

## Poster Sessions' Abstracts

### Members' Forum 2024

**Jennifer Grünewald, Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Science (AHPGS), Germany**

**Title:** Programme accreditation of blended learning and distance study programmes

#### **Abstract**

There is an increase in blended learning and distance learning programmes, which has been further fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic. The term "blended learning" has an ambiguous definition and is used in various forms by higher education institutions (HEIs), which leads to a variety of organisational forms of study programmes.

As part of a thematic analysis, self-evaluation reports from HEIs and respective review reports by AHPGS were examined, focusing on programme organisation and workload distribution. It was found that there are significant overlaps in the extent of in-person study and self-study. This means that the usage of different learning environments does not necessarily indicate whether the HEI markets the study programme as a blended learning, distance learning, or on-campus programme.

The investigation of differences in study programmes serves as a starting point to examine how programme accreditation can effectively address these types of programmes. The presentation explores the thematic aspects that play a role in the quality assessment of blended learning and distance learning programmes. The aim is to support experts in evaluating these study programmes and to provide assistance to HEIs when it comes to preparing self-evaluation reports.

**Tornike Bakakuri, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), Georgia**

**Title:** Ensuring impact through end-to-end ownership of the QA methodology

#### **Abstract**

In order for the new QA policies and regulations to function effectively and for the preconceived value chain to be transferable and impactful, the agencies must be active participants of the initiated change themselves. With a range of tools and general community-based approach, the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) and higher education institutions (HEIs) are co-opting to bring about the reforms, while monitoring the impact on the way. These steps, although not exhaustive, include the following: a) actively communicating with the Rectors' Conference as well as HEIs individually, b) collaborating through Erasmus+ projects with the aim to develop and pilot new QA procedures and/or standards, while maintaining a rigorous system for tracking project results, and c) conducting thematic analyses including interviews and focus groups with stakeholders, to enhance common understanding and interpretation before extrapolating and applying the results to QA methodology in use. Such an approach caters to the needs and capabilities of the Georgian higher education community at large, it promotes joint ownership of system-wide reforms and acknowledges the objectives and outcomes at every step of the QA cycle.

*These posters will be presented in Room: IB 0.21*

## **Nataliia Stukalo, National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA), Ukraine**

**Title:** QA security in challenging world: how NAQA digitalisation contributes to QA sustainability under martial law

### **Abstract**

Since its launch in 2019, the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA) has faced a number of challenges caused by internal, external and global factors. Covid-19 and Russia's war invasion of the territory of Ukraine are the key serious problems which in turn caused technological challenges, cyberattacks, students and teachers migration, research and study facilities destruction, universities replacement. Under such circumstances Ukrainian QA system was forced to quickly adapt and transform in order to ensure QA security and sustainability. Digitalisation of NAQA procedures became the key to success and helps to overcome challenges. NAQA has fully digitalised the procedure of study programmes accreditation. Proactive communication with stakeholders through social networks, webinars, remote panels and trainings, hybrid meetings, events broadcasting as well as professional development of experts help to ensure trust and consistency of external QA. Thus, on one hand, digitalisation of NAQA procedures and activities has a number of positive aspects, however on the other hand, there are some additional challenges to be addressed.

## **Dagmar Provijn, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) Flanders**

**Title:** No standards, no criteria: "In der beschränkung zeigt sich erst der meister" or how Goethe inspires external quality assurance to be flexible to change.

### **Abstract**

How do you ensure that responsibility lies with those who are responsible? The path NVAO Flanders has chosen is to let institutions tell their own story of choices, successes, hurdles, and failures, and not the story we want them to tell when imposing standards and criteria they should meet. Obviously, this is based on deserved trust, meaning the institutions have shown a positive track record of programme accreditations proving their programmes meet the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area elements that typify high-quality higher education programmes. Therefore, NVAO Flanders keeps external quality procedures simple and tailored to the context of the individual institution. Documentation is limited to a critical self-reflection and if needed documents that are already present in the daily operations of the institution. Moreover, NVAO Flanders' Appreciative Approach allows for an enhancement-led perspective, with a special focus on strengths and successes. This allows for an open dialogue that is a valid source of information to thoroughly understand the full context of the institution. This results in a holistic review by the panel that tries to answer the holy trinity of external quality assurance: 'What do you intend?', 'How will you implement what is intended?' and 'How do you make sure that you realise what was intended?'. The panel presupposes the story of the institution is consistent, and if not, the panel has the burden of proof. A positive outcome of the institutional review allows the institution to internalise the external quality assurance of existing programmes. But most of all, this system of external quality assurance easily adapts itself to the continuously changing context the institutions are confronted with and as such also to significant developments or challenges in higher education or society at large.

