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Student involvement in the processes of quality assurance agencies

DG Education and Culture

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Foreword

In recent years, the role of students in the quality assurance of higher education has become recognised, across Europe, as being both necessary and desirable.

Students have increasingly become involved in the improvement and enhancement of their own learning experiences. Whether it be through providing feedback on the courses they have taken, contributing to the development of learning and teaching in their subject area, participating in university decision making processes, or representing student views in any number of ways through a student union or other representative body – students' voices are today being heard loudly and clearly and, ever more often, their views are being taken seriously.

This report brings together a wide range of sources of evidence about the variety of types and levels of involvement of students in the quality assurance of higher education in the European Higher Education Area. Students are involved within the processes of their 'own' institutions, as part of the quality assurance of institutions and programmes by outside bodies, and in the review of the quality assurance of those bodies themselves. Participation takes many forms, both formal and informal.

ENQA provides opportunities for the exchange of information and ideas on all areas of the quality assurance of higher education. The rich diversity of student involvement with quality assurance provides us with an abundant resource from which we can research and share good practice and so help all involved to learn and to develop. I hope this report will assist with the achievement of that objective.

Peter Williams
President,
ENQA

Chapter 1: Introduction

Emmi Helle, Acting Secretary General, ENQA

1.1 Background

The Bologna Process has put increasing emphasis on the importance of the involvement of students in the quality assurance of higher education. The ministers of education of the Bologna signatory states have underlined the importance of partnership between higher education institutions, their staff and students in order to achieve the goals set for the European Higher Education Area.

The regulations of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) encourage the involvement of students in the external quality assurance processes of its member agencies. The recently published Guidelines for national reviews of ENQA member agencies include students, alongside quality assurance experts, representatives of higher education institutions and other stakeholders as the proposed members of the panels which should evaluate the quality of the quality assurance agencies. A student member, proposed by the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), will always be included in the expert panel of ENQA-coordinated external reviews of member agencies.

1.2 Structure

The present report is a product of the "ENQA workshop on student involvement in the processes of quality assurance agencies", hosted by the ENQA member agency National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) in Madrid on 19-20 October 2006. Presenters at the workshop were given the opportunity to submit an article based on their presentation. The report includes four articles submitted by the speakers and chairs, which deal with national experiences of student involvement in quality assurance. In addition, the report incorporates the main results of the ENQA membership survey on student involvement. The questionnaire for the survey, which can be found as Annex II of this report, was designed by ANECA and ENQA on the basis of the questions raised and points discussed at the student involvement workshop. A total of 31 agencies contributed to the survey.

1.3 Different national and cultural contexts

The workshop had a wide regional coverage, including participants from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Catalonia, Cyprus, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, Spain, Sweden and The Netherlands. The audience was composed of staff of the quality assurance agencies, representatives of higher education institutions and students. The cases presented at the workshop were from Catalonia, Finland, Norway and Scotland.

ENQA workshops function as venues for sharing experiences of different practices. They can create an environment in which different approaches to diverse challenges can be discussed and answers to open questions may be found through mutual exchange of ideas. For cultural and historical reasons, however, a model that works in one country does not necessarily work in another. This was further proved at the

student involvement workshop. For example, a participant from Italy found that the Catalan experience had many features that might work well in the Italian context. In contrast, the same participant found that the Finnish model might be culturally and contextually too different to be implemented successfully in Italy. Depending on their national and professional backgrounds, the participants experienced the different cases presented in different ways, and this created many fruitful discussions which contributed to the overall outcome of the workshop, and to the format of the questionnaire used in the survey.

Chapter 2: The role of students in the external review of QA agencies: a comparative reflection with the external review of higher education institutions

Lene Karin Wiberg, Student representative, NOKUT evaluation committees (2003-2006)

2.1 Introduction

The forthcoming external evaluations of quality assurance agencies (QAAs), for the purposes of ENQA membership or for the possible European Register, raise questions regarding the way students can and should contribute to the process. The Bergen Communiqué emphasised the importance of student involvement in quality assurance (QA) processes, and the benefits of including students in evaluating QAAs needs to be highlighted.

The backdrop for this reflection are the experiences of Norwegian students involved in QA processes, the experiences shared among participants at the workshop on student involvement[1] and the author's personal experience with QA and accreditation processes within the NOKUT system.

Stakeholders should be involved and able to play a role in external evaluations of QAAs. Students are likely to contribute positively to QAA evaluations across a number of different stages of the process. Finding students with relevant and appropriate competences, should not be more challenging than finding other kind of experts to contribute to this type of evaluation.

2.2 Background

The Norwegian Agency of Quality Assurance (NOKUT) has, since its establishment in 2003, included students in the majority of external evaluation panels. Students are also full members of the expert committees involved in the accreditation of institutions. In addition to this, NOKUT has a student representative on its Board.

As pointed out in the paper *Student participation in external evaluation panels*,[2] NOKUT has had good experiences of including students in its QA processes. As a consequence, NOKUT also wishes to include students in its forthcoming external evaluation.

Norway has so far no experience in the evaluation of QAAs, hence this paper will present reflections based on the broad experience of student involvement (in different

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[1]   ENQA Workshop on student involvement in external quality assurance, 19-20 October 2006, Madrid.

[2]   Wenche Froestad, Sverre Redtrøen and Gunnveig Grødeland: Student participation in external evaluation panels, 27th ANNUAL EAIR FORUM, August 2005, Riga, Latvia. Available from Internet: http://www.nokut.no/graphics/NOKUT/Artikkelbibliotek/ Generell/Rapporter/EAIR_CDRom_paper-end.pdf

processes) at the national level of higher education in Norway. This experience of good practice can in some way give an idea of what role students may take in such a process.

2.3 The roles of the student in external panels at institutional level

The students take on several simultaneous roles in the external panels that evaluate institutions. This has also been discussed in other papers, such as the paper of Froestad, Redtrøen and Grødeland (op cit.). First of all, the student representative is, of course, a student, and as such the only one who has the ability to see the situation from the perspective of a student and of a learner. Secondly, the students elected to be a part of an evaluation panel in Norway usually have a background as student representatives, either at the institutional or the national level. Their insight and knowledge of the higher education system is thus significant, and they have the ability to see and understand consequences for the students' situation, which the other panel members may not take into account.

A third role of the students consists in being the largest stakeholder in higher education, investing time and money in education. As such they have a special interest in factors that are relevant in making education a good investment. Students should be seen as partners in the academic community, because they often have a balanced view of the aim of the academic institution; on the cultural, political and historical aspects of the academic community; on the institutions' role in society and on the future of the academic tradition. This insight combined with factors such as the influence of their age, their peer group, and the time they live in, means that students may bring a valuable perspective into the panel's work.

Finally, it should be stressed that students need to be acknowledged as full committee members. Some might argue that the students may not have enough academic experience or organisational insight to be accepted as full members in expert committees. In some cases, the students may lack a full understanding of some organisational aspects of an institution, but one might think that this is not a serious hindrance compared to professors who do not understand the importance of modern learning methods.

In the end, students, quality assurance experts and academic staff have competences which are complementary for an evaluation. Therefore, all these groups of stakeholders ought to be included.

It is important to acknowledge and appreciate the differences between an academic staff representative and a student involved in the evaluation processes. The student may have a different approach to the process, and use different jargon. The student background will also contribute to the adoption of a different point of view, which in several cases has proven to be a valuable contribution to the evaluation process, including matters not directly linked with the students' learning situation. Most importantly, the participants of an evaluation panel may identify different challenges due to the different perspectives they represent, and thus the evaluation might result in a more thorough process, due to the better opportunity to "get under the surface".

Despite their potentially varying perspectives, the expert panel members all have the same goal: a system where the higher education institutions function at their best; and a versatile, flexible system with better learning conditions, including the wellbeing of staff. The creation of better learning outcomes is the overall goal of evaluation.

2.4 Challenges regarding student involvement in QA processes

Some of the agencies represented at the ENQA workshop on student involvement reported that they faced challenges in recruiting students with proper competences. Some reported that they had a hard time finding qualified students; others reported that there was little interest among students to participate. This led to a discussion on how and where students could be recruited: directly through advertisements, through nomination from institutions or through student unions. Norway has had good experiences in recruiting through the two national student unions. Others, like QAA Scotland and a QA Agency in Germany, have been content with direct recruiting. Success seemed to be dependent on whether the agencies had been able to communicate clearly what was expected from the students involved. It was also felt to be important to make it clear to the participating students that their role in the process was valued.

Success, or lack of success, in finding students with proper competences did not depend only on the process of recruitment. Some agencies reported on the lack of relevant competences in students, despite a satisfactory recruiting process. This might be the case in those countries where students are not represented at the faculty and institutional boards. Consequently, they will not have the opportunity to get training in tacit competences, which are most relevant for participation in evaluations at this level.

