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Taking stock and looking forward

Paper proposal

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Proposal

Title: Using ESG in IQA systems enhancement– EQAS project survey’s results on Part 1 ESG and IQAs

Abstract (150 words max):

According to the “*The European Higher Education Area in 2015. Bologna Process Implementation Report*” data on progress in IQA were “necessarily limited”. EQAS (Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems) Erasmus Plus project responds to this information gap. In 2014 project partners from Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia decided to map the stage of IQA development in their countries and their readiness to apply revised ESG 2015. Since EQAS is forward looking project the survey was based on the BFUG-endorsed draft of the revised ESG, which, to a large extent, overlaps with the 2005 version. As the draft was only approved in May 2015, HEIs were not expected to have the new ESG elements in place, though some might have integrated such or similar elements into their IQA systems regardless of the ESG. The EQAF presentation will introduce the general idea of EQAS project and main conclusions from the cross-country reports.

The paper is based on: practice



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Text of paper (3000 words max):

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose of the paper

The purpose of the paper is to introduce main conclusions from the cross-country reports which was based on the survey's findings on Part 1 ESG and internal quality assurance systems (IQAs). The survey was conducted within EIQAS project in four countries Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia that have different history and maturity of IQA development. Whereas the current stage of IQA evolution could be considered as the function of overall progress of QA in four countries, project partners decided to cooperate together towards the enhancement of IQAs through the capacity building of HEIs and QA agencies. Besides paper responds to the goals of EQAF "taking the stock of QA status" revealing the extent to which ESG 2005 were incorporated by HEIs and their readiness to follow the revised ESG 2015. To some degree it also fills in the information gap in "The European Higher Education Area in 2015. Bologna Process Implementation Report" where data on progress in IQA were "necessarily limited".

1.2. EIQAS Project

The survey on Part 1 of the ESG and IQAs was a key initial activity in the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project 'Enhancing internal quality assurance systems' (EIQAS), approved for funding in autumn 2014. EIQAS is a joint initiative of national QA agencies and Rectors' Conferences and / or HEIs. It has two objectives. Firstly, it aims to support HEIs in the further development of their internal quality assurance (IQA) systems by enhancing their awareness and understanding of Part 1 of the ESG. Secondly, it aims to support the national agencies in the further development of their methodologies for the external assessment of IQA systems at HEIs, thus addressing one of the standards in Part 2 of the ESG. The EIQAS is the first project specifically designed to support the development of IQA and bringing together both national QA agencies and HEIs. It will produce four main intellectual outputs: a reference framework for comparative analysis of the participating Agencies' methodologies for the assessment of IQA as part of EQA and a comparative report on their methodologies, a Guide to IQA including more detailed practical guidelines on Part 1 of the ESG and examples of good practice, and a Student Guide to Part 1 of the ESG. The project is directly targeted at all HEIs, the QA Agencies and their external experts, including students, in the participating countries. Indirectly, the project will address QA agencies and HEIs in other countries of the European Higher Education Area through dissemination activities. The two main outputs of the project will be a Guide to IQA based on Part 1 of the ESG and a reference framework for comparative analysis of the participating agencies' methodologies for the external assessment of IQA. More details about EIQASat: <http://www.eiqas.com>.

1.3. EIQAS Survey

Pursuing the first objective of EIQAS, the survey aimed to collect data on overall progress that HEIs had made in the implementation of their IQA systems, the extent to which (elements of) Part 1 ESG are integrated into their IQA systems, and the problems HEIs had faced and / or might face when integrating the ESG into their IQA systems. The survey findings fed into an EIQAS Training Seminar on IQA and the ESG for HEIs that was held in Warsaw in June 2015. Together with suggestions and conclusions from the seminar, they will also be used to develop the above-mentioned Guide to IQA which will be available to all HEIs concerned.

Since EIQAS is forward-looking project the survey was based on the BFUG-endorsed draft of the revised ESG, which, to a large extent, overlaps with the 2005 version. As ESG were approved in May 2015, HEIs were not expected to have the new ESG elements in place, though some might have integrated such or similar elements into their IQA systems regardless of the ESG.



