

TRANSPARENCY OF EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH PUBLIC QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORTS (EQArep)

Final report of the project

TIIA BACH, ĐURĐICA DRAGOJEVIĆ, PETER FINDLAY, STEPHANIE HERING,
LIJA LAURI, ORLA LYNCH, ZEYNEP OLCEN, MAIKI UDAM

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Lifelong Learning Programme

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FOREWORD

The evolution towards a more knowledge-based society and strong competition in the labour market has resulted in an increasing interest in higher education in Europe. Given the large number of higher education institutions (HEIs) and study programmes on the market, choosing a programme and an institution has become more difficult. As a result, students, other stakeholders and the public at large are looking for more detailed, reliable and comparable information on the quality of individual study programmes, faculties and HEIs.

As stated in the European Council conclusions of 12 May 2009, regarding a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), one of the four strategic objectives for the framework is to “improve the quality and efficiency of education and training”. Quality assurance (QA), which plays an important role in fostering the transparency of European higher education, can be considered an important means to achieve this objective. In response to the growing need for accessible and reliable information on institutions and study programmes, ENQA has carried out the EU-funded “Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports” (EQArep) project. The overall aim of the project is to understand the needs of the relevant stakeholders and to improve the QA reports produced by QA agencies as a result. The project has been implemented in collaboration with the Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ), Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the (Croatian) Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) and the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA).

This report presents the results of the activities carried out in the context of the EQArep project. In doing so, the report sets out the current practices of QA agencies in publishing the outcomes of their evaluations (QA reports) and an overview of the use and usefulness of these QA reports from a stakeholder perspective. Both analyses are based on the findings of surveys and workshops carried out as part of the project.

The project has resulted in a set of European Guidelines for summary QA reports addressed to QA agencies and a set of generic recommendations for the drafting of comprehensive reports. These Guidelines, in tandem with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), aim to provide a framework for the QA agencies to work within. The Guidelines specifically recommend that all summary reports produced by QA agencies provide similar and comparable types of information, to help the beneficiaries better understand, compare and inform choice, while contributing to the transparency of European higher education.

On behalf of the project consortium, I would like to thank the contributors to this project. These are the respondents to the surveys, participants of the workshops, members of the steering group and members of the advisory board.

I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage all ENQA member agencies to consider the outcomes of this project for their own work, thus contributing to the shaping of the future of QA reports.

Padraig Walsh
President of ENQA

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION TO THE EQAREP PROJECT

Zeynep Olcen, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

RESPONDING TO A NEED FOR BETTER INFORMATION

As a result of increasing competition in the labour market and the shift towards a society where knowledge is the key to success, higher education institutions (HEIs) are the center of attention for students and other stakeholders more than ever. The increased interest and demand for HEIs raises concerns regarding the quality and the accessibility of information about institutions and study programmes. Stakeholders require transparent, reliable and comparable information about institutions and programmes in order to make well-informed decisions.

Among other tools providing transparent information, such as the Bologna transparency tools or rankings, quality assurance (QA) plays a major role in contributing to the transparency of European higher education. Within this perspective, QA reports are considered an important source of reliable and comparable information. As mentioned in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), external QA reports should be made public. However, the content, structure and publishing channels of these reports vary considerably, and there are no common guidelines for QA agencies to follow. This situation limits the potential of reports in contributing to the comparative dimension and transparency of higher education at the European level.

In order to foster the role of QA reports as a source of reliable and comparable information and to contribute to the overall transparency of European higher education, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) decided to carry out a project entitled “Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports (EQArep)”. The project was set to investigate the current state of the content, structure and publication of QA reports while trying to understand the expectations and demands of stakeholders with regard to these reports. On the basis of the results, the project developed a set of recommendations for use by QA agencies.

In addition to ENQA as the lead partner, the project consortium comprised four QA agencies: the Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in higher education (OAQ), Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) and the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA). The project was successful in obtaining funding from the European Commission Lifelong Learning Programme.

METHODOLOGY

The project’s primary objective to develop common “European Guidelines for external QA reports” required two important actions: 1) analysing and understanding how the

stakeholders perceive the use and usefulness of external QA reports produced by QA agencies, and 2) mapping the current practices of QA agencies in publishing external QA reports in terms of content, structure and purpose.

Within this perspective, the first part of the project methodology consisted of consulting various stakeholders - namely students, employers, governments and HEIs - through an online questionnaire developed by the project working group. The aim of the questionnaire was twofold: 1) to map the current use of information regarding quality in HEIs and study programmes, and 2) to identify the expectations of the stakeholders regarding the reports. The analysis of the online survey was presented and discussed during an interactive workshop with stakeholders from different backgrounds.

The second activity focused on mapping the current reporting methods and practices of QA agencies. Following the same structure as for part one, an online survey was developed by the project working group and sent to ENQA members and affiliates. The survey questions focused on the purpose, structure, content and publication channels of the QA reports. In addition, the project working group performed an in-depth analysis of a selected sample of twenty QA reports based on a common grid in order to consolidate and frame the findings of the questionnaire. The findings of the online survey and the analysis of the sample of reports were presented and discussed in an interactive workshop with QA agencies.

The results of both analyses supported the project working group in identifying areas where a mismatch existed between the current practices and the expectations of the beneficiary groups. Based on the needs and requirements expressed by the stakeholders with regard to external QA reports, the project working group developed a set of recommendations for QA reports and specifically for summary QA reports insofar as their content, structure and accessibility are concerned.

The project consortium considered that an important distinction had to be made between comprehensive ("full") reports and summary reports. In fact, the group considers that the main purpose of institutional and programme comprehensive QA reports is to facilitate a review or accreditation decision and to serve as a trigger for enhancement at the reviewed institution. Their primary users are therefore the HEIs or programmes under review. The summary reports, on the other hand, are mainly produced to provide concise and easily readable information to the general public. The project consortium, based on the findings of the project activities, came to the conclusion that attempting to uniformise comprehensive reports might result in the loss of relevant important information to the institution or a reduced usefulness of the reports to their main users. Therefore, while this report provides some recommendations insofar as comprehensive reports are concerned and enlists good features of comprehensive reports, the guidelines that have been developed concentrate on summary reports specifically. While not suggesting full standardisation of summary reports, the project consortium considers that in order to better meet the needs of stakeholders, a higher degree of comparability between summary reports would be beneficial.

ENQA invites its members and affiliates (where relevant) to make good use of the developed recommendations in order to enhance the information value and accessibility of their reports and thus contribute to the increased transparency of European higher education.

CHAPTER 2:

INTRODUCTION TO QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORTS

Orla Lynch, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF QA REPORTS

The production and publication of reports are common unifying features of all external quality assurance (QA) proceedings in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Standard 2.5 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2009*¹ (ESG) requires that “reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.” The production of these reports allows for a record of a QA review at programme or institution level. The frequently asserted core objective for reports which are to be made public is transparency. In the EHEA, the origins of QA can be traced to two main sources: attempts to solve problems centred on questions of quality and considerations relating to the improvement of the systems that underpin higher education. Consequently, QA has traditionally served two main purposes in higher education: enhancement and accountability. The question remains as to whether transparency is a purpose of QA on par with accountability and enhancement or whether it is a key principle or standard for QA. The existence of standard 2.5 on QA reports in the ESG may indicate the latter.

In the EHEA, where external QA regimes are in compliance with the ESG, variety and steady change are key features². The most common external QA procedures are accreditation and evaluation of programmes, followed at a significant distance by evaluation and accreditation of institutions, though the gap is closing. Ninety percent of agencies apply more than one approach and 75 percent of agencies have changed or are changing their approach. The variability of national agendas means that the emergence of a fully unified external QA system in Europe is unlikely.

Over the course of recent years, in more economically straitened circumstances, the stakes around external QA have been raised, and external QA in the EHEA has become more visible. Due to competition and diversification, quality has become a core success factor for institutional success. Guaranteeing a certain level of quality or enhancing the quality of a programme or an institution has become an integral part of regular management and external marketing of higher education institutions (HEIs). Possibly deriving from the requirement for compliance with the ESG, there is a stronger emphasis

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- 1 Thune, C. (2009). *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 3rd edition*. Helsinki: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
 - 2 Rauhvargers, A., Deane, C., & Pauwels, W. (2009). Bologna process stocktaking report 2009. *Report from working groups appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group to the Ministerial Conference in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve*. Brussels: Lifelong Learning Programme, European Commission.
- Westerheijden, D. F., et al. (2010). *The Bologna Process Independent Assessment-The first decade on working on the European Higher Education Area-Volume 1 Detailed assessment report*. CHEPS/INCHER-Kassel/ECOTEC. Available at: www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/2010_conference/documents/IndependentAssessment_executive_summary_overview_conclusions.pdf;
- Crozier, F., Grifoll, J., Harris, N., Kekalainen, H., & Malan, T. (2011). *Evaluation of the reports on agency reviews (2005-2009)*. ENQA Occasional Papers 16. Helsinki: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Available at: www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/ENQA_Occasional%20paper_16.pdf

on QA and, in particular, on reporting in relation to QA as a source of information to inform internal management decision-making and to inform an external public about the quality of an institution. There is growing interest in detailed and reliable information on the quality of individual study programmes and HEIs, sometimes for comparison purposes rather than description of single programmes or institutions.

QA is a highly dynamic and diverse field with divergent requests from stakeholders. How can QA and reporting on QA meet this challenge? In the first ten years of the ESG, the focus has been on methodology. Is it time now for a shift in focus from methodology towards purpose? And are the purposes of external QA sufficiently clear? A study by David Woodhouse (2010) indicates that a confusing and heterogeneous array of stated purposes have emerged for external QA agencies³. It is valid to assert that a single purpose for external QA would not be appropriate. A recent evaluation of external reviews in Ireland, the Review of Reviews⁴, in keeping with the Woodhouse report, found that the purposes of external QA reviews were not clear. Furthermore, the Review of Reviews posited that before matters relating to review methods can be properly or even adequately addressed, there must be clarity with respect to purpose.

Whilst the existing purposes of external QA are not clear or unified, they do appear to converge around a number of key themes, which are:

- To assist HEIs in assuring/enhancing their quality, in developing their internal structures and procedures and in achieving various aims
- To investigate the 'quality' of programmes or institutions
- To check compliance with certain (legal) requirements
- To assess effectiveness/success of certain policies/reforms
- To provide independent information for comparing programmes/HEIs
- To provide independent information for decision-making (funding, enrolment, collaborative work)
- To provide independent information for certain constituencies
- To provide independent information about quality of HEIs/programmes/HEI-systems

The intended audiences for reports are not homogeneous. Reports can be variously, and sometimes simultaneously, addressed to HEI management, teachers, students, employers, cooperation partners, political decision-makers, or media and society at large.

In these contexts it is worth giving deliberate consideration to reporting on external QA. If reports are to be fit for purpose, then external QA reports are required to meet varying purposes across the EHEA, aligned to different national priorities. Furthermore, even within a single state or agency there can be a range of possibly competing purposes to which external QA is aligned. The consequence of this is that various kinds of information are required from reports across the EHEA, and sometimes there are diverse requirements, or purposes, for a single report. The ESG standard 2.5 for reporting requires that "reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is

3 Woodhouse, D. (November 2010). *Is there a globally common understanding to Quality Assurance?* ESU Board Meeting 59 Seminar: Quality Assurance. Presentation conducted from Jerusalem, Israel.

4 Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) (2014). *Review of Reviews: Report of the Independent Review Team*. Available at: www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Reviews/Review%20of%20Reviews/12639-QQI%20Review%20of%20Reviews-WEB.pdf.

clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.” Based on the current draft for the revised ESG⁵, the new version will likely go further, stating that “full reports by the experts should be published.” The revised version may also include (in the Guidelines) a recommendation to allow for the report to include “features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution”. The current version of the revised guidelines also indicates that “the preparation of a summary report may be useful.”

As outlined above, the diversity of purposes for external QA that have emerged means that there are varied and heterogeneous needs and audiences for QA reports. All agencies produce reports as an outcome of their reviews. What are the key features of a report that provides a reliable account of the review event while assuring that the various purposes of external QA have been addressed? Furthermore, how can a report adequately inform a diverse audience? Is one report sufficient? Or should there be different reports for different audiences? This project emerged as a direct response to a necessity to deliberate on reporting in general, these questions in particular and the consideration of all of these in a broader context of transparency.

5 E4 Group, in cooperation with EI, Business Europe, and EQAR (2014). *Revision of the ESG*. Available at: <http://revisionesg.wordpress.com>.

CHAPTER 3:

UNDERSTANDING THE STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE USE AND USEFULNESS OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORTS

Maiki Udam, Liia Lauri, and Tiia Bach, Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA)

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The survey on the use and usefulness of external quality assurance (QA) reports for different stakeholders was directed at all main stakeholder groups in higher education QA: students, potential future employers, governments, and higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves. The purpose of the survey was to identify and compare the exact interests of the various stakeholders regarding information about the quality of institutions and programmes.

The questionnaire (Annex 1) was sent by the EQArep partners to stakeholders within their respective countries in February 2013 and to additional stakeholders by the ENQA Secretariat. The first part of the questionnaire dealt with the current use of the information about quality in HEIs and study programmes. The second part of the questionnaire focused on the expectations of stakeholders: what information concerning the quality of a HEI they need, as well as where and in what format the information should be presented. The last three questions concerned information about the respondent. A workshop for stakeholders organised in May 2013 explored the findings of the survey and collected further insights on the expectations of different stakeholders and the possible format/template of an assessment report.

Stakeholders were grouped as follows:

- representatives of HEIs
- students
- public authorities/government offices
- employers
- funders/investors
- other

In total, there were 127 respondents from 15 countries (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of respondents by country

COUNTRY	RESPONDENTS
Ireland	37
Estonia	35
Switzerland	21
Croatia	15
Romania	3
Italy	3
France	3
Slovenia	2
Bulgaria	2
United Kingdom	1
Netherlands	1
Hungary	1
Germany	1
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1
Austria	1

The most active respondents were representatives of HEIs, with a response rate of 70 percent. The response rate of students and public authorities was 28 percent and 21 percent, respectively. Only three employers completed the questionnaire, contributing to a 10 percent response rate (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2. Number of respondents, by stakeholder groups

GROUP	RESPONDENTS
Higher education institution	78
Student	24
Public authorities	10
Other	12
Employer	3
Funder/Investor	0

Table 3. Response rate, by stakeholder groups

GROUP	N° ASKED	N° RESPONDED	RESPONSE RATE
HEI	112	78	70%
Student	86	24	28%
Public authority	48	10	21%
Employer	30	3	10%

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Below, the results of the survey are presented. All responses are included in the general statistics (e.g. Figure 1); in the segmented statistics (e.g. Figure 2), only the responses from students, public authorities and HEIs are presented, as the response rate from employers was too low.

REASONS FOR SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE QUALITY OF A HEI AND ITS STUDY PROGRAMMES

The first question explored the reasons why stakeholders search for information about the quality of HEIs and study programmes. The answers indicate that the main purpose is deciding on possible further studies (31% of all responses), but also finding partners among other HEIs and evaluating the quality of graduates for recruitment purposes received relatively high scores – 23 percent and 16 percent, respectively (Figure 1). Expectedly, most of the students looked for information on further studies, and the greatest amount of HEI representatives were interested in finding collaboration partners (Figure 2).

However, 24 percent of respondents selected “other purposes”. These purposes have been summarised and grouped into three categories:

- To learn about internal QA systems in other HEIs
- For comparison/benchmarking (of similar programmes, or QA procedures)
- To do research

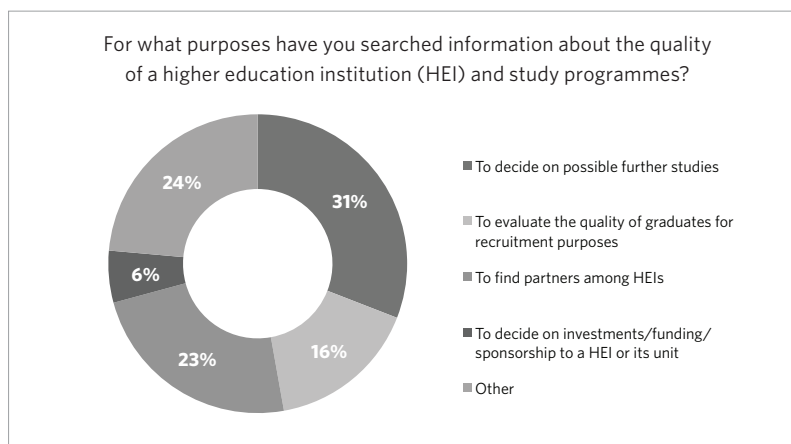


Figure 1. Reasons for searching for information about the quality of higher education.