The involvement of students at faculty and institutional levels is part of the Finnish and Norwegian key to success. For instance, the students in NOKUT's expert panels usually have broad experience in being Board members at different levels within institutions, and so are already familiar with quality assurance procedures, codes and jargon. In addition to this, NOKUT has a joint seminar for all panel experts (students, academic staff and others), in order to train them for their commission. NOKUT considers it important to provide all panel members with joint preparation for their work in the committees. QAA Scotland has also had great experiences with SPARQS[3], the training programme for students.

The legitimacy of student experts in the eyes of the professors under evaluation also seems to present a challenge in some cultures. This is especially challenging for the QA Agencies – are they capable of training the students properly and so of helping them act in a way that increases the students' legitimacy?

At the workshop, the students' personal integrity was also mentioned as a challenge. Some countries have very politically-oriented student unions, and in those cases the students' ability to set personal integrity over political agenda can be questioned. It might be fair to address this as a challenge, and not only as a challenge for the student representative, but also for the QA agencies in general.

Finally, the last but by no means least challenge mentioned at the workshop, which is especially relevant regarding evaluation of the QA agencies, is the international perspective. Language, cultural issues and knowledge of the educational system in foreign countries present true challenges to the involvement of students. This of course sets an additional requirement for students' competences, as it does for the panel as a whole.

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[3]   ENQA Workshop on student involvement in external quality assurance, 19-20 October 2006, Madrid.

2.5 External evaluation of QA agencies versus the evaluation of higher education institutions: what are the differences?

The valuable contribution that Norwegian and other European students have made by participating in the quality assurance processes for higher education institutions, gives a good basis for appraising the competences of students involved in the external evaluation of the QA Agencies.

Even though many of the competences needed and roles played by students in these processes are the same as those for the evaluation of the agencies, one will require for other qualifications as well. It is not the intention of this paper to point out a list of competences for all the evaluation panel experts, but rather to outline once again the focus on complementary competences among the stakeholders involved in the process. Then, of course, it is important to ask: who are the participating students (and professors)? And in what parts of the process are they (not) capable of contributing?

As Tove Blytt Holmen, Deputy Director at NOKUT, addressed this issue at the workshop:

> *"If we believe in the value of students, involving them in external evaluation of higher education institutions, as well as of QAAs, will be a proof of this. If we don't believe in the value of students – why be afraid to try?"*

Chapter 3: Student participation in quality assurance in Finland

Hanna Alaniska, Coordinator
Suvi Eriksson, Student
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3.1 Introduction

Right from the very beginning of their university studies, students are considered important members and budding researchers in the academic community of Finland. They help to develop, together with the other members of the academic community, the culture of learning. In order to create and support a culture of participation in all aspects of university life, however, a continuous effort needs to be made to integrate new members.
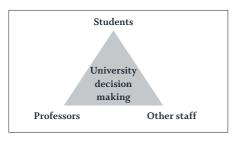
One of the most important goals of universities is to enhance students' learning. To do this it is essential that students actively participate in every step of the development process. In Finland, student involvement is always understood to mean full participation. Experience has shown that the closer students are involved in departments' activities, the better the result for enhancement. This close involvement generates an authentic partnership and therefore more open dialogue. There is no question that students would not be capable of participating in quality assurance (QA) at the national level; the basis of the partnership has already been built at the departmental level.

This article will describe student participation in QA in Finland. The first part deals with students' position in the academic community. The second part will briefly present the current situation in QA. The intention of the article is to introduce the different roles that students play in the QA, to give some concrete examples of their involvement, and to present some further challenges that will need to be met.

3.2 Students in the academic community

THE TRIPARTITE SYSTEM

In the 1960's students started to demand a more significant role in the decision-making of their universities. As a consequence, there is now a tripartite system in operation at all the official decision making levels within institutions. This arrangement was enshrined in the University Act.

The application of the tripartite system may vary between universities, but there are always representatives of the professors, other staff (lecturers, administrative staff, etc.) and students at all decision making levels (see picture 1).

Picture 1.
The tripartite system in university decision making

ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

The perceived importance of students' role in QA is based on the students' respected position in the overall academic community. In Finland, it is emphasised that university is a scientific community, not a school. Students are seen more as novice members in the academy than pupils taking classes. Both staff and students are knowledge-seekers; the only difference between them is the different level of experience. The absence of tuition fees may also contribute to the feeling that students are more partners than customers.

Academic freedom is a major attribute of Finnish university studies. The extent and interpretation of this may vary between subjects, but in many cases it means that the lectures are not compulsory, and that students are responsible for planning their own studies.

STUDENT UNION

All undergraduate students automatically become members of their local student union. The student union is responsible for selecting student representatives to participate in all official decision-making bodies in a university. The union represents students and so can act on their behalf. The student union as an organisation is responsible for initiating discussion about important but often very sensitive issues. The position of the student unions is defined in the University Act.

STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS AT SUBJECT LEVEL

It is very common that students in Finnish universities also belong to student associations at the subject level. Student associations are very active in advancing the well-being of students in many ways. In every association there is a person who is responsible for educational matters. Student associations are very close to the classroom activities and this enables a sincere partnership between students and staff.

3.3 Students' roles in quality assurance

As a consequence of the Bologna Process, by 2005 all Finnish universities will have adopted quality assurance systems. During the development of the QA systems, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) pointed out the importance of student involvement. FINHEEC also supported higher education institutions by offering training to develop a more student-oriented QA system. In autumn 2005, the University of Oulu organised a training project under the auspices of FINHEEC. There were nine universities and polytechnics involved in the project, working to produce innovative models for the role of students in their own context. The training project showed that universities' quality assurance systems can include multiple types of student participation. Practices can vary but the belief in the value of students' participation is the same.[4]

In the following analysis students' roles are divided into four categories. Most of the concrete examples below come from the authors' home university, the University of Oulu.

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[4] See Alaniska, H. 2006. Opiskelija opetuksen laadunarvioinnissa.

STUDENT AS AN INFORMATION PROVIDER

Giving feedback is the most common way students participate in QA. There is a wide diversity of how, when and what kind of feedback students give. It is typical that feedback is given after each course or at least once in a term. Both quantitative and qualitative procedures are used.

One of the polytechnics recommends that their teachers also collect feedback in the middle of the courses. The method they use is to ask the students to write down their feelings, problems and ideas on how to improve the course on a blank piece of paper. This may sound a very simple approach, but it seems to be quite an effective way to collect feedback for both teachers and students.

STUDENT AS AN ACTOR

Students are able to do more than function merely as information providers. In many universities in Finland students design their own feedback questionnaires or do so in close cooperation with the academic staff. Feedback is also often collected and analysed by students. They organise staff and student development workshops, where innovative and problem-solving oriented discussions are encouraged in a comfortable atmosphere.

Last year at the University of Oulu, one student association collected student feedback in an innovative way. They produced a form and used it to collect information in informal settings in the student café. Afterwards they summarised the information to produce a few main development targets. Finally, they organised a workshop for students and staff, where the decisions concerning improvement were made.

Once a year all student associations at the University of Oulu organise, together with staff, a workshop where they discuss and solve problems relating to teaching. The student association uses the collected feedback to decide the themes that need to be discussed. In small groups they try to find solutions to problems in teaching and studying. Very often representatives of working life are invited to speak about the current trends and needs of employers. In some departments the workshops include a dinner and social programme.

STUDENT AS AN EXPERT

If we believe that the focus of QA should be about the quality of learning, not teaching, the role played by students is inevitably important. In Finland, the students are generally regarded as experts in learning. They know how they have reached their learning outcomes and how the teaching has assisted them in this process. Thus teaching should be evaluated through students' learning experiences and based on how it actually assists the learning process. Harnessing this student expertise in a concrete form includes using methods like inviting students into working groups and meetings, asking widely for their opinions, and for written statements.

Treating students as experts is now a cultural expectation, which demands a positive attitude both from the staff and from the students. It has taken years to develop an atmosphere where student feedback is not seen as nagging but more as constructive feedback from an expert. Asking students to participate in development teams shows that staff values student expertise. It has been noticed that, as a consequence of some of the practices outlined above, students and staff have been able to work in closer partnership and so to develop a shared commitment to recognising the value of student expertise.

At the University of Oulu there is a teaching development team for every subject. The main task of the teams is to improve the quality of teaching. Half of the team members are students; usually this means 4-5 students. So the expertise of students is heavily utilised. There are also a few teams where the chairperson is a student.

STUDENT AS A PARTNER
Learning is achieved through close cooperation between teachers and students. The development of the concept of partnership, in relation to student involvement in quality assurance, can therefore be seen as a natural consequence. Common examples of the ongoing reinforcement of the sense of partnership include shared coffee breaks, academic and annual celebrations, events and excursions. The notion of partnership between students and staff members represents the possibility of an authentic and constructive dialogue which offers the opportunity for more reflective feedback. It is the responsibility of staff to treat students as partners and to create an easy-going and positive atmosphere in the institutions. This, hopefully, leads to more open and authentic quality assurance.

3.4 Keeping the process going
COOPERATION
The continual organisation of student involvement in QA is a challenge for many actors at the university level. The main actors in Finland are the university, the student union, the student associations, the staff and the individual students. To keep the process moving, continuous cooperation and co-organisation is needed. None of the actors could manage the process alone. Despite the extra time and effort required to maintain student participation in quality assurance, all parties have felt that it adds a great deal of value to the process.