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The questionnaire was designed to provide mainly quantitative data as a basis for an in-depth and qualitative analysis during the EIQAS Training Seminar on IQA and the ESG. It comprised 40 questions. General questions about IQA systems covered, in particular, the period when a HEI started implementing its system and the main motivation behind the decision to do so; the scope of the system; progress in its implementation across the institution and problems encountered; beneficial changes resulting from its operation; general links with the ESG, and activities undertaken to raise internal awareness of the ESG. These were followed by detailed questions about procedures, processes and / or other arrangements covered under each of Part 1 ESG. HEIs were also requested to identify the ESG which had been or could be most difficult to implement, and those where they would need more clarification and guidelines.

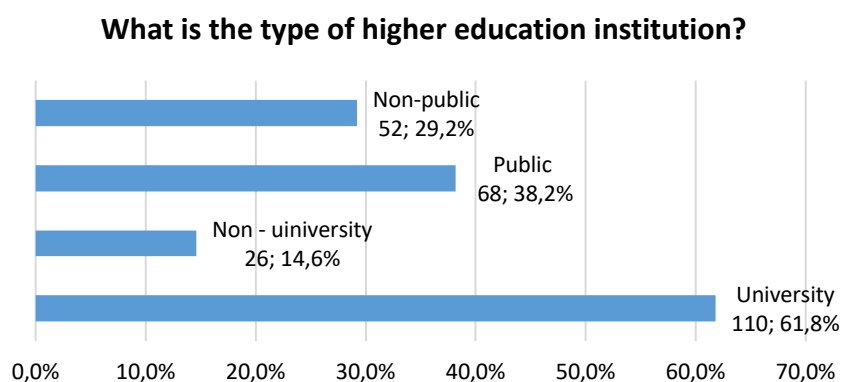
The survey was conducted online between 3 February and 3 March 2015. In total 178 HEIs responded to the survey questionnaire. Majority of respondents come from Poland (116) then Portugal (42), Slovenia (11) and Bulgaria (9) (see Table 1).

Table 1 No of Invited HEIs v. No of Responding HEIs

Country	Total number of HEIs	Invited HEIs to fill in the survey questionnaire	Percentage of invited HEIs in total number of HEIs	Number of responding HEIs	Percentage of responding HEIs in total number of HEIs
Bulgaria	52	11	21%	11	100%
Poland	431	431	27%	116	27%
Portugal	108	108	39%	42	39%
Slovenia	56	9	16%	9	100%

Majority of respondents came from university type HEIs (61,8%) and from public sector (38,2%) while only 14,6% of respondents were from non-university HEIs and 29,2% from non-public sector (Fig.2).

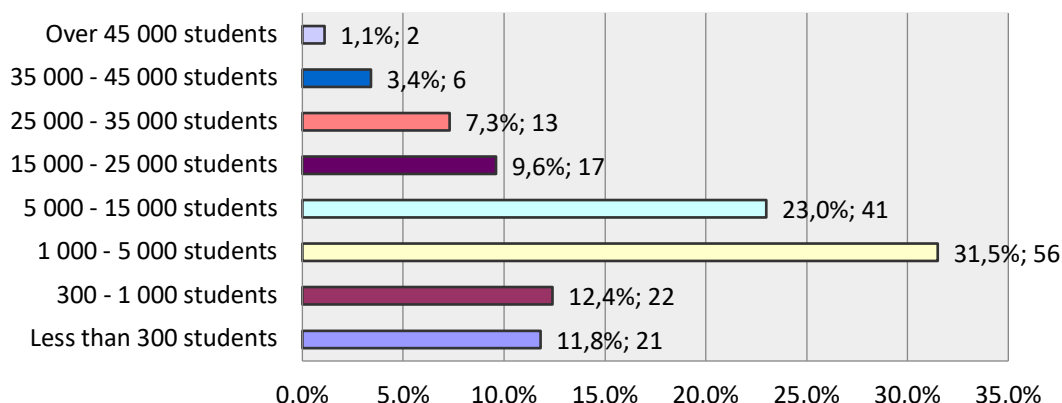
Figure 2



HEIs with the number of students ranging from 1000 to 5000 and from 5000 to 25 000 constituted the majority of respondents (31,5%). Details on the size of the HEIs participating in the survey are shown below:

Figure 3

What is the size of your higher education institution?



