ENQA
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Quality Procedures in the European Higher Education Area and Beyond – Second ENQA Survey

Education and Culture DG

International co-operation in higher education and training

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission in the framework of the Socrates programme. This publication reflects the views of the authors only and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

ISBN 978-952-5539-31-8 (PAPERBOUND)
ISBN 978-952-5539-32-5 (PDF)
ISSN 1458-1051

The present report can be downloaded from the ENQA website at
http://www.enqa.eu/pubs.lasso

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Cover design and page layout: Eija Vierimaa

Edited by Nathalie Costes, Emmi Helle

Helsinki, Finland, 2008

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Foreword

Quality assurance for higher education in Europe has developed significantly since 2002, and has increasingly influenced, and been influenced by, the Bologna Process.

A major step in the Bologna Process was taken at the ministerial meeting in Bergen in May 2005, with the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQEHEA). The ESG were developed to meet the need for a common understanding of quality assurance in European higher education. The FQEHEA was developed to meet the need for a common understanding of the generic learning outcomes that signified completion of each of the three cycles of higher education. Both documents have encouraged change and are having a growing impact on quality assurance procedures.

The present report updates the findings of the first ENQA survey on Quality Procedures in European Higher Education, undertaken by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) in 2002, and considers the main developments that have taken place since then. In addition, the survey looks at agencies' views on their compliance with Part 3 of the ESG; their attitudes towards the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR); and their external review plans.

ENQA is pleased to present the 2008 Quality Procedures Project report. The results of this survey offer a valuable insight into quality assurance procedures across Europe, and I hope this survey will contribute to further future discussions between agencies.

Peter Williams,
President
European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Glossary

An external quality procedure could be one of the following:

- An **evaluation of a subject**[1], which focuses on the quality of one specific subject, typically in all the programmes in which this subject is taught.
- An **evaluation of a programme**, which focuses on the activities within a study programme, which in this context is defined as studies leading to a formal degree.
- An **evaluation of an institution**, which examines the quality of all activities within an institution, i.e. organisation, financial matters, management, facilities, teaching and research.
- An **evaluation of a theme** which examines the quality or practice of a specific theme within education e.g. ICT or student counselling.
- An **audit**, which is an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality mechanisms established by an institution itself to continuously monitor and improve the activities and services of either a subject, a programme, the whole institution or a theme.
- An **accreditation process**, which builds on the same methodological elements as the other types of evaluation, but differs from the other procedures in that judgement is provided according to predefined standards to decide whether a given subject, programme, institution or theme meets the necessary level.
- **Benchmarking**, which is a comparison of results between subjects, programmes, institutions or themes leading to an exchange of experiences of best practice.
- **Criteria** are seen as checkpoints and benchmarks for assessing the quality of the input and the process.
- **Standards** are seen as the expected outcomes of the educational training. For example standards defined by professional organisation or legislation. It concerns the competencies that are expected from the graduates.

Readers should note that aforementioned definitions are valid for this project only.

[1] In this survey the term 'external quality procedure' covers the terms 'evaluation', 'assessment', 'review', 'audit', etc.
[2] A subject is for example the subject 'chemistry' within the study programme of medicine.

Executive Summary

This paper is concerned with the 2008 Quality Procedures survey on quality assurance agencies within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and beyond. Undertaken by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), it collates and analyses responses from 51 agencies and related bodies, and provides an update on a similar survey undertaken in 2002.

The initial chapter identifies the responding agencies, their countries and their ENQA status, and the extent of their remits. Most but not all agencies work within a national remit but a few also have international ones as well. Remits vary from those covering only one type of institution to those with a far wider range of responsibilities, often encompassing essentially all higher education provision, and in some cases various support services as well. The 'level' at which quality assurance responsibilities are held shows some interesting patterns; in about half of the cases the institutions are responsible for approval of new subject areas, but when it comes to programmes the role of the relevant QA agency rises markedly. Approval of new institutions is typically done by central or regional government, but not in all cases.

Chapter 2 provides details on the status, structures, activities and resources of the QA agencies. It pays particular attention to those issues covered by Part 3 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), and is of interest regarding criteria that are also used for ENQA membership. The analysis and commentary acknowledge that there can be a strained relationship between national traditions, legislation and the ESG. The responses illustrate that almost all agencies are formally recognised, either under a specific law (most) or by public authorities. The number of agencies within a country varies; in most cases there is a single agency, but regional and other dimensions can result in there being multiple agencies within a country. The analysis of the types of activities covered by agencies shows that, whilst two-thirds of agencies use programme level procedures, just less than half work at institutional level. Some agencies cover both. QA procedures are generally undertaken on a cyclical rather than one-off basis, and generally result in formal consequences. One of the significant sets of responses in this part of the survey indicates that, within a five year period, three-quarters of the agencies have undertaken or are undertaking change, or planning changes to their procedures. Data on staffing, funding and other resources provide an interesting snap-shot of generally adequate provision, but also illustrate some constraints under which agencies are working.

The third and most extensive chapter is concerned with structure(s), functions, decision making and methodological approaches to external quality assurance. A very rich source of data illustrates the increasing extent to which stakeholders are now involved within agency structures, although the main functions of agencies (external quality assurance and improvement, and dissemination of information about quality) remain much the same as in 2003. Agencies have however taken on, or become involved in, a wider range of additional functions, particularly in relation to the development of the Bologna Process. One interesting finding is that the four-stage theoretical process of quality assurance, presented in an annex of the ESG, is applied by most but not all of the responding agencies. Within the details of what is examined during the external evaluations, research strategies and assessment ranked highly, but

a surprising 20% of agencies indicated that they do not include institutions' assessments of students in their evaluations. A variety of mechanisms is used by agencies to look at their own internal quality assurance procedures with, as might be expected, the more developed agencies having a wider range of measures than those established more recently.

Chapter 4 provides further evidence that builds upon important aspects coming from Chapter 3. It describes and discusses a number of critical areas relating to the division of responsibilities within the methodological frameworks and procedures used by agencies. It reports on: the membership of external panels [there is clear evidence of an increase in student membership but a (corresponding?) decrease in the direct involvement of agency staff on panels)]; the training of panels; the responsibilities exercised in determining what QA method(s) will be applied (mostly the agency's) and the writing of reports (mostly the panel's). Legal regulations provide a reference frame for many agencies in determining their methodologies, but there are other important factors as well. An interesting comparison with the 2003 survey may be drawn from the now wider availability and use of 'specific criteria and standards' for QA. The quality assurance of collaborative provision between (providing) institutions (including trans-national delivery) was not covered in 2003; the data provided here may act as a baseline for future comparisons in an area that is becoming of increasing importance.

Chapter 5 focuses on just one critical aspect of QA – site visits, and the preparatory work undertaken before them. Evidence suggests that the development of the self-evaluation reports is done by institutions in much the same way as in 2003; sources for data collection are much as might be expected and the people and panels interviewed much as in 2003. The site visits themselves are generally, but not always, accompanied by agency staff, and whilst averages can be distorting it was perhaps interesting to see that site visits for institutional evaluations are only one day longer than those for programme evaluations. Class room observations were used in a small proportion of methodologies / cases only.

The sixth chapter covers the extent to which, and the ways in which, the outcomes of the QA procedures are reported. Most agencies provide public reports on their evaluations, with those that do not yet do so are planning to. The majority of reports, which include data analyses, recommendations, and conclusions, are subject to some form of 'consultation' with the institution before final publication. It is usually the agency that published the report, with the number of reports published clearly depending on the size of an agency's 'jurisdiction' and whether it is involved in only institutional evaluation or programme evaluations, when the number of reports rises considerably, or both.

This is followed in Chapter 7, as in any typical QA methodology, by consideration of follow-up procedures after any judgements and recommendations have been made. Various responsibilities lie with both agencies and institutions, and there are a range of actions that can be asked for or required of institutions.

Some preliminary thoughts about possible future developments are covered briefly in the penultimate chapter. Revisions to external QA procedures figure highly in the responses, as does the development of national qualifications frameworks. Almost

all agencies have undergone, are undergoing, or are planning to undergo an external evaluation themselves, although a small proportion do not, as yet, intend to apply for membership of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

The final chapter aims to summarise the key findings not in a repetitive way but by seeking to provide interesting insights into similarities and differences through cross referring detailed findings and discussion points that have arisen from various parts of the survey.

Introduction

Background and purpose

The Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states, in the Prague Communiqué of 19 May 2001, 'called upon the universities and other higher education institutions, national agencies and the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)[3], in cooperation with corresponding bodies from countries which are not members of ENQA, to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice' and added that 'the European University Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Unions of Students in Europe and the Council of Europe should be consulted in the follow-up work'.

The first ENQA survey on Quality Procedures in European Higher Education was undertaken by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) in 2002 and formed part of the response to this mandate. That survey addressed higher education quality assurance practices in the countries of ENQA members. The survey findings were published under the title *'Quality Procedures in European Higher Education – An ENQA Survey'* [4] which for the first time detailed the evaluation methods used by quality assurance agencies in Europe. One reported finding was that major progress had been made towards convergence in basic methods and procedures despite national agencies having varying priorities[5].

Given the significant developments of European quality assurance that have occurred since 2002 – including the adoption of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQEHEA)* – the Board of ENQA decided in May 2007 that it should update, using project funding from the European Commission, the 2002 findings by conducting a new survey of ENQA members, affiliates and associates. For this purpose, ENQA launched the second project on "Quality Procedures in European Higher Education".

The project goals were:

1. to update the 2002 survey;
2. to assess the agencies' opinion on their compliance with Part 3 of the ESG;
3. to survey agencies' external review plans and
4. to survey agencies' attitudes towards the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Process and Method

The project was divided into three phases.

In the first phase the Steering and Project groups designed and developed the second Quality Procedures questionnaire (attached as an annex in the report) and implemented it using the SurveyMonkey electronic tool for web-based questionnaires.

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[3] ENQA was transformed from a network into an association in 2004.

[4] European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Quality Procedures in European Higher Education - An ENQA Survey, Occasional Paper No. 5, ISBN 951-98680-8-9, Helsinki, 2003

[5] ENQA statement to the Conference of European Ministers of Education in Berlin, 18-19 September 2003

The online questionnaire was distributed to the ENQA member agencies, associates and affiliates on 21 December 2007 with a response deadline of 31 January 2008.

The second phase involved preliminary analysis of the responses. For this purpose the survey was divided into seven sections namely: (i) Introduction and background information about the higher education system (10 questions); (ii) Agencies' operations (14 questions); (iii) Typical methodological approaches to external quality assurance (14 questions); (iv) Division of responsibilities and methodological framework for procedures involving panels (11 questions); (v) Self-evaluation by the institution/ programme (7 questions); (vi) Reporting the outcome of agencies' external quality procedures and follow-up (9 questions); (vii) Future developments (6 questions). The task of analysing each section and writing the corresponding chapter was assigned to specific members of the Project Group, according to their areas of interest.

Finally, the third phase involved the final analysis and the production of the report.

Organisation of the project

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) took the lead the project.

A Steering Group and a Project Group were set up to conduct the survey and to draft the report. However, in the course of the project the two groups merged into one, as it was felt that in this case one group with members of equal tasks and responsibilities was more functional. The ENQA Secretariat carried out the administrative responsibility of the project.

The original Steering Group comprised four individuals, i.e. three representatives of ENQA member agencies, including an ENQA Board member, plus a member of the ENQA Secretariat:

- Nick Harris, the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (QAA)
- Peter Cullen, the Higher Education and Training Award Council (HETAC)
- Achim Hopbach, German Accreditation Council (GAC), ENQA Board Member
- Emmi Helle, ENQA Secretariat

The initial Project Group consisted of nine members, i.e. six representatives of ENQA member agencies (including a student representative and an ENQA Board member), a representative of a higher education institution and two members of the ENQA Secretariat. Peter Cullen and Emmi Helle were acting respectively as chairman and secretary:

- Peter Cullen, HETAC
- Fiona Crozier, QAA
- Josep Grifoll, the Agency for Quality Assurance in the Catalan University System (AQU Catalonia)
- Helka Kekäläinen, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)
- Tanel Sits, the Higher Education Quality Assessment Center of Estonia (HEQAC), student representative
- Kurt Sohm, Fachhochschulrat (Autrian FHR), ENQA Board member
- Bozana Knezevic, University of Rijeka (Croatia), HEI representative
- Emmi Helle, ENQA Secretariat
- Nathalie Costes, ENQA Secretariat

In the end, the Steering Group and the Project Group acted as one and both, therefore, are referred to as the Project Group in this report.

Each of the Project Group members was responsible for the production of one part of this report. The first round of putting together the different chapters and editing them was conducted by HETAC (Peter Cullen) and QAA (Nick Harris). ENQA Secretariat took care of the final touch, including the layout and publication on the ENQA website.

Response to the survey

The survey was largely based on the original survey of 2002, which was updated to reflect the relevant developments since then, including the ESG, the FQEHEA, the reviews of agencies and the impending establishment of the EQAR.

The survey was distributed to all ENQA members, affiliates and associates on 21 December 2007 with a response deadline of 31 January 2008. The findings are based on 51 responses from agencies from 30 EHEA countries[6]. The Project Group deemed that this sample was sufficiently representative of the whole of the EHEA.

Since 2002, the membership of ENQA has grown steadily and two new categories of formal linkage with ENQA were introduced in 2006 namely: association and affiliation. Since then 21 entities (networks and organisations) either associated or affiliated with ENQA. Therefore, the 2008 survey covered a significantly wider distribution than the first, which was completed by 36 quality assurance agencies from 23 countries.

Persons completing the survey were given the option to require that their responses be reported anonymously in the final report. Nine chose this option. The name and the country of those organisations is, therefore, omitted in the text.

It should be noted that the survey text was the sole channel of communication with respondents. Accordingly, the interpretation of questions and criteria may vary, leading to potential factual errors or misinterpretations in the results. The authors cannot be held responsible for inaccuracies or misunderstanding. Finally, it should also be noted that not all questions were completed by all survey respondents.

[6] As of May 2007, 46 countries have signed the Bologna declaration and are thus members of the Bologna Process.

Chapter 1: Introduction and background information about higher education systems

Summary information about the 51 respondents is presented in tables 1–2. The respondents have been classified according to their relationship with ENQA, namely Full member, Candidate member, Associate and Affiliate. The names of the agencies in tables 1–2 and in the report are referred to as they were written by those agencies which responded to the survey. Some agencies are named by their national names while other agencies' names are translated in English. The name and the country of those nine organisations that required their responses to be reported anonymously are marked with "XX".

In the first part of the questionnaire, agencies were asked to state which of the following were within their remit or scope:

i. Universities;
ii. Higher Education Institutions such as Universities of Applied Science, University Colleges, etc;
iii. A specific discipline or field of learning;
iv. Other (with a request to specify).

However, given that the terminology and notion of "universities" and "non-universities" varies from country to country, there might have been misunderstandings when responding to this question. Respondents could select more than one category.

1.1 Participating agencies

Table 1. Full and Candidate members

NAME OF AGENCY	COUNTRY	STATUS	SCOPE
Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA)	Austria	Candidate member	(i), (ii), (iv)
National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA)	Bulgaria	Candidate member	(i), (ii), (iii), (iv)
XX	XX	Candidate member	(i), (ii)
National Accreditation Agency (NAA)	Russia	Candidate member	(i), (ii)
Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (ACSUG)	Spain	Candidate member	(i), (ii)
XX	XX	Candidate member	(i)
The European Council on Chiropractic Education (ECCE)	U.K	Candidate member	(ii), (iv)
Austrian Accreditation Council (AAC)	Austria	Full member	(iv)
Austrian Fachhochschulrat (FH Council)	Austria	Full member	(ii)
Council of Flemish Institutions of Higher Education (VLHORA)	Belgium	Full member	(ii)

European University Association – Institutional Evaluation Programme (EUA-IEP)	Belgium	Full member	(i), (ii)
XX	XX	Full member	(i)
XX	XX	Full member	(ii)
Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic	Czech	Full member	(i), (ii), (iii)
Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)	Finland	Full member	(i), (ii)
Agence d'Évaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur (AÉRES)	France	Full member	(i), (ii), (iv)
XX	XX	Full member	(ii), (iv)
XX	XX	Full member	(i), (ii), (iii)
Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN)	Germany	Full member	(i), (ii)
Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hanover (ZEvA)	Germany	Full member	(i), (ii)
Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA)	Germany	Full member	(i), (ii), (iii), (iv)
German Accreditation Council (GAC)	Germany	Full member	(iv)
Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC)	Hungary	Full member	(i), (ii), (iv)
Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)	Ireland	Full member	(ii)
XX	XX	Full member	(i), (ii)
Comitato Nazionale Per la Valutazione del Sistema Universitario (CNVSU)	Italy	Full member	(i), (ii)
Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre (HEQEC)	Latvia	Full member	(i), (ii)
Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)	Netherlands	Full member	(i), (ii)
Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)	Norway	Full member	(i), (ii), (iv)
The Accreditation Commission of Slovak Republic	Slovakia	Full member	(i), (ii)
Agency for Quality Assurance in the Catalan University System (AQU)	Spain	Full member	(i)
National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA)	Spain	Full member	(i)
Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE)	Sweden	Full member	(i), (ii)
Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss universities (OAQ)	Switzerland	Full member	(i), (ii)
The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)	U.K	Full member	(i), (ii), (iv)

Table 2. Associates and Affiliates

NAME OF AGENCY	COUNTRY	STATUS	SCOPE
Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education	Albania	Affiliate (CEEN member)	(ii)
Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN)	Hungary	Affiliate	(iv)
Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education	Lithuania	Affiliate (CEEN member)	(iv)
European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA)	Netherlands	Affiliate	(iv)
Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia	Slovenia	Affiliate (CEEN member)	(ii), (iv)
Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE)	Croatia	Associate	(i), (ii), (iv)
XX	XX	Associate	(i)
Quality Management Project (HRK)	Germany	Associate	(ii)
Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions (AVEPRO)	Holy See	Associate	(i), (ii), (iii)
Office of Evaluation and Analysis of the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland	Iceland	Associate	(i), (ii), (iv)
The Council for Higher Education (CHE)	Israel	Associate	(ii)
European Evangelical Accrediting Association (EEAA)	Italy	Associate	(ii), (iii)
Higher Education Planning, Evaluation, Accreditation and Coordination Council (YÖDAK)	North Cyprus	Associate	(ii)
Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assessment (CAQA)	Serbia	Associate	(i), (ii)
XX	XX	Associate	(i)
Commission for Academic Assessment and Quality Improvement at Higher Education (YODEK)	Turkey	Associate	(i), (ii)

The European system of quality assurance in higher education has expanded through the emergence of new agencies since 2002.

Perusal of tables 1 and 2 and the responses to the survey demonstrate that new agencies continue to be established. The Holy See and the governments of the Republics of Croatia and Kazakhstan have recently established evaluation (or accreditation) agencies responsible for external quality assurance in higher education[7]. Greece, Romania and Malta have recently established, or are planning to establish, quality assurance agencies[8].

In some EU member states, new legislation has led to the restructuring of the higher education quality assurance system. In France, for instance, the Comité National d'Evaluation (CNE) has been integrated into the new Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education (AERES), which covers not only all institutions of higher education but also research bodies in France. In Denmark, a new act was passed by the Parliament in 2007 creating a new accreditation body.

[7] The Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) was established in Croatia in 2004. The National Accreditation Centre of the Ministry of Education and Science (NAC) was founded in Kazakhstan in 2005. The Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Faculties (AVEPRO) was established in 2007.

[8] The Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (HQAA), established in 2005, is an Associate of ENQA. The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), established in 2005, is a Candidate member of ENQA.

1.2 Scope of agencies

As said in the previous chapter, the agencies were asked to state which of the categories – (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) – were within their remit or scope, with the possibility to select more than one category. Table 3 illustrates that both ENQA members and associates/affiliates (28 agencies covering 24 countries) predominantly evaluate both universities [type (i)] and higher education institutions [type (ii)]. It can be deduced that in the majority of European higher education quality systems, university (i) and HEI (ii) sectors are integrated under one quality framework.

Table 3 also shows that the remit of the agency is general, in majority of the cases, and includes all fields of learning. Only seven respondents specialise in a specific field of learning.

Table 3.

WHAT IS THE SCOPE OR REMIT OF YOUR AGENCY?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Both universities (i) and HEI (ii)	28	42
Other (iv)	16	24
Only HEI (ii)	10	15
A specific discipline or field of learning (iii)	7	10
Only universities (i)	6	9
answered question	50	
skipped question	1	

The categories specified under "other" included:

- Evaluation of research institutes, research teams and laboratories;
- Evaluation of programmes;
- Evaluation of post secondary vocational programmes and institutions;
- Evaluation of pre-primary, primary and secondary schools;
- Other specific disciplines;
- Private organisations with degree-awarding powers; further education colleges offering higher education programmes;
- Consortium of accreditation organisations; accreditation agencies;
- Scientific organisations;
- Engineering schools.

1.3 The agencies' primary domain

The responses revealed that most of the quality assurance agencies have been established to operate within a country (table 4). Of the seven agencies which operate within a part of a territory, four are Spanish regional agencies and two are Belgian regional agencies. Among the five organisations which operate within a specific group of countries, two are affiliate networks of ENQA: Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN) and European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). In addition, four bodies have reported to be operating in an international domain: Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions (AVEPRO), European Council on Chiropractic Education (ECCE), EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) and European Evangelical Accrediting Association (EEAA).

Table 4.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR AGENCY'S PRIMARY DOMAIN?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
A country (i.e. the whole territory of a sovereign state)	35	68.6
A part of the territory of a sovereign state	7	13.7
A specific group of sovereign states	5	9.8
International	4	7.8
Please specify	13	
answered question	51	
skipped question	0	

In table 5, it can be found that, if looking at the numbers, the institutions subject to quality procedures of the agencies are in most cases public, type (ii) institutions such as university colleges, applied universities, followed by private type (ii) institutions.

Table 5.

HOW MANY INSTITUTIONS ARE IN YOUR AGENCY'S PRIMARY DOMAIN?	RESPONSE AVERAGE	RESPONSE TOTAL	RESPONSE COUNT
Public universities	44	1543	35
Private universities	29	958	33
Public HEI	69	2144	31
Private HEI	52	1573	30
answered question			45
skipped question			6

In addition, the respondents were asked whether institutions in their agency's primary domain are subject to compulsory external quality procedures by their agency and/or others. 42 respondents indicated that all institutions in their agency's primary domain were subject to compulsory external quality procedures against six that indicated the opposite. However, it should be noted here that the question's options were restrictive, as respondents had to choose between "yes, all are subject" or "no, none are subject". This may have had a polarising effect in the responses, as the reality is often more complicated than just a yes/no-option. For example, AQA from Austria, which had chosen the no-answer, stated that public universities (which represent ca 80% of higher education) and teacher-training colleges (ca 5%) are recognised by law and obliged to implement internal quality management (QM) systems. Evidence of implementation is achieved through certification by AQA, but the external quality procedures are not compulsory. Fachhochschulen (ca 12%) and private universities (ca 3%), are subject to compulsory national accreditation (by the FH Council and the AAC respectively), based on evaluation procedures carried out by AQA or other internationally-recognised agencies.

1.4 Approval of new subjects, programmes and institutions

Table 6 suggests that, in most cases, new subjects are approved by institutions; new institutions are approved by central or regional governments and new programmes are approved by institutions or QA agencies. Interestingly enough, in five cases, institutions are responsible for approving other new institutions. Five agencies skipped this question.

Table 6.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE APPROVAL OF NEW SUBJECTS, PROGRAMMES AND INSTITUTIONS?				RESPONSE COUNT
	SUBJECTS	PROGRAMMES	INSTITUTIONS	
The institutions	**25**	**21**	5	30
Central government	9	16	**21**	26
Regional government	5	11	**16**	16
The relevant QA agency	6	**20**	13	22
Other	3	6	7	7
Please specify				20
			answered question	46
			skipped question	5

Chapter 2:
European quality assurance agencies

2.1 Introduction

External quality assurance in the European higher education systems has developed tremendously in the ten years since the recommendation of the European Council of 24 September 1998 on European Co-operation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The developments have been both organisational and structural and have modified the role and relevance of external quality assurance.