A challenge for this cooperation is that the student body is constantly changing, as students join and leave the university and the student organisations. In student unions and student associations it is common that the representatives change every January. When the university organises training for the students together with the student union, the information needs to be disseminated through the union and the associations to each student.

CONCRETE RESULTS
As a result of this cooperation there should be regular activities and a tangible improvement in practices for each stakeholder in QA. In all universities in Finland there are training and support materials provided for student representatives. In addition, it is common to organise different kinds of theme days and events to inform students and staff about the practise of QA.

The University of Oulu seeks to support and motivate students to innovate in the practise of QA by giving out an annual development award. This "Ad Fontes" award is given to a student or to a group of students who has made a significant contribution to the improvement of teaching. The recipient of the award is chosen based on recommendations from the student association and Teaching development team.

The constant renewal of the process is vital to enable successful student participation in QA. What is self-evident today might not be so tomorrow.

Chapter 4: Student involvement in quality assurance agency processes: the Catalan experience

Esteve Arboix Codina, Project Manager, Agency for Quality Assurance in the Catalan University System (AQU Catalunya)

4.1 Introduction

There are many building blocks out of which the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is being constructed. One element is the push to involve students more in quality assurance processes. This serves as the context for the initiative by AQU Catalunya and the Catalan universities to organise training courses for students. The training project has a twofold aim: in the short term, to train students so that they can take part in the various external assessment committees appointed by the AQU and, in the medium term, to promote the active participation of students in decision-making bodies.

AQU Catalunya has, for a considerable time, maintained the policy of taking the student body into consideration as one of the main users of the university and as a stakeholder involved in quality assurance processes.

Student involvement at all university levels was low when AQU Catalunya started the Student involvement in quality assessment processes project in 2004. The aim of the project has been to train students in university quality processes and to provide them with the necessary skills to participate fully. A second aim has been to obtain a pool of students who are adequately prepared to take part in external assessment committees and to ultimately promote a culture of student involvement in the Catalan University System.

Three cycles of the project have taken place in Catalan universities over the past two years, with over 80 students participating.

4.2 AQU Catalunya and student involvement

AQU Catalunya is the official quality assurance body in the Catalan university system consisting of twelve universities (seven public/state-run and five private) with a total of 231,000 students, 450 degree courses and 15,000 teaching staff. It was established by law in 1996 as a consortium between the public universities in Catalonia and the autonomous Catalan government. AQU Catalunya was a founder member of ENQA.

The philosophy of AQU Catalunya is to assist university institutions in promoting a quality culture and not so much to serve as a body for inspection or control. One of the main action lines of the Agency has comprised of working together with the stakeholders in the university system to reach a consensus on quality policies. In relation to student involvement, it was the public universities' Committee of Vice-Rectors for Student Affairs that gave the green light to the project presented here.

Prior to starting the project, AQU Catalunya had already undertaken actions to promote the involvement of university students in quality assurance. Students have

been taken into consideration in assessment processes right from the start of the Agency's activities, and all assessments have included at least two students in the internal assessment committees. AQU Catalunya also carries out periodic assessments of graduate placement and employment (1998, 2003) and of other areas such as secondary school students entering university (1999). AQU Catalunya has also published various General Frameworks (documents drawn up by experts that set up good practices) that especially refer to students, for example the *General framework for dealing with student suggestions, complaints and appeals*[5] and the *General framework for assessing student learning*[6].

4.3 The context of student involvement at the university level

Although student involvement in decision-making structures is regulated by law, these requirements tend not to be applied on the ground and so, within the context of the Catalan university system, student involvement in general is minimal. A very small number of students participate in the elections of Rectors and in student meetings and associations. Up to now, there has been no Catalan representation at ESIB (National Unions of Students in Europe). Students prefer to be involved in social movements and NGOs. As regards the involvement within universities, there is a high level of abstention and therefore there have been no requests from students to participate in assessment processes.

The reasons for this could be, perhaps, found in the current trend in society towards individualism, which weakens collective participation. Students have the view that they are merely "passing through" the university, and feel that it is not possible for them to influence the running of the institution. Catalan student associations also tend to be incestuous in their appointment and exchange of representatives. Moreover, academic life absorbs a lot of the students' available time and as a result political activism in universities appears to be decreasing.

The main challenge for the students who are involved is to try to be seen as collaborators in, more than users of, higher education so that they become important players in the planning and governance of university institutions and give up the role of being merely passive receivers of the training process.

This challenge comes from some of the current trends at the European level:
- Berlin Communiqué (2003): "Students are full partners in higher education governance. Ministers note that national legal measures for ensuring student involvement are largely in place throughout the EHEA. They also call on institutions and student organisations to identify ways of increasing actual student involvement in HE governance"
- The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area: (3.7. External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies) "[…]an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s)"

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[5]   General framework for suggestions, complaints and claims from students, Barcelona, AQU Catalunya, 2004. Available from Internet: http://www.nokut.no/graphics/NOKUT/Artikkelbibliotek/Generell/Rapporter/EAIR_CDRom_paper-end.pdf

[6]   General guidelines for the assessment of student performance. Barcelona: AQU Catalunya, 2003. Available from Internet: http://www.aqucatalunya.org/uploads/publicacions/arxiu%20pdf/MGAprenentatges_cat.pdf

- EUA reports: "[…] students should be involved in the decision-making processes. To make students committed to the educational evaluation activities. They should have a real responsibility to inform and advise the Senate" (10 years on, by Stefanie Hofmann)

In Spain and Catalonia, student involvement is also promoted in the corresponding legal frameworks:
- Spanish Universities Act, LOU 2006 (Art. 46) "[… students] must receive recognition for participating in university life"
- Catalan Universities Act, LUC 2003 (Art 40) "[…] the involvement and participation of students in the sphere of associative activities is to be encouraged".

From a practical point of view, student involvement could considerably improve assessment practices as it encourages the identification of new quality criteria adapted to the aims of new degrees (including, for example, the competence of students to learn on their own). In order to achieve this, improvements need to be made in the training of all the players involved. Students and teaching staff also need designated places where they can meet to discuss the new participative teaching culture. Resources are required to set up innovative activities, learning from other countries where university quality assurance is well developed.

The initiative being presented here by AQU Catalunya, albeit a modest contribution, underpins the theoretical and legal frameworks for dealing with the challenge of this transformation.

4.4 Project: Promoting student involvement in programme evaluations - training courses

AIMS

The purpose of the project *Promoting student involvement in programme evaluations - training courses*, the details of which are given below, is to run training courses for university students.

The project has a twofold aim. The short term aim is to train students so that they can participate in the various external assessment committees appointed by the AQU. The idea is to create a steady stream of students who are capable of becoming external assessors and not a closed body of "assessment professionals". The second aim is a long term one and more ambitious: it seeks to promote the active participation of students in university quality assurance policies and thereby to help to establish a participative culture in Catalan universities.

From the institutional point of view, the main aim is to provide students with a transversal or horizontal competence of participation and with further skills for critical analysis. As a consequence, their experiences and ideas can contribute to the improvement of degree programmes. The ultimate aim is to bring about a new type of student association, the members of which become more interested in the technical aspects of the universities.

From the perspective of the students, the aim is to familiarise the students with AQU quality assessment model, which is done through a framework of practical exercises. The students have to analyse and deal with problems concerning assessment and the

role of students, and they will then be able to participate in real assessment situations. Plans have also been designed in order to simulate, through the use of role play, for example, the external committee meetings where the students have to prepare an oral report.

STAKEHOLDERS

There are three main stakeholders involved in the project, the students, the universities and AQU Catalunya. The role of each of these in order for the project to work is as follows.

The students participate in the training courses and receive training in matters dealing with quality assessment. Upon completion, they become qualified to take part in external assessment committees (it is preferred that they participate in the assessment of degrees that are similar to their own but from another university). They must then act as disseminators of the experience amongst their classmates, and give feedback on the whole process.

The universities, through the Vice-Rectors Committee for Student Affairs, approve the project and then select and propose the students who are to take the course. They also appoint the tutorial teaching staff for the course. It is up to the universities to actually organise the courses and give impetus to the project within the given university.

AQU Catalunya draws up the proposal for the training course and, at the same time, appoints a group of experts to prepare the course materials. This group of experts, in which the majority of the Catalan universities are represented, is responsible for compiling good practices for encouraging student involvement using international sources (for example the Nordic project on student involvement and ESIB publications). AQU Catalunya funds the project and also serves as the link with the external assessments in which trained students participate. The results of the experience are put together in a dossier, which is then made available to other universities interested in organising similar courses.

DESIGN

In order to design the courses, it was necessary to define the profile of the students to whom the course would be aimed at and who ideally would become involved, together with the type of training they would receive.

In the terms of the student profile, it was necessary to consider whether to make an open call to all students, the majority of which have very limited knowledge of participative dynamics, or to aim at certain specific student profiles. The decision was finally made to aim the call at students who were especially motivated by improvement and had a vocation to serve in the project.

