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Quality Assurance in Bulgarian Higher Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. EIQAS Project

The survey on Part 1 of the ESG and internal quality assurance systems was a key initial activity in the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project ‘Enhancing internal quality assurance systems’ (EIQAS), approved for funding in autumn 2014. EIQAS is a joint initiative of national quality assurance agencies and Rectors’ Conferences and / or higher education institutions (HEIs) from four countries, Poland (Coordinator), Bulgaria, Portugal and Slovenia. It has two objectives. First, it aims to support HEIs in further development of their internal quality assurance (IQA) systems by enhancing their awareness and understanding of Part 1 of the ESG. Second, it aims to support the national agencies in further development of their methodologies for the external assessment of IQA systems at HEIs, thus addressing one of the standards in Part 2 of the ESG. The two main outputs of the project will be a Guide to IQA based on Part 1 of the ESG and a reference framework for comparative analysis of the participating agencies’ methodologies for the external assessment of IQA. More details about EIQAS at: <http://www.eiqas.com>.

1.2. EIQAS Survey

Pursuing the first objective of EIQAS, the survey focused on IQA in the context of Part 1 of the ESG and was conducted at the institutional level. It aimed to collect data on overall progress that HEIs had made in the implementation of their IQA systems, the extent to which (elements of) Part 1 ESG are integrated into their IQA systems, and the problems they had faced and / or might face when integrating the ESG into their IQA systems. Survey findings will feed into an EIQAS Training Seminar on IQA and the ESG for HEIs to be held in spring 2015. Together with suggestions and conclusions from the seminar, they will also be used to develop the above-mentioned Guide to IQA which will be available to all interested HEIs.

The survey was based on the BFUG-endorsed draft of the revised ESG, which overlaps to a large extent with the 2005 version. As the draft was yet to be approved in May 2015, HEIs were not expected to have the new ESG elements in place, though some might have integrated such or similar elements into their IQA systems regardless of the ESG. Since EIQAS is forward-looking, the main reason for choosing the draft ESG for the survey was that this enabled the EIQAS partners to identify (elements of) Part 1 of the ESG which should be given special attention both at the Training Seminar on IQA and the ESG and in the Guide to IQA which will be based on the revised ESG.

The questionnaire was designed to provide mainly quantitative data as a basis for a more in-depth and qualitative analysis during the EIQAS Training Seminar on IQA and the ESG. It

comprised 40 questions. General questions about IQA systems covered, in particular, the period when a HEI started implementing its system and the main motivation behind the decision to do so; the scope of the system; progress in its implementation across the institution and problems encountered; beneficial changes resulting from its operation; general links with the ESG, and activities undertaken to raise internal awareness of the ESG. These were followed by detailed questions about procedures, processes and / or other arrangements covered under each of Part 1 ESG. HEIs were also requested to identify the ESG which had been or could be most difficult to implement, and those where they would need more detailed clarification and guidelines. For details, please see the full questionnaire in Annex.

The survey was conducted online between 3 February and 3 March 2015 among HEIs in all four countries participating in EIQAS. Depending on the total number of HEIs, the number of those invited to complete the questionnaire varied between the four countries.

In Bulgaria 11 HEIs (of which 7 public/state HEIs and 4 non-public/private HEIs), representing 21% of the total number of HEIs (51), were invited to complete the questionnaire.

All of them are university-type of HEIs and all 11 HEIs completed the questionnaire (i.e., 100%).

