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for Quality Assurance at Institutional Level“**

IBAR

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**Project “Identifying barriers in promoting European Standards and Guidelines for
Quality Assurance at institutional level” (IBAR)**

**National Study: Quality and Employers including Private Sector
(WP9)**

Czech Republic

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Methodology

This study examines implementation of the ESG-related issues that directly concern the involvement of stakeholders in institutional bodies whose activities bear on quality assurance. To this end, primary and secondary data analysis were utilised, the latter through the study of relevant institutional and national documentation whilst the former through semi-structured interviews with 29 actors from four HEIs. The actors for semi-structured interviews were selected with regard to having all major stakeholder categories represented. These were members of senior management (12), quality managers (3), academic staff (6), students (7) and members of administrative support units (1). Some of the interviewed actors were also the members of decision-making bodies within the institutions, i.e. academic senates and scientific boards (see below). As for the previous WP enquiries, the participating HEIs were selected on the basis of type (three public, one private) and profile (one comprehensive, three specialised) following the representation of these two criteria in the Czech system of higher education.

Answering the research questions¹

1) What are the national rules that govern higher education institutions' inclusion or exclusion of stakeholders in/from decision-making or advisory bodies that have a say about quality-relevant issues and have they changed in the past five years? If so, which stakeholders, which bodies, which numbers/proportions of total members.

The national policy context regarding the representation of stakeholders in institutional bodies of HEIs is set by the Higher Education Act no. 111/1998 Coll. (HE Act). This legal instrument specifies three types of stakeholder bodies having an impact on institutional quality assurance policies. For *public HEIs*, these bodies are: academic senates, scientific boards and the board of trustees whose composition and legal remit are to be dealt with in some detail below.

Starting with the academic senate, this body is established at faculty and institutional level. The institutional academic senate is a representative, decision-making body of HEI, composed of at least 11 members *from which students have to constitute the minimum of one third and the maximum of one half of all seats*. The membership, based on electoral vote of the academic community (HE academic and research staff plus students), is for three years and is incompatible with the position of the rector, vice-rector, dean or vice-dean. The institutional academic senate has a number of decision-making responsibilities bearing on institutional quality management and assurance. In short, these are:

- Approval of internal regulations of HEI and its constituent parts (faculties, institutes),
- Approval of the institutional budget and supervision of financial management of HEI,
- Approval of the Rector's proposals for nominating or dismissing members of the institutional Scientific Board²,
- Approves the proposals and admission regulations for degree programmes that are not provided by individual faculties³.
- Approval of the strategic, long-term plan of HEI and of the institutional annual report,

¹ National policy context is covered within the first question.

² Acting as a guarantor for degree programmes *not* offered by individual faculties (see the footnote no. 3 and competences of the institutional scientific board).

³ These are especially programmes offered by specialised institutes or scientific centres operating independently on faculties but subordinated to the rectorate.

- Approval of the evaluation of the activities of the higher education institution, presented by the Rector,
- Expression of a view on suggestions and viewpoints of the institutional Board of Trustees.

The faculty academic senates are composed of at least nine members out of which students constitute from one third to one half of all seats. The legally granted competences of the faculty senates and the terms of office are analogous to the academic senate of HEI, except for the approval of the evaluation of quality of faculty activities, which is not required by faculty senators. As to degree programmes provided at the faculty, the faculty academic senate expresses its viewpoints on them, with the approval function vested in the authority of the faculty scientific council (see further). Meetings of both the academic senate of HEI and faculty senates are open to the public. The rector or dean has the right to speak at the meetings of the academic senate of HEI or, respectively, the faculty senate if he/she so requests.

Next, there is the scientific board, again set up at the institutional as well as faculty level. The members of the scientific board of HEI, appointed and dismissed by the rector, are distinguished representatives in fields in which the public higher education institution carries out teaching, research, development, artistic and other creative activities. *At least one-third of the members of the Scientific Board must be from outside the academic community* of the public HEI in question. The stakeholders external to the board thus constitute at least one third of all members; in reality the number of external members is mostly slightly higher than the legally specified minimal representation. This is due to limited time-capacities of external members who mostly come from senior teaching and research positions (i.e. professoriate) also held at the Academy of Sciences. Especially in case of technically-oriented HEIs, external members of the institutional scientific board may be representatives of industries key for graduate employment. The competences of the scientific board of HEI concern:

- Discussion of the strategic, long-term plan of HEI,
- Approval of degree programmes⁴ that do not fall into the competency of a particular faculty's Scientific Board,
- Pursuit of the procedures for the appointment of professors and for conferring “*venium docendi*” (habilitation).