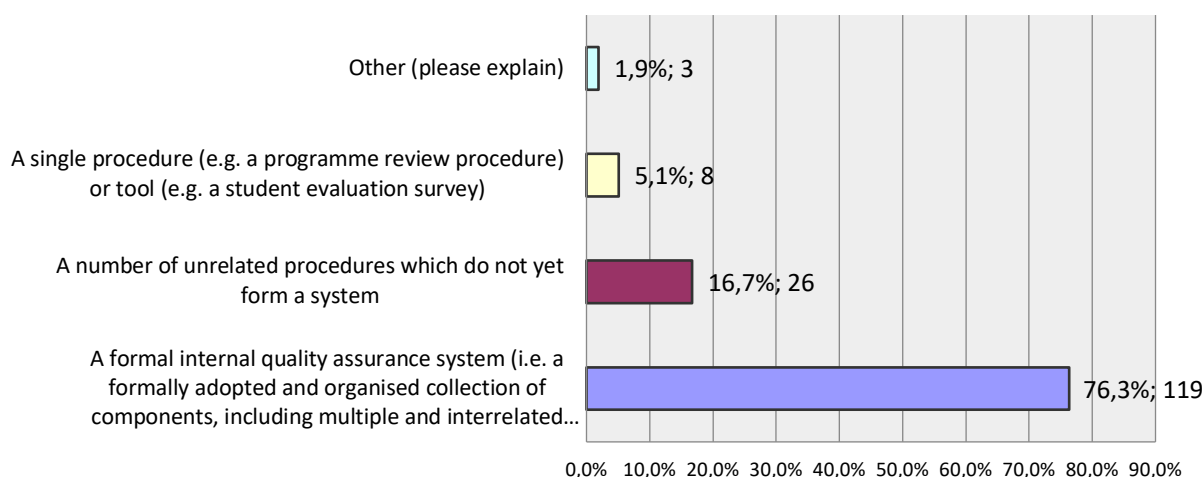
2. EQAS survey findings and conclusions from cross-country report

2.1. General questions findings

When we asked about the stage of implementation of IQAs the majority of responding HEIs (76,3%) confirmed that their IQA systems have reached the formal implementation. The remaining 16,7% declared that they have a number of unrelated procedures which do not yet form a system and 5,1% have only a single procedure or tool. The “other” answers showed that implementation of IQAs or their procedures is still in progress. 22 out of 178 respondents skipped the question.

Figure 4

What stage has your institution reached in the implementation of its internal quality assurance system? Our institution has in place:



In most of the cases (55,9%) IQAs were established between 2006 and 2011 and were mainly prompted by national requirements (46.6%) (e.g. in 2007 requirements came into force in Poland, in 2006 SQA was founded, or in 2009 A3ES was established). It is worth to be mentioned that in



Bulgaria, in contrast to the other partner countries, 100% of responding HEIs declared that they established IQAs on their own decision and between 2006-2011 all had IQAs in place. On basis of survey results we can also observe further intensive development of formal IQA systems between 2012 and 2014 (24,6%) which could be caused by e.g further legislative changes at the same time in Poland and at the same time relevant requirements for IQA.

The breakdown of responses is presented below (still 60 out of 178 respondents skipped the questions):

Figure 5

When did your institution start establishing a formal internal quality assurance system?