The Council recommendation of 1998 highlighted the need for autonomy of the agencies and addressed standards for external quality procedures used by agencies. Besides the development of quality assurance methodology, one major issue of debate since the late nineties has been the question of what standards should be required of external quality assurance agencies as organisations. This question was addressed by the third part of the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG) which were adopted at the Bologna conference in 2005.

The ESG comprise a set of standards for agencies that wish to be considered as trustworthy and professional in the performance of their functions in the European Higher Education Area. The growing importance of these standards as a reference frame for agencies is evidenced by the foundation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) on 4 March 2008.

The ESG were developed to be applicable to all quality assurance agencies in Europe (EHEA), irrespective of their structure, function and size and the national system in which they operate. However, every agency operates in the context of its national higher education system, its assigned role in the national quality assurance system, and its national culture and traditions. This means that even though there is some convergence in European quality assurance, there are limitations when the requirements of ESG conflict with national regulations and traditions.

This chapter examines the current state of development of ENQA full members, candidate members, associates and affiliates, as perceived by the agencies themselves, having regard to the national higher education contexts. Questions 11 to 24 of the survey paraphrase Part 3 of the ESG and thereby the ENQA membership criteria. The analysis and commentary acknowledge that there can be a strained relationship between national traditions, legislation and the ESG.

When interpreting the findings an important underlying question is whether ESG are perceived as generic principles which can be satisfied in different ways taking into account the national context, or as strict rules to be followed literally.

It is noteworthy that even though the analysis of this part of the survey follows the ESG and thus the membership criteria of ENQA, it does not replace the assessment of the fulfilment of the ENQA membership criteria by an agency, nor can any eligibility be derived from information contained in this survey. It is the responsibility of the ENQA Board to examine the agencies in this respect and decide upon fulfilment of membership criteria.

2.2 Status of the Agency

Other than specifying autonomy as a necessary characteristic of the agencies the Council recommendation of 1998 does not explicitly refer to the status of agencies in law. In contrast the ESG stipulate that "agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the EHEA as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis"[9].

This standard seems to be motivated by a principle — one that underpins many other parts of the ESG — which holds that the reliability and trustworthiness (credibility) of an agency is based on its professionalism in terms of its organisation as well as in the performance of its functions.

In this respect the responses to the question "Does your agency have a legal basis?" (table 7) were quite uniform over the agencies irrespective of the relationship with ENQA (Full member, Candidate member, Associate and Affiliate). 34 out of 47 responding agencies answered that they are based on a specific law which is the highest possible level of formal recognition.

Table 7.

DOES YOUR AGENCY HAVE A LEGAL BASIS?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Yes	46	95.8
No	2	4.2
Please specify	28	
answered question	48	
skipped question	3	

Ten out of the remaining 13 agencies are recognised by public authorities, just beneath this level, and two are not formally recognised at all. Taking into account that four of the ten agencies which are recognised by a public authority belong to the German accreditation system, and also taking into account that the two agencies that are not recognised are international organisations by definition, the survey shows that it is a common pattern in the EHEA to establish quality assurance agency(ies) in legislation.

This picture illustrates the dynamic process of implementing national quality assurance systems especially after the Bologna Conference in Berlin in 2003 where ministers stated that quality is at the heart of setting up the European Higher Education Area and the adoption of the guiding principles of the ESG two years later in Bergen 2005.

2.3 Structure of national quality assurance systems and the position of the agency

2.3.1 RESPONSIBILITY OF THE AGENCY

ESG standard 2.3 stipulates that the agency shall bear formal responsibility for external quality assurance.

The number of agencies in a country is variable. It is influenced by limitations on the remit of individual agencies and by the structure of the quality assurance system. Evidently, different approaches are feasible. One approach is to have a single

[9] ESG part III, standard 2

agency that bears sole responsibility for external quality assurance. This can promote transparency and simplicity. Alternatively, a country with an extensive higher education system and different approaches in place for external quality assurance may opt for a division of responsibilities. Such divisions may be regional, or based on the type of institution, or procedural, etc. Many different approaches are possible. The ESG do not address the division of responsibility.

At a first glance the responses to the question about responsibility (table 8) indicate a largely homogeneous landscape in so far as two-thirds of the agencies are solely responsible for external quality assurance. On closer inspection the situation becomes even more homogeneous. Considering the 20 responding agencies which claim not to be the only responsible actor in the field of external quality assurance, by discounting the three internationally established agencies, and by observing that 10 out of the remaining 17 represent only two national systems (namely the federally structured systems of Spain and Germany), there are only seven national systems which do not assign responsibilities in quality assurance to only one agency.

Table 8.

IS YOUR AGENCY THE ONLY COMPETENT/RESPONSIBLE BODY FOR THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BASED IN ITS PRIMARY DOMAIN?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Yes	28	58.3
No	20	41.7
Comment	20	
answered question	48	
skipped question	3	

This does not mean, however, that in those systems more than one agency bear the same responsibilities. On the contrary, the only national quality assurance systems with a somehow competitive environment, with agencies having exactly the same responsibilities, are the German and the Dutch ones, and to some extent also the Spanish. In the other systems with more than one agency, the agencies have different responsibilities and thus do not compete with one another.

2.3.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE AS CORE FUNCTION OF THE AGENCIES

ESG standard 3.3 states that agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities on a regular basis.

This standard addresses the expected level of experience (and professionalism) in undertaking external quality procedures. Given the crucial role of quality assurance stressed by ministers in Berlin in 2003, it is natural that they, as well as higher education institutions and other stakeholders, would demand a high level of quality and professionalism of external quality assurance agencies. An agency needs to perform external quality assurance as a core function and on a regular basis to reach an adequate level of professionalism and reliability in terms of policy, procedures, skills of staff and experts, etc. Moreover, compliance with ESG standard 3.3 is necessary for an agency to be able to meet the other standards of Part 3 of the ESG.

Given the fact that almost all national quality assurance systems in the countries covered by the responding agencies are established by legislation with agencies having

defined responsibilities, it is not surprising that respondent agencies normally conduct external quality assurance regularly, as their main task. Only five out of 47 agencies (including one network of agencies) responded that they do not perform external quality assurance regularly, mostly due to the fact that they have only recently been established or have recently changed their responsibility.

2.4 Activities

2.4.1 TYPE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

ESG standard 3.3 does not specify the type of external quality assurance that should be applied by the agencies. It only states that external quality assurance shall take place "at institutional or programme level". The standard is in line with one of the main principles of the ESG – the principle of tolerance of diversity: the ESG are "*designed to be applicable to all higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they are located (ESG, p.12)[…] The standards […] reflect basic good practice across Europe in external quality assurance, but do not attempt to provide detailed guidance about what should be examined or how quality assurance activities should be conducted*." (ESG, p.15)

The principle of tolerance of diversity is essential not least because of the development of external quality assurance since the early nineties. Although the main principles developed in the EU pilot project "Quality Assessment in the Field of Higher Education", especially the four-stage-model, still form a common basis for external quality assurance, the currently applied procedures vary in detail as regards the design of the procedures.

Amongst the respondents, the most frequent (dominant) types of procedures are 'evaluation' and 'accreditation'. 'Audit' and other types of procedure follow far behind (table 9).

Table 9. Regularly carried out external quality procedures

HOW FREQUENTLY ARE THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES CARRIED OUT BY YOUR AGENCY?	REGULARLY	RESPONSE COUNT
Evaluation of subjects	5	33
Evaluation of programmes	**23**	35
Evaluation of institutions	**14**	35
Evaluation of themes	2	31
Audit at subject level	1	29
Audit at programme level	7	32
Audit at institutional level	13	32
Audit at thematic level	1	28
Accreditation of subjects	3	30
Accreditation of programmes	**25**	38
Accreditation of institutions	13	34
Accreditation of themes	2	29
Benchmarking of subjects	2	28
Benchmarking of programmes	3	30
Benchmarking of institutions	1	30
Benchmarking of themes	0	27
Other types of combined approaches (please specify)	5	25

The main findings to be drawn from the responses are:

- The most common external quality procedures are evaluation and accreditation followed by audit, others such as benchmarking and ranking are rarely part of the agencies' remits.
- About two-thirds of the agencies use programme-level procedures in their external quality assurance whereas institutional-level procedures are only applied by about 40% of the agencies. These ratios do not differ between evaluation and accreditation. Audit is understandably more uncommon at the programme level.
- At a closer look, in almost all cases the specific external quality procedures are carried out either regularly or never. The only significant exceptions to this are evaluation of institutions and of themes which are carried out occasionally by approximately 20% of respondents.

These major findings give a picture of well developed systems with equally well established regulations concerning the choice of approach.

On closer inspection the agencies' responses contain more interesting information. Most of the respondent agencies (about 90%) are not confined to only one type of external quality procedure. Moreover, some of them, for example HAC, even conduct most types of procedures (evaluation, audit and accreditation). Considering the most frequently applied approaches, reveals the following correlations:

- Agencies that conduct programme evaluation also conduct - at a rate of fifty percent - accreditation of programmes and evaluation of institutions.
- Agencies that conduct accreditation of programmes also conduct – at a rate of fifty percent – evaluation of programmes and accreditation of institutions.
- Almost every agency that accredits institutions also accredits programmes, and half of them also evaluate programmes and institutions, and audit institutions.

- Almost two-thirds of the agencies conducting audits at the institutional level also evaluate programmes, and half of them also accredit programmes, and evaluate and accredit institutions.

In all these cases the respective procedures are applied regularly.

Hence it is quite common for agencies to apply different types of external quality procedures. A possible explanation for this pattern may be the fact that quality assurance in higher education has undergone a highly dynamic evolution and that this process is continuing. Furthermore, it may be conjectured that the optimal approach to external quality assurance and the configuration of the national quality assurance system is situational: i.e. the approach is determined at least partly by the national context.

This is not surprising considering that quality is a relative rather than an absolutely definable concept. Agencies, governments and stakeholders may have somewhat different views on quality and particularly on the most effective ways to enhance and assure it. The tolerance for diversity in the approach to quality assurance and especially for the assignment of more than one responsibility to one agency may be influenced by the national context and perception of external quality assurance. This seems significant, for instance, in the cases where accreditation of programmes has been added to existing types of quality assurance to meet the requests of students and employers or even tax payers.

These findings are even more interesting when combined with the analysis of the consequences of the different types of procedures.

2.4.2 FORMAL CONSEQUENCES OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

It is no surprise that accreditation procedures at programme level as well as at institutional level have significant consequences for formal approval of programmes and institutions respectively as well as for funding (table 10). There are formal consequences for approval and/or funding in 90% of cases. However, given the traditional definition of accreditation it is rather surprising that every tenth agency responded that there are no formal consequences. It is equally interesting to find out that evaluation at programme level and at institutional level as well as audit at institutional level also lead to formal consequences in between 54 and even 70% of the cases.

This high level of obligation (flowing from consequences) corresponds to the fact that higher education institutions are formally required to address recommendations at a rate of approximately 75% in evaluation procedures and audits, and at approximately 87% in accreditation procedures.

Recalling the discussions about pros and cons of the different approaches to external quality assurance and especially the theoretical concepts that form the basis for the different approaches, it is important to recognise that the consequences are, in most cases, defined independently of the type of external quality assurance. The main objectives of external quality assurance are to approve programmes and/or institutions and to inform decisions on funding, and all the most common types of external quality procedures are applied for these purposes. It is also worth noting that the term "formal consequences" does not in every case mean "direct" or automatic consequences but rather preparation for a formal decision made by another party.

Table 10. Consequences of external quality procedures

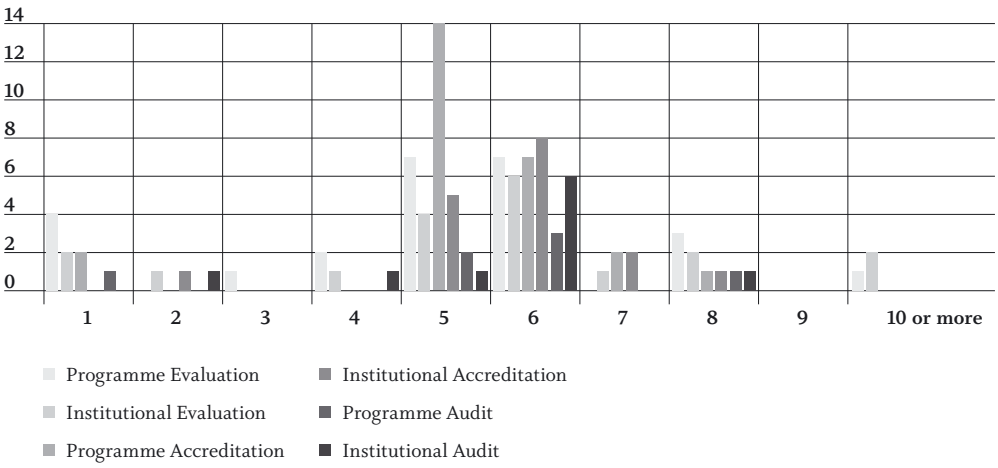
	FUNDING	FORMAL STATUS/ APPROVAL	FUNDING + FORMAL STATUS/ APPROVAL	OTHER	NO FORMAL CONSEQUENCES
Programme Evaluation	0	11	5	3	6
Institutional Evaluation	0	12	4	3	4
Programme Accreditation	0	18	7	1	2
Institutional Accreditation	0	14	3	0	2
Programme Audit	0	5	0	2	2
Institutional Audit	1	7	1	3	3

2.4.3 CYCLE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURE

The principle that external quality assurance is periodic as stipulated in ESG standard 2.7 is not controversial. External quality assurance especially contributes to quality enhancement when it is done on a cyclical basis and not "once in a lifetime".

The responses to the question about the length of the cycle draw a very clear picture: most external quality procedures are carried out in cycles of five or six years.

Figure 11. Activity cycle in years



2.4.4 CHANGE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE APPROACH

As mentioned before, one of the most striking features of external quality assurance in European higher education is the dynamism of its development over the last ten years. In the light of this, it not surprising that three-quarters of the agencies responded that they have changed their quality assurance approach recently or that they are about to do so in the near future (table 12). Nine out of the 36 agencies which answered "yes" only made some small adjustments to their procedures. The other 27 agencies that made significant changes can be divided into three groups. First, and this is not surprising, eight agencies replied that they modified their approach in order to align it with the ESG. The second group, consisting of three agencies, changed their approach

mostly by switching to another type of procedure. Interestingly enough the last group of the remaining 16 agencies added a new type of procedure to the existing one(s), instead of replacing the "old" one, which corresponds to the above mentioned finding that many agencies apply more than one external quality assurance approach.

Table 12.

HAS YOUR AGENCY SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED ITS APPROACH TO EVALUATION IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS OR IS IT PLANNING TO CHANGE ITS APPROACH?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Yes	36	75
No	12	25
answered question	48	
skipped question	3	

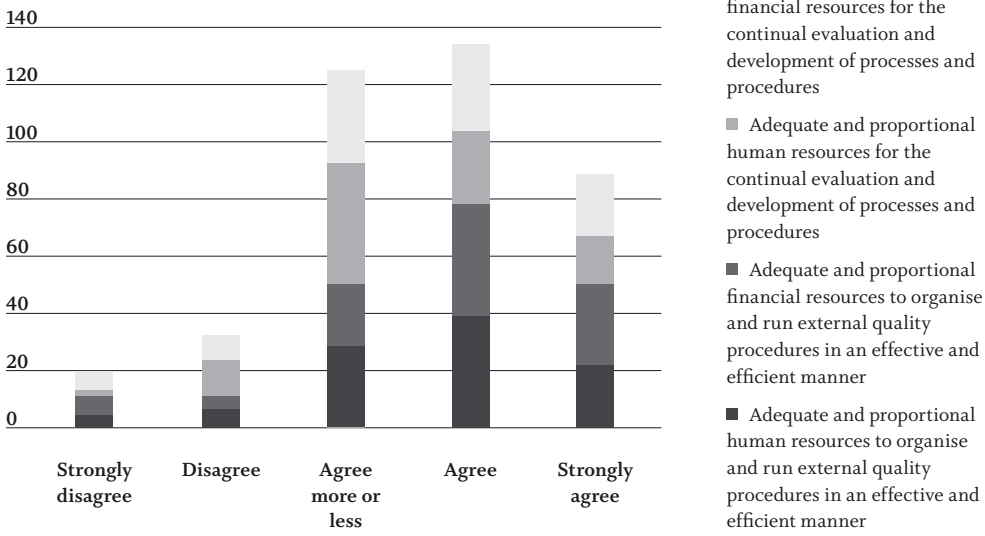
2.5 Resources

2.5.1 HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The ESG assert in standard 3.4 that agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

The meaning of this standard is twofold: on the one hand, agencies should have appropriate resources to effectively and efficiently conduct their external quality procedures. On the other hand, the provision of resources should enable agencies to further develop their processes and procedures. This second facet is linked with the standard on accountability procedures, because the (further) development of quality assurance procedures should be based both on internal and external feedback and reflection mechanisms in order to inform and support the development and improvement actions. Both aspects were covered by the survey. The results (in percentage) are shown in figure 13.

Figure 13. Adequate resources



The average rating provides, for each of the question's propositions, a numerical expression of the respondent's overall level of agreement with it. The highest average rating (3.78) concerns provision with adequate and proportional financial resources to enable the agencies to organise their external quality procedures in an effective and efficient manner. The lowest average rating (3.43) relates to the provision with adequate and proportional human resources for the continual evaluation and development of the agencies' processes and procedures. The average rating pertaining to provision with adequate and proportional human resources to enable the agencies to organise their external quality procedures in an effective and efficient manner is 3.67. The average rating applying to provision with adequate and proportional financial resources for the continual evaluation and development of their processes and procedures is 3.52.

On the whole, the results of the survey show that there is agreement that the provision of human and financial resources is adequate but it falls short of being strong agreement. In analysing the data one has to bear in mind the developmental stage of agencies. Three agencies, for example, mentioned that they have just recently been established and that in the years to come they will need to increase their human and financial resources. One agency commented that it is severely underfinanced and understaffed and that this is due to the fact that the government budget has for several years allotted 10-20% less funds to it than requested.

The ESG and the corresponding external review of agencies aim *inter alia* to ensure that agencies act professionally and with a high level of expertise and credibility across Europe and to encourage external quality assurance capacity building. The continuous improvement and the establishment of internal quality management systems is not only an important challenge for higher education institutions but also for external quality assurance agencies. In this context, research and development activities play a crucial role within agencies. Therefore, it is quite striking that the lowest rating average pertains to provision with adequate and proportional human resources for the continual evaluation and development of the external quality assurance processes and procedures.

External quality assurance agencies operate in a socially and technically (referring to QA methods) complex domain where there can be tensions between generally accepted principles. With governments, higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies all on the playing field, there can be uncertainty about who is in charge of what? Strains can arise in relation to the following:

- the autonomy of higher education institutions;
- the 'two-pillar concept' involving higher education institutions' internal quality management and external quality assurance;
- the division of responsibility;
- governmental steering mechanisms;
- diverse interests of students;
- societal, economic, methodological, organisational and content aspects of external quality assurance.

In this complex and sensitive environment external quality assurance agencies should be enabled – in order to gain credibility and to ensure the quality of their own activities – to self-critically reflect on their own activities based on both internal and external inputs. This requires the allocation of appropriate human resources.

2.5.2 COMPOSITION OF STAFF

The question put to the agencies was: How many full-time equivalent staff members are (directly) employed by (or seconded to) your Agency? The results of the survey are shown in table 14.

Table 14. Composition of staff

HOW MANY FULL-TIME EQUIVALENT STAFF MEMBERS ARE (DIRECTLY) EMPLOYED BY (OR SECONDED TO) YOUR AGENCY?	RESPONSE AVERAGE	RESPONSE TOTAL	RESPONSE COUNT
Number of external quality procedures officers	4.9	214	44
Number of staff covering functions that are unrelated to external quality procedures	8.9	382	43
Number of administrative staff	24	891	37
Number of management staff	3	76	23
Number of research/development officers	1.2	28	23
Number of trainees/interns	152	2737	18
Other (please specify in answer to next question)	19.8	415	21
		answered question	45
		skipped question	6

When interpreting the table it is useful to consider the following detail. The number of management staff varies from 0 (one agency) to 29; 38 agencies reported the number of management staff to be in the range of one to ten; six agencies indicated that the number of management staff is in the range of 13 to 29. In the three cases where it was indicated that the number of management staff is in the range of 25 to 29, it is reasonable to assume that the members of the agencies' decision making bodies were included in number of the management staff of agencies.

Thirty five agencies answered that the number of administrative staff is in the range of one to ten. The number of administrative staff of three agencies is in the range of 11 to 13; five agencies have between 24 and 70 administrative staff members.

Three agencies indicated that they do not employ (or second) any external quality procedures officers; 27 agencies mentioned that the number of external quality procedures officers is in the range of one to twenty and the number of external quality procedures officers of five agencies is in the range of 20 to 48; two agencies answered that the number of external quality procedures officers is 224 and 300 respectively. In the latter two cases it is reasonable to assume that the members of the expert panels were added to the number of the external quality procedures officers of the agency.

It is quite striking to note that only 13 agencies indicated that research and development officers are part of their staff. Within this group the number of such staff varies from one to 26. Eleven agencies answered that the number of research and development officers is in the range of one to seven and two agencies mentioned that the number is 17 and 26 respectively.

Eighteen agencies have staff in category "other" the numbers vary between 0 and 1,400. This category covers staff members like internal quality assurance staff, international officers, officer for legal affairs, IT-experts, students, members of the Boards/Councils, public relation officers, scientific collaborators for external procedures and development and research, officers for Communication and members of the expert

panels. It is noteworthy that agencies make use of quite high numbers of members for expert panels, for example ZEvA (1,400) and NEAA (1,300).

All in all, apart from the inconsistent interpretation of the meaning of the different categories of staff, the data show that external quality assurance agencies across Europe differ quite a lot in terms of structure, function and size. It is reasonable to assume that this heterogeneous picture is also reflected in the size of the agencies' primary domain and in the remit or scope of its activities. The relatively low proportion of agencies with research and development officers as staff members could be an area for development in light of the importance of implementing and maintaining internal quality management systems.

2.5.3 FUNDING OF AGENCIES

As mentioned above, almost every respondent agency is recognised explicitly in legislation in the whole of its primary domain and/or is recognised by the competent authorities established for that purpose. This means that, in almost all the countries which are covered by the responding agencies, the initiative to set up external quality procedures has either been taken, or supported by government. Governments evidently perceive external quality assurance to be an effective instrument for assuring and enhancement of quality of higher education. The high priority status that governments grant to quality assurance is also reflected in the funding of the agencies.

The questionnaire asked the agencies to indicate the approximate percentage of their funding received from a selection of sources (the sum of the entries was 100). The findings are presented in table 15.

Table 15. Funding of agencies

FUNDING SOURCES	RESPONSE AVERAGE	RESPONSE TOTAL	RESPONSE COUNT
Government	70.63	2896	41
HEIs (fixed subscriptions only)	37.53	563	15
Fees (for specific activities)	32.25	903	28
Grants (other than government)	2.25	27	12
Other (please specify in answer to next question)	11.72	211	18
		answered question	46
		skipped question	5

Government funding is the main source of funding for agencies, followed by higher education institutions. Grants are the third most important source of funding. Perusal of the responses revealed the details that are shown in figures 16–19.