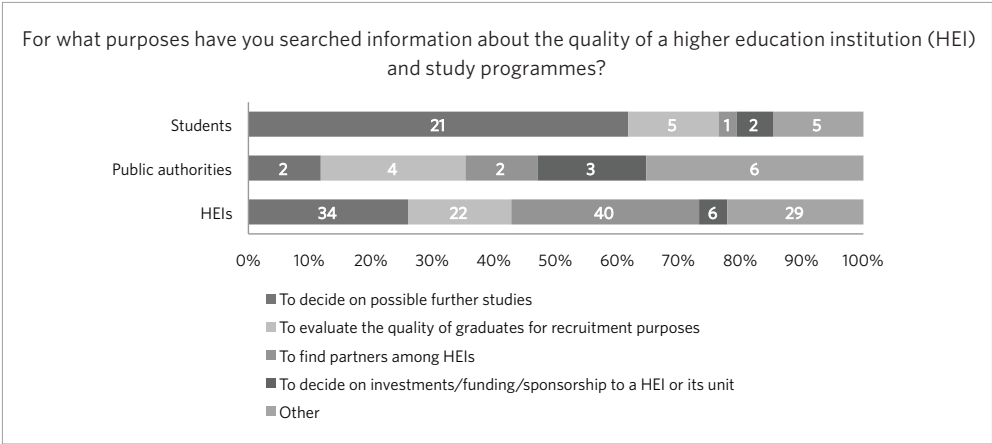


Figure 2. Reasons for searching for information, by stakeholder groups.

CURRENT SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The respondents were asked about the main sources of information they used to collect the information which they sought. By and large, the main source for different stakeholders were the websites of HEIs (see Figure 3). The second most popular source for information came from friends, colleagues, parents, etc. Assessment reports appeared to be the third most popular source of information concerning the quality of an institution or programme. Only very few respondents marked social media as a source for this kind of information, and it was slightly more popular among students compared to other groups (Figures 4, 5, 6).

In the additional comments, NARIC and alumni were mentioned as distinctive sources of information.

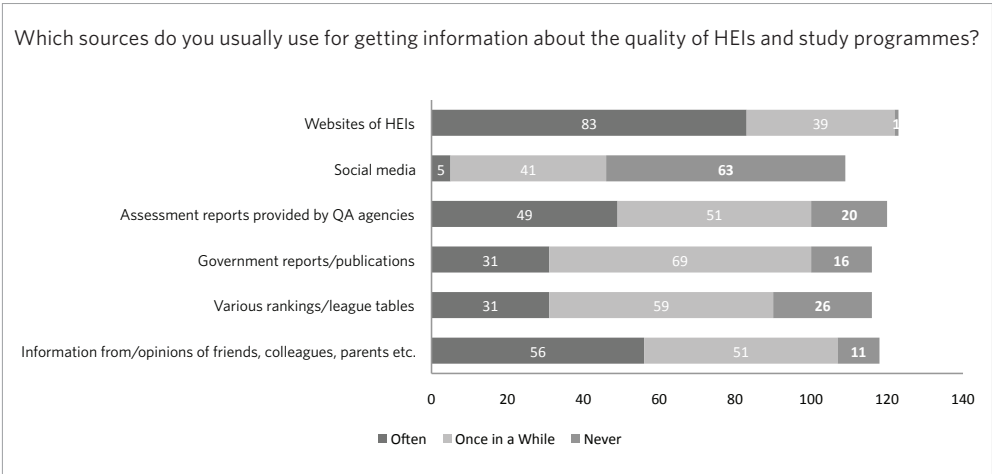


Figure 3. Sources for acquiring information about the quality of HEIs and study programs.

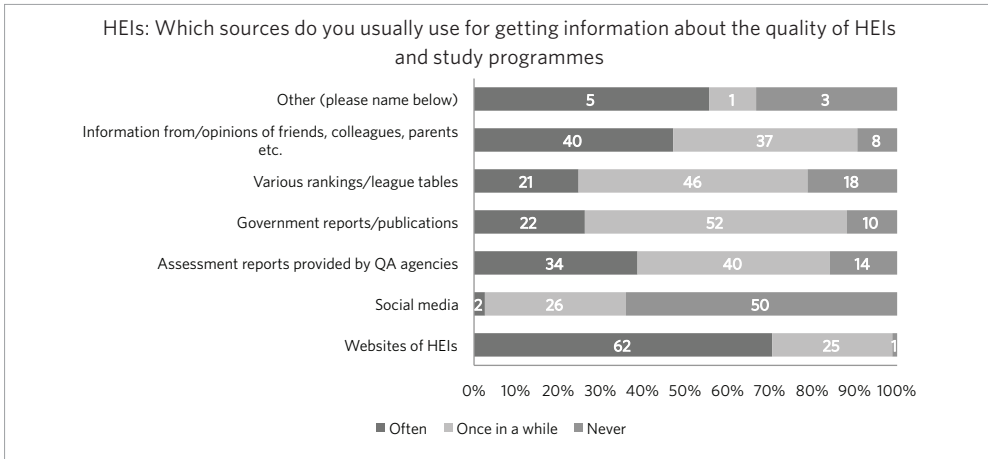


Figure 4. Sources for acquiring information: HEIs.

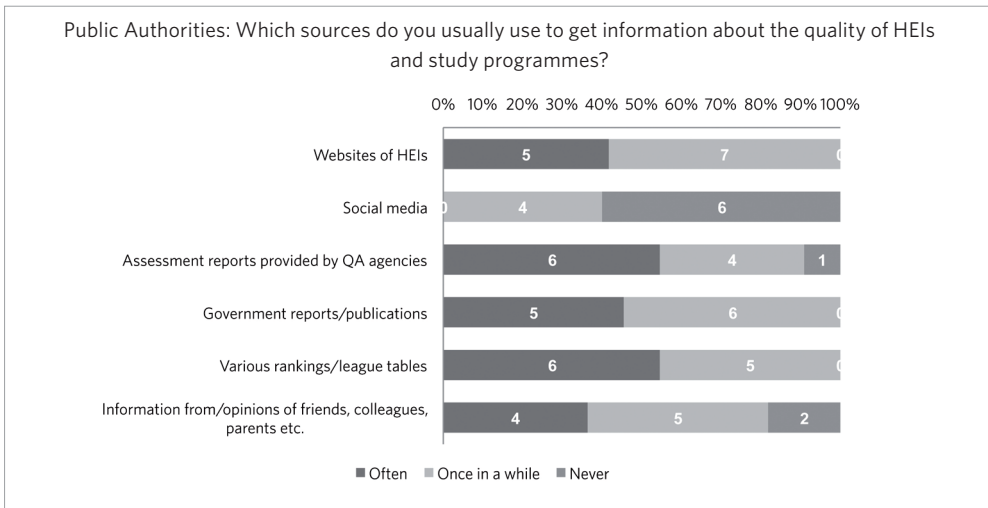


Figure 5. Sources for acquiring information: Public authorities.

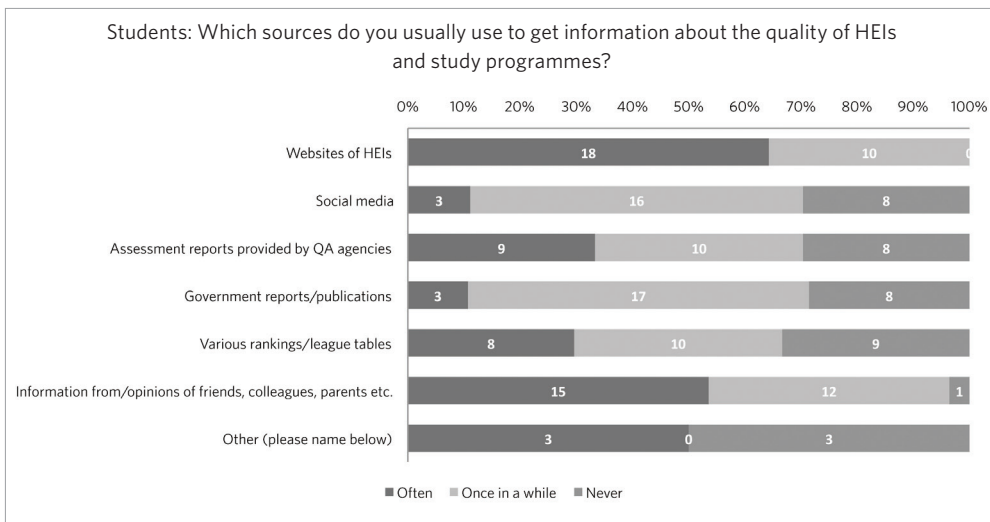


Figure 6. Sources for acquiring information: Students.

REASONS WHY NOT TO USE ASSESSMENT REPORTS

Several respondents had never used QA reports as an information source. The survey sought insight from respondents who indicated that they never used assessment reports as to why these sources were not utilised. Thirty-six percent of respondents indicated they either did not know where to find the reports, or they did not know about them (Figure 7), suggesting that stakeholders are not sufficiently aware of the reports and the kind of information they may provide. In case of 20 percent of the responses, respondents found the needed information elsewhere, and in case of 15 percent of responses, it was claimed that the reports did not contain necessary information. One-fifth (21%) of responses revealed that the reports are either too long or too complicated to understand. Interestingly, the different stakeholder groups had quite similar reasons for not using the QA reports as a source of information (Figure 8).

Additional comments indicated the lack of time to consult reports as a reason, but also the fact that the reports are not always publicly available.

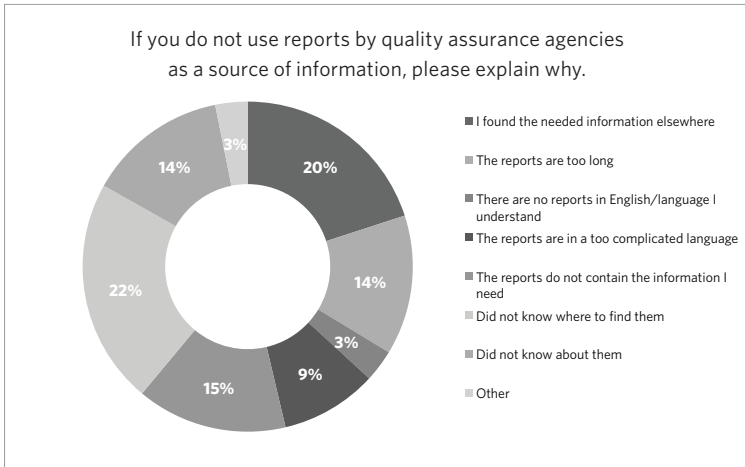


Figure 7. Reasons why not to use reports published by QA agencies.

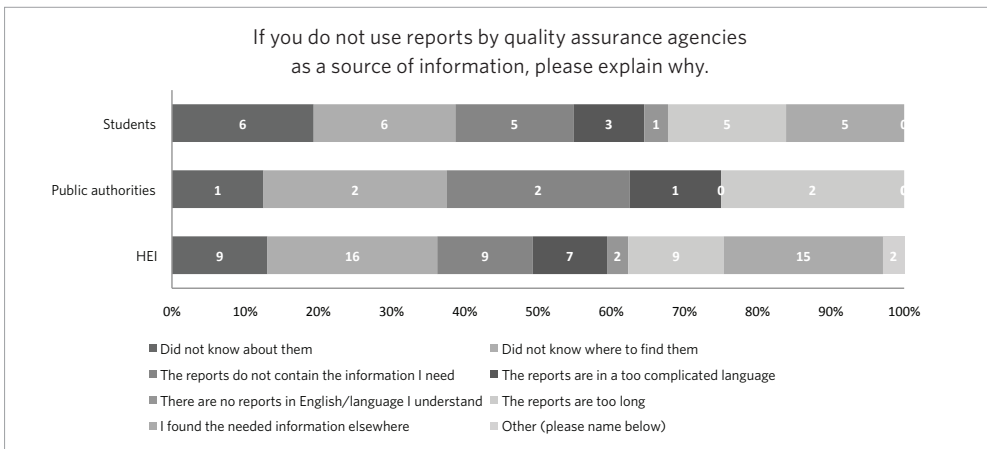


Figure 8. Reasons why not to use reports published by QA agencies, sorted by stakeholder group.

HELPFULNESS OF ASSESSMENT REPORTS

Individuals who use assessment reports published by QA agencies as one source of information were asked whether they find the reports and the information provided in them helpful.

One-third of respondents (32%) fully agreed that the reports are a helpful source of information, while an additional 51 percent “slightly agree” with the statement. Six percent of responses show that respondents did not find the reports helpful at all (see Figure 9). The stakeholder groups possess, once again, quite similar views (Figure 10).

This question raised very many comments, 55 in total. The main ideas expressed in the comments are summarised below:

- The main advantage of these reports is the fact that all the information is gathered in one place, and the source is trustworthy. Unfortunately, the reports are sometimes too technical.
- Some reports are far too standardised and do not contain sufficient information about what the evaluation team actually found.
- The final decision of the agency only shows if the standards are fulfilled – without any ranking or degree of performance of the evaluated programmes.
- Agency reports differ in style and content considerably - a more standardised international approach would be very helpful.
- The language used is too complicated and would need to be changed to make the reports more user-friendly.

In general, the reports are comprehensive and considered to cover all relevant areas. At the same time, easier comparability (e.g. through international standards for reports) and user-friendliness is needed (including language, length etc.).

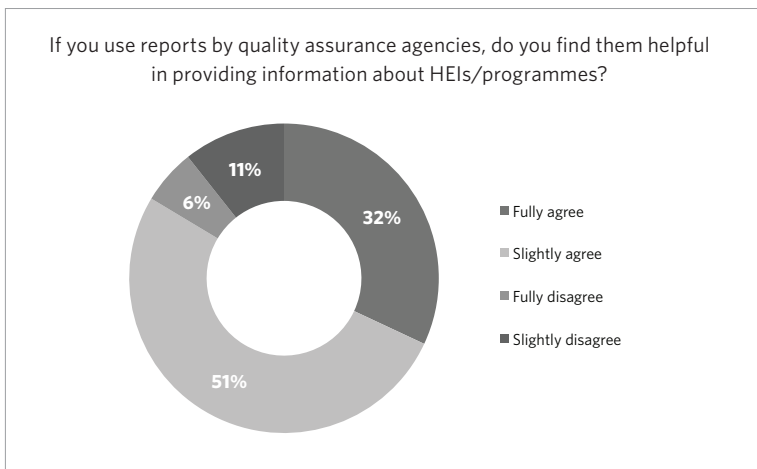


Figure 9. Helpfulness of reports by QA agencies.

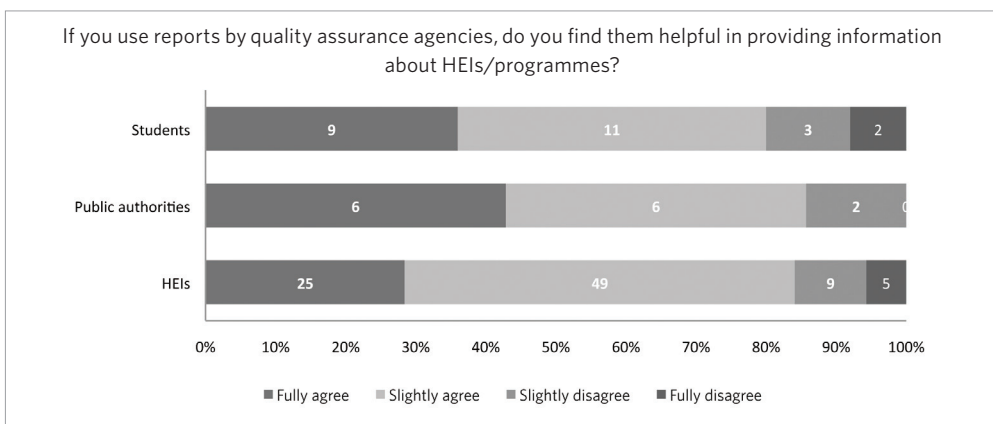


Figure 10. Helpfulness of reports by QA agencies, sorted by stakeholder group.

PLACES TO FIND REPORTS PUBLISHED BY QA AGENCIES

More than half (56%) of responses indicated that respondents find the reports on websites of QA agencies. However, a large proportion of the respondents (36%) also find the reports on websites of HEIs (Figure 11). Among the students, nearly half of them use the websites of HEIs to find the reports (Figure 12).

