

***Results of the survey on the use and usefulness of external quality assurance reports for different stakeholders***

*Maiki Udam, Liia Lauri, Tiia Bach (EKKA)*

**Table of Contents**

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Methodology .....	2
3. Respondents.....	3
4. Results of the survey .....	5
4.1 Reasons for searching information about the quality of a higher education institution and its study programmes.....	5
4.2 Current sources of information .....	8
4.3 Reasons why not to use assessment reports .....	11
4.4 Helpfulness of assessment reports .....	13
4.5 Places to find reports published by QAA-s.....	18
4.6 Information expected by different stakeholders .....	20
4.7 Preferable format of information.....	22
4.8 Preferable sources of information .....	26
5. Conclusions.....	28
ANNEX 1 Survey on the use and usefulness of external quality assurance reports for different stakeholders .....	29
ANNEX 2 Summary of split-up groups: HEI-s.....	34
ANNEX 3 Summary of split-up groups: Employers.....	36
ANNEX 4 Summary of split-up groups: Students.....	38

## 1. Introduction

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is carrying out a European Commission LLP co-funded project Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports (EQAreps) together with four European QA agencies: OAQ (Switzerland), QQI (Ireland), ASHE (Croatia), and EKKA (Estonia).

The aim of the project is to develop European standards for quality assurance reports in order to ensure that the information contained in the quality assurance reports meet the expectations of the stakeholders. The outcomes of the project shall result in a recommendation to quality assurance agencies on the content and form of informative and approachable quality assurance reports (The EQArep consortium).

**The survey on the use and usefulness of external quality assurance reports for different stakeholders** was directed at all main stakeholder groups in higher education quality assurance: students, potential future employers, governments, and higher education institutions themselves. The purpose of the survey was to identify and compare the exact **interests of the various stakeholders** as regards information about the quality of institutions and of programmes.

More information about the project can be found on ENQA's webpage <http://www.enqa.eu/projectitem.lasso?id=456&cont=projDetail>.

## 2. Methodology

The questionnaire was drafted by the EQArep partners in December 2012. The first draft was sent to the Advisory Board representing EUA, ESU, Business Europe, and EURASHE. The Advisory Board gave its feedback in January 2013. After some amendments based on the commentary of the Board, the questionnaire was sent by the EQArep partners to the stakeholders in respective countries in February 2013. ENQA Secretariat sent it to their partners via the Advisory Board (EUA, ESU, Business Europe, EURASHE). Filled questionnaires were expected to be returned by the 28<sup>th</sup> of February. A week before the deadline, a reminder was sent to all the stakeholders.

The questionnaire (Annex 1) consisted of 13 questions. The first part of the questionnaire – questions 1-7 – dealt with the **current use** of the information about quality in higher education institutions and study programmes. The second part of the questionnaire – questions 8-10 – focused on the **expectations** of stakeholders: what information concerning the quality of a higher education institution they need, as well as where and in what format the information should be presented. The last three questions (11-13) asked for information about the respondent.

EKKA as the leading partner in this Work Package analysed the returned questionnaires in March 2013 and presented the results to the EQArep partners at a project meeting in Tallinn, Estonia, on 4 April 2013 as well as in the EQArep workshop for stakeholders in Tallinn on 6-7 May 2013.

The questionnaire was developed and the analysis conducted on the electronic platform LimeSurvey.

During the workshop in May, three split-up groups discussed the expectation of different stakeholders and the possible format / template of an assessment report. The main conclusions from these groups (Annexes 2-4) are introduced in the results of the survey in Chapter 4.7.

### 3. Respondents

Stakeholders were grouped as follows:

- representatives of higher education institutions
- students
- public authorities/government offices
- employers
- funders/investors
- other

There were altogether 127 respondents from 15 countries (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of respondents by countries

Country	Respondents
Ireland	37
Estonia	35
Switzerland	21
Croatia	15
Romania	3
Italy	3
France	3
Slovenia	2
Bulgaria	2
United Kingdom	1
Netherlands	1
Hungary	1
Germany	1
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1
Austria	1

The most active respondents were representatives of higher education institutions with the response rate of 70%. The response rate of students and public authorities was 28% and 21% respectively. There were only 3 employers in Europe willing to fill in the questionnaire that makes the response

rate 10% (see Tables 2 and 3). One should notice that the number of employers contacted was also very small: for example, in Switzerland no employer was contacted, in Ireland the number was 3 (2 answers) and in Croatia 5 (0 answers). In Estonia, 23 employers were approached but only one of them filled in the questionnaire (Table 4).

Table 2. Number of respondents by stakeholder groups

Group	Respondents
Higher education institution	78
Student	24
Public authorities/Government office	10
Other	12
Employer	3
Funder/Investor	0

Table 3. Response rate by stakeholder groups

Group	N° asked	N° responded	Response rate
HEI	112	78	70%
Student	86	24	28%
Public authority	48	10	21%
Employer	30	3	10%

Table 4. Respondents by countries

***Estonia***

	Students	HEI	Government Rep	Employer Rep
<b>Numbers asked</b>	21	30	19	23
<b>No of respondents</b>	7 (33%)	25 (83%)	6 (32%)	1 (4%)

***Switzerland***

	Students	HEI	Government Rep	Employer Rep
<b>Numbers asked</b>	32	29	23	
<b>No of respondents</b>	5 (16%)	15 (52%)	1 (4%)	

## ***Ireland***

	<b>Students</b>	<b>HEI</b>	<b>Government Rep</b>	<b>Employer Rep</b>
<b>Numbers asked</b>	12	29	1	2
<b>No of respondents</b>	9 (75%)	28 (97%)	1 (100%)	3 ?

## ***Croatia***

	<b>Students</b>	<b>HEI</b>	<b>Government Rep</b>	<b>Employer Rep</b>
<b>Numbers asked</b>	21	24	5	5
<b>No of respondents</b>	3 (14%)	10 (42%)	2 (40%)	0

## **4. Results of the survey**

Below, the results of the survey are presented. All responses are included in the general statistics (e.g., Figure 1); in the segmented statistics (e.g, Figure 2) only the responses from students, public authorities and higher education institutions are presented, as the response rate from employers was too low.

### **4.1 Reasons for searching information about the quality of a higher education institution and its study programmes**

The first question explored the reasons why stakeholders search information about the quality of a higher education institution (HEI) and study programmes. The answers indicate that the main purpose is to decide on possible further studies (31% of all responses), but also finding partners among other HEIs and evaluating the quality of graduates for recruitment purposes got relatively high score – 23% and 16% respectively (Figure 1). Expectedly, most of the students looked for information on further studies and the biggest part of HEI representatives were interested in finding partners (Figure 2).

However, in case of 24% of responses “other purposes” was selected (presented in Table 5). These purposes can be summarised in three categories:

- To learn about internal quality assurance (IQA) systems in other HEI-s
- For comparison / benchmarking (of similar programmes, QA procedures)
- To do research