Figure 16. Governmental funding

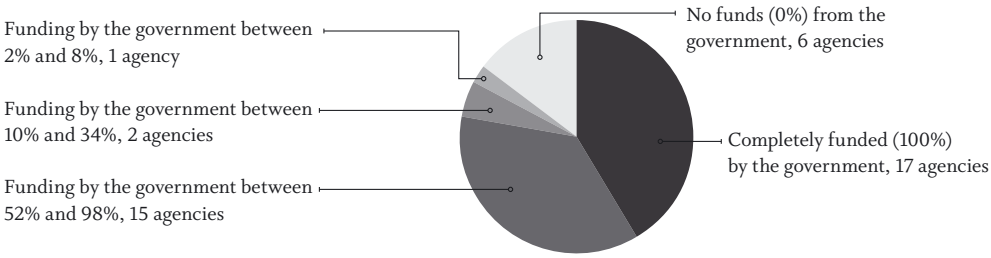


Figure 17. HEI funding

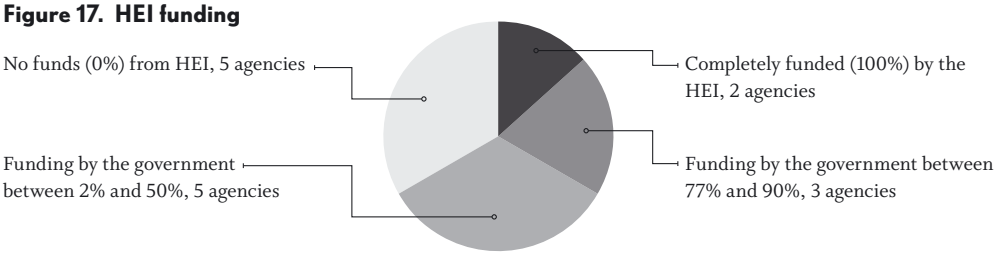


Figure 18. Fee funding

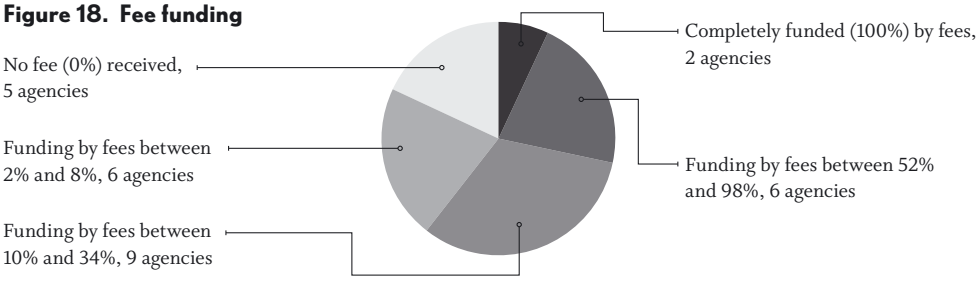
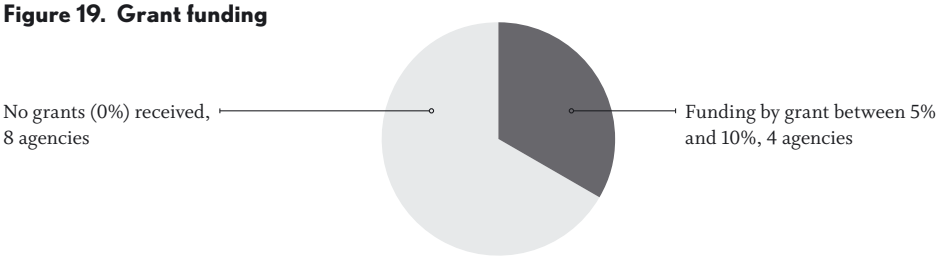


Figure 19. Grant funding



Eighteen of the responding agencies stated that a specific part of their funding comes from sources other than the proposed categories. The percentage for funding from other sources varies from 1% to 75% and covers for example the following sources: international projects, EU Commission's Socrates project grants, European structural funding, professional organisations, membership fees, state commissioned projects and contracts to develop QA in other countries.

2.6 Mission statement

The ESG require in standard 3.5 that agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement. The corresponding guidelines suggest that these statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes; the division of labour between the agency and relevant stakeholders especially the higher education institutions; and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be

documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

Almost all responding agencies publish a statement of their goals and objectives and a statement setting out a systematic approach to external quality assurance (see table 20). 63.8% of the responding agencies publish a statement explaining the division of responsibility for quality procedures between the agency and higher education institutions and 59.6% of agencies publish a general policy and management plan.

Twenty agencies indicated that they publish additional kinds of information to those proposed by the questionnaire. This information covers, for example, the following: composition of the quality assessment committees; report of activities; assessment guides; self-evaluation and external evaluation reports; quality policy; labour market reports; global annual report on quality assurance on higher education; code of ethics; procedures; standards and guidelines for accreditation and evaluation; quality management system; annual reports; manual for training external review teams; etc.

Table 20. Mission statement

WHAT KIND OF GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT ITSELF DOES YOUR AGENCY PUBLISH FOR THE BENEFIT OF STAKEHOLDERS?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Statement of the goals and objectives of the Agency	42	89.4
Statement setting out the systematic approach to external quality assurance	40	85.1
Statement explaining the division of responsibility for quality procedures between the Agency and higher education institutions	30	63.8
Statement of general policy and management plan	28	59.6
Other (please specify)	20	42.6
answered question	47	
skipped question	4	

2.7 Independence

The ESG determine in standard 3.6 that agencies should be independent to the extent that they have both autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties, such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders. The corresponding guidelines outline some specific measures, viz.:

- The agency's operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);
- The definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- While relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

The issue of independence is regarded as being critically important and deserving of special attention, since it, among others, forms the basis for professionalism and thus the basis for trust. In September 2006 the ENQA Board held a seminar on membership

issues and concluded that independence for the purpose of the ESG should be interpreted as "autonomous responsibility for operations, where conclusions in reports cannot be influenced by HEIs, ministries or other stakeholders".

In 2005–06 the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA, incl. QA bodies from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland[10]) carried out a project entitled "ESG in a Nordic perspective". The aims of the project were: (i) to interpret and clarify the ESG for quality assurance agencies; (ii) to share and compare practices among the Nordic agencies; (iii) to reflect on how organisations, processes and procedures could be enhanced having regard to the new European standards; and (iv) to determine how the ESG for external QA agencies could be interpreted and made operational for assessment.

Considering that the ESG are designed to be applicable to all quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they operate, the results of the NOQA project[11] raised many important and interesting questions about this ambitious level of generality of applicability viz. What role do national traditions and legislation play in respect of agencies' compliance with the ESG? Do legislation and/or traditional approaches need to be changed? Can they be viewed as a reason for allowing exemption from elements of the ESG? What is the significance of the moderation of formal arrangements by informal practice? For instance, an agency can be formally independent from ministries and other stakeholders, but not independent in practice if the government places a high level of pressure on the agency through informal channels. Conversely an agency that operates independently in practice may not be formally independent. The findings of this survey can be related to the Quality Convergence Study, conducted by ENQA in 2005, which clearly showed, that although national quality assurance systems converge to some extent, the practicalities in national systems may differ without compromising shared principles.[12]

In the survey, two questions were put to the agencies addressing the issue of independence. The results of the survey are shown in tables 21 and 22.

Table 21. Influence of stakeholders on reports

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT INFLUENCE, IF ANY, DO EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS HAVE ON THE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN YOUR AGENCY'S REPORTS?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
External stakeholders may influence neither the conclusions nor the recommendations in reports	30	66.7
External stakeholders may sometimes influence the recommendations in reports	11	24.4
External stakeholders may sometimes influence the conclusions in reports	10	22.2
Comment	15	
answered question	45	
skipped question	6	

[10] www.noqa.net
[11] www.noqa.net
[12] http://www.enqa.eu/files/Quality%20Convergence%20Study.pdf

Thirty of the responding agencies (66.7%) indicated that external stakeholders may influence neither the conclusions nor the recommendations in reports. The possibility of occasional external stakeholders' influence both on recommendations and conclusions in reports was reported by 21 agencies (46.6%).

In analysing and interpreting the data related to occasional external stakeholders' influence on recommendations and conclusions in reports, one has to take into account the comments made by respondents. Four agencies pointed out that external stakeholders are involved in committees and expert panels and that they are interviewed during the site visit, which leads to the fact that their views are taken into account in the final report. Two agencies commented that HEIs are provided with the possibility to make a response statement to the draft report of the expert panel which may get included in the final report. One agency mentioned that the results of students' surveys, which are discussed by the accreditation board, may sometimes influence the recommendations in the reports. Another agency took the view that stakeholder involvement is a key principle of its system and that this helps to avoid attempts of external influence. It was also stated that, in very exceptional cases, if a question is politically sensitive, external stakeholders may sometimes influence the conclusions of the reports. One agency commented that the social milieus of the evaluation, academic and ministry worlds are very similar and that the same people during their career may hold positions in one of the three fields of activities. This leads to mostly positive, but also in some cases negative, interactions. Another agency which is at an early developmental stage pointed out that this will have to be checked in practice. In conclusion this means that only one agency mentioned influence by external stakeholder which could compromise its decisions.

Table 22. Autonomy of agencies

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT SHARE, IF ANY, DO EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS HAVE IN RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR AGENCY'S OPERATIONS?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
No share, my Agency has autonomous responsibility	37	78.7
Other	10	21.3
answered question	47	
skipped question	4	

Thirty seven agencies (79%) indicated that external stakeholders do not have any share in responsibility for the agencies' operations, i.e. that they have autonomous responsibility. Ten agencies (21%) pointed out that external stakeholders do have some share in responsibility for the agencies' operations. However, external stakeholders' share in responsibility for the agencies' activities has to be interpreted having regard to the comments made by respondents under "other".

Four agencies mentioned that within their organisation structure, the membership of different bodies is drawn from stakeholder groups. For example (external) stakeholders are involved as members of committees and expert panels as well as of the decision making body. One of these agencies drew attention to the fact that, as members of the decision making body, the stakeholders act autonomously and do not represent any particular interests. Three agencies commented that stakeholder views are sought as part of consultation processes related to significant changes in policy and process, to improvement issues and to general working methods but cannot influence individual

cases. Another agency pointed out that it has autonomous responsibility for external quality procedures but not for decisions.

On the one hand, these specifications suggest that stakeholder involvement plays a crucial role in external quality assurance arrangements. On the other hand, they indicate that the agencies' membership drawn from stakeholder groups should not be regarded as external stakeholders. In summary, stakeholder involvement should not be mistaken for influence of external stakeholders on the agencies operations.

Chapter 3: Typical methodological approach to external quality assurance

3.1 Introduction to Chapter 3.

This chapter addresses typical methodological approach to external quality assurance and is divided into two parts. The first part (Section 3.2) describes the data and reports the detailed findings. The second part (Section 3.3) is a commentary on the main findings.

If you are just interested in an overview of the main findings you can skip directly to Section 3.3.

3.2 Description of the data

3.2.1 THE DATA FOR QUESTIONS 25-38

There were 47 respondents that had given answers to the set of questions from 25 to 38. This number was made up of 25 full members (members); seven Candidate members (Candidates); four Affiliates; 10 Associates and one other. In the analysis in some cases the responses are reported separately for two sub-groups: (i) Members and Candidates and (ii) Affiliates and Associates.

However, not all of these questions were answered by all 47 respondents. In some cases this is because the question was not found relevant by all respondents. For example questions about programme-level procedures are only relevant to those agencies which use them. No further conclusions about other possible reasons for agencies skipping questions were drawn. Accordingly, when percentages are reported they relate to the number of respondents which addressed the question and not to the total number of respondents to the survey (51).

In a number of questions respondents were invited to use a five-point rating scale (from one to five) when responding to items. Alternatively, they could indicate that a particular item is not relevant (i.e. that it is not an objective/function/activity of the agency). In such cases the latter indication is combined (valued at 0) with the rating to produce an impact valued between 0 and five.

The ratings of one respondent (or group of respondents) are not calibrated to those of another, thus there are no control questions. This means that a small difference in pairs of ratings or of average ratings is not necessarily significant.

Some of the questions ask respondents to rate the "importance" of certain criteria. The meaning of "importance" is a little vague. One interpretation is 'absolute importance' but another might be relevance i.e. an item is regarded as unimportant if an agency has a very small share in the responsibility for evaluating it.

Where data are tabulated they are normally sorted in order of percentage or average impact. Inspection of the tables will allow readers to tell at a glance which are the most/least significant items.

Qualitative responses (where not anonymous) are attributed to an agency or a country (if unambiguous). In quite a few cases the "other" option was used by some respondents not to describe an "other" category but rather to make a comment.

3.2.2 ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE AGENCY'S BOARD OR COUNCIL

The vast majority (94%) of agencies have a board or council (table 23). Two of those that do not have a Board/Council indicated that they had "other" arrangements in place viz. a "permanent working commission" (Czech Republic); and an "independent body whose members are approved by the Ministry of Education" (Russia).

Table 23.

DOES YOUR AGENCY HAVE A BOARD OR COUNCIL (I.E. A FORMALLY ESTABLISHED GOVERNING COMMITTEE)?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Yes	44	93.6
No	3	6.4
Other (please specify)	6	
Total	47	
skipped question	4	

The most commonly represented stakeholder groups represented on respondents' Boards/Councils (table 24) are "higher Education Institutions"; followed, in joint second place, by "industry and labour market representatives (union, employers, etc.)" and "students". Those three stakeholder groups remain the most likely to be represented for the sub-groups of respondents with three or more groups represented and for those with five or more.

Table 24.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STAKEHOLDER GROUPS IS REPRESENTED ON THE BOARD/ COUNCIL OF YOUR AGENCY?	RESPONSES WITH THREE OR MORE GROUPS (%)	RESPONSES WITH FIVE OR MORE GROUPS (%)	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Higher education institutions	91	100	37	82
Industry and labour market representatives (union, employers, etc.)	63	77	22	49
Students	69	100	22	49
Government (central/regional)	50	62	17	38
International quality assurance community	34	54	14	31
Other (please specify)	28	23	14	31
Professional organisations	41	54	13	29
National association of HEIs (such as rectors' conference)	41	46	13	29
National quality assurance community	28	46	10	22
International association of HEIs (such as EUA)	3	0	1	2
answered question			45	
skipped question			6	

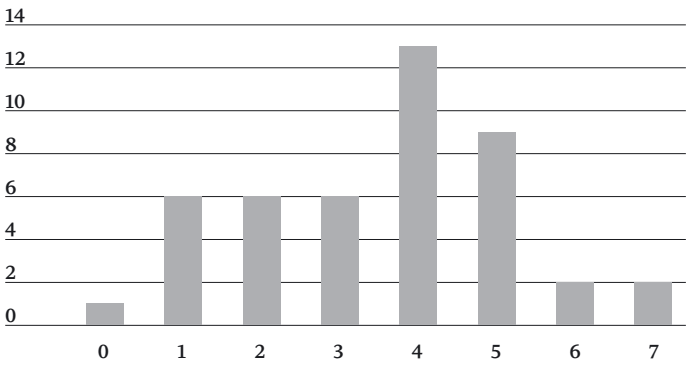
Fourteen respondents selected the "other" category (again sometimes to comment rather than provide an alternative to those listed): in three cases this meant (in broad terms) academics; and in three cases it meant the research community (AÉRES, NEAA Bulgaria, ANECA.)

Three more respondents who selected "other" distinguished between a person representing a group and a person affiliated to a group but not representing it e.g.

"stakeholder groups are not represented on the Board: all Board members are individuals and only represent their personal views. The composition of the Board does however take into account the affinity of the different persons and seeks a balance between affinities with stakeholder groups."(NVAO)

Figure 25 illustrates the distribution of the number of stakeholder groups (including "other") represented on the agency's board/council. It peaks at four stakeholder groups and the average number is 3.5.

Figure 25. Number of stakeholders



3.2.3 ON THE DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS OF THE AGENCY AND THEIR RELATIVE IMPORTANCE

Table 26 lists the functions of agencies in order of average impact and also displays the average rating. The difference between impact and rating is that the former includes "not a function" responses with an impact of zero whereas the latter does not. Figure 27 provides a graphical illustration of the data.

The functions that have the highest impact are: "quality assurance"; "quality enhancement/improvement"; "external quality assurance of programmes"; "external quality assurance of institutions"; "collecting/ disseminating information on quality of HE" and most respondent agencies have all of those as functions. A total of 34 out of 44 respondents (77%) include all five of these as functions.

The function with the lowest average impact is "deciding on the funding of higher education". 48% of respondents do it but even among those its relative average importance (moderately important to important) is least among the alternatives provided.

Exactly 50% of respondents have "recognition of national diplomas" as a function and among those it is considered important to very important.

The function "recognition and licensing of higher education institutions" is implemented by 68% and on average it is considered important to very important by those.

"Development and maintenance of discipline standards" is a function of 68% and on average it is considered moderately important to important by those.

A majority of respondent agencies develop and maintain qualification frameworks (63%).

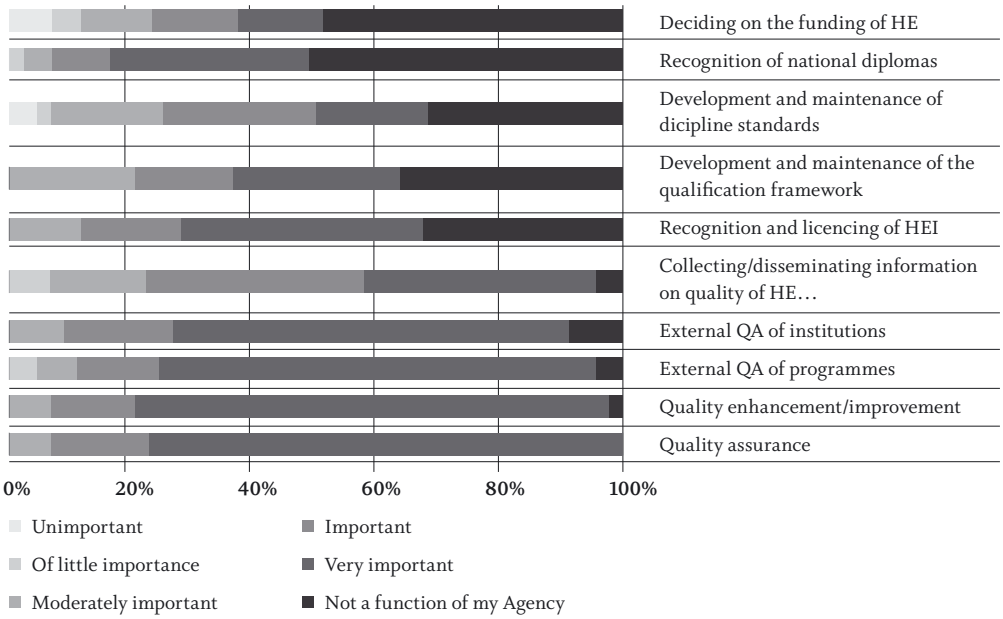
The average ratings given to the functions (where a function of the respondent's agency) by Members and Candidates are comparable (within about 0.5 standard deviations) to those given by Affiliates and Associates. The greatest difference (measured in standard deviations) occurs for "development and maintenance of discipline standards"; and "collecting/disseminating information on quality of HE..." both of which receive a higher average rating from Affiliate/Associate respondents.

Considering average impact of functions reveals greater differences between the two respondent groups. The most significant impact differences between the two groups are for "development and maintenance of discipline standards"; and "deciding on the funding of higher education", where the average impact is higher for Affiliate/Associate respondents than for Member/Candidate respondents (table 26).

Table 26.

INDICATE THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE TO YOUR AGENCY'S MISSION OF THE FOLLOWING (WHERE THEY ARE FUNCTIONS OF YOUR AGENCY).	UNIMPORTANT	OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	NOT A FUNCTION OF MY AGENCY	RATING AVERAGE	IMPACT AVERAGE	RESPONSE COUNT
Quality assurance	0	0	2	7	34	0			43
Quality enhancement/improvement	0	0	2	6	34	1			43
External quality assurance of programmes	0	2	3	5	32	2			44
External quality assurance of institutions	0	0	3	8	29	4			44
Collecting/disseminating information on quality of HE...	0	3	7	15	17	2			44
Recognition and licensing of higher education institutions	0	0	4	7	17	14			42
Development and maintenance of the qualification framework	0	0	9	6	12	16			43
Development and maintenance of discipline standards	2	1	8	10	8	14			43
Recognition of national diplomas	0	1	1	4	14	22			42
Deciding on the funding of higher education	3	2	5	5	6	21			42
Other									5
								answered question	44
								skipped question	7

Figure 27. Importance of your Agency´s mission of the following where they are functions of your agency



3.2.4 ON THE DIFFERENT OBJECTIVES OF THE AGENCY'S EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES AND THEIR RELATIVE IMPORTANCE TO ITS MISSION

"Transparency" and "quality improvement/enhancement" are the highest rated objectives of the agencies' quality procedures. All respondents rate them as either important or very important. "Accountability" and "accreditation" come next. Nevertheless, three agencies (NVAO, FIBAA, and Swedish NAHE) do not have "accountability" as an objective of their quality procedures.

63% consider "student (or prospective student) protection" to be important or very important.

14% consider the estimation of graduate learning outcomes not to be an objective of their procedures. Most of those who have it as an objective, consider it to be important to very important.

Table 28.

INDICATE THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE TO YOUR AGENCY'S MISSION OF THE FOLLOWING WHERE THEY ARE OBJECTIVES OF THE MAIN TYPE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES UNDERTAKEN BY YOUR AGENCY.	UNIMPORTANT	OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	NOT AN OBJECTIVE	RATING AVERAGE	IMPACT AVERAGE	RESPONSE COUNT
Transparency	0	0	0	7	**37**	0	4.84	4.84	44
Quality improvement/enhancement	0	0	0	11	**33**	0	4.75	4.75	44
Accountability	0	0	3	14	**24**	3	4.51	4.20	44
Accreditation	0	1	2	4	**32**	5	4.72	4.18	44
Student (or prospective student) protection	0	1	3	10	**22**	8	4.47	3.66	44
Estimation of graduate learning outcomes	0	2	4	15	**17**	6	4.24	3.66	44
Make international comparisons with similar institutions/programmes	1	2	8	**16**	8	8	3.80	3.09	43
Make national comparisons with similar institutions/programmes	3	1	11	**13**	7	9	3.57	2.84	44
Ranking	5	7	4	0	1	**24**	2.12	0.88	41
Other									7
								answered question	44
								skipped question	7

The average ratings given to the objectives (where an objective) by the Member/Candidate respondents is comparable (within about 0.5 standard deviations) to that given by Affiliate/Associate respondents. The greatest difference (measured in standard deviations) occurs for "estimation of graduate learning outcomes" which receives a lower average rating from Affiliate/Associate respondents.

Considering average impact reveals greater differences between the two groups. The most significant differences are for "ranking"; and "student (or prospective student) protection" where the average impact is higher for Affiliate/Associate respondents.

One particularly noteworthy "other" objective is "complying with the Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG) Concordat to ensure regulation is appropriate to the level of assurance sought" (QAA, UK).

3.2.5 ON THE EXPERT PANELS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT AND DISSEMINATION OF THE AGENCY'S EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES AND CRITERIA INCLUDING THE INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

Almost all quality assurance agencies publish relevant processes, criteria and procedures prior to execution of external quality procedures (93%). Three respondent agencies [two ENQA members (AERES and an anonymous one) and one Candidate (AQA)] do not (table 29).

Table 29.

DOES YOUR AGENCY ALWAYS PUBLISH RELEVANT PROCESSES, CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES PRIOR TO EXECUTIONS OF EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Yes	43	93.5
No	3	6.5
answered question	46	
skipped question	5	

A range of stakeholders have a formal role in the specification of processes and criteria for external quality assurance (table 30). "Higher education institutions" top the list followed by "government". Only one response indicates "higher education institutions" as the only stakeholder group with a formal role in this process.

Table 30.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STAKEHOLDERS HAVE A FORMAL ROLE IN THE SPECIFICATION OF PROCESSES AND CRITERIA FOR THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN YOUR PRIMARY DOMAIN?			RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
	MEMBERS AND CANDIDATES	AFFILIATES AND ASSOCIATES		
Higher education institutions	63%	57%	29	62
Government (central/regional)	59%	43%	26	55
Student representatives	56%	50%	25	53
Quality assurance agencies	53%	43%	24	51
National association of HEIs (such as rectors' conference)	44%	43%	20	43
Industry and labour market representatives (union, employers, etc.)	44%	21%	17	36
Other (please specify)	28%	50%	16	34
Professional organisations	34%	29%	15	32
International association of HEIs (such as EUA)	16%	21%	8	17
answered question			47	
skipped question			4	

The most pronounced difference between the Member/Candidate respondent group and the Associate/Affiliate group is in the percentage giving a formal role to "industry and labour market representatives (union, employers, etc.)" which is 44% and 21% respectively.