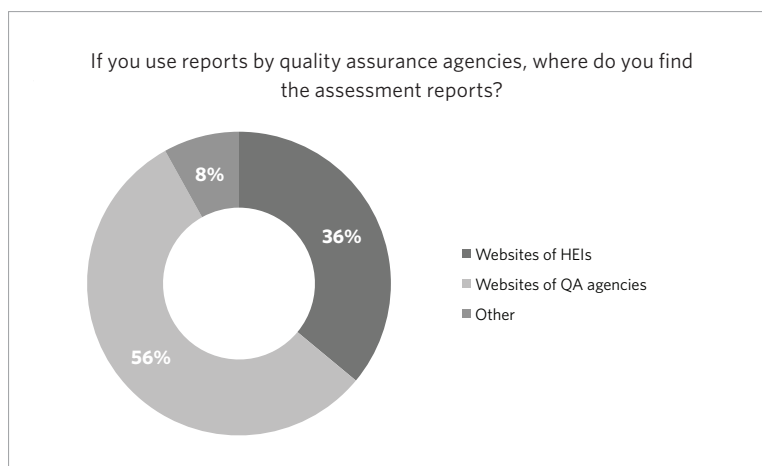


Figure 11. Places to find the reports by QA agencies.

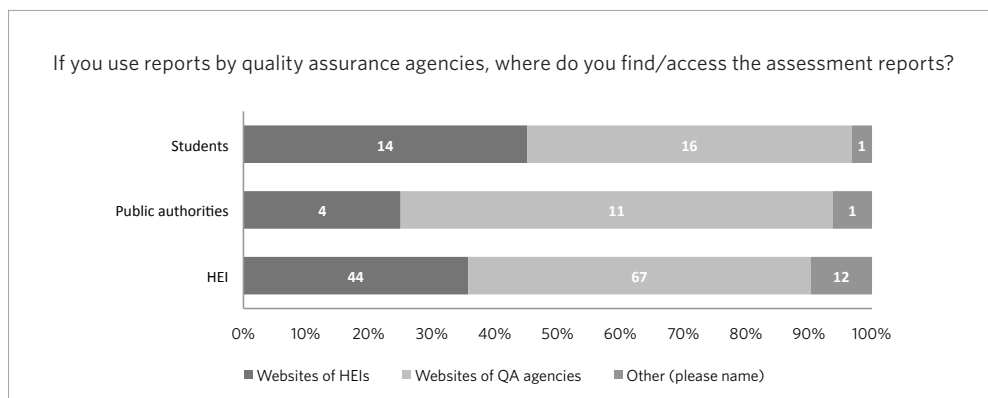


Figure 12. Places to find the reports by QA agencies, sorted by stakeholder group.

INFORMATION EXPECTED BY DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

For one question, the respondents were asked to indicate what kind of information they normally need to make decisions regarding further learning, partnerships, comparisons with other institutions, etc. The majority of respondents (96 out of 127) named 'content of study programmes' as the single most important piece of information, followed by 'accreditation status of institutions/study programmes' (80 respondents) and 'strategic planning, management and governance' (78 respondents) (Table 4). The overall

priorities correspond with the preferences of respondents from HEIs, with the exception of students and public authorities who expressed slightly different needs. Although students also indicate 'content of study programmes' as the most important item, their second concern is 'employability of graduates' (9th important for HEIs and the most important for public authorities) followed by 'student support system' and 'qualifications of teaching staff'. Public authorities valued equally 'content of study programmes', 'accreditation status', 'qualifications of teaching staff', 'student support system' and 'financial resources', placing them all as the second most important following 'employability of graduates'. Unimportant for all stakeholders was 'institution's position in league tables' and 'history and traditions' (Table 5).

Table 4. Information needed to make decisions regarding further learning, partnerships, comparisons with other institutions, etc.

INFORMATION	RESPONDENTS
Content of study programmes	96
Accreditation status of institutions/study programmes	80
Strategic planning, management, governance	78
Qualifications of teaching staff	74
Internal quality assurance system	73
Student support system	67
Employability/employment of graduates	66
Reputation of teaching staff	59
Number of research grants, publications, citations	57
Application and admission statistics	57
Condition of infrastructure	54
Institution's ability to respond diverse students' needs	46
Financial resources	45
History and traditions	37
Institution's position in league tables	29
Other	4

Table 5. Information needed, by stakeholder group

	HEI	Public authorities	Students
Content of study programmes	69(1)	9(2)	27(1)
Accreditation status of institutions/study programmes	62(2)	9(2)	13(9)
Strategic planning, management, governance	61(3)	8(7)	14(8)
Internal quality assurance system	56(4)	7(8)	12(11)
Qualifications of teaching staff	53(5)	9(2)	17(4)
Student support system	47(6)	9(2)	18(3)
Number of research grants, publications, citations	46(7)	7(8)	9(13)
Reputation of teaching staff	44(8)	4(13)	16(6)
Employability/employment of graduates	40(9)	10(1)	21(2)
Application and admission statistics	40(10)	6(10)	15(7)
Condition of infrastructure	35(11)	6(10)	17(4)
Institution's ability to respond to diverse student needs	32(12)	6(10)	12(11)
History and traditions	30(13)	1(15)	8(14)
Financial resources	28(14)	9(2)	13(9)
Institution's position in league tables	22(15)	2(14)	6(15)
Other (please name below)	6(16)	1(15)	1(16)

PREFERABLE FORMAT OF INFORMATION

One-third (32%) of respondents indicate they would like to receive information about the quality of a HEI and its study programmes in a **short, concentrated summary** describing the main strengths and areas for improvement. Twenty-seven percent expect to see comparative data with other institutions, and 25 percent prefer numerical data designating the most important aspects of the institution and its programmes. Only 14 percent are interested in comprehensive reports providing extensive information about strengths and areas of improvement in management and core processes of a HEI (see Figure 13). No significant differences could be detected among the different stakeholder groups (Figure 14). Some additional comments referred to the use of multimedia as a facilitated entryway to information.

In the breakout groups during the stakeholders' workshop in Tallinn on 6-7 May, it was discussed that the national agencies within Europe prioritise their own unique national agendas thereby making comparison between different countries impossible. Consequently, it seems that comparisons can really only be made between HEIs within one country. The students agreed, furthermore, that the provision of comparable data was not a task of QA agencies: in QA procedures, an institution's or a programme's performance is compared against set standards, not against other institutions.

For the employers, the institutional reports are of no relevance and are therefore not used, as employers do not have any specific need for acquiring information about institutions' internal QA mechanisms. The most relevant information for the professional world is 'performance', which is translated into quantitative indicators through various rankings.

All stakeholder groups agreed that an assessment report should also include a summary report showing the outcome of the assessment, the main strengths and weaknesses of an institution/programme and the recommendations for follow-up activities. This is essential, as the comprehensive reports are considered too long and not intended for the needs of a wider readership. At the same time, the institutions and programmes subject to QA procedures need comprehensive reports, and their needs should not be sacrificed for the sake of other potential readers.

Employers recommended the following content and format be considered for inclusion in the summary reports of study programmes:

- Context of the quality assessment (voluntary/obligatory; accreditation/evaluation; period of validity; quality labels? evaluated by national/international panel against national/international standards; single/joint procedure; accreditation status of offering HEI; etc.);
- Synthetic programme description (special features, innovative character, relevance, specificities);
- Statements on achievement of the intended learning outcomes matching with given QF level;
- Profile of strengths and weaknesses;
- Link to comprehensive report;
- Link to the website where the study programme can be found

The groups agreed that the length of a summary report should be kept limited, at approximately two pages. Information concerning the context should be provided in schematic form (rather than in discursive form), while the programme description should be discursive and normally no longer than five lines. Care should be taken with the use of quantitative data or figures that could be easily misused and misinterpreted. Strengths and weaknesses should be provided in a table focusing on the main outcomes of the assessment. In all groups it was agreed that a template or standard reporting structure might be helpful.

The discussions in the stakeholders' workshop underlined the importance of making information easily accessible, readable, and even comparable. At the same time, it was underlined that as different QA processes have different subjects (institutions vs. programmes) and different purposes (accreditation vs. audit), a single report template would not be possible, nor desirable. Some main characteristics of a good comprehensive report could be identified at the European level, while the details should be discussed and determined in the national context in consultation with the stakeholders. In addition, the stakeholder groups agreed that the institutions are the primary users of the QA reports, and the reports should thus address their needs first, before considering the requirements of other audiences. A report summary was considered as a possible way to meet the needs of all groups.

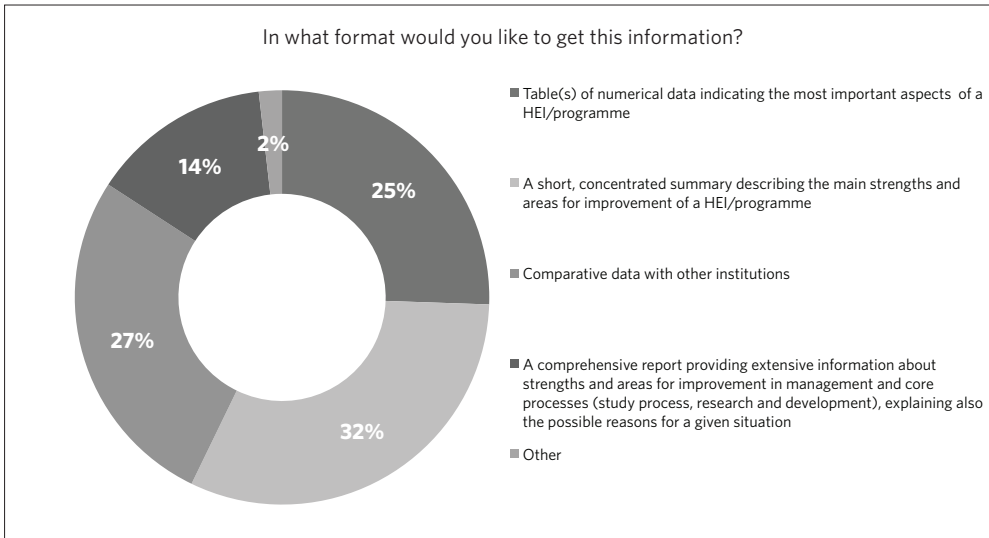


Figure 13. Preferable format of information.

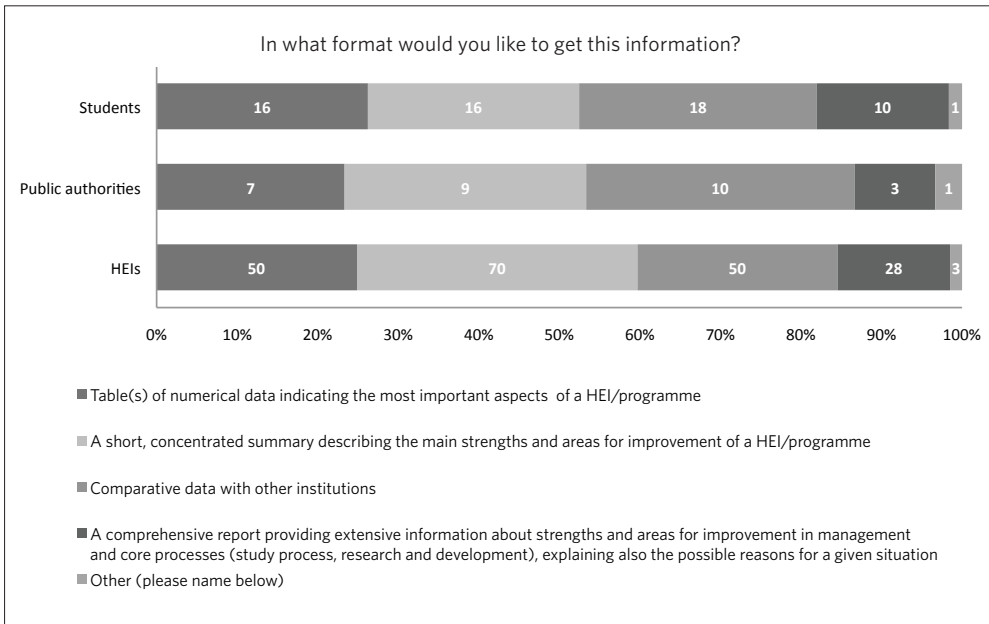


Figure 14. Preferable format of information, sorted by stakeholder group.

PREFERABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Similar to the answers corresponding to the question which inquires as to currently used sources, the most preferable source for acquiring information concerning the quality of a HEI is the institution's own webpage (47% of responses) followed closely by webpages of QA agencies (40%). Social media is not a preferred source for information on the quality of institutions, with only 5 percent of all respondents giving it priority (Figure 15).

When comparing different stakeholder groups, it is evident that while about half of all groups prefer institutions' webpages, students differ from HEIs and public authorities in their expectations regarding other sources: only about 20 percent of students seek information from the webpages of QA agencies. At the same time, they name 'social media' and even 'printed reports in libraries' more often than other stakeholders (Figure 16). Some comments suggest that it is not necessary to publish the report on more than one website (e.g. that of a QA agency), but that eventually links to the published report should be made on other relevant webpages (e.g. that of an institution/programme).

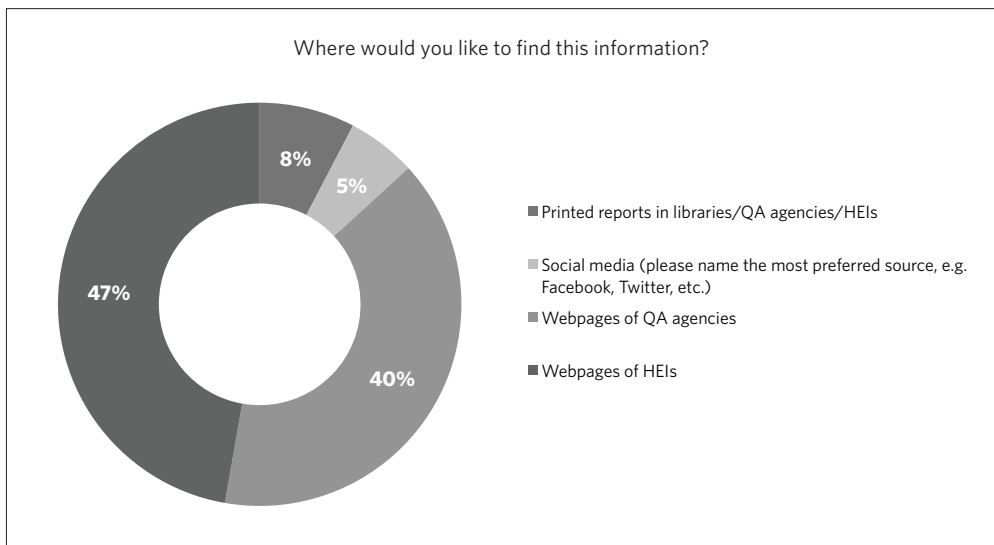


Figure 15. Preferable sources of information.

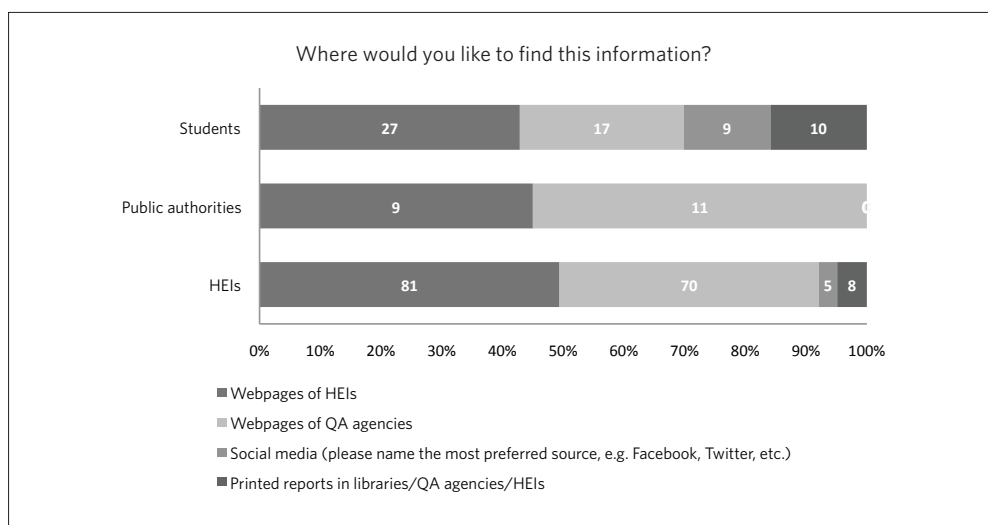


Figure 16. Preferable sources of information, sorted by stakeholder group.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results collected in the survey and at the stakeholders' workshop in May 2013, it is possible to draw the following conclusions regarding the information needs and use of QA reports by the stakeholders:

- There is no significant difference between the expectations and use of information between the different stakeholders (i.e. HEIs, public authorities and students), except expectations regarding the type of information which is searched.
- Very low response rate from employers indicates they do not see themselves as a target group for QA of higher education and are probably not frequent users of QA reports.
- QA reports are the third source of information after websites of HEIs and friends/colleagues when seeking information about the quality of an institution or its programmes.
- Awareness about the existence of QA reports, and locations of where they can be found, is not widespread, thereby significantly hindering their use and informational value for a wider group of stakeholders.
- Reports are, in general, a helpful tool to get information, but they can be more comparable and user-friendly, especially in terms of length and the language used.
- Reports should contain easily comparable data in the format of short, concentrated summaries and tables with quantitative data.
- Reports should be accessible both on the webpages of the institutions and the QA agencies, preferably with links to each other.
- Some main characteristics of a good comprehensive report could be identified at the European level, while the details should be discussed and determined in the national context in consultation with the stakeholders.