It is necessary for this type of training to assume no prior knowledge. The contents must also have an added value to make the training attractive, as well as it being useful for the student's life at university and professional career in the future.

Participation is seen as being an instrument and not an end in itself, with emphasis being put on participation in external assessment committees. This means that the participation has to be formal (with specific contents), external and semi-professional.

Other aspects, which follow, were also taken into account in the design of the training courses.

Duration and aims: At the planning stage, it was necessary to be realistic regarding the course's duration, i.e. that it should not be too short or too long. Twenty to thirty hours were considered to constitute an appropriate length, concentrated where possible into one week in order to provide for group cohesion and thereby stimulate the students' motivation and enthusiasm. This also ensured that the sequence of training topics would stay in order and that the course would not go on for an excessively long time. It was also necessary for the aims of the course to be sufficiently interesting to maintain the students' motivation (through the development of skills like interpersonal communication, negotiation, reasoning, etc.), and at the same time to take into account the aims of the institution giving the course.

Content selection and sequence: The primary requirement of the training was to provide the students with knowledge about the university system and with information on the aims and work associated with quality assessment. It was also thought that students would need self-confidence and assertiveness in oral communication, with the emphasis put on communication skills (drafting of reports, public speaking, the ability to come to conclusions, etc.). Students also need to be trained in procedural aspects, such as the understanding of assessment protocols, so that upon the completion of the course they are capable of reviewing and improving the procedures.

Teaching methodology: As the students require training in the techniques of participation in assessment committees, the methodology needs to be tailored towards the practical and participatory. The majority of the activities therefore require the students to actively participate in group activities, which are based on the study of specific cases prepared especially for the course. This design enables continuous feedback to be obtained on the different activities. The simulation of real situations (committee meetings, oral presentation of reports, etc.) is highly useful for helping the students to acquire greater confidence.

Assessment: Given that the course assessment methods are intended to be formative rather than conclusive, the trainers ask exploratory questions at the beginning of each activity regarding the students' prior level of knowledge. At the end of the activity there needs to be time for reflection so that improvements can be made to the course design for the future. At the end of the course, the students receive an official certificate accrediting their achievement of the course objectives.

Team of trainers: Priority should be given to trainers with a dynamic and committed profile, rather than to those who just transmit content. It is better that the course is given by a team of trainers with a variety of profiles than just one person. Team members can include university teaching staff, experts in assessment, former students and international experts who can present innovative approaches, with all of these working in a coordinated way.

One final point, to be a success it is vital that support for the initiative is forthcoming from the university's management teams.

STRENGTHS OF THE PROJECT

The course has been prepared and organised by working groups that include representatives from practically all the Catalan universities' teaching offices and quality units, meaning that it is a shared experience. Students have expressed a high level of satisfaction with the training received, and many of them have sent their curriculum vitae to AQU and so they have been included in the assessors' register.

The course teaching materials are provided to Catalan universities, and details are made available so that other similar courses may be organised.

Although students are not experts in academic matters, they are experts in affairs that affect them directly i.e. university facilities, the learning process, etc. Drawing from the AQU experience, it can be stated that students can work efficiently in external assessment committees and there is a good team spirit.

The participation of students in external assessments gives greater credibility to the quality assurance process by taking into account the points of view of other stakeholders involved in the process. It is also accepted by the university community because it adds value to the assessment process.

By taking these training seminars, students attain not only skills and knowledge relating to assessment but also new competences such as group work experience, better communication skills, etc. Students who take part in these seminars receive 3 credits (1 ECTS) and have the possibility of being called by AQU to participate as external assessors.

WEAKNESS

As mentioned earlier, there is a low-level of student participation in university structures generally, so recruitment of students for the project takes place against a negative backdrop.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

AQU Catalunya is aware that, to get the students to participate more actively, coordinated action by the stakeholders will be necessary in order to disseminate as widely as possible the information on the courses among students. The courses that have been run so far have been a modest but at the same time groundbreaking initiative. The challenge now is to set up a Catalan network in which the universities, teaching staff and student associations are all involved in promoting student involvement in quality assurance processes. The overall challenge facing the entire university community is to increase participation in a natural and progressive way and at all university levels.

Conversations are taking place with the Council of Catalan Universities, which is the coordinating body for all of the universities in Catalonia, to participate in this project subsequent to the pilot experience of the AQU. The next step forward is to promote not just individual student participation but also the involvement of student and other organisations.

Anticipated actions that also need to be considered include: editing of all materials, publishing of a General Framework to promote student participation, provision of collaboration grants, etc.

AQU has taken note of experiences such as SPARQS (Scotland) and the report on the *Student Involvement in Quality Assessments of Higher Education in the Nordic Countries*[7], which can be used as examples against which this project can be benchmarked.

CONCLUSIONS

The project presented above has relied on three stakeholder groups (students, universities and AQU Catalunya), without the participation of which it would have been impossible to go on. Most of the universities in the Catalan university system have been represented from the very beginning in the working groups involved in the course design.

The result is a practice-oriented course that lasts a maximum of thirty hours, the contents of which are quality assessment and cross-cutting competences designed to prepare students to take part in external assessment committees.

The project has so far provided AQU Catalunya with a group of qualified students who have already participated in external assessment committees. It also represents a modest first step towards promoting the culture of student involvement in Catalan universities.

The current challenge is to get as many students and universities involved as possible, in order for the project to become an on-going process.

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[7]   http://www.noqa.net

Chapter 5: The role of the student in quality assurance processes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Janet Bohrer, Development Officer, QAA, UK

5.1 Quality Assurance in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

UK higher education institutions (HEIs) are responsible for awarding their own degrees i.e. UK degrees are not state accredited awards and each HEI is responsible for maintaining the standards and quality of their degrees. Most HEIs carry out both regular monitoring and periodic reviews of their programmes of study, as well as use a system of external examining to underpin their internal quality assurance processes. This helps to maintain the standards and quality of their degrees.

External examiners are independent academic experts from another institution, or from relevant professional practice. They report to the head of institution on a number of factors around the standard of award made, compared to other similar awards across the country, and about the fairness by which the processes of assessment, examination and determination of award have been conducted.

To help with their internal quality assurance, HEIs can draw upon a number of national and UK external reference points, such as the various components of the national Academic Infrastructure [Framework(s) for Higher Education qualifications, benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*] and European reference points such as the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ENQA, 2005).

The emphasis is on institutions managing their own quality assurance processes as they are responsible for the award they make. Internal quality assurance processes are monitored, however, through external quality assurance procedures. This takes place for a variety of purposes:
- to promote quality;
- to provide public information;
- to ensure minimum standards;
- to protect the public; to provide accountability;
- to protect and enhance the reputation of UK higher education.
  (JM consulting, 2005)

There are a number of external quality assurance processes to which HEIs are subject, including:
- the regulations which surround degree awarding powers and university title;
- the funding council's processes of institutional monitoring and the review of the quality of research through the research assessment exercise;
- the review and monitoring by government departments and public bodies;

• reviews by a wide range of professional and statutory regulatory bodies (PSRBS) academic quality review; the most significant for most institutions being the review by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

QAA is charged with safeguarding the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. In order to achieve this, QAA carries out a range of activities which include the peer review processes of institutional audit in England and Northern Ireland, institutional review in Wales and enhancement–led institutional review (ELIR) in Scotland.

In England and Northern Ireland institutional audit sits within the Quality Assurance Framework implemented from 2001 and comprising of:

• institutional audits by QAA;
• collaborative provision audits to supplement institutional audits for those HEIs with large or complex collaborative provision;
• the publication of information about quality and standards through the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website which includes the results of the National Student Survey (NSS).
(HEFCE, 2005)

The involvement of students is integral to both internal and external quality assurance systems.

5.2 Student involvement with quality assurance

Institutional audit (England and Northern Ireland), institutional review (Wales) and ELIR (Scotland) all involve students and student representatives as a significant part of the process. All methods include auditors/reviewers meeting with student groups and student representative bodies.

The documentation about institutions provided for auditors/reviewers before any external quality assurance visit does differ between Scotland and the rest of the UK. In Scotland student representative bodies work with institutions in preparing the Reflective Analysis (RA). In England, Wales and Northern Ireland student representative bodies are invited to submit a Student Written Submission (SWS), separate from the self-evaluation document (SED) which the institution submits. The SWS can be confidential if the student body wishes. However, QAA encourages student representative bodies and institutions to share their respective submitted reports. In some cases the SWS has been no more than an endorsement of the institution's self-evaluation document, to which the student unions have contributed in a similar way to the Scottish model of writing the RA.

Other differences also exist between the method in Scotland and the rest of the UK. National student representatives are included as full members of the ELIR review teams. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland there is no student representative as a member of the audit/review team. The different elements which make up the totality of the national quality frameworks are in their own ways considered to offer excellent opportunities for students and their representatives to be involved.

