The Social Responsibility of Quality Assurance Agencies

Mentor: Anne Flierman, Chair NVAO

Project Group 3
Mairead Boland (QQI)
Alexandra Paffen (QANU)
Marina Cvitanušić Brečić (ASHE)
Einar Meier (NOKUT)
Maria Browning (ECCE)
Vlad Popescu (ARACIS)

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Our project

- To investigate QAAs’ own perceptions of social responsibility
- What is the scope of the agency and how can it achieve its mission in cooperation with other entities?
  - Do they have a role to play in promoting it?
  - Do their current activities incorporate it?
  - If not, do they plan to incorporate it into future activities?
No unique definition of social responsibility, but there are common grounds

**European Commission’s Green Paper 2001:**
- “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis”

**ISO 26000 Guidelines**
- “the responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behaviour that:
  - contributes to sustainable development
  - takes into account the expectations of stakeholders
  - is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour
  - is integrated throughout the organization and practiced in its relationships

**ESG does not specifically mention "social responsibility"**
Our definition of social responsibility
By social responsibility we mean the obligation of an organization towards the welfare and interests of the society in which it operates
Social Responsibility: Advantages and opportunities for providers/institutions

- Benefits wider society (not just students and employers, but also the general public)
  - equal access to education
  - environmental sustainability
- Builds identities within local society or organisations
- Staff/students feel worthwhile
  - doing good
  - team work
  - pleasure from giving
  - making a difference
- Appeals to prospective stakeholders
Barriers and challenges for providers/institutions

- Institutional autonomy
- Doing it but nobody knows
- Ensuring stakeholders get feedback
- Resistance to change
- Scepticism
- Fear
- Apathy
- Reluctance to be measured
- Aligning research with cultural needs

- Complex process
  - Overwhelming – where to start?
  - Cost – money, time
- Window dressing – superficial
- No “one size fits all”
  - Inter-institutional comparisons of community engagement are meaningless
- Could inhibit engagement
SURVEY on Social responsibility of the QA agencies

- Insight into how agencies fulfil the role of a socially responsible entity and which activities they undertake toward 3 main stakeholders
  - current and future activities

- Respondents were asked to reflect organisational-level views, based on verified information, not personal impressions

- For the purpose of this survey - the three main stakeholders:
  1) education sector actors (HE institutions, staff, students),
  2) government and
  3) public
What do we talk about when we talk about SR...?

“Because we are financed with public money, we feel we have a greater responsibility to repay our debt and contribute to societal development and growth.”

“Our agencies’ thoughts on QAAs role in social responsibility

“Quality assurance agencies should act as influencers and consider how they actively contribute to raising living standards.”

“QA agencies should encourage institutions to ensure that societal engagement and the third mission are afforded a similar focus to HEIs’ other core missions (research and education and training).”

“The more responsibilities are assigned to QA...the less importance the individual responsibility gets.”

“Given the difficulty of defining the concept,...the way for the future, is to have an enhancement-led approach which is based on the participation of different actors and which builds on trust.”

“The...promotion of quality culture in higher education, based on trust and autonomy for the institutions, must lead to further transparency of quality in all aspects of higher education, the true involvement of all stakeholders and the ability of the institutions to differ in their responses to politico-social requirements...”
SURVEY results

Is social responsibility a strategic objective of your organisation?

Yes: 77%
No: 23%

How would you rate the importance of social responsibility engagement for your organisation?

***** 54%
**** 31%
*** 15%

Average Rating: 4.38

How important do you think social responsibility will be to the role of QA agencies in the future?

***** 61%
**** 31%
*** 8%

Average Rating: 4.38

13 responses from senior management in QA agencies
SURVEY results - -

QA agencies' activities related to a socially responsible role

- Enhancing quality culture
- Sustainability
- Transparency (work, funding, spending)
- Equality goals (gender, minorities, refugees, ...)
- Environmental goals
- Participate in drafting legislation
- Supporting decision making
- Organizing events
- External evaluations/assessment
- Thematic analyses and reports

CURRENT activities contributing to a socially responsible role
FUTURE activities contributing to a socially responsible role
Necessary improvement/development of socially responsible role
SURVEY results – activities toward stakeholders

HE ACTORS
- Promoting new trends in HE
- Training, events

GOVERNMENT
- Cooperation in drafting legal documents
- Providing support in decision making

PUBLIC (SOCIETY IN GENERAL)
- events, conferences, discussions
- providing reliable information about HE qualifications and programmes
Sustainability of internal practices

- NOKUT was certified through the Eco-Lighthouse (ELH) scheme in 2017 and aims for re-certification in 2020.
- Norway's most widely used certification scheme for enterprises seeking to document their environmental efforts and demonstrate social responsibility.

Eco-Lighthouse Requirements/Indicators

1. General
2. Working conditions
3. Procurement
4. Energy
5. Transport
6. Waste
7. Emissions to air and water
8. Aesthetics
Where does the role of QA end?

Green indicators for universities and colleges in Norway

- Will measurement of sustainability in educational offerings impact on the development of programmes of study?
- Should QA agencies play a role in this?
- 2019 report proposing 98 quantitative indicators for monitoring climate impact of Norwegian HEIs
- Ministry of Education: HEIs will be scored on the indicators + two additional dimensions, still to be defined:
  - Sustainability in educational programmes
  - Research for a green transformation
- Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (DIKU) will operate the scheme
Who follows?
Recommendations on possible next steps

... prior to the introducing (evaluation of) social responsibility into QA procedures

- Is it possible to agree a **definition of ‘social responsibility’** among actors in the EHEA?
  - **common understanding** of what SR represents (what will be evaluated?)
  - discussion and **acceptance of common guidelines** (ESG? national criteria?)
  - **BFUG Advisory Group for Social Dimension** → drafting **Principles and Guidelines for Social Dimension**

- **QAAs as influencers** - "Be the change you want to see" approach
For discussion...

- Every QA Agency should have a **mission statement about social responsibility** (with regard to inclusion, social justice, citizenship, and environmental sustainability)

- **ENQA** should incorporate agencies' activities regarding social responsibility into their **assessment of QA agencies**

- The **ESG should be adapted** to include social responsibility (including a **definition** aligned with e.g. ISO 26000, UNESCO 2009, Council of Europe’s declaration of 2006 and the European Commission’s 2011 strategy – all reflecting on education and social responsibility)

- Social responsibility should be included in **relevant legislation and regulations**