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for Quality Assurance at Institutional Level“**

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

**IBAR WP9: The National study (Stakeholders and Quality Assurance)  
The Netherlands**

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## Introduction

The ESG emphasizes the role of stakeholders in internal quality assurance. The ESG 1.1 notes that internal quality assurance 'should also include a role for students and other stakeholders'. Further, the stakeholders such as students and employers are mentioned in ESG 1.2, which states that periodic reviews of programmes and awards should include external panel members, feedback from employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organizations should be solicited. It is also underscored that the participation of students in quality assurance activities should be ensured.

In looking at the implementation of Standards 1.1 and 1.2, national and institutional policies and practices related to governance of and especially stakeholder involvement in internal quality processes have been analysed. The report's aim is to highlight on the one hand barriers and on the other hand examples of good practice observed in the implementation of these standards in the selected Dutch higher education institutions.

We borrow the concept of stakeholders from the management literature. We start with the Freeman's definition of stakeholder: "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (1984, p. 46). Based on the theory of stakeholder identification (Mitchel et al. 1997) we can use the broad definition for the purposes of this project so that no stakeholders, potential or actual, are excluded from analysis a priori. However, we want to focus a bit on a specific group that has a 'stake' following (Brenner 1992), that is, the group that has an ability to influence the university's behavior, direction, process or outcomes. In the case of the IBAR project – the 'stake' means the ability of a particular actor/group to influence the university's definition of quality of teaching and learning and the internal quality assurance processes.

In the Dutch context, the stakeholders will include external and internal stakeholders, such as, *employers, the government, society at large, NVAO (National accreditation agency), students, alumni, academic and administrative staff, university management.*

In the following we present the findings of the four case studies (two universities A and C, and two HBO institutions B and D) on stakeholder involvement in internal quality assurance policies and practices. We conclude by identifying the key barriers to ESG implementation and good practices as found in our case studies. The main characteristics of Dutch cases were presented in WP 5. Within the institutions we have studied different faculties/schools – we chose faculties/schools focusing on 'hard' sciences, such as chemistry or life sciences and on the 'soft' sciences, such as business and management.

## Methodology

The Dutch four case studies were carried out in September 2011-March 2012 to answer the questions of the WP 9. We studied the national legal documents (WHW 2010), the NVAO documents regarding the new Accreditation Framework, as well as the Codes of Good Governance of HBO institutions and universities. Further, we studied a range of institutional documents and reports, including strategic plans, institutional policies for quality assurance, governance and management rules, institutional quality frameworks for Bachelor and Master studies, faculty and school regulations on quality assurance. Various additional documents were collected, such as guidelines for teachers about internal quality assurance, the organograms of the organizations, assessment reports of studied programmes, self-evaluation reports of some faculties/schools, rules for consultations with the professional field and advisory councils

Finally, a range of semi-structured interviews were carried out ranging from 30 to 70 minutes. For this work package we interviewed individuals at four institutions, including: 8 middle and top managers responsible for quality, 6 policy advisors responsible for quality assurance at the central and faculty/school levels, 1 education director, 1 human resources policy officer, 12 teachers and 13 students.

The interviews were recorded, summarized and analyzed. Further, document content analysis was carried out.

## Findings

### ***Q 1. National rules governing inclusion or exclusion of stakeholders in/from decision-making bodies.***

During the past 20 years, the state steering of the sector has changed as a result of ambitions of strengthening the institutional autonomy and the internal governance and management structures of higher education institutions. The *Higher Education and Research Act* (Dutch abbreviation *WHW*), put into effect in 1993 (last revision 2010) codified the enhanced institutional autonomy and introduced the principle of self-regulation for universities. Since then, the policy framework for the Dutch universities revolves mostly around funding and quality assurance. In exchange for more autonomy, the universities were expected to play an active role in the establishment of a new quality assurance system for teaching and research (De Boer et al. 2006).

The role of external stakeholders has been emphasized in the Dutch quality assurance system from its inception. In disciplines with an explicit vocational character the world of work had to be represented. It was agreed that the intermediary bodies representing the institutions (the *VSNU* for the research universities and *HBO-Raad* for the universities of applied sciences) play the coordinating role with respect to quality assessment. Particularly in the HBO sector, the sectoral committees that operate on the national level are important actors in defining the programme requirements, the quality framework at the

institutional level and the competence profiles for each individual programme. The sectoral agreements contain guiding principles for all the institutions that provide those programmes, this is in order to guarantee the 'HBO level' provision of education. Stakeholders from the professional field have an important say in these committees. Institutions have some flexibility to bring in their (local) specificities, but only within this overall framework.

Practically the higher education institutions themselves, their managers and academics were playing the leading role in internal quality assurance. The roles of some stakeholders, such as students or business representatives have been broadened while others, such as academics, were narrowed down over the years

The changes in the governance arrangements discussed in WP 8 report have increased the importance of the central institutional management in quality matters. This level in the higher education system was traditionally weak in the Netherlands. With the 1997 revision of the Law, 'Modernising University's Governance Structures' (*MUB*), executive leadership was strengthened, powers became more concentrated, and representative bodies where academics, non-academics and students held seats became advisory instead of decision-making bodies (De Boer et al. 2007). At the same time, the role of the students has been and remains important in decision making processes as they hold half of the seats in the advisory councils at the central institutional as well as faculty levels. They further are involved in the programme committees.

