



# The Icelandic Quality Enhancement Framework: The self-reflection process from a European perspective

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## Overview of the presentation

- The Icelandic self-reflection process
- The European QA framework
- Five European-wide challenges with the new ESG-Part 1
- Concluding remarks about the Icelandic QEF

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## 1. The Icelandic self-reflection process



## The Icelandic self-reflection process: basis for my observations

- Desk research:
  - ✓ Quality Enhancement Framework Handbook
  - ✓ Clever Data Report
  - ✓ The Institution-Wide reports
- 7-11 June visit:
  - ✓ Meeting with groups of (about 35) stakeholders: National Rectors' Conference, students, ministry staff, Quality Council, Quality Board
  - ✓ Attending the Quality Board meeting, the annual QEF conference and two annual meetings (Reykjavik University and Agricultural University of Iceland)



## Consultation process

- Consultation of the sector was externalised to Clever Data: data collected and analysed independently
- Consultation queried about key aspects of the QEF
- Excellent return rate
- Board discussed systematically and thoroughly all the implications arising from the Clever Data report
- Board presented preliminary findings at the annual conference in June (University of Iceland)



## Onsite visit: key findings

- Strongest areas of consensus:
  - ✓ The principles of QEF
  - ✓ Its focus on the students' learning experience
  - ✓ The need to promote students' involvement
  - ✓ The need to clarify the criteria for the confidence judgment
  - ✓ The need to renew the Quality Board membership
- Under discussion in June:
  - ✓ Whether and how to include research?
  - ✓ Whether and how to publish the subject review reports?
  - ✓ The link between QEF and the accreditation process?

**Self-reflection process**

- Objective, thorough and transparent
- Showed the Quality Board to be a “learning organisation”
- Demonstrated the commitment of the universities and the students to QEF and its further development
- Revealed that the sector recognised the need to improve some processes while preserving the founding principles of QEF

**2. The European QA framework**

Based on “Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities”

**Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG)**

- HEIs have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance
- QA supports the development of a quality culture
- QA responds to and respects the diversity of HE systems, institutions and programmes
- QA involves stakeholders and takes into account the expectations of all stakeholders and society

**QA: a key reform of the recent years**

Figure 1: Trends 2015 Q9 – Since 2010, how important have national reform initiatives on the following issues been for your institution? Answer option: “High importance” (Trends 2015 data)

Issue	Percentage
Quality assurance	73%
Internal evaluation	70%
Bologna degree structure	68%
Research policy	64%
Learning and teaching generally	62%
Implementation of learning outcomes	60%
Institutional funding	58%
Governance and autonomy	53%
Student recruitment	51%
Widening access and participation	40%
Lifelong learning	39%
Tuition fees	34%
Other	5%

**Q51: Institutional QA policy and procedures**

**Institutional quality assurance policy and system**

Policy/System Description	Percentage
We have an institutional QA policy and an integrated approach to QA at institutional level	63%
We have a QA policy, but the QA processes are being developed	11%
We have an institutional QA policy, but the QA systems are faculty/department based	10%
We have QA processes in place, but no QA policy	7%
Both QA policy and systems are faculty/department based	3%
We neither have a QA policy, nor a QA system	1%

Trends 2015, Q51; N= 419

**3. Five European-wide challenges with the new ESG**

Based on “ESG Part 1: Are Universities Ready”



## European-wide challenges with the new ESG-Part I

1) The ability of the QA system to generate information that is valuable for both internal decision-making and external stakeholders

- ✓ Collect the information that is useful and makes sense for own context and purposes
- ✓ Do this through a variety of information sources and methods in order to ensure a comprehensive and objective view of institutional activities
- ✓ Communicate the findings to a variety of stakeholders

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2) Ensuring the quality of student experience and success

- ✓ Give high priority to good teaching
- ✓ Supporting students and staff, tracking student success, etc.

3) Strengthening the link between quality assurance and the quality of learning and teaching

- ✓ Require expertise typically located outside the QA unit => important to strengthen cooperation among different institutional actors
  - Learning outcomes
  - Student-centred learning and teaching
- ✓ How are programmes designed, delivered and monitored? How will universities demonstrate to external reviewers and stakeholders that they take into account the many aspects covered by the ESG?

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4) Demonstrate that institutions have put in place robust measures to review their programmes

- ✓ Lack of data at European level on how this is done in practice
- ✓ Put in place clear mechanisms for linking programme review to strategic management and decision-making

5) The need to link internal quality assurance to institutional strategic management

- ✓ Analyse how this happens and whether the link could be strengthened through a re-design of the internal QA system

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## 4. Concluding remarks



## The Icelandic QEF

- Stresses the role of universities in QA and respect their autonomy
- The result of ongoing partnership and dialogue, including with students
- Focused on the the quality of the learning experience and academic standards
- Enhancement-led
- International



## Questions about the future

- Does the scope and approach of the future quality assurance system support each institution's strategic development effectively? Within a well-designed higher education system?
- Is it sufficiently context-sensitive and mission-led?
- Are the available resources adequate to enable institutions to implement the recommendations that they receive?
- Does the QA approach promote trust?

## References

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) 2015
- Sursock A (2015) *Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities*, Belgium: European University Association
- Gover A, T. Loukkola & A Sursock (2015) *ESG Part 1: Are Universities Ready?* Belgium: European University Association