The process of audit in England and Northern Ireland, and of review in Wales, is one of monitoring HEIs own processes of quality assurance. It is based on a peer review process of making judgements about institutions

> 'At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students – in terms of the quality of the information they receive about their programmes of study, the ways in which their learning is facilitated and supported, and the academic standards they are expected to achieve, and do achieve in practice'. (QAA , 2002)

The 'student voice' from individual institutions, gathered from meetings with both groups of students and student representative bodies and from the submission of the SWS, is important information for the audit/review team that is making the judgements about an institution's quality assurance. However, it is considered that the auditors and reviewers that make up the audit/review team need to be experienced members of senior institutional staff, and not other stakeholders such as students or employers.

In England, the recent review of the Quality Assurance Framework has shown that the method used for institutional audit in England and Northern Ireland is fit for purpose (HEFCE, 2005). The report stated that student input into the institutional audit process had been valuable (and referred to paragraphs 3.81 to 3.84 of JM Consulting, 2005). The report of the Quality Assurance Framework Review further stated that the continued involvement of students in the process should help to promote the focus on assuring and enhancing the quality of the student experience. Recommendation 8 of the review concluded that

> 'Student participation in institutional audit has been successful and valuable, and should continue to be promoted and supported by all'. (HEFCE, 2005:16)

The 'student voice' provides valuable insight to auditors and reviewers about the student experience.

> 'Audit teams recognise the value and importance of student involvement in the audit process.' (QAA, 2006)

However this annual report continues with the following comment, following surveys and focus groups undertaken with auditors which states that:

> 'There was mixed experience from audit teams in relation to the quality and usefulness of the SWS. All agreed that it was important in providing the opportunity to reflect upon the student experience, a theme deemed to be of growing importance given the notion of the student as a consumer and in light of the introduction of variable fees... Some participants considered that the SWS had not been used to its full potential as part of the audit. Although the document was considered to provide a useful insight into the student experience, its validity as an evidence base was often questioned on the basis of a number of factors.' (QAA 2006:9)

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the SWS has proved to be a successful way of giving student representative bodies an active role in the audit process, over and above the meetings auditors and reviewers have with groups of students during the audit visit itself. The opportunity provided by the inclusion of the SWS as part of these institutional review methods means that all student representative bodies, at all

institutions, are invited to participate in the external quality assurance process. It is considered to provide the best possible inclusion of student views for these methods of external review.

The Quality Assurance Framework considers the importance of providing students, and other stakeholders, with public information about the quality of provision. Following on from the report about *Information on quality and standards in higher education* (HEFCE, 2002) the teaching quality information (TQI) website was launched in September 2004 (www.tqi.ac.uk).

The site brings together the key sources of official information about the quality of higher education in UK universities and colleges. It is designed in such a way that prospective students, their parents and other advisors and stakeholders can compare similar subjects taught at different institutions. The information includes institutional context, data about student admissions, progression and completion, and information about internal procedures for assuring academic quality and standards. This information is provided by each institution and the next cycle of QAA institutional audit will formally consider the 'completeness, accuracy and frankness of institutions' TQI reports' (HEFCE, 2006).

Institutional information provided on the TQI website is complimented by results from the National Student Survey (NSS). During 2005, the first NSS took place, questioning those students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland who were nearing the end of their studies, about their views on the quality of the education they had received. Approximately 170,000 students responded. The information for all those institutions and subject groupings that produced a response rate of over 60% is available to the public. Early in 2006, the second NSS questionnaire was distributed, and the data on this second year has now been published.

The TQI site, including the NSS data, is currently being reviewed by the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group. They are focusing on the costs, benefits and impacts of this public information, and are due to report initial findings in the near future.

Student involvement with external quality assurances processes is becoming embedded within the national quality frameworks. However, it is HEIs themselves that are responsible for the standards and quality of their academic awards and programmes, which is why it is important that students are part of internal quality assurance processes.

> 'Institutions are generally aware of the importance of enabling the participation of students in managing the quality of teaching, learning and the learning environment, and the need for representation arrangements to be periodically reviewed… The audit reports have found a general recognition that "student representation is a key component of quality assurance in higher education in the twenty first century", and that it is in the interests of individual institutions to listen and respond to the views of their students, presented either individually or through representatives.' (QAA, 2005:1)

Students participate in HEIs' decision making processes through representation by elected officers at the higher levels on 'key' or 'appropriate' committees. 'Appropriate' is generally defined as the governing body, Senate or equivalent and committees

concerned with learning and teaching, quality assurance and the student experience in general.

> 'Broadly speaking there appears to be near universal agreement on the types of committees of Senate and Court that students should be represented upon.' (SPARQS, 2004)

At some institutions the inclusion of student elected representatives in decision-making processes is part of a Student Charter or Student Entitlement Framework. At other institutions, students are made aware of their rights to representation through Student Handbook, or Guides for new students. At many institutions student representatives may also be invited to join appropriate working groups, consultation exercises and focus groups. At operational or departmental level student representation can take many forms,

> 'membership of programme or course committees; representation on departmental, school or faculty committees; and staff – student liaison, consultative or advisory committees.' (QAA, 2005:7)

However institutions have found that both attendance and engagement at some of these meetings by student representatives can sometimes be low.

> 'In terms of attendance and engagement, the survey has found that around a third of institutions have difficulties with representatives that don't attend meetings. A further third of institutions have students that attend but don't engage with the processes. A final third of institutions have student representatives who attend and are engaged in the processes. It is clear that the difficulties in engaging students do not solely lie with the personalities of the student representatives concerned, but are also due to features and practices that institutions themselves have control over.' (SPARQS, 2004:4)

In contrast to Scotland, no formal mapping survey of student involvement in quality assurance has been conducted in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the Scottish pattern reported above is echoed across all UK institutions. During the academic year 2005-06 QAA's institutional liaison scheme (which operates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) has taken the involvement of students with quality assurance as a theme for project work. This has involved QAA officers talking in more depth with individual institutions about specific institutional quality assurance arrangements. The likely culmination of this work is a conference in the spring of 2007, which will allow institutions to share features of good practice around this issue.

The outcomes for audit report identified that 'some institutions find difficulties in recruiting student representatives, and in overcoming their reluctance to attend meetings regularly' (QAA, 2005). Audit reports have suggested that this has been helped by HEIs offering support. This support has been found to be most effective when offered in partnership with the institution's student representative body. Some institutions offer incentives by offering certificates for service, a limited amount of credits or even a small financial payment or gift. The National Union of Students (NUS) offers a programme of support through their annual national training programmes.

5.3 Benefits of student involvement in quality assurance

This paper has identified some difficulties in involving students in quality assurance processes and issues, but it is not just institutional practices which cause difficulties for students. It is suggested that students are under more pressure than ever before, with more than 58% of students reporting that they work, and with 71% of those saying they need to work to pay for essentials (Unite Student Living Report 2006 www.unite-students.com).

It was reported at a presentation given by the NUS at a recent conference (Student Complaints and Appeals, London, 20 June 2006) that with the pressures of increasing competitiveness in job markets, the increasing fear of debt and because of general feelings of loneliness and isolation, 1 in 4 students are having mental health problems. It would be unfair of HEIs and external bodies such as the QAA to contribute to this pressure unnecessarily by highlighting student involvement in quality assurance processes over and above academic studies. However, institutions do support elected student union sabbatical officers' positions, and some institutions provide financial assistance for employing union staff officers, all of which can help to support participation. There are also some very important benefits for student participation in quality assurance, which have been reported by student representative bodies and the NUS.

> 'The strengths identified by the student representative bodies primarily focused upon the notion of giving students a voice, and providing them with the opportunity to comment upon quality and standards and the student experience.' (QAA, 2006:10)

The SWS is considered to be a useful and valuable document, which in some cases has provided student unions with an evidence base and impetus for change across their institutions. During recent discussions held with representatives from student unions in England and Wales, at least one student union reported that the writing of the SWS had brought about a change in the dialogue between the union and the institution, leading to a less mistrustful and more positive relationship. Several institutions gave examples of reported 'quick fixes' - such as changing library opening hours - as a result of writing the SWS and of participation in the institutional audit. When questioned further these reported 'quick fixes' had remained permanent features.

Student unions tended to be proud of their SWS reports and suggested that it was the one document produced by the unions that they could be sure that the institution would read. Student unions were reporting positive relationships with their institutions, often fostered as a result of writing a SWS, but it was also reported that involvement at a departmental level could be quite difficult as academic staff could be quite defensive. As one union summarised it: 'centrally supportive, locally dismissive.' Criticism exists that relationships between institutions and student unions are often dependent on particular individuals, who are elected on a yearly basis. This is being countered by some unions who are beginning to embed the inclusion of quality assurance processes into their strategic plans.