In more than half of all respondent agencies "government", "quality assurance agencies" and "student representatives" are involved in the specification of processes. It would not be uncommon also to involve "industry and labour market" (36%) and "professional organisations" (32%). In a limited number of cases (four out of 47, three of which are ENQA full members) "government" is the sole stakeholder group with a formal role in specification.

Three respondent agencies, which did not select any of the stakeholder options or just the "agency" option, make the point that stakeholders, while not having a formal role in the specification, would be consulted by the agency (Austrian FHR, NVAO, and NEAA Bulgaria). Exploring the comments under "other", reveals that at least one respondent who indicated stakeholder group involvement might be in a similar situation with stakeholders involved "only via their participation in the membership of the committee" (HAC Hungary).

Other stakeholders with a formal role include: Federal Service of Supervision in Education and Science (Russia); and "International experts" (German Accreditation Council.)

The final decision on the specification of processes and criteria for external quality procedures (EQPs) is likely to be made by the relevant agency (79%). Table 31 illustrates the pattern of responses. Note that respondents frequently chose more than one option (which can mean that different types of decisions have different decision makers but could also mean a joint decision). In 62% of cases it is the agency alone that makes the final decision. In two cases it is the government alone.

When neither the agency nor government make the final decision there is an external authority in four cases (Serbia, Russia, Croatia and Switzerland).

There is a significant difference between the two respondent groups in the percentage of respondents indicating that the agency makes the final decision.

Table 31.

WHICH BODY MAKES THE FINAL DECISIONS IN THE SPECIFICATION OF PROCESSES AND CRITERIA FOR THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN YOUR PRIMARY DOMAIN?			RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
	MEMBER AND CANDIDATE	ASSOCIATE AND AFFILIATE		
The relevant quality assurance agency	88%	57%	37	79
Other (please specify)	13%	57%	12	26
Government (central/regional)	19%	21%	10	21
		answered question	47	
		skipped question	4	

Another way in which stakeholders are involved in the agency's operations is when they may nominate/suggest members of the expert panel (table 32).
89% of respondents indicated that the quality assurance agency may nominate/suggest experts and 41% of those do so exclusively. The next most frequent responses are: "higher education institutions"; "students"; and "industry and labour market representatives (union, employers, etc.)".

In four cases (Sweden, Latvia, Austrian FH Council, NVAO) "quality assurance agencies" with which the agency cooperates including those in other countries may nominate experts. One respondent mentioned the European Student's Union (ESU).

One respondent made the point that HEIs have the right to "comment on the make-up of panels" (ECCE, UK) but not to suggest/nominate. Another respondent indicated that "external evaluators are selected on the basis of [an] open [advertisement]" (Serbia). In Russia the Federal Service of Supervision in Education and Science may suggest potential members to the expert panels, while the agency (NAA) certifies experts and compiles the expert database.

A higher percentage (62%) of Affiliate/Associate respondents receive nominations/ suggestions for expert panel members from HEIs than Member/Candidate respondents (47%) and this imbalance is reversed for students where the percentages are 34% and 23% respectively.

Table 32.

WHO MAY SUGGEST/NOMINATE POTENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE EXTERNAL EXPERTS PANELS USED BY YOUR AGENCY?			RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
	MEMBER AND CANDIDATE	ASSOCIATE AND AFFILIATE		
Your Agency	91%	85%	41	89
Higher education institutions	47%	62%	24	52
Students	34%	23%	14	30
Industry and labour market representatives (union, employers, etc.)	28%	23%	13	28
National association of HEIs (such as rectors' conference)	25%	31%	12	26
Other (please specify)	25%	31%	12	26
The institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure involving the panel	25%	15%	10	22
Professional organisations	19%	23%	9	20
Government (central/regional)	6%	23%	5	11
International association of HEIs (such as EUA)	9%	15%	5	11
		answered question	46	
		skipped question	5	

3.2.6 ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE "FOUR-STAGE MODEL" AND ESG FOUR-STAGE PROCESS FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES

The four-stage model is promoted as the shared foundation of European quality assurance and it has a prominent place in the criteria for ENQA membership.

It is defined to be the following: (i) autonomy and independence in terms of procedures and methods concerning quality evaluation both from government and from institutions of higher education; (ii) self-assessment; (iii) external assessment by a peer-review group and site visits, and (iv) publication of a report.

To explore compliance, first note that Question 24 deals explicitly with autonomy and most respondents reported their agencies to be either autonomous or "other" which in all but one case means that stakeholders are consulted. Combining the answers to Questions 29, 31 and 33 (46 agencies responded to all three) and deselecting those agencies where government has involvement in deciding the final outcome or in the formal appointment of the panel and selecting those which implement all four stages of the ESG four-stage process (see below) yields 22 out of 46 (47%) respondents. That means that less than 50% of the respondent agencies which addressed the question are fully compliant with the four-stage model [with 15 out of 25 (60%) full-member respondents non compliant].

The ESG four-stage process is different from the four-stage model. It is related to the four-stage model but describes four distinct processes explicitly and includes follow-up, viz.

1. A self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
2. An external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, student representation and site visits as decided by the agency;
3. Publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes; and
4. A follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

One respondent (ECA) indicated that the four-stage process question did not apply to it as it does not perform accreditation itself, only its members do. 29 out of 46 (63%) respondent agencies that carry out external quality procedures implement the four-stage process in full. 59% of Member/Candidate respondents implement all four stages and 64% of Associate/Affiliate respondents do (table 33).

Twelve out of 32 (37.5% of) ENQA Full Member respondents do not implement all four components of the ESG four-stage process. All but one (86%) of the Candidate member respondents implements all four elements of the process.

In one case where a published report is not used the respondent commented: "the decision is always published according to the national database" (ACQUIN); and another reported that what is published is a "statement of the applicant institution in terms of the expert reports. The report is only accessible [by] the assessed institution, and not published" (Austrian Accreditation Council).

Table 33.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING PROCESSES DOES YOUR AGENCY USE/ REQUIRE WITHIN ITS EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
A self-assessment procedure by the institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure	45	96
An external assessment by a group of experts irrespective of whether or not there is a site visit	42	89
A published report	37	79
A follow-up procedure undertaken by the institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure in the light of any recommendations contained in the report	34	72
Other (please specify)	9	19
answered question	47	
skipped question	4	

One respondent commented that "a follow-up procedure is undertaken only in those cases when institution (or its programme) has not been granted full accreditation" (Lithuania).

The component processes most commonly implemented by respondent agencies are self-assessment (96%) and external assessment by a group of experts (89%) (table 33). While still commonly implemented, there is a notable fall-off in respondents' implementation of the latter stages of the process.

72% of agencies require a follow-up procedure to be undertaken by the institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure in light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Underpinning the four stage process and in pole position in the four-stage model are autonomy (self-governance) and independence in terms of procedures and methods. The procedures for appointing experts and making the final decision on outcomes of external quality procedures are important indicators (among others) of independence. Table 34 presents the distribution of agents that formally appoint the external expert panel in respondent agencies.

Table 34.

WHO FORMALLY APPOINTS THE MEMBERS OF THE EXTERNAL EXPERT PANELS USED BY YOUR AGENCY?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Your Agency	37	80
Other (please specify)	9	20
Government (central/regional)	4	9
The institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure	0	0
answered question	46	
skipped question	5	

The question about who formally appoints the members of the external expert panels (table 34) may not have been clear to all respondents because a number did not select a given option but did make a comment. Nevertheless, it is clear that in most cases it is the agency that has the sole responsibility for appointing persons to the external expert panel (80%).

Government has a role in a small proportion of cases (9%) but it is exclusive in only three cases. In no cases does the institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure formally appoint the external expert panels. Where neither the agency nor government formally appoints, this responsibility is likely to fall to an overarching accreditation or higher education body. Of the four agencies where the government makes the appointment two are ENQA members. In six cases, under the "other" category, bodies that are external to agencies formally appoint the members of the panels.

The respondent agency is most likely to make the final decision on the outcomes of external quality procedures (74%) (table 35). In many cases where the respondent agency does not make the final decision the external panel does (in around 22% of cases). The government makes the final decision in around 13% of cases. There is some overlap in responses because different outcomes may have different decision makers. In 87% of responses it is the agency or the expert panel that makes the final decision on the outcome of external quality procedures.

In four cases where the respondent agency does not take the final decision it appears that it needs to report to some higher authority.

Two respondents (AVEPRO, AQA) indicated that in some cases the higher education institution under review will make the final decision on the outcome of quality procedure. In both cases other sources are mentioned, such as government, quality assurance agency and national accreditation bodies.

Table 35.

WHO MAKES THE FINAL DECISION ON THE OUTCOME OF YOUR AGENCY'S EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES?	MEMBER AND CANDIDATE	ASSOCIATE AND AFFILIATE	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Your Agency	78%	62%	34	74
Other (please specify)	25%	23%	11	24
The external expert panel	28%	8%	10	22
Government (central/regional)	13%	15%	6	13
The institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure	3%	8%	2	4
		answered question	46	
		skipped question	5	

3.2.7 ON THE DIFFERENT AREAS ADDRESSED BY THE AGENCY'S EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES AT PROGRAMME LEVEL (WHERE APPROPRIATE) AND AT INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL AND THEIR RELATIVE IMPORTANCE

Fourty three agencies responded to the part of the survey enquiring about the relative importance of areas addressed by their EQPs at programme level and at institutional level (research programmes leading to PhD, etc., if provided, is relevant here).

Table 36 and figure 37 summarise the overall findings and in each case the options are sorted by average impact.

At programme level, all respondent agencies who answered this part of the question (40) assess the professional and pedagogical qualifications of staff and consider it to be very important. It has the highest impact and rating.

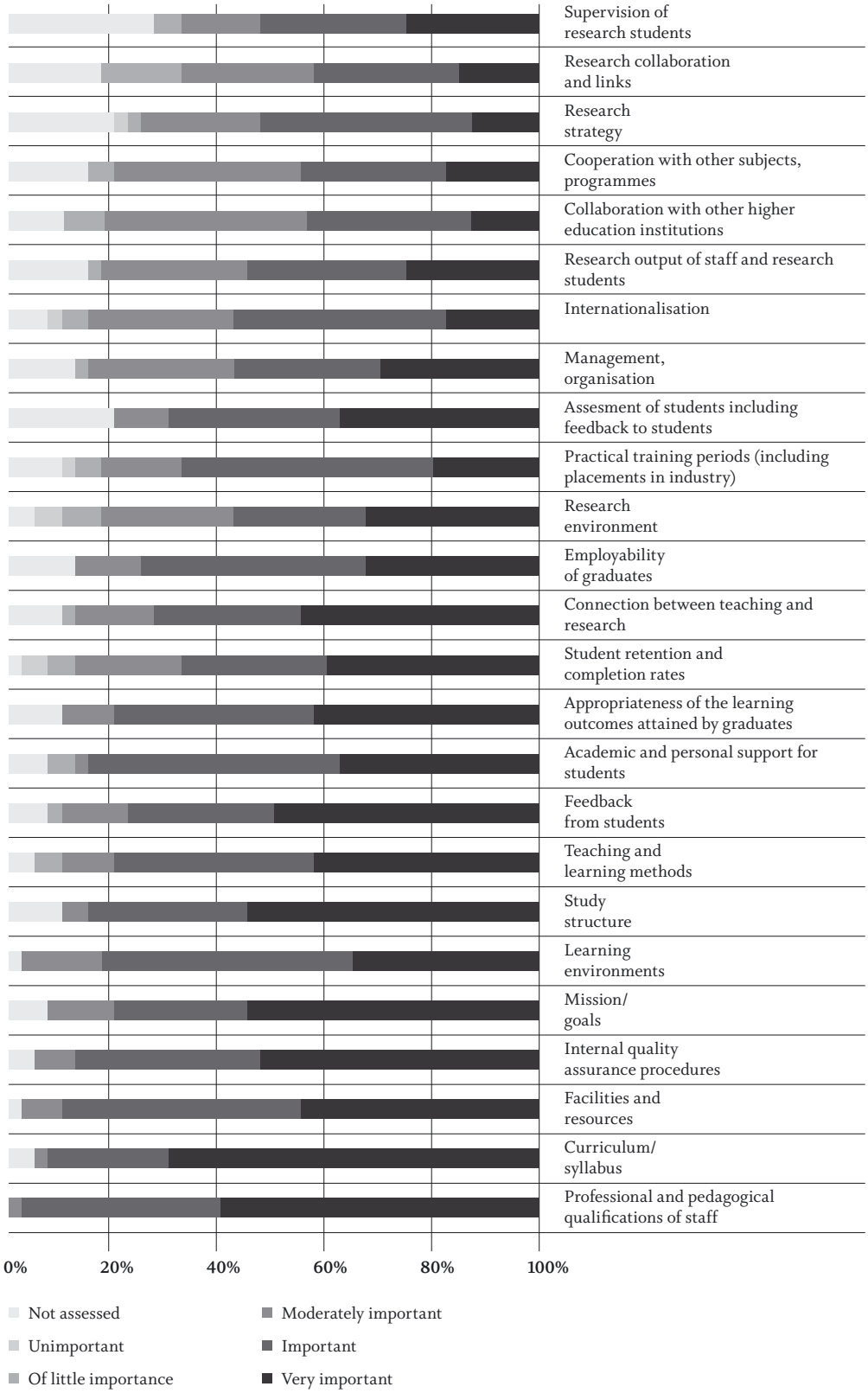
The five highest impacting items for programme level procedures are: "professional and pedagogical qualifications of staff"; "curriculum/syllabus"; "facilities and resources"; "internal quality assurance procedures"; and "mission/goals". None of these items can be categorised as outcomes.

Assessment of students including feedback to students is rated as important to very important by those who assess it but eight out of 40 (20%) of respondents do not assess this.

Table 36. Programme level

INDICATE, USING THE DROP-DOWN MENUS, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOLLOWING WHERE THEY ARE ASSESSED BY YOUR AGENCY'S EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES AT PROGRAMME LEVEL [...]	NOT ASSESSED	UNIMPORTANT	OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	RESPONSE COUNT NO.	RATING AVERAGE	IMPACT AVERAGE
Professional and pedagogical qualifications of staff	0	0	0	1	15	24	40	4.6	4.6
Curriculum/syllabus	2	0	0	1	9	28	40	4.7	4.5
Facilities and resources	1	0	0	3	18	18	40	4.4	4.3
Internal quality assurance procedures	2	0	0	3	14	21	40	4.5	4.3
Mission/goals	3	0	0	5	10	22	40	4.5	4.1
Learning environments	1	0	0	6	19	14	40	4.2	4.1
Study structure	4	0	0	2	12	22	40	4.6	4.1
Teaching and learning methods	2	0	2	4	15	17	40	4.2	4.0
Feedback from students	3	0	1	5	11	20	40	4.4	4.0
Academic and personal support for students	3	0	2	1	19	15	40	4.3	4.0
Appropriateness of the learning outcomes attained by graduates	4	0	0	4	15	17	40	4.4	3.9
Student retention and completion rates	1	2	2	8	11	16	40	3.9	3.9
Connection between teaching and research	4	0	1	6	11	18	40	4.3	3.9
Employability of graduates	5	0	0	5	17	13	40	4.2	3.7
Research environment	2	2	3	10	10	13	40	3.8	3.6
Practical training periods (including placements in industry)	4	1	2	6	19	8	40	3.9	3.5
Assessment of students including feedback to students	8	0	0	4	13	15	40	4.3	3.5
Management, organisation	5	0	1	11	11	12	40	4.0	3.5
Internationalisation	3	1	2	11	16	7	40	3.7	3.4
Research output of staff and research students	6	0	1	11	12	10	40	3.9	3.3
Collaboration with other higher education institutions	4	0	3	15	12	5	39	3.5	3.2
Cooperation with other subjects, programmes	6	0	2	14	11	7	40	3.7	3.1
Research strategy	8	1	1	9	16	5	40	3.7	3.0
Research collaboration and links	7	0	6	10	11	6	40	3.5	2.9
Supervision of research students	11	0	2	6	11	10	40	4.0	2.9

Figure 37. Programme Level



Appropriateness of the learning outcomes attained by graduates is in eleventh place on the list of 25 areas considered by programme-level procedures.

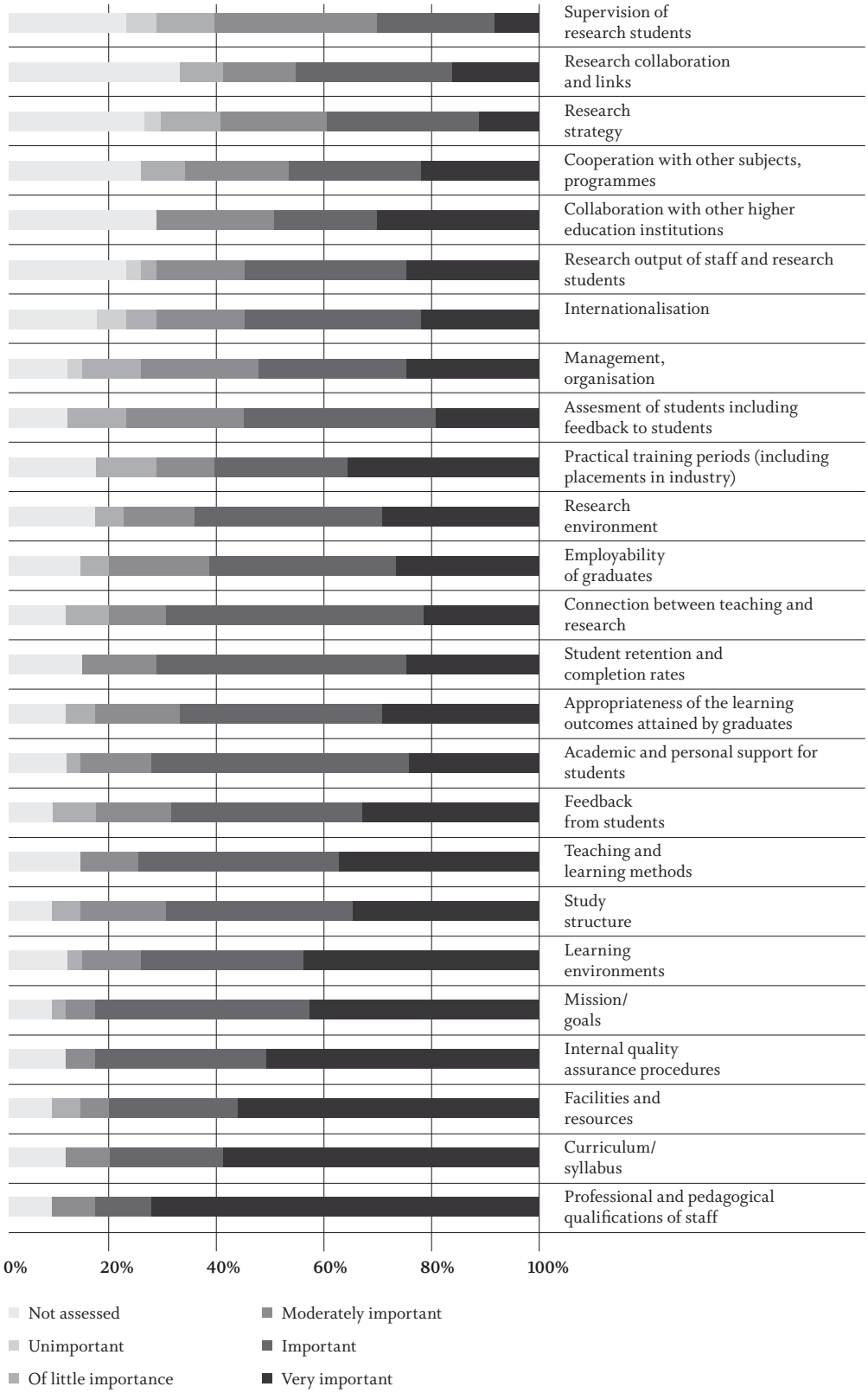
At the institutional level (table 38 and figure 39), internal quality assurance procedures are considered to be from important to very important (with average rating of 4.7) and are assessed by 92% of the agencies.

The five highest impacting items for institutional level procedures are: internal quality assurance procedures; management, organisation; mission/goals; professional and pedagogical qualifications of staff; and facilities and resources.

Table 38. Institutional level

INDICATE, USING THE DROP-DOWN MENUS, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOLLOWING WHERE THEY ARE ASSESSED BY YOUR AGENCY'S EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES AT [...] INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL [...]	NOT ASSESSED	UNIMPORTANT	OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	RESPONSE COUNT	RATING AVERAGE	IMPACT AVERAGE
Internal quality assurance procedures	3	0	0	3	4	27	37	4.7	4.3
Mission/goals	4	0	0	3	8	22	37	4.6	4.1
Management, organisation	3	0	2	2	9	21	37	4.4	4.1
Professional and pedagogical qualifications of staff	4	0	0	2	12	19	37	4.5	4.0
Facilities and resources	3	0	1	2	15	16	37	4.4	4.0
Feedback from students	4	0	1	4	11	16	36	4.3	3.8
Research environment	3	0	2	6	13	13	37	4.1	3.8
Research strategy	5	0	0	4	14	14	37	4.3	3.7
Academic and personal support for students	3	0	3	5	13	12	36	4.0	3.7
Learning environments	4	0	1	5	18	9	37	4.1	3.6
Connection between teaching and research	4	0	2	6	14	11	37	4.0	3.6
Employability of graduates	5	0	0	5	17	9	36	4.1	3.6
Internationalisation	4	0	3	4	18	8	37	3.9	3.5
Collaboration with other higher education institutions	5	0	2	7	13	10	37	4.0	3.4
Research output of staff and research students	6	0	2	5	13	11	37	4.1	3.4
Assessment of students including feedback to students	6	0	4	4	9	13	36	4.0	3.4
Research collaboration and links	4	0	4	8	13	7	36	3.7	3.3
Student retention and completion rates	4	1	4	8	10	9	36	3.7	3.3
Teaching and learning methods	6	2	2	6	12	8	36	3.7	3.1
Study structure	8	1	1	6	11	9	36	3.9	3.1
Appropriateness of the learning outcomes attained by graduates	10	0	0	8	7	11	36	4.1	3.0
Curriculum/syllabus	9	0	3	7	9	8	36	3.8	2.9
Practical training periods (including placements in industry)	9	1	4	7	10	4	35	3.5	2.6
Supervision of research students	12	0	3	5	11	6	37	3.8	2.6
Cooperation with other subjects, programmes	8	2	4	11	8	3	36	3.2	2.5

Figure 39. Institutional level



While the appropriateness of the learning outcomes attained by graduates is not assessed by institutional-level procedures in 10 cases out of 36 respondents (28%), where it is assessed it is considered important or very important. The employability of graduates (49%) and feedback from students (43%) are considered important assessment areas at the institutional level where assessed.

At the institutional level 34 out of 37 respondents (93%) address at least one of the four research related areas and 24 out of 37 respondents (65%) address all four of them. Research strategy is considered as an important to very important part of institutional-level external quality procedures for 28 out of 37 respondents (75%). The research environment is also considered very important. Research output and research collaboration are considered somewhat less important. 26% of (9/34) respondents, who address research, do not address the "supervision of research students".

Two "other" areas that are assessed each by one respondent are "- development plan (five years) [which] is [considered] very important –[and] business plan to guarantee mid-term financial solvency [which] is [considered] very important" (Austrian Accreditation Council) and "Professional competence to work in the profession [which is considered] very important" (ECCE).

Three of the comments under "other" were to explain that the question did not apply (ECA, Anonymous, German Accreditation Council).

One respondent who completed the question made the point that "institutional evaluation has a more complex structure. Programme evaluation is undertaken only in an accredited institution and is less complex" (Russia).

One of the respondents (CAQA Serbia) who marked the research criteria as important noted the agency shared responsibility for the QA of research activities: "there is parallel system for accreditation of research institutions and parts of educational institutions doing research activities. So it is important for CAQA to deal with research, particularly in terms of teacher's qualification".

3.2.7.1 Exploratory analysis

The results in the tables seem to suggest that process and configuration criteria might be considered slightly more important than outcome criteria. This will be explored further.

