

# The Social Responsibility of Quality Assurance Agencies

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## **Project Group 3**

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*ENQA Leadership Seminar, The Hague, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020*

# Our project

- To investigate QAAs' own perceptions of social responsibility
- What is the scope of the agency and how can it achieve its mission in cooperation with other entities?
  - Do they have a role to play in promoting it?
  - Do their current activities incorporate it?
  - If not, do they plan to incorporate it into future activities?

# Introduction and definition

**No unique definition of social responsibility**, but there are common grounds

## European Commission's Green Paper 2001:

- “a concept whereby companies integrate **social and environmental concerns** in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a **voluntary basis**”

## ISO 26000 Guidelines

- “the responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on **society and the environment**, through transparent and ethical behaviour that:
  - contributes to **sustainable development**
  - takes into account the expectations of stakeholders
  - is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour
  - is integrated throughout the organization and practiced in its relationships

**ESG does not specifically mention "social responsibility"**

## Our definition of social responsibility

By social responsibility we mean the obligation of an organization towards the welfare and interests of the society in which it operates

# Social Responsibility: Advantages and opportunities for providers/institutions

- Benefits wider society (not just students and employers, but also the general public)
  - equal access to education
  - environmental sustainability
- Builds identities within local society or organisations
- Staff/students feel worthwhile
  - doing good
  - team work
  - pleasure from giving
  - making a difference
- Appeals to prospective stakeholders

# Barriers and challenges for providers/institutions

- Institutional autonomy
- Doing it but nobody knows
- Ensuring stakeholders get feedback
- Resistance to change
- Scepticism
- Fear
- Apathy
- Reluctance to be measured
- Aligning research with cultural needs
- Complex process
  - Overwhelming – where to start?
  - Cost – money, time
- Window dressing – superficial
- No “one size fits all”
  - Inter-institutional comparisons of community engagement are meaningless
- Could inhibit engagement

# SURVEY on Social responsibility of the QA agencies

- Insight into **how agencies fulfil the role of a socially responsible entity** and which **activities they undertake toward 3 main stakeholders**
  - *current and future activities*
- Respondents were asked to reflect organisational-level views, based on verified information, not personal impressions
  
- **For the purpose of this survey - the three main stakeholders:**
  - 1) education sector actors (HE institutions, staff, students),
  - 2) government and
  - 3) public

# What do we talk about when we talk about SR...?

*“Because we are financed with public money, we feel we have a **greater responsibility to repay our debt and contribute to societal development and growth.**”*

*“Quality assurance agencies should act as **influencers** and consider how they **actively contribute to raising living standards.**”*

*“Given the difficulty of defining the concept,...the way for the future, is to have an **enhancement-led approach** which is based on the **participation of different actors** and which **builds on trust.**”*

*“QA agencies should encourage institutions to **ensure that societal engagement and the third mission are afforded a similar focus to HEIs’ other core missions** (research and education and training).”*

*“The **more responsibilities** are assigned to QA...the **less importance the individual responsibility gets.**”*

*“The...promotion of quality culture in higher education, based on **trust and autonomy for the institutions**, must lead to further transparency of quality in all aspects of higher education, the **true involvement of all stakeholders** and the ability of the institutions to **differ in their responses to politico-social requirements...**”*

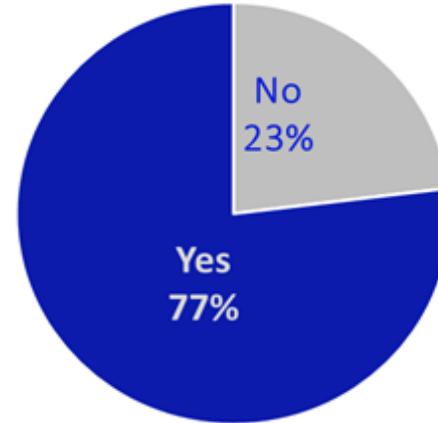
**Our agencies’ thoughts  
on QAAs role in social  
responsibility**