Again, the rules of member nomination of the scientific council of the faculty are analogous to that of the scientific board of HEI. The minimum of one third of the faculty scientific board thus must come outside of the HEI of which the faculty is part. As far as competencies are concerned, apart from taking a standpoint to the faculty long-term strategic plan, the faculty scientific board is responsible for approving the eligibility of all faculty degree programmes for accreditation (done externally by the Accreditation Commission). With regard to the overseeing of procedures for appointment of professors and associate professors, the responsibilities are divided as follows. The scientific board of HEI is primarily authorised to guarantee professorial appointments⁵, whilst the primary responsibility for a habilitation procedure falls into the competence of the corresponding faculty scientific board, presenting

⁴ This is only approval of programme eligibility to undergo programme accreditation by the Accreditation Commission, *not* the act of accreditation as such.

⁵ Strictly speaking, the scientific board of a given HEI does not award professorships; this falls into the competence of president of the state (and presidential office). Following its positive standpoint, the given scientific board of HEI thus “only” passes a recommendation for naming a professor to the presidential office, with the recommendation requiring the rector's signature.

its standpoint to the rector⁶. However, in special cases which may originate as the candidate's written notification, the scientific board of HEI can be asked by the rector to look into and possibly revoke the faculty scientific board's standpoint. Few of such instances have already been documented in institutional practice.

Expectably, most of the members of institutional board or faculty scientific boards come from academic staff of the same or another HEI. These are mostly professors or associate professors. However, external membership is also granted to outstanding specialists in a given field not necessarily having the corresponding academic background, such as in case of medicine or law.

Finally, stakeholder participation in quality-assurance bodies, as legally stipulated, also entails the board of trustees. Contrary to academic senates or scientific boards, no boards of trustees operate at faculty level, so there is just one such board per institution. The board of trustees is composed by the minimum of nine members. Members of the board of trustees are appointed and dismissed by the Minister after consultation with the rector, with the aim of achieving an appropriate *representation from, in particular, the spheres of public life, municipal and regional authorities and the state administration. All members of the board of trustees, appointed for six years, must not be employed at public HEI in question.* When the board of trustees is first established, lots are drawn to determine the names of one-third of the members whose term of office will expire in two years' time and one-third of the members whose term of office will expire in four years' time. Meetings of the board of trustees are called by the chair, and must take place at least twice a year. The rector, a vice-rector or the bursar acting on his behalf, have the right to take part in the board meeting. The chair of the board of trustees is obligated to call an extraordinary meeting of the board of trustees upon the rector's request. The manner of election of the chair and the deputy chairs and the rules of order of the board of trustees of the public higher education institution are set out in its Statute, which is subject to approval by the Minister. The competences of the board entail especially approval of legal acts concerning acquisition of real estate or movable assets but, with regard to quality assurance, they include expressing view on the strategic, long-term plan of HEI. The board of trustees is legally granted the option to take initiative and give suggestions to the rector on matters pertaining to the activities of HEI, including mechanisms of quality assurance/management. However, in practice, this option has been made use of rather rarely.

The foregoing overview of the legal remit of stakeholder bodies of public HEIs, i.e. the academic senates, scientific boards and the board of trustees, suggest some division of their competencies as far as quality assurance is concerned. Quality assurance of degree programmes, debated within the faculty senates, is under the responsibility of the faculty scientific boards, having at least half of members external to the (part) of institution. Those degree programmes (mostly doctoral) provided in specialised institutes/centres operational under the rectorate are supervised by the institutional scientific board and approved by the senate of HEI. As qualifications of academic staff in terms of numbers of professors and associate professors, who commonly act as guarantors of individual programmes, seem to still play quite a significant role in Czech programme accreditation by the Accreditation Commission (File et al. 2006), the role of faculty and institutional scientific boards in overseeing the procedures of professorial appointment or habilitations is also quite important

⁶ Both for the procedure of professorial appointment and for habilitation, the respective board sets up a special committee (mostly five persons) from which more than a half of the members must be external to the given institution. The committee is responsible for naming the opponents to the habilitation/professorial thesis that the candidate presents to the board.

for programme quality assurance. The rector's or deans' nomination of members of the institutional/faculty scientific board is liable to the approval of the academic senate of HEI/faculty. Aside from degree programmes, the quality function also entails dealing with strategic policy documents (long-term plans of HEI/faculties) commonly taking up the subject of quality assurance/management. The quality-related documents are debated by scientific boards plus the board of trustees and approved by the respective academic senate. The legal obligation of evaluation of institutional activities and, implicitly, their quality is, in practical terms, often done by means of presentation of the annual report and comments on it by the rector to the academic senate of HEI (and analogically by the dean to the faculty senate).