The MUB promulgated a significant shift in internal authority distribution; new bodies were created (Supervisory Board) and some old ones were – formally – abolished (disciplinary teaching and research units – in Dutch *vakgroepen*). The powers of the executives – rectors and deans – were increased. The Supervisory Board (*Raad van Toezicht*) is made up of highly respected persons from outside the university, such as prominent businessmen. It is meant as a buffer between the government and the executives of the university. The Supervisory Board of public universities is accountable to the minister of education. In this way stakeholders representing broader society started to have a say in how things are run at universities.

Another important external stakeholder in assuring quality of higher education was introduced in 2002. The Dutch Accreditation Council (NVAO) has become a body accrediting all study programmes, complemented from 2011 onwards by audit of the whole institutions (upon their request to make the accreditation 'lighter'). The NVAO's rules and codes of conduct have strongly affected the way study programmes and internal quality assurance processes are run at higher education institutions and arguably have contributed to the enhancement of the role of administration and management in internal quality assurance processes. For example, the revised Higher Education Act (WHW2010) and the recently adopted Dutch National Higher Education Qualification Framework have increased the checks and balances in student assessment procedures in higher education institutions.

How have these changes in the roles of stakeholders played out in the quality assurance procedures and practices in the higher education institutions will be revealed in the following discussion of the four case study institutions.

## **Q 2. *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***

### **Institution A**

The institutional rules regarding inclusion or exclusion of stakeholders largely follow the national legislative prescriptions such as the MUB Act as well as the requirements of the study programme accreditation. The strategic institutional document shows the importance of alumni in fund raising activities for research. It also emphasizes the links with the regional stakeholders and asserts the meeting the needs of the society as being central for the institution's profile.

Following the MUB (1997) revisions, the main advisory body is the University Supervisory Board at the top management level of the institution A. The Supervisory Board approves the Strategic Plan, the Annual Report and the Annual Accounts. This board consists of known public figures, professionals and business people – thus it is a representative body of external societal and governmental stakeholders. As noted in the interviews, the Supervisory Board of the institution A monitors the quality assurance processes within the university. Following the Strategic plan, at the highest level the university may establish a committee at the consisting of prominent alumni, students and staff to solve particular issues at hand.

Another body representing students and staff is the University Council as defined by the Law as well as by the internal university regulations. This is an elected advisory body representing all staff and students of institution A in equal proportions. As noted in the WP8 report, the University Council has mainly advisory powers, although there are some additional authorities: it has to give its consent to the university's strategic plan, the multi-year budget plan and the university ordinances on governance.

Students are very important stakeholders in this university as can be observed from internal regulations and from the interviews. Students are encouraged to participate in different decision-making bodies besides the University Council, such as study programme committees, different workgroups and platforms, and the board of the research and educational institutes.

Employers and other world of work representatives (alumni, industry representatives, professionals) are relatively important as they participate in the study programme advisory committees. They are seen as part of the educational quality structure. Further, guest lecturers are invited to comment on the courses. The committees meet once per year and give feedback on study programme development.

### **Institution B**

Institution B follows a clear stakeholder approach in its mission and actions. The internal quality policy identifies the government, society, the professional field,

employees, students and secondary schools as essential stakeholders for the institution and its quality. These stakeholders are mirrored in various decision-making bodies and their presence is strongly connected to quality: *“feedback from all stakeholders is important to improve the quality of the organisation and education”*. Their inclusion and role is laid out in the internal regulation.

To start with, the government is a main stakeholder to the institution, particularly from a societal and a financial supporting point of view. The government/society is represented in the supervisory board of the institution (see also WP 8), overseeing the governance of the institution. The board consists of 3-5 members having different professional backgrounds. Another stakeholder is the professional field, as they are the future employers of the graduates. In its governance and management rules, the institution refers to the presence of an advisory working field commission, for every programme or cluster of programmes. The commission is formed of external members, having a direct link with the professional field of the respective programme. The main function is to give advice to the director about the content and quality of the programme, point out developments in the field and evaluate the respective programme: *“it is regarded as an extension of external governance”*. Formal meetings take place twice a year. The committee is particularly concerned with the process and the final competences the graduates will obtain: *“the advisory committee provides an aspect of quality assurance in that regard”*. The representation of the working field commission is also inspected in the P&C cycle (see WP 8). The programme directors need to demonstrate how often they meet and what the advice of the commission is: *“if a study programme does not have a commission, they have something to explain”*.

Academic and administrative staff are another distinct group of stakeholders within the institution and are represented in the participation council. Students are given a voice in decision making bodies at the institutional level (participation council) and the faculty level (academic committee). The participation council is formed of equal proportion of employees and students (see WP 8). The assessment report of one school mirrors that meetings take place as planned. Furthermore, the voice of students is heard in different surveys and evaluation moments. A change in a decision-making body within institution B is the composition of the examination board. As indicated in previous reports, the committee should be independent from managerial decisions and changed the role of the director to an advisory one. Furthermore, it is anticipated that in the future an external person is included in the board, being a substantial change. Overall, the formal composition of the decision-making bodies introduced earlier, did not change over the last years.