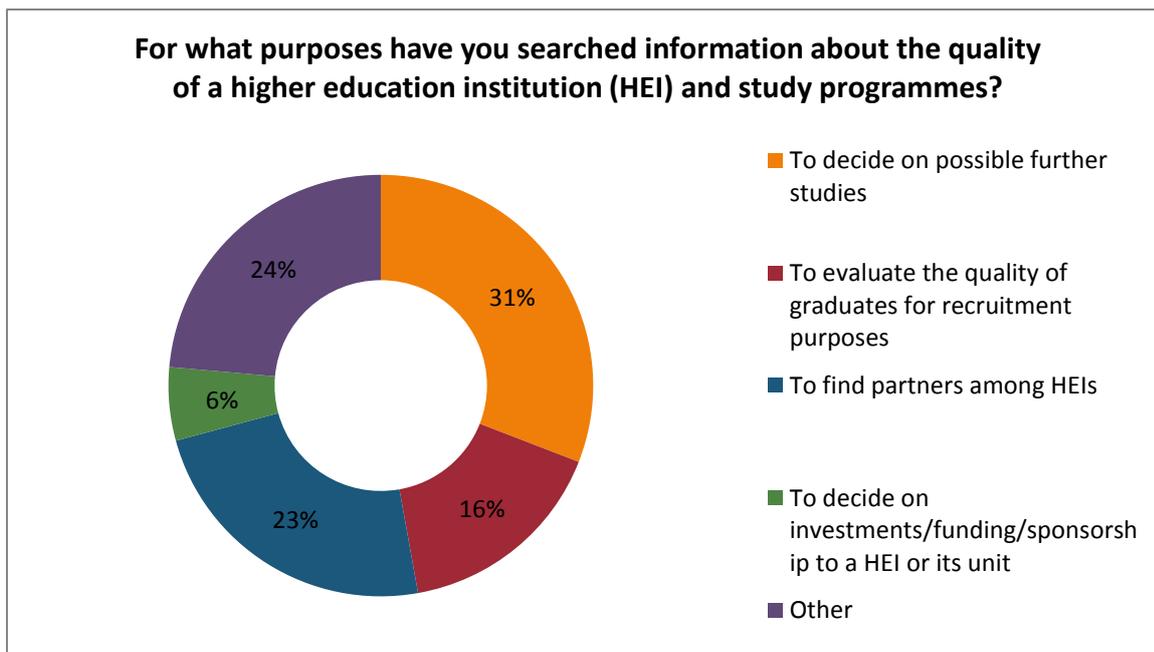


Figure 1. Purposes to search information about the quality of higher education

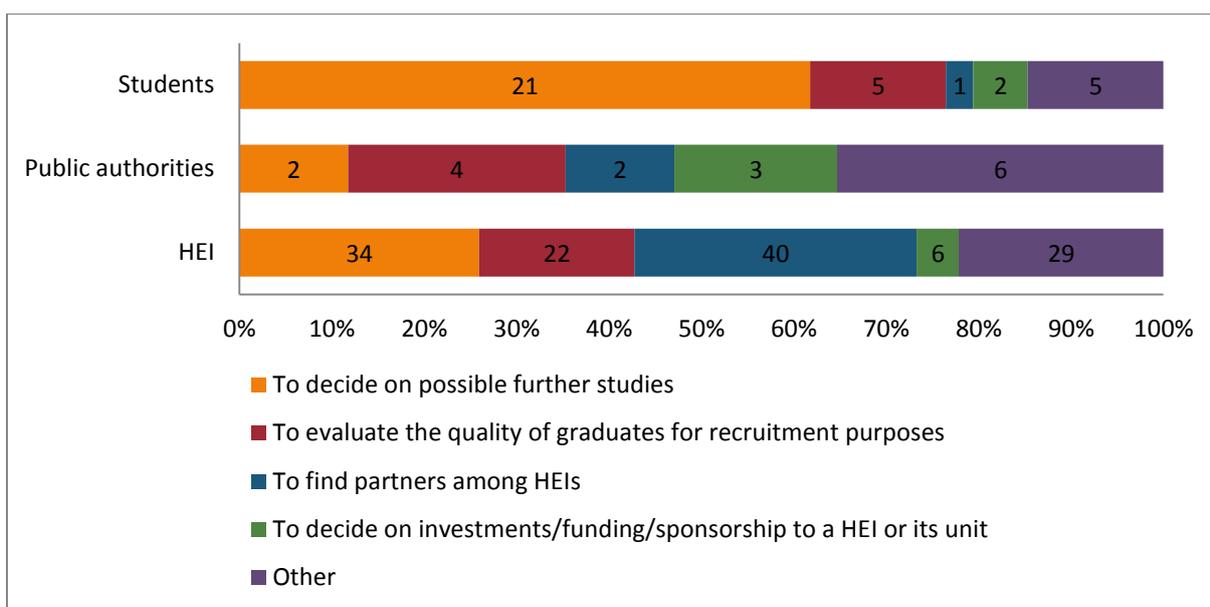


Figure 2. Purposes to search information by stakeholder groups

Table 5. Comments on “other” purposes to search information

Comment	Stakeholder group
to see if HEI itself is meeting acceptable standards and legislative requirements	Other

to evaluate their eligibility for quality labels	Other
participating evaluation processes	Public authorities
State (administrative) mission	Public authorities
never searched before	Student
students representation and participation	Student
To get an overview of different quality assurance systems and procedures used in different HEIs.	Student
for decision concerning Student Union opinion	Public authorities
To learn about other QA-systems	HEI
To have information on what is taken as relevant in a Quality Audit in other HEI's	HEI
To improve our own quality enhancement procedures	HEI
For benchmarking purposes	HEI
To compare with similar programmes	HEI
To do research	HEI
To compare QA procedures	HEI
To identify potential peer reviewers for programme quality assurance reviews (e.g. programme validation / programmatic review panels); occasionally for comparing aspects of the quality assurance system	HEI
Searching for good practices; identifying problems other universities are struggling with	HEI
To update my competence as a quality evaluator	HEI
for research	HEI
to find ideas for developing our own institution	HEI
Comparison with own HEI performance in QA	HEI
To compare quality practices in comparable institutions	HEI
evaluate quality of provision/institution	HEI
to survey the standards in QA, in my position of vice-rector for Quality	HEI

Assurance of education	
<i>für die gezielte und nachhaltige Qualitätssicherung und vor allem Qualitätsentwicklung</i>	HEI
benchmarking	HEI
To see approach to QA activities	HEI
Evaluation <i>externe des établissements</i>	HEI
To keep up with current trends in the field	HEI
exchange of experiences	HEI
to evaluate HEI for the purpose of accreditation (I am a member of an accreditation agency)	HEI
To learn from their experience and apply it in a HEI	HEI
To consider as a partner for international collaboration	HEI
For the first answer: when my children had to decide the HEI where to study, the chosen scientific fields. For the answer "Others": to compare similar study programmes in other HEIs with those existing in our University, where I work.	HEI
for quality assurance purposes them selves	HEI, Public authorities
For institutional evaluation purpose	HEI, Public authorities
To realise a study based on QA.	HEI, Student
As part of research for a thesis.	HEI, Public authorities, Student
Development of occupational standards for engineers	Other
Considering employment opportunities within institute	HEI

## 4.2 Current sources of information

The main source where different stakeholders get information about the quality of HEI-s and their study programmes are the websites of HEI-s (see Figure 3). The second source is information from friends, colleagues, parents, etc. Assessment reports appeared to be the third popular source. Only very few respondents marked social media as a source for this kind of information, although it was slightly more popular among students compared to other groups (Figures 4, 5, 6).

In the additional comments also NARIC and alumni was mentioned as distinctive sources of information (Table 6).

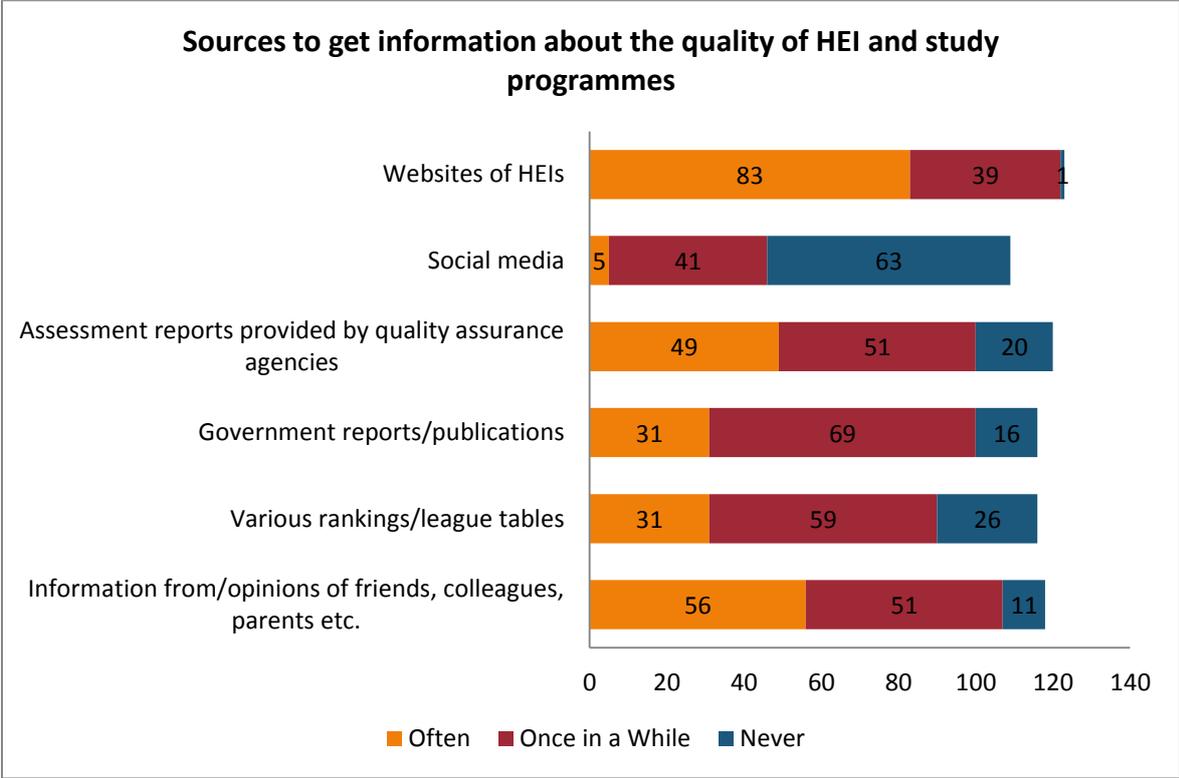


Figure 3. Sources to get information about the quality of a HEI and its study programmes