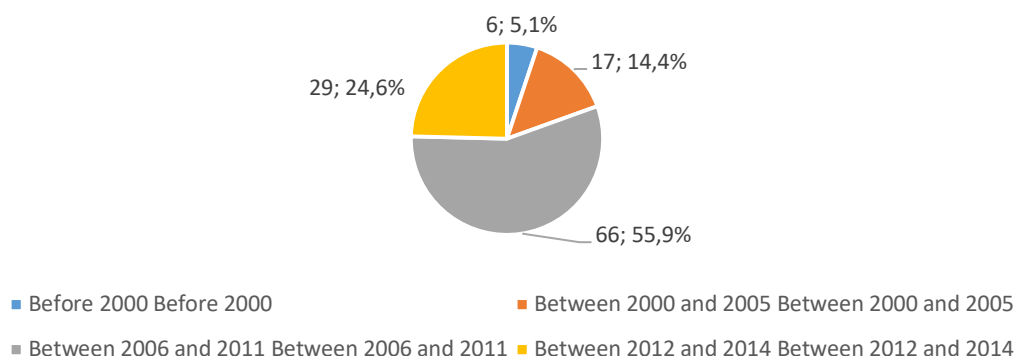
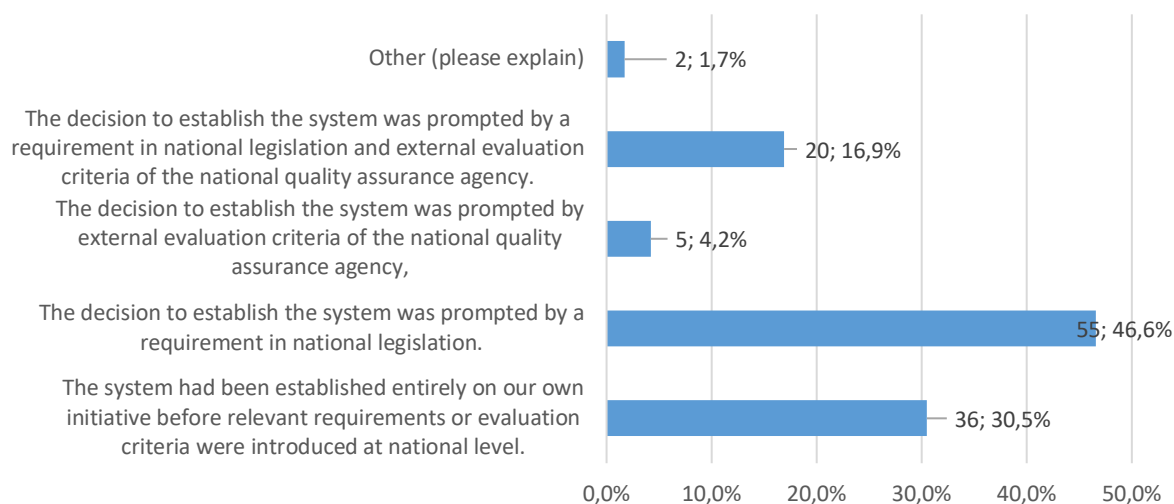


Figure 6

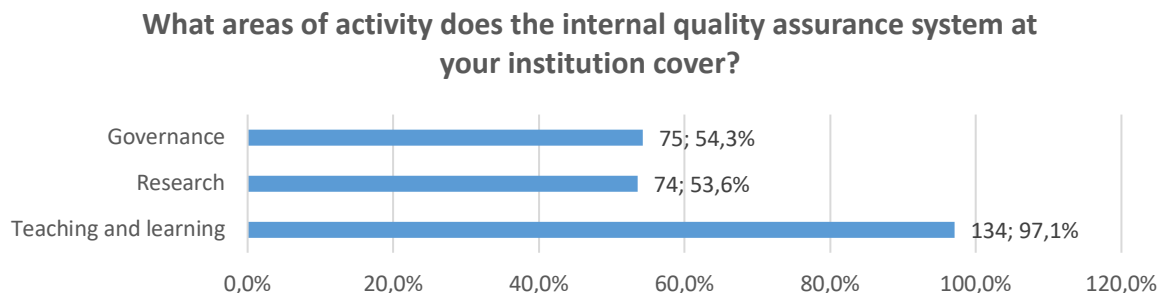
What prompted your institution to establish a formal internal quality assurance system?



In 97.1% of cases the IQA systems cover teaching and learning activity while research and governance is covered only in 53.6% and 54.3 % of responses. A great number of HEIs (29%) also decided to skip the question. Although there were only 138 answered questions and 40 skipped questions about the covered areas, the results confirm what the common sense is. Research and governance are not usually