## **Institution C**

The institutional rules regarding inclusion or exclusion of stakeholders largely follow the national legislative prescriptions and the requirements of the study programme accreditation (see WP8 for detail description of governance arrangements within this institution). The types of stakeholders who participate in the decision-making regarding the quality of education involve students, academic staff, people from professional world, alumni, quality officers, the external quality regulatory bodies (such as NVAO). While some of them



participate directly via the programme committees, decision-making representative bodies such as faculty councils or university council, others are involved more indirectly via rule setting for accreditation, for example, or through participation in the Supervisory Board of the University, which deals with various organizational domains of the university. The key governance bodies which comprise stakeholders are particularly interesting here.

In the Dutch universities the Supervisory Board members are all 'lay members'. In institution C the Supervisory Board consists of nine members who represent major businesses in the area, are well known public figures - bankers, political figures, industry representatives i.e. they are not full time governors - their main jobs are outside the university. According to the national Act on Higher Education they are supposed to represent 'the society at large'. They advise and oversee the university core processes and budgets. Directly they do not influence the quality of study programmes, but they can oversee the results of the institutional audit and the quality of the study programmes when these are the important issues on the university's strategic agenda.

Another important body comprising stakeholders is the Joint Meeting. It is an elected advisory body which represents all university staff and students in equal proportions. Staff refers to both academic and non-academic staff, which implies that academic staff does not have a majority. Although it advises on all the spectrum of the strategic issues for the university, such as a strategic plan, or the university budget, quality assurance of teaching falls also into its portfolio. According to the internal institutional regulation the influence of this Council can vary depending on the issue. However, when it comes to the quality of education, its opinion, especially the opinion of students is very important. The students are very active in addressing the quality of education agenda as seen from the interviews and their participation in discussions of quality in various forums.

Similarly to the overall Joint Meeting, staff and students are important stakeholders in the advisory councils in their respective faculties (see WP8). They advise the deans on various issues, including the quality of education. Since quality assurance procedures are rather localised within the faculty administration, the faculty council then works close with the local quality policy offers when they need to advise on education quality related issues. As noted in the internal quality assurance report, it is the responsibility of the faculty management to take care of the quality of education. However, the management has to consult the advisory council as well as take into consideration the advice of faculty quality officers.

Another important representation of the stakeholders in quality issues takes place in committees loosely affiliated with some study programmes as defined in internal university regulations and also national accreditation framework. Especially in more applied fields such as economics, business administration or engineering, the programmes also have 'working field committees' which usually are comprised from university alumni. Their opinion is sought on the programme development questions, they are also asked to comment on the issues of the link with the labour market and the qualifications of the graduates. Further, the contacts with the external stakeholders from the professional world are also emphasized the internal regulations of the university as they contribute to the traineeships as daily supervisors to students.

In terms of stability and change, the main advisory structures representing stakeholders remained unchanged in terms of proportions of membership. The

'working field' committees have become slightly more popular and important since the university administration and the national quality assurance regime increasingly ask for the input from practitioners in terms of the 'right' skills and qualifications of the graduates. In the latest university's strategic plan the involvement of alumni in the study programme innovation is made explicit.

## **Institution D**

In accordance with national legislation Institution D has a clear stakeholder oriented approach visible at all levels within the institution and manifested in the system. Co-creation and drive shall be fostered through the interaction with students, employees and societal partners and a strategic vision is produced in consultation with students, the private sector, the supervisory board and the central participation council.

This is also displayed in the institutional quality policy, where Institution D explicitly refers to seven groups of clients and stakeholders in relation to quality of education: 1) future students, 2) current students, 3) graduated students /alumni and students who dropped out, 4) professional field and working field, 5) clients of transfer activities, 6) ministry of education and 7) Society.

These groups are differently involved in decision-making and advisory bodies. For a description of the institutional decision-making bodies please read WP 8. Future students, graduated students/alumni and students who dropped out, as well as clients of transfer activities are not included in institutional decision making bodies. Still the feedback from alumni, graduated students and clients of transfer activities is obtained through various channels and discussed during meetings (for instance the curriculum committee, explained subsequently).

Students, as a stakeholder group, are included in different institutional decision making bodies. First, they are represented in the central representative council (24 members) and second within the faculty representative council (6-10 members). Students form 50% of the members. During the council meetings, they have to agree and discuss various issues related the quality of education: i.e.: the level of the courses, examinations, graduate profiles. At the programme level, students are represented in study programme committees, for 50%.

Another stakeholders group which is being represented in the central representative council and the representative council are academic and administrative staff (students and staff are represented equally). Teachers form also part of the study programme committee, in which they represent 50% together with professionals from the working field. Likewise students, their approval is needed on certain issues of the quality of education.