The size of the HEIs participating in the questionnaire and the period in which they were involved in internal quality assurance are shown in *Chart 1* below:

Chart 1

Size of the higher education institution	1 000 - 5 000 students	9.1 %	1
	5 000 - 15 000 students	45. 5%	5
	15 000 - 25 000 students	36. 4%	4
	35 000 - 45 000 students	9.1 %	1
TOTAL:		100 %	11 HEIs
Period in which the HEIs were involved in internal quality assurance	More than 20 years	10%	1
	More than 15 years	30%	3
	More than 10 years	10%	1
	More than 5 years	30%	3
	Less than 5 years	20%	2
TOTAL:		100 %	10 HEIs
<i>Note: 1 HEI did not answer the second question</i>			

The position (function) of the individuals who filled in the questionnaire and how they filled in the questionnaire is shown in *Chart 2* below:

Chart 2

Position (function) of the individuals who filled in the questionnaire	Rector / President	20%	2
	Vice-Rector / Vice-President	50%	5
	Institutional QA Coordinator	10%	1
	Head of the QA Unit / Office	20%	2
TOTAL:		100%	10 HEIs
The questionnaire was filled in individually or in consultation with colleagues	Individually	60%	6
	In consultation with colleagues	40%	4
TOTAL:		100%	10 HEIs
<i>Note: 1 HEI did not answer either of the questions</i>			

1.3. Basic facts about Internal Quality assurance in Bulgaria

HEIs started establishing IQA systems in a systematic way in 1997 when a new Higher Education Act was adopted. A requirement to establish a system of IQA was introduced. The law did not specify any required elements of the system and did not refer to ESGs (adopted in 2005). Before 2000, 14% had established IQA systems. In 2002, five universities pooled together and started their own R&D project to design and implement an effective mechanism. After 2000, 71% had established their IQA systems. The process of development continued until 2007 when NEAA became cofounder of ENQA's IQA Group. NEAA included IQA-related criteria in its methodology for institutional and program evaluation and accreditation in 2007: a new section on quality assurance was introduced in the agency's statutes. This resulted in immediate application of the IQA criterion in the accreditation procedures of all types at national level. NEAA's criteria related to IQA cover implicitly ESGs. In 2006 – 2011, all universities had their IQA systems in place.

The system had been established entirely on the initiative of individual HEIs before relevant requirements or evaluation criteria were introduced at national level (29%). The decision to establish the system was prompted by a requirement in national legislation (14%). The decision to establish the system was prompted by external evaluation criteria of the national quality assurance agency (14%). The decision to establish the system was prompted by a requirement in national legislation and external evaluation criteria of the national quality assurance agency (43%).

NEAA makes use of its own system of criteria for evaluation and accreditation including four separate dimensions – teaching and learning, research, governance and competitiveness of HEIs. IQA covers all four areas of activity but specifically it is audited in dimension three – management.

2. OVERVIEW OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (IQA) SYSTEMS

100% of the responding Bulgarian HEIs have designed a formal IQA system of their own (i.e., a formally adopted and organized collection of components, including multiple and

interrelated procedures and tools) and 87.5% of the higher schools have their own IQA Manual.

In 25% of cases the HEIs have involved external stakeholders in the development of their own quality assurance policy and in its implementation, while in 37.5% of the cases external stakeholders were involved in the development of the policy but not involved in its implementation.

28.6% of the institutions review their IQA policy on an ongoing basis. 42.9% of the HEIs review their IQA policy on an annual basis and 14.3% - every three years. It is interesting to note that 14.3% review their IQA policy every six months during regular external audit made by External ISO 9001 Evaluation Agency (Lloyds Register Quality Assurance, LRQA).

The level of implementation of the IQA system in the various units of the HEIs is shown in *Chart 3* below:

Chart 3

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
All units (faculties, departments, etc.) are at the same stage of implementation	62.5%	5
Progress in the implementation varies to some extent among units	37.5%	3
Progress in the implementation varies considerably among units	0%	0
Any additional comments	0%	0
HEIs that answered the question		8
HEIs that skipped the question		3

Three main groups of problems are reported. Firstly, individual HEIs report a lack of trained specialists and of general experience in the field, e.g., the idea of developing quality culture is rather unclear. Secondly, institutions state the issues of stakeholder involvement, feedback and general communication. Thirdly, institutions declare difficulties related to involving students and evaluation of operation of elements of the IQA system, e.g., the way local electronic information systems are implemented.