Up to this point, the review of stakeholder bodies involved in institutional quality assurance has only concerned public HEIs. As to *private HEIs*, the Higher Education Act does not specify the respective stakeholder bodies, leaving it to the discretion of a given HEI. The private HEI is, however, legally obliged to concretise in the internal regulations the remit of such body/ies upon establishment. The remit of such bodies may vary, depending on the type of legal entity which a given private HEI is. Most of private HEIs have the institutional board of trustees operating under different names, whose members are named by the founder of the institution. Also, most private HEIs have a scientific board, appointed and dismissed by the rector, with a composition and scope of competences similar to those boards of public HEIs. Due to highly competitive environment in which private HEIs operate, the search is made for well known and renowned personalities to fill the seats in their boards of trustees or scientific boards.

Both public and private HEIs have been given a legal *possibility* to name external stakeholders to the boards overseeing the final state examination and thesis defence that are decisive for conferring the Bachelor, Master or doctoral degree. Most of HEIs make use of this option, but the actual practices vary, depending on internal regulations of HEIs/their parts. Generally, the external members, i.e. academic staff or employer representatives, do not constitute a majority of the respective board members, and for some (bachelor) examinations they may not sit on the board at all.

All these above-stated regulation pertaining to the remit of stakeholder bodies with involvement in institutional quality assurance have not changed in the last five years.

Finally, aside from legally-mandated actor bodies having some say on institutional quality assurance and management, there is also space for *informal arrangements*. These are embodied by the advisory boards of the rector or the dean that commonly operate at every public HEI/its parts and at most private HEIs. Named by the rector/dean their membership mostly comprises those closest to the rector or the dean, i.e. the vice-rectors and the deans in the former case and the vice-deans plus heads of some departments in the latter. It is becoming increasingly common to also have a student representative as an academic senate member on the board (to smooth out passing suggestions of the rector/dean through the institutional/faculty senate where student representatives are sometimes the decisive factor).

2) What are the institutional rules that govern higher education institutions' inclusion or exclusion of stakeholders in/from decision-making or advisory bodies that have a say about quality-relevant issues and have they changed in the past five years? If so, which stakeholders, which bodies, which numbers/proportions of total members.

HEI A has the rules guiding the inclusion and participation of stakeholders in bodies responsible for institutionalised quality-assurance set in its statute. The rules pertaining to the remit and composition of the board of trustees follow the legal stipulations of the HE Act and have not been modified in the last five years. The same applies to the remit and composition of the academic senates and scientific boards of HEI A. Hence, students represent one third of total senate membership, or slightly over it in case of faculty senates. Similarly, external members of scientific boards also compose one third of the total number of seats. Traditionally, HEI A has developed partnerships with some industrial enterprises whose representatives have some influence on thesis foci and course content, especially through their involvement in teaching activities.

As far as HEI B is concerned, the institutional regulations on inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making bodies are (again) set in the statute of the institution. As these regulations follow the relevant stipulations of the HE Act, competences of the academic senates, scientific boards and board of trustees do not deviate from national legislation described in the previous section. Important issues are informally discussed at the meetings of the rectors' or dean's advisory board in which student representative do not participate. Student participation is thus limited to academic senates in which students constitute the legal minimum of one third of seats.

At HEI C, the rules pertaining to stakeholder involvement in quality assurance-related bodies differ, based on whether the stakeholder status is legally mandated or is linked to activities that the institution itself initiates to improve quality of its activities. In case of the former category, i.e. stakeholders with legal status exercising their competences within the academic senates, scientific boards and the board of trustees, the corresponding rules correspond to national legislation. Additionally, however, the university academic senate as well as faculty senates are divided into two chambers, i.e. the chamber of academic staff and the chamber of students in each case, but students always make up one third of all senate seats. These rules have not changed in the last couple of years.