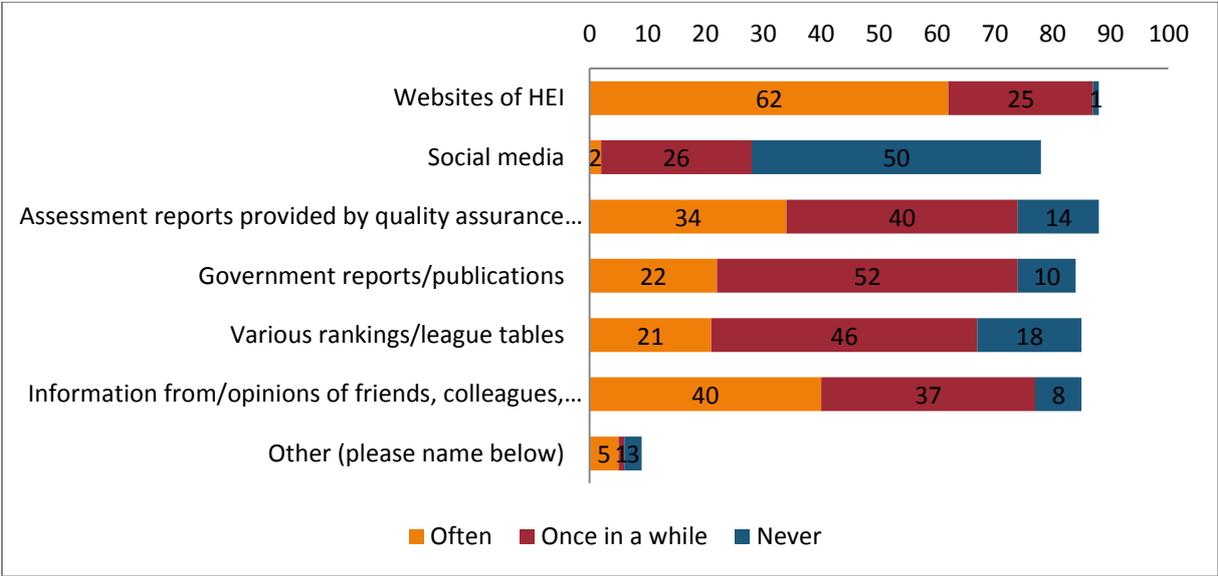


Figure 4. Sources to get information: Higher education institutions

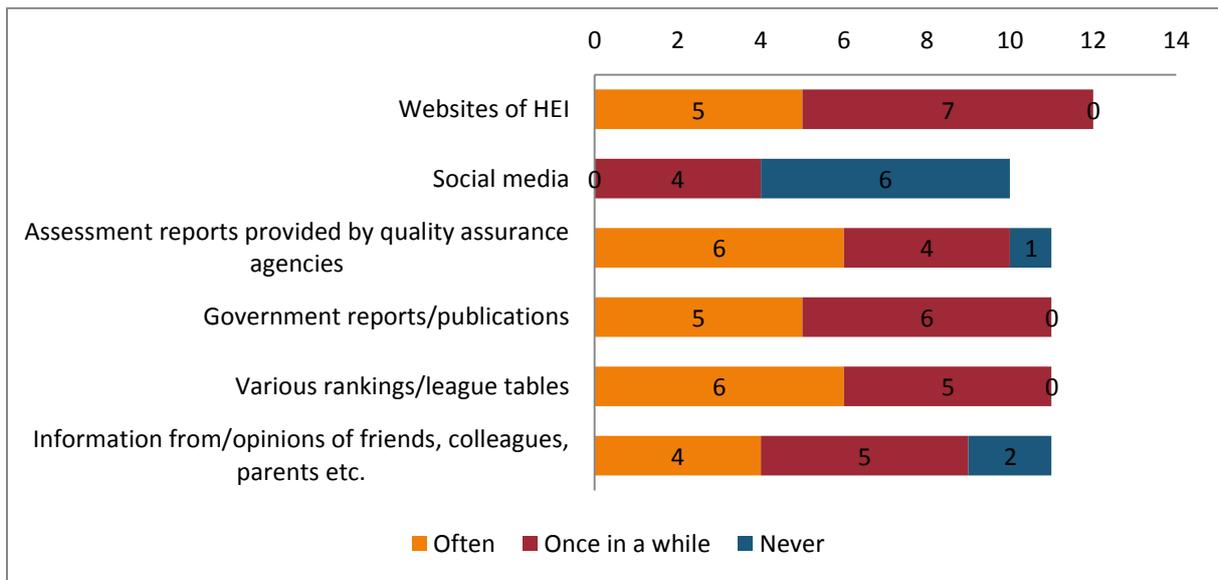


Figure 5. Sources to get information: Public authorities

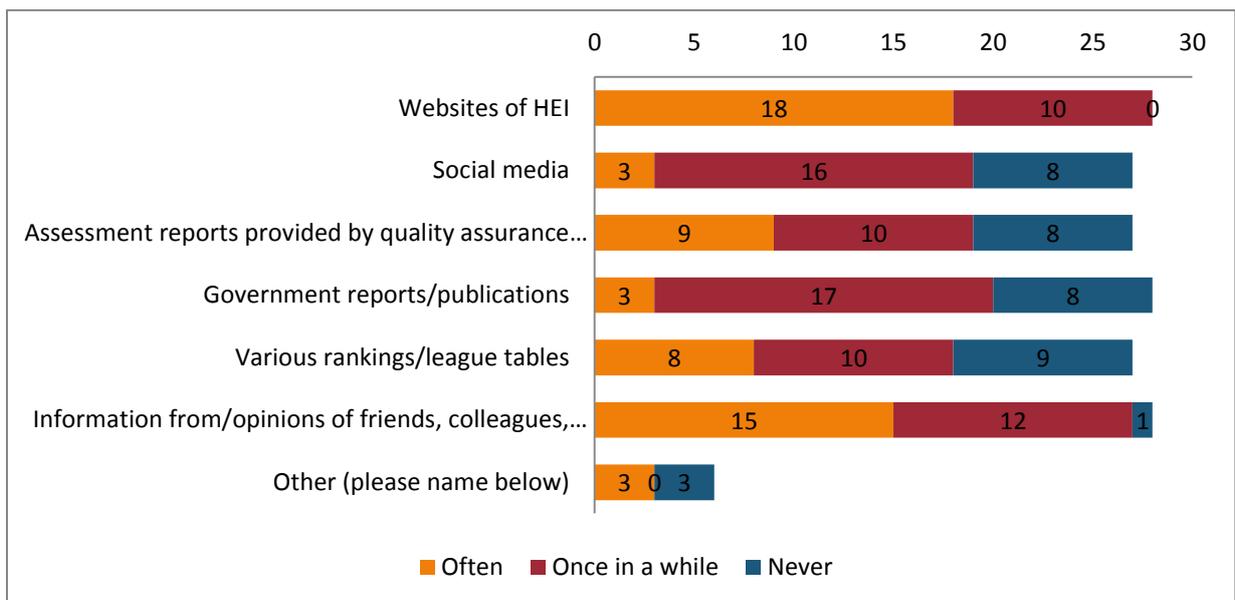


Figure 6. Sources to get information: Students

Table 6. Comments on sources to get information

Comment	Stakeholder group
opinions of students and student's unions	Student
Scholarship Opportunities	Student
NARIC	HEI
<i>Fach- und Arbeitsgruppe zum Qualitätsmanagement, zur Qualitätsentwicklung</i>	HEI
peers	HEI
NARIC	HEI
HEIs' publications for promoting their own study programmes with the occasion of different special organized events as: educational fairs for presenting the university offer to the high school graduates, professors' visits at high schools.	HEI
Information from alumni	Student

#### 4.3 Reasons why not to use assessment reports

We also asked those who marked 'assessment reports ...' with 'never', why they do not use them. The choices 'did not know where to find them' and 'did not know about them' were selected in case of 36% of answers (Figure 7). It shows that stakeholders are not aware of the reports and information they provide.

In case of 20% of responses, the respondents found the needed information elsewhere, and in case of 15% of responses it was claimed that the reports do not contain necessary information.

21% of responses revealed that the reports are either too long or written in too complicated language.

Different stakeholder groups had quite similar views on this matter (Figure 8).

There were three comments on this issue indicating the lack of time but also the fact that the reports are not always and in all countries public.

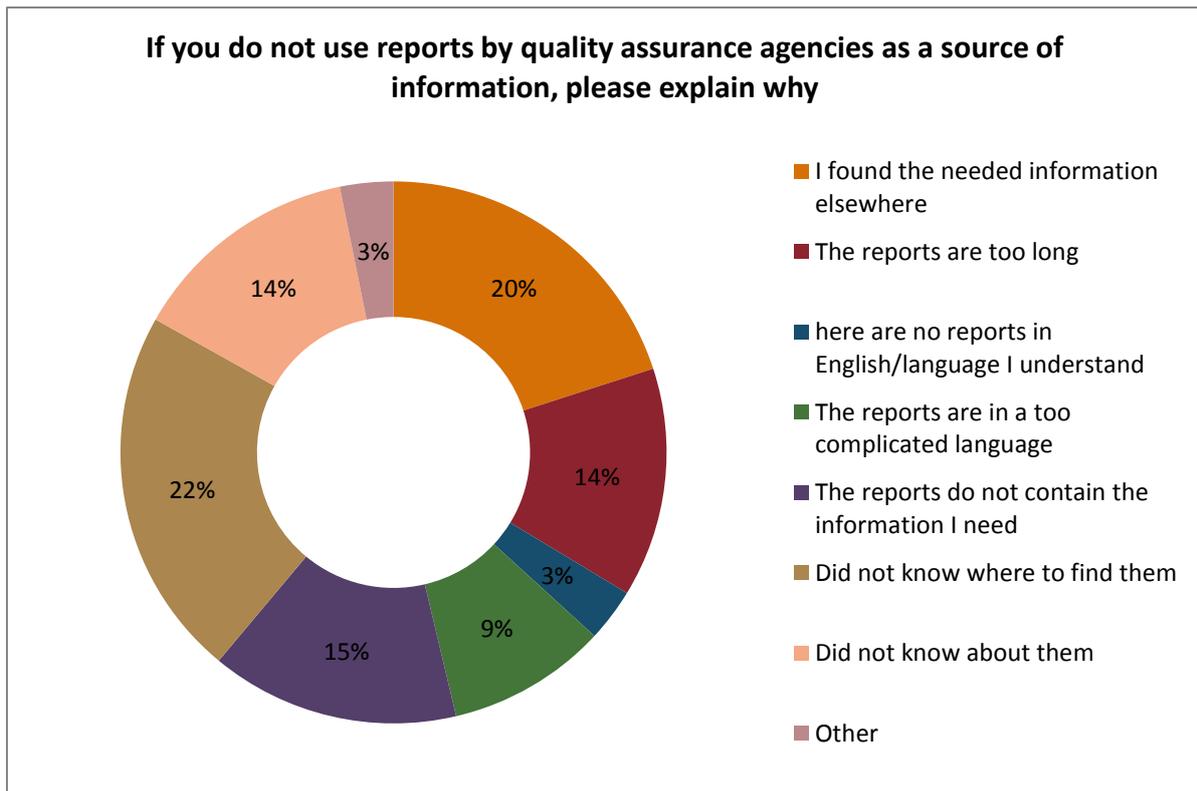


Figure 7. Reasons why not to use reports published by QAA-s

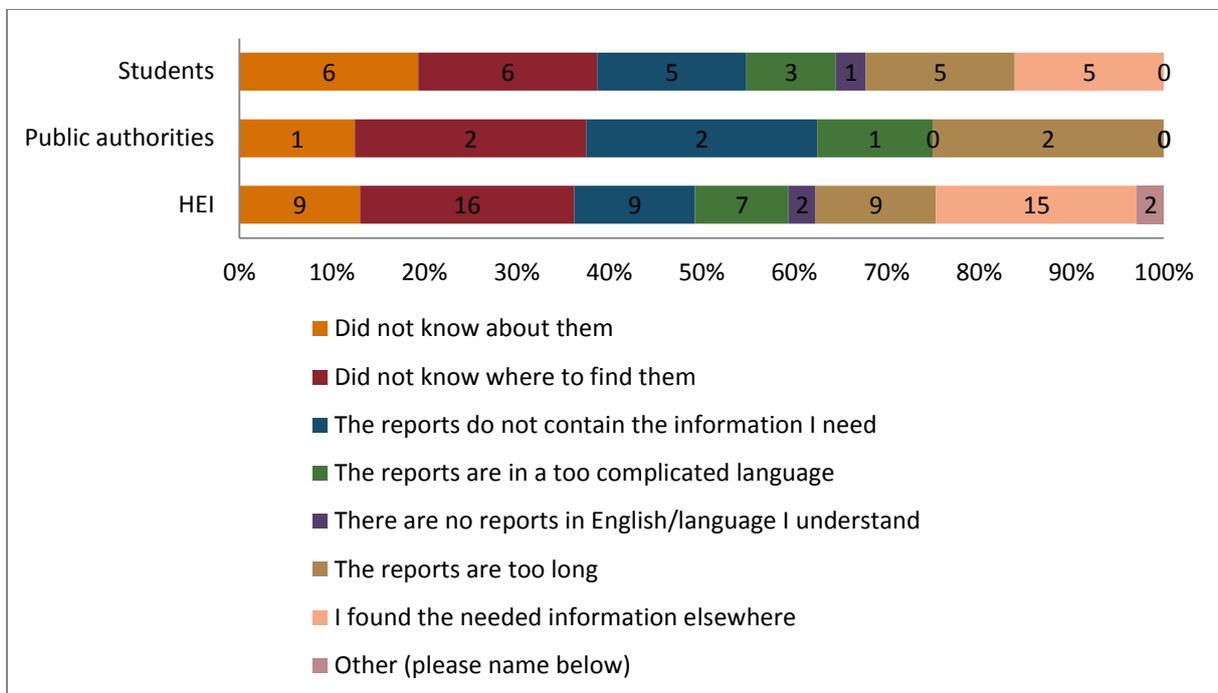


Figure 8. Reasons why not to use reports published by QAA-s by stakeholder groups