Examples of beneficial changes that have occurred after the implementation of IQA systems are presented. Positive influences can be summarized in 9 points as follows:

On teaching/learning processes,

- On academic development and appraisal of staff,
- On implementation of ECTS,
- On achieving excellence in research,
- On achieving Student-centeredness of pedagogy,
- On improvement of degree programs,
- On internationalization of work (e.g. when new regulations are proposed and adopted),
- On student involvement in curriculum development,
- On quality of administrative services,
- On learning resources.

Based on the information, it is not possible to establish any relation between date of establishment of IQA system and progress in quality assurance made. Data reported at

institutional level point to a state in which significant agreement with requirements has been achieved. Also, no relation between type and size of institution and beneficial changes can be seen. An issue of national specificity is the rapid enlargement of the higher education system in the last decade of the XX century. On the whole, HEIs are looking for specific identity, attempting to be creative and innovative. On the other hand, institutions develop in line with the educational tradition, established after national independence was achieved in the XIX century.

The IQA systems of the respondent HEIs vary with regard to their reference to the ESG, as shown in *Chart 4* below:

Chart 4

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Refer explicitly to the ESG	37.5%	3
Refer implicitly to the ESG as they are based on national legislation / national external evaluation criteria in which the ESG are integrated	50.0%	4
Do not refer explicitly or implicitly to the ESG	12.5%	1
HEIs that answered the question		8
HEIs that skipped the question		3

The majority of the HEIs (37.5%) use the current version of ESG as an indicative checklist to ensure broad compliance with the ESG, and only 12.5% - as a strict checklist to ensure full compliance with the ESG. The rest of the HEIs use the ESG as broad guidelines for selected elements of their IQA system (25%), or they have integrated the ESG into their own standards and guidelines (25%). The majority of the HEIs (50%) undertake training events and seminars on internal quality assurance where the ESG were explicitly discussed. None of the HEIs organized a training events or seminar specifically devoted to the ESG.

3. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS AND PART 1 OF ESG

3.1. ESG 1.1: Policy for quality assurance

100% of respondent HEIs have got a policy for QA that is published.

As shown in *Chart 5* below, in the main part of the of cases (37.5%), institutions have involved external stakeholders in the development of their QA policy but have not involved them in its implementation; and 25% of HEIs have involved external stakeholders in both development and implementation of the policy:

Chart 5

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Involved in both the development and implementation of the policy	25.0%	2
involved in the development of the policy but not involved in its implementation	37.5%	3
Not Involved in the development of the policy but involved in its implementation	12.5%	1
I don't know / It is hard to say	25.0%	2
HEIs that answered the question		8
HEIs that skipped the question		3

Institutions have addressed this standard seriously irrespective of their size or age. The current situation is regulated by the law. The operation of NEAA is an external factor in which this principle is audited on a regular basis.

HEIs review their IQ policy on a regular basis as shown in *Chart 6* below:

Chart 6

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
On an on-going basis	28.6%	2
Every year	42.9%	3
Every two years	0%	0
Every three years	14.3%	1
Other	14.3%	1
HEIs that answered the question		7
HEIs that skipped the question		4

3.2. *ESG 1.2: Design and approval of programs*

All institutions (100%) have in place a formal procedure for design and approval of programs.

In terms of observing ESGs, progress in this process can be described as follows:

- Are designed in line with the institutional strategy, mission and vision (88% in all fields of study)
- Are designed in line with the objectives set for them (88% in all fields of study)
- Are designed by involving students (38 in most fields of study)
- Are designed by involving external stakeholders (50% in all fields of study)
- Are designed so as to enable smooth student progression (75% in all fields of study)
- Define intended learning outcomes to be achieved by students (88% in all fields of study)
- Define the expected student workload in terms of ECTS credits (88% in all fields of study)
- Include student practical placements where appropriate (75% in all fields of study)
- Lead to clearly specified qualifications which refer to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework (75% in all fields of study).