What seems to have changed, though, is the status of stakeholders whose competences in institutional quality assurance and management are granted by HEI C itself. These include especially representatives of alumni, employers and professional associations having more intensive say in curricula design, graduate profiles and thesis supervision. The importance of the advisory board of the rector or the deans should also be underscored. These boards, also including the university registrar, chancellor (rector's board) or faculty secretaries (dean's board), serve for informal discussion of directives (to be in turn acted upon by the (part) of institution) or documents (such as strategic ones including the long-term plan and its early updates). If realisation of these materials is liable to the approval by a given representative body (mostly the academic senate), its representatives, including students, also take part in the advisory board's meetings. With respect to institutional quality, the special role is played by the University Committee of Quality Assurance (QA Committee), set up by the rector to act as his advisory body in quality-related matters. The QA Committee is composed by specially trained staff and its activities are overseen by the Council for Quality Assurance, set up in 2009 and having representatives of HEI C top management, QA Committee and individual faculties as members. Finally, in recent years, the collaboration of HEI C with other HEIs

located in the same city has intensified. This is especially due to the undertaking of large EU funded research projects with the terms of partners' involvement specified in special contracts.

As far as HEI D is concerned, its institutional type as of private HEI seems to bear on the status of stakeholders in institutional decision-making and advisory bodies responsible for quality assurance. HEI D has the status of a beneficiary company owned by two founding organisations. As set in the statute, the stakeholder bodies of HEI D having a say on institutional quality assurance are: the rector, the board of trustees, supervisory board, scientific board and deans. The rector is named by the board of trustees who are in turn named by the owners for a period of three years⁷. Activities of HEI D are overseen by the supervisory board, again named by the founders. The members of these boards come from business environment. Importantly, the board of trustees also exercises the competences of the institutional academic senate, however, *with no student representation on the board*. The scientific board exercises its competences in ways similar to scientific boards of public HEIs. This means that it has the responsibility for approving degree programmes to undergo programme (re-) accreditation. As suggested above, due to heavy competition for applicants among business-oriented private as well as public HEIs, HEI D maintains frequent contacts with alumni and the representatives of employers for feedback on quality of studies, with some of members of employer organisations involved in final state examinations or thesis supervision.

3) What is nominal and real stakeholder's representation in institutional decision-making bodies? Has it changed and why?

HEI A has equal nominal and real stakeholder representation in institutional decision-making bodies. The academic senate of HEI A has 24 members. With four academic staff and two students elected per every faculty, it means that student representatives compose one third (8) and academic staff representatives the remaining two thirds (16) of seats. New members took seats, following regular elections in 2011⁸. The faculty senates have a similar composition, with student representation slightly higher than the legal minimum (between 30-40% of seats). The institutional scientific board has a total of 36 members out of which 13 (36%) are external to the institution. The external members mostly come from other universities or the Czech Academy of Sciences; still two of them come from industries and one from the Ministry of Education. The same pattern of representation applies to the scientific boards of individual faculties, with external members again having predominantly academic/scientific background. The board of trustees comprises nine members, all external to HEI A as the HE Act stipulates. The recent change in the rector's seat has not had an impact on remit of institutional decision-making bodies. The composition of the institutional scientific board has, however, changed somewhat once the new rector took office, which is the practice fairly common in such instances in Czech higher education settings.

HEI B has the academic senate of the institution composed of 24 senators. 16 senate members are academic representatives; the remaining one third of seats is filled by student representatives. Faculty senates show the same composition. The board of trustees of HEI B has 15 members, with five of them coming from state or municipal government bodies (Parliament, city council, financial bureau) and another five from local businesses. The

⁷ With one third of members changed every year.

⁸ Current student representation comprises only doctoral students.

remaining five members have been nominated and elected for their beneficiary public-life activities. The scientific board of HEI B has 36 members out of which 12 (one-third) are external, again mostly coming from other universities or research institutions. The composition of the board should reflect the statutory rule of balanced representation of all major study fields taught at the institution. The current composition of the scientific board of HEI B fulfils such a rule. The scientific boards of individual faculties follow the same pattern as far as their composition is concerned, with the percentage of external members just equal or slightly higher than the legal minimum of 30%. The only noteworthy exception is the Faculty of Law, which has over 50%, i.e. 10 out of the total of 18, external members. Five out of these 10 external members come directly from legislature (jurist, judge, member of the Czech Bar Association and the like). Interestingly, the enquiry into stakeholder decision-making bodies at HEI B has revealed that each scientific board (institutional one as well as faculty ones) has a member of Slovak nationality (external or internal to the board).

