



AQAS

AGENTUR FÜR
QUALITÄTSSICHERUNG DURCH
AKKREDITIERUNG VON
STUDIENGÄNGEN E.V.

FROM EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO NEW PRACTICE

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QUESTION:

WHAT YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNT BY YOUR OWN AGENCY FROM THE PAST 18 MONTHS OF DEALING WITH THE PANDEMIC?

Answer:

God

give me

the patience to accept things I cannot change

the courage to change things that I can change

and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other

(unknown author)

FIRST PHASE: EMERGENCY RESPONSE SOLUTIONS

First aid: keep the system alive – don't change it

In the first 2 month:

- Postponement of site visits
- Extension of accreditation periods
- Desk based reviews (written only)
- AQAS closed the office and worked completely from home, we fully returned in September 2021



CHANCES - VIRTUAL VISITS (AGENCY)

- no travel (panel & agency)
 - safe cost for travelling
 - ecological impact
 - less travel time / more visits
- flexible timing options
- experts participate who had no time to be absent for a longer time
- fewer logistical preparation



CHANCES – VIRTUAL VISITS

Creative approaches - visit of labs of University of Applied Science Cologne with support of a drone



CHALLENGES - VIRTUAL VISITS (AGENCY)

- high effort to organize and coordinate online site visit
 - more support for panel needed (checklists etc.)
 - more documentation from HEI requested
 - more coordination of panel
- workload of staff of agencies was/is high
- limitations of connectivity & technology is a challenge
- limited option to get evidence (infrastructure, resources)
- dynamics of discussion can become problematic
- no socializing, no intercultural exchange

VIRTUAL SITE VISITS (EXPERTS)

peers work professionally – but:

- impact on expert motivation
 - reduction to content
 - international exchange is lacking
 - social panel interaction – professional networking lacks
- online fatigue
- expert perception is key, but lack of context experience impacts assessment



LESSONS LEARNT (1)

- more structure & preparation by the agency is needed
- clear & strict communication rules needed
- technical support needed (not possible in some cases)
- new channels for experts to exchange (Whatsapp)
- real life goes on behind & besides the screens (different realities at the same time)
- other schedules (more days/shorter days?)
- virtual meeting days are tiring – breaks



LESSONS LEARNT (2)

- international procedures: language is getting crucial and dependence on interpretation
- videos as an additional source of information?
- data protection given?
- problems are more difficult to discuss online
- intercultural aspects in international reviews can become a problem
- reports do not differ in quality (virtual/physical)



RESULTS OF A PRELIMINARY SURVEY BY ANOTHER GERMAN AGENCY*

Survey on the basis of 33 virtual site visits of 54 study programmes, answered by 115 experts and 45 representatives of HEI:

- 96,3 % of the reviewers and 88,9% HEI representatives were „very satisfied“ or „satisfied“ with the process of online site visits
- *Positive aspects:* reduced time needed and efficiency
- *Negative aspects:* limited social interaction and limited forms of communication
- *Room for improvement:* adaption of schedule for the site visit, breaks, technical aspects, moderation, communication

* AHPGS survey of its stakeholders

WAYS FORWARD - CONSIDERATIONS



How will HE change as a result of the pandemic?

HEIs: how can effort and costs be saved in the future?



Is a site visit the gold standard?
How much validity does EQA need?

Can mutual trust be created online?
Different procedure for different HEIs?



How will reviewers engage on the long run?

What is their benefit from x online visits?
Will agencies lose experienced experts?



Do we accept outcomes for institutions that we have never seen?

EQAR/ENIC-NARICS: are outcomes of online visits only second class?

A „WEATHER FORECAST“:



- Online training of experts and HEI continue
- Hybrid models for international reviews (online visit & delegation visits HEI)
- New instruments for assessment of e-formats
- International exchange of HEI & agency staff (access to conferences) is strengthened



- Pressure on costs = funding of agencies
- Online fatigue – loss of experts
- Agency staffing (number and qualification?)
- High reliance on technical infrastructure
- Fraud?