Another group of stakeholders is represented in the Supervisory Board; one of two important decision-making bodies within Institution D. The Supervisory Board consists of 1 chairman and 4 members from public and private organisation. The members are required to have a distinct profile, including a future-oriented vision on society, societal involvement and knowledge and experience to provide a clear vision on the future of Institution D. External professionals are also included for 50% together with teachers, in the study programme committees. The strong involvement of the professional side/ working field is considered essential for

assuring quality: *“For universities of applied sciences, the connection with the working field is very important. The field is part of our system; [...] they are important in the development of quality”*. Because of this, institution D has set out in its institutional policy to have a unique working field commission for every programme.

Beyond national rules for stakeholder representation, Institution D asks its programmes to have a unique working field commission. The commission advises about developments in the sector and graduate profiles, leading to a “co-creation”. The rules for meeting the working field are formalised in a procedure, tailor-made by each school. It is required that formal interaction takes place at least twice a year and the commission should consist of ca. 6-10 persons. This formal set-up is considered essential for the mission of Institution D: *“we educate for the working field [...] only when we contribute to the field, will we be taken serious”*.

The composition of the commission is disputed as the management team is in charge of appointing members. Thereby, on the one hand the fact whether the members have legitimacy from the field to represent a wider working field is under discussion and on the other hand whether people are part of the commission due to personal titles or qualifications. Despite this, the connection with the working field is a crucial element in the internal quality assurance policy and checked in the different audits: *“we are very happy with the working field commission. They are important for the accreditation process, as the management is asked to prove that stakeholders are involved in the quality assurance. So we need them”*.

The connection with the working field, is also stressed by the two schools. School A emphasises the need for a working field commission, in order to stay connected to the field. It is anticipated to have companies included, which have an international orientation. Currently, meetings take place four times a year. Also a board of advice would be desirable in the future (read WP 8). Within school B, the working field commission is perceived valuable, however, it is challenging to meet with all of them. Formally 10-11 members are part of the commission, but only 5-6 show up. A solution/best practice to tackle this is developed by school B: the management team visits the companies individually and discusses matters and obtains their feedback.

### **Q3 Nominal and real stakeholder’s representation in institutional decision-making bodies**

#### **Institution A**

In institution A both nominal and real stakeholder representation is observed in the key decision-making bodies.

The studied programmes use the input from the ‘working field’ committees according to most interviewees. The committees discuss the curriculum of study programmes. As noted by one interviewee. *“This is not only for the accreditation,*

*but is also involved otherwise to ensure the curriculum meets the requirements of the working field. Feedback from the workfield occurs both via these committees but also via internships*". However, the representatives of the employers and alumni from these committees do not have an official say in the curriculum, their role is advisory. Traditionally not all programmes would have such committees. As noted by the study coordinator, with the new accreditation framework now it is compulsory to have them.

## **Institution B**

The data did not reveal radical changes and gaps in the nominal and real stakeholder representation in institutional decision-making bodies. The participation council of institution B consists of 24 members (teachers and students equally plus one secretary). Participation in the meetings usually brings together at least 20 and is considered satisfactory, despite the challenge that the institution is located in three different cities: *"sometimes there are people missing but we try to arrange video conferences if the people cannot come to all the locations"*. A gap exists with regard to the representation of the working field. Although they are not a formal decision-making body, their role is undisputed. Within the schools the importance of this working field commission is realised, but the implementation is challenging. In one school the working field commission stopped working for some time and attempts are made to revive it. In the other school there is a working field commission, but the way the feedback is obtained and used, leaves room for improvement:

*"we don't put enough energy asking the companies to join us. We don't put enough energy asking students, so we don't follow the rules optimally [...] it is very important to have this kind of information. If you talk about quality assurance you have to listen to your stakeholders/clients. Somehow we tend to forget that"*.

For the other bodies introduced previously, meeting notes and data for nominal/real representation could not be collected.

## **Institution C**

In terms of change, as mentioned in the previous chapter, not much change can be observed between nominal and real stakeholder representation when it comes to the key advisory bodies at the university such as the Supervisory Board or the University Council. However, the real change has been commented upon in terms of student involvement in the programme quality assessment and their participation and demands via student representative bodies. In addition, while traditionally field work commissions were rather nominal than real – now there is more importance attached to these commissions and they are actually asked to contribute with their comments. The new accreditation requirements as well as the need to maintain good relations with the professional world for research needs and student internships have been mentioned as reasons for this change.

## **Institution D**

The data revealed that the representation of students and staff in the central representative council (24 members) and the academy representative council, did not change over the last years. Representatives of institution D emphasised that the nominal and real representation of stakeholders in these two decision-making bodies does not differ. An overview of exact figures is not available though. The academies report about the presence of representatives of the academy council in their annual reports. These reports are in turn subject to wider discussions with the quality assurance team and the central board: *“in the last years we did not have to interfere, because the rates were balanced and representation was good enough”*.

The examination committee, a distinct committee within institution D, is subject of change in terms of composition. In previous reports (read WP 7 & 8) it was highlighted that its role was strengthened, and top managers shall be excluded from decision-making. In addition, in some schools of institution D, an external member from the professional working field is part of the committee. Experiences from this are not available yet.