HEI C has the institutional academic senate composed of the total of 27 seats. The corresponding statutory rule stipulates that each faculty/institute delegates two academic staff and one student representatives into one of the respective chambers (student chamber, academic staff chamber). Furthermore, the election rules also recognise the status of a substitute held by an unsuccessful candidate. The status is pending on obtaining the minimum of a pre-specified number of votes in the respective elections (institutional, faculty). Once in the substitute position, the substitute(s) may easily replace the senate member in case of his/her withdrawal from the representative body. The scientific board of HEI C has 39 members with 41%, i.e. 16 members, coming outside of the institution (six of them from non-academic/research backgrounds). The board of trustees of HEI C has officially 15 members, however, in last couple of years, there were only 14 members on it, possibly due to differences between the rector and the minister on the nomination. In May 2012, the fifteenth member was named, so the nominal representation equals the real one. The faculty senates and, to a lesser extent, faculty scientific boards of HEI C also seem to have had some problems with assuring the real representation of their members. The corresponding evidence on composition of academic senates and scientific boards of individual faculties is somewhat dated (mostly available up to 2009). The analysis, backed up by information obtained from the interviews, suggest that the factual representation of scientific boards' members was in most cases harmonious with official statutory requirements. Contrary to that, the real composition of some of faculty academic senates seems to have deviated from the statutory rules (being lower than prescribed), which may have serious legal repercussions e.g. in case of dean elections.

As stated earlier, the set-up of decision-making bodies of private HEI D is different from that of public HEIs but has not changed in recent years. Private HEI D thus has a six-member board of trustees with the terms of office set for three years and a three-member supervisory board. The members of the two bodies, named by the founders of HEI D, come from business. The institutional scientific board is composed of the total of 27 members out of which one third (9 members) is external to the institution. The seats of the board are filled by professors, associate professors or outstanding personalities in the study fields that are taught at HEI D. Private HEI D has no academic senate whose responsibilities are exercised by the board of trustees.

4) Do different units in the institution (faculties) or programmes have stakeholder representation on decision-making or advisory bodies that have a say about quality-relevant issues, beyond what is prescribed? If so, which stakeholders, which bodies, which numbers/proportions of total membership?

Such stakeholder bodies, functioning on an informal basis, are represented by the advisory board of the rector or deans. At HEI A, B and C, the rector's advisory board has a similar composition, including: vice-rectors, deans, chair of the institutional academic senate (representing academic staff), student senator, and registrar. To give an example, the rector's advisory board of HEI A has 14 members, which are: the rector, four vice-rectors, four deans, head of research institute, registrar, chair of the institutional academic senate, the student representative (member of the institutional academic senate) and labour union representative. Analogically, the dean's advisory board, as operational at HEIs A-C, is composed of the vice-deans, heads of institutes, faculty secretary and the chair of the faculty senate. In known cases at HEIs A-C, the total membership oscillates between 9 and 15, with the majority taken by vice-deans plus heads of the institutes. Informal agenda of the dean's advisory board comprises mostly discussing plausibility of designs and contents of faculty study programmes (and their courses) to be in turn submitted for discussion in the faculty senate and approval by the faculty scientific board (once approved and signed by the rector, the proposal for (re-) accreditation is sent to the Accreditation Commission). With regard to quality assurance, agenda of the rector's advisory boards seems to be mainly occupied by debates about eligibility of candidates for associate professorship in cases when the vote of the respective faculty scientific board is tight or other irregularities⁹ arise. If the informal conclusion is to look into the respective habilitation case, the case is passed to the scientific board of the institution to be formally decided on. As associate professors quite often act as guarantors of quality of bachelor or master programmes, the debates within the rector's or dean's advisory board may have important implications for institutional quality assurance processes.

