

WP9 - Stakeholders and Quality: Final version

The key question of WP9 is to understand: If and how the ESG and National Qualification Frameworks have changed the nominal and real stakeholder influence on decisions related to the internal quality assurance processes in higher education institutions.

Analytical question for national reports: Which ‘good practices’ and ‘barriers’ can be identified at different levels when it comes to stakeholder’s contribution to the processes of internal quality assurance (e.g. decisions on improving the primary processes in the higher education institutions) and to what extent stakeholder’s inputs are in line with expectations on processes and content of undergraduate education from the ESG and other official inputs, such as national qualification frameworks? To explain our aim with this WP further, the questions about official representation of stakeholders in HEIs are meant as preliminaries to the core issue, namely, whether (or to what extent) stakeholders concretely influence the quality of HE and if their influence is or is not in line with the ESG and the National Qualification Frameworks.

The definition of stakeholders

The concept of stakeholders is borrowed 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 the IBAR 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 – 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.

Stakeholders in the ESG

Stakeholder notion in *ESG standard 1.1*: internal quality assurance ‘should also include a role for students and other stakeholders’. Rationale for quality enhancement: The added value of involving stakeholders *should be* that a richer conception of quality will be adopted in the higher education institution. It should help to strengthen links between the higher education institution and the society.

The possible groups (the data should also come out from the interviewees) may be *employers, professional organizations, government, alumni, students, local government representatives, labour unions (of teaching/research staff, but also labour unions representing alumni, e.g. in the region of the higher education institution).*

Decision-making bodies within the institution (depending on the context): Board of Trustees/external supervisory board, academic Senate or its committees (e.g. for

curriculum review and vetting?), examination committees, faculty Senates, Study programme advisory committees, study programme examination/degree committees)

The final research questions on stakeholder involvement in quality assurance:

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.

Data sources - national regulation on higher education governance and quality assurance, National Qualification Frameworks. Check briefly in an interview with institution's central (strategic) staff.

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.

Data sources - institutional documents (bylaws). Check briefly in an interview with institutions' central (strategic) staff.

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

Data sources -Institutional bylaws. Check briefly in an interview with institution's central (strategic) staff.

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? *(The answer to this question points to possible cases of interesting practice to be investigated - perhaps good practice?)*

Data sources - institutional documents (faculty's bylaws). Check briefly in an interview with unit's (faculty) central (strategic) staff.

5. To what extent are stakeholder's views (and from which stakeholders?) taken into account and why specifically with respect to:
 - a. Graduate profiles, learning outcomes
 - b. Exam requirements and curriculum review
 - c. Soft and entrepreneurial skills acquisition
 - d. Internal quality assurance processes

Data sources - institutional documents (meeting notes of curriculum review committees/ project groups), check briefly in interview with institution's or faculty's quality assurance staff.

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)
 - b. Internships (are the informal contacts with businesses during students' internships used for curriculum reviews)
 - c. Special professional development courses - job-related continuing education and training courses distinct from the standard degree-courses¹ (are insights from such courses used to inform the 'standard curriculum' and its requirements)
 - 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?)
 - e. Requirements of external professional bodies

Data sources - institutional documents, (e.g. cooperation agreements between faculty/university and external organizations or professionals), interviews with institution's or faculty's quality assurance staff, course coordinators, students.

¹ Continuing professional development (CPD) is defined as job-related continuing education and training in which people obtain knowledge and/or learn new skills for a current or a future job or to improve their opportunities for advancement and promotion. CPD activity is not part of the regular teaching activities supported through the institution's general grants and tuition fees paid by students enrolled in degree programs. So it is mostly short fee-based training programmes of a vocational character and excludes the training of degree-seeking students in the institution's BA, MA courses (CHEPS U-MAP).