Table 7. Comments on reasons why not to use reports published by QAA-s

Comment	Stakeholder group
<i>interessant wäre eine Plattform, ein Newsletter OAQ zu solchen Berichten</i>	HEI
lack of time	HEI
The full institutional reports are not public. Often only summary or a decision is public.	HEI

#### 4.4 Helpfulness of assessment reports

Those who used assessment reports published by quality assurance agencies (QAA) as one source of information, were asked whether they find the reports and the information provided in them helpful.

The statement that the reports are helpful received 1/3 (32%) of responses “fully agree” and 51% “slightly agree”. 6% of responses showed that respondents did not find them helpful at all (see Figure 9). Different stakeholder groups had, once again, quite similar views (Figure 10).

This question raised very many comments – 55 (Table 8). Some of the comments that can be brought up are as follows:

- The main advantage of these reports is the fact that all the information is gathered in one place and the source is trustworthy. On the down side, such reports are at times rather technical.
- Some reports are far too standardised and do not contain sufficient information about what the evaluation team actually found there.
- Lack of standardisation in reports and report formats can be problematic.
- Variability of content/poor review process
- Agency reports differ in style and contents considerably - a more standardised international approach would be very helpful.
- The final decision of the agency only shows if the standards are fulfilled – without any ranking, any degree of performance of the evaluated programmes.
- Change the language that is used, too complicated

We may summarise that, in general, the reports are comprehensive, covering all relevant areas. More comparability (e.g., international standards) and user-friendliness is needed (including language, length etc.).

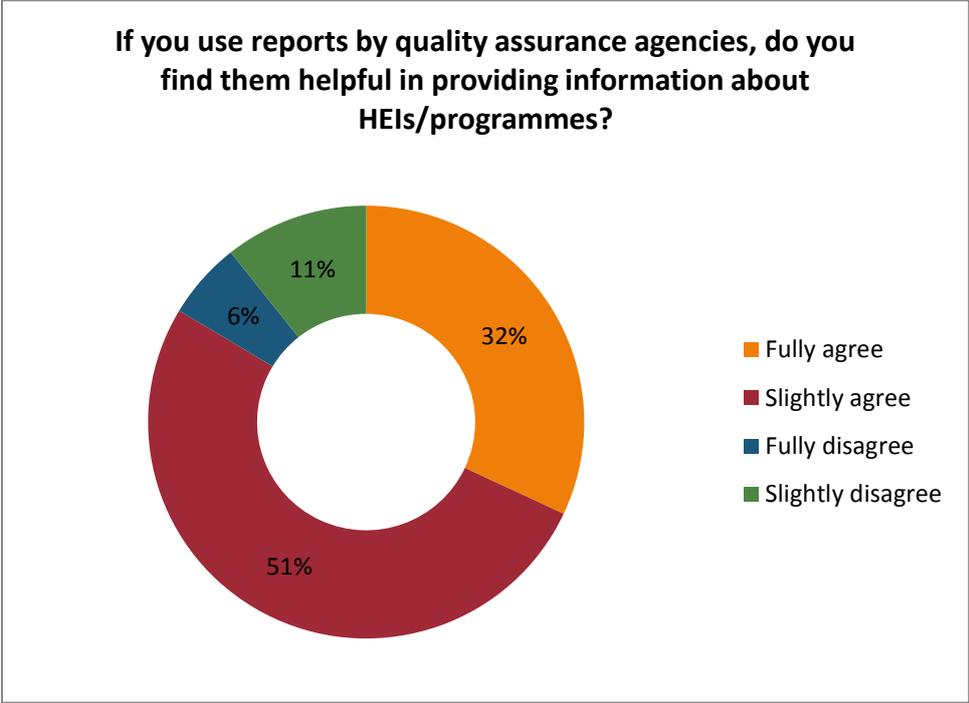


Figure 9. Helpfulness of reports by QAA-s

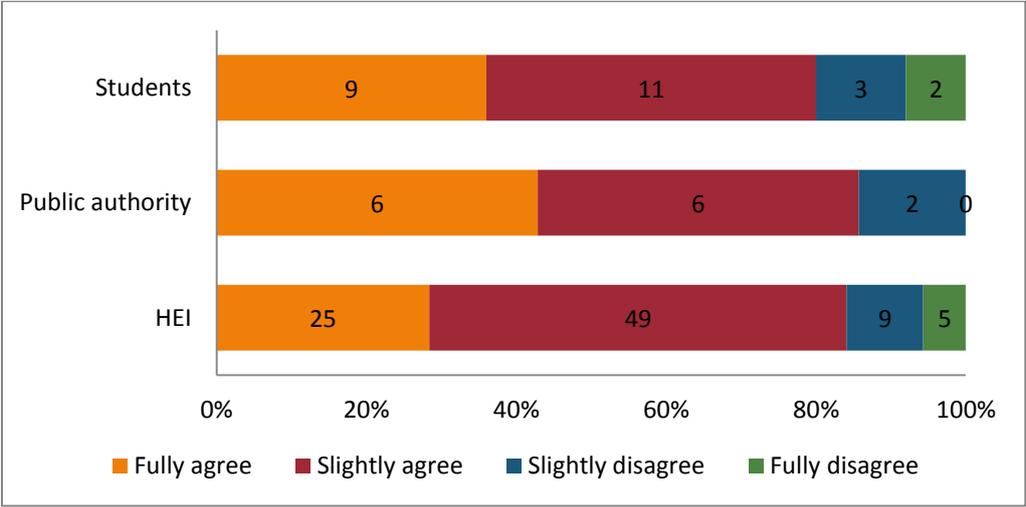


Figure 10. Helpfulness of reports by QAA-s by stakeholder groups

Table 8. Comments on helpfulness of reports by QAA-s

Comment	Stakeholder group
Some reports are far too standardised and do not contain sufficient information re what the evaluation team really found there	Other
Reports, and even their executive summaries, can be overly lengthy	Other
Missing quantitative data	Public authorities
it would have data about employment of finished students	Public authorities
Well structured, independent meaning, professional	Publiv authorities
the information are compressed at one side	Student
You can usually find the information quite easily	Student
They give a more objective view as opposed to the material that HEIs themselves publish	Student
structure of the report,	Student
<i>They are thorough and comprehensive, include all aspects.</i>	Student
Sometimes they are difficult to read!	Student
It is very detailed and many aspects are covered within the reports. What could be interesting to add, are actual comparisons to other HEIs/programmes and which is better for what etc.	Student
it's always missing a universal list of points/aspects/infrastructures that could be applied to every HEI in the world, so that comparisons can be made point by point	Student
Direct speech of a teacher is a complementary way to better understand studies.	Student
Reports made by QA agencies sometimes don't include student's perspective of a study programme.	Student
the main advantage of these reports is the fact that all the information is gathered in one place and the source is trustworthy. On the down side, such reports are at times rather technical	Student
Usually too much said multiple times, this makes long documents	Student

How to evaluate the work that HEIs are doing with students.	Student; HEI
Give good overview, if they are transparent	HEI
They are not competent reviews.	HEI
Lack of standardisation in reports and report formats can be problematic	HEI
In general they are not user friendly. They try to cover too much.	HEI
Not sufficiently focussed and precise	HEI
In medicine, very comprehensive	HEI
Reports depend on the evaluating committee. An aspect can be considered as important by one committee, and not important at all by other.	HEI
The information provided by the agency on each HEI is sparse - e.g. it is difficult to find on the QQI web site which programmes are on the National Framework of Qualification in Ireland	HEI
General evaluation is good but methods and criteria are not fully clear	HEI
It is hard to comment on this in the abstract. It depends on how well my information needs match the objectives and criteria of the QA review which gave rise to the report by the QA agency.	HEI
Often problems and how universities try to tackle them are just briefly mentioned; limited learning potential	HEI
only provides general assurance if a legitimate institution usually, not enough detail to adequately compare organisations	HEI
The information about validity and reliability of the results is weak	HEI
Often reports concentrate on the minute of quality assurance rather than engaging with more strategic, developmental areas of quality enhancement. Moving away from a 'tick box' exercise is perhaps practiced more widely in some jurisdictions than other	HEI
variability of content/poor review process	HEI
evidence-based information and possibilities to compare datas	HEI
<i>teilweise keine fachspezifischen Berichte gefunden; gut wäre eine transparente Dokumentation, ein entsprechendes Suchsystem (z.B. als Plattform)</i>	HEI
I do not access any of these reports	HEI