All these data can be seen like ratio in the following *Chart 7*:

Chart 7

Answer Options	In no field of study	In some fields of study	In most fields of study	In all fields of study	Response Count
Are designed in line with the institutional strategy, mission and vision	0	0	1	7	8
Are designed in line with the objectives set for them	0	0	1	7	8
Are designed by involving students	2	1	3	2	8
Are designed by involving external stakeholders (employers and other partners)	1	1	2	4	8
Are designed so as to enable smooth student progression	0	0	2	6	8
Define intended learning outcomes to be achieved by students	0	1	0	7	8
Define the expected student workload in terms of ECTS credits	0	0	1	7	8
Include student practical placements where appropriate	1	0	1	6	8
Lead to clearly specified qualifications which refer to the correct level of the National Qualifications Framework	0	1	1	6	8
HEIs that answered the question					8
HEIs that skipped the question					3

In addition, HEIs have an educational technology which:

- Provides programs in different modes of delivery (e.g. full- and part-time, campus-based and distance-learning) in most fields of study (63%)
- Offers flexible learning paths to students (e.g. individual study programs/paths) in all fields of study (63%)
- Uses a variety of teaching and learning methods, including those which encourage active and interactive engagement of students in their learning in all fields of study (75%)
- Evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery of programs on a regular basis in all fields of study (88%) in all fields of study (88%)
- Evaluates and adjusts teaching and learning methods on a regular basis in all fields of study (88%).

The spread of the responses indicates that there exists a very good understanding and substantial observance of this standard (see *Chart 8*):

Chart 8

Answer Options	In no field of study	In some fields of study	In most fields of study	In all fields of study	Response Count
Provides programmes in different modes of delivery (e.g. full- and part-time, campus-based and distance-learning)	0	2	5	1	8
Offers flexible learning paths to students (e.g. individual study programmes / paths)	0	1	2	5	8
Uses a variety of teaching and learning methods, including those which encourage active and interactive engagement of students in their learning	0	0	2	6	8
Evaluates and adjusts the modes of delivery of programmes on a regular basis	0	1	0	7	8
Evaluates and adjusts teaching and learning methods on a regular basis	0	2	0	6	8
HEIs that answered the question					8
HEIs that skipped question					3

3.3. *ESG 1.3: Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment*

In terms of student-centeredness, progress can be described as follows:

- Student assessment procedures, methods and criteria are published (75%);
- Procedures, methods and criteria enable assessing the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved by students (100%);
- A procedure to ensure consistency and fairness in student assessment is in place (75%);
- Student performance is assessed by more than one examiner where possible (50%);
- A procedure for student appeals is in place (87.5%).

With regard to the assessment of student achievement, required features such as consistency and fairness are realized to a great extent (5 HEIs) and to a very great extent (1 HEI).

The spread of the responses indicates that there exists very good understanding and substantial observance of this standard.

3.4. *ESG 1.4: Student admission, progression, recognition and certification*

In terms of designing and publishing regulations, progress of institutions can be described as follows:

- Regulations on student admission (in all fields of study 86%);

- Regulations on student progression (in all fields of study 100%);
- Regulations on certification / the award of diplomas and certificates (in all fields of study 88%);
- Regulations on the recognition of study periods completed at other institutions in the country and abroad (in all fields of study 100%);
- Regulations on the recognition of qualifications (degrees) awarded by other institutions in the country and abroad (in all fields of study 100%);
- Regulations on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (in no field of study 50% and in some fields of study 25%).

In the majority of cases (87.5%) institutions apply regulations consistently.

In *Chart 9* are featured these regulations for each of respondent HEIs:

Chart 9

Answer Options	In no field of study	In some fields of study	In most fields of study	In all fields of study	Response Count
Regulations on student admission	1	0	0	6	7
Regulations on student progression	0	0	0	8	8
Regulations on certification / the award of diplomas and certificates	1	0	0	7	8
Regulations on the recognition of study periods completed at other institutions in the country and abroad	0	0	0	8	8
Regulations on the recognition of qualifications (degrees) awarded by other institutions in the country and abroad	0	0	0	8	8
Regulations on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning	4	2	1	1	8
HEIs that answered the question					8
HEIs that skipped question					3

3.5. *ESG 1.5: Teaching staff*

With regard to teaching staff, institutions guarantee the competence of the teachers.