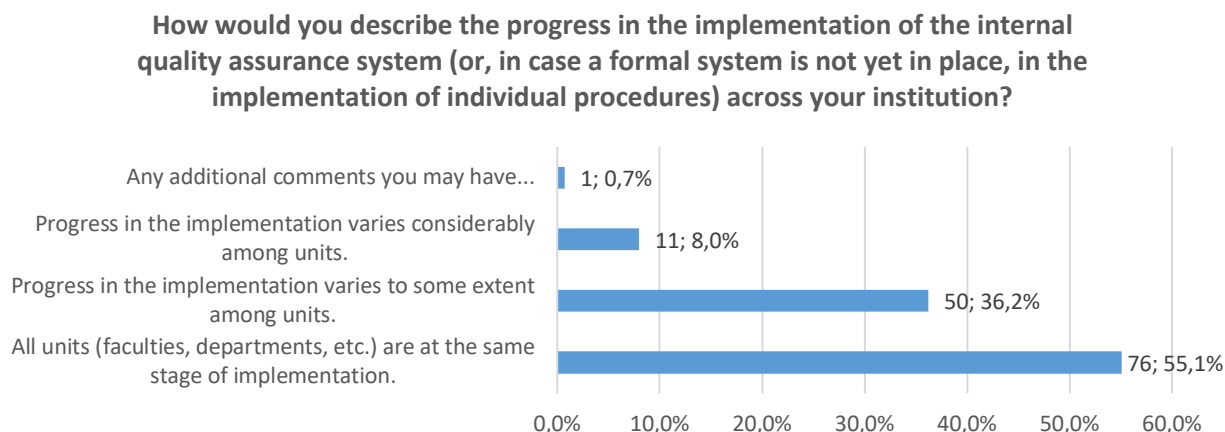
included in the IQA systems. There is clearly much room for improvement in these area in most of the HEIs even in those that have their IQA systems more consolidate.

Figure 7



More than half of responding HEIs confirmed that internal quality assurance system covers all units (faculties, departments, etc.) while in 36,2% cases the progress of implementation varies to some extent or in 8% considerably. 22% of responding HEIs decided to skip the question. The detailed level of implementation of the IQA system in individual units of the HEIs is shown below:

Figure 8

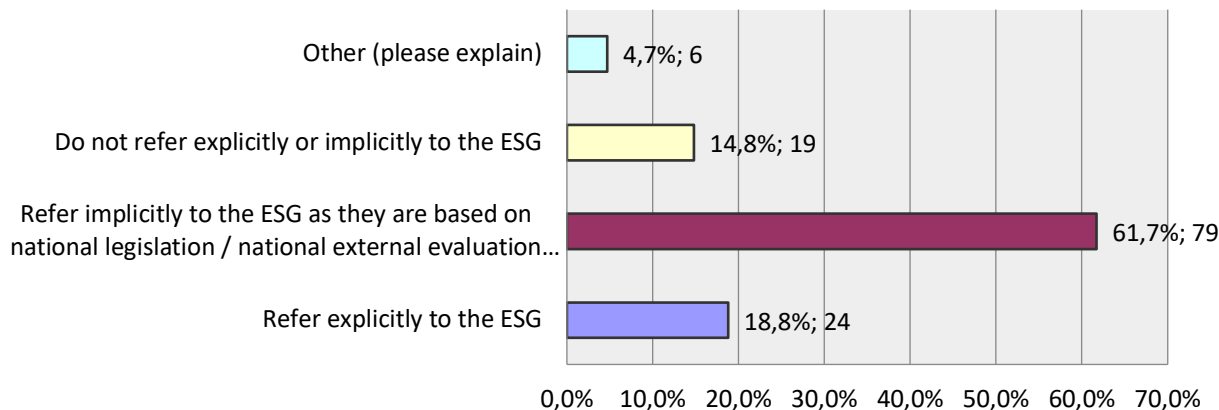


Respondents from all countries identified slightly different main groups of problems even though there were some commonalities in individual answers e.g. lack of qualified staff, involvement of stakeholders or bureaucracy when developing or implementing their IQA systems. In all countries respondents observe rather similar beneficial qualitative and quantitative changes or innovative practices introduced on the basis of evidence collected through the internal quality assurance system.