If we want that quality assurance reports serves as reliable source of information about HEI, than there must be an obligation for HEI to put it on a visible place on HEI website, but not only when the report is good or praiseworthy	HEI
It does vary from country to country and the approach taken. However, in the main, assuming the reader is familiar with the approach taken and therefore is able to read what the report is outlining in context there is no issue.	HEI
comparability	HEI
First they need to be public in full to be able to assess the information in them.	HEI
The reports are a many cases too general i.e. less concrete.	HEI
<i>Les rapports d'agence d'assurance qualité donne une information précise et contrôlée au regard de différents critères</i>	HEI, other
Benchmarking mechanism	HEI
In our opinion, many reports keep too much information confidential; there could be more transparency about good and bad experiences to enhance the possibility of learning	HEI, other
Good point: the standards used in reports cover all relevant areas	HEI, olther
The level of detail is appropriate - measured - not dramatic - not overly bland / vague	HEI
The final decision of the agency shows only if the standards are fulfilled, without any ranking, any degree of performance of the evaluated programmes. There cannot be seen the changes in time of the quality, in the re-evaluation processes.	HEI
agency reports differ in style and contents considerably - a more standardised international approach would be very helpful	HEI, public authorities
have not used	HEI, public authorities
It is good that the reader has access to data such as the average competition to academic positions. However, not all reports contain information about employment of graduates or the level of scientific research conducted.	HEI, student
Change the language that is used, too complicated	HEI, student
Is good because you can find information related to different fields, and what is missing is the information about social student support, the social dimension of higher education.	HEI, student
They provide information on the extent to which agreed policies have been	HEI, student

implemented but rarely on the curricular or pedagogical fitness of the programmes.	
Better concise summaries needed	Employer
They sometimes have a lot of legal speak in them	HEI, employer

#### 4.5 Places to find reports published by QAA-s

More than a half (56%) of responses indicated that respondents have found the reports on websites of QAA-s. However, a big part (36%) have also found them on websites of HEI-s. See Figure 11. From students, nearly half of them have used websites of HEIs- to find the reports (Figure 12).

In comments, also Google search and asking specialists was mentioned.

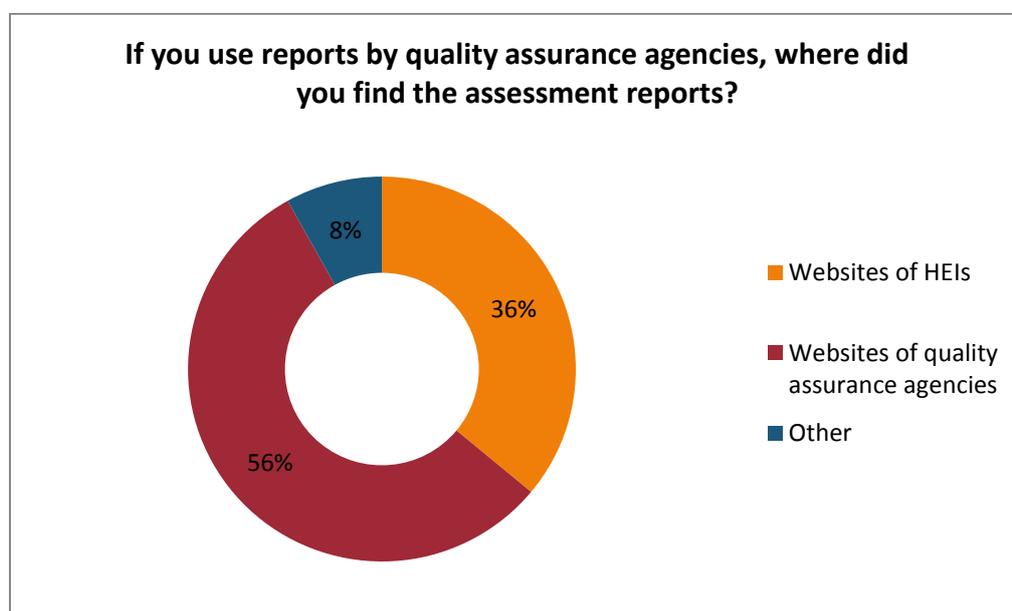


Figure 11. Places to find the reports by QAA-s

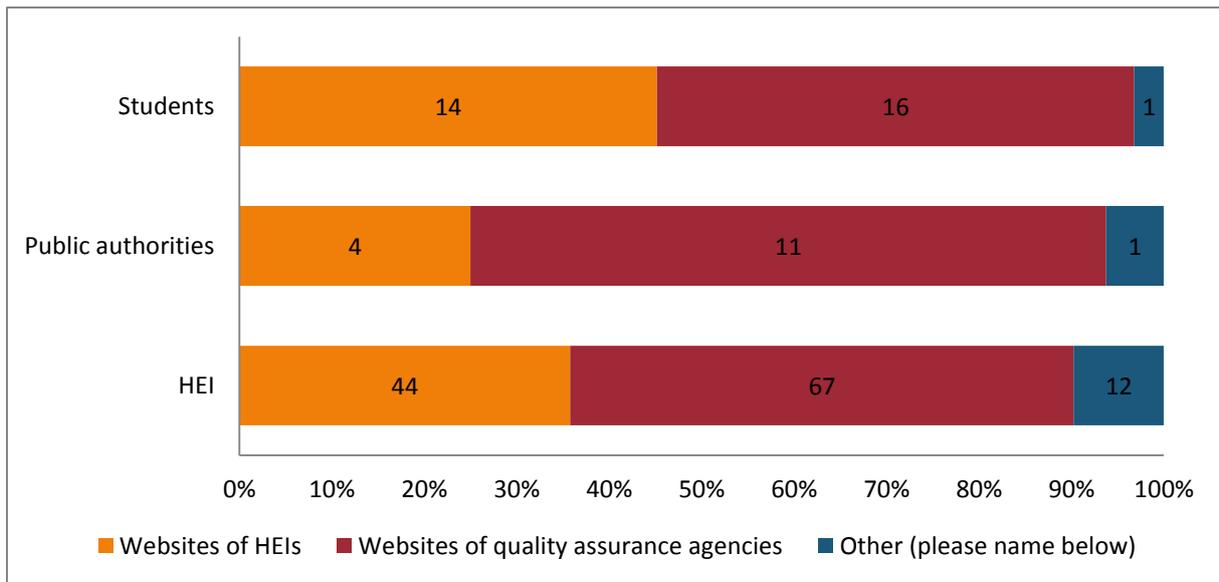


Figure 12. Places to find the reports by QAA-s by stakeholders

Table 9. Comments on places to find the reports by QAA-s

Comment	Stakeholder group
I have never used one	Student
still hard to find	Student
colleagues	HEI
asking specialists	HEI
Google search	HEI
I do not access any of these reports	HEI
Google searches	HEI
through direct contacts with HEI	HEI
The full reports are not accessible.	HEI
websites of different projects in the field	HEI
personal contact; participation in working-groups	HEI, other

Mainly through QQI / QAA / ENQA etc.	HEI
Usually, the reports of quality assurance agencies; there can be found the lists with the final decisions for the study programmes and for the HEIs evaluations.	HEI
have not used	HEI, public authorities

#### 4.6 Information expected by different stakeholders

Under this question, respondents were asked to mark what kind of information they need to make decisions regarding further learning, partnerships, comparisons with other institutions, etc. The majority of respondents (96 out of 127) named 'content of study programmes' as most important information, followed by 'accreditation status of institutions/study programmes' (80) and 'strategic planning, management and governance' (78) (Table 10). It overlaps with the preferences of the respondents from HEI-s, since the majority of the respondents were from HEI-s (Table 11). Students and public authorities, though, had a slightly different view: while also students marked on the first place 'content of study programmes', the second was 'employability of graduates' (Nº 9 for HEI-s and Nº 1 for public authorities) followed by 'students support system' and 'qualifications of teaching staff'. Public authorities valued equally 'content of study programmes', 'accreditation status', 'qualifications of teaching staff', 'student support system' and 'financial resources', placing them all as the second important information. Unimportant for all stakeholders was 'institution's position in league tables' and 'history and traditions'.

In the comments was, among others, mentioned that requested information depends on intended purpose (Table 12).

Table 10. Information needed to make decisions regarding further learning, partnerships, comparisons with other institutions, etc.

Information	Respondents
Content of study programmes	96
Accreditation status of institutions/study programmes	80
Strategic planning, management, governance	78
Qualifications of teaching staff	74
Internal quality assurance system	73
Student support system	67
Employability/employment of graduates	66

Reputation of teaching staff	59
Number of research grants, publications, citations	57
Application and admission statistics	57
Condition of infrastructure	54
Institution's ability to respond diverse students' needs	46
Financial resources	45
History and traditions	37
Institution's position in league tables	29
Other	4

Table 11. Information needed by stakeholder groups

	HEI	Public authorities	Students
Content of study programmes	69(1)	9(2)	27(1)
Accreditation status of institutions/study programmes	62(2)	9(2)	13(9)
Strategic planning, management, governance	61(3)	8(7)	14(8)
Internal quality assurance system	56(4)	7(8)	12(11)
Qualifications of teaching staff	53(5)	9(2)	17(4)
Student support system	47(6)	9(2)	18(3)
Number of research grants, publications, citations	46(7)	7(8)	9(13)
Reputation of teaching staff	44(8)	4(13)	16(6)
Employability/employment of graduates	40(9)	10(1)	21(2)
Application and admission statistics	40(10)	6(10)	15(7)
Condition of infrastructure	35(11)	6(10)	17(4)
Institution's ability to respond diverse students' needs	32(12)	6(10)	12(11)
History and traditions	30(13)	1(15)	8(14)
Financial resources	28(14)	9(2)	13(9)
Institution's position in league tables	22(15)	2(14)	6(15)
Other (please name below)	6(16)	1(15)	1(16)

Table 12. Comments on information needed

Comment	Stakeholder group
R&D focus areas	HEI
Again, requ. information depends on intended engagement. Retention statistics may be useful. In any report, I'd be interested in a reasoned indication of gaps betw. e.g. policy and implementation, or discrep betw. performance indicators on the same area.	HEI
quality indicators	HEI, other
Depends on the application - pretty much everything is of interest. Wouldn't expect the regulating agency to get involved in programme detail ... we'd get that from the HEI.	HEI
It would be useful an evaluation done by the graduates after at least 2 years of working in the field of their diploma. Maybe also, such an evaluation made by other kind of stakeholders.	HEI
The answer above is not comprehensive since the information I (would) seek depends very much on the purpose.	HEI, public authorities
Learning outcomes of programmes	HEI, student

#### 4.7 Preferable format of information

32% of responses indicated that respondents would like to get information about quality of a HEI and its study programmes in a short concentrated summary describing the main strengths and areas for improvement. 27% expect to see comparative data with other institutions, and 25% prefer numerical data indicating the most important aspects of the institution and its programmes. Only 14% are interested in comprehensive reports providing extensive information about strengths and areas of improvements in management and core processes of a HEI (see Figure 13). There is no essential variety among different stakeholder groups (Figure 14).