Progress can be defined by the following 8 descriptors:

- Has in place a transparent and fair recruitment process for teaching staff (in all fields of study 100%);
- Provides professional development opportunities to teaching staff (in all fields of study 75%)
- Offers incentives to encourage professional development of teaching staff (in all fields of study 75%);
- Offers incentives to encourage innovation in teaching (in all fields of study 63%);
- Offers incentives to encourage the use of new technologies in teaching (in all fields of study 63%);

- Has in place mechanisms for rewarding teaching achievements (in all fields of study 63%);
- Regularly assesses the performance of teaching staff (in all fields of study 88%);
- Regularly monitors teaching staff satisfaction (in all fields of study 50%).

This correlation can be figured in the following chart:

Chart 10

Answer Options	In no field of study	In some fields of study	In most fields of study	In all fields of study	Response Count
a) Has in place a transparent and fair recruitment process for teaching staff	0	0	0	8	8
b) Provides professional development opportunities to teaching staff	0	1	1	6	8
c) Offers incentives to encourage professional development of teaching staff	1	1	0	6	8
d) Offers incentives to encourage innovation in teaching	1	1	1	5	8
e) Offers incentives to encourage the use of new technologies in teaching	1	1	1	5	8
f) Has in place mechanisms for rewarding teaching achievements	1	0	2	5	8
g) Regularly assesses the performance of teaching staff	0	1	0	7	8
h) Regularly monitors teaching staff satisfaction	2	1	1	4	8
HEIs that answered the question					8
HEIs that skipped question					3

Related to the above descriptors, the following examples can be given:

Provides professional development opportunities to teaching staff

1. There is at the HEIs a Career Development Centre, which offers various professional development opportunities to the teaching staff;
2. Opportunities for professional development of the teaching staff are regulated by Ordinance № 3 of the faculty of VFU and Instruction № 6 for the acquisition of the Ph.D. and "Doctor of Science" which is an integral part of the Ordinance;
3. A project of improving qualification of teaching staff is realizing at the HEIs. There are following relevant courses (modules);
4. The HEIs regularly organize qualification courses and other activities for its academic staff and has developed a System for qualification according to the academic position;

5. On the basis of the accepted Rules of the terms and conditions for acquisition of scientific degrees and academic positions at the HEIs and regulations ensuring participation of teaching staff in them, national and international research and educational projects;
6. Regular courses, consultancy and individual advising through Centre for Educational Technologies
7. The HEIs participate in many projects and programs for mobility through which the academic staff have the opportunity to raise their qualifications, to study other faculties' experience and good practices, such as ERASMUS, CEEPUS, etc.

Offers incentives to encourage professional development of teaching staff

1. The pay of the teaching staff depends to some extent on their professional achievements;
2. Instruction № 5 for identifying and assessing the employment of teachers as a tool for the evaluation of research, artistic, sporting and administrative activities for teachers. The degree of implementation of preplanned educational research and scientific product quality are reflected in the annual evaluation of each teacher;
3. Annually additional rewards are paid to the academic staff for research activity and achievements in the study process;
4. Ensuring participation of teaching staff in HEI, national and international research and educational projects, conferences, workshops, etc.;
5. Special projects and financing short term trips and conference participation;
6. The HEI periodically announces competitions for various academic positions, which stimulates the development of the academic staff.