The composition of the rector's and dean's board at public HEIs A, B, C shows that these advisory bodies operate without external stakeholders. However, as evidence from HEI A suggests, external stakeholders, i.e. industry or business representatives, are involved in other groupings working on informal basis. This is especially the board of managing directors established at several institutes of HEI A. Other platforms for informal discussion are meetings of teacher groups complementing meetings of chairs of these groups with the faculty secretary/vice-dean for study affairs along with the departmental meetings as such. If persons with business or industry backgrounds are involved as teachers within a given department, they participate in (some of) these meetings, depending on their position.

None of stakeholder bodies with informal remit is functional at private HEI D.

⁹ There may be doubts about the duality of a habilitation thesis or candidate may state his/her intention to file a formal complaint against the proceedings.

5. To what extent are stakeholder's views (and from which stakeholders?) taken into account and why specifically with respect to: graduate profiles and learning outcomes, exam requirements and curriculum review, soft and entrepreneurial skills acquisition, internal quality assurance processes?

a. Graduate profiles, learning outcomes

Specification of a graduate profile along with the corresponding learning outcomes is a mandatory part of every degree programme submitted for (re-) accreditation. However, it should be pointed out that, up to now, such specifications have been rather nominal, with no links to the descriptors of the national qualifications framework, as this framework only recently entered the pilot stage. It is therefore the explicit intention of some HEIs to analyse their study programme contents and align them with the national qualifications framework (HEI A, C), with HEI C taking part in framework piloting. With respect to the currently prevailing practice, all four HEIs (A-D), to a different extent, make use of views of two external stakeholder groups: professionals with practical experience in a given field who do teaching at a given institution and business/industry representatives if sitting on the board of trustees or scientific boards. The involvement of both groups seems to be more pronounced in case of professionally regulated programmes (nursing, medicine, law, and also theology) at HEI B or strongly application-oriented programmes that are provided mostly (but not only) by HEI A and HEI C. Obviously, other members of especially scientific boards, i.e. academics internal to (the part of) institution, may get involved in study programme design and content during the approval procedure. Importantly, as far as study programme design and content are concerned, all four HEIs seem to be in the process of giving somewhat more weight to alumni views through regular alumni surveys or special actions (HEI A). To give an example, the special initiative "Alumni", self-financed by donations, gifts and other fund-raising activities, is undertaken at HEI A, aims at running the alumni club and holding the events that would attract alumni, thus establishing rapport between them and the institution. Similar initiatives are in progress at HEI C and D.

b. Exam requirements and curriculum review

Here, at four HEIs surveyed, the primary responsibility is vested in study programme guarantors, heads of departments, study programme committees (HEI C) or, ultimately, scientific boards. The influence of external stakeholders is somewhat limited, boiling down to three ways. First, professionals from practice with a teaching load may exercise some, mostly informal authority to change curriculum content and/or exam requirements after the discussion with departmental staff. Second, there is a possibility for external stakeholders (professionals, academics) to sit on the boards overseeing the final state examination and thesis defence, thus having an opportunity to influence examination requirements. Third, drawing on feedback and initiatives of local business representatives, *HEI A has established an educational centre in the region of Northern Bohemia*. Supported by the regional administration and the city council, the centre offers study in bachelor and master programmes as well as courses of lifelong learning. Trained staff from regional businesses is involved in teaching within these programmes/courses. Additionally, fourth, there may be other external stakeholders with largely informal impact, such as representatives of source secondary schools (headmasters, counsellors for choice of study paths) *and students of these and other secondary schools*. This finding applies to HEI A, C as well as D¹⁰. In case of HEI

¹⁰ Business-oriented HEI D operates within the so called "Union of Schools" comprising also a grammar school, secondary professional school and tertiary professional school. All these institutions have the same founders and owners.

A, the contact between these external stakeholders from secondary schools and institutional staff is further intensified through regularly held promotional activities such as summer schools or olympic games.

c. Soft and entrepreneurial skills acquisition

The extent of acquisition of soft and entrepreneurial skills is generally dependent on a course lecturer (if he/she has a professional background, the better) and contact with professional environment as such through internships and/or thesis focus. The latter case, i.e. involvement of student through internships bearing on the topic of a bachelor/master thesis, is developed especially at technically oriented HEI A and C. Utilising financial support from the EU operational programmes, HEI C has recently intensified its cooperation with businesses through internships, also including one-month intensive involvement in concrete problem solving and defence of the solution proposed. More specifically, faculties of HEI A most often make offers of internships and thesis topics to students who, however, are in position to seek for an internship company on their own, depending on the nature of their interests. In any case, the student is obligated to produce a report once the internship ended and those companies that are established, long-term partners in internship organisation also report to the designated part of institution. Nonetheless, the impact of internships on course design and content seems to be limited and only informal. Moreover, at HEI A, a well-known, multinational company with a subsidiary in the Czech Republic takes responsibility for a special course aimed at acquisition of soft-skills. The course, which is taught in English, may be considered a system-wide example of good practice. Internship cooperation may, however, not involve only private companies, as especially HEI A develops it successfully also with some institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