In the commentary, use of multimedia was also mentioned (Table 13).

In the split-up groups during the workshop in Tallinn, Estonia, on 6-7 May, it was discussed that Europe has strongly national agencies with national agendas that serve the national systems and, therefore, comparison between different countries is impossible. Comparisons can only be made between HEI-s within one country (Annex 2). However, in the students' group it was agreed that the provision of comparable data is not the role of QAA-s, because a QAA compares against a standard, not against other institutions (Annex 4).

Employers' group stated that they do not read the institutional reports at all, since they do not have any specific need for getting information about internal quality assurance mechanisms. The relevant information for the professional world is the 'performance', which is translated into quantitative indicators through various rankings (Annex 3).

All split-up groups agreed that an assessment report should also include a summary report showing the outcome of the assessment as well as strengths and weaknesses of an institution/programme, and recommendations for follow-up activities (Annexes 2-4).

Employers recommended a following content and format for the summary report of study programmes:

- Context of the quality assessment (voluntary / obligatory; accreditation / evaluation; period of validity; quality labels? Evaluated by national/international panel against national/international standards; single / joint procedure; accreditation status of offering HEI; etc.);
- Synthetic programme description (special features, innovative character, relevance, specificities);
- Statements on achievement of the intended learning outcomes matching with given QF level;
- Profile of strengths and weaknesses;
- Link to comprehensive report;
- Link to the website where the study programme can be found

Format: approximately 2 pages. The information on the context should be provided in schematic form rather than discursive. Programme description needs to be discursive and normally no longer than 5 lines. Strengths and weaknesses should be provided in a table with 2 columns, no numbering needed, discursive style, focussing on main outcomes of the assessment. (Annex 3)

In all groups it was agreed that a template or standard reporting structure might be helpful (Annexes 2-4).

### In what format would you like to get this information?

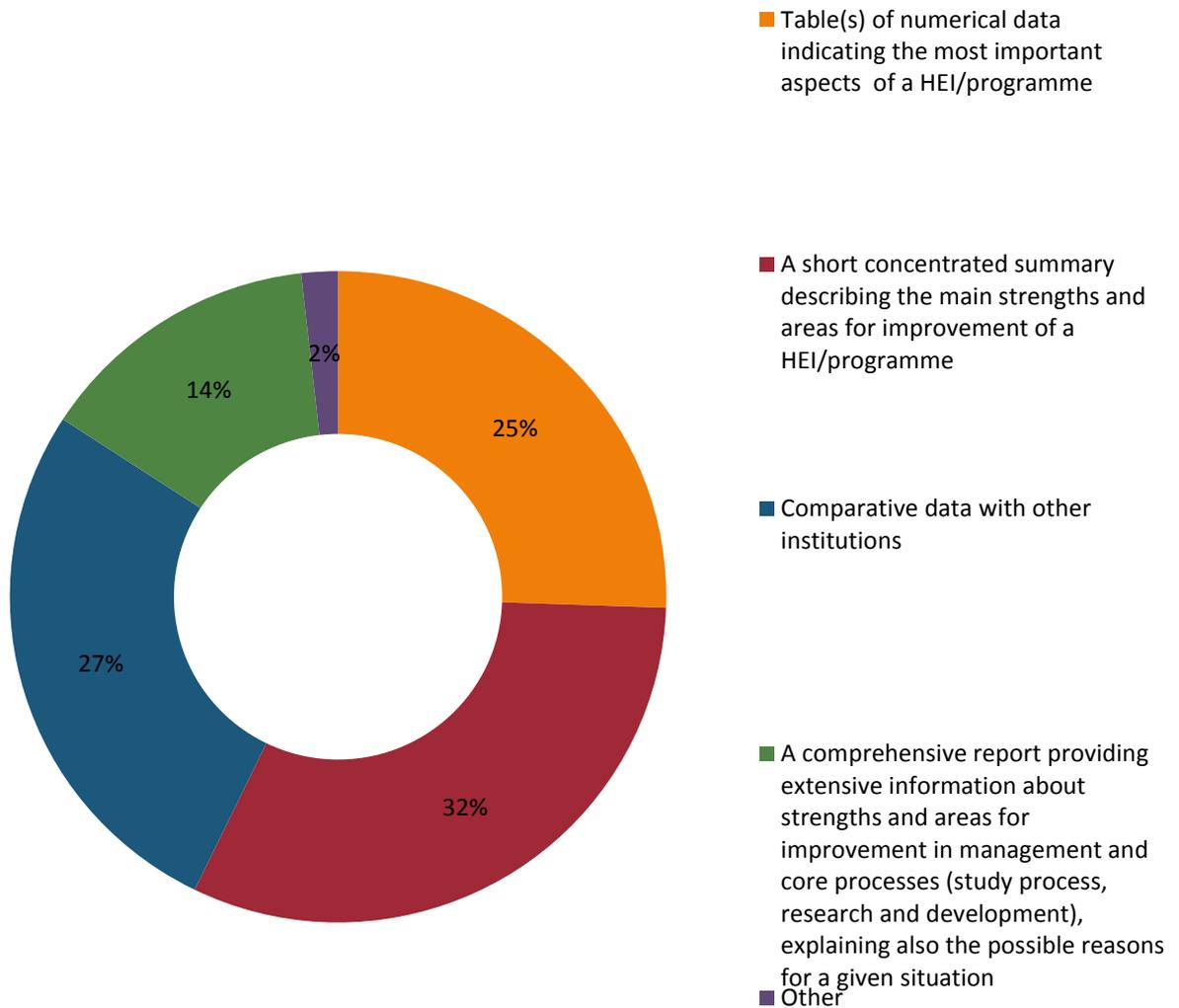


Figure 13. Preferable format of information

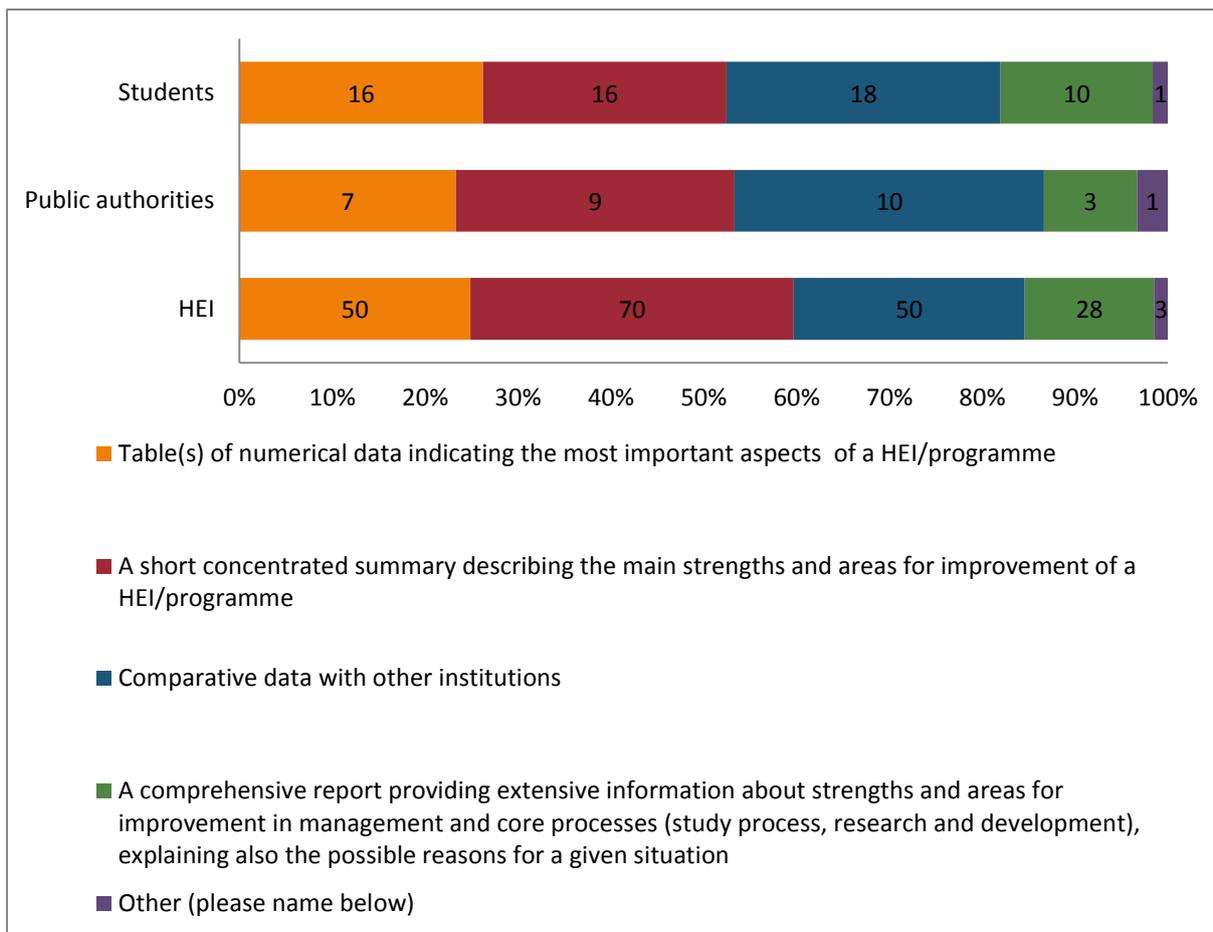


Figure 14. Preferable format of information by stakeholder groups

Table 13. Comments on preferable format of information

Comment	Stakeholder group
Benchmarking on EU level	Public authorities
Multimedia (Video, Sample T&L Methods, etc.)	Student
Tabellary / summary information should reference more extensive presentation / analysis of the aspects investigated. Methodology / assumptions need to be accessible esp. w/ regard to compar. data.	HEI
A clear curriculum structure	HEI
These items provide a good starting point. More can follow if a partnership is created.	HEI
Both table(s) and a short concentrated summary. The comparisons of HEIs can raise a lot of comparability problems (size, history, time, funding...). It would be better to have the evolution in time of the numerical data for the analyzed aspects.	HEI

#### 4.8 Preferable sources of information

Similar to the answers regarding the question which sources are currently used, the most preferable source to get information about quality of a HEI is HEI's webpage (47% of responses) followed by webpages of QAA-s (40%). Social media is the least expected source (5%) (see Figure 15).