To aid interpretation of the data the areas have been classified into four domains viz. Process; Configuration; Outcome; and Goal. "Outcome" is concerned with evidence of attainment of educational goals (e.g. learning outcomes). "Goal" is concerned with targets, policy, plans and strategies. "Configuration" is concerned with descriptions and characteristics of the institution and its programmes. "Process" is concerned with how things work dynamically. Most areas can be discussed from all four perspectives but fit best with one. For example, research collaboration can be discussed and assessed in terms of linkages, facilitating processes, strategy and outcome but it fits best within configuration because it is more likely that the existence of collaborative links is the evidence that is most immediately relevant to an assessor under this heading. The strategic aspects, for example, will presumably be included in the institutional and programme strategies.

Table 40.

CLASSIFICATION	AREA ADDRESSED
Configuration	Collaboration with other higher education institutions Facilities and resources Research collaboration and links Learning environments Research environment Connection between teaching and research Professional and pedagogical qualifications of staff Study structure Curriculum/syllabus Cooperation with other subjects, programmes Management, organisation Internationalisation
Goal	Mission/goals Research strategy
Outcome	Student retention and completion rates Employability of graduates Feedback from students Research output of staff and research students Appropriateness of the learning outcomes attained by graduates
Process	Supervision of research students Internal quality assurance procedures Teaching and learning methods Assessment of students including feedback to students Practical training periods (including placements in industry) Academic and personal support for students

To explore this further the average of individual ratings for each classification is considered. The average is over all members of the indicated respondent group (which could be All; Members and Candidates; and Affiliates and Associates) and over all the criteria in the category (Goal, Outcome, Configuration and Process). Repeating this calculation but replacing rating with impact yields metrics which emphasise the differences more but it does not significantly change the order.

Table 41 reveals differences in average rating (Avg) but they are small in comparison with the standard deviations (SD). Goal-related criteria are rated as most important for institutional level external quality procedures followed by Outcome, Configuration and Process-related criteria in that order. Process and Outcome-related criteria are rated highest for programme-level procedures followed by Goal and Configuration-related criteria. There is very little difference in this pattern between the respondent groups.

Table 41. Ratings analysis by respondent group and item category

		ALL RESPONDENTS		AFFILIATES AND ASSOCIATES		MEMBERS AND CANDIDATES	
		AVG	SD	AVG	SD	AVG	SD
INSTITUTIONAL	Goal	4.4	0.7	4.5	0.6	4.4	0.7
	Outcome	4.1	0.9	4.1	0.8	4.0	0.9
	Configuration	4.0	0.9	4.1	1.0	4.0	0.9
	Process	4.0	1.0	4.2	1.0	3.9	1.0
PROGRAMME	Goal	4.1	0.9	4.2	0.8	4.1	0.9
	Outcome	4.2	0.9	4.2	0.9	4.2	0.9
	Configuration	4.1	0.9	4.0	1.0	4.1	0.9
	Process	4.2	0.8	4.3	0.9	4.2	0.8

Using a different approach, the mean of the average criteria rating/impact over each respondent group and category may be considered, this approach ignores variation in the number of responses to the different criteria. It turns out that the mean of the average ratings over each the two respondent groups over each category are not significantly different. Little additional insight is gained and the results are consistent with the previous ones.

3.2.8 ON THE AGENCY'S INTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES

Table 42 shows that a majority (89%) of respondent agencies have established procedures to ensure their own accountability.

Internal quality assurance (IQA) is more likely to be implemented by Members and Candidates than Affiliates and Associates. Accountability procedures are established by 94% of ENQA Members and Candidates but by only 77% of Affiliates and Associates (one skipped this question).

Three of the five respondent agencies that have not established accountability procedures indicated that it is because they are in the early stage of development and that they will be developed.

Two agencies mention the use of ISO protocols and three indicate/give the impression that they are in the early stages of development of their IQA procedures: one (YÖDAK) reports that it has "some procedures which [are] currently under review"; another (EEAA) that the IQA procedures "are not fully established, but are being progressively put in place"; and the third one (ECCE) reports that it is addressing IQA "at present through its own Quality Assurance Committee although very much under development".

Table 42.

HAS YOUR AGENCY ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES FOR ITS OWN ACCOUNTABILITY?			RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
	MEMBERS AND CANDIDATES	ASSOCIATES AND AFFILIATES		
Yes	94%	77%	41	89
No			5	11
Comment			17	
		answered question	46	
		skipped question	5	

The top five accountability measures are (table 43):

- An enforced no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of the agency's external experts is established and enforced;
- Mechanisms for collection and analysis of, and reflection on, feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for the purpose of informing and supporting the agency's improvement and development;
- Processes and results which reflect the agency's mission and goals of quality assurance
- An appeals system;
- Internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism and an internal reflection mechanism.

An enforced no-conflict-of-interest mechanism for external experts is established and very effective in 42% of respondent agencies. It is the highest rated accountability measure. One respondent which does not have such a mechanism points out that its members do (ECA). Another indicated that "given our remit it is difficult to be specific as required above" (anonymous).

Mechanisms for collection and analysis of, and reflection on, feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for the purpose of informing and supporting the agency's improvement and development are established in all 43 respondents to this part and on average considered effective.

Processes and results which reflect the agency's mission and goals of quality assurance are widely implemented and considered effective, as would be expected, but only partly implemented in nine out of 41 (22%) cases.

Thirteen out of 43 (30%) respondents to the question about an appeals system (including two ENQA members) either have not established or have only partly established such a system. Note that in Sweden "an appeals system is presently not possible due to the Swedish constitution. This will possibly be changed within the next two years."

Internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism and an internal reflection mechanism are established in 65% of respondent agencies: 12% regard it as very effective and 44% as effective. Fifteen out of 43 (35%) respondents to this question either have not established or have only partly established such procedures.

Table 43.

IN YOUR OPINION WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE FOR YOUR AGENCY AND HOW EFFECTIVELY IS EACH FUNCTIONNING?	NOT ESTABLISHED	PARTLY ESTABLISHED	ESTABLISHED AND MODERATELY EFFECTIVE	ESTABLISHED AND EFFECTIVE	ESTABLISHED AND VERY EFFECTIVE	MEMBERS AND CANDIDATES	AFFILIATES AND ASSOCIATES	RATING AVERAGE	RESPONSE COUNT
An enforced no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of your Agency's external experts is established and enforced	2	5	4	14	18	4.4	2.9	4.0	43
Mechanisms for collection and analysis of, and reflection on, feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for the purpose of informing and supporting your Agency's improvement and development	0	9	7	17	10	3.9	3.1	3.7	43
Processes and results which reflect your Agency's mission and goals of quality assurance	1	9	4	19	8	3.8	3.1	3.6	41
An appeals system	6	7	6	15	9	3.4	3.2	3.3	43
Internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism and an internal reflection mechanism	4	11	4	19	5	3.6	2.4	3.2	43
Mandatory cyclical external review of your Agency's activities at least once every five years	9	8	3	11	10	3.5	2.2	3.1	41
A published policy for the assurance of your Agency's own quality, made available on its website	9	8	6	11	9	3.4	2.3	3.1	43
Provision for periodic independent evaluation and reporting of your Agency's conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA.	10	5	10	9	7	3.5	1.8	3.0	41
Reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in your Agency's quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties	11	3	7	10	2	2.8	2.3	2.7	33
Other (please specify)									9
								answered question	43
								skipped question	8

Mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years is **not** established in nine out of 41 (22%) respondent agencies including at least (some skipped the question) three ENQA full member agencies. However, the full member agencies have time until the end of 2010 to undergo the external review.

To the question about having reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in an agency's quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties, 14 out of 33 (43%) respondents have either not established or only partly established such a mechanism. However, there is a possibility that some respondents answered this in the negative where they should have skipped it entirely if inapplicable.

Provision for the periodic independent evaluation and reporting of the agency's conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA is absent in 10 out of 41 (24%) responses, including two ENQA members.

One interesting addition to the list of accountability measures listed in the questionnaire is the "publication of all the external expert panel reports with the CVs of the experts and their undersigned statement of independence and confidentiality" (NVAO).

Two respondents stress that their accountability procedures are new.

3.3 Main topics for interpretation

3.3.1 ANALYSIS OF AGENCY FUNCTIONS, OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS IN ITS WORK

The European Standards and Guidelines document places a strong emphasis on the interests of students and other stakeholders, such as labour market representatives, which "should be at the forefront of external quality processes". The involvement of stakeholders is an indicator of higher education's shift from a teaching to a learning focus, its relationship to society, industry, and commerce, to employers and professional needs, and its interest in international comparability. Stakeholder involvement can enhance the transparency and confidence in external quality procedures and the standing of the higher education sector as a whole.

However, the ESG also make it clear that it is important that the external quality assurance agency is autonomous and that its procedures are independent: "Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders."

Most respondent agencies have a board/council (table 23) and more than half (57%) of respondents has representation from four or more stakeholder groups (table 24).

There have been some significant increases in stakeholder representation on boards/councils from 2003. Notably, there has been an increase in student representation (now 49%) on respondent agency boards/councils since 2003, when only a third of boards had student members. While an improvement, the current level still seems low in the context of a recognised need for greater emphasis on how higher education affects students. The proportion of boards/councils with representation of higher education institutions is 82% which is also a significant increase on 62% in 2003. Slightly less than one third of respondent agency boards (31%) (table 24) include an international quality assurance and/or higher education perspective. This limited representation by international quality assurance or higher education bodies is noteworthy, given that many have transparency as an objective and given that international comparability and peer review are priorities under the Bologna process.

Moving from stakeholder involvement to agency functions: in 2003 the main agency functions were reported as being: (i) quality improvement, and quality assurance in a traditional sense; (ii) disseminating knowledge and information; and (iii) accreditation. The current survey found the five functions that have the highest impact to be "quality assurance"; "quality enhancement/improvement"; "external quality assurance of programmes"; "external quality assurance of institutions"; "collecting/ disseminating information on quality of HE" and most respondents have all of those as functions. The

2008 survey results seem broadly consistent with the 2003 survey findings (but recall that the questions are different).

Many respondent agencies have other complementary functions but these are considered to be of somewhat lower importance to the agency's mission than the main ones (table 26). Significantly, 27 out of 43 respondents see the "development and maintenance of qualifications frameworks" as a one of their functions and among those its average rating is more than important (4.11). This is a very significant increase on the three agencies that reported this as a task in the 2003 report. It is an expected finding owing to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQEHEA) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Recognition of national diplomas is another function where there has been a large increase from one in 2003 to 20 in 2007. Removing barriers to mobility is an objective of the Bologna process. This increase suggests a strong linkage between recognition and external quality assurance which is understandable. Such a linkage can be expected to motivate a growing interest in collaborative/standardised approaches including mutual recognition agreements between quality assurance agencies.

The objectives of the main types of respondent agencies' quality assurance procedures are broadly consistent with the stated functions. The top five agency objectives, in order of impact, are "transparency", "quality improvement/enhancement", "accountability", "accreditation" and "student (or prospective student) protection" (table 28). In 2003 Quality improvement was the predominant objective followed by accountability and transparency (in joint second place). Given that transparency is the top objective and given that stakeholder involvement has increased transparency, it is curious how 51% of agencies can seem to justify not having student representation on their boards/councils. To better interpret this it would be necessary to ask agencies what they understand by the objectives selected.

Fourteen percent (six out of 44) of respondents consider the estimation of graduate learning outcomes not to be an objective of their procedures. Most of those who have it as an objective, consider it to be important to very important.

The objectives associated with making national and international comparisons are on average rated lowest but for ranking, by respondents. However, the proportion of respondent agencies involved in these activities is about 80%, which is significantly higher than in the 2003 sample. Notwithstanding this, the relatively low rating/impact may warrant further investigation given that comparability and compatibility of higher education institutions is a key theme in the Bologna process.

More than half of the respondents do not have rankings as an objective and, where it is and objective, it is on average considered to be unimportant to of little importance. This is consistent with the 2003 findings (table 28).

Finally, one particularly noteworthy objective reported by the QAA, UK relates to ensuring that regulation is appropriate to the level of assurance sought. This is an objective that might usefully be adopted by all agencies which do not already include it.

3.3.2 ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 'FOUR-STAGE MODEL' AND VARIANTS OR ALTERNATIVES

Responses to the 2007 survey demonstrate that the four-stage model is frequently (nearly 50%) but not universally implemented.

Compliance with the (distinct) ESG four-stage process is higher at 29 out of 46 (63%) (ECA responding indicated that the ESG four-stage model did not apply to its operations). 59% of Member/Candidate respondents (52% of Full members and 86% of Candidate members) implement all four ESG stages and 64% of Associate/Affiliate respondents do. A published report is required by 79% of agencies which is lower than the 2003 finding (when 87% of respondent agencies published a report) (table 33).

Of the respondent agencies who implement the ESG four-stage process fully 59% involve student representatives in a formal role in the specification of processes and criteria; 55% have student representation on their board/council; and 90% have established accountability procedures. All this may suggest that implementation of the model may be correlated with a progressive overall approach.

Even where respondents claim to implement the ESG four-stage process in full, there are instances where not all four stages are considered necessary.

That the four stage model is not being implemented fully among so many ENQA members gives pause for thought. The relatively high non-compliance (given the age of the model) could be due to the relatively long lead time for necessary changes in legislation to be implemented or it could be that the reality is more complex than the model. Both of these notions were discussed in Chapter 3.2.

The non-compliance with the four-stage model arises from government involvement and lack of implementation of the latter stages of the ESG four-stage process. However, as noted in Chapter 3.2 the inference of independence from government is not straightforward. Consider that government is represented on 40% of boards/councils (table 23).

It is possible to speculate about the causes for the apparent level of resistance to this model. Publication of reports is good for transparency but challenges candour and increases the likelihood of anodyne commentary. Independence from government and institutions is a stark criterion however it is glossed. It is important that external quality procedures should bring a perspective that is different from the institution, free from conflict of interest and objective in basing its decision exclusively on material evidence. Obviously, independence is not sufficient to provide this perspective and clearly some feel that absolute independence it is not necessary.

3.3.3 ANALYSIS OF THE AREAS ADDRESSED BY EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES

The five highest impacting items assessed by programme level procedures are: "professional and pedagogical qualifications of staff"; "curriculum/syllabus"; "facilities and resources"; "internal quality assurance procedures"; and "mission/goals". None of these items can be categorised as outcomes (table 36 and figure 37). The five highest impacting items for institutional level procedures are: internal quality assurance procedures; management, organisation; mission/goals; professional and pedagogical qualifications of staff; and facilities and resources (table 38 and figure 39).

The ESG states that "the assessment of students is one of the most important elements of higher education". Assessment of students links the ESG with the FQEHEA. Given the focus at policy level on learning outcomes (exemplified by the two qualifications frameworks) learning-outcome centred areas such as assessment of students including feedback and appropriateness of learning outcomes attained by students, etc. are areas that should not be overlooked by agencies. Assessment of

students including feedback to students is rated as important to very important by those who assess it but eight out of 40 (20%) respondents do not assess it. Indeed, appropriateness of the learning outcomes attained by graduates is in eleventh place on the list of 25 areas considered by programme-level procedures. While the appropriateness of the learning outcomes attained by graduates is not assessed in 10 out of 36 (28%) respondents' institutional-level procedures, where it is assessed it is considered important or very important.

Research assessment is addressed by most respondents to this part (the institutional-level procedures). Thirty four out of 37 (93%) respondents address at least one of the four research-related areas and 24 out of 37 (65%) respondents address all four of them. Research strategy is an important to very important part of institutional-level external quality procedures for 28 out of 37 (75%) respondents. The research environment is also considered very important. Research output and research collaboration are considered somewhat less important. 26% of (9/34) respondents, who address research, do not address the "supervision of research students".

Finally, if the areas are classified into Goal, Outcome, Process and Configuration (table 40) then Goal-related criteria are rated as most important for institutional level external quality procedures followed by Outcome, Configuration and Process-related criteria in that order; (table 41) and Process and Outcome-related criteria are rated highest for programme-level procedures followed by Goal and Configuration-related criteria. There is very little difference in this pattern between the respondent groups.

3.3.4 ANALYSIS OF INTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES

The European Standards and Guidelines state that agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability. These procedures are to include: a published policy, supporting documentation and a mandatory cyclical external review at least once every five years [13]. 89% of respondents (41/46) claim to have procedures for their own accountability. The top five accountability measures are (table 43):

- A no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of the agency's external experts is established and enforced;
- Mechanisms for collection and analysis of, and reflection on, feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for the purpose of informing and supporting the agency's improvement and development;
- Processes and results which reflect the agency's mission and goals of quality assurance
- An appeals system;
- Internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism and an internal reflection mechanism.

In four of the top five accountability procedures the average effectiveness is between "moderately effective" and "effective" (table 43). Evidently, agencies see potential for improvement in many areas. Only five out of 28 (18%) respondents which have established internal quality assurance procedures report then as being very effective.

Overall ENQA Members/Candidates perform significantly better than Affiliates/ Associates on accountability criteria.

[13] ESG, p.26

Notwithstanding this, when it comes to mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years, two ENQA members skipped this and three have not yet established it (but have still time until the end of 2010).

Finally, reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in an agency's quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties may be a significant weakness.

Chapter 4: Division of responsibilities and methodological framework of procedures

4.1 Introduction

This section of the report deals with the following areas:

- Membership of expert panels and their training;
- Division of function and responsibility in external quality procedures;
- Reference frame of, and criteria and standards for external quality procedures; and
- Procedures for the external quality assurance of collaborative provision.

The section deals with each of the above topics in turn, and sets out a description of the statistical responses received, along with the presentation of aspects of the qualitative responses, where relevant. This is followed by a brief comparison with similar aspects of the last Quality Procedures Survey, which was carried out in 2003.

Several points should be borne in mind when reading this section of the report. Firstly, the (relatively) abnormal number of developments that has taken place since the last survey in 2003; for example, the publication of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA*, the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in the EHEA*, etc. has meant that there has been an enormous amount of activity in this field in the last five years; much of the activity might certainly indicate trends in particular areas, but it may not yet be well-embedded in the systems of any particular national context.

There are several areas (the training of experts, the reference frame for external evaluations and quality assurance of collaborative provision) which were not covered in the 2003 survey. Comments on those particular areas will, therefore, be set out for the first time.

4.2 Membership of expert panels and their training

4.2.1 MEMBERSHIP

Table 44.

WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE EXTERNAL EXPERT PANEL?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
National experts representing area of focus	35	76.1
International experts	34	73.9
Professional practitioners	29	63.0
Students	26	56.5
National experts representing institutions	15	32.6
Employers	21	45.7
Staff members of the quality assurance agency	12	26.1
Other (please specify)	12	26.1
Professional organisations	9	19.6
Graduates	7	15.2
answered question	43	
skipped question	8	

A majority of processes (76%) make use of national experts representing the area of focus (table 44). In fact, this majority may be even larger due to the fact that the questionnaire separated "area of focus" from experts who represented institutions. In fact, if the area of focus is the institution, then such experts could be added to the majority. A high percentage of respondents indicated that the composition of their expert panels included international representation (74%) and professional practitioners (63%). The number who indicated student participation in external expert panels was lower (56%, but see paragraph below on comparison with 2003). There is no real differentiation between the composition of panels and the type of agency – for example, an accreditation agency with a specific subject focus does not differ radically in the composition of its panels to other types of agencies.

Some of the commentary in response to this question indicates that students and international experts will be represented from 2008.

4.2.2 TRAINING

The majority of agencies (83%) offer some kind of training or briefing to external expert teams. The questionnaire did not distinguish between training and briefing, and it is evident that the two activities can in some cases be considered quite different. From the answers it could be deduced that such training/briefing lasts, on average, for 1.5 days. Responses ranged from two hours to five days.

75% of respondents indicated that training was compulsory, with 25% saying that an expert could not be appointed to a panel until they had completed training. 22.5% of agencies said that training might be provided by means of distance learning (table 45). There is evidence that these agencies use international panel members, suggesting that some form of distance learning is considered as a cost-effective and convenient means of briefing such panel members.

It is interesting to note that a relatively high numbers of agencies skipped this question.

Table 45.

CHARACTERISTICS AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF BRIEFING/TRAINING PROVIDED TO PANEL MEMBERS	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Training/briefing is compulsory for all panel members	30	75
Training/briefing is compulsory for panel chairs	20	50
Training/briefing provided is matched to the experience of each panel member	17	42.5
Training outcomes are assessed by my Agency	11	27.5
Training is required before a person may be nominated to a panel	10	25
Training is provided using distance learning	9	22.5
Other (please specify)	7	17.5
answered question	40	
skipped question	11	

The content of any training/briefing sessions generally focuses on the methodology to be used and the function of the panel arising out of that methodology. However, probably dependent on whether the event was viewed more as training or as briefing, there were significant variations in responses. For example, some sessions are intended

to provide guidelines to panels or to point them in the direction of good practice. Others focus on training the team to carry out the task and provide training tools such as learning logs so that the experts can apply what they have learned during the procedure itself. Several responses indicated that it was necessary to inform experts of the legal situation in which they would be working, and many of the respondents indicated that an explanation of the education system, alongside any relevant legislation formed part of the training/briefing. It is possible that such aspects of training could be mapped to those agencies which use international experts as part of their teams or those agencies that work in a context where programmes and/or institutions are accredited or approved by the state. Only three respondents referred to the ESG and the Bologna Process. In some cases, analysis of the self-evaluation document and preparation for the site visit was considered to be training or briefing, whereas for other agencies, these were activities that are carried out individually by panels/panel members.

One agency pointed out that it did not offer any training or briefing because it had an oversight role and was therefore not involved at this level of detail. (This comment can be taken as read for responses to other questions in this chapter of the survey).

4.2.3 COMPARISON WITH THE 2003 SURVEY

In terms of direct comparisons with the figures produced, the percentage of national experts representing the area of focus and the percentage of international experts on panels has remained the same. The number of student members has risen significantly (from 22% in 2003). Given the level of recent debate on the matter of student involvement in quality assurance, this is not surprising. If the category of "Employers" in the 2003 survey can be assumed to be equivalent to "professional practitioners" then this percentage too has risen significantly (from 36% in 2003). The number of agencies where staff is cited as being represented on external panels has dropped from 40% to 26%.

Training of external experts was not covered in the 2003 survey.

4.3 Division of function and responsibility in external QA procedures

4.3.1 DIVISION OF FUNCTION

In terms of the choice and development of any external quality procedures, *all* responding agencies performed this function (table 46). In about a quarter of cases, the external expert panel was also involved. A very high percentage of agencies (between 84% and 98%) were involved in the development of guidelines for self-evaluation, contact with the institution, and preparation of the site visit, with involvement of the expert panel in such functions ranging from 9% (preparation of guidelines for self-evaluation) to 52% (planning of the site visit).

The statistics are significantly reversed when the report-writing function is considered – 94% of expert panels are responsible for writing the report, compared to only 37% of agencies, and, in fact, when the responses are considered in detail, the majority of this 37% say that they carry out this function jointly with their expert panels.

Table 46.

WHO PERFORMS THE FOLLOWING FUNCTIONS IN THE EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES (IF THE FUNCTIONS ARE PERFORMED IN COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EXTERNAL EXPERT PANEL AND THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY, PLEASE MARK BOTH)	THE EXTERNAL EXPERT PANEL	THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY	RESPONSE COUNT
Choice of basic methodology applied	12	44	44
Preparation of the guidelines for the self-evaluation	4	42	43
Preparation of the external quality procedure concept	11	42	42
Contact with the institution	11	41	44
Planning of the site visit	23	36	43
Preparation of the guidelines for the site-visit	16	38	42
Writing of the report	41	17	44
Other	1	2	3
Other (please specify)			6
		answered question	44
		skipped question	7

4.3.2 RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURE

There is a marked division in the responses to this question (table 47): the description and analysis of any process being externally evaluated, conclusions drawn and recommendations made are quite clearly the responsibility of the expert panel (88-96% of responses). However, this situation is reversed in terms of responsibility for the decision about the outcome of the external evaluation process and the preparation of the report for publication (74% and 84% of agencies saying that they were responsible for these respective parts of the process). It may, however, be worth remembering here that whilst some agencies might not take the final decision on the outcome, nonetheless the outcome and its subsequent reporting are owned by the agency. It was also pointed out that a final accreditation decision or judgement would be owned by the agency. Thirty agencies of diverse status and purpose stated that they owned the formal outcome or decision from an evaluation.