*These posters will be presented in Room: IB 0.22*

**Ketija Andersone, Academic Information Centre/ Quality Agency for Higher Education (AIC/AIKA), Latvia**

**Title:** Models for agency cooperation in organising assessments within a national legal framework

The legal amendments in force already from 1st January 2019 in Latvia foresee the possibility for Latvian higher education institutions to use the services of any EQAR registered agency for the “assessment of study fields” that currently is the main and the only cyclical quality assurance procedure in Latvia. However, the mandate of any agency other than AIC/ AIKA is limited to the assessment phase only, and the decision on accreditation of a study field has to be made by an independent national body – the Study Quality Commission – for which the AIC/ AIKA serves as the secretariat. The decision on accreditation must be taken based on several criteria, including legal requirements defined by the national legislation.

In November 2023, the Study Quality Commission received the first application for accreditation based on the framework described above. Before this particular case, AIC/AIKA considered several possibilities to cooperate with other agencies, both resulting in a joint assessment procedure and also ending at the early stages of negotiation.

This presentation focuses on decision-making processes foreseen by the legal framework, challenges in fulfilling the national legal requirements, ensuring integrity and consistency of decisions and implications for decision-making based on assessments performed by other agencies.

**Jasmine Rudolph, Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN), Germany and Naim Gashi, Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA)**

**Title:** The international role of quality assurance agencies in a changing world

**Abstract**

Quality assurance has long been a key tool to support internationalisation and mobility in higher education by fostering trust and transparency between higher education systems through a commonly agreed framework and tools at the level of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). As cross-border cooperation between higher education institutions intensifies and the mobility of students and staff continues, what is the role of QA agencies in supporting internationalisation of higher education institutions?

The result of our survey shows that with the Bologna Process came internationalisation, the comparability of study programmes and compliance with quality standards. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are looking for reliable orientation to be able to develop these processes in a sustainable manner. This is where QA agencies come into play, for questions on academic mobility, English-language study programme concepts, international cooperation etc., and of course international accreditation. Here QA agencies should be a reliable guide and external contact for HEIs a role model and knowledge keeper, that can help to increase the international visibility of HEIs and their study programmes.

QA agencies thus have an essential mediating role and are a connective bridge between theoretically sound internationalisation criteria and a constantly developing quality awareness of the international higher education landscape.

*These posters will be presented in Room: IB 0.23*

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## **Daniele Livon, National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research System (ANVUR), Italy**

**Title:** Thematic analyses based on ANVUR QA activities

### **Abstract**

The National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research System (ANVUR) produces every two years a detailed report on the state of the higher education and research system in Italy, based on the analysis of data resulting from the agency's evaluation activities and a variety of other sources. The report is presented to the Minister of University and Research, who shares it with the Council of Ministers and the Parliament; it is also distributed among the academic community and its stakeholders. The purpose of the report is to provide an updated overview of key data related to universities and artistic institutions (AFAM sector), and their higher education, research and third mission activities. The report serves as the primary reliable source of systemic statistical and analytical information regarding higher education and research performed in Italian institutions. It also offers thematic insights on various relevant topics: in the most recent edition, published in 2023, there are also thematic focuses linked to the impact of the pandemic on student enrolment, the evolution of medical higher education, the valorisation of outreach and third mission activities, disability, the internationalisation of the Italian higher education system, online universities, gender analysis, and the measurement of students' competences. The report and its thematic focuses provide policymakers with data and reflections for correcting, improving or implementing actions and measures for the country's development.

## **Kirsty Williams, Royal College of Veterinary surgeons (RCVS) the UK**

**Title:** Horses for courses: conducting risk-based and bespoke QA site visits

### **Abstract**

In January 2023, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) launched their new innovative approach to the accreditation of veterinary degree programmes. The standardised self-evaluation report (SER) has been removed, replaced with a data repository; combined with this, a bespoke site visit schedule and a shorter report have also been introduced. This is a big change for the institutions accredited by the RCVS and required individualised support for each institution.

The evidence in the repository can be uploaded by the institution at any time, thus reducing the time intensive period to write the SER before an accreditation event. Each piece of evidence is accompanied by a brief narrative to explain the purpose of the information.

The visit schedule is risk-based and tailored, with the topics of the meetings during the site visit pre-defined, based on interrogation of the evidence in the repository. This enables the panel and the institution to better decide on the meeting participants and is an innovative practice.