- Institutions are the primary users of QA reports, and reports should thus address their needs first, before considering the requirements of other audiences. A report summary was considered as a possible way to meet the needs of all groups.

CHAPTER 4:

ANALYSIS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES' CURRENT PRACTICES IN REPORTING THE OUTCOMES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

Stephanie Hering, Swiss Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ)

BACKGROUND, CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

As one of the project activities, the project team surveyed European quality assurance (QA) agencies on their current practices in the publication, purpose, structure and content of QA reports. The survey of the QA agencies consisted of two parts:

1. A questionnaire for all ENQA agencies was sent during summer 2013, including 41 full members and 45 affiliates. A total of 50 responses were received (Annex 2).
2. In-depth analysis of a sample of approximately 20 reports, conducted during autumn/winter 2013-2014 by ENQA and the project partner agencies following a shared analysis grid in order to consolidate and frame the findings of the questionnaire.

Furthermore, the results of the survey and report analysis were presented and further discussed at a workshop for agency representatives in January 2014, in Zurich, Switzerland.

Some questions in the questionnaire turned out to be irrelevant or not significant. In the following section, only relevant and significant results are shown in order to keep the report comprehensible and readable, highlighting the most important findings. The survey distinguished between *institutional* and *programme* assessment reports, and the focus lay on published, publicly available reports.

Aware of the different use and target groups for each type of report, the current analysis has furthermore distinguished between *comprehensive* and *summary reports*, which are defined as follows:

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT:

An extensive review report which documents the full analytical outcomes of a given external QA assessment procedure, be it at institutional or programme level, be it written by academic experts, agency employees or an external technical secretary; an in-depth analysis upon which the main findings are based is made explicit and is a key characteristic of this type of report. Often this is the primary report.

SUMMARY REPORT:

Any summarising form of reporting the outcomes of an external QA assessment procedure, be it a summary, a description, a table of comparative data, a final procedural report, web text or other possible types and forms of descriptive or schematic reporting. All kinds of derivative forms of a primary comprehensive report are included here (except exclusively yes/no assessment results).

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The agency survey contained 31 questions covering the following items:

- Type of assessments conducted and reports published
- Publication and intended/desired readership
- Editing and publication practices
- Structure
- Content
- Usability and utility
- Perspectives

The main results of each of these are presented below.

TYPE OF ASSESSMENTS CONDUCTED AND REPORTS PUBLISHED

The agencies were asked how many *institutional* reviews or assessments they carry out, on average, in a year. As the figure below shows (Figure 1), the variation between agencies is significant.

Almost a third (30%) of the agencies conduct between 6 and 15 institutional reviews or assessments each year. The second largest group of respondents, 28 percent, complete no reviews in a year. This can be explained by the fact that some of the agencies are specialised in programme assessments and/or are new agencies just about to start their work. Thirteen percent of the agencies conduct more than 31 reviews or assessments per year.

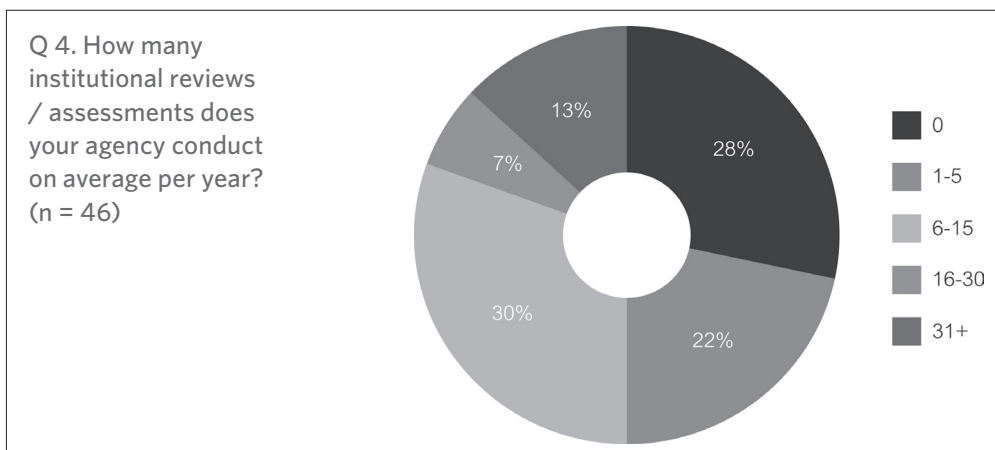


Figure 1. Amount of institutional reviews/assessments per year.

Published comprehensive reports are the most common form to present the results of institutional reviews (Figure 2). This is the case for 77 percent of the respondents. Forty-one percent also report on the results of the institutional reviews in published summary reports. Only three percent of agencies issue non-published summary reports, while as many as six agencies reported that they do not publish the comprehensive report.

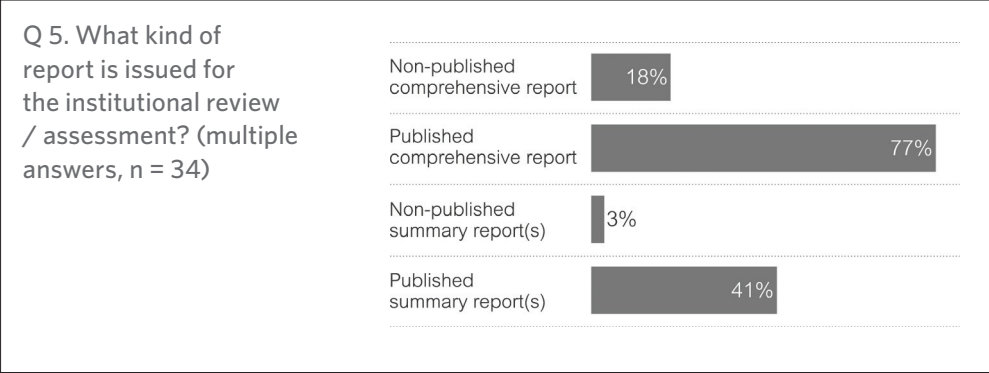


Figure 2. Types of reports issued for institutional reviews/assessments.

Programme reviews are more common than institutional reviews among the respondents (Figure 3). More than 60 percent of the agencies conduct over 30 programme reviews per year, and 35 percent implement between one and 30 programme reviews annually. Only four percent do not execute any programme reviews.

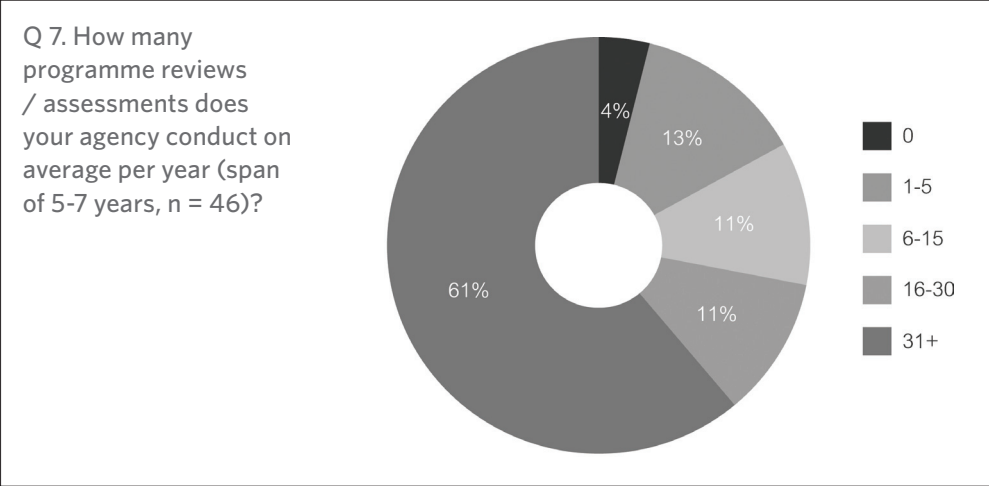


Figure 3. Amount of programme reviews/assessments per year.

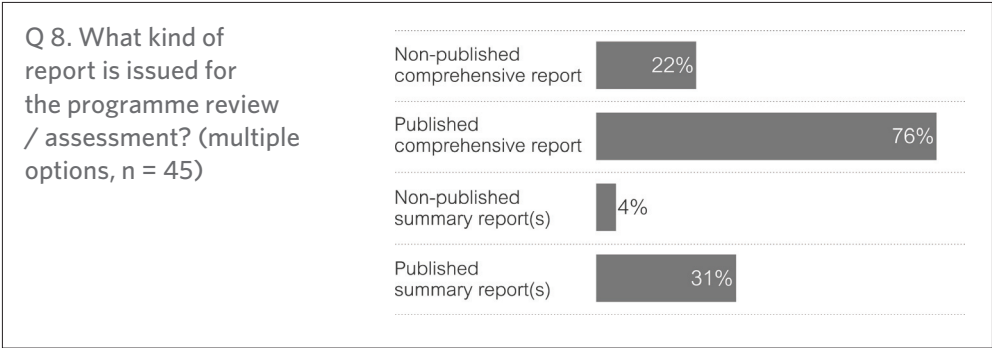


Figure 4. Types of reports issued for programme reviews/assessments.

Three-quarters (76%) of those conducting programme assessments published the comprehensive reports, as is similar to the 77 percent for institutional reviews (Figure 4 and Figure 2, respectively). Of all, 31 percent disclose the results of programme reviews in the form of published summary reports.

PUBLICATION AND READERSHIP

It is evident that different QA reports meet different goals and are intended for different purposes (Figure 5). Overall, *institutional comprehensive reports* are expected to facilitate review or accreditation decisions and to supply feedback to the higher education institution (HEI) to support its internal quality enhancement. *Programme comprehensive reports* have the primary objective to facilitate a review or accreditation decision, while they may also be used for enhancement purposes and to assure transparency.

Institutional summary reports as well as *programme summary reports* are mainly published to supply information to the general public and to assure transparency. The information contained in the summary reports is concise and easier to read, but necessarily limited in detail and depth.



Figure 5. Purpose of reports.

Different stakeholders use different reports (Figure 6), and indeed the different reports are designed to meet the needs of the identified target groups. According to the perceptions of the QA agencies, institutions and official authorities or governmental bodies use the reports most frequently. Overall, it appears that comprehensive reports are more frequently used than summary reports, and the former are fundamentally important for HEIs and official authorities. According to the surveyed QA agencies, programme comprehensive reports are, after the HEIs and official authorities, the most important for students.

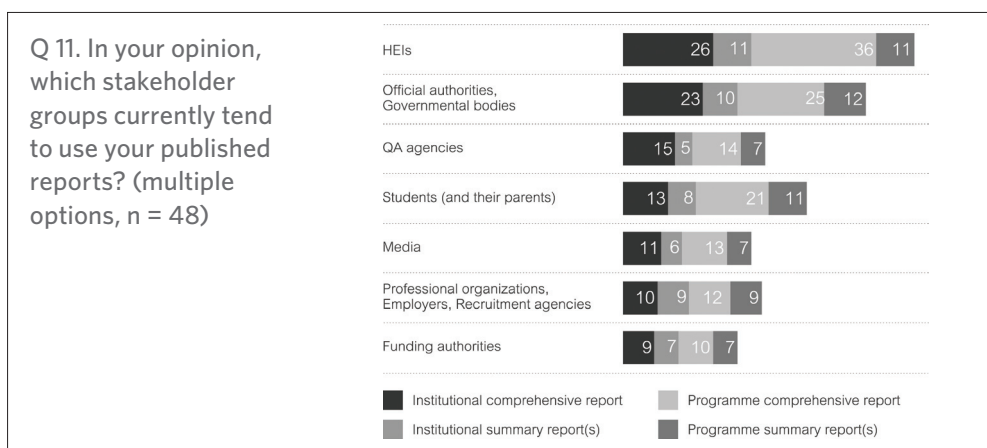


Figure 6. Users of published reports.

The agencies agree that the reports should ideally be used more, by all stakeholders. In particular, the agencies would like to have more students and professional organisations or employers among their readership (Figure 7). Additionally, the media is considered a relatively important future target user of QA reports. Agencies would also like to see the comprehensive reports be used more than they are now and seem to give less importance to the summary reports. On the other hand, the stakeholders (in particular those representing the world of work) expressed a strong plea for clear and comparable summary reports in the survey of stakeholders (see Chapter 3).

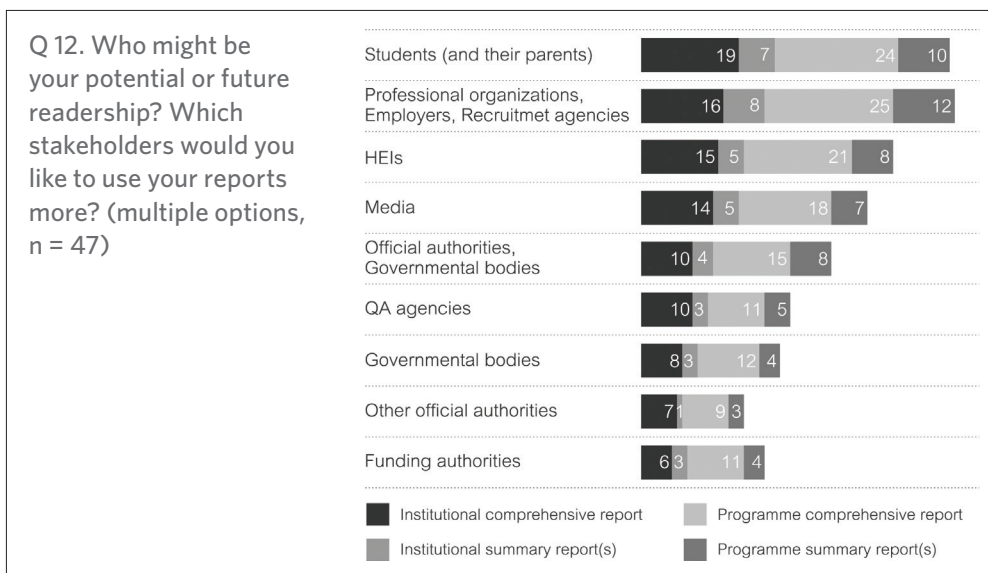


Figure 7. Potential readership, sorted by stakeholder group.

Discussing the question of the current and potential future readership of published QA reports during the workshop in Zurich in January 2014, some respondents pointed out that it may not be necessary to have different reports to meet the needs of different stakeholders, but that the different parts of the same report may be of interest to different user groups. In order to put this into practice, the reports will need to be well-structured and their purpose and content clearly explained to all potential users. On the other hand, some other agencies are worried that trying to meet the needs of different readers would lead to the modification of the full reports, arguing it is important to maintain them for their primary user groups, i.e. the institution itself and the relevant public authorities. Many agencies expressed awareness of the difficulty in meeting the different information needs of stakeholders and commented that they are currently considering different communication and publication strategies to meet those expectations better. Another important challenge here derives from the fact that even to stakeholders themselves, it is not always nor yet clear what exactly they would and could expect from a QA report (see section entitled “Usability and utility of reports” on page 37).

EDITING AND PUBLICATION OF REPORTS

Currently, agencies publish the QA reports they produce mainly in the national language(s) (Figure 8). At the same time, English has become an important working language for agencies which utilise international experts and is gaining ground as the publication language of comprehensive reports in particular. Languages other than the national one(s) and English seem not to be relevant in this context. Considering that for the majority of agencies the institutions themselves and/or official authorities/ governmental bodies are considered as the most important readership of QA reports, it comes as no surprise that the national language is the first and foremost language in which these reports are drafted.

Q 14. In which language(s) are your reports available?
(n = 48)

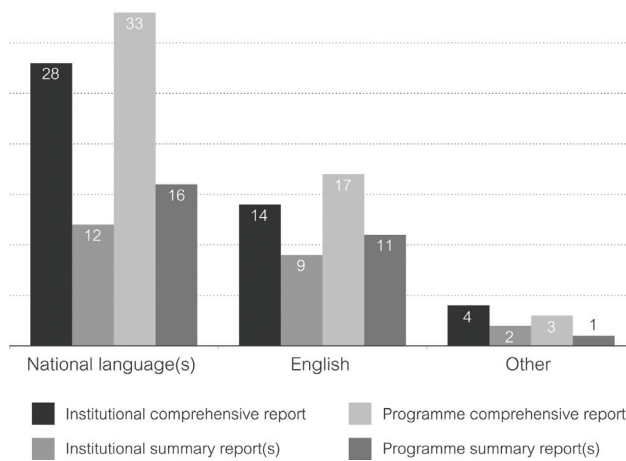


Figure 8. Languages in which reports are made available.