### ***Q4 Stakeholder representation on decision-making or advisory bodies that have a say about quality-relevant issues beyond what is prescribed***

## **Institution A**

Stakeholder representation in decision making and advisory bodies is mainly prescribed by the internal university regulation. External stakeholders such as business and industry representatives participate in the ‘workfield’ programme committees which evaluate the needed changes of the programmes. Informal external stakeholder participation takes place mainly via guest lecturers and informal contacts. The interaction between teachers and students with external stakeholders beyond what is prescribed is related thus to personal networks and collaborations. Lecturers keep good relations with the professionals who employ students via internships. One alumnus who participates in the ‘working field’ committee noted that he is happy to give advice on programme issues outside the committee as well. This happens in informal gatherings and meetings related to research and internships.

## **Institution B**

The collected data revealed that stakeholder consultation takes place informally through various contact moments. It is mentioned that particularly the professional side is consulted when there are a revolutionary changes in the field and when new programmes are established. During moments like these, Institution B consults with the professional field, even outside of regulated meetings. Furthermore, there are a number of informal moments with stakeholders. School B does its best to provide high quality education and thereby engages with the professional field whenever possible: *“we really listen to the field, there are a lot of guest lectures and lots of excursions where we visit factories and we also gain lots of experience when we guide students during practical placements”*. Furthermore, school B inspects the quality of the working field: *“Within 20 years I saw lots of factories several times and when we approach a new factory, I mostly guide the student to see what is happening there and whether the company has the right level”*. This picture is confirmed in school A, where the strong connection with the working field is expressed by assignments for students designed by companies and experts from the professional field giving guest lecturers.

### **Institution C**

As noted earlier, some of the study programmes have ‘field committees’ which are rather informal sounding boards for the particular study programmes. As noted by one quality officer in the applied field, these committees sometimes are just formality, but in some cases they actually do meet and discuss programme development. The field visits in this university did not reveal any additional engagement of external stakeholders beyond to what is defined by the internal regulation. However, the interview data shows that there are quite some informal contact between the lecturers, students, and the professionals. The example of not prescribed interactions which indirectly may influence study quality are alumni association events, guest lectures, internship placements.

### **Institution D**

The institutional level and the two faculties stressed that next to the formal consultation processes, informal exchanges are a sine qua non. Informal exchanges take place by regularly talking to people from the field, in the frame of for instance, supervising a student during work placement/thesis writing etc. Another channel for informal exchanges relates to the issue of multi-employment. Some staff members within school A and B work in the commercial sector as well as in institution D: *“they are excellent people for giving input about what is going on”* (see also subsequently).

## **Q5 The extent to which stakeholder's views are taken into account**

### **Institution A**

Lecturers mentioned that work field committees indicate what they expect from university graduates of particular study programmes. Most of interviewees note that the advice of the work field committees is seriously taken into account. As noted by one teacher *"it is considered important that students leave the university with those qualities that connect to the labour market"*. The interviewed member of the fieldwork committee had an impression that his views were welcomed although he was not sure what happened with their input in the end.

The comments and criticism from students are also important for the study programme improvement according to the teachers, students and the quality officer. Students participate in the regular evaluation cycle of courses via course evaluations and via programme committees. They also are active in giving feedback via the board of the education institute.

### **Institution B**

#### **a. Graduate profiles, learning outcomes**

Graduate profiles and learning outcomes are a central element in the educational vision in the institution. Because students are trained for a certain professional field, its respective job profile and competences are central. The competences and profiles are the point of departure for constructing the curriculum and also assessments. The advisory committee from the working field has a crucial role when it comes to determining learning outcomes and manifesting graduate profiles. By this, institution B obtains legitimacy from the working field: *"that it is right what we are doing. That we educate for the right market"*. In sum, the requirements of the working field are determining graduate profiles and learning outcomes. Furthermore, the experience within institution B shows, that competences/learning outcomes are only modified if the working field sees a strong need for this, occurring seldom. The academic representative council (formed of students and staff) is to a large extent involved in curriculum reviews.

#### **b. Exam requirements and curriculum review**

The working field commission has a crucial role when it comes to the curriculum, as laid out before. This is because institution B is professionally oriented and maintains close ties with the working field in its competence based learning approach. Every study programme has its own working field commission, constituting of experts of the field. As the working field is strongly concerned with graduate profiles, their role is essential when introducing/amending a program:

*“they test/validate the programme and determine the direction of the program. Thus the advisory committee provides an aspect of quality assurance in that regard”.* Although the working field commission in one of the locations, School A, does not currently exist, in the past the impact was seen regarding the concept of the programme: *“one development in the working field is that it is becoming more international. So also we are getting more international: giving the programme in English and giving more international accents. We did this on recommendation of the working field”.* Next to these official meeting moments, the feedback from the professional field is obtained through working together on projects, attending symposia and guest lectures and subsequently leading to changes and improvements of a course, and the general job profiles. The Dublin descriptors (see WP 7), as laid out by the Ministry of Education are an essential requirement, that institution B has to follow in its curriculum. Finally, alumni have an evident role in relation to curriculum review and learning outcomes. Their evaluations, coming from an alumni survey, are used to reconsider and reflect upon the whole education.

### **c. Soft and entrepreneurial skills acquisition**

The professional field has an impact on soft and entrepreneurial skills, students should obtain. There are formal consultations with the field whether graduates have the right skills. Next to these regular meetings, the combination of small remarks and informal consultations might lead to adaptations. The critical reflection of school B explicitly states that docents should have enough flexibility to be able to structurally work/do research together with the professional field in order to gain an understanding of the skills needed.