Table 47.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES? (IF BOTH THE EXTERNAL EXPERT PANEL AND THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY ARE RESPONSIBLE, PLEASE MARK BOTH)	THE EXTERNAL EXPERT PANEL	THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY	RESPONSE COUNT
The description and analysis	38	17	43
The conclusions	42	11	44
The recommendations	40	17	44
The formal decision (evaluation outcome)	15	30	40
The report prepared for publication	19	35	42
Other	1	2	2
Other (please specify)			8
		answered question	44
		skipped question	7

4.3.3 COMPARISON WITH THE 2003 SURVEY

The results of the 2003 survey are similar in terms of the responsibility of the experts with regard to description, analysis, conclusions and recommendations, although this responsibility appears to have increased a little between 2003 and 2007/08.

The 2003 survey does not consider the responsibility of the decision regarding the outcome of the external process.

4.4 Reference frame of, and criteria and standards for external quality procedures

4.4.1 THE FRAME OF REFERENCE FOR THE EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURE

The following were offered by the survey as potential frames of reference for any external quality assurance procedure: the goals of the institution undergoing evaluation, guidelines for good practice, legal regulation, a national framework for qualifications, the EHEA framework for qualifications, subject benchmarks and standards set by professional organisations.

Table 48.

WHAT DEFINES THE REFERENCE FRAME FOR THE EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURE?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Legal regulation	35	74.5
The stated goals of the institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure	27	57.4
Guidelines of good practice	27	57.4
National Framework of/for Qualifications	26	55.3
A Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA	21	44.7
Standards defined by professional organisations	16	34
Subject benchmarks	13	27.7
Other (please specify)	12	25.5
answered question	47	
skipped question	4	

74.5% of respondents said that their frame of reference was defined by legal regulation (table 48). These agencies were mostly those based in Eastern Europe and/or are accreditation agencies. However, it should be noted that none cited legal regulation as the sole basis of their frame of reference.

There was a cluster of responses (43%–57%) around qualification frameworks (both national and EHEA), the stated goals of the institution and guidelines for good practice. It should be noted however, that some respondents specified that their national framework of qualifications was still under development. The lowest responses were for professional standards (34%) and subject benchmarks (27.7%).

More detailed responses indicated that members of the European Accreditation Consortium (ECA) were committed to ECA's Code of Good Practice, whilst others mentioned the ESG specifically, although it is possible that others will have assumed these to have been covered by the 'guidelines for good practice' category.

4.4.2 SPECIFIC CRITERIA AND STANDARDS

Respondents indicated that the main sources of specific criteria and standards were their own (87%) and the ESG (83%). National criteria and standards were also prevalent

(66%). The survey also offered the option of the OECD/UNESCO guidelines on quality provision in cross-border HE. Only 14% of respondents indicated that these formed part of their criteria and standards for external procedures.

Again, the ECA Code of Good Practice was mentioned (although not by all member agencies of ECA) and also the guidelines published by the World Health Organisation (one response).

Table 49.

WHAT SPECIFIC CRITERIA AND STANDARDS ARE USED FOR YOUR AGENCY'S EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
The Agency's own published criteria and standards	41	87.2
European Standards and Guidelines	39	83
National criteria and standards	31	66
OECD/UNESCO Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education	7	14.9
Others (please specify all and provide url links)	5	10.6
answered question	47	
skipped question	4	

4.4.3 COMPARISON WITH THE 2003 SURVEY

The 2003 survey describes the notion of criteria and standards as "emerging as a common feature" and as being much more in evidence than in 1998. The results of the 2007–08 survey demonstrate that this feature could now be described as embedded. However, the 2003 survey states that criteria and standards were emerging beyond previous terms of reference which were almost entirely based on legal regulations. The 2007–08 survey separates the framework of reference and the specific criteria and standards and, as indicated above, legal regulations still account for the majority of the responses in terms of the framework of reference. Care must be taken, therefore, in drawing conclusions.

Indeed, the answers to many of the questions raised in the 2003 survey still cannot be answered definitively [e.g. 'what is the difference between criteria and standards?' (In the case of this question, it would be interesting to know if the development of the ESG has helped to clarify this point), 'when does an agency work with threshold criteria?' 'Is it important whether the criteria are explicitly formulated or not?']. However, the current survey does seek to provide answers to other questions posed in 2003, e.g. 'who formulates the criteria?'

The publication of the ESG will also impact on the comparisons that one can draw in this area; it is possible that some newer agencies will have adopted the ESG without having developed their own at any time due to the circumstance of timing, or, indeed, that the ESG were published as some of the more well-established agencies were reviewing their own activities.

4.5 Quality assurance of collaborative provision

4.5.1 THE EXISTENCE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES FOR JOINTLY/COLLABORATIVELY PROVIDED PROGRAMMES DELIVERED BY A GROUP OF INSTITUTIONS IN ONE COUNTRY

Just over half (56.5%) of the responding agencies said that they had procedures specifically for the evaluation of collaborative provision. However, care should be taken

in making assumptions around this figure as no definition of the term "collaborative" or "joint" was provided. A couple of agencies that had provided a qualitative response stated that same procedures were used for collaborative/joint provision as for other provision.

4.5.2 THE EXISTENCE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES FOR JOINTLY/ COLLABORATIVELY PROVIDED PROGRAMMES THAT ARE DELIVERED ACROSS NATIONAL BOUNDARIES

Again, just over half (55%) of responding agencies said that such procedures for programmes delivered across national boundaries were in place. Qualitative responses indicated that, in some cases, procedures are to be developed in the near future, particularly to deal with the development of Erasmus Mundus joint programmes. One response stated that it would expect any partnerships to adhere to the ESG. The ECA guidelines were also cited. Other responses indicated that transnational provision was dealt with on a case by case basis or that standard QA procedures were adapted accordingly.

4.5.3 COMPARISON WITH THE 2003 SURVEY

This area was not covered in the 2003 survey – it would be interesting to note trends and developments in the external quality assurance of collaborative provision in any future survey of this type. The proliferation of programmes such as Erasmus Mundus joint masters is sure to mean further development in this area in the near future.

4.6 Conclusion

Readers may be interested to compare the findings of this chapter with those of Chapters 2 and 3. Of particular note is the fact that many agencies apply more than one type of external quality assurance, although the four-stage model (see 3.2.6) is the most common throughout. It might also be surmised that the publication of the ESG has helped agencies to clarify their purpose.

A further interesting study would be to compare the outcomes above with the conclusions of the *Quality Convergence Studies I and II*;(Crozier, Curvale & Henard, ENQA, March 2005 and March 2007); how much variation is there? And, in the cases of variation, are agencies aiming for the same outcome but via different methods? Or are they looking to achieve different outcomes with similar methodologies?

Chapter 5: Site visits

The characteristics of the quality assurance systems, mentioned in the Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 on European Co-operation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education, correspond to the four-stage model: independent agencies, self-evaluations, visits by experts and a published report. These were identified as common features of European quality assurance in the *European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education* of 1995 and in *Evaluation of European Higher Education: A Status Report of 1998*. The four-stage model is widely accepted as the common ground for the European quality assurance in higher education. As such it has become the criteria for ENQA membership.

Questions 50–56 of the survey addressed institutional self-evaluation as well as the site visit and directly refer to the four-stage model and ESG.

The findings are discussed in the following and commonalities in self-evaluation procedures are identoified.

5.1 Institutions' self-evaluation groups

The capacity for objective self-evaluation is necessary for both professional and institutional development. It is the staff of an institution (academic, administrative, governing, etc) who are principally responsible for quality. The constitution of self-evaluation groups is a critical factor in their success or otherwise.

Agencies participating in the survey were asked to indicate who is included in the self-evaluation groups of the institutions that were subject to their quality assurance procedures. The overall findings in table 50 show that a majority of respondents listed teaching staff and management as the most commonly included categories. Administrative staff and students came second. Graduates were rarely included in the institutions' self-evaluation groups. A self-evaluation group was not used in three cases: HETAC (Ireland), CNVSU (Italy) and an anonymous agency. In the cases of ECA (varies per member), German Accreditation Council (only accredits agencies) and an anonymous respondent (oversight role of the agency) this question was not applicable.

Overall, and compared with the previous survey (2003), the responses showed no difference in the most frequently included group (management and teaching staff) and in the least often included group (graduates). External stakeholders were mentioned once, in the "other" category.

One surprising finding is the low number of agencies that report that institutions' self-evaluation includes persons in the 'other' category. In particular, this implies that the number of institutions using external experts (discipline experts, facilitators, etc) in the self-evaluation is low. Respondents were not prompted to consider this category and it is possible that if they were, the number would have been higher.

Table 50.

WHO, TYPICALLY, IS INCLUDED IN THE INSTITUTIONS' SELF EVALUATION GROUP?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Management	39	84.8
Teaching staff	39	84.8
Students	33	71.7
Administrative staff	33	71.7
Graduates	13	28.3
Self-evaluation group is not used	3	6.5
Other	6	13
answered question	46	
skipped question	5	

5.2 Sources for data collection

Agencies were further asked to identify what kind of statistical data was used in the institutions' self-evaluation. All respondents indicated that they were using statistical data. The most frequently occurring type of data was "data on students"; followed by "data on teaching staff"; "data on administrative staff" and "financial key figures" (see table 51). Just as in the 2003 survey, labour market statistics ranked lowest.

The collection of employers feedback can provide evidence on the quality of graduates' learning outcomes, and consequently on the quality of the institution. Therefore it may be expected that the trend of conducting regular employer surveys might get stronger in the future. The analysis of responses under 'other', however, revealed a variety of data sources, for example: curriculum, syllabus, student workload, research outcomes and publications, facilities and equipment, development plan and mobility.

Table 51.

WHAT SORT OF STATISTICAL DATA IS USED IN THE SELF-EVALUATION?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Data on students (e.g. in take, drop-out rate, passing rate)	43	93.5
Data on teaching staff	42	91.3
Data on administrative staff	34	73.9
Financial key figures	27	58.7
Labour market statistics	26	56.5
Other	13	28.3
Statistical data is not used	0	0
answered question	46	
skipped question	5	

5.3 Site visits

The site visit is conducted, in the vast majority of cases, by the expert panel with or without the agency's staff in attendance (table 52). The site visit is conducted by the agency's staff alone in only three out of 45 cases.

Six respondents selected the "other" category: in two cases agency's staff members usually attend, but their presence is not formally required or defined; in one case

agency's staff members are not always present in all site visits panels; and in another case the agency's staff is in attendance only for part of the visit.

Table 52.

WHO CONDUCTS THE SITE VISITS?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
The expert panel with a member of the Agency's staff in attendance	32	71.1
The external expert panel alone	12	26.7
Other (please specify)	6	13.3
The Agency's staff alone	3	6.7
answered question	45	
skipped question	6	

The respondents' average duration of a site visit (table 53) varies from 1.7 to 2.9 days, depending on the type of quality procedure in question.

Table 53

WHAT IS THE AVERAGE DURATION OF THE SITE VISITS IN DAYS?	RESPONSE AVERAGE	RESPONSE TOTAL	RESPONSE COUNT
per institutional-level external quality procedure?	2.9	101	35
per programme-related external quality procedure?	1.9	60	32
per thematic external quality procedure?	1.7	17	10
per subject-related external quality procedure?	2.1	23	11
answered question			45
skipped question			6

Interviews are the most commonly included element in site visits, followed by a tour of the facilities, examination of documentary evidence, and a final meeting with the management to present the main findings and conclusions (table 54). Classroom observation, as a way of assessing and reporting on the overall quality of learning and teaching at the institutional level, ranked lowest. Research outcomes, publications, facilities and equipment were reported under 'other'. There was little difference between the 2003 survey and 2008 survey findings.

Table 54.

WHICH ELEMENTS ARE INCLUDED IN THE SITE VISIT?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Interviews with members of the institution	44	97.8
Tour of the facilities	42	93.3
Examination of the documentary evidence	42	93.3
Final meeting with the management to the present main findings and conclusions	37	84.4
Interviews with stakeholders from outside the institutions	24	57.8
Perusal of student's work (dissertations, etc.)	23	51.1
Classroom observations	17	35.6
Other	10	22.2
answered question	45	
skipped question	6	

Management staff was the group most frequently interviewed during the site visit (95.6%), followed by teaching staff (93.3%), students (93.3%), administrative staff (86.7%) and research staff (73.3%). Graduates ranked lowest (60%) (table 55). Additional interviewees were identified under the 'other' category, including: self-evaluation group; HEI quality assurance staff; employers; collaborative partners (if relevant); support staff; regional authorities; stakeholders; and representatives of business/ industry.

Table 55.

WHO IS INTERVIEWED AT THE SITE VISIT?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Management staff	43	95.6
Teaching staff	42	93.3
Students	42	93.3
Administrative staff	39	86.7
Research staff	33	73.3
Graduates	27	60
Other (please specify)	11	24.4
Interviews are not used	1	2.2
answered question	45	
skipped question	6	

Considering the responses to Question 56 (Who is interviewed at the site visit?), Question 50 (Who, typically, is included in the institution's self-evaluation group?) and Question 51 (What sort of statistical data is used in the self-evaluation?) it can be deducted that the management and teaching staff followed by students form the major source of evidence that the evaluators directly rely on via interview, and indirectly count upon via statistical data.

5.4 Conclusion

The fact that it is relatively uncommon for institutions to include graduates in the self-evaluation panels or to consider labour market statistics as relevant data in such evaluations, suggests that there may be scope for making the self-evaluation more outward-looking. It would be a concern if graduate opinion and labour market data did not form part of an institution's self-evaluation considering the EHEA focus on learning outcomes and the Lisbon Strategy.

Site visits are widely used by the respondents of this survey. They are usually conducted by an expert panel, which sometimes has some of the agency's staff in attendance. The 'average duration' of a site visit is 2.9 days for institutional-level external quality procedure, 2.1 days for subject-related procedure, 1.9 for programme-related procedure and 1.7 for a thematic one.

In general, the findings presented in Chapter 5 are similar to the 2003 survey results. However, with the current shift towards learning outcome -oriented programmes, it is reasonable to expect that in the future more attention will be focused on students, graduates and employers when assessing the overall quality of an institution.

Chapter 6: Reporting the outcome of the agency's external quality procedure

6.1 Content of the published report

Agencies were asked if there is a publicly available report (table 56). Thirty seven agencies answered affirmatively, while nine agencies gave a negative response.

Table 56.

IS THERE A PUBLICLY AVAILABLE REPORT?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Yes	37[14]	80.4
No	9	19.6
Other (please specify)	8	
answered question	46	
skipped question	5	

The respondents who answered "no" gave the following explanations:

- the reports are not publicly available yet, but will be in the future (answers given by four Associates);
- the circulation of the reports is limited (one Associate and one Candidate member);
- only some parts of the evaluation, e.g. assessment of the teaching activities of the academic staff, are published (one Associate);
- the decisions are public, but the reports are published only if the institution gives its consent and, in case of an accreditation, if the decision is positive (two Full members).

The majority of the published reports include conclusions (87%), recommendations (78.3%) and analysis (78.3%). Empirical evidence (54.3%) and conditions (41.3%) rank lower. Four agencies answered that the report is not published (table 57).

Table 57.

WHAT IS THE CONTENT OF THE PUBLISHED REPORT?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Conclusions	40	87
Analysis	36	78.3
Recommendations	36	78.3
Empirical evidence	25	54.3
Conditions	19	41.3
Others (please specify)	11	23.9
The report is not published	4	8.7
answered question	46	
skipped question	5	

[14] This is the same number as was reported in Chapter 3.2.6., where 37 agencies responded that they use a published report within their external quality procedures. The percentage is different in the two chapters because the number of respondents who completed the question differs.

One agency answered that it does not use the term "conditions" but there are three categories of recommendation one of which is deemed "essential" and which would be considered a condition. Another mentioned that the contents of public reports are: an improvement plan, CV's of the experts, "declaration of independence and confidentiality" undersigned by each expert and a list of some of the documents reviewed by the panel, for example publications by the programme and students' work. Two agencies publish only the final decision and two agencies publish summary reports of several evaluations.

6.2 Number of reports published by the agency over the past three calendar years (i.e. January 2005–December 2007)

Table 58.

NUMBER OF REPORTS PUBLISHED BY YOUR AGENCY OVER THE PAST THREE CALENDAR YEARS (I.E JANUARY 2005-DECEMBER 2007)	RESPONSE AVERAGE	RESPONSE TOTAL	RESPONSE COUNT
How many institutional evaluation reports has your Agency published?	71	2282	32
How many programme evaluation reports has your Agency published?	217	6953	32
How many subject evaluation reports has your Agency published?	50	906	18
How many thematic evaluation reports has your Agency published?	8	140	17
		answered question	39
		skipped question	12

Programme evaluation reports are the most commonly published reports, with a total number of 6,953 reports published from 2005 to 2007 (table 58). The biggest number of programme evaluation reports is published by NAA Russia (1,787) followed by NVAO the Netherlands and Flanders (1,700). Nine agencies have published between 100 and 600 programme evaluation reports. Nine agencies have published between 11 and 76 reports. Eleven agencies have published between 0 and 10 programme evaluation reports.

Institutional evaluation reports are the second most common with 2,282 reports. One agency is responsible for the publication of 1,784 reports (NAA Russia). The two next biggest publishers of institutional evaluation reports are the QAA, UK and the Commission for Accreditation and quality assessment, Serbia. They have published 131 and 80 reports respectively. 21 agencies have published between one and 48 institutional evaluation reports over the three years (2005-2007). Eight agencies answered that they have not issued institutional evaluation reports.

The total number of subject evaluation reports and thematic evaluation reports over the three years is 906 and 140 respectively. Four agencies have published between 118 and 300 subject evaluation reports and five agencies between two and 50. Nine agencies have not published any subject evaluation report. One agency (QAA, UK) has published 93 thematic evaluation reports and another agency (CNVSU, Italy) 29 reports. Five agencies answered between one and seven thematic evaluation reports

over the past three years, and 10 agencies have never issued thematic evaluation reports.

6.3 Consultation before the publication of the report

Table 59.

WHO IS CONSULTED BEFORE THE REPORT IS PUBLISHED?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
The institution(s) that is(are) the subject of the external quality procedure	32	82.1
Other (please specify)	9	23.1
Central government	4	10.3
Professional organisations	3	7.7
Industry and labour market	2	5.1
National associations of HEIs (e.g. Rectors' Conference ...)	2	5.1
Regional government	1	2.6
answered question	39	
skipped question	12	

In the great majority of cases the institutions that are the subject of the external quality procedure are consulted before the report is published (82 %) (table 59).

The second most consulted body is the central government (10 %), followed by the professional organisations (8%), the industry and labour market (5%) and the national associations of HEIs (5%). Only one agency answered that the regional government is consulted before publishing the report. Two agencies answered in the category "other" that agency's board or commission on accreditation is consulted and one agency answered that a federal body of supervision in education and science is consulted in addition to the institution before publishing the report.

6.4 Who publishes the report?

In most cases, the agency publishes the report (93%). The report is rarely published by the central government (5%) and by the evaluated institution (2%). In Germany the agencies are required by the German Accreditation Council to publish the reports on all degree programmes using a database provided by the HRK. (table 60).

Table 60.

WHO PUBLISHES THE REPORT?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
The quality assurance agency	40	93
Others (please specify)	5	11.6
Central government	2	4.7
The evaluated institution	1	2.3
Regional government	0	0
answered question	39	
skipped question	12	

Chapter 7: Follow-up procedures and meta-evaluation

When dealing with the follow-up procedures that are used by the QA agencies it is important to distinguish current methods from future plans. Another important consideration is the existence of a small group of agencies which are currently defining or adapting their procedures and methodologies for follow-up. The analysis will focus on current methods and will not comment on the merits or otherwise of any future plans declared by respondents.

Of the 45 respondents to the question "who is formally responsible for taking action/following up on recommendations/conclusions of the report?", 34 out of 45 agencies reported that institutions are responsible for follow-up on recommendations included in the assessment reports (table 61). A minority (13%) indicated that the central government is formally responsible. In two cases, there is no formal follow-up to quality procedures.

The number of agencies reporting to be responsible for the follow-up procedures is significant (27 out of 45). Multiple answers were possible for this question. In 19 cases both the agency and the institution have formal responsibility for follow-up. In three cases the agency, the institution and the central government all have formal responsibility. In other three cases, there is a combined responsibility involving the central government and the institution, and in two a responsibility involving the agency and a national body (German Accreditation Council). Thirteen agencies declared that they are not formally responsible for follow-up.

As could be seen in Chapter 6, public reports produced by the agencies include recommendations in 36 out of 46 cases. Although reports include conditions or recommendations, it is possible that institutions (in eight cases) or QA agencies (in six cases) are not formally responsible for the follow-up. The respondents' possible interpretations of the question, and particularly the word "formal", give pause for thought, considering that just a little over a half of the agencies (27 out of 45) indicate that they are formally responsible for follow-up actions on recommendations. Indeed, the responses to the question in table 62 concerning follow-up actions involving the agency indicate that 39 agencies out of 44 are involved in follow up actions. Ten agencies indicate that the institutions are not formally responsible for taking action on recommendations/conclusions of the report. Here also there is a need to question the interpretations given to the term "formal".

Table 61.

WHO IS FORMALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR TAKING ACTION/THE FOLLOWING UP ON RECOMMENDATIONS/CONCLUSIONS OF THE REPORT?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
The institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure	34	75.6
The quality assurance agency	27	60
Central government	6	13.3
Others	6	13.3
There is no formal follow-up/action taken	2	4.4
Regional government	0	0
answered question	45	
skipped question	6	

Considering the kinds of actions that are taken for the purpose of follow-up, 27 agencies reported that they request action plans from the institutions and 22 make use of a desk-based study (table 62). 16 agencies stated they use a follow-up site-visit and almost the same number (17) reported they use a repeat of the external procedure.

However the key finding here is the large number of agencies that are using more than one of the follow-up actions listed in the question, as only 13 of the 44 selected only one of the options.

Table 62.

WHAT KIND OF ACTIONS ARE TAKEN FOR THE PUPOSE OF FOLLOWING UP ON RECOMMENDATIONS/CONLCUSIONS OF THE REPORT?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Request for action plan	27	61.4
Desk-based study by quality assurance agency	22	50
Repeat of external quality procedure	17	38.6
Other (please specify)	17	38.6
Follow-up site visit	16	36.4
answered question	44	
skipped question	7	

Of the 13 agencies that indicated that they do not have *formal* responsibility for follow-up (table 61), it is interesting to observe that eight of them indicated, hovewer, that they were using two or more follow-up methods. It is common practice among the agencies (78%) that do have formal responsibility for follow-up to use two or more of the methods listed.

Of the 17 responses under "other", four specified that the follow-up procedures were under preparation but not in place yet, two explained that the follow-up depends on the specific quality assurance procedure used and two said that the follow-up depends on the conditions or recommendations of the procedure.

Twenty five respondents out of 45 (56%) affirmed that they have in place a systematic meta-evaluation of the conducted external quality procedures carried out in the agencies' primary domain. From the comments it can be deduced that, out of those 20 respondents who gave a negative answer, four agencies are new ones, and thereby do not have the meta-evaluation process in place as yet. Two respondents indicated that the processes are partly in place, but they are not necessarily systematic.

Twenty two agencies reported that they themselves conduct the systematic meta-evaluation processes (table 63). In general the meta-evaluation is conducted by the agency, in some cases with the support of external experts. A singular arrangement can be found in Germany where the German Accreditation Council organises the meta-evaluation process for all the agencies.

Finally, there is no significant connection between the use of meta-evaluation procedures and the way follow-ups are organised and conducted in terms of responsibility.

Table 63.