Most often the panel of experts, the peer leader and the secretary of the panel of experts (sometimes a QA agency employee) are the main authors of the reports (Figure 9). For comprehensive reports, the role of the panel is stronger, while summary reports may be edited by the secretary of the panel of experts and/or an agency employee.

Q 15. Who writes the reports? (n = 48)

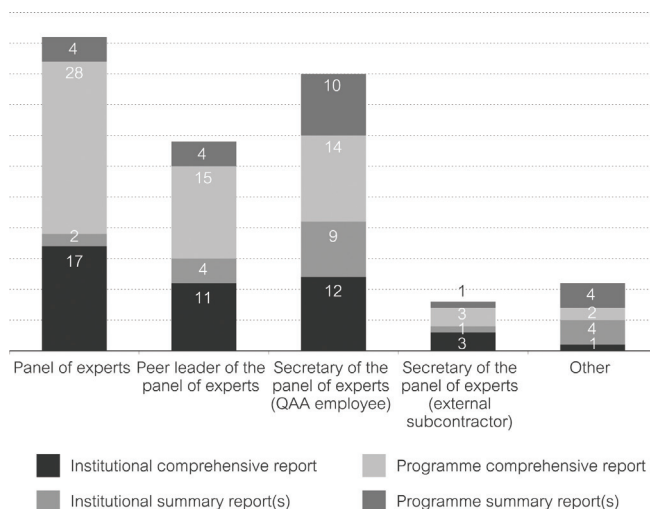


Figure 9. Writers of reports.

Preparing QA reports can be highly time-consuming. The survey asked the agencies to provide an estimate on the average time that it takes to produce a report (of the type used by the agency), considering the total input of time between all those involved (panel, QA agency staff, etc.). Unsurprisingly, the preparation of the comprehensive reports requires the highest time investment (Figure 10). Most agencies estimate they spend at least 16 hours to write an institutional comprehensive report. The completion of a comprehensive programme report is nearly as time-consuming. Agencies indicated that summary reports are mostly written in less than 5 hours. This may nevertheless constitute a significant additional time expenditure, in particular for agencies that may not publish summary reports.

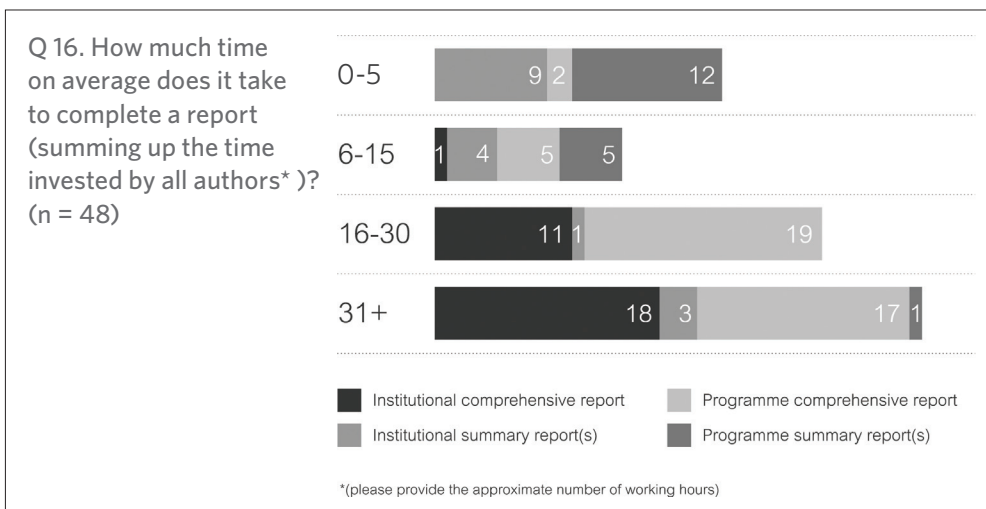


Figure 10. Time spent to complete a report.

The reports are most often published on the websites of QA agencies (Figure 11). The webpages of other public authorities and of HEIs are of less interest, and agencies do not often have information on whether institutions publish the reports on their own websites or not. The hard copies of reports are considered irrelevant by the agencies, or are not a priority considering also the additional costs associated with printing reports. At the same time, the stakeholders consider the websites of the HEIs as the main source of information, and therefore it seems that in order to reach a wider group of the intended readership, at least links to the agency website should be provided on the institutions' websites (see Chapter 3).

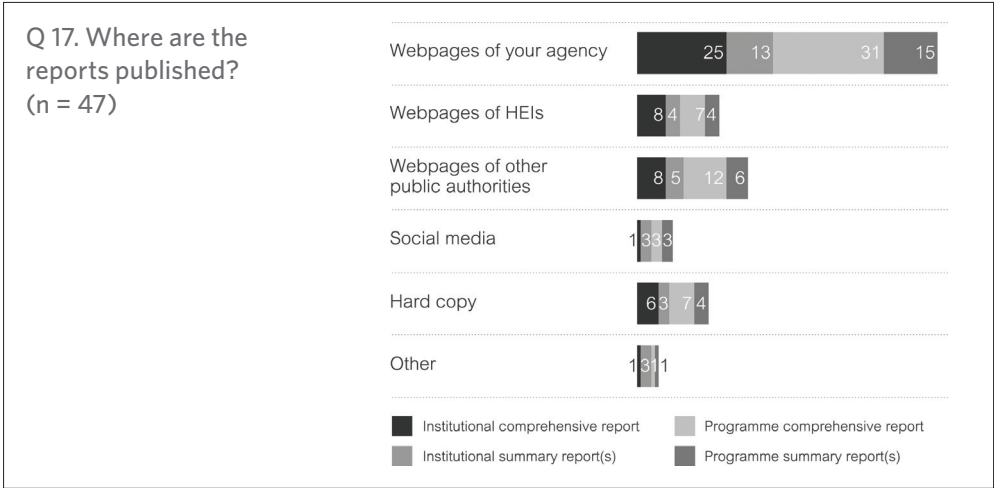


Figure 11. Location of published reports.

STRUCTURE OF REPORTS

Nearly all agencies have templates available for writing reports (Figure 12), which means that a pre-set structure is followed throughout the drafting process for all reports of the same typology. Templates exist for all kinds of different reports but are considered the most important and relevant for the programme comprehensive reports.

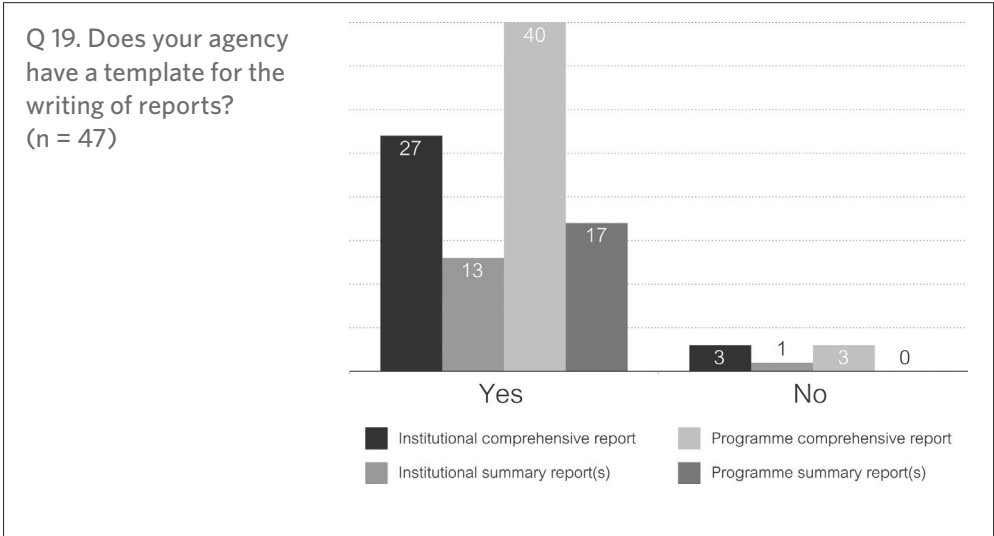


Figure 12. Templates for reports.

The length of the reports (Figure 13) varies according to the type of report, but they often follow guidelines set by the agency. The majority of comprehensive reports fall into the '31 pages or more' category (55% of institutional reviews and 33% of programme reviews). No institutional comprehensive reports are shorter than 6 pages.

For programme assessments, the reports tend to be slightly shorter, with only 25 percent falling into the range of 31 or more pages in length. The shorter length of programme reports is underscored by the fact that the majority fall between six and 15 pages. Summary reports are short, as their name indicates, and they are most often under six pages.

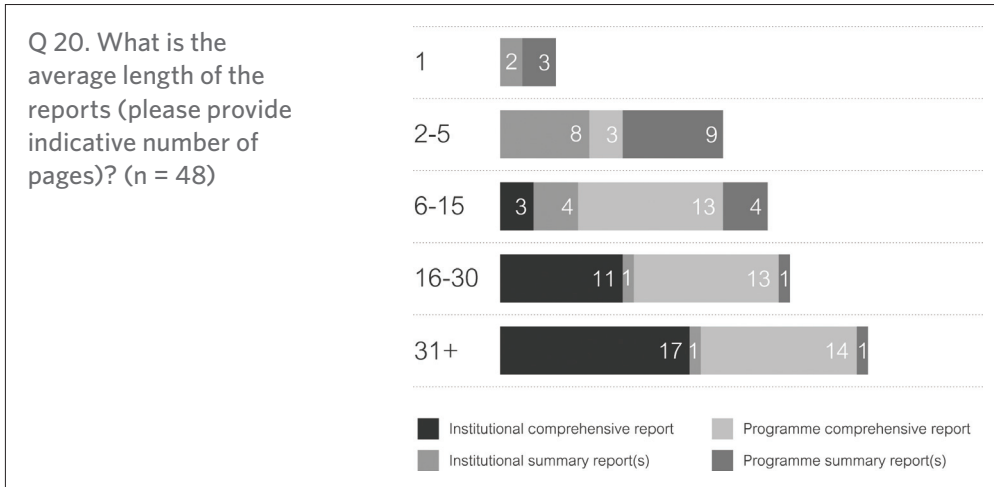


Figure 13. Length of reports.

Reports use a variety of formats to present information (Figure 14). Discursive, detailed information is mainly used for comprehensive reports, and provision of key data is particularly important for programme comprehensive reports. Summary reports use nearly no tables of numerical data and schematic comparative data.

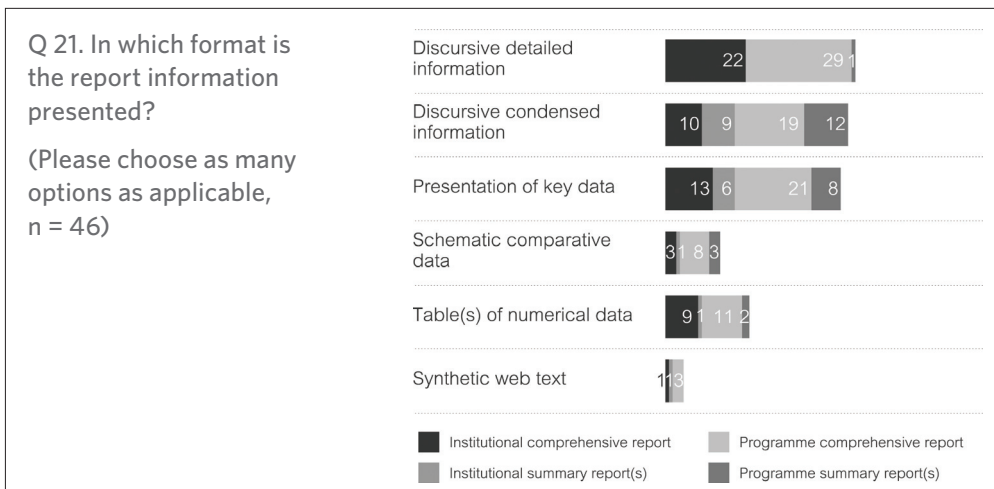


Figure 14. Formats of reports.

CONTENT OF REPORTS

Reports provide a wide range of information and address different requirements and information needs. Principally, the agencies want to provide information on the final outcomes of an assessment, propose suggestions for quality enhancement and publish general findings in their reports (Figure 15). Also, the description of formal criteria, quality standards and QA systems is of great importance. The same applies to the information about site visits and the learning environment. Some agencies pointed out that the content of the reports is constantly adjusted based on feedback and recommendations from the review teams and from the HEIs. According to the feedback received through the agency workshop, in some countries, the agencies are not allowed to publish information or data that could be used to create rankings at the national level.

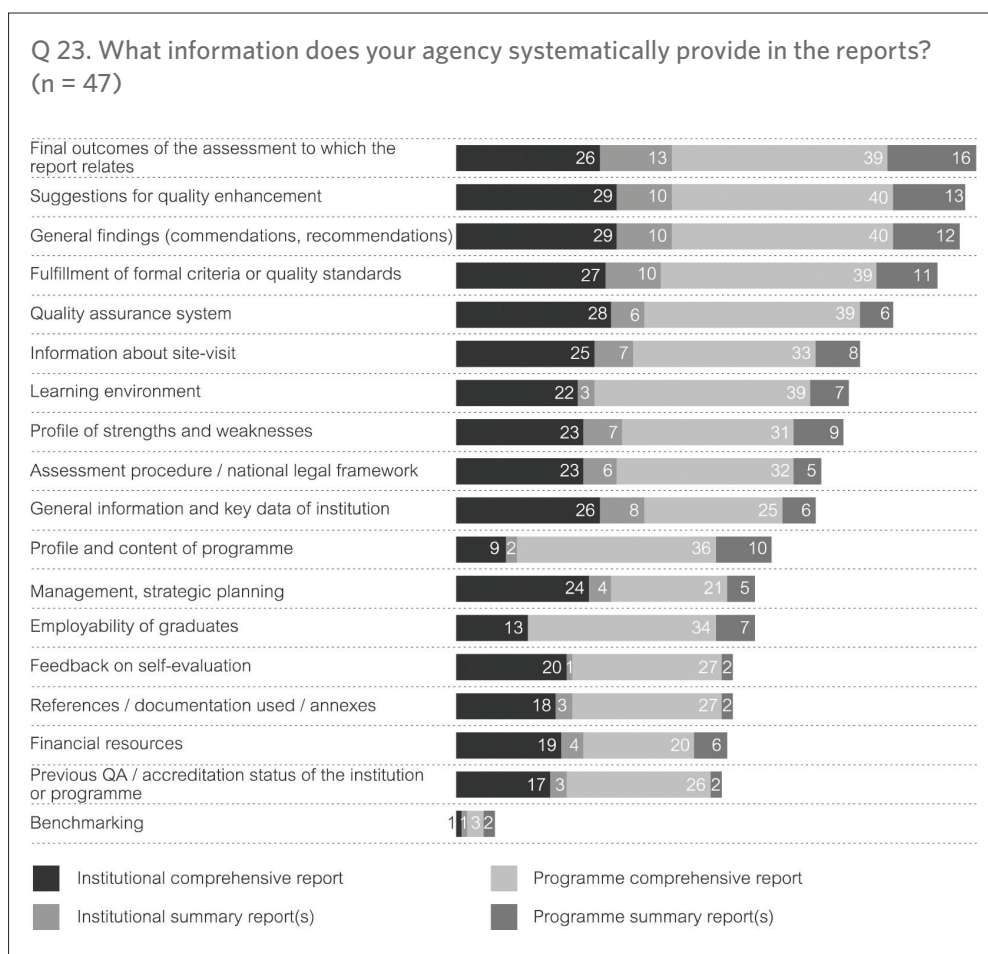


Figure 15. Information provided in reports.

USABILITY AND UTILITY OF REPORTS

An overwhelming majority of the agencies (46 out of 47) stated that the comprehensive reports need to be first and foremost useful for the HEIs (Figure 16). High importance is also given to the role of QA reports in providing clear and transparent information on the quality of institutions and programmes. Easy access to the reports is also crucial. Agencies do not give, overall, high importance to the usefulness of the reports for funding decisions or for the media.