According to the majority of responding HEIs (61.7%), IQA documents refer indirectly to the ESG as they are based on national legislation/national external evaluation criteria in which the ESG are integrated. At the same time 50 respondents out of 178 decided to skip the question which might indicate some problems in that area or law awareness of ESG Part 1 components. The IQA systems of responding HEIs vary with regards to their reference to the ESG, as it is shown below:

Figure 9

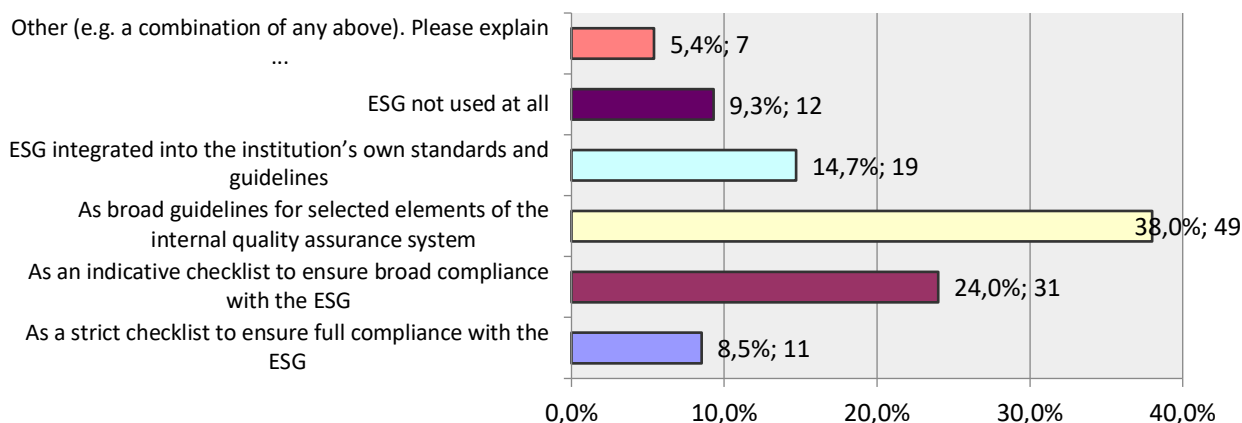
Do internal quality assurance documents of your institution refer to the ESG?



Most of the HEIs (38%) use the current version of ESG as broad guidelines for selected elements of the internal quality assurance system. The rest of the HEIs use the ESG as an indicative checklist to ensure broad compliance with the ESG (24%), or they have integrated the ESG into their own standards and guidelines (14.7%). Over 9.3% HEIs use no ESG at all.

Figure 10

How does your institution use the 2005 version of Part 1 of the ESG in its internal quality assurance?



Only 31.5% of HEIs organised training events or seminars specifically dedicated to the ESG (e.g. in Bulgaria none of the responding HEIs organized any training events or seminar specifically devoted to the ESG). The majority of HEIs (38.6%) held training events and seminars on internal quality assurance where the ESG were not explicitly discussed. 51 out of 178 decided to skip the question



2.2. Detailed questions on ESG Part 1 findings

ESG 1.1. Policy for quality assurance

60% of HEIs have a published policy for quality assurance and external stakeholders were involved in both the development and implementation of the policy. In most cases quality strategic goals are directly incorporated by HEIs into strategic plans and they do not develop separate documents for their quality assurance policy. Cooperation with external stakeholders shows an increasing tendency for the last few years and confirms the response of the HE sector to the labour market needs.

ESG 1.2. Design and approval of programmes

The procedure for design and approval of programmes is not followed in all fields of study. While the approval procedure does not generate a problem for respondents, the designing procedure is declared as a weakness. Nevertheless, the majority of programmes are designed in line with institutional strategies, mission statements and vision and refer to the National Qualification Framework. The involvement of external stakeholders in the procedure of design and approval still require more attention.

ESG 1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Students are systematically involved in IQA activity, and student-centred learning, teaching and assessment is said to be well understood by HEIs. However, the actual implementation of this range of issues in the revised ESG should be more fully addressed.

Fairness and consistency achieved through the procedure of student assessment was quite misunderstood by most HEIs and over 62% respondents decided to skip the question.

ESG 1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

HEIs apply consistent regulations concerning student admission, recognition and certification. At present, the development of regulation on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning pose a great challenge for the IQAs.

ESG 1.5. Teaching staff

The teaching staff is assessed on a regular basis since in some cases it is required by national regulations. The remaining activities which include professional development opportunities provided to teaching staff, incentives to encourage the professional development of teaching staff, incentives to encourage the use of new technologies in teaching, or mechanism for rewarding teaching achievements vary greatly among units and fields of study. The main problem is linked to the regular monitoring of teaching staff satisfaction.