### **d. Internal quality assurance processes**

In terms of internal quality assurance processes, it is particularly the participation council (students & staff) that is involved. The council is the platform where quality related issues are discussed and suggestions are made. Furthermore, students feedback through the National Student survey and the feedback moments after each quarter. Employees participate in the employee satisfaction survey. The views of these two stakeholders are subsequently fed into the internal quality cycle (PDCA). The professional field is not involved in the set-up of the internal quality assurance process.

## **Institution C**

The views of the students are taken on board as seen from the interviews with the students from the faculty council and the programme committees where students are represented. For example, in the hard sciences faculty, the students managed to start a serious discussion of what happens after the evaluation forms are collected in the end of the courses since they asked for more transparency. For example, after serious student complaints to the programme committee of hard sciences faculty, the teacher of one course was changed after a series of discussions. But at the same time, he mentioned that there are still many ‘bad stories where nothing changes’ after the discussions in the programme



committee. They also asked that the results of student assessments should be discussed with the students if they wish so.

Their main criticism of the lack of feedback from teachers on the assessment was heard in the view of the interviewed student and they accommodated a possibility for students to meet their teachers after the exams to discuss the grades. Student opinions are also emphasized by the university management. As noted by the university top management, the students are change agents and the university makes it a habit to include them in all committees to have a stimulus to improve the study quality. In this respect, their role of education committees and student council are mostly emphasized. The interviews revealed that the opinions from the workfield advisory committees if they exist and meet once per year are taken as friendly advice.

## **Institution D**

### **a. Graduate profiles, learning outcomes**

Institution D considers the input of stakeholders (in form of the future employers), regarding graduate profiles and learning outcomes essential: “we educate for the working field”. Therefore, every Bachelor programme has a unique working field commission, advising on learning outcomes and graduate profiles. But also at institutional level, a quantitative and qualitative survey is conducted in order to be better able to link the graduate profile to the needs of the working field. Institution D measures the working field’s satisfaction with the institution’s graduates and the work placements of students.

Within school B, the professional field has an advisory role in relation to constructing the programme. In association with the professional commission, the body of knowledge is developed and the didactical principles are agreed upon. The graduate profile is checked with the working field every three years, considered to be an essential aspect of quality assurance. Thereby, it is examined whether there are trends in the job profile and whether the lines of education need to be changed. It is stressed within school B, that a stronger connection with the working field is desirable and shall be deepened in the future, particularly for single modules: “reading a book is not enough. I am then looking for someone from the field, who can help me with the content”.

### **b. Exam requirements and curriculum review**

The professional committee, assisting every bachelor programme is not concerned with exam requirements. Sometimes the field serves as an external assessor, yet formally they cannot take a decision and remain advisory. They also contribute to updating the curriculum. In one programme within school B, it appeared challenging to get a satisfactory feedback from the working field commission on the curriculum review: “mostly they say yes to the things we propose. I would like to have more discussions with them”. Reasons for this are connected to the limited time that the members of the commission have. In addition, some docents are educated and trained to maintain the contacts with the working field, as a more informal way of ‘listening to the field’. A good practice was revealed in School A and B: both schools invite guest lecturers from

the professional field and thereby insights from the working side are given to students and docents.

The students within school A underlined the professional character of their study: “the topics are very real and up-to-date. We for instance dealt with the financial crisis intensively from the beginning”. Students are involved in curriculum reviews through participating in the participation council at central and faculty level. The exam requirements and translation of the curriculum to the exam, is the responsibility of the teachers/examiners. Institution D strives to consult alumni regarding curriculum reviews as well. However, until now institution D did not proof successful in its attempts.

### **c. Soft and entrepreneurial skills acquisition**

The acquisition of soft and entrepreneurial skills of graduates is part of the graduate profile for which the professional field is consulted. Skills like giving presentations, working in groups or how to be entrepreneurial and sell your ideas form part of the curriculum of almost every study programme. The working field approves these skills in form of the wider curriculum. Students and teachers who are part of the institutional council need to agree with the graduate profiles and the respective skills as well.

### **d. Internal quality assurance processes**

In terms of internal quality assurance processes, students and employees have an influence by means of their participation in the councils and the study programme committees. Through these channels they can formally express their views on quality processes. Furthermore, the results of student’s and employee’s evaluations are part of the internal quality assurance. Also the working field participates in certain evaluation processes (i.e.: professional field satisfaction survey). The results are used to measure the quality of institution D. There is, however, no role for the professional field to influence the organisation of quality processes within institution D.

## ***Q6 Stakeholder viewpoints filtering into the standard undergraduate curriculum and requirements***

### **Institution A**

The views of students and graduates filter into the undergraduate curriculum via the views of students and graduates based on student course evaluations and a regular alumni survey. The results of student evaluations and accreditation visitations are discussed in the programme committees and taken into account by the programme directors in revising the programmes and the curriculum.