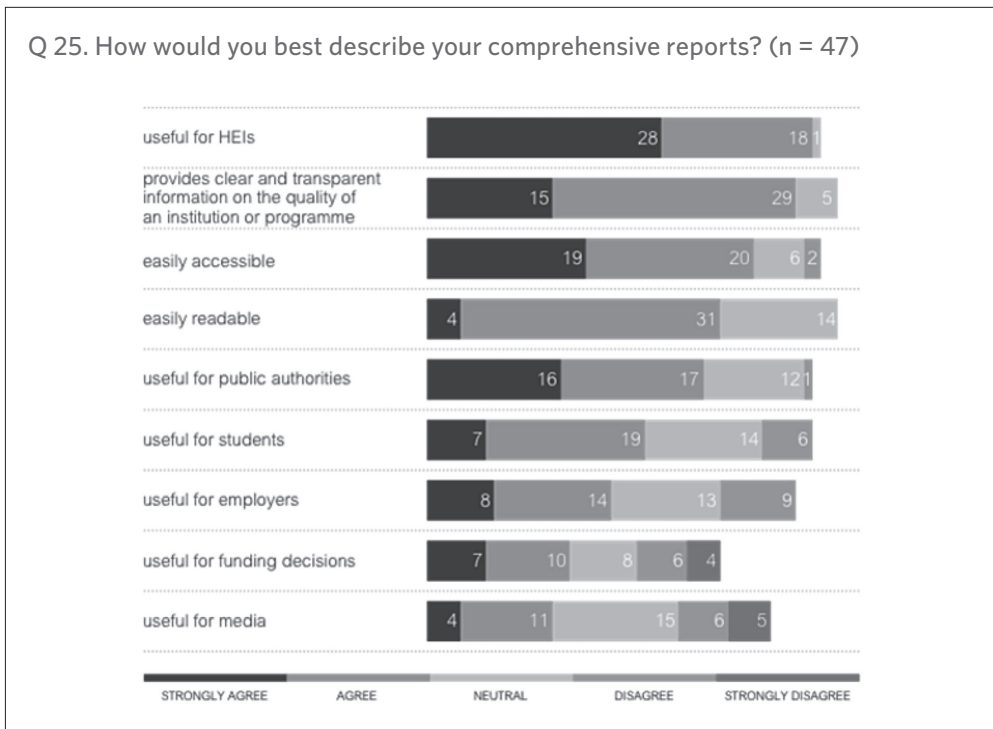


Figure 16. Comprehensive reports.

The main purpose of the summary reports is to provide clear and transparent information in an easily readable and accessible manner (Figure 17). The summary reports may also be useful for the public authorities or the media.

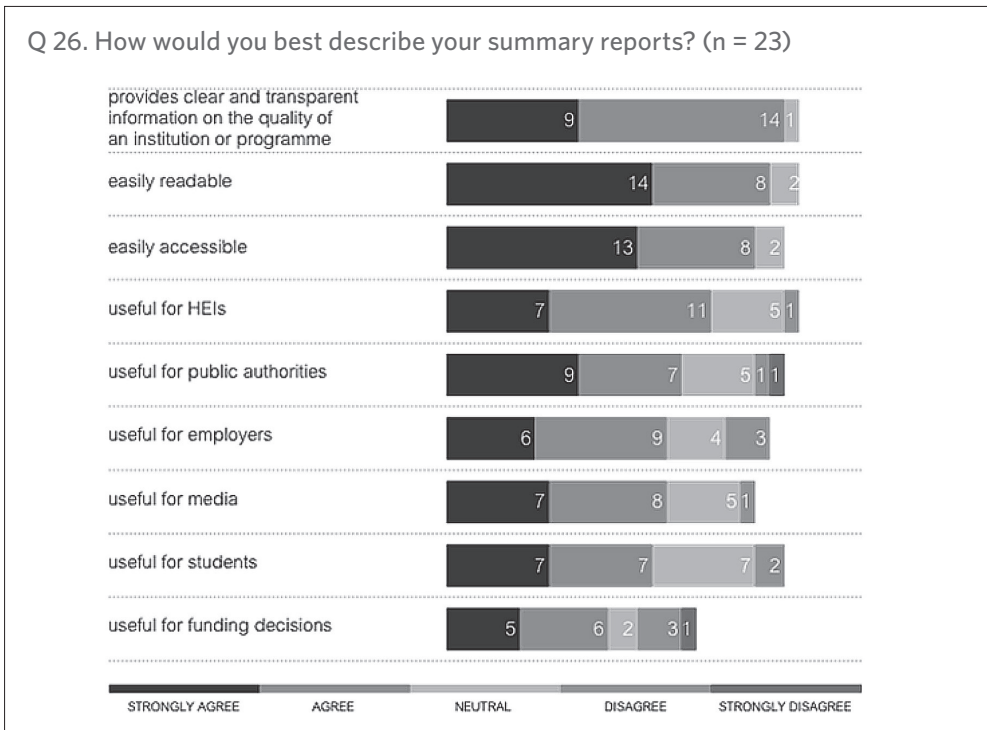


Figure 17. Summary reports.

PERSPECTIVE OF AGENCIES ON THEIR REPORTS

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE PUBLISHED REPORTS

When asked about the main strengths and weaknesses related to their QA reports, the agencies identify transparency and recommendations for quality improvement as the main strengths of the published reports. On the other hand, the format and consistency of the reports, as well as the complicated language often used, are considered as important areas of improvement.

Strengths:

- Transparency, open to the public (7)
- Recommendations for quality improvement (6)
- Easily readable (5)
- Quality and level of information (4)
- Useful information for HEIs (4)
- Format (3)
- Easy access (3)

Other positive characteristics mentioned include: clear structure; coverage of a wide area of subjects; availability in both the national language and in English; full information on the members of expert panels and their expertise; and the visual presentation of information.

Weaknesses:

- Format and consistency of the reports changes, which depends often on the experts (4)
- Use of complicated language (3)
- Availability of reports only in English (2)

Other shortcomings identified by the agencies include: complexity of information provided; not enough information on evaluation procedures; delays in finishing the reports due to experts being late in submitting their parts; delays between decision and publication of the report; reports are only available in the national language; reports are not useful for students and employers; summaries do not include the key data of the institution; and HEIs do not publish the reports on their webpage.

ELEMENTS THAT WOULD INCREASE THE QUALITY AND USEFULNESS OF REPORTS IN THE EHEA

The respondents were also asked which elements, according to their expertise, could increase the quality and usefulness of reports produced by QA agencies in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Six respondents agree that comparability of reports would be most welcome. In addition, five agencies mentioned the use of clear language and the availability of a European template, or European Guidelines for reports as important improvements to the reports at the European level.

In addition, the following points were made:

- Clear terminology (4)
- Available for the public (4)
- Good structure and easily searchable (4)
- English reports (3)
- Reports should be more clearly targeted (3)
- Outlining best practice in the HEIs; Opinion of foreign expert/s (3)
- Availability of recommendations (2)

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES AND RISKS IN TRYING TO INCREASE TRANSPARENCY AND COMPARABILITY OF REPORTS

Throughout the project, the project team has been aware of the potential risk of limiting the usefulness of reports by trying to adapt them to wider or different readerships. The agencies were thus asked to express their views on the potential risks or challenges related to the improved access to more comparable reports.

Some quotes from the survey collecting the voices were:

- Comparison of reports will turn QA into another form of ranking. Reports should never be comparable, only the procedure and/or the decision making should be comparable, i.e. consistent.
- Reports contain an excessive amount of data which makes their use difficult and which may lead to speculation and unfair competition.
- Universities could perceive the process as an exercise of “revealing it all”. It can show particular weaknesses that could make some students think to choose another option.

- Good comprehensive reports in both the national language and English require a lot of work and expertise and well-established agencies. Publishing reports reveals not only the quality of the institution or programme but also of the agency.
- Transparency is not always in the HEI's best interest, as the reports also show their weaknesses. Thus, greater transparency would lead to more protests against publication or less openness in the procedures.
- Legal frameworks might limit the way reports are published.
- To make reports more comparative, all agencies would need to change their current practices.
- QA reports deal with very complex issues. Oversimplifying the content is not appropriate. It is important to distinguish between HEIs themselves and other potential users of the reports.
- Agencies are dealing with a large number of processes every year and use a large number of experts. It will be difficult to ensure full consistency of the reports.
- The (national) systems are very diverse and are also at different development stages, as are the needs and aims of different QA systems. This makes comparison difficult and risky.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the survey and the in-depth analysis of a sample of QA reports, conclusions could be drawn as follows:

KEY FINDINGS

- Published comprehensive reports are the most common form to present the results of institutional reviews.
- The variation in the number of publications of institutional reviews per year among agencies is high.
- Reports meet different goals and are used by different stakeholders:
 - Comprehensive reports facilitate review or accreditation decisions and supply feedback to the institutions for quality enhancement.
 - Summary reports supply information to a general public and assure transparency.
- QA reports are mainly written by a panel of experts and require significant time input.
- Webpages, primarily those of the QA agencies, are the most common medium of publication.
- The majority of agencies have templates available for the writing of reports.
- Comprehensive reports are often longer than 30 pages. Programme reports are, on average, slightly shorter than institutional reports.
- Reports provide a wide range of information and address different requirements.
- QA reports vary greatly between countries and agencies but also between programme and institutional reports. In addition, comprehensive and summary reports - and even editing practice, structure, content, length, readability, accessibility, etc. - within a single agency differ considerably.
- QA reports are - at the moment - not comparable.

VIEWS ON QUALITY REPORTS

Essential qualities of a good and useful QA report:

- Clear structure
- Introduction to the framework and standards/guidelines
- Information on procedure/review and review panel/author(s)
- Detailed information about HEI/programme
- Adequate complexity-reduction (without oversimplification)
- Careful use of terminology/language
- Pleasant layout
- Easily accessible

RISKS AND CHALLENGES

Possible risks and challenges in trying to increase transparency and comparability of reports:

- Transparency itself: misuse or manipulation of information
- Comparability/benchmarking
- Lose sight of the actual purpose of the reports (usefulness for the institution)
- Overrating the potential value and interest for wider public/lay reader
- Oversimplification
- Standardisation: comparing apples with pears
- Language issues

CHAPTER 5:

EUROPEAN GUIDELINES FOR SUMMARY REPORTS AND GENERIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE REPORTS OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

Đurđica Dragojević, Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE)

EUROPEAN GUIDELINES FOR SUMMARY QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORTS

The results of the survey on the use and usefulness of quality assurance (QA) reports conducted by the stakeholders show that there is a clear need for more comparable and accessible information to be provided by the QA agencies. While one of the initial aims of the project was to develop a European template for comprehensive reports, this was deemed by the project consortium as unfeasible due to the differences in QA procedures and systems of higher education and the specific needs of stakeholders and authorities relating to the particular political framework of external QA in higher education. Approximately one-third of the respondent stakeholders expressed the need for summary reports to be published on the agencies' websites in order to serve as an introduction to the data collected by the QA agencies in the comprehensive reports and to provide comparable information to the wider public. This is in line with standard 2.5 of the current (and 2.6 of the draft revised) ESG on the publication of QA reports.

We hope that these guidelines, together with the ESG standard on the publication of QA reports, will encourage a large number of QA agencies to publish summary reports. While full standardisation is avoided by suggesting the use of guidelines rather than templates, these guidelines aim to ensure that all summary reports provide similar and comparable information, thus increasing their usefulness for the intended user groups and the transparency of the agencies' work.

1. Types of summary reports

Depending on the types of evaluations performed, an agency may wish to have a common template for summary reports for all of its procedures, or, in line with the comprehensive reports, a separate template for institutional and programme evaluation summary reports.

The target audiences of summary reports are various – from students and prospective students and their parents to employers, other higher education institutions (HEIs), government bodies and media representatives. A summary report should provide clear and succinct information on the evaluation, which should be understandable to members

of the general public and sufficient as a first source of information, without targeting any group specifically. Targeting specific groups would require development of a number of different templates, which might reduce their comparability and significantly increase the time necessary for producing them, without sufficient additional benefits. However, agencies are well-advised to survey potential target groups on the use of summary reports and add additional information if requested by specific target groups.

2. Placement

The summary reports should be accessible to as wide an audience as possible. For this reason, as in the case of comprehensive reports, it is recommended they be easily found by search engines through the use of keywords, such as the name of the agency and the institution(s) and/or programme(s) and terms connected with the type of evaluation (e.g. accreditation, audit, etc.).

The summary reports should be easily accessible on the agencies' websites, and the agencies may wish to disseminate them further, for example, by asking the institutions to place them on their own websites or by placing them on other websites that provide information on higher education (such as the websites of national ENIC-NARICs, Study in... websites providing information to foreign students, etc.).

3. Drafting

To ensure homogeneity and consistent use of terminology, it is best that reports are written by agency staff. A summary report should only summarise and present in a clear and succinct form some of the information provided in the comprehensive report, without adding any additional information. The summary report should be sent to the panel for their check and approval so that what is highlighted in the summary report reflects the overall impression of the panel.

4. Developing templates

The corporate image of the agency should be included in the summary report, so it is easily recognisable and distinctive. The template should enable the summary report to be published as a web page (i.e. the part of the institutional website where the connected comprehensive report can be found) with a print-ready version (e.g. pdf) which can be easily printed or even distributed in a print form (e.g. as a leaflet). When printed, a summary report should not be longer than two pages, in order to provide information in a concise and structured way.

Given that the layout and the design are crucial for the readability and user-friendliness of the summary reports, the agency should be careful to include headings/ text boxes and other layout segments which provide maximum clarity and ease of communication. When developing templates, the agency may be well-advised to work with communication and design experts.

5. Language

Given that one of the functions of the summary report is to enable comparability and provide information across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), for example, to institutions looking for partners in other countries or foreign students, summary reports should be produced in English. However, depending on the language(s) used by

the agency's stakeholders, the agency may also wish to publish summary reports in the national language(s) of the agency or the institution.

Because the summary reports are aimed at the general public, meaning a range of stakeholder groups, the language should avoid specialist jargon and provide explanations when it cannot be avoided. This is especially true for QA and legal terminology which can often go unnoticed by experts, while decreasing the transparency and the understandability of the report by the wider audience. Input from linguistic experts and stakeholders can be helpful in this aspect.

6. Content – minimum useful information to be provided in the summary reports

Summary reports should contain basic information on the agency and the institution/ programme under evaluation. The fact that the summaries will be made available online makes it easy to insert links to related websites and the comprehensive report on which it is based.

Given that the summary report is a document produced by the agency, but also given the type of information the stakeholders seek in this type of report, the names of the panel members who have performed the evaluation need not to be mentioned. Instead, the composition of the panel should be noted in order to give an idea of the group of stakeholders represented in the panel (e.g., academic, student, employer, etc.).

As indicated by stakeholders in the survey, lay readers would also like to be able to find information which is often obvious for expert readers – individuals from agencies and institutions – and is thus sometimes omitted from comprehensive reports. Such information includes the type of evaluation, whether it is obligatory or voluntary, and its focus (if any – e.g., management, internationalisation, etc.). Hyperlinks should again be inserted in the summary report to make the comprehensive report easy to find for anyone interested in it, possibly adding a brief description of the type of information that can be found there. Other types of contextual information – the description of the QA system within the country, the criteria used in the evaluations, etc. should be accessible on the agency's website and thus not included in the summary report.

Taking into account the fact that the general public often looks at QA reports simply to establish if the institution and/or programme is accredited, this information should be mentioned in the summary reports. In addition to this, because external QA decisions often have an 'expiry date', the date when the report was published or the final decision was issued should be noted together with the validity period. This will help the reader to easily establish when the evaluation was conducted and whether it may be necessary to look further for reports on more recent evaluations.

Although reports should primarily provide a summary of the panel's findings rather than information about evaluated institutions and programmes, some basic information should be provided to the reader. This type of information will vary among the different types of reports, but should include information on the status of the institution (e.g., if it is private or public, if it is a university or some other type of HEI). For programme reports, the Bologna framework (QF-EHEA), the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and, if applicable, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level of the programme should be indicated, with other information relevant for the evaluation (e.g., if it is an academic or a professional programme, a joint programme, etc.).

CONTENT OF SUMMARY REPORTS: CHECKLIST

Information on the evaluation

- The name of the agency which performed the evaluation.
- Link to the website of the agency.
- Type and focus of evaluation (e.g. institutional audit, audit with a focus on internationalisation) and if it was obligatory or voluntary (with, possibly, a brief mention of the way it fits in with the national legal framework/other activities of the agency – e.g., obligatory accreditation of study programmes according to the national criteria).
- The date when the report/decision was issued, the validity period and the date until which the recommendations should be implemented.
- Link to the comprehensive report (possibly with a note on its content, e.g. “recommendations for improvement and detailed analysis can be found in the comprehensive report”).
- A brief explanation on the composition of the panel.

Information on the institution/programme

- Name of the institution/programme.
- Link to the institutional website and/or study programme website.
- Type of institution (e.g. private or public, professional or university for binary systems) or programme (Bologna Framework, NQF and, if possible, EQF level, whether it is professional or academic, if it is a joint programme, etc.).

