

**Outcomes of the Peer-learning session with the participation of group C members, regarding involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance activities at the European Higher Education Area countries level (Work package 3)  
Ghent, 17 January 2020**

The ESQA consortium organised a peer-learning activity as part of the Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance (TPG C on QA) on 17 January 2020 in Ghent, Belgium. The purpose of the peer-learning activity was to share the first outcomes of the Study on stakeholders' involvement in external quality assurance activities, developed within the project. The five QA agencies members in the consortium – ANACEC, ARACIS, DAI, Hcéres and NEAA – also presented their own experience and practices regarding the involvement of stakeholders in QA activities. Other members of the Group C had the opportunity to ask questions on the study and to share their practices and challenges on stakeholder involvement as well as give their view on what elements they would like to see in the Guideline on involvement of stakeholders in QA activities, which is to be developed in the framework of the project.

The peer-learning activity started with an introduction to the ESQA project by Cristina Ghitulica from the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS, Romania) and Jakub Grodecki from ESU.

After the short introduction to the project, the QA agencies that are members of the consortium presented the status of stakeholder involvement in their agencies. The presentations show that there are some differences between the different agencies for instance due to legislation or culture but also similarities. Agencies involve stakeholders in similar activities including as members of decision-making, advisory and/or governing bodies, as peer experts, and through consultations and interviews during site visits as well as in development and revision of QA standards and processes. The short presentations by the agencies aimed to provide some case examples to participants and to encourage discussion with the audience concerning participants' experience on stakeholder involvement in their own or other countries including challenges and best practices.

During the discussion, it was commented that employer and labour market representatives are difficult to engage – apart from being members in the advisory board – as they do not have time for instance to take part in site visits. Another problem is that HEIs try to use the same employer representatives. Consequently, the participants identify employer involvement and ways to motivate their engagement as an area that would be important to cover in the Guideline.

It was also discussed that generally the best way to involve stakeholders is through co-creating and co-ownership. To achieve this, communication plays an important role. A way to motivate stakeholders is to create “win-win” situations where stakeholders can see and feel the impact of their involvement. Each stakeholder group should be studied separately as they have different objectives for their engagement.

Following the discussions on the experiences of the ESQA partner QA agencies and members of the Group C, Milja Homan from ENQA presented the first outcomes of the Study on stakeholders' involvement in external quality assurance activities. The study constitutes as the start-up activity of the project with the objective of taking stock of the current involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as well as to identifying examples of good practice for stakeholder engagement.



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**ESQA**  
Effective involvement of Stakeholders in  
External Quality Assurance Activities

The study takes a holistic view to stakeholder engagement in external quality assurance activities by mapping the perspectives of quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and students on the topic.

The first results of the study concentrated on the results of the survey conducted among ENQA member and affiliate QA agencies. Although the survey results do not bring big surprises as such in regarding involvement of the different stakeholder groups, the high response rate and good geographical representation of QA agencies contribute to give a solid picture of the current status of stakeholder involvement in the EHEA.

The results of the survey confirm that QA agencies involve various stakeholders in various ways. The most well-known stakeholders – students, teaching staff, employers and other staff at higher education institutions – are the ones involved the most across all the surveyed agencies, whereas civil society and local authorities are involved only by a small part of the agencies. The level of involvement of the different stakeholder groups varies depending on the type of external quality assurance activity. For instance, the main stakeholder groups as identified above are largely involved in evaluations – although work remains for full engagement – while they are not as extensively represented in the agencies’ different bodies (e.g. decision-making and governing structures).

During the discussion, followed by the presentation, it was noted that the survey illustrates the involvement of the most common stakeholder groups. However, the low level of civil society participation stands out although in general QA should pay attention to social inclusiveness. Thus, it would be good to examine how to include other stakeholders including civil society in addition to the “traditional” stakeholders.

It was proposed by one participant that HEIs and QA agencies could learn from each other regarding the ways they connect with their stakeholders. For instance, the contribution of the perspective of world of work at programme level is important. The ways HEIs motivate labour market representatives’ engagement could benefit QA agencies as well. It would be interesting to read in the study about QA agencies’ motivations and reasons for engaging different stakeholder categories.

The participants also expressed an interest to read in the study about stakeholder involvement in relation to independence. For instance, it could be studied if stakeholders consider participating as formal representatives of a sector or rather working in a personal capacity.<sup>1</sup>

The concluding remarks of the peer-learning activity underlined the need for continuous and meaningful stakeholder involvement to benefit external quality assurance.

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<sup>1</sup>The consortium notes that guidelines of the standard 3.1 Independence of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) explain that “[anyone] contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency (e.g. as expert) is informed that while they may be nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency.” ESG [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf), p. 23