d. Internal quality assurance processes

As to internal quality assurance processes, the involvement of internal stakeholders (students, QA management, academic staff) is clearly documentable at four HEIs under analysis. All four HEIs have institutionalised internal quality surveys, involving academic staff along with students, which are overseen by quality management staff. At HEIs C and D, top-down managerial approaches seem to be somewhat more pronounced, as evidenced by institutional documentation (HEI D) and especially by the establishment of the University Committee of Quality Assurance at HEI C. Also other stakeholder bodies (academic senates, scientific boards) may be active in design and implementation of internal quality assurance. At four HEIs surveyed, there is only anecdotal evidence of involvement of external stakeholders, except for the Accreditation Commission.

Finally, the external role of the Accreditation Commission, composed very predominantly from senior academics, must be emphasised. This pertains to graduate profiles, learning outcomes and exam requirements that are mandatory for a programme (re-) accreditation request but, importantly, also to the design of internal quality assurance evaluated externally by the special working group of the Commission in regular intervals.

6. Are stakeholder views filtering into standard undergraduate curriculum and requirements through:

- a. Employment requirements for staff (if and which stakeholders decide on the hiring and promotion criteria)

Almost no such cases of external stakeholder influence were identified at four HEIs surveyed. The requirements for a given position are set by the head of the department/institute or the dean. The position is filled on the basis of a competitive procedure and the organisational rules of the procedure follow the statutory rules derived from the corresponding stipulations of the HE Act. The only exception noted is in case of theology programmes at HEI B, where the candidates have to be granted the canonical mission, which is done externally by the archbishop who has the position of the great chancellor of the theological faculty.

- b. Internships (are the informal contacts with businesses during students' internships used for curriculum reviews)

As suggested, the cooperation by means of student internships is becoming more common and the informal contacts thus obtained are, to some extent, used for curriculum reviews, especially at technically-oriented HEI A and C. Relevantly, at some parts of HEI C, master thesis based on internship is awarded by 30 ECTS credits (equal to six months of regular study), which gives ground even for more formalised effects on curricular content.

- c. Special professional development courses – job-related continuing education and training courses distinct from the standard degree-courses (are insights from such courses used to inform the 'standard curriculum' and its requirements)

These paid-for professional development courses are, in the form of life-long learning courses, offered by all four HEIs surveyed. However, the extent to which insights from these courses filter into standard curricula differs on a case-by-case basis, depending on the position of the lecturer. Informal feedback from LLL courses seems to be more likely to materialise in curricular requirements in case the lecturer is a member of faculty teaching staff (e.g. not hired externally for temporary cooperation).

- d. Contacts with business and other organizations (e.g. public research institutes) (are R&D projects with external research organizations/companies influencing the 'standard curriculum'?, do business/industry professionals co-supervise MA and PhD theses? Are they external examiners?)

Institutional cooperation with businesses and industries as well as with the institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences is noticeable – especially at HEI A and C but also at some faculties of HEI B (e.g. the faculty of medicine) – and entails also thesis supervision and participation in thesis defence. In this respect, HEI B has made it a statutory rule that there must be at least one external member on the board for doctoral thesis defence, the rule which is increasingly applied also to defence procedures of master theses (standard at the faculty of education). In case of outputs from research projects co-undertaken by external R&D organisations, the corresponding impact on curricula seems to be only occasional and largely limited to doctoral programmes.

- e. Requirements of external professional bodies

Judging from the evidence gathered at four HEIs surveyed, the relevant professional bodies (the Czech Medical Association, Czech Chamber of Commerce or Czech Bar Association) seem to exercise their influence rather indirectly (through the corresponding ministry) or informally through personal contacts. Their *direct* involvement (also through the boards of trustees) in study programme designs and contents seems to be rare.

