Stakeholders' involvement in QA across Europe

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ESG on involvement of stakeholders

- External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).
  [standard 2.4]

- Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.
  [standard 3.1]

Why is stakeholder involvement important?

- Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose.

- Higher education aims to fulfil **multiple purposes**; including

  - preparing students for active citizenship,

  - for their future careers (e.g. contributing to their employability),

  - supporting their personal development,

  - creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation.

- Therefore, **stakeholders**, who may prioritise different purposes, can **view quality in higher education differently** and quality assurance needs to take into account these different perspectives. […]

ESG on independence

- Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.
  [standard 3.3]

Involvement of stakeholders and independence of agencies

- Stakeholder involvement: no end in itself, but is key to a good and objective quality judgement

- Might sound contradictory, but: independence ≠ vacuum

- Important to differentiate – each have their role and place:

  - Representatives of stakeholder organisations

  - Experts or Board members serving in personal capacity ≠ political representatives – yet bring in their perspective/background

- Diversity of stakeholders involved supports independence: prevents controlling stake of one single group

One dimension: expert groups

- ESG require students – but do not preclude others
- Common challenges:
  - Training of experts
  - Attracting experts, interest in QA
  - Ensure both independence and context knowledge
- Clearly an expert role, not a representative function
- … but cooperation with stakeholder organisations needed

Another dimension: governing structure

- "Unitary" approach:
  - one single main governing body
  - responsible for criteria/procedures **and** individual decisions
  - usually composed of experts from different backgrounds, serving as individuals
- "Two-tier" approach:
  - one larger assembly/council, responsible for criteria/procedures;
    often includes organisational representatives
  - smaller board/committee, responsible for individual decisions;
    usually composed of individual experts

Governing structure – reflections

- Both approaches have pros and cons, for example:

  - Unitary model underlines independence, but need to organise consultation of stakeholder organisations through other channels

  - Two-tier model might be seen as less independence, but has certain level of stakeholder consultation, and checks and balances "built-in"

- Many challenges are shared, for example:

  - Training and briefing Board/committee members for their role

  - Securing enough interest to contribute to agency bodies

  - Clarity of everyone's role, prevent undue influence