Offers incentives to encourage innovation in teaching

1. The system of evaluation of the teaching staff on annual basis rewards innovation in teaching;
2. When scientific, artistic and sporting successes are achieved there are forms of material (additional financial remuneration) and moral incentives (awarded with gold, silver and bronze badges and plaques);
3. The development of courses in the Moodle platform is stimulated and promoted;
4. On the basis of Rules of the structure and organization of education process;
5. Included as a coefficient giving bonus in the University Teaching Workload;
6. Support for innovations in teaching is provided on competitive basis. Teachers participate in competitions organized by the university's Research and Development Fund by submitting project proposals which are evaluated by expert commissions. The best projects receive funding.

Offers incentives to encourage the use of new technologies in teaching

1. The system of evaluation of the teaching staff rewards on annual basis the use of new technologies in teaching;
2. When scientific, artistic and sporting successes are achieved there are forms of material (additional financial remuneration) and moral incentives (awarded with gold, silver and bronze badges and plaques);
3. Opportunities for active use of information technologies are provided to all the members of the academic staff;
4. A Center for Educational Technologies is established, including Distance Learning Unit in its structure;
5. Included as a coefficient giving bonus in the University Teaching Workload Credit system

6. The HEI provides facilities, technical support and consultations to teachers who wish to use innovative technologies in teaching. Training for the introduction of electronic forms of teaching is periodically provided.

Has in place mechanisms for rewarding teaching achievements

1. The system of evaluation of the teaching staff on annual basis rewards teaching achievements in general;
2. When scientific, artistic and sporting successes are achieved there are forms of material (additional financial remuneration) and moral incentives (awarded with gold, silver and bronze badges and plaques);
3. A common system for additional rewards and payments is developed at the HEI. It includes various areas – participation in research, projects, conferences, loyalty to the institution, image building, etc.;
4. On the basis of the accepted Rules of the terms and conditions for acquisition of scientific degrees and academic positions at the University and the Statute of honorary awards, titles and symbols at the HEI;
5. Included as a coefficient giving bonus in the University Teaching Workload Credit System
6. All teachers are financially stimulated at least three times a year through bonuses that depend on their accomplishments.

Regularly monitors teaching staff satisfaction

1. There is no such monitoring.
2. A questionnaire for self-evaluation of the academic staff is developed.
3. Through regular surveys organized by Centre for Educational Technologies.
4. The satisfaction of the teaching staff is accounted through surveys.

As far as career development of teaching staff, experience in this area can be made known by describing a good practice at a HEI. It is called "Development of a system of qualification and career growth of academic staff at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (an R&D project under Human Resources Development operational programme of EU – 2013-2015). A new virtual career centre for teachers has been designed and realized by setting up a University Education for Teachers Facility in the electronic e-learning platform of the university.

The spread of the responses indicates that there exists excellent understanding and full observance of this standard.

3.6. ESG 1.6: Learning resources and student support

Learning resources and student support are issues that are adequately met. Progress can be described as follows:

- a) Provides academic support to its students (in all fields 100%)
- b) Provides financial support to its students (in all fields 75%)
- c) Provides advice and support to outgoing and incoming students (in all fields 88%)
- d) Has in place mechanisms for informing students about the support and services available (in all fields 75%)
- e) Has in place a mechanism for assessing whether learning resources are adequate and accessible (in all fields 75%)
- f) Has in place a mechanism for assessing whether student support is adequate and accessible (in all fields 75%)
- g) Has in place procedures to ensure that administrative staff is properly qualified to deliver support services to students (in all fields 71%)
- h) Offers professional development opportunities to administrative staff providing support services to students (in all fields 75%).