# SURVEY results

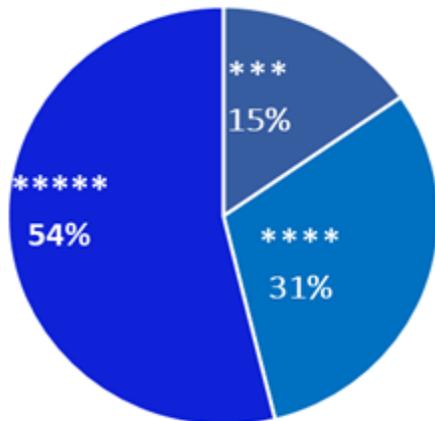
13 responses from senior management in QA agencies



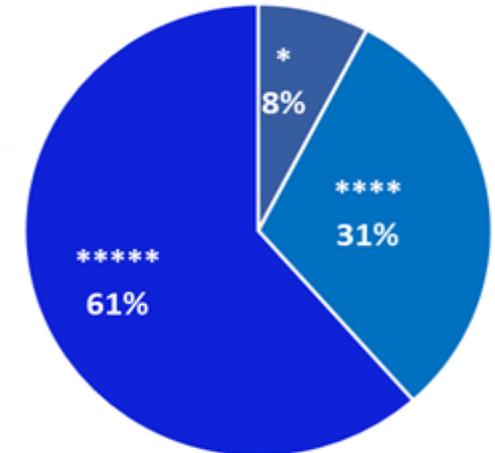
Is social responsibility a strategic objective of your organisation?



How would you rate the importance of social responsibility engagement for your organization?