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

Hiring and promotion is carried out by Broad Assessment Committees (BACs), which depending on the stage of assessment can consist of the chair holder, a chair group representative, a student and a science group expert. If the assessment has to be carried out regarding the promotion, the committee also includes an independent chair and an external expert. The committee advises the management about the promotion based on the quality criteria, internal and external peer review. From the hiring rules we see that the main role is played by the university academic staff, the professoriate (chair holders) and a student representative. Further, inclusion of external academics shows the importance given to the external peer review.

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

Students as part of their curriculum must to undertake internships. For the BSc students this means between minimum 24 credits to maximum 39 credits to be earned while doing an internship in the professional field. The internship opportunities usually are provided by the informal networks of the professor or other teaching staff.

**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)**

Professional development courses for academic staff are organized on a yearly basis but they are mainly geared towards didactics and how to improve teaching and learning. Academic staff participate in conferences and other professional events. Due to the specific nature of the university, there are close links with research institutes. Academic staff are also motivated to be excellent in research since their promotion depends on it. Thus interaction with research community is vital for academic staff. In the applied fields, this also means interaction with the working field. An exchange between teaching and research is taking place. For students the training is mainly done within the standard BSc and MSc programmes.

**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?)**

As indicated by the national student satisfaction scores of this university, the link between the study programmes/courses and the world of work is very close. Students satisfaction with the preparation for employment is significantly higher than the national average in 2011. This applies to the practical orientation of the coursework, contact with the world of work and the quality of internship supervision. External supervision of theses is possible. In this university the link with research institutes is especially strong.

## **Institution B**

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

The employment requirements for staff members are these days influenced by the Ministry of Education. The ambition is that the educational level of staff members is increased, and a certain percentage should nowadays have a master degree. Furthermore, it is prescribed that a certain mix of functions exists within institution B (different salary scales) and a mix of temporary and permanent positions. For the latter, the participation council has to approve it. The new performance agreements with the Ministry of Education request next to the master degree level, a certain level of didactic skills for docents. Employees of institution B are typically involved in the job interviews with new staff members. They form part of the wider selection committee.

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

Throughout the interviews, the importance of informal contacts with the business sector are mentioned. Particularly when docents supervise students in their final project or work placement, they have a close connection with the professional sector and get to know about developments there. Currently, there is no structured way, how the input is channelled and formalised but usually this feedback is brought into the programme committee and discussed subsequently. During meetings of the academic representative council or during curriculum review days, this feedback might be included. Curriculum review days take place once/twice a year and it is explored whether the curriculum matches the working field's needs.

### **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)**

Next to the formalised stakeholder consultations, individuals of institution B use of informal channels, when they meet representatives from the working field at different occasions: *"in all kind of symposia/daily courses, I meet the same people and we talk about things and I bring it here"*. The input of these informal meetings is then processed during the curriculum review days, taking place once or twice a year. Furthermore, the docents interviewed stressed that they informally share their experiences of these courses and trainings with the students during regular lectures.

### **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?)**

In the external assignments that students do during their course of study, externals function as assessors on the students' performance/reports. On basis of this, school A enquires about the experiences of the examiners. The feedback is consequently used as input for improvements. A number of docents in school A & B looks back on work experience in the professional sector themselves. The experiences from that time and the networks individuals possess, form a good basis for further contact and exchange. The experiences and feedback through these informal contacts are discussed during the curriculum review days.

## **Institution C**

The interviewed academics and students did not think that the advisory fieldwork committees influence the curriculum and requirements in any way. One manager reported that these committees are important for the accreditation requirements and if the evaluation report mentions that the programme does not address the labour market needs. In such cases the quality officers at the university central level ask for more data on the role of such committees and the engagement of professionals in advising on the programme development. The view expressed in the soft sciences was that the academics are also professionals, so they do not really need external stakeholders for advice.

Further, alumni views on education quality are taken in consideration via a survey carried out every six years as noted in the faculty of soft sciences. The teaching manager takes note of these views, proposes measures for improvement, implements those measures and investigates whether these improvements measures have had an impact. Similarly, the faculty board member responsible for teaching has to take these views in to account and ensure they are taken into consideration in improving education quality.

Representatives from the professional world are members of a programme's advisory council. The management team of an academic department responsible for the programme discusses the quality and quality assurance of the programmes with this council. The teaching manager takes stock of the opinions of these members about education quality, reports them to the faculty board about it and proposes the measures for improvement.

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

The hiring of academic staff is carried out by the committees in the faculties. These committees largely consist of senior academics. They do not include external stakeholders. Hiring and promotion criteria are decided by the academics and agreed by the management of the faculty. The contracts are signed by the deans of the faculty/school.

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

Internships are part of the programmes. The applied sciences related programmes have strong links with the world of work and students have many opportunities to get internships which later may lead to jobs. Students have perceived this as a positive aspect of the programmes at this university.

**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)**

The courses which are introduced for staff professional development include skills training, pedagogy training, career development training. For student, additional course may be offered to help improve writing skills.

**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?)**

The most obvious example of stakeholder influence on curriculum is the involvement of the external supervisors from companies in the supervision of the student internships and their Bachelor thesis in some cases. Although not every program requires field experience, but in for example business studies, this is a popular practice.