All these data can be shown as well in the chart below:

Chart 11

Answer Options	In no field of study	In some fields of study	In most fields of study	In all fields of study	Rating Average	Response Count
a) Provides academic support to its students	0	0	0	8	4.00	8
b) Provides financial support to its students	0	1	1	6	3.63	8
c) Provides advice and support to outgoing and incoming students	1	0	0	7	3.63	8
d) Has in place mechanisms for informing students about the support and services available	0	1	0	7	3.75	8
e) Has in place a mechanism for assessing whether learning resources are adequate and accessible	1	1	0	6	3.38	8
f) Has in place a mechanism for assessing whether student support is adequate and accessible	1	1	0	6	3.38	8
g) Has in place procedures to ensure that administrative staff are properly qualified to deliver support services to students	2	0	0	5	3.14	7
h) Offers professional development opportunities to administrative staff providing support services to students	2	0	0	6	3.25	8
HEIs that answered the question						8
HEIs that skipped question						3

Satisfaction of students with resources and support is measured as follows:

1. The satisfaction of students with the learning resources is measured by using regular surveys, carried out, two times a year;
2. In accordance with established procedures by the Academic Council periodic surveys of students are conducted. The completed questionnaires are designed to understand and summarize the students' opinions on the curriculum, teaching schedule, teaching and administrative services. The results are presented at Departmental and Faculty

boards and data is stored in Club alumnus and is available to academic departments and colleges;

3. The satisfaction of students with the learning resources and the student support available is measured through specific questions in the questionnaires which the students fill in every academic year for each teacher and each subject taught;
4. Annually a survey is carried out based on approved questionnaires;
5. By specially prepared reviews and analysis on a regular basis;
6. The students periodically fill in surveys which include questions about the learning resources, the educational process, the support provided to the students, etc.

3.7. **ESG 1.7: Information management**

HEIs collect data on a regular basis. This can be described as follows in *Chart 12*:

Chart 12

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
A defined set of key performance indicators for the institution	75.0%	6
Profile of the student population (e.g. age, gender, domicile; level, mode and subject of study)	87.5%	7
Student progression, success and drop-out rates	100,0%	8
Students' satisfaction with their programmes	87.5%	7
Learning resources and student support available	75.0%	6
Indicators of graduates' employability	87.5%	7
Indicators of internationalisation of the institution	87.5%	7
HEIs that answered the question		8
HEIs that skipped question		3

In that, institutions have a formal mechanism for analyzing and using data collected for IQA (100%). Examples range as follows:

1. In the recent year the collected data have been used for complete revision and improvement of several BA and MA programs in economics, music and visual arts.
2. One HEI has developed and implemented a university-wide information system that includes those following subsystems: "Student status", "Student accession process", "Student fees", "Electronic exchange of documents", "e-library" and "Centre for distance learning". All subsystems are web-based and provide optimal free access to the service and continuously update and design and build new modules. "Student Status" module provides 24-hour online access for students to record their student status, curriculum, results of exams and awarded credits, information about fees, the possibility of applying for administrative service online, check the status of applications and their outcome. A Careers Center has been created which provides the following services - full profile and data about the alumni, students and employers; the possibility of web application implemented work and training; web-based assistant; News - events; the possibility of performing web surveys. An integrated information system for management, control and administration has been implemented which includes the following modules: Module "College students," Module "Students", Module "Curriculum", Module "Teachers", Module "Training schedule", Module "Finance", Intranet and software which allows online access to the electronic library catalogue as well as cooperation and exchange of

records with other libraries. Increased number of communication channels for students and teachers - telephones, e-mails, university web portal, Skype. With the creation of university profiles across various platforms the possibilities to use social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter, which provides a 24-hour online exchange of information and user feedback has been achieved. Based on the collected data and students feedback and users new professional fields, subjects and new forms of trainings are considered and academic records are updated.