ESG 1.6. Learning resources and student support

Similarly, the compliance with ESG 1.6. varies greatly among different fields of study and units. At present, all of responding HEIs provide academic, financial and personal advice to students. Besides, they have in place a mechanism for informing students about the support and services available. At the same time there are still HEIs which declare that they do not have a mechanism for assessing the adequacy and accessibility of learning resources or student support, or do not have in place procedures to ensure that administrative staff are properly qualified to deliver support services.

ESG 1.7. Information management

The majority of HEIs have a formal mechanism for analyzing and using data collecting for quality assurance enhancement purposes e.g. key performance indicators, profile of the student population, student progression, success and drop-out rates, students' satisfaction with programmes, etc. It shows a fairly good observance of standard requirements by HEIs.



ESG 1.8. Public information

HEIs provide full information about the programmes they offer, including admission criteria, full curricula, syllabuses etc. However, some of them declare that some legal requirements (data protection law) might hinder public information activities.

ESG 1.9. On-going monitoring and periodic reviews of programmes

External stakeholders are still not fully involved in the on-going monitoring and periodic reviews of programmes.

ESG. 1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance

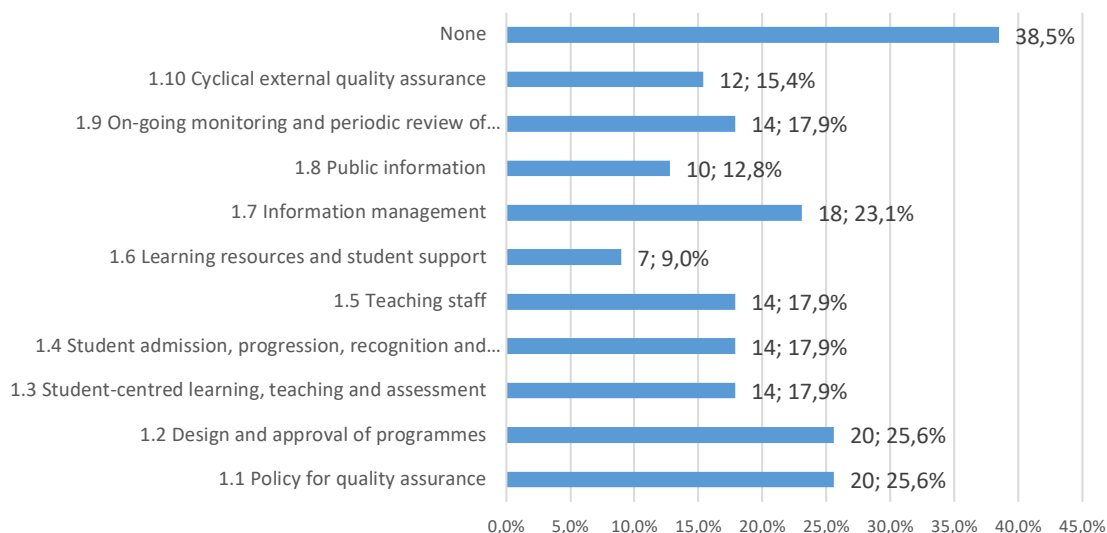
According to HEIs the external evaluation methodology of quality assurance agencies could be improved in the aspect of the criteria and methodology of assessment, time and quality-related costs, trainings of experts as well as further support and consultancy. The complex and multi-area impact study on influence of EQA on IQA could improve the knowledge of quality assurance agency and its adjustment to relevant expectations and needs.

ESG 1.1-1.10: Standards which are not entirely clear and difficult to apply

Respondents expressed a need for clarification of the following standards:

Figure 11

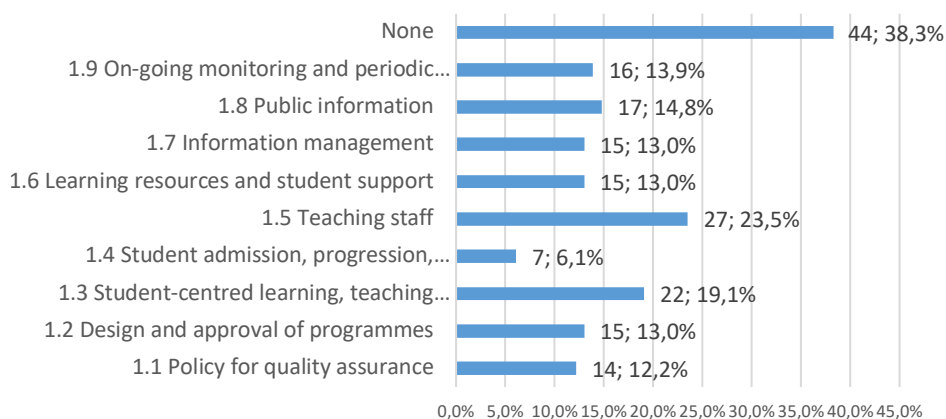
In your opinion which of ESG 1.1. to 1.10 would require further clarification and/ or more detailed guidelines (in addition to those provided by ENQA under each Standard) to be entirely clear and easily understandable to teaching staff and students?