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORTS

The findings of the survey on the use and usefulness of QA reports addressed to the stakeholders showed that QA reports can be at times technical with a complicated language and too different in style and content. The stakeholders mentioned that a more standardised approach would be helpful, but the purpose (supporting the review or an accreditation process) and the very diverse and complex nature of comprehensive QA reports does not allow the development of a detailed set of contents, as could be done in the case for the summary reports. Comprehensive reports provide important qualitative information on institutions or programmes. Giving an indication of the content for comprehensive reports would limit their usability and would thus result in the loss of some valuable information or the usefulness of the information to the main users. Nevertheless, there is space for some generic recommendations on the structure, layout, and publishing of these reports to those who produce them.

It is important that comprehensive reports provide clear and understandable information in order to make them more usable and accessible for different groups of stakeholders, including those within the institutions subject to the review. In this perspective, when producing comprehensive reports, one should consider the generic recommendations below:

1. Structure

- The comprehensive report should be well-structured and easy to read.
- A list of contents should be provided at the beginning of the report in order to facilitate the finding of specific information.
- Clear headings, sub-headings and numbered paragraphs should be used in order to clearly indicate the different sections of the report.

2. Content

- The report should clearly describe the process, recommendations, commendations and conditions clearly identifiable and the context of the review.
- The report should use key terminology consistently.
- It is important that the report contains a glossary explaining technical terms for those who are not familiar with QA.
- The report should identify and present the person(s) who wrote the report as well as the composition of the review team.

3. Publication and dissemination

- The report should be made easily accessible: it should be published online and in an easily printable format.
- The decisions, institutional responses and follow up documents should be published together with the report.
- The reviewed HEI/programme should be encouraged to publish the report on the institutional website, or at least, to provide a link to the agency website where the report is published.

In addition to these findings, the reflections on QA reports by Peter Findlay in the next chapter provide some interesting points to consider in relation to QA reports.

CHAPTER 6:

FEATURES OF A GOOD EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORT - SOME THOUGHTS

Peter Findlay, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

This collection of reflections and questions about the quality assurance (QA) reports produced by agencies is based on a presentation, part serious, part light-hearted and occasionally provocative, made at the EQArep workshop held in January 2014. While these reflections draw on some twenty years of working with QAA and its predecessor, the ideas here do not necessarily represent either the policy or practice of QAA as an agency.

QA QUESTIONS FOR REPORTS

Some of the perennial and well-trying questions for QA also apply, of course, to the quality of our agency reports:

- For what is it intended? (aims, readership)
- Why are we doing it that way? (method and format adopted)
- Is that the best way? (evaluation of the method)
- How do we know it works? (achieving the aims, impact of reports)
- How could it be improved? (reviewing, evaluating, planning)

A REPORT IS A MESSAGE

A report is, in terms of standard communication theory, just another kind of message. Its effective communication will depend on three things: the sender (the expert team, the agency), the medium (the form of the report, the means of its publication) and the receiver (the university and other stakeholders such as students and employers).

Messages are also governed by the rule that the purpose, the content and the readership or audience are three inter-related factors which will determine each other. Any report has to take into account its most important aims, its likely readership, and the best form in which to address these.

Communication theory uses the terms 'encoding' and 'decoding' with regard to messages. For our considerations, 'encoding' means:

- Knowing the purpose of the report
- Knowing the content of the report
- Knowing how it will be written and the stages of production
- Knowing who will/should read it
- Knowing how and when they will read it

and 'decoding' implies:

- that the report is received and read in a managed process
- that the reader understands the process involved and the conventions of the report
- that the reader knows what is expected from the report in terms of actions to be taken or information to be used.

WHO IS IT FOR?

An agency therefore needs to be very clear in deciding the aims of its reports and their intended readership and users. Unfortunately, that is often not a simple matter. It would be reasonably straightforward if reports were simply written for the exclusive attention of higher education institutions (HEIs), but there are other interested parties – governments, students, employers, etc. who may also be among the target readership. A review report may need to address all of these interests, but can a single report do that successfully with such different expectations and needs involved? A major question for our reports is how to meet the needs of these different stakeholders.

Answers to this knotty problem that have been tried:

- Separate reports for separate stakeholders
- A summary section of the report with clear outcomes, separated from the more detailed main body of the report
- Different parts of the report for different readers
- A short report on the website and a longer report for the institution
- A 'checklist' format for the key criteria, with a comments box for the details, where required.

THE REPORT IS THE RESULT

We need to keep in mind that an agency's report is the end result, or outcome of a whole process; the character and quality of the report will therefore depend on the quality of many other contributing aspects:

- Agency management, policy and method
- Agency officer and review team
- Documentation and information provided, access to institutional information
- Visit and confirmation
- Drafting the report
- Editing the report
- Finalising and agreeing on the report

It can easily be forgotten that completing the report is the primary aim of all these different parts of the review process. It is both the end product and the focus of the whole process. Meeting other reviewers or managing the team is worthwhile and rewarding; the site visit is likely to be exciting and interesting; the preparation of the report, on the other hand, is isolated and desk-based, and will often be a demanding and even tedious task. It can all too easily be forgotten about during the earlier stages of the process.

At every stage, therefore, we need to think ahead to the report: keeping notes, making early drafts, checking evaluation against the facts, working towards the judgements. A good report results from a planned process leading up to its final production.

WHO OWNS WHAT?

There must - from the very start of the process - be clarity about who 'owns' the report - that is, who makes the final decision about what is included in it or not, and how judgements are made. Sometimes ownership is shared, and then the various responsibilities must be carefully defined. Does ownership lie with:

- The expert panel?
- The member of the panel who writes the report?
- The agency officer who edits the report?
- The agency committee that approves the report?
- The agency as a legal entity?
- The institution?
- Most importantly, what person or body has the right to modify the report and/or its judgements?

Can different participants in the process own different parts of the report? For instance, it might be argued that the judgements in a report are owned by the experts as peer reviewers, but the form and content of the report are owned by the agency that has ultimate responsibility for the quality of publication.

KEEP IT SIMPLE, *****!

It can be argued that complicated and opaque reports which are difficult to read may serve a purpose, which would be to limit the understanding and reception of the report to a limited readership who understand the conventions and codes in which it is written. However, if the aim is to reach as wide and various a readership as possible, then the simpler, the better.

By simplicity is not meant reducing the significance or complexity of the content, but ensuring that it is conveyed via a very clear structure and in language which can be easily followed and understood.

Some desirable and undesirable features of such a report might be:

To aim for:

- Length - as short as possible
- A good sign-posted structure with clear headings
- Style - simple, precise, clear, focused
- Well-structured paragraphs 'beginning, middle, end'
- Sentences, which are simple and clear (never longer than two lines of text!)
- Tone - neutral, measured, objective
- Content - minimum description, maximum analysis and evaluation (it is difficult to see the usefulness of large amounts of description of institutional procedures - the institution itself knows about them already, and other report readers probably don't really want to know very much about them, except whether they are effective)

- Arguments clearly based on evidence
- Regular reminders of the relevance to the review questions/agenda/framework
- Regular summaries of each section
- Clear explanation of basis for judgements and recommendations

To avoid:

- Too much reference to the process (the expert team, the review visit, etc.)
- Overly complex sentences
- Jargon and cliché (especially the jargon of QA experts)
- Emotive or strongly judgmental words
- Obscure words
- Ambiguity
- Too much unnecessary detail
- Speculation about future developments in the institution
- Subjective comments drawn on experts' personal experience

THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

National languages of small nations won't have the same breadth of impact or allow international comparability (but will stay in the culture), but the national language reflects more exactly the ownership and location of the report.

Translation into the lingua franca (English) brings risks of mistranslation, confusion, and misunderstanding; there are many varieties of English (a 'Euroglish' is in development in QA reports!). We don't realise how varied our understanding of key terms in English can be ('accreditation,' 'expert,' 'validation,' 'assessment' and 'standards' are some key terms that have different meanings in different contexts), and you can't always be sure what English means to the reader.

SCHEDULES

A timeline for the development and submission of the report is essential. It should include a clear indication of what each contributor is expected to provide and the iterations needed for editing.

Deadlines are the plague and sometimes the agony of report-writers. Always make your deadlines very realistic, and then add some more days on, to make for greater flexibility in meeting the problems that will certainly occur.

TRANSPARENCY... I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW

Transparency is generally regarded as a virtue and a goal of a good report, but transparency can harm as well as help – what exactly is the aim of complete clarity? Is the main aim of the report to regulate, control and compare, or is it to improve, enhance and develop? If we seek to improve, and to help an institution to succeed, then is it always a good idea to publish the full facts, which might damage its reputation (to publish in detail for the public to read all that is wrong with an institution?)? Is the alternative acceptable - for an agency's publication policy to be adjusted, taking into account the message delivered by the report? Is there, then, a tension between transparency and enhancement?

TIGHT-ROPE WALKING – THE TENSION BETWEEN PEER REVIEW AND REGULATORY BODY

Most agencies use a reporting method which involves an expert team. Either they write the early drafts of the report themselves, or their views and opinions are gathered and incorporated into a report by the agency officer. This approach follows the principle of peer review. In its purest form, a peer review approach using the informed opinion of the experts would mean that those experts own the review and write the report. In such a method, individual experts might even be allowed to submit a minority, dissenting statement. However, agencies will usually want a higher level of control over the report. They will require experts to reach a consensus on the report judgements and may impose a common framework for all reports.

Consider the potential spectrum of possibilities for the format of the report. At one extreme, pure peer review is close to the character of a personal narrative about impressions gained by experts; at the other end of the spectrum is something like a highly controlled checklist, pre-defined by the agency, into which the experts place their views and decisions. A question during all report processes is where to position the form of the report between these two extremes. The signs of agency control will be found in the amount of shaping structure given to the report: specified standards and criteria; required headings; checklists for completion; word counts; tables; pre-defined forms of judgement statements.

There is a tension here, because the higher the level of control that is exerted by the agency, the less the experts may feel their views and the expression of them are taken seriously. It is also questionable whether a simple 'tick-box' conformity approach can accurately reflect the complexity of institutional systems and their different approaches. So it is a matter of balancing freedom of expression (a high value in our academic context) as against the level of bureaucratic control, and the levels of consistency and comparability between reports that are required by the agency.

It is also worth noting that the higher the level of agency control, the more will be needed a thorough training and briefing of experts, so that they understand fully what is expected in their work on the report.

SHOW ME THE EVIDENCE....

We follow the principle of 'evidence-based assessment', but what exactly do we mean by 'evidence', and how do we use it?

- Do we only use evidence provided by the institution?
- Does the team have the right to request other evidence?
- Can we request from the institutions evidence that demonstrates or confirms the occurrence of bad practice?
- How do we ensure that evidence is recorded and retained? (Photocopying during the visit? Access to internal web pages?)
- Who takes care of the evidence and ensures safekeeping? Can individual experts be relied on to do this?
- Is the evidence published with the report (which probably makes it too long) or kept in reserve?

- Maybe the evidence-base can be embedded in early, unpublished versions of the report as comments, footnotes or parentheses.

It is worth noting the institutions usually only require sight of the evidence when a criticism is made, not when the assessment is positive: in that case do we only need to retain evidence relating to critical points or problematic matters?

WHO READS IT, WHO NEEDS IT?

It seems at least arguable that very few people actually read through a full institutional QA report from end to end. That is, of course, with the exception of the ever-resilient agency officer responsible for the report, who probably reads it through from end to end many times!

What evidence does an agency have of the eventual reading and the actual impact of its reports? We should reflect carefully on the likely readership for reports.

If we really are dealing with a small number of readers (more than ten, less than 50? Or even less than that?), then surely we need also to think about the economy of our report production: the expenditure of effort in producing it relative to the actual pattern of reception and use. Remember also that research shows that generally, in reading reports like ours, the attention span of the reader reduces with every page that is turned.

Maybe many more people will read the summary of the report or a short version published on the website. Is there a case for a relatively short published report and then separately an unpublished, more detailed report for the institution? Usually evidence of impact comes in the form of follow-up reports and action plans. Maybe, then, all we need for our readership are summaries, judgements, recommendations and action plans?

Could we improve the accessibility of reports by using more visual images in the layout (e.g. graphics, tables, highlighting, and even pictures)?

Finally, we need to remember that our readers too may need advice and even training in reading and using reports in the most productive way. Guidance documents about the procedure and the main features and aims of reports are very worthwhile.

LAST WORD (IT'S ALWAYS GOOD TO ARRIVE AT IT!)

The perfect report is more likely to be an aspiration than a realisation: the best you can do, in the time you have available, has to be good enough!

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSIONS

Zeynep Olcen, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

With the growing public interest in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe, accessing quality and transparent information on the institutions or the programmes offered by these institutions has become a challenge. As one of the main Bologna transparency tools, quality assurance (QA) reports play an important role in fostering the transparency of European higher education and providing reliable information to the stakeholders, but there is currently a gap between the current practices of QA agencies in publishing their external QA reports and the expectations of stakeholder groups in relation to these reports.

QA reports are the third source of information for stakeholders following the HEIs' websites and friends or colleagues. There is a clear need to raise awareness regarding the existence of QA reports among the stakeholders and to ensure that they are easily accessible. While different target groups such as HEIs, students and public authorities have similar expectations regarding QA reports, and utilise the information within them, employers do not necessarily consider these reports as a source of information on the programme or the institution. The overall impression from the stakeholders is that QA reports are a helpful source of information, but the technicality (jargon used) and the length of these reports limit their potential. One of the main requirements of the stakeholders is that the reports should contain easily understandable and comparable data. However, summary QA reports do not exist in order to provide quantitative data on HEIs (which can be easily found on the institutions' websites) but rather information on the evaluation process and the outcomes. In addition, stakeholders underlined the importance of easy access to QA reports and require that they be published not only on the QA agencies' websites but also on the HEIs' websites. Within this perspective, HEIs should be highly encouraged to publish their evaluation reports on their websites.

While comprehensive QA reports are very diverse and address primarily HEIs themselves, summary QA reports may better serve the needs of all the different target groups. Thus, this project aimed at developing common European Guidelines for the summary reports and some generic recommendations for the structure and the publication of comprehensive reports on the European level. The details and content of the comprehensive reports are to be decided upon at the national level.

The EQArep project also looked into the current practices of QA agencies in publishing their QA reports and the related strengths and weaknesses. The surveyed agencies identified transparency (openness to public) and the recommendations for quality improvement as the main strengths of QA reports. At the same time, interestingly, some agencies also mentioned easy readability, clear format and easy access as strengths. This is in contradiction with what the stakeholders have identified as limitations when using QA reports. Indeed, there is a discrepancy between the agencies' and the stakeholders' visions regarding the readability and the accessibility of QA reports. This might be due to the fact that QA agencies are more familiar with the structure and terminology of QA reports and have better knowledge on where to find them. Some of the identified

weaknesses include the inconsistency concerning the format of QA reports (which very much depends on the experts drafting them) and the use of complicated terminology. The availability of reports only in English is also seen as a weakness by some surveyed QA agencies. However, from the stakeholders' point of view, publication of QA reports in English is essential in terms of understandability and comparability at the European level. From this perspective, the common Guidelines for summary reports suggest that the reports should be published in English and any other languages which might be relevant.

When questioned about the elements that could contribute to the improvement of the quality of QA reports, the majority of the agencies emphasised the need for clear terminology, accessibility (availability to public), good structure, clear target groups, availability of reports in English as well as other languages, inclusion of institutions' best practices, and recommendations/commendations given by the experts. The general finding of the QA agencies' survey indicates that QA reports (comprehensive and summary) vary significantly among countries and agencies but also between programme and institutional types. Furthermore, the editing, structure and content, length, readability and accessibility of reports also differ at the country and agency level.

The conclusions of this project, therefore, focus on the improvement of the QA reports by bringing closer the current practices of QA agencies in publishing these reports and the overall expectations of the stakeholders. The common European Guidelines for summary reports and the generic recommendations for comprehensive reports are the important tools to achieve this.

EUROPEAN GUIDELINES FOR SUMMARY REPORTS

Summary reports target a wider audience than comprehensive reports, including students, parents, employers, other HEIs or government bodies, and thus, they are expected to provide clear, understandable and concise information about the evaluated institution or programme. When producing summary reports, QA agencies should ensure the following expectations are met:

- Clear terminology, avoiding professional jargon.
- Easy access to the wider audience by publishing reports not only on the agency's website but also the HEI's website. The target groups should be able to find the reports easily through search engines by typing keywords.
- Drafting of the report by an agency's staff, as it is important to ensure homogeneity and consistency.
- Developing a user-friendly and easy-to-communicate template which includes the agency's corporate image for visibility as well as clear headings and other layout segments.
- Producing the reports in English in order to reach a wider public, especially foreign students in other countries, and for comparability purposes at the European level, but also in any other language(s) that the agency or institution uses.
- Providing useful information on: 1) the evaluation process; 2) the institution or the programme under evaluation; and 3) the main conclusions of the evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE REPORTS

Since comprehensive reports target mainly the HEIs and contain a wide range of important information varying from one agency to the other, the recommendations for these types of reports is limited to their structure, drafting and the publication rather than the content. The comprehensive reports should pay attention to the following:

- Good structure with clear headings, sub-headings and a list of the contents to facilitate searches for specific information.
- Clear description of the process, stating the recommendations, commendations and the context of the review.
- Consistent use of terminology and a glossary explaining the technical terms.
- Easy access to the report online through publication of the report on the agency and the higher education websites.
- Publication of the institutional responses and the follow-up documents together with the report.