## **Institution D**

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

As mentioned already in WP 8, the faculties have certain autonomy in terms of hiring staff. Besides the general institutional and national criteria for hiring new staff members, the faculties can determine the profile they are looking for. Stakeholders like the working field are not officially included in the process of hiring new personnel within the institution. A best practice is that the management team of school A consults with the working field when there is an open vacancy about the requirements the candidate should have. Sometimes a representative of the professional field is even involved in solicitation talks, as an advisor. A similar role is the one of students, not formally regulated within institution D. Students sometimes participate in solicitation talks as members of the advisory or participation council. Employees/staff members of a school are usually present during solicitation talks. The final decision remains with the management team of a school.

In school B, the procedures for hiring new staff members are not inclusive towards stakeholder involvement in solicitation talks. Neither the professional field nor students are involved in staffing policies/recruitment. Still, the skills that

a new staff member needs to possess are linked to the curriculum: “if the curriculum changes, it is needed that the staff possesses the new required skills”. Based on that the school offers training and further education to its staff.

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

Institution D evaluates the internships that students do with businesses in a structural way. Every internship is evaluated by the hosting company and the results are handed over to a ‘curriculum review committee’ (formed by a group of teachers). Combined with the quarterly student evaluations, this feedback is used to suggest modifications and updates of the curriculum to the team manager (changes subsequently need approval by the academy representative council).

The interviewees within school A and B stressed the involvement of the working field particularly at a stage, when students do work placements and write their dissertations. During this process, the lecturers interact with companies and see whether the teaching content is adequate and applicable. Although this channel is an informal one, its value is not underestimated: “yes, of course [...] you get lots of input from the working field during these moments”. Still, there is not an immediate change in the curriculum teaching content after each visit. Instead, a mosaic is formed and brought to the curriculum review committee: “It is the combination of things, you hear and see, that lead to a small changes and adaptations of the curriculum”.

**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)**

As indicated previously, the professional working field indicates skills and trends of the field to the manager of a team. Thereby new skill requirements become evident, leading to trainings and further education of staff members. This is also brought to the curriculum review committee and discussed during annual review meetings: “if the curriculum changes, it is needed that the staff possesses the new required skills”.

**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?)**

The working field is to a large extent involved in student assessment procedures. They might be included as an external assessor, varying per faculty (compare WP 7). The professional field within school A is included in the assessment of the final report of a student’s work placement or the final graduation project. The students indicated that this might be challenging sometimes, due to the different expectations and requirements. Another example of the connection is within school B. Whereas in the past the student would get one mark for the final project, the professional field expressed the need to give a mark for the overall quality of the report (style, format, how it is written) and the work the student has done. Another example is that the working field had concerns about the quality of Dutch-language of the final reports. During internal management team

meetings and curriculum committee meetings, attempts are made to address this.



## Conclusions

This review has shown that the role of external stakeholders such as employers and internal stakeholders- students- is formally defined as important in the Dutch case study institutions. Partly due to the regulatory changes, partly due to the historical developments, the decision-making structures in Dutch institutions include advisory participatory governance bodies partly staffed by students and partly by staff. Institutions also have an external stakeholder representative body at the central institutional level. The review has revealed that stakeholder participation is formally prescribed at the programme level as well although it does not always work in practice. This largely depends on the discipline/field of research and on the type of institution. The universities of applied sciences with their mission of 'applied sciences' had more developed and closer relations with the world of work and practice compared to the other two universities. In the following we summarize the barriers for the implementation of the ESG standards related to the stakeholder involvement in the four case study institutions as well as point out to the good practices. We conclude with a list of recommendations.

### ***Barriers and institutional good practices***

*This review has identified a couple of barriers for stakeholder involvement in the internal quality assurance processes of the study programmes:*

1. Gaps between nominal and real stakeholder (professional field) participation in the study programme quality assurance processes were noted in some cases/programmes.
2. The feedback from employers and other work field committee members does not always feed back into the program design.

*Good practices were also identified in the Dutch case studies:*

1. The involvement of students both in formal decision making bodies and informally is high in the four studied institutions.
2. The views of students are taken into consideration in improving study programmes.
3. University management is increasingly important stakeholder in setting up and implementing the PDCA cycle in the institutions.
4. The informal interaction and ad-hoc committees between the institution (lecturers and managers, students) and the external stakeholders (employers) is strongly visible via internships, guest lecturers, alumni association events.

5. Institution A has a strong integration of the programme revision process in which students participate at all level (programme committees and the Board of the Education institute).

## **Recommendations**

1. Strengthen the informal interaction by facilitating platforms of exchange between students staff and external stakeholders
2. Bridge the gap between nominal and real stakeholder representation in institutions by mutual learning processes between different programmes
3. Improve the quality of the study programmes by inclusion of a larger variety of stakeholders in the decision-making processes regarding study programmes review.
4. Provide spaces for the informal interaction between external stakeholders and internal stakeholders at or around the institution to contribute to the increase of exchanges and experiences which may lead to richer student learning experience.
5. Universities should increase the input from the working field, especially the traditional universities. Although the tradition in universities and universities of applied sciences are different, the employability of graduates and relevance of their skills to the labour market needs should be important for all institutions.

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