From analysis conducted on the first 70 institutional audit reports we see that the SWS was mentioned in 59 of the reports, and in 39 of the reports there were five or more mentions of the SWS. It also appeared that a number of audit teams seemed to have used the SWS as a starting point for one or several of their enquiries (data

presented to CHERI Quality Assurance Seminar Series, The role of students in quality assurance (II), 11 May 2005)

> 'The gathering of student feedback through the preparation of the SWS was seen as a valuable exercise, which had positive outcomes for the student body in respect of the student experience. It was reported that many institutions had responded to the concerns raised through the SWS, and that the response had direct benefits to the student experience. It was additionally considered that giving students a voice made them a valid and active participant.' (QAA, 2006:11)

5.4 Support for student involvement with quality assurance

This paper has sought to show that involving students and their representatives is important, but in order for that involvement to be of benefit to the institutions, to auditors/reviewers, to student representatives and ultimately to students, it is important that adequate support is given to students and their union members. The QAA has provided the NUS with an extensive programme of support enabling the NUS to develop the 'Quality Takes Time' initiative. This initiative has allowed the NUS to develop a website of resource materials for student unions to access in association with QAA. Twice yearly 'Quality Takes Time' events are organised in conjunction with QAA and supported by partners such as the National Postgraduate Committee (NPC). These allow for general briefings and discussion sessions for student representatives around student involvement in quality assurance issues.

> 'NUS is pleased to launch this new database dedicated to students union officers and staff to guide them through what some see as the maze of higher education quality assurance and enhancement.' (www.officeronline.co.uk/library/)

As part of ongoing monitoring which is reported in the annual report to the HEFCE, QAA surveys those student unions who have submitted a SWS. Where possible QAA has tried to respond to suggestions collected from this survey, and it was as a result of feedback gathered in this manner, that the QAA produced a specific guide for students about institutional audit - Institutional audit: a guide for student representatives (QAA, 2003c) - as well designed other leaflets specifically for students. QAA has developed a specific web portal for students to help give them access to QAA information (www.qaa.ac.uk/students).

The relationship between QAA, the NUS and NPC, and the continual support provided by QAA to student representative bodies about quality assurance, is considered to be part of an ongoing commitment. Continual support remains necessary not only because each year new sabbatical officers are elected, but also because despite a growing knowledge within the student representative body, there continue to be areas still requiring greater understanding by student unions. For example,

> 'a quarter of respondents [from the ongoing monitoring cited above] noted that they remained unclear about the criteria for evaluation and making judgements.' (QAA , 2006:10)

5.5 Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the positive aspects of inclusion of students and their representatives with quality assurance processes.

'One of the successes of institutional audit has been student involvement. Many institutions made the point that they already had close relations with students in respect of QA. Student representatives are normally included in all main QA committees and processes in institutions. However, the experience of preparing for audit had facilitated a dialogue with the students' union which was valuable to both parties. In particular it was refreshing to have a renewed focus of attention in this dialogue on the core business of student learning.' (JM consulting, 2005: 27)

It can take significant effort for a student union to prepare a SWS. For many unions, but especially the smaller ones, finding the officer time for involvement has been an issue. However the NUS has stressed that students do find their involvement in this way valuable and continue to be in support of the process.

It is necessary that all those involved with quality assurance see it as a process and not an end point in itself. External quality assurance is only part of a continual journey of reflection and improvement which HEIs are undertaking. Student involvement in that journey has been shown to be valuable. There needs to be continual engagement by such national bodies as the QAA and its auditors/reviewers, by individual HEIs and by student representative bodies to continue to fully embed the involvement of students in that journey. At any case the benefits of that involvement have been demonstrated to be of great value.

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WEB RESOURCES:
- Academic Infrastructure QAA, www.qaa.ac.uk/ academicinfrastructure/default.asp
- Quality Takes Time, NUS, www.officeronline.co.uk/library/
- Student portal QAA, www.qaa.ac.uk/students
- Teaching Quality Information, www.tqi.ac.uk

Chapter 6: Student involvement in external quality assurance: results of a preliminary survey

Analysis by Rachel Dearlove, QAA

6.1 Introduction

The survey design was based on the outcome of discussions at the student involvement workshop and was refined by ANECA and the ENQA secretariat. The questionnaire (see Annex II) was distributed to all ENQA members in November 2006; a total of 31 responses were received.

Where results could be presented quantitatively they have been shown in tabular format with a commentary. It should be noted that for some questions, responses were not received from all respondents and therefore the total given may be less than 31. In other cases respondents had the opportunity to give more than one answer, so in these cases the total given may be more than 31. Given the small size of the sample, and the variation in response rates between questions, the quantitative information is not intended to be statistically robust, but merely summarise the responses received. For qualitative content, a simple text based analysis of the answers provided was undertaken to draw out salient points.

Respondents had the option to request that the information they gave be dealt with anonymously. As a general rule, even when permission had been given, an agency has only been identified in the analysis where their comments have been substantially quoted.

6.2 Results
6.2.1 STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

ARE STUDENTS INVOLVED IN THE QA PROCESSES OF YOUR AGENCY?	No.	%
Yes	27	87
No	4	13
Total	31	100

Table 1.

Of the four agencies who do not currently involve students in their quality assurance process (see Table 1), all indicated that they have plans to include them in the near future and at most within the next two years.

As one of the respondents who do not currently have students involved in quality assurance processes, ANECA provided a number of examples it had introduced in order to change the situation, including: organisation of a national forum on student

involvement and formation of a working group within the agency addressing student involvement. In its Action Plan for 2007 ANECA has foreseen student involvement in the external evaluation teams of the Institutional Evaluation Programme and student participation in its Advisory Board, among others.

Types of involvement

IN WHAT WAY ARE THE STUDENTS INVOLVED IN THE QA PROCESSES OF YOUR AGENCY?	No.	%
As expert members of the evaluation/accreditation teams – including the position of chair/secretary	4	10
As expert members of the evaluation/accreditation teams – excluding the position of chair/secretary	13	33
As observers in the evaluation/accreditation teams	4	10
As planners of the evaluation/accreditation	2	5
Other	16	41
Total	39	100

Table 2.

For those respondents who indicated that students were involved in 'other' ways (in addition or as an alternative to the options given above) a wide range of activities were described, including:
- Involvement in ranking and benchmarking exercises;
- Full membership or observer status in the overall decision making body for accreditation/evaluation – in some cases these bodies are internal to the agency, in some cases external;
- Full membership observer status in the agency's Board, other senior committees or project groups;
- Involvement in the preparation or approval of the institution's self-evaluation report;
- Preparation and submission of a specific student-written report to the review team during the evaluation or accreditation process;
- Interview during the evaluation or accreditation process by the review team;
- Participation as speakers and/or delegates at agency-organised events;
- Student organisations are formally approached in consultation exercises.

Selection procedures
The responses revealed that there are two main ways in which students are selected for involvement in quality assurance processes.

Firstly, they may be drawn from a national 'pool' of students – established through a variety of nomination methods, including from student representative bodies. A system of this type operates in Germany (the 'Studentischer Akkreditierungspool'), in Scotland as part of the QAA's Enhancement Led Institutional Review method and in Switzerland

(OAQ). Students selected in this way may then also go on to be 'appointed' by the accrediting council or agency operating the review.

Secondly, they may be nominated individually (or in very small numbers) by the national or European student representative bodies (often after an internal selection process), or by student members of the accreditation council or agency board. They are then selected/appointed by the accrediting council or agency.

Where students are involved in their own institution's review – preparing a submission, meeting the panel or in some other capacity – they may be organised by the local student representative body, invited based on a random sample or nominated by the institution itself.

A wider range of responses was given in relation to the competences or qualities required (or desired) of the students participating in quality assurance processes. Student members were expected to have one or several of the following qualities:

- *Be a current or recently graduated student of higher education.* The exact requirement varied between systems;
- *Subject-related knowledge.* This was common across many agencies undertaking subject-specific quality assurance processes. For example, NOKUT requires a student member of an external panel for re-accreditation of a programme, to have spent at least two years studying a subject from the same field as the programme being re-accredited;
- *Some experience of quality assurance and governance within an institution*;
- *Experience as a student representative at either a school, institutional or national level*;
- *Analytical skills*;
- *Report writing skills*;
- *Communication skills*;
- *An interest in and understanding of the wider higher education system.* For some agencies this includes an understanding of issues outside the national context such as the Bologna process.

Other respondents indicated that either no specific profile is set or it had not yet been specified.

ARE THESE COMPETENCES/PROFILE SIMILAR WITH OR DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF THE OTHER EXPERTS YOU USE IN YOUR QA PROCESSES?	No.	%
Similar	9	50
Different	9	50
Total no. of responses	18	100

Table 3.

Half of respondents indicated that the competences/profile of student panel members were different than those required of other members (see Table 3.).

Differences identified included expectations that an expert panel member would be one or all of the following:

- A recognised academic;
- Have experience of/expertise in quality assurance;
- Have held or currently hold a senior academic or administrative office in a higher education institution.

The major similarities in competency expectation between 'peer' panel members and student members was that they are both expected to bring their own 'expert' viewpoint of their 'specialism' to the panel.

TRAINING

DO YOU PROVIDE A TRAINING/BRIEFING COURSE FOR THE STUDENTS BEFORE THEY PARTICIPATE IN THE QA PROCESSES?	No.	%
Yes	17	63
No	10	37
Total no. of responses	27	100

Table 4.

The majority of respondents indicated that they provide some form of training for the students involved in their quality assurance processes (see Table 4). The training time provided showed wide variation between respondents - ranging from one hour to five days – although the most common length was one day.