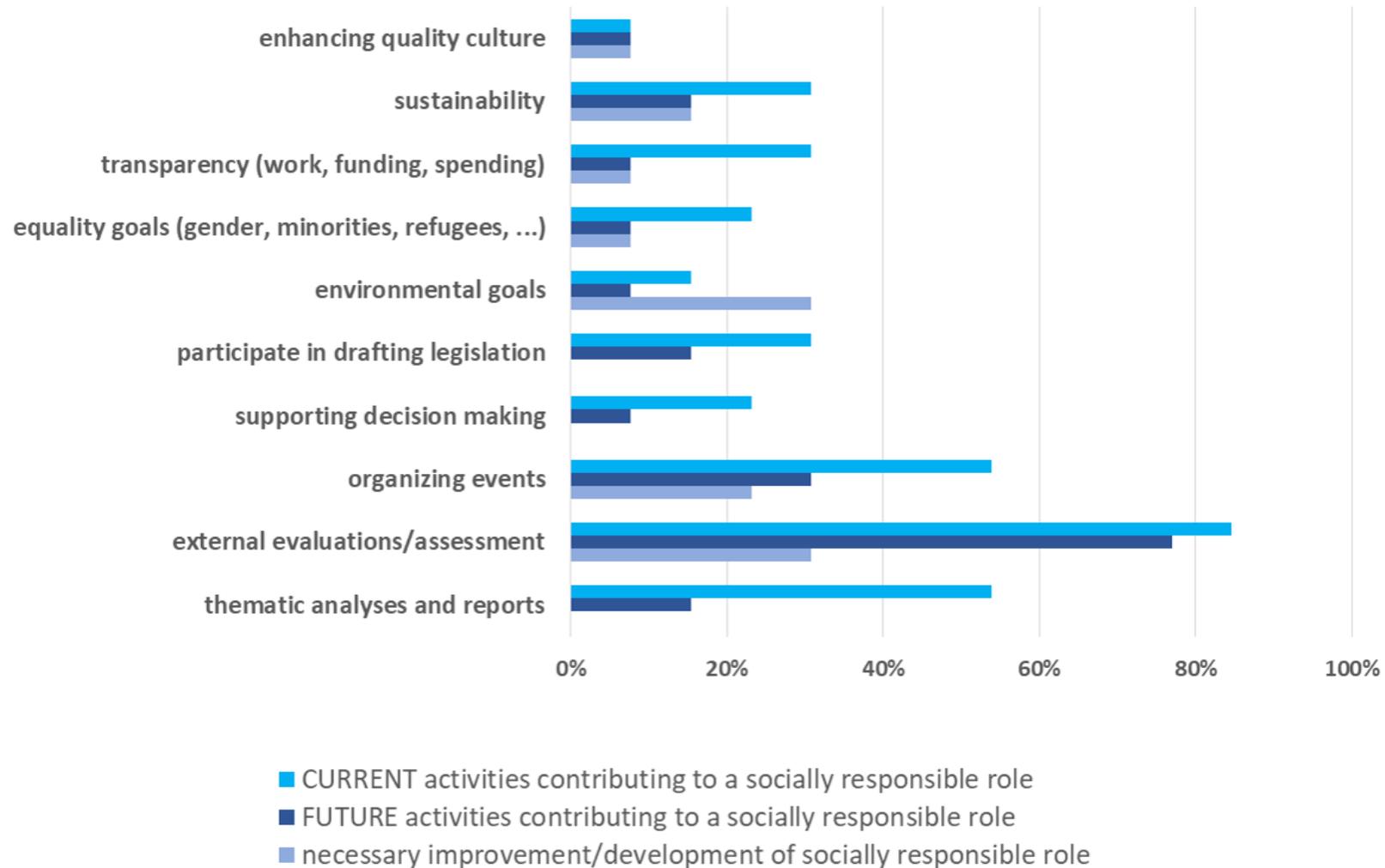


How important do you think social responsibility will be to the role of QA agencies in the future?



# SURVEY results - -

## QA agencies' activities related to a socially responsible role



# SURVEY results – activities toward stakeholders

## HE ACTORS

- Promoting new trends in HE
- Training, events

## GOVERNMENT

- Cooperation in drafting legal documents
- Providing support in decision making

## PUBLIC (SOCIETY IN GENERAL)

- events, conferences, discussions
- providing reliable information about HE qualifications and programmes

# Sustainability of internal practices

- NOKUT was certified through the Eco-Lighthouse (ELH) scheme in 2017 and aims for re-certification in 2020.
- Norway's most widely used certification scheme for enterprises seeking to document their environmental efforts and demonstrate social responsibility.

## Eco-Lighthouse Requirements/Indicators

1. General
2. Working conditions
3. Procurement
4. Energy
5. Transport
6. Waste
7. Emissions to air and water
8. Aesthetics



# Where does the role of QA end?

## *Green indicators for universities and colleges in Norway*

- **Will measurement of sustainability in educational offerings impact on the development of programmes of study?**
- **Should QA agencies play a role in this?**
- 2019 report proposing 98 quantitative indicators for monitoring climate impact of Norwegian HEIs
- Ministry of Education: HEIs will be scored on the indicators + two additional dimensions, still to be defined:
  - Sustainability in educational programmes
  - Research for a green transformation
- Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (DIKU) will operate the scheme

# Who follows?

# Recommendations on possible next steps

- ... prior to the introducing (evaluation of) social responsibility into QA procedures
- Is it possible to agree a **definition of ‘social responsibility’** among actors in the EHEA?
    - **common understanding** of what SR represents (what will be evaluated?)
    - discussion and **acceptance of common guidelines** (ESG? national criteria?)
    - *BFUG Advisory Group for Social Dimension* → drafting *Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension*
  - **QAAs as influencers** - "Be the change you want to see" approach

# For discussion...

- Every QA Agency should have a **mission statement about social responsibility** (with regard to inclusion, social justice, citizenship, and environmental sustainability)
- **ENQA** should incorporate agencies' activities regarding social responsibility into their **assessment of QA agencies**
- The **ESG should be adapted** to include social responsibility (including a **definition** aligned with e.g. ISO 26000, UNESCO 2009, Council of Europe's declaration of 2006 and the European Commission's 2011 strategy – all reflecting on education and social responsibility)
- **Social responsibility** should be included in **relevant legislation and regulations**