WHO CARRIES OUT THE SYSTEMATIC META-EVALUATION OF THE CONDUCTED EXTERNAL QUALITY PROCEDURES IN YOUR AGENCY'S DOMAIN (PROCESS AND REPORT)?	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
The quality assurance agency	22	78.6
Others (please specify)	9	32.1
An external agency	2	7.1
Central government	1	3.6
Regional government	0	0
There is no systematic meta-evaluation of the conducted evaluations	0	0
answered question	28	
skipped question	23	

Conclusions

The responsibility of the follow-up process is a matter generally carried by the agencies and/or the higher education institutions. A significant number of the agencies declared that responsibility is borne both by the agency and by the institution.

Follow-up methods are diverse and it is common for more than one method to be used by the same agency.

Meta-evaluation is a function that is generally placed under the responsibility of the agencies. In some countries there is another authority that undertakes that function.

Chapter 8: Future developments

In the final part of the survey, the agencies were asked to answer questions relating to future developments of the quality assurance sector in their primary domain.

The implementation of the ESG, and the establishment (or renewal) of national qualification frameworks (NQF) have clearly influenced the agencies' procedures and will continue to do so.

The spotlight is currently on issues such as the development of quality assurance methodology for e-learning and joint degrees, and the importance of confidence and mutual recognition between agencies.

A significant development that occurred following completion of the survey was the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which was formally established on 4 March 2008, is expected to "serve as an instrument to improve the quality of agencies and to promote mutual trust among them". The emergence of the EQAR had been expected and respondents' opinion was sought concerning it.

8.1 Agencies in the next two years

As shown in table 64, half of the respondents are expecting, over the next two years (i.e. by January 2010), some developments regarding the establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) and the introduction of different methodologies for external quality procedures. More than half of the respondents plan to revise their external quality procedures. A total of 13 agencies expect change in legislation and NQF against 16 who expect change in external quality procedures.

Table 64.

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE EXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS IN THE QA SECTOR IN YOUR AGENY'S PRIMARY DOMAIN IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS (I.E. BY JANUARY 2010).	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
Revision of external quality procedures	27	57.4
Establishment of National Qualifications Framework	23	48.9
Introduction of different methodologies for external quality procedures	22	46.8
Commencement of new higher education legislation	15	31.9
Reorganisation or merging of quality assurance agencies	15	31.9
Other, please specify	11	23.4
answered question	47	
skipped question	4	

Fifteen agencies, throughout various European countries, indicated forthcoming reorganisation or merging of QA agencies involving themselves. These included, for example: VLHORA Belgium, HETAC Ireland, the three Austrian agencies, ACQUIN Germany, Slovenian Council for Higher Education, the Serbian Agency for Science and Higher Education, YODEK Turkey and ECA.

8.2 On external reviews of agencies

Many respondent agencies (20 out of 46) indicated that they are currently preparing for being externally reviewed (table 65). 39% of respondents plan to subject themselves to external reviews in the future. 14 respondents (30%) have been externally reviewed already and 6.5% are not planning to subject themselves to external review in the future. Two of the four agencies who answered "other" are externally audited through the ISO standard.

Table 65.

PLEASE INDICATE WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ASSERTIONS APPLY:	RESPONSE COUNT	RESPONSE %
My Agency has been externally reviewed	14	30.4
My Agency is currently preparing for being externally reviewed	20	43.5
My Agency plans to subject itself to external reviews in the future	18	39.1
My Agency is not planning to subject itself to external review in the future	3	6.5
Other (please specify)	4	8.7
answered question	46	
skipped question	5	

Table 66 demonstrates what kind of arrangements the agencies have/will have for the coordination of their review. It is interesting to note that five agencies have indicated that their past evaluation was coordinated by ENQA, when in reality in January 2008 there had only been three ENQA-coordinated reviews – they had started only in 2007. The same applies to the evaluations that were going on in January 2008: there was just one ENQA-coordinated review taking place, instead of three. This confusion might be due to the fact that the difference between nationally coordinated and ENQA-coordinated reviews is not clear to all agencies. Several of the agencies that indicate their future evaluations to be coordinated by ENQA operate in an international domain.

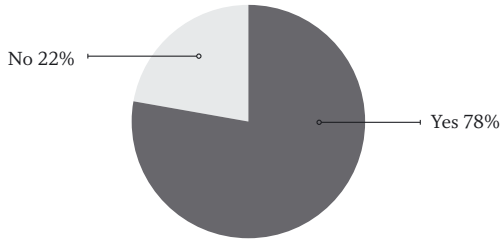
Table 66.

PLEASE INDICATE HOW THE REVIEW OF YOUR AGENCY HAS BEEN/IS/WILL BE COORDINATED.				RESPONSE COUNT
	PAST EVALUATIONS	CURRENT EVALUATIONS	FUTURE EVALUATIONS	
Coordinated by ENQA	5	3	**13**	21
Nationally coordinated	**8**	**9**	8	25
Other (please specify)				6
			answered question	40
			skipped question	11

8.3 On the Register

The majority of respondent agencies (28 out of 46) intend to apply for inclusion in the recently established European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education, EQAR (figure 67).

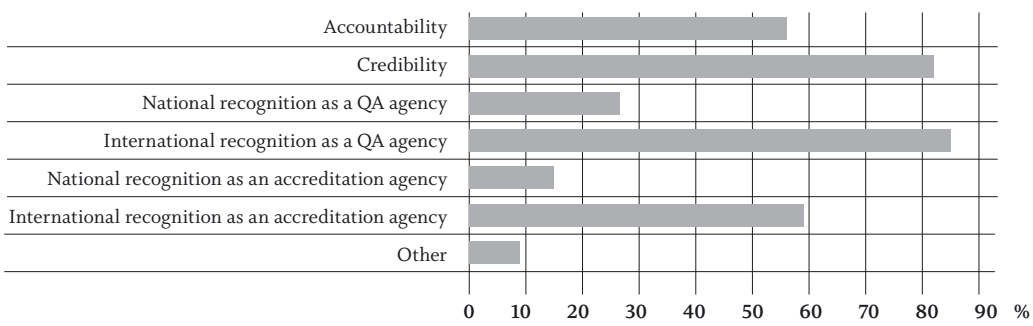
Figure 67. Is your Agency planning to apply for the Register?



Out of the eight agencies that do not intend to apply for inclusion five are ENQA full members including HAC Hungary, CNVSU Italy and German Accreditation Council (the latter because of its role as a meta-evaluator); two associates (from Iceland and Israel) and one affiliate (ECA). Six of the 10 agencies who answered "other" stated that they had not officially decided yet whether to apply or not; two (from Latvia and Slovak Republic) indicated that they would apply if they can afford to and another two would apply if, in their estimation, inclusion is either necessary or beneficial to the agency. It is interesting to note that ten agencies who plan to apply for inclusion in the Register also intend to engage ENQA for the coordination of their future evaluation. Only six agencies that plan to apply for inclusion will organise their future evaluation at a national level. It might be that they see the ENQA-coordinated review as having more legitimacy than the national one, though in practise there is not much of difference between the two, especially when the national review is conducted according to the ENQA guidance.

The most commonly expected benefits from inclusion in the Register are international recognition as a quality assurance agency (85%) and credibility (82%) (figure 68). It is interesting that nine agencies out of 36 are expecting national recognition as QA agency/accreditation agency after inclusion in the Register. The nine agencies include CAQA Serbia, ECCE, FINHEEC, ZEvA, three anonymous, AQU Catalonia and ANECA. This might be because the inclusion in the Register will in some cases be included in and required by the Education Law. In Finland it has been planned that in the future the universities and HEIs could choose any of the agencies from the Register to do their quality procedures.

Figure 68. If your Agency plans to apply to be included on the Register, what are the benefits that you expect to follow?



The general feeling towards the newly established EQAR is positive as 66% of the agencies (31 out of 47 respondents) see it as a useful tool to increase recognition. Twenty one out of the 47 respondents think that the Register will promote confidence between agencies and 17 consider it as an opportunity. Only one agency sees it as a threat, mainly because of the additional bureaucracy, effort and cost what it brings. This is feeling is shared by several of the 13 agencies who answered "other". One respondent indicated that "if well managed it could prove a useful and complementary tool to ENQA membership, serving as a quick recognition tool as opposed to the support and network function offered by ENQA. However, if badly managed it will cause duplication of effort and an increase in burden on agencies" (QAA, UK).

Chapter 9: Findings

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter seeks to summarise the key findings from the ENQA Quality Procedures Project (QPP) survey of quality assurance (QA) agencies across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), not as a straightforward summary of what has been shown in the previous chapters but from the perspective of a number of 'cross cutting themes'. More subjective than the detailed reporting of the earlier chapters, selected contents are brought together to provide insights not only into what is being done, and why, but what patterns of activities can be identified, and the related 'pressures', expectations and opportunities that QA agencies are subject to. The chapter comments on some of the changes since the 2002 survey, and also looks to the future.

9.2 Key findings

Across the EHEA new agencies continue to be established [Chapter 1: tables 1 and 2], whilst the functions, objectives and priorities for agencies are also changing [see: sections 3.2 and 3.3]. Yet the core business of providing information on the quality of higher education remains, with increasing levels of external (stakeholder) involvement. A high level summary of the more factual aspects of key findings is provided in the Executive Summary.

9.3 Cross cutting themes

9.3.1 QA AGENCIES PROVIDE A STABLE BUT INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT ROLE IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION.

The survey responses clearly indicate that whilst most agencies have a national 'remit' this is not always the case. In Spain for example there is an additional regional dimension, and in some countries (Austria and Denmark, for example) different parts of the HE sector are assured by different agencies. In Germany a 'market' in QA has been established with a number of 'competing' agencies under an accreditation council. In addition to the over-arching and integrating role of ENQA with regard to the QA of European higher education, one major consortium of agencies with a shared specific (methodological) interest has been formed.

The status of agencies remains formal (most are either recognised through formal legal procedures or they are recognised by public bodies) and many aspects of their work remain fundamentally the same as in 2002 [see: 3.3.1]. But there is also evidence of an increase in the scope and range of the work undertaken by agencies, although whether they employ those actually undertaking their evaluations or contract directly or indirectly, varies.

Whilst two-thirds of the agencies are primarily concerned with evaluations at programme level, about 40% are primarily or significantly involved in activity at an institutional level. Most agencies are not confined to one type of QA procedure. It is still the case that within the general portfolio of approaches to QA two general types of procedures, evaluations (assessing aspects of quality) and accreditation (making a yes/no judgement on the basis of defined standards and criteria), tend to predominate, with audit (looking at strengths and weaknesses of an institution's QA mechanisms) only taking a major role in a fewer number of agencies.

For many, the frame of reference for external quality procedures remains, as in 2002, set by the (national/regional) legal context [see: 4.4.1], but the influence and impact of the Bologna Process is becoming more marked [see: 9.3.3 and references therein].

Reporting findings is a key task for all agencies who responded to Quality Procedures Survey. Their reports are almost always published (in line with the ESG) and, at least for some agencies, in vast numbers. Reporting such volumes is demanding but students might reasonably ask for reliable information about the quality of the programmes they may be intending to take. Whether such a volume of QA will continue to provide a worth wile benefit to cost and thus provide sustainable may be demonstrated by any subsequent Quality Procedures Survey.

Higher education institutions are, in the substantial majority of procedures, formally required to address recommendations [2.4.2] and especially those set out in any published reports. Often this is a legal requirement but even so, the authority of agencies is in part dependent on their 'credibility'. This can be and is reinforced by agencies being subject to external quality assurance themselves on a regular basis (see ESG standard 3.3). It is interesting but not surprising to see that all of the agencies that responded had, were in the process of, or were planning to undergo an external evaluation.

The survey returns demonstrate that agencies are carrying out a wider range of activities with an increasingly 'public' profile, but are they resourced to undertake an expanding range of activities? Agencies generally seem to agree (if not always 'strongly') with the statement that they are adequately resourced, although there are just a few who 'disagree strongly', and in one case record severe under funding / understaffing.

The source(s) of an agency's funding raises some interesting points. Funding from government(s) is the main source for most agencies, followed by higher education institutions, with 'grants' providing a (significant) income for some [2.5.3]. Can these responses 'square' with the ESG requirement for agencies to be 'independent'? This complex but important aspect is considered in detail in Chapter 2 (section 2.7), and it is clear that there is no simple answer and, as the ENQA Quality Convergence study (2005) showed, 'although national quality assurance systems converge to some extent, the practicalities in national systems may differ without compromising shared principles.'

9.3.2 AGENCIES IN TRANSITION

As well as the formation of new agencies mentioned above the survey also revealed restructuring of agencies taking place. In France, for example, the Comité National d'Evaluation (CNE) has been integrated into the new Agence d'Evaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur (AERES) (which covers all institutions and research bodies as well), whilst in Denmark a new law in has changed the role of the long established Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) and created a new accreditation body. But it is not just major structural change that is occurring; three quarters of agencies responded that they have changed their QA approach recently or that they are about to do so in the near future, with most of these changes of a 'significant' nature. European higher education is in a period of dramatic flux, driven in part by the Bologna Process, but also by a range of other national and international pressures including ones that are political, pedagogical, demographical and employment-

related. 'Quality assurance in HE has undergone a highly dynamic evolution and this process is continuing...' [2.4.1] and this is reflected in changes in the division of QA responsibilities between agencies and institutions; subject evaluations are often the responsibility of the institutions, whilst programmes may be covered by institutions or agencies and quality assurance procedures of institutions are generally the responsibility of the agencies. But changing patterns in the overall work of agencies appear to be emerging with, in several cases, a shift away from programme evaluation either being instigated or discussed. There are exceptions to the rule however.

Agencies are not just revising procedures but are adding new activities to their portfolio of work [2.4.4]. Many respondents to the survey noted that they were changing their methods. Not only are these procedural but they are often accompanied by changes of a fundamental nature, with moves from those based largely on the use of input measures (entry qualifications, hours of work, staff qualifications, library and IT facilities, etc) to ones that are, at least in principle, based on 'learning outcomes'. Such changes are already well under way, and supported by a wider range of objective criteria (qualifications frameworks, 'benchmarks' (subject and Tuning), the ESG, and a continuing 'political rhetoric' about the importance of learning outcomes. But quality assurance focussing on learning outcomes will continue to provide QA agencies and those they assure with some challenges. If learning outcomes are really all that matter should quality assurance merely look at the validity and valid assessment of these? Of course not, but finding the right balance that will both provide quality procedures that are flexible enough to adapt to a range of increasingly different, innovative and complex learning environments, whilst still providing a (conservative basis for) public reassurance will be yet another (significant) challenge. Quality assurance should not stifle innovation and development yet it should be clear about the basic purposes that society expects of it.

As pointed out in section 3.3.1: the increasing "involvement of stakeholders (in agencies in terms of functions objectives and priorities) is an indicator of higher education's shift from a teaching to a learning focus, its relationship to society, industry and commerce, to employers and professional needs".

9.3.3 IMPACT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

For many agencies the frame of reference for their (external) quality procedures remains, as in 2002, set by the (national/regional) legal context [4.4.1], but the influence of Bologna is becoming more marked. Agencies are changing their QA procedures in significant ways, with features of the Bologna Process being amongst the drivers. Of these, alignment with the ESG was shown in the survey to be particularly important [2.4.4]. Qualifications frameworks are also becoming increasingly important reference points for QA procedures – with agencies often involved the development of their national qualifications frameworks and in time, no doubt, the self certification of these against the FQEHEA. Other specific criteria for agencies and their quality procedures were mentioned individually and there were a few who include the OECD/UNESCO guidelines on quality provision in cross border higher education. But perhaps the most significant change from the 2003 survey is that, whilst then the notion of specific standards and criteria was 'emerging as a common feature', a number of these have not only 'emerged' but are in widespread use. It is perhaps interesting to note that standards and criteria initiated within the HE sector and developed by widespread

consensus (the FQEHEA and the ESG) are referred to far more frequently than, for example, Tuning and various 'quality labels'.

One of the more paradoxical findings from the survey is that whilst responding agencies are, or are hoping to be, members of ENQA, and there is a general expectation within the ESG that agencies will carry out their quality procedures through a four stage model, there are a surprisingly high number of returns that indicate that procedures do not follow such a model. As pointed out in 3.3.2 there are several possible reasons for this, and various inferences as well, and most agencies do follow the four-stage model. With a likely increase in mobility of students and trans-national education in general this could be an interesting point to focus on in any following survey.

9.3.4 WORKING TOGETHER

'External QA agencies operate in a socially and technically complex domain where there can be tensions between generally accepted principles. With governments, higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies all on the same playing field there can be uncertainties about who is in charge of what' [2.5.1].

The survey clearly indicates a division of QA 'responsibilities' - subject and programme approval and evaluation by institutions, programme and institutional approval and evaluation by agencies, institutional approval generally by (or on the recommendation of) agencies. But the responses also indicate changing patterns emerging in this balance of work between institutions and agencies, with shifts away from external programme evaluation either having taken or taking place, or being discussed; although there are exceptions.

Site visits are where 'working together' really should 'come together', and Chapter 5 provides a great deal of specific information on this. It identifies how institutions' self evaluation groups are formed and work, who is represented on them, and what data sources support their reports. Details of the range of practices in the site visits themselves are also provided, including the duration, the elements included and the types of interviewees. The addition, on average, of only one extra day for an institutional evaluation over a programme evaluation might be a surprise to some, but the detailed scrutiny of *primary evidence* in the latter and a focus on *v* in the former may explain this, in part. In comparison to 2003 there is a reduction in the extent to which agency staff is directly involved in all of the site visit activities, but this is offset by increasing participation of students in the panels. The continued limited use of graduate surveys and labour market information is perhaps a surprise in light of the current (political) pressures and emphases on 'employability', but these may not have yet worked through fully into the detail of the internal institutional or external quality procedures (something for the next survey to look at and compare?).

The relationships between 'stakeholders' and QA agencies cover a variety of aspects, including funding, the selection of QA procedures and their criteria, and the making and dissemination of decisions / judgements. Funding is discussed briefly above [and more extensively in 2.5.3]. In terms of 'responsibility for agencies' operations', more than three quarters of the respondents stated that external stakeholders do not have any responsibilities at all. Amongst those agencies that did acknowledge stakeholder responsibilities these included membership, at various levels, of committees and panels and consultation(s) when establishing or changing QA procedures and criteria. It is

important to note that 'stakeholder involvement should not be mistaken for influence of external stakeholders on the agencies' operations.' [2.7]

Agencies draw on a wide range of experts when assembling the panels that will undertake their quality procedures, using independent national and international experts to assist in making peer judgements, with students being used increasingly (c.f. 2003) but agency staff playing a smaller role in the panels themselves [see 4.2.2]. There are slight differences in the ways in which agencies work with their experts; in terms of functions, it is usually the agencies that determine the choice of QA procedure, the preparation of any guidance materials, and the practicalities of any site visits. By contrast, experts in many cases take an increasingly important responsibility and 'load' when it comes to the preparation of any reports [4.3.2] although any formal decisions and report publication revert in most cases to the agencies.

The quality assurance of collaborative provision was not looked at in the 2003 survey so there is no baseline for the results presented in section 4.5. Trans-national HE is increasing rapidly and is predicted to become more important, particularly within the promoted European and globalised agendas around student and labour mobility. There are 'hints' in the survey data of an increasing awareness of the need for closer collaboration in trans-national and trans-regional QA to meet expectations, particularly of students and their employers, in shared standards and criteria that can underpin 'fairness' and 'comparability'.

Chapter 7 deals, more substantially, with follow-up procedures and meta-evaluations. There are a variety of (context dependent) approaches and actions but the general impression is that where matters are raised by external evaluations that do need to be addressed there are ways and means of ensuring that changes occur within institutions. One area the survey did not address in detail was the extent to which the information in the numerous reports published by agencies is, or could be, collated to provide more generic information on and assistance to improving practice, both of the quality assurance mechanisms within institutions generally (as opposed to the specific recommendations that are/have to be acted on), and also for external quality procedures more generally.

9.4 Future directions

Future developments are addressed specifically in Chapter 8. Agencies have been, currently are, and expect to be centres where much change is happening. These changes are not just minor revisions to quality procedures, although the survey shows that these are taking place on an almost continuous basis. There are much more substantial changes occurring as well. Some of these, and their implications, can provide an insight into general 'directions of travel' that agencies may choose, with more or less 'encouragement'.

Agencies, governments and stakeholders may have somewhat different views on quality and particularly on the most effective ways to assure and improve/enhance it. The tolerance for diversity in the approaches to quality assurance can be influenced by context and perceptions. These can be significant, for example, in the cases where the requests of students and employers and even tax payers have resulted in the (additional) accreditation of programmes [2.4.1].

The recent and increasing emphasis in many European countries on 'employability' and 'graduate skills' is perhaps under-reflected in the priorities recorded in many of the

quality procedures reported here (there is an inevitable time lag between policy and implementation), but if this trend continues it may be likely that greater emphasis on these topics will be seen in any future analyses of quality procedures.

With increasing mobility of students and employees and growth in trans-national higher education, it is likely than any future survey will also find greater emphasis on the quality assurance of collaborative provision. Whether this is through institutions expanding their provision beyond their own national/regional boundaries as 'sole traders', or through 'joint ventures' or 'franchising', students surely have a right to the same level of quality of provision and standards of awards wherever and however they study. The quality assurance of collaborative provision is currently a relatively minor interest [see: 4.5]; this may well not be the case in a few years time. It remains to be seen whether new approaches to quality assurance of joint/trans-national provision are more likely to be through joint QA or through some form of 'mutual recognition'. It is however interesting to note that one of the respondents to the Quality Procedures survey was not a single agency but a consortium of agencies from various different national and regional jurisdictions, seeking to work together in what is, in practice, difficult legal territory.

Chapter 3 includes data that shows an interesting development in terms of international activity: although direct work on international comparisons is not currently amongst agencies' top objectives (as in 2003) there are now far more agencies devoting staff time and effort to international work. There seems to be an underlying message that, whilst agencies certainly need to keep abreast of what is happening on an international basis in order, for example, to benchmark themselves to retain credibility, there may also be an element of planning for a broader scope of activity in future.

9.5 Final conclusions

The 2008 Quality Procedures survey has provided a wealth of data on what agencies have been doing, are doing and are planning to do. It is clear that there are not only an increasing number of agencies but that, as well as maintaining much of their more 'traditional' portfolio of work, many agencies are (being asked/expected) to change and broaden their remit and the scope and types of their activities. This is, perhaps, not surprising; with more and more students from a greater diversity of social backgrounds going into an increasingly diverse range of higher education provision it is right that there is an increasing demand for more detailed information about the quality of higher education.

Students are increasingly involved in the procedures themselves, and demanding new sorts of information; employers are faced with an ever-widening range of graduates and, if they are to recruit the best for their purposes, they will need to have a better understanding of just what particular graduates have learnt and can do. The emphasis on learning outcomes will increase.

But can quality procedures cope with the amount of work required to provide reliable information on these at a detailed level? Probably not if the emphasis on data collection is merely for accountability and reporting; but if quality assurance has quality improvement/enhancement as an agreed and truly integrated focus then it is more likely to be able to. It is both interesting and encouraging to note that the survey shows, in several places and in different ways, such a change in emphasis; from assurance to enhancement could have been another cross cutting theme. Agencies and

the institutions they are responsible for evaluating are at different stages in the journey of moving to explicit external quality assurance. Some have been doing it for decades, others only for months.

It is unrealistic to expect that the same model(s) of quality procedures are applicable to all; legal, social, pedagogical and other contexts are different and quality assurance must reflect these. Similarly, it is unrealistic to expect that all agencies and institutions will instantly have the same levels of understanding and expertise in quality procedures. It is clear that the Bologna Process is having a major impact on the way that agencies have developed since the 2003 survey; it will be interesting to see what further changes occur over the next few years, especially with the introduction of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education. Whilst this will, undoubtedly, have an impact at the outset, the extent to which it is sustained will, as with all such mechanisms, finally be reliant on evidence of its worth.

Second ENQA survey on Quality Procedures in European Higher Education

1. Introduction

The object of this web-based survey is to collect information from ENQA members, candidates, affiliates and associates for the purpose of updating the findings of the ENQA report *Quality Procedures in European Higher Education* (ENQA Occasional Paper n. 5, year 2003.) This project is funded by the European Commission through its **Socrates Programme**.

