures to evaluate and develop the quality system.*

• *The institution is able to identify the system’s strengths and areas in need of development, and development work is systematic.*

• *The development of the quality system after the first audit has been systematic. The system works better than before.*
The quality system as a whole

a. **Functioning** of the quality management procedures as a coherent system

b. **Comprehensiveness and effectiveness** of the quality system

c. **Quality culture** of the institution

Developing stage:

- The quality management procedures constitute a functioning system.

- **The quality system covers the essential parts of the core duties of the HEI and provides support for the development of the operations.** There is evidence that the system has an impact on the development of the core duties.

- The development of the operations is based on an existing quality culture.
Audit targets

1. Quality policy

2. Quality system’s link with strategic management

3. Development of the quality system

4. Quality management of the HEI’s core duties, incl. essential services supporting these
   - 4 a) Degree education
   - 4 b) RDI & artistic activities
   - 4 c) Societal interaction and regional development work
   - 4 d) Optional audit target

5. Samples of degree education (3 degree programmes)

6. The quality system as a whole
Threshold for passing

• Audits employ a set of criteria that is based on a **scale of four development stages** of quality management
  - absent
  - emerging
  - developing
  - advanced

• The development phase **for each audit target is determined individually**, including each degree programme audited

• The audit team can propose that the institution passes the audit if **none of the targets are ‘absent’ and if the quality system as a whole is at least ‘developing’** – Final decision made by the Higher Education Evaluation Committee
## Audit target 6. The quality system as a whole

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TARGETS</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. The quality system as a whole</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Emerging</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The HEI has only individual and unrelated quality management procedures.</td>
<td>• The quality management procedures do not yet form a functioning and unified system.</td>
<td>• The quality management procedures constitute a functioning system.</td>
<td>• The quality management procedures form a dynamic and coherent system.</td>
<td>• The quality management procedures cover all the core duties of the HEI and provide excellent support for the institution’s overall strategy and the development of the operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is no evidence of the procedures’ impact on the development of the operations.</td>
<td>• The quality system encompasses some of the HEI’s core duties but there is little evidence of the system’s impact on the development of the core duties.</td>
<td>• The quality system covers the essential parts of the core duties of the HEI and provides support for the development of the operations. There is evidence that the system has an impact on the development of the core duties.</td>
<td>• The quality system covers all the core duties of the HEI and provides excellent support for the institution’s overall strategy and the development of the operations. There is clear evidence that the system has an impact on the development of the core duties.</td>
<td>• The institution has a well-established quality culture, characterised by wide participation, commitment and transparency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The institution’s quality culture is only just emerging.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>