Through the analysis of the needs of stakeholders regarding QA reports, and the QA agencies' current practices on the publishing of QA procedures, the EQArep project shed light on the existing gap between what is expected and what is reality. Based on the findings and the conclusions derived from the findings of the EQArep project, ENQA highly recommends that the QA agencies take into consideration the European Guidelines presented in this report when producing and publishing summary reports – or when considering the development of such reports. Furthermore, the QA agencies are also encouraged to communicate the generic recommendations for comprehensive reports to those in charge of drafting and to mirror their current practice to those recommendations.

The detailed work carried out in the EQArep project brought into focus different views, perspectives and expectations with regard to QA reports. As QA reports and the overall context of higher education is constantly evolving, QA agencies are recommended to request feedback from and periodically survey their stakeholders in order to further improve their reports.

The outcomes of this project will have an important impact on the improvement of the role of QA reports as a source of reliable and comparable information for different types of stakeholder groups if the recommendations made are taken into account. QA agencies have an important role to play in this process.

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ANNEX I

QUESTIONNAIRE: THE USE AND USEFULNESS OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORTS FOR DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is carrying out a European Commission LLP co-funded project Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports (EQAreps) together with four European QA agencies: OAQ (Switzerland), QQI (Ireland), ASHE (Croatia) and EKKA (Estonia).

The aim of the project is to develop European standards for quality assurance reports in order to ensure that the information contained in the quality assurance reports meet the expectations of the stakeholders. The outcomes of the project shall result in a recommendation to quality assurance agencies on the content and form of informative and approachable quality assurance reports.

The survey is directed at all main stakeholder groups in higher education quality assurance: students, potential future employers, governments and the higher education institutions themselves. The purpose of the survey is to identify and compare the exact **interests of the various stakeholders** as regards information about the quality of institutions and of programmes.

We would be most grateful if you could dedicate some time to responding to this survey. The approximate time needed is **10 minutes**. The responses will be **anonymous**.

Please rely on **your personal experience** and use of information sources on HEI. Please note that not all parts of a question will be relevant to all different responder groups.

Your comments will be of high value for us. Please provide as many of them as you wish in **the comment boxes provided**, to explain your experience better.

Please leave your email address if you wish to be informed of the workshop which will be organised as a follow-up of the survey, and will provide an opportunity to discuss the information needs of different user groups further.

The deadline for replying is 28th of February.

Warm thanks in advance for your time and contribution

The EQAreps consortium

I - USE OF THE INFORMATION ABOUT QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND STUDY PROGRAMMES

1. For what purposes have you searched information about the quality of a higher education institution (HEI) and study programmes? (*Multiple answer*)
 - a. To decide on possible further studies
 - b. To evaluate the quality of graduates for recruitment purposes
 - c. To find partners among HEIs
 - d. To decide on investments/funding/sponsorship to a HEI or its unit
 - e. Other (please name)

2. Which sources do you usually use to get information about the quality of HEI and study programmes?
 - a. Websites of HEIs
often - once in a while - never
 - b. Social media (e.g. Facebook)
often - once in a while - never
 - c. Assessment reports provided by quality assurance agencies
often - once in a while - never
 - d. Government reports/publications
often - once in a while - never
 - e. Various rankings/league tables
often - once in a while - never
 - f. Information from/opinions of friends, colleagues, parents etc.
often - once in a while - never
 - g. Other (please name)

3. If you do not use reports by quality assurance agencies as a source of information, please explain why (please choose all that apply):
 - a. Did not know about them
 - b. Did not know where to find them
 - c. The reports do not contain the information I need
 - d. The reports are in a too complicated language
 - e. There are no reports in English/language I understand
 - f. The reports are too long
 - g. I found the needed information elsewhere
 - h. Other (please name)

If you do not use reports by quality assurance agencies as a source of information, please continue to Question 8.

4. If specific information, please indicate what kind of information you were looking for (please choose all that apply)
- a. General findings (e.g. general recommendations, overall assessment)
 - b. Strategic planning, management, governance
 - c. Internal quality assurance system
 - d. History and traditions
 - e. Application and admission statistics
 - f. Number of research grants, publications, citations
 - g. Employability/employment of graduates
 - h. Content of study programmes
 - i. Reputation of teaching staff
 - j. Qualifications of teaching staff
 - k. Financial resources
 - l. Condition of infrastructure
 - m. Student support system
 - n. Institution's ability to respond diverse students' needs
 - o. Accreditation status of institutions/study programmes
 - p. Institution's position in league tables
 - q. Other (please name)

5. The assessment reports provide the information you are looking for

Fully agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Fully disagree
-------------	----------------	-------------------	----------------

Please comment what exactly is good, what is missing, how it can be improved

6. You find the assessment reports by quality assurance agencies helpful in providing information about HEIs/programmes

Fully agree	Slightly agree	Slightly disagree	Fully disagree
-------------	----------------	-------------------	----------------

Please comment what exactly is good, what is missing, how it can be improved

7. Where did you find/access the assessment reports?

- a. Websites of HEIs
- b. Websites of quality assurance agencies
- c. Other (please name)

II - EXPECTATIONS OF THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORTS

8. What information do you need to make decisions for further learning, partnerships, comparisons with other institutions etc.? (Up to 5 choices)
 - a. Strategic planning, management, governance
 - b. Internal quality assurance system
 - c. History and traditions
 - d. Application and admission statistics
 - e. Number of research grants, publications, citations
 - f. Employability/employment of graduates
 - g. Content of study programmes
 - h. Reputation of teaching staff
 - i. Qualifications of teaching staff
 - j. Financial resources
 - k. Condition of infrastructure
 - l. Student support system
 - m. Institution's ability to respond diverse students' needs
 - n. Accreditation status of institutions/study programmes
 - o. Institution's position in league tables
 - p. Other (please name)

9. In what format would you like to get this information? (choose one)
 - a. Table(s) of numerical data indicating the most important aspects of a HEI/programme
 - b. A short concentrated summary describing the main strengths and areas for improvement of a HEI/programme
 - c. Comparative data with other institutions
 - d. A comprehensive report providing extensive information about strengths and areas for improvement in management and core processes (study process, research and development), explaining also the possible reasons for a given situation
 - e. Other (please name)

10. Where would you like to find this information? (please choose all that apply)
- Webpages of HEIs
 - Webpages of quality assurance agencies
 - Social media (please name the most preferred source, e.g. Facebook, Twitter...)
 - Printed reports in the libraries/quality assurance agencies/HEIs
 - Other (please name)

III - INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESPONDENT

11. What is your country of residence? (Choice of the countries of EHEA)
12. Which of the following groups do you represent?
- Higher education institution
 - Public authorities/Government office
 - Funder/Investor
 - Employer
 - Student
 - Other (please name)
13. The results of this survey will be presented and further focus group interviews conducted in a workshop in Tallinn, Estonia, on **May 6-7, 2013**. If you are interested in participating in this event, please write your name and e-mail address below. The project will cover the travel costs of the selected participants.
- Name (optional)
 - E-mail address (optional)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION!

ANNEX II

QUESTIONNAIRE: THE PUBLICATION OF QA RESULTS: PURPOSE, STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

SURVEY ON THE USE AND USEFULNESS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE REPORTS

ENQA is carrying out the project *Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports (EQArep)*, together with four member agencies: ASHE (Croatia), EKKA (Estonia), OAQ (Switzerland) and QQI (Ireland).

The aim of this project is to enquire on current needs and practices about the publication of external QA reports and evaluate the possibility of developing European standards for these reports in order to ensure that the information provided by them meets the needs of stakeholders.

This survey has been developed for Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA members and affiliates). Its outcomes will be complemented with the analysis of a sample of published quality assurance reports and further discussed in a workshop in Switzerland during winter 2013-14.

We would be grateful if you would dedicate some time to respond this survey. The approximate time needed is 20 minutes.

Please note that your answers can be saved and reviewed any time before your feedback is submitted. Your answers will exclusively be used for the project purposes and treated with discretion.

The survey will be open until [XX.XX.XX]

Thank you in advance for your time and precious contribution.

The EQArep consortium

RESPONDENT QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY (QAA)

weblink to the agency

Name and role of the person of reference for this survey: ...

Please note that for the purpose of the present survey:

- a distinction between **institutional** and **programme** external QA reports is made;
- the focus is on **published**, publicly available reports;

There is a diversity of practices in writing and publishing reports across the EHEA, accordingly, in this survey, we distinguish between

- “**comprehensive report**” and “**summary report(s)**”:

comprehensive report: An extensive review report which documents the full analytical outcomes of a given external QA assessment procedure, be it at institutional or programme level, be it written by academic experts, agency employees or an external technical secretary; an in-depth analysis upon which the main findings are based is made explicit and represents a key characteristic of this type of report. Often this is the primary report.

summary report(s): Any summarising form of reporting the outcomes of an external QA assessment procedure, be it a summary, a description, a table of comparative data, a final procedural report, web text or other possible types and forms of descriptive or schematic reporting. All kinds of derivative forms of a primary comprehensive report are included here.

Section 1 - Type of assessments conducted and reports published

1. How many **institutional** reviews/ assessments does your agency conduct on average per year (covering a time span of 5-7 years)?

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-15
- 16-30
- 31+

2. What kind of report is issued for the institutional review/ assessment? (Please choose as many options as applicable)

- Non published comprehensive report Published comprehensive report
- Non published summary report(s) Published summary report(s)

3. Additional comment/ further explanation:

4. How many **programme** reviews/ assessments does the agency conduct on average per year (covering a time span of 5-7 years)?

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-15
- 16-30
- 31+

5. What kind of report is issued for the programme review/ assessment? (Please choose as many options as applicable)

- Non published comprehensive report
- Published comprehensive report
- Non published summary report(s)
- Published summary report(s)

6. Additional comment/ further explanation:

Section 2 – Publication and Readership

7. What is the main purpose of the reports?

	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
Facilitate a QA/ accreditation decision				
Supply feedback to a HEI for quality enhancement				
Supply information to the general public				
Assure transparency				
Agency accountability				
Other (specify):				

8. In your opinion, which stakeholder groups currently tend to use your published reports?

	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
HEIs				
Students (and their parents)				
Official authorities/ Governmental bodies				
QA agencies				
Funding authorities				
Professional organisations/ Employers/ Recruitment agencies				
Media				
Other (specify):				

9. Who might be your potential or future readership? Which stakeholder groups would you like to use your reports more?

	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
HEIs				
Students (and their parents)				
Official authorities/ Governmental bodies				
Other official authorities				
QA agencies				
Funding authorities				
Professional organisations/ Employers/ Recruitment agencies				
Media				
Other (specify):				

10. Additional comment/ further explanation

--

Section 3 – Editing and publication of reports

11. In which language(s) are your reports available?

	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
National language(s)				
English				
Other (specify):				

12. Who writes the reports?

	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
Panel of experts				
Peer leader of the panel of experts				
Secretary of the panel of experts (QA employee)				
Secretary of the panel of experts (external subcontractor)				
Other (specify):				

13. How much time on average does it take to complete a report?

<i>approximate number of working hours</i>	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
-5				
6-15				
16-30				
31+				

14. Where are the reports published?

	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
Webpages of the agency				
Webpages of HEIs				
Webpages of other public authorities				
Social media (specify):				
Hard copy				
Other (specify):				

15. Additional comment/ further explanation

Section 4 – Structure of reports

16. Does your agency have a template available for the writing of reports?

	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
yes				
no				
Other (specify):				

17. What is the average length of the reports?

<i>number of pages</i>	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
1				
2-5				
6-15				
16-30				
31+				

18. In which format is the report information presented? (Please choose as many options as applicable)

	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
Discursive detailed information				
Discursive consolidated information				
Presentation of key data				
Schematic comparative data				
Table(s) of numerical data				
Synthetic web text				
Other (specify):				

19. Additional comment/ further explanation

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Section 5 – Content of reports

20. What information does your agency systematically provide in the reports?

	Institutional comprehensive report	Institutional summary report(s)	Programme comprehensive report	Programme summary report(s)
Assessment procedure/ national legal framework				
Information about site-visit				
Feedback on self-evaluation				
References/ documentation used/ annexes				
Accreditation status				
General information and key data of institution				
Profile and content of programme				
Fulfillment of formal criteria or quality standards				
General findings				
(commendations, recommendations)				
Profile of strengths and weaknesses				
Management, strategic planning				
Financial resources				
Quality assurance system				
Learning environment				
Employability of graduates				
Suggestions for quality enhancement				
Other benchmarking information, please specify:				
Other (specify):				
Other (specify):				

21. Additional comment/ further explanation

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Section 6 – Usability of reports

22. How would you best define your **comprehensive reports**?

	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree	don't know
easily accessible						
easily readable						
provides clear and transparent information on the quality of an institution/ programme						
useful for HEIs						
useful for public authorities						
useful for funding decisions						
useful for students						
useful for employers						
useful for media						

23. How would you best define your **summary reports**?

	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree	don't know
easily accessible						
easily readable						
provides clear and transparent information on the quality of an institution/ programme						
useful for HEIs						
useful for public authorities						
useful for funding decisions						
useful for students						
useful for employers						
useful for media						

24. How do you get external feedback on the quality and usefulness of your reports?

25. Additional comment/ further explanation

Section 7 – Perspectives

26. In general, what do you think are the main strengths and weaknesses of the published reports of your agency?

27. Please name some elements that, from your professional perspective , would increase quality and usefulness of reports.

28. What do you think are possible challenges and risks in trying to increase transparency and comparability of reports?

Thank you for your contribution!

ANNEX III

LIST OF RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY ON THE PUBLICATION OF QA RESULTS: PURPOSE, STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

- Accreditation Association for Medical Education, Turkey
- Accreditation Commission (ACCR), Czech Republic
- Accreditation Organisation (NVAO), The Netherlands and Flanders
- Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungs-Institut (ACQUIN), Germany
- Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León (ACSUCYL), Spain
- Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur (AERES), France
- Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement supérieur (AEQES), Belgium
- Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior (A3ES), Portugal
- Agencia nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA), Spain
- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA), Bosnia & Herzegovina
- Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (ACSUG), Spain
- Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE), Croatia
- Agenzia per la Certificazione di Qualità e l'Accreditamento EUR-ACE dei Corsi di Studio in Ingegneria (QUACING), Italy
- Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance and Career Development (AKKORK), Russia
- Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch Akkreditierung von Studiengängen (AQAS e.V.), Germany
- Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior (ARACIS), Romania
- Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya (AQU Catalunya), Spain
- Associazione Italiana per la Formazione Manageriale - Italian Association for Management Development (ASFOR), Italy
- Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik e.V. (ASIIN e.V.), Germany
- Austrian Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (AQ), Austria
- Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania
- Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (ZEVA), Germany
- Commission for accreditation and quality assurance (CAQA), Serbia
- The Commission for Technology and Innovation (CTI), France
- Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA), Estonia
- European Accreditation Agency for the Life Sciences (EAALS)
- European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA)
- European Council for Business Education (ECBE)
- European Council on Chiropractic Education (ECCE)
- Evaluationsagentur Baden-Württemberg (evalag), Germany
- Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA), Germany
- Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC), Finland
- Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC), Hungary
- Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP)
- Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA), Kosovo
- National Accreditation Agency of the Russian Federation (NAA), Russia
- National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA), Russia
- National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA), Armenia
- National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency to the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria (NEAA), Bulgaria
- Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), Norway
- Organ für Akkreditierung und Qualitätssicherung (OAQ), Switzerland
- Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA), Poland
- Public Agency for Accreditation of Higher Education (PAAHE), Albania
- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), UK
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Ireland
- The Council for Higher Education (CHE), Israel
- The Danish Accreditation Institution (AKKR), Denmark



THE PRESENT PUBLICATION is based on the findings of the “Transparency of European higher education through public quality assurance reports (EQArep)” project. This report investigates the current state of content, structure and publication of quality assurance reports while trying to understand the expectations and demands of stakeholders with regard to these reports. This report sheds light on the existing gap between what is expected by the stakeholders and the reality of the situation. In addition, the report provides QA agencies with a set of European Guidelines for summary reports and some generic recommendations on the structure and publication of the comprehensive reports in order to support these agencies in producing reports with understandable and comparable information.



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