When comparing different stakeholder groups we can see that while about half of all groups prefer webpages of HEI-s then students differ from HEI-s and public authorities in their expectations regarding other sources: only about 20 % of students would seek this information from the webpages of QAA-s; at the same time they have named 'social media' and even 'printed reports in libraries' more than other stakeholders (Figure 16).

One of the comments suggests that the report could be only in one place but there should be links from one source to the other (Table 14).

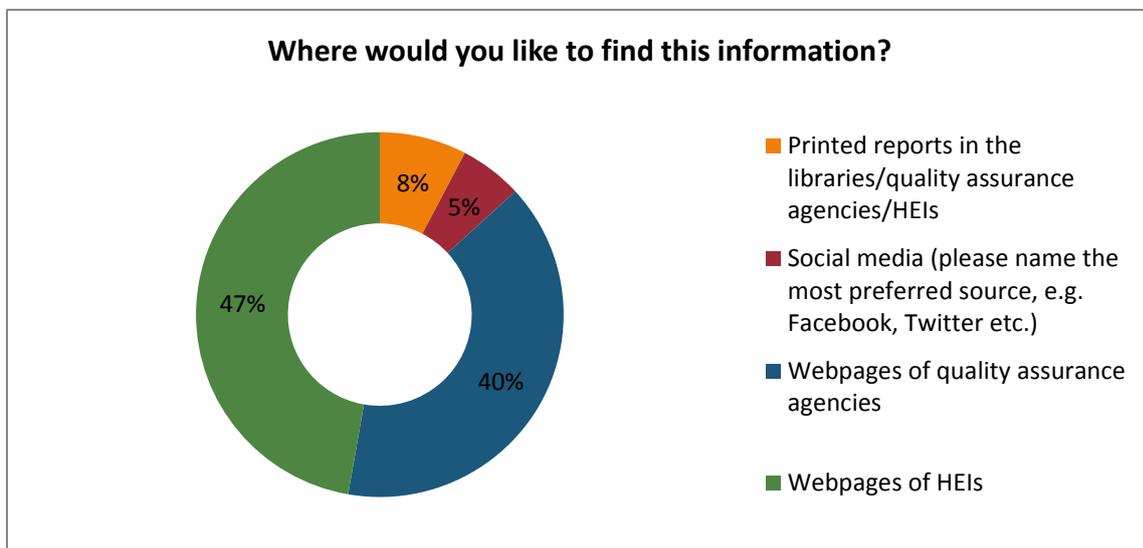


Figure 15. Preferable sources of information

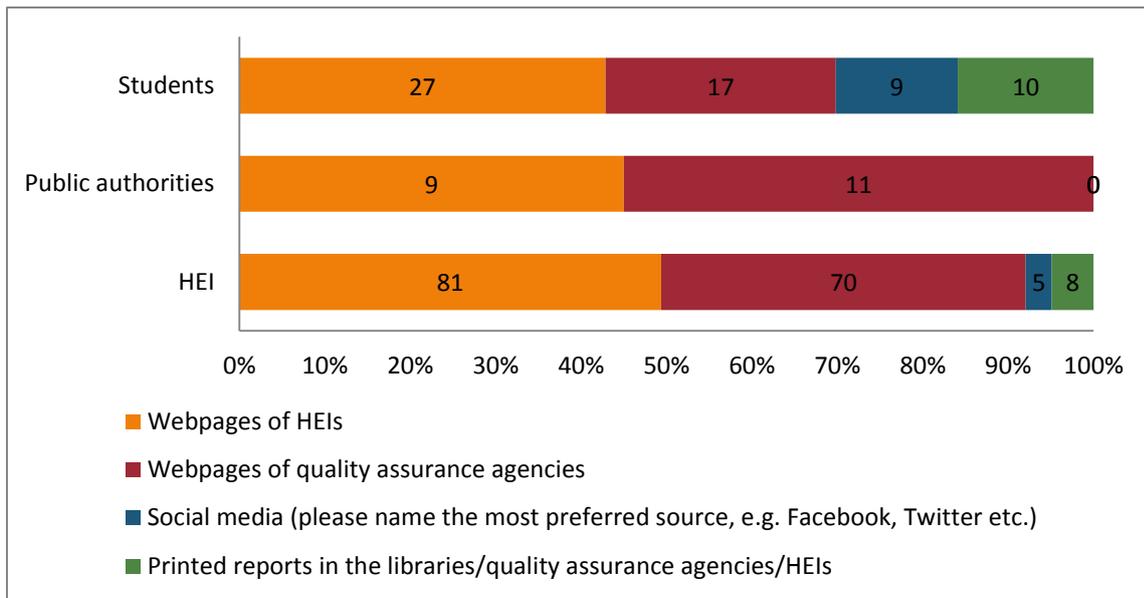


Figure 16. Preferable sources of information by stakeholder groups

Table 14. Comments on preferable sources of information

Comment	Stakeholder group
Hard copies are fine but e- copies should be available and would be more accessible	HEI
facebook	HEI
Links from one to the other so that the report is only in one place. --- Possibly on the QA agency's site. / and the HEI if proud of its assessment.	HEI

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the results, we may conclude the following:

- There is no significant difference between the expectations and use of information among higher education institutions, public authorities and students, except expectations regarding the information about quality (Chapter 4.6 Table 11).
- Very low response rate from employers indicates that they do not see themselves as a target group for quality assurance of higher education institutions.
- Assessment reports are the third source of information after websites of HEI-s and friends / colleagues.
- Awareness about existence of assessment reports is not sufficient.
- Reports are, in general, a helpful tool to get information, but they could be more comparable and user-friendly.
- Reports should contain comparative data with other institutions in the format of short concentrated summary and tables with quantitative data.
- Reports should be accessible both on the webpages of HEI-s and QAA-s (preferably linked to each other).

## **ANNEX 1 Survey on the use and usefulness of external quality assurance reports for different stakeholders**

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is carrying out a European Commission LLP co-funded project Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports (EQArep) together with four European QA agencies: OAQ (Switzerland), QQI (Ireland), ASHE (Croatia) and EKKA (Estonia).

The aim of the project is to develop European standards for quality assurance reports in order to ensure that the information contained in the quality assurance reports meet the expectations of the stakeholders. The outcomes of the project shall result in a recommendation to quality assurance agencies on the content and form of informative and approachable quality assurance reports.

**The survey** is directed at all main stakeholder groups in higher education quality assurance: students, potential future employers, governments and the higher education institutions themselves. The purpose of the survey is to identify and compare the exact **interests of the various stakeholders** as regards information about the quality of institutions and of programmes.

We would be most grateful if you could dedicate some time to responding to this survey. The approximate time needed is **10 minutes**. The responses will be **anonymous**.

- Please rely on **your personal experience** and use of information sources on HEI. Please note that not all parts of a question will be relevant to all different responder groups.
- Your comments will be of high value for us. Please provide as many of them as you wish in **the comment boxes provided**, to explain your experience better.
- Please leave your email address if you wish to be informed of the workshop which will be organised as a follow-up of the survey, and will provide an opportunity to discuss the information needs of different user groups further.

**The deadline for replying is 28<sup>th</sup> of February.**

Warm thanks in advance for your time and contribution

The EQArep consortium

### **Part I Use of the information about quality in higher education institutions and study programmes**

1. For what purposes have you searched information about the quality of a higher education institution (HEI) and study programmes? (*Multiple answer*)
  - a. To decide on possible further studies
  - b. To evaluate the quality of graduates for recruitment purposes
  - c. To find partners among HEIs

- d. To decide on investments/funding/sponsorship to a HEI or its unit
  - e. Other (please name)
2. Which sources do you usually use to get information about the quality of HEI and study programmes?
- a. Websites of HEIs  
often – once in a while – never
  - b. Social media (e.g. Facebook)  
often – once in a while – never
  - c. Assessment reports provided by quality assurance agencies  
often – once in a while – never
  - d. Government reports/publications  
often – once in a while – never
  - e. Various rankings/league tables  
often – once in a while – never
  - f. Information from/opinions of friends, colleagues, parents etc.  
often – once in a while – never
  - g. Other (please name)
3. If you do not use reports by quality assurance agencies as a source of information, please explain why (please choose all that apply):
- a. Did not know about them
  - b. Did not know where to find them
  - c. The reports do not contain the information I need
  - d. The reports are in a too complicated language
  - e. There are no reports in English/language I understand
  - f. The reports are too long
  - g. I found the needed information elsewhere
  - h. Other (please name)

*If you do not use reports by quality assurance agencies as a source of information, please continue to Question 8.*

4. If specific information, please indicate what kind of information you were looking for (please choose all that apply)
- a. General findings (e.g. general recommendations, overall assessment)

- b. Strategic planning, management, governance
- c. Internal quality assurance system
- d. History and traditions
- e. Application and admission statistics
- f. Number of research grants, publications, citations
- g. Employability/employment of graduates
- h. Content of study programmes
- i. Reputation of teaching staff
- j. Qualifications of teaching staff
- k. Financial resources
- l. Condition of infrastructure
- m. Student support system
- n. Institution's ability to respond diverse students' needs
- o. Accreditation status of institutions/study programmes
- p. Institution's position in league tables
- q. Other (please name)

5. The assessment reports provide the information you are looking for

Fully agree              Slightly agree              Slightly disagree              Fully disagree

Please comment what exactly is good, what is missing, how it can be improved

6. You find the assessment reports by quality assurance agencies helpful in providing information about HEIs/programmes

Fully agree              Slightly agree              Slightly disagree              Fully disagree