The survey contains about seventy questions and will probably take at least 90 minutes to complete. The survey allows one response per computer (identified by IP address.) You do not have to complete the survey in one sitting. You or any other person with access to your computer (the one you used to start the survey) may use the Web link provided to go back to previous pages in the survey and update existing responses until the survey is completed or the closing date. When using the Web link to re-enter the survey you might need to click the refresh button on your web browser to reveal the most recent data.

Please attempt to answer all of the questions. Many questions make provision for the entry of succinct comments. Typically such comments are limited to approximately 100 words. If you exceed the limit you will need to shorten your response to progress with the survey. A very small number of questions are marked with an asterisk, these need to be answered to progress with the survey. Certain other consistency checks are made by the software and if additional input is required before progressing with the survey an appropriate message will be displayed in red beside the relevant question. If you click next without making the required input the page will not advance;(sometimes you may need to scroll back to see the message).

The closing date for the survey is 31 January 2008.

The survey is being conducted an ENQA project group (PG) and steering group (SG). The members of the groups are:

- Nick Harris, (QAA) (SG)
- Achim Hopbach, (SG), ENQA Board member
- Peter Cullen, (HETAC), Chair (SG and PG)
- Fiona Crozier, (QAA)
- Josep Grifoll, (AQU) Catalonia
- Helka Kekäläinen, (FINHEEC)
- Tanel Sits HEQAC, (student representative)
- Kurt Sohm, (Austrian FHR), ENQA Board member
- Bozana Knezevic, Croatia (HEI representative)
- Emmi Helle (ENQA), Secretary (SG and PG)
- Nathalie Costes (ENQA), Alternate Secretary

The SurveyMonkey Tool is being used to collect the responses.

The responses will be analysed by the Project Group, and presented in the Second Report on Quality Procedures in European Higher Education, to be published by August 2008.

Your responses will not be used in any ENQA coordinated review of your agency or for any purpose other than that stated above.

If you have any questions about the survey please contact Nathalie Costes Nathalie.Costes@enqa.eu.

Note on multiple choice questions: The survey contains two types of questions that offer multiple options. The more common type (indicated by a square check-box) allows a respondent to select combinations of more than one options. The other type (indicated by a circular check-box) requires a respondent to select a single choice. In both cases the order of the choices is randomly assigned for each response except in a few cases where a particular order is used to enhance clarity.

Note on length of responses: Where a question includes a space for comments you may enter up to a maximum of 600 characters including spaces (approximately 100 words). Responses should be in the English language.

Second ENQA survey on Quality Procedures in European Higher Education

1. Name of your Agency.

*** 2. What is your Agency's relation to ENQA**

- ◯ Associate
- ◯ Candidate member
- ◯ Full member
- ◯ Affiliate
- ◯ Other (please specify)

3. Name of respondent and contact information

Name:	
E-mail	
Address 1:	
Address 2:	
City/Town:	
State/Province:	
ZIP/Postal Code:	
Country:	

*** 4. Several of the questions will ask you to express a view concerning some issue in your Agency's primary domain. For many this will be the country in which the agency is established but it could be more or less extensive than this. 'Primary domain' means the principal territories within which your agency was established to operate as an external quality assurance agency. Which of the following best describes your Agency's primary domain?**

- ◯ International
- ◯ A part of the territory of a sovereign state
- ◯ A specific group of sovereign states
- ◯ A country (meaning the whole territory of a sovereign state)

Please specify

5. Remit or scope of your Agency (Please indicate all that apply here. Also note that throughout the survey a set (row, column or matrix) of square tick-boxes indicates that you can tick as many boxes as you wish. Circular tick-buttons, on the other hand, require you to make an exclusive choice.)

☐ Universities

☐ Higher Education Institutions such as Universities of Applied Science; University Colleges; etc..

☐ A specific discipline or field of learning

☐ Other (please specify)

6. Grant/refusal of permission to ENQA to publish your responses:

◯ I give permission for my Agency to be identified with the responses I give in the final report.

◯ I do not give permission for my Agency to be identified with the responses I give in the final report (your responses will be reported anonymously).

2. Explanatory note

An external quality procedure[1] **could be one of the following:**

- An **evaluation of a subject**[2], which focuses on the quality of one specific subject, typically in all the programmes in which this subject is taught.
- An **evaluation of a programme**, which focuses on the activities within a study programme, which in this context is defined as studies leading to a formal degree.
- An **evaluation of an institution**, which examines the quality of all activities within an institution, i.e. organisation, financial matters, management, facilities, teaching and research.
- An **evaluation of a theme** which examines the quality or practice of a specific theme within education e.g. ICT or student counselling.
- An **audit**, which is an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality mechanisms established by an institution itself to continuously monitor and improve the activities and services of either a subject, a programme, the whole institution or a theme.
- An **accreditation process**, which builds on the same methodological elements as the other types of evaluation, but differs from the other procedures in that judgement is provided according to predefined standards to decide whether a given subject, programme, institution or theme meets the necessary level.
- **Benchmarking**, which is a comparison of results between subjects, programmes, institutions or themes leading to an exchange of experiences of effective practice.
- where **Criteria** are seen as checkpoints and benchmarks for assessing the quality of the input and the process.
- where **Standards** are seen as the expected outcomes of the educational training. For example standards defined by professional organisation or legislation. It concerns the competencies that are expected from the graduates.

[1] In this survey the term 'external quality procedure' also covers the terms 'assessment', 'review', audit, etc.

[2] A subject is for example the subject 'chemistry' within the study programme of medicine.

3. Background information about the higher education system in your primary do...

7. Who is responsible for the approval of new subjects, programmes and institutions?

	Subjects	Programmes	Institutions
The institutions (self-regulation)	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐
Central government	☐	☐	☐
Regional government	☐	☐	☐
The relevant quality assurance agency	☐	☐	☐

Please specify (other)

8. Please enter the number of higher education institutions in your Agency's primary domain in each of the following categories:

Private universities

Public universities

Private HEIs such as university colleges, applied universities etc.

Public HEIs such as university colleges, applied universities etc.

9. Please paste a webpage link to an English language fact sheet (if available) describing the higher education system in your Agency's primary domain and providing a diagram (if available) of the qualification and institutional structures. Alternatively please send this by e-mail to: Nathalie.Costes@enqa.eu. This incidental information will not be analysed as part of the survey.

10. Are institutions in your Agency's primary domain subject to compulsory external quality procedures by your Agency and/or others?

◯ No none are subject.

◯ Yes all are subject.

Comment

4. About your Agency

11. Indicate the extent to which your Agency is recognised as having formal responsibility for external quality assurance.

- ◯ Not yet formally recognised as such
- ◯ Not fully recognised in the whole of its primary domain
- ◯ Recognised by the competent authorities established for that purpose (or their agents) in the whole of its primary domain
- ◯ Recognised explicitly in legislation in the whole of its primary domain

Please explain

12. Does your Agency have a legal basis?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Please explain

13. Is your Agency the only competent/responsible body for the external quality assurance of higher education institutions based in its primary domain?

- ◯ No
- ◯ Yes

Comment

14. Does your Agency undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis?

- ◯ No
- ◯ Yes

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15. How frequently are the following types of external quality procedures carried out by your Agency? (If your Agency does not carry out a particular procedure listed select never in the first column of the relevant row.)

	Frequency	Activity cycle in years	Consequences: change in	Is there a formal requirement for the HEI to take action to address recommendations
Evaluation of subjects				
Evaluation of programmes				
Evaluation of institutions				
Evaluation of themes				
Audit at subject level				
Audit at programme level				
Audit at institutional level				
Audit at thematic level				
Accreditation of subjects				
Accreditation of programmes				
Accreditation of institutions				
Accreditation of themes				
Benchmarking of subjects				
Benchmarking of programmes				
Benchmarking of institutions				
Benchmarking of themes				
Other types of combined approaches (please specify)				

Please specify if applicable

Second ENQA survey on Quality Procedures in European Higher Education

16. Has your Agency significantly changed its approach to evaluation in the past five years or is it planning to change its approach?

◯ No

◯ Yes: please specify how your Agency changed (or will change) its approaches and why.

17. Indicate your agreement or otherwise with the following assertions.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree more or less	Agree	Strongly agree
In my opinion my Agency has adequate and proportional human resources to enable it to organise and run its external quality procedures in an effective and efficient manner	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
In my opinion my Agency has adequate and proportional financial resources to enable it to organise and run its external quality procedures in an effective and efficient manner	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
In my opinion my Agency has adequate and proportional human resources for the continual evaluation and development of its processes and procedures	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
In my opinion my Agency has adequate and proportional financial resources for the continual evaluation and development of its processes and procedures	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Comment

18. How many full-time equivalent staff members are (directly) employed by (or seconded to) your Agency?

Number of management staff	
Number of administrative staff	
Number of external quality procedures officers	
Number of research/development officers	
Number of trainees/interns	
Other (please specify in answer to next question)	
Number of staff covering functions that are unrelated to external quality procedures	

19. Please specify the 'other' category selected in the last question.

20. Indicate the approximate average value of the percentage of funding received by your Agency from the following sources. (Please check that the sum of your entries is 100.)

Government	
HEIs (fixed subscriptions only)	
Fees (for specific activities)	
Grants (other than government)	
Other (please specify in answer to next question)	

21. Please specify the 'other' category selected in the last question.

22. What kind of general information about itself does your Agency publish for the benefit of stakeholders?

- [ ] Statement of general policy and management plan
- [ ] Statement of the goals and objectives of the Agency
- [ ] Statement explaining the division of responsibility for quality procedures between the Agency and higher education institutions
- [ ] Statement setting out the systematic approach to external quality assurance
- [ ] Other (please specify)

23. In your opinion, what influence, if any, do external stakeholders have on the conclusions and recommendations made in your Agency's reports?

- [ ] External stakeholders may influence neither the conclusions nor the recommendations in reports
- [ ] External stakeholders may sometimes influence the conclusions in reports
- [ ] External stakeholders may sometimes influence the recommendations in reports

Comment

24. In your opinion, what share, if any, do external stakeholders have in responsibility for your Agency's operations?

- ◯ No share, my Agency has autonomous responsiblity
- ◯ Other (please specify)

5. Typical methodological approach to external quality assurance

In this part you (the respondent) should focus on your Agency's general approach to external quality assurance and on the framework within which this is executed.

25. Which of the following stakeholders have a formal role in the specification of processes and criteria for the external quality assurance of higher education institutions in your primary domain?

- [ ] Student representatives
- [ ] International association of HEIs (such as EUA)
- [ ] Higher education institutions
- [ ] Government (central/regional)
- [ ] Industry and labour market representatives (union, employers, etc.)
- [ ] Professional organisations
- [ ] National association of HEIs (such as rectors' conference)
- [ ] Quality assurance agencies
- [ ] Other (please specify)

26. Which body makes the final decision in the specification of processes and criteria for the external quality assurance of higher education institutions in your primary domain?

- [ ] The relevant quality assurance agency
- [ ] Government (central/regional)
- [ ] Other (please specify)

27. Does your Agency have a board or council (i.e. a formally established governing committee)?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Other (please specify)

If you answered 'No' to the previous question please skip forward to Q(5) on this page.

28. Which of the following stakeholder groups is represented on the Board / Council of your Agency?

- [ ] International association of HEIs (such as EUA)
- [ ] Professional organisations
- [ ] Higher education institutions
- [ ] Government (central/regional)
- [ ] National quality assurance community
- [ ] International quality assurance community
- [ ] Industry and labour market representatives (union, employers, etc.)
- [ ] National association of HEIs (such as rectors' conference)
- [ ] Students
- [ ] Other (please specify)

29. Who formally appoints the members of the external expert panels used by your Agency?

- [ ] The institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure
- [ ] Government (central/regional)
- [ ] Your Agency
- [ ] Other (please specify)

30. Who may suggest/nominate potential members of the external expert panels used by your Agency?

- [ ] International association of HEIs (such as EUA)
- [ ] National association of HEIs (such as rectors' conference)
- [ ] Higher education institutions
- [ ] The institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure involving the panel
- [ ] Students
- [ ] Professional organisations
- [ ] Industry and labour market representatives (union, employers, etc.)
- [ ] Your Agency
- [ ] Government (central/regional)
- [ ] Other (please specify)

31. Who makes the final decision on the outcome of your Agency's external quality procedures?

- [ ] Your Agency
- [ ] The external expert panel
- [ ] The institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure
- [ ] Government (central/regional)
- [ ] Other (please specify)

32. Does your Agency always publish relevant processes, criteria and procedures prior to execution of external quality procedures?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

33. Which of the following processes does your Agency use/require within its external quality procedures?

- ☐ A self-assessment procedure by the institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure
- ☐ An external assessment by a group of experts irrespective of whether or not there is a site visit
- ☐ A published report
- ☐ A follow-up procedure undertaken by the institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure in the light of any recommendations contained in the report
- ☐ Other (please specify)

34. Has your Agency established procedures for its own accountability?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Comment

35. In your opinion which of the following accountability procedures are in place for your Agency and how effectively is each functioning?

	Not established	Partly established	Established and moderately effective	Established and effective	Established and very effective
An enforced no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of your Agency's external experts is established and enforced	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in your Agency's quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
An appeals system	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism and an internal reflection mechanism	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Mechanisms for collection and analysis of, and reflection on, feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for the purpose of informing and supporting your Agency's improvement and development	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Provision for periodic independent evaluation and reporting of your Agency's conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA.	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
A published policy for the assurance of your Agency's own quality, made available on its website	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Processes and results which reflect your Agency's mission and goals of quality assurance	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Mandatory cyclical external review of your Agency's activities at least once every five years	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

36. Indicate the relative importance to your Agency's mission of the following where they are functions of your Agency.

	Unimportant	Of little importance	Moderately important	Important	Very important	Not a function of my Agency
Recognition and licensing of higher education institutions	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Deciding on the funding of higher education	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
External quality assurance of programmes	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Quality enhancement/improvement	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Collecting/disseminating information on quality of HE...	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Recognition of national diplomas	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Development and maintenance of discipline standards	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Quality assurance	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Development and maintenance of the qualification framework	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
External quality assurance of institutions	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

37. Indicate the relative importance to your Agency's mission of the following where they are objectives of the main type of external quality procedures undertaken by your Agency.

	Unimportant	Of little importance	Moderately important	Important	Very important	Not an objective
Student (or prospective student) protection	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Quality improvement/enhancement	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Ranking	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Accreditation	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Estimation of graduate learning outcomes	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Accountability	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Transparency	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Make international comparisons with similar institutions/programmes	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Make national comparisons with similar institutions/programmes	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

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38. Indicate, using the drop-down menus, the importance of the following where they are assessed by your Agency's external quality procedures at programme level and at institutional level. (Research programmes leading to PhD etc. if provided are also relevant here.)

	Programme level	Institutional level
Curriculum/syllabus		
Employability of graduates		
Research strategy		
Collaboration with other higher education institutions		
Study structure		
Cooperation with other subjects, programmes		
Academic and personal support for students		
Learning environments		
Appropriateness of the learning outcomes attained by graduates		
Supervision of research students		
Teaching and learning methods		
Research environment		
Practical training periods (including placements in industry)		
Management, organisation		
Research collaboration and links		
Feedback from students		
Professional and pedagogical qualifications of staff		
Mission/goals		
Assessment of students including feedback to students		
Internationalisation		
Connection between teaching and research		
Student retention and completion rates		
Facilities and resources		
Research output of staff and research students		
Internal quality assurance procedures		

Other (please specify)

6. Division of responsibilities and methodological framework for procedures in...

39. Who are the members of the external expert panel?

- [ ] Staff members of the quality assurance agency
- [ ] Professional organisations
- [ ] National experts representing institutions
- [ ] Students
- [ ] National experts representing area of focus
- [ ] Graduates
- [ ] Professional practitioners
- [ ] Employers
- [ ] International experts
- [ ] Other (please specify)

40. Does your Agency provide training/briefing for the external expert panel?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

If you answered 'No' to the previous question please skip forward to Q(6) on this page.

41. Typical duration of any briefing/training:

What is the duration (expressed in hours) of the training/briefing provided to experts?

42. Please outline the content of any briefing/training:

43. Characteristics and circumstances of briefing/training provided to panel members.

- [ ] Training/briefing is compulsory for panel chairs
- [ ] Training is required before a person may be nominated to a panel
- [ ] Training/briefing is compulsory for all panel members
- [ ] Training/briefing provided is matched to the experience of each panel member
- [ ] Training outcomes are assessed by my Agency
- [ ] Training is provided using distance learning
- [ ] Other (please specify)

44. Who performs the following functions in the external quality procedures? (If the functions are performed in cooperation between the external expert panel and the quality assurance agency, please mark both.)

	The external expert panel	The quality assurance agency
Choice of basic methodology applied	☐	☐
Preparation of the guidelines for the self-evaluation	☐	☐
Preparation of the external quality procedure concept	☐	☐
Contact with the institution	☐	☐
Planning of the site visit	☐	☐
Preparation of the guidelines for the site-visit	☐	☐
Writing of the report	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐

Other (please specify)

45. Who is responsible for the different parts of the external quality procedure? (If both the external expert panel and the quality assurance agency are responsible, please mark both.)

	The external expert panel	The quality assurance agency
The description and analysis	☐	☐
The conclusions	☐	☐
The recommendations	☐	☐
The formal decision (evaluation outcome)	☐	☐
The report prepared for publication	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐

Other (please specify)

46. What defines the reference frame for the external quality procedure?

- ☐ Subject benchmarks
- ☐ Standards defined by professional organisations
- ☐ Guidelines of good practice
- ☐ National Framework of/for Qualifications
- ☐ A Framework for Qualifications of the EHEA
- ☐ The stated goals of the institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure
- ☐ Legal regulation
- ☐ Other (please specify)

47. What specific criteria and standards are used for your Agency's external quality procedures?

- [ ] The Agency's own published criteria and standards
- [ ] European Standards and Guidelines
- [ ] OECD/UNESCO Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education
- [ ] National criteria and standards
- [ ] Others (please specify all and provide url links)

48. Does your Agency have quality procedures for jointly/collaboratively provided programmes that are delivered by a group of institutions within one country?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Comments

49. Does your Agency have quality procedures for jointly/collaboratively provided programmes that are delivered across different 'jurisdictions'?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Comments

7. Self-evaluation by the institution / programme

50. Who, typically, is included in the institution's self-evaluation group?

- [ ] Self-evaluation group is not used
- [ ] Teaching staff
- [ ] Graduates
- [ ] Management
- [ ] Administrative staff
- [ ] Students
- [ ] Other (please specify)

51. What sort of statistical data is used in the self-evaluation?

- [ ] Financial key figures
- [ ] Data on students (e.g. in-take, drop-out rate, passing rate)
- [ ] Labour market statistics
- [ ] Data on administrative staff
- [ ] Statistical data is not used
- [ ] Data on teaching staff
- [ ] Other (please specify)

8. Site-visit

52. Do any of your Agency's procedures involve a site visit?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Other (please specify)

If you answered 'No' to this question please skip forward to the next page.

53. Who conducts the site visit?

- [ ] The Agency's staff alone
- [ ] The expert panel with a member of the Agency's staff in attendance
- [ ] The external expert panel alone
- [ ] Other (please specify)

54. What is the average duration of the site visit in days

per programme-related external quality procedure?

per thematic external quality procedure?

per subject-related external quality procedure?

per institutional-level external quality procedure?

55. Which elements are included in the site visit?

- [ ] Interviews with stakeholders from outside the institution
- [ ] Classroom observations
- [ ] Final meeting with the management to the present main findings and conclusions
- [ ] Perusal of students' work (dissertations etc.)
- [ ] Tour of the facilities
- [ ] Interviews with members of the institution
- [ ] Examination of documentary evidence
- [ ] Other (please specify)

56. Who is interviewed at the site visit?

- [ ] Graduates
- [ ] Teaching staff
- [ ] Research staff
- [ ] Students
- [ ] Interviews are not used
- [ ] Management staff
- [ ] Administrative staff
- [ ] Other (please specify)

9. Reporting the outcome of your Agency's external quality procedures

57. Is there a publicly available report?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Other (please specify)

58. What is the content of the published report?

- [ ] Empirical evidence
- [ ] Analysis
- [ ] Conclusions
- [ ] Recommendations
- [ ] Conditions
- [ ] The report is not published
- [ ] Others (please specify)

59. Information about the number of reports published by your Agency over the past three calendar years (i.e. January 2005-December 2007):

How many institutional evaluation reports has your Agency published?

How many thematic evaluation reports has your Agency published?

How many subject evaluation reports has your Agency published?

How many programme evaluation reports has your Agency published?

60. Who is consulted before the report is published?

- [ ] The institution(s) that is(are) the subject of the external quality procedure
- [ ] Central government
- [ ] Regional government
- [ ] Industry and labour market
- [ ] Professional organisations
- [ ] National associations of HEIs (e.g. Rectors' Conference ...)
- [ ] Other (please specify)

61. Who publishes the report?

- [ ] The quality assurance agency
- [ ] Central government
- [ ] Regional government
- [ ] The evaluated institution
- [ ] Others (please specify)

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10. Follow-up

62. Who is formally responsible for taking action/the following up on recommendations/conclusions of the report?

- [ ] The quality assurance agency
- [ ] There is no formal follow-up/action taken
- [ ] The institution that is the subject of the external quality procedure
- [ ] Central government
- [ ] Regional government
- [ ] Others (please specify)

63. What kind of actions are taken for the purpose of following up on recommendations/conclusions of the report?

- [ ] Desk-based study by quality assurance agency
- [ ] Follow-up site visit
- [ ] Request for action plan
- [ ] Repeat of external quality procedure
- [ ] Other (please specify)

64. Is a systematic meta evaluation of the conducted external quality procedures carried out in your Agency's primary domain?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Comment

If you answered 'No' to this question please skip to the next page.

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65. Who carries out the systematic meta-evaluation of the conducted external quality procedures in your Agency's domain (process and report)?

- [ ] The quality assurance agency
- [ ] Central government
- [ ] Regional government
- [ ] An external agency
- [ ] There is no systematic meta-evaluation of the conducted evaluations
- [ ] Others (please specify)

11. Future Developments

66. Please describe the expected developments in the QA sector in your Agency's primary domain in the next two years (i.e. by January 2010).

- [ ] Establishment of National Qualifications Framework
- [ ] Commencement of new higher education legislation
- [ ] Introduction of different methodologies for external quality procedures
- [ ] Revision of external quality procedures
- [ ] Reorganisation or merging of quality assurance agencies
- [ ] Other (please specify)

67. Please indicate which of the following assertions apply:

- [ ] My Agency has been externally reviewed.
- [ ] My Agency is not planning to subject itself to external review in the future
- [ ] My Agency plans to subject itself to external reviews in the future
- [ ] My Agency is currently preparing for being externally reviewed
- [ ] Other (please specify)

If your Agency is not planning to subject itself to external review in the future please skip the next question.

68. Please indicate how the review of your Agency has been/is/will be coordinated.

	Past evaluations	Current evaluation	Future evaluations
Nationally coordinated	◯	◯	◯
Coordinated by ENQA	◯	◯	◯

Other (please specify)

69. How do you regard the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) for Higher Education?

- ☐ Promoter of confidence between agencies
- ☐ Opportunity
- ☐ Useful tool to increase recognition
- ☐ Threat
- ☐ Other (please specify)

70. Is your Agency planning to apply for the Register?

- ◯ No
- ◯ Yes
- ◯ Other (please specify)

71. If your Agency plans to apply to be included on the Register what are the benefits that you expect to follow?

- ☐ Accountability
- ☐ Credibility
- ☐ National recognition as a quality assurance agency
- ☐ International recognition as a quality assurance agency
- ☐ National recognition as an accreditation agency
- ☐ International recognition as an accreditation agency
- ☐ Other (please specify)

12. Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.
Please click done to complete.
You will then be redirected to the ENQA website.

The present publication is the result of an ENQA survey on quality procedures of quality assurance agencies across Europe and beyond. This report updates the findings of the first ENQA survey on Quality Procedures in European Higher Education, undertaken by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) in 2002, and considers the main developments that have taken place since then.

ENQA

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ISBN 978-952-5539-31-8 (Paperbound)
ISBN 978-952-5539-32-5 (PDF)
ISSN 1458-1051