Topics covered in training included:
- Legislation/standards of relevance to the quality assurance process;
- Procedures – including timetable, activities, etc.;
- Objectives of the process;
- Overview of the national higher education system, quality assurance framework and international developments in quality assurance;
- Case studies;
- Panel members roles and responsibilities;
- Ethics;
- Specific issues and information relating to the object of the review (institution, program of study, course, etc.);
- Practical skills: report writing, research skills (i.e. interview techniques, documentary analysis), time management, etc.

IS THE COURSE FOR STUDENTS THE SAME THAT YOU PROVIDE FOR OTHER EXPERTS OF THE PANEL, AS WELL, OR IS IT A SEPARATE ONE?	No.	%
Same	11	69
Separate	2	13
Other (e.g. a combination)	3	19
Total no. of responses	16	100

Table 5.

Where the training given to students was recorded as the 'same' as that for other experts on the panel, several respondents indicated that sections of the training were, in fact, tailored towards student needs.

6.2.2 ROLE IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF A STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE IN YOUR EXPERT PANELS OR AT THE DECISION-MAKING BODIES OF YOUR AGENCY?	No.	%
As an equal partner	20	38
As an expert	10	19
As a consumer	4	8
As a stakeholder	14	27
Other	4	8
Total no. of responses	52	100

Table 6.

From the responses given it seems that there are several views on what the role of a student is, when they are present as members of review panels or participating in other areas of quality assurance. The comments made illustrate this:
- "[As a panel member they are an] expert in student affairs (facilities, academic organization, student life, etc.)."
- "[As part of self-evaluation] their role is to bring an important stakeholder view to the process."
- "In the decision making bodies (for accreditation) students are equal partners; in expert teams [they are] mainly observers, representing stakeholders."

But for another agency the reverse seemed to be the case:
"In the case of review panels, the intention would be that the student would be an equal partner, in that they would be expected to ask questions and to contribute to the final report. The student representative on the Board and the Management

Committee of IUQB is there as an identified stakeholder, in the same manner as the nominees representative of employers, trade unions, professions, etc." (IUQB)

An interesting aspect, which couldn't be explored in this survey, is how students perceive their own role on the panel, and how they are viewed by other team members:

"The intention is to regard them as partners but experience shows that this is to be a longer process. Both the experts and the students themselves usually regard them as simply students, ie. something a bit like 'guests' in the team. There are exceptions, too, it depends on the actual persons involved. We have had a case when the (PhD) student member was quite 'strong', he even argued in writing with the chair." (HAC)

DO YOU INCLUDE STUDENTS IN THE DECISION- MAKING BODIES OF YOUR AGENCY?	No.	%
Yes	17	55
No	14	45
Total no. of responses	31	100

Table 7.

Table 7 shows that participation of students in the decision-making bodies of agencies is not universal among ENQA members. For those agencies that do include students, they are present in a range of ways and in varying proportions to other members of the decision-making body (ranging from 1 out of 19 to 2 out of 12). The voting status of the student members also varies – some only sit as 'observers' while others have full voting rights.

Perceptions of the overall added-value of student involvement in agencies was overwhelmingly high. This was most simply put by OAQ - *"they are experts in learning".* A common theme included the student member's ability to provide a different viewpoint:

"[The] quality is observed from a very important position that nobody else can cover. The student may be regarded as customer, raw material, part of the process and as the end product. The student representative will bring in new or unexpected ideas that in themselves improve the assessment." (NOKUT)

Related to this the idea of student as stakeholder was brought up:

"student involvement provides the opinion of the most impotant stakeholder on the quality of education." (NAA)

Another theme highlighted by some respondents was the additional credibility that having students involved in quality assurance lends to the process and outcomes:

"Student involvement is a question of legitimacy. As students represent one major group of stakeholders in the process of higher education, it is of major importance that their interests be adequately represented in the process(es) of quality assurance in higher education." (ASIIN)

More practical benefits were also identified including an increased ease of communication with students at the institution being evaluated and a greater tendency to focus on the concrete "problems" facing students (i.e. workload, mobility).

IF YOU INVOLVE STUDENTS IN THE QA PROCESSES AND/OR IN THE DECISION-MAKING OF YOUR AGENCY, DO THEY GET ANY COMPENSATION FOR THEIR TASKS?	No.	%
Yes	15	60
No	10	40
Total no. of responses	25	100

Table 8.

The most common form of compensation for student members of expert panels was the payment of a fee. Many agencies indicated that this fee was paid at the same rate as for other members of the panel. Similarly, where students participate in the decision-making body of an agency and do not receive a compensation, again this is in line with the non-student members.

6.2.3 INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS UNIONS

DO YOU HAVE STUDENT UNION(S) IN YOUR COUNTRY?	No.	%
Yes	27	90
No	3	10
Total no. of responses	30	100

Table 9.

ARE THE STUDENT UNION(S) ACTIVE IN THE FIELD OF QUALITY ASSURANCE?	No.	%
Yes	22	81
No	5	19
Total no. of responses	27	100

Table 10.

Although specific details about the activities of student unions in the field of quality assurance would have to be asked of the Unions themselves, agencies that responded indicated an awareness of the broad range of areas of involvement.

Nationally
- Lobbying for changes in national policy;
- Responding to national calls for consultation by government and agencies;
- Campaigning for new legislation or to revise proposals for legislation;
- Participation in conferences and so contributing to the informal debate;
- Participation in and observation of key organisations Boards, committees, working groups, etc.;
- Supporting students involved in accreditation/evaluation processes at national and local levels through training and other resources.

Locally
- Involved in internal institutional quality assurance – often in committees and working groups.

6.2.4 VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF ENQA

SHOULD ENQA TAKE ON THE ROLE OF PROMOTING STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE QA?	No.	%
Yes	28	90
No	3	10
Total no. of responses	31	100

Table 11.

A general consensus was evident that ENQA should take on the role of promoting student involvement. It was suggested that this could be achieved in a range of ways, ENQA could:
- Promote discussion and the sharing of experiences;
- Promote the exchange of information on practice across agency and national boundaries;
- Promote the benefits of student participation:
- Organise events (workshops, seminars etc.);
- Produce publications (reports, discussion papers, website etc.);
- Continue working with ESIB;
- Organise projects (joint evalutions, benchmarking, etc.).

There was, however, one area where responses diverged – whether it would be appropriate for ENQA to pursue the development of further guidelines or a 'code of practice' on student involvement? Some respondents expressed the desire to have guidelines in place, to see the European Standards and Guidelines strengthened in this area, or to see student involvement prescribed in ENQA membership criteria. Other respondents indicated strongly that ENQA should not make a 'ruling' on student participation and that activities should only be complementary to other national and international initiatives and standards.

WOULD YOUR AGENCY FIND IT USEFUL IF ENQA WOULD CONDUCT SOME FURTHER RESEARCH ON THE ROLE, PROFILE AND TRAINING OF STUDENTS INVOLVED IN THE QA PROCESSES OF ITS MEMBER AGENCIES?	No.	%
Yes	27	87
No	4	13
Total no. of responses	31	100

Table. 12

The majority of respondents would be happy to see ENQA conduct further research on student involvement (see Table 12). Potential areas of research suggested included:

- Processes for the selection of students;
- Training of students – content, aims, methods;
- The competences and qualities required of students for effective participation;
- Role of students in the decision making bodies of quality assurance agencies;
- Types of student involvement in quality assurance processes;
- Extent of student involvement in quality assurance processes;
- Student involvement in the self-evaluation process;
- The added value of student involvement as panel members in accreditation/ evaluation processes;
- Perceived role of students in quality assurance (i.e. stakeholder, consumer, etc.);
- Statistical information – numbers of students involved (within institutions, nationally, internationally), age and profile of students, etc.;
- The experiences of students involved in quality assurance – their perceptions of the experience, impact, satisfaction, etc.

6.3 Conclusion

There is evidently great variety in the way that students are involved with the quality assurance of higher education across Europe. Differences spring from both the requirements of national systems and the cultural and historic role of students in the higher education.

Considering this diversity, designing a questionnaire that could be understood by and engage with all audiences, was a great challenge. The responses given do, however, form a good starting point from which to build on and to point to an underlying trend towards the greater involvement of students in the whole range of quality assurance activities.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Emmi Helle, Acting Secretary General, ENQA

On the basis of the results of the survey and of the discussions at the workshop it is evident that the ENQA member agencies acknowledge the clear added value of student involvement in external quality assurance processes. It also seems that the majority of ENQA member agencies aim to enhance student involvement in their activities. The guiding principle for student involvement is thus the same, while the practices in achieving it vary from country to country.

It was recognised at the workshop that in some countries profound cultural and legal changes would be needed in order to allow student involvement at all levels of the higher education system as promoted by the Bologna Process; while in others there were good legal and structural frameworks that just did not work well in practise. It was also brought up that while the student involvement in the Norwegian and Finnish contexts had a long history, the Catalan and Scottish (SPARQS) more recent pilot experiences had demonstrated that different traditions can change in time and progress can be made if there is enough will and resources available. This view was further reinforced by the recent developments in Flanders, which now has had in place student unions – recognised by the ministry and universities – for two years; this would not have been possible just ten years earlier.