Please comment what exactly is good, what is missing, how it can be improved

7. Where did you find/access the assessment reports?

- a. Websites of HEIs
- b. Websites of quality assurance agencies
- c. Other (please name)

## II Expectations of the information provided by the quality assurance reports

8. What information do you need to make decisions for further learning, partnerships, comparisons with other institutions etc.? (Up to 5 choices)

- a. Strategic planning, management, governance
- b. Internal quality assurance system
- c. History and traditions

- d. Application and admission statistics
- e. Number of research grants, publications, citations
- f. Employability/employment of graduates
- g. Content of study programmes
- h. Reputation of teaching staff
- i. Qualifications of teaching staff
- j. Financial resources
- k. Condition of infrastructure
- l. Student support system
- m. Institution's ability to respond diverse students' needs
- n. Accreditation status of institutions/study programmes
- o. Institution's position in league tables
- p. Other (please name)

9. In what format would you like to get this information? (choose one)

- a. Table(s) of numerical data indicating the most important aspects of a HEI/programme
- b. A short concentrated summary describing the main strengths and areas for improvement of a HEI/programme
- c. Comparative data with other institutions
- d. A comprehensive report providing extensive information about strengths and areas for improvement in management and core processes (study process, research and development), explaining also the possible reasons for a given situation
- e. Other (please name)

10. Where would you like to find this information? (please choose all that apply)

- a. Webpages of HEIs
- b. Webpages of quality assurance agencies
- c. Social media (please name the most preferred source, e.g. Facebook, Twitter etc.)
- d. Printed reports in the libraries/quality assurance agencies/HEIs
- e. Other (please name)

### III Information about the respondent

11. What is your country of residence? (Choice of the countries of EHEA)

12. Which of the following groups do you represent?

- a. Higher education institution
- b. Public authorities/Government office
- c. Funder/Investor
- d. Employer

- e. Student
- f. Other (please name)

13. The results of this survey will be presented and further focus group interviews conducted in a workshop in Tallinn, Estonia, on **May 6-7, 2013**. If you are interested in participating in this event, please write your name and e-mail address below. The project will cover the travel costs of the selected participants.

Name (optional)

E-mail address (optional)

Thank you for your contribution!

## ANNEX 2 Summary of split-up groups: HEI-s

EQArep Workshop 6.-7.05.2013

### What are the expectations of HEI towards the reports?

- It is important to think what the report should contain, not what it should look like. The content should be according to the demands.
- HEI should be aware that there are different evaluations and for different evaluations there are also different procedures, and therefore they should expect the reports to be in accordance with those procedures, e.g. accreditation = meeting standards. Since reports look different for different evaluation types, it will be difficult to come up with one single template for everyone.
- On the bases of an expert report, the role of the QA agency is to say whether a study programme has quality or not, not whether the programme is useful/good for the country, region... etc. Yet, quality is very difficult to define. When the agency makes a negative decision about a study programme, it should not be overruled by the government – i.e., the government should really consider this and not allow such a programme to exist.
- The main purpose for the HEI regarding the reports is benchmarking in the country. It is useful to read other institutions' reports to pick up good practices.
- Report should definitely include strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for the follow-up, so that for example students could compare reports about various institutions.

### Should reports include comparable data about institution/programme?

- In Croatia media is very interested in reports and comparisons.
- In Europe, we have strongly national agencies with national agendas that serve the national systems and therefore comparison between different countries is impossible. Comparisons can only be made between HEI-s within a country itself!

### Report template

- Report should include: overall summary of the outcome of the assessment + state strengths and weaknesses of the institution/programme, recommendations. Such a summary could be at the beginning of the report or separately. It is better that it is part of the report and not an additional report.
- If we want to appeal to different audiences, then the composition of the expert team is also important (should include employers, students...). Mixed teams necessary!
- We should not differentiate various target groups, and it should be one single report by all the members of the panel (i.e., each member is not writing his own report!).
- Question arises: Could then there be another level, i.e. summary report, to target different groups? And who should write such a report – panel or agency?

34

... Agency should perhaps define what points should be brought out in the summary (e.g. strengths and weaknesses) – it's good if the panel would actually write the summary (would be part of the task of the expert team). If the agency does it, it may miss some points that seem to be important for the experts.

- When developing report templates it is important for agencies to collaborate with stakeholders to come up with one that is agreed upon.

Tiia Bach

## ANNEX 3 Summary of split-up groups: Employers

EQArep Workshop, Tallinn, 7 May 2013

Currently institutional reports are not at all used and there is not a specific need for getting information on a HEI's internal quality assurance processes and enhancement mechanisms. The relevant information about HEI for employers -or the professional world in general- is the 'performance', which is translated into quantitative indicators throughout various rankings.

On the other side, they would be interested in reading summary reports about study programmes, with no need of a highly standardised format. A summary seems essential, as comprehensive reports are too long and are not intended for a wide readership.

Students, parents, society at large may also profit from summary reports of programme assessments. Data should be as qualitative as possible, avoiding figures and misleading comparisons, trying to minimize the wrong interpretation of numbers in extrapolating information from reports.

Participants agree that such summary reports should contain the following pieces of information:

- **Context of the quality assessment** (voluntary / obligatory; accreditation / evaluation; period of validity; quality labels? Evaluated by national/international panel against national/international standards; single / joint procedure; accreditation status of offering HEI; etc.);
- Synthetic **programme description** (special features, innovative character, relevance, specificities);
- Statements on **achievement of the intended learning outcomes** matching with given **QF level**;
- **Profile of strengths and weaknesses**;
- **Link to comprehensive report**;
- **Link to the programme's website**

Format: approximately 2 pages. The information on the context should be provided in schematic form rather than discursive. Programme description needs to be discursive and normally no longer than 5 lines. Strengths and weaknesses should be provided in a table with 2 columns, no numbering needed, discursive style, focussing on main outcomes of the assessment.

On the opinion of the 'employers' such information on programmes should be available for any programme which undergone an independent quality assessment, including programmes offered by Q-audited or accredited institutions. In this case, the link to the comprehensive report points to the institutional report as well.

Summary reports should be written by QAA, unless they are done by the audited HEIs.

Reports of institutional accreditations, evaluations, or audits are not perceived as needed by employers nor are their summaries.

However, an attempt to give a similar structure of information needed was made, including some points drawn from comments of the plenary discussion which followed.

- **Context of the quality assessment** (voluntary / obligatory; accreditation / evaluation; period of validity; Evaluated by national/international panel against national/international standards; single / joint procedure; focus of the assessment, etc.);
- Synthetic **description of the HEI** (special features, innovative character, relevance, specificities, contextual role, etc.);
- Statements on **the internal QA system and how the institution assures the achievement of the programmes' intended learning outcomes** matching with given **QF level**; in general: **effectiveness of the IQA system**.
- **Profile of strengths and weaknesses**;
- **Link to comprehensive report**;
- **Link to the HEI's website**

It needs to be made by the QAAs, in consultation with the panel of reviewers.

Format: as programme summary.

Laura Beccari

## **ANNEX 4 Summary of split-up groups: Students**

EQArep Workshop, Tallinn, 7 May 2013

### **Group**

I would characterise my group as mainly a student representative grouping. Most of the conversation and discussion took place between the student representative.

### **Current Use of Reports**

The group were unsure about where the demand to market reports was coming from? This needs to be clarified.

Reports are a form of communication and effective communication always has an audience in mind. We may currently package too much into reports that contain both outcomes and opinion.

QAA staff are also an audience for reports. Reports are also currently used for agency decision making functions. It is nonsense to think that QAAs are responsible for enhancement – this is the responsibility of the institutions themselves.

There is an integrity and honesty about current reports that we need to build on and improve.

The fundamental purpose of QA is a public service to create trust in the QA systems of institutions – this is the fundamental basis for the reports.

### **Comparable Data**

There was not agreement in the group on this. One view was that people need an easily understandable answer on the quality assurance of an institution – yes/no/in-between. The other view is that we must accept that the agency is not the expert here, that the institutions are the experts. A view was also expressed that at the very least the QAA should be able to remove the opportunity for institutions to ‘fool’ people.

We must also be clear about what is being measured – i.e. that this is a judgement of the quality assurance procedures, not the quality of the programmes or institution. Perhaps the judgement on enhancement should be split into conditions for non-compliance and recommendations for further improvement. But the ESG is not attuned to enhancement. We cannot guarantee that a functioning QA system will mean a good quality programme/institution. We cannot control learning with QA.

It was agreed that the provision of comparable data is not the role of the QAA. The QAA compares against a standard, not against other institutions. The QAA can highlight that the criteria are the same but not the performance against the criteria. That the only QAA guarantee is a minimum standard. What stakeholders want to know is that something has been verified by an external QA agency.

Could the four ENQA criteria used for agency reviews be applied to institutional reports? This would make reports more attractive.

### **Summary Reports**

The main products of QAAs are QA reports but these do not meet the needs of stakeholder audiences, apart from HEIs.

The group was divided on this matter. One view was that the QAA should be able to provide very brief simple information such as a simple list of certified qualifications. Again, this was challenged as inappropriate for a QAA. There is a difference between making reports available and making them accessible. There was disagreement as to whether it was the role of the QAA to disseminate conclusions. It was agreed that review results should be understandable in a public context. In terms of additional extraneous information it was suggested that reports might contain links to information available elsewhere.

One suggestion was to look at EU guidelines on how to disseminate research and use these as a guide for our approach to disseminating report information.

It was agreed that a template or standard reporting structure might be helpful. Perhaps something akin to a Diploma Supplement should be explored. It was cautioned, though, that templates are usually written in codes that are understood by a limited audience. One suggestion was that there could be a single cross-border template at a European level and different templates at a national level. The group wondered who the EU audiences for such reports might be. Potential collaborative and transnational partners is one key audience.

It was agreed that we could probably now achieve a simple template/shared site for accreditation and then build on this.

The report should, at a minimum:

- Assure someone that the environment is conducive to a quality learning experience
- That what is promised is true
- Generally speaking that the institution has quality comparable to the average

### **HEI Report expectations**

It was felt that the HEIs, in particular management, are the key audience for reports. Reports should be primarily aimed at the institutions and address their needs first, before turning to other audiences. However, every stakeholder will expect the reports to be aimed at them.

Orla Lynch