The final report is a summary of the panel findings against each domain, alongside a rubric that summarises the evidence against each standard, the type of evidence, commentary from the panel and any commendations, recommendations, or suggestions for that standard.

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**Viveka Persson, Swedish Higher Education Authority (Universitetskanslersämbetet, UKÄ), Sweden**

**Title:** Can a new governmental assignment create impetus for change in HEIs? Can we reinforce links between HEIs quality work and strategic management?

**Abstract**

The national quality assurance system in Sweden has gone through several systematic changes since the mid-90s. During 2006-2014 programme reviews dominated external quality assurance. The Swedish rectors conference then successfully advocated for a change towards institutional autonomy where higher education institutions (HEIs) assume the main responsibility for internal quality assurance. Since then, the focus of UKÄ's quality assurance is on institutional reviews.

A thematic analysis of the cycle 2017-2022 showed that most HEIs have quality systems that are generally working well. However, the implementation of HEIs' own programme reviews in line with ESG 1.9 had not always progressed far enough to be assessed. Hence, we believe there is potential for HEIs to increase the use of quality work in its strategic management.

In 2023, UKÄ was given a government assignment requesting proposals on how the national quality assurance system can be developed to further strengthen quality and promote excellence in higher education. The proposals should be developed in dialogue with HEIs without adding administrative burden.

Along these lines, UKÄ is considering the role of institutional reviews to create impetus for change in HEIs. A natural part of self-governance should be to make strategic investments towards enhanced quality and excellence by using the results generated by its quality work.

**Robert Redhammer and Andrea Zacharova, Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (SAAHE), Slovakia**

**Title:** From zero to EQAR: SAAHE's first 5 years on the way to ESG compliance

**Abstract**

This is a story of a change in the way of thinking about quality assurance. It started with a new agency created through a new Act on Quality Assurance. The law brought changes in all aspects of external QA in higher education in Slovakia. Three main areas of changes – legal framework, methods of external QA, and remit. Legally, the change contained a totally new independent agency in contrast to the former accreditation committee working as a consulting structure of the Ministry. This change brought with it the change in external QA methods that were created from scratch. Whole new organisation with its new structure, list of reviewers, its new national standards. Building the programme and institutional accreditation procedures based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, including all four stages of external QA processes – that's the third area of changes. Factors of success – learning from ENQA and other agencies – importing their best practices; strategic planning, various trainings, and briefings for all stakeholders, including the staff. Lessons learned – essential importance of trainings, discussions, cooperation, dissemination of information building trust. Change takes time – still a lot to enhance.

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## Philipp Emanuel Friedrich, Norwegian Agency for Quality assurance in Education (NOKUT)

**Title:** Changing external quality assurance in Norway – towards a more differentiated and enhancement-oriented approach

### Abstract

From 2025 onwards NOKUT will introduce its next cycle of institutional reviews after having completed three previous cycles. In designing the new cycle, NOKUT paid close attention to a more differentiated and enhancement-oriented approach in direct response to the changing environment under which Norwegian institutions operate. The next generation of institutional reviews is expected to reflect institutional variety and experience with quality assurance to a higher degree, and to address institutional needs more effectively.

Through an intensive internal and external consultation process - with the ESG 2.2. “Designing methodologies fit-for-purpose” as guiding principle - NOKUT carefully investigated the changing needs of the sector when it comes to quality assurance. The process was flanked by external evaluations about NOKUT’s review methodology, as well as inspired by the work of leading quality assurance agencies in the EHEA.

NOKUT is currently in the process of operationalising its intended changes for the new review methodology. Among the key changes are a more risk-based approach that determines how comprehensive NOKUT will review the institutions; institutional self-assessment as part of the reviews; elements of bench learning and self-selected evaluation areas; stronger focus on supervision and sharing of knowledge between institutions.

## Dyani Kurulenko, National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA) Bulgaria

**Title:** Incorporating criteria for social inclusion in the framework of ESG

### Abstract

In recent years, policies and practices for the social and educational inclusion of students from vulnerable groups have gradually begun to be implemented in the higher education institutions. Nevertheless, in many systems of higher education, there is still much room for improvement, and there exists lack of research into inclusion approaches and their applicability and universality.

The START project, a partnership between NEAA, ARACIS, the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science and the Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants, funded by Erasmus+, is specifically aimed at addressing the social dimension in QA of higher education.

This poster session is centred around social inclusion in higher education of the aforementioned vulnerable groups, and specifically – students with disabilities and student refugees. The purpose of the discussion will be twofold – measuring the sensitivity of this issue among QA agencies, and gathering information regarding potential and/or existing practices in QA related to social inclusion.

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