Regardless of the different agencies and actors represented at the workshop, many common questions were raised and challenges identified. For example, there were many questions as regards recruitment and selection of students, their optimal profile and organisation of training for the students and for the whole review team. Again, as the student involvement survey showed, there is no single answer to these questions and different models work in different contexts.

A common challenge, in almost all countries of the workshop participants, seemed to be how to ensure the commitment of the students in quality assurance in a period of increasing study pressure and time constraints. In this respect it was recognised that optimism should be counterweighted by realism and that the lack of time and increasing stress of the students were to be taken into account.

The idea of enhancing the role of ENQA, of quality assurance agencies and of student organisations in promoting the student involvement was also commonly accepted at the workshop. This was further confirmed by the survey, which suggested that ENQA should continue cooperating with ESIB, disseminating information and organising events and projects on student involvement. The majority of respondents supported also the idea of ENQA conducting further research on the challenging issues of selection, training, profile and role of students as well as the type and extent of their involvement in quality assurance processes and decision-making bodies of the agencies.

Finally, the workshop participants found that the Bologna Process was an efficient and productive undertaking because it was voluntary and its goals were shared and promoted by many stakeholders. It was a common perception that the same principle would also make the student involvement in higher education a successful process.

Annex I: Programme of the ENQA workshop on student involvement in the processes of quality assurance agencies

Organised with the collaboration of ANECA
Madrid, 19–20 October 2006

The workshop is divided into three main sections and active participation of the audience is explicitly encouraged.

19th October
FIRST SESSION: MORNING

09:00 h   General framework of the student involvement in quality assurance processes within the agencies: outlining the objectives of the workshop – Chair: Gemma Rauret, ENQA Board Member and Managing Director of ANECA

The European framework after Bergen – ENQA viewpoint
Séamus Puirséil, Vice-President of ENQA and Chief Executive of HETAC

The role played by higher education institutions
Hanna Alaniska, Coordinator, University of Oulu
Suvi Eriksson, Student, University of Oulu

The student perspective
Maher Tekaya, Student, Member of the Executive Committee, ESIB

10:30 h   Coffee break

SECOND SESSION: MORNING

11:00 h   State-of-the-art: good practices in the European QA agencies - Chair: Rafael Llavori, Head of Unit, Institutional and International Relations, ANECA

The Nordic experience: the role of the agency
Tove Blytt Holmen, Deputy Director General, NOKUT

The Scottish case

Norman Sharp, Director, QAA-Scotland
Other experiences of student involvement in different spheres of QA
Esteve Arboix Codina, Project Manager, AQU-Catalunya

12:30 h   Debate
Chair: Rafael Llavori

13:00 h   Lunch

THIRD SESSION: AFTERNOON

14:30 h   Workshop (the participants will be split up into two working groups)

1st Group:
External reviews of agencies: the role of the students.
Chair: Lene Karin Wiberg, Student representative, NOKUT committee
The Chair will give a brief presentation (15 min) focusing on
the role played by students. A short document will be circulated in
advance to foster the debate.

2nd Group:
External reviews of agencies: the viewpoint from the agencies.
Chair: Janet Bohrer, Development Officer, QAA, UK
The Chair will give a brief presentation (15 min) focusing on
the role played by students. A short document will be circulated in
advance to foster the debate.

Both working groups will submit a short summary of their conclusions
to the plenary session.

16:00 h   Coffee break

16:30 h   Plenary session: Conclusions from the working groups
Chair: Emmi Helle, Acting Secretary General, ENQA

17:00 h   Debate
Chair: Emmi Helle

17:30 h   End of the first day

20:00 h   Workshop dinner

20th October
FIRST SESSION: MORNING

09:00 h   Future trends of student involvement in quality assurance processes
Gemma Rauret

10:00 h   Debate
Chair: Hanna Alaniska

10:30 h   Coffee break

11:00 h   Conclusions (panel discussion)
Séamus Puirséil, Gemma Rauret and Maher Tekaya

12:15 h   End of the workshop

12:30 h   Lunch

Annex II: ENQA questionnaire on student involvement

Resulting from the ENQA-ANECA workshop of 19–20 October 2006

Please fill in the questionnaire and send to emmi.helle@enqa.eu by Friday, 1 December 2006. The results will be analysed and presented in the Student Involvement workshop report to be published by the end of the year.

N.B. Please limit your answer to text answer questions to a maximum of 200 words.

Agency: _____

Respondent: _____

Please choose one of the following options:
- [ ] I give permission for my Agency to be identified with the responses I give in the final report.
- [ ] I do not give permission for my Agency to be identified with the responses I give in the final report (responses will be reported anonymously).

SECTION A: Student involvement in quality assurance (QA) processes
1. Are students involved in the QA processes of your Agency?
- [ ] Yes (go to Q3)
- [ ] No (go to Q2)

2. IF YOU DO NOT INVOLVE STUDENTS IN THE QA PROCESSES AT THE MOMENT, DO YOU HAVE PLANS TO INCLUDE THEM IN THE FUTURE?
- [ ] Yes (go to Q2a and then to SECTION B)
- [ ] No (go to Q2b and then to SECTION B)

2a. Yes – Over what time frame do you plan to do so?

2b. No – Why do you not intend to involve students?

3. IN WHAT WAY ARE THE STUDENTS INVOLVED IN THE QA PROCESSES OF YOUR AGENCY? (YOU CAN SELECT MORE THAN ONE CHOICE)
- [ ] As expert members of the evaluation/accreditation teams - including the position of chair/secretary
- [ ] As expert members of the evaluation/accreditation teams - excluding the position of chair/secretary
- [ ] As observers in the evaluation/accreditation teams
- [ ] As planners of the evaluations/accreditations
- [ ] Other, please specify:

4. HOW ARE THE STUDENTS SELECTED BY YOUR AGENCY (E.G. WHICH BODY IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SELECTION; WHAT KINDS OF SELECTION PROCEDURES DO YOU USE)?

5. WHAT IS THE PROFILE AND COMPETENCES YOU REQUIRE OF THE STUDENTS TO BE INVOLVED IN YOUR QA PROCESSES?

5a. Are these competences/profiles similar with or different from those of the other experts you use in your QA processes?
- [ ] Similar
- [ ] Different

If different, please specify: _____

6. DO YOU PROVIDE A TRAINING/BRIEFING COURSE FOR THE STUDENTS BEFORE THEY PARTICIPATE IN THE QA PROCESSES?
- [ ] Yes (answer questions 6a-c)
- [ ] No (go to Q7)

6a. What kind of a training course is it/what are the main topics covered?

6b. How long does it last (in days/hours)?

6c. Is the course for students the same that you provide for other experts on the panel, as well, or is it a separate one?
- [ ] Same
- [ ] Separate
- [ ] Other (e.g. a combination), please specify:

7. HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF A STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE IN YOUR EXPERT PANELS OR AT THE DECISION-MAKING BODIES OF YOUR AGENCY?
(you can choose more than one answer)
- [ ] As an equal partner
- [ ] As an expert
- [ ] As a 'consumer'
- [ ] As a stakeholder
- [ ] Other, please specify:_____

SECTION B: Other student involvement in your Agency
8. DO YOU INCLUDE STUDENTS IN THE DECISION-MAKING BODIES OF YOUR AGENCY?
- [ ] Yes (go to Q8a)
- [ ] No

8a. If so, in what way(s) and to what extent (e.g. what kind of powers do the students have; what is the proportion of student representatives compared to the total number of seats)?

9. WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS THE OVERALL ADDED VALUE OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN YOUR AGENCY?

10. IF YOU INVOLVE STUDENTS IN THE QA PROCESSES AND/OR IN THE DECISION-MAKING OF YOUR AGENCY, DO THEY GET ANY COMPENSATION FOR THEIR TASKS?

☐ Yes (go to Q10a)
☐ No

10a. If so, what kind of compensation (ECTS-credits, an expert fee…)?

SECTION C: Student Unions

11.DO YOU HAVE STUDENT UNION(S) IN YOUR COUNTRY?

☐ Yes (go to Q11a)
☐ No

11a. Are the student union(s) active in the field of quality assurance?

☐ Yes (go to Q11b)
☐ No

11b. If so, in what way(s)?

SECTION D: The role of ENQA

12. SHOULD ENQA TAKE ON THE ROLE OF PROMOTING STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE QA?

☐ Yes (go to Q12b)
☐ No

12b. If so, what should that role be?

13. WOULD YOUR AGENCY FIND IT USEFUL IF ENQA WOULD CONDUCT SOME FURTHER RESEARCH ON THE ROLE, PROFILE AND TRAINING OF STUDENTS INVOLVED IN THE QA PROCESSES OF ITS MEMBER AGENCIES?

☐ Yes (go to Q13a)
☐ No

13.a If so, would you have any suggestions on the topics of the research?

14. ANY FURTHER COMMENTS:

Thank you very much for your attention and input!