In line with the above mentioned concerns, HEIs report that they find it difficult to apply the following IQA standards in their IQA systems:

Figure 12

Which of ESG 1.1. to 1.9 addressed above are or would be difficult to apply/integrate into your institution's internal quality assurance system?



In spite of the fact that 38,3% of responding HEIs do not have difficulty in integrating the revised standards for ESG in their local IQA, the remaining HEIs are still identifying a number of internal and external obstacles which might prevent full compliance with the ESG standards such as stakeholders' reluctance, insufficient resources, organizational deficiencies, ambiguity of legal regulations, lack of financial support, weak support from external quality assurance providers, etc.

2.3. Conclusions

In most cases responding HEIs decided to skip some survey questions which might have had a bearing on the final conclusions and demonstrated that awareness of Part 1 ESG principles was/is rather low.

In the last two decades HEIs in four countries have witnessed a pronounced and dynamic development of IQAs. In all countries appeared external bodies responsible for QA. Besides some crucial changes in law on higher education systems took places that imposed in some cases legal requirements to establish IQA system. HEIs turned to a more systematic approach to IQA and to the formalisation of solutions to this issue. HEIs have IQA systems in place whose functioning varies greatly among faculties/units and fields of study. Partial lack of consistency and complexity may be caused by rather low awareness of quality management principles among internal stakeholders, especially teaching staff, and their reluctance to changes. Quality managers still meet internal and external obstacles in developing sufficient IQAs but at the same time they provide many good examples of activities undertaken in that area and observe beneficial qualitative and quantitative changes. Besides, frequent changes of legal requirements cause some dissatisfaction among people involved in IQA at management as well as operational levels. HEIs declare difficulties related to bureaucracy which can be considered a hot potato in the higher education and quality assurance system at the moment.



The development of those systems and their effectiveness is monitored on an ongoing basis and evaluated by the QA agencies. All agencies from partners' countries were externally reviewed for the purpose of full membership of ENQA. The continuous improvement of the external quality assurance systems of the agencies is a priority for their future operations.

With regards to the ESG progress made so far on the basis of the survey results it is difficult to perform a comparative study with the previous period as no similar study has been conducted four countries as yet. Besides, it is not possible to establish any correlation between the implementation of individual ESG standards in HEIs and its timing. It is only confirmed that the intensive development of IQAs took place between 2006-2011 and after 2011 which All ESG standards are covered by different activities of HEIs, which was reflected in the survey results and examples given by respondents. ESG are treated rather as a broad framework for further IQA activities.

In the terms of revised ESG 2015 the results of the survey showed that HEIs are willing and ready to follow them, in spite of the short history in IQA systems development in some countries and their maturity. Some of HEIs that were aware of beneficial changes in the quality management area as well as quality culture importance decided to introduce and develop IQA systems on their own initiatives without external pressure Nevertheless, further clarifications of individual standards and their popularization is highly required since majority of respondents still identify internal and external obstacles in applying revised ESG. The results of the survey and expressed need by HEIs for further support in IQA enhancement should imply the activities at the national level (policy makers, QA agencies, conferences of rectors) as well as at European level (ESU, EURASHE, ENQA etc.).

References:

EIQAS project cross-country report /Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia/
Country report Bulgaria,
Country report Poland
Country report Portugal
Country report Slovenia

Expected learning outcomes for participants:

- knowledge on the current status of IQA in Bulgaria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia,
- knowledge on readiness to apply by HEIs revised ESG Part 1 ,
- awareness of possible challenges for further support of IQA development,



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