Summing up and identifying the barriers or examples of effective practice

The review of stakeholder participation in decision-making and advisory bodies bearing on institutional quality assurance relates to some of the ESG Part 1, i.e. the 1.2 standard¹¹ and especially its guidelines¹². The corresponding enquiry done in four institutional settings shows that there are two bodies with responsibility for programme quality approval and assurance. First, these are the academic senates (institutional plus faculty), composed entirely of internal stakeholders, i.e. students filling (slightly over) one third of seats and academics taking (almost) two thirds of seats. Important as they are for other (such as financial issues), in the matter of programme quality assurance the senates play only a consultative role. Second, the responsibility for decision-making on programme approval is vested in the scientific boards, again set up at the institutional and faculty level and with one third of members coming outside the (part of) institution regardless the organisational level. Such is the situation at three public HEIs surveyed (A, B, C), where their boards of trustees quite rarely take initiative and put programme quality assurance on their agendas. Expectably, due to somewhat dissimilar legislative rules, the situation at private HEI D is, to some extent, different, as this institution has no academic senate with its consultative function taken over by the board of trustees. However, as in case of public institutions, private HEI D has its scientific board that decides on programme approval.

This synthesis so far suggests that responsibility for programme quality assurance and approval is primarily vested in a limited group of stakeholders (representatives of academic staff, students as academic senators and senior academics sitting on scientific boards). Indicative as this finding is, two additional comments apply. First, the enquiry at three public HEIs also points towards an important advisory role of the rector's or deans' advisory boards. Having no mention in national legislation, these advisory boards inspected are, however, composed only of internal stakeholders (senior managers, senior academics plus, in some cases, a student representative). Second, the enquiry also shows an overall increasing role of external stakeholders, be they representatives of businesses/industries that are active especially at technically oriented HEI A, C and some faculties of HEI B, or be they secondary (source) school staff (HEI A). The impact of external stakeholders is mostly indirect and often mediated, coming through industrial R & D partnerships, student internships, thesis co-supervision, alumni contacts or even promotional activities targeted at secondary schools. Still, there is still some space for more direct involvement either on the basis of course teaching or membership in state examination boards, the latter point especially (but far not only) pertinent to HEI B. Speaking of the state influence, it is exercised through the board of trustees named by the Minister with nomination pending on the rector's viewpoint and, importantly, through the Accreditation Commission, named by the government. With regard

¹¹ Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

¹² Such as: the quality assurance of programmes and awards are expected to include regular periodic reviews of programmes (including external panel members) and regular feedback from employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations.

to the ministerial influence, it should be pointed out that, in recent years, there have been repeated attempts to modify the composition of decision-making bodies of HEIs (especially senates and boards of trustees), including naming mechanisms. However, these Ministry-initiated attempts have met with opposition from students and academic community alike, expecting increased politicisation due to the worsening political climate in the country. For now, there have been no changes to the policy regulations, with the corresponding reform proposal withdrawn earlier this year.

Taking the foregoing findings into account, some barrier to optimal ESG 1.2 implementation seems to be the composition of external members of scientific boards. At HEIs surveyed, these external members are again predominantly senior academics (like the internal members), though there is a possibility to reach a more varied board composition, especially by naming professionals from practice (with teaching loads at a given HEI). Such more varied composition might pay dividends especially in case of approval of bachelor programmes. Similarly, composition of advisory boards of the dean or the rector may, in some cases, also be reviewed with respect to the point just made, considering student inclusion as a step in the right direction. Here, the institutional quality culture along with the extent of discretionary powers traditionally vested in the rector' and the deans' authority might tip the scales either for or against the inclusion of external stakeholders including alumni.

However, aside from these aspects preventing implementation of the ESG 1.2 to the maximal extent, the enquiry in question also generated some examples of effective practice. Found especially at HEI A, they include especially effective cooperation of the institution with businesses/industries, which takes the following form:

- Establishment and running of the educational centre in Northern Bohemia with teaching loads shared by the business representatives;
- More intensive and effectively organised student internships and thesis co-supervision – also pertinent to HEI C;
- Special course aimed at acquisition of soft and entrepreneurial skills organised and taught in English by industry professionals.

The last activity may be considered the example of effective practice beyond the Czech Republic. Finally, the running of the Alumni club at HEI A, *financed on a fund-raising basis*, may also be considered quite inspiring, though more time is needed to assess its long-term viability and benefits.

Sources:

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