3. The data collected are analyzed by sociologists and the reports compiled are given to the heads of faculties. The Faculty Boards discuss the results of the analyses and make a managerial decision about changes in work organization, curricula, or whatever else might be necessary. Such reports and analyses are done both for the students in every bachelor's and master's degree programs and for the work of some lecturers in particular university disciplines (using a survey on student satisfaction with a particular lecturer's work) These data are used for creating lecturers' profiles which are necessary for the attestation of a given lecturer or for their carrier development.
4. The information gathered as a result of the questionnaires for each teacher is presented to the teacher, to the head of department and to the dean. If the results are unsatisfactory, the student opinion is being discussed at the Department Council meeting and at the Faculty Council meeting and the respective measures are taken.
5. As an integral element of the implemented quality management system, a reliable basis for effective management decisions on issues related to the quality of teaching and learning: decisions related to program duration; foreign language teaching; design of programs in foreign languages; distance learning, etc. To support the work of the Attestation Commissions since teachers' individual results from surveys form part of the complex assessment of teachers' attestation according to Art. 57, para 2, 5 of Bulgarian Higher Education Act.
6. Evaluating the fulfilling the year plans from strategic plan of the university on the base of key performance indicators using profile of students and students satisfaction surveys when developing agenda for improvements and developing new programs and courses.
7. When procedures for quality evaluation are conducted, recommendations are formulated with the purpose of addressing the weaknesses in the educational process.

3.8. ***ESG 1.8: Public information***

Public information is ensured in the following way:

- Full information about programs offered, including admission criteria, full curricula, syllabuses with all names and contact details, reading lists, intended learning outcomes, qualifications awarded and student assessment procedures (87.5%);
- Only selected information about programs offered (12.5%).

As far as national context is concerned, provision of information is regulated by the law. Institutions are obliged to provide any kind of information to an interested party.

3.9. ***ESG 1.9: On-going monitoring and periodic review of programs***

Institutions have in place procedures for ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programs (87.5%), as it can be seen in the following chart:

Chart 13

Answer Options	In no field of study	In some fields of study	In most fields of study	In all fields of study	Rating Average	Response Count
Does your institution have in place (a) procedure(s) for on-going monitoring and periodic review of programs?	0	0	1	7	3.88	8
HEIs that answered the question						8
HEIs that skipped question						3

This is regulated by the Higher Education Act. External evaluation reviews are conducted by NEAA periodically at institutional and program level. In addition, post-accreditation monitoring is carried out by NEAA on a regular basis.

For example, information is used as follows:

1. The data collected through the HEI's program monitoring that has led to complete revision and improvement of BA and MA programs in economics, music and visual arts
2. Academic records are periodically updated as a result of:
 - Changes in the regulations of higher education;
 - Needs and interests of students;
 - Declared interests of consumers;
 - Requirements of national and European labor market;
 - Synchronization of training with modern trends in European and global higher education.

The most dynamic elements of academic records are programs and training tools that provide training courses to the curriculum. In order to be updated reviews of professional aptitude obtained by employers to our alumni and student feedback are provided. Surveys are conducted regularly among students with questionnaires including questions related to academic records - for the sequence of disciplines in the curriculum and its implementation. Updating of curricula and educational programs is done in order to include such subjects or thematic units, forms of training, which would provide the opportunity for the university's graduates to be more competitive in the labor market. Based on the information gathered and expressed interest from consumers of personnel regular update of topics for theses, master's theses and dissertation research are done which are available to students. The academic leadership of the HEI is responsible for engagement in the management of the training that is adequate to the requirements of national and international educational space and labor market. An International Board of academic entrepreneurship has been created acting as the chief consultant of the Dean in the direction education-science-business.

3. At the quality assurance system of one of the HEIs there are developed mechanisms for assuring education quality. They provide a monitoring of curriculums once a year. A Calendar of Quality Activities is created, whereby the faculties must plan their activities of education assurance. Monitoring of curriculums is done firstly at departments. It is expected from the teaching staff to do annual reviews of teaching material and to improve it.

Moreover there are surveys on students. The results from those questionnaires are used for planning changes in teaching material.

4. The evidence collected through the program monitoring is analyzed at meetings of the departments and faculties and if necessary changes are made. After that they are approved by the Academic Council.

5. An internal integrated information system has been developed and implemented that allows immediate access to established information data bases from registration, admission, enrollment and current student status throughout the period of study and supportive administrative services to graduation. The questionnaires have been updated and included in the university information system as electronic and web-based records on the Internet. The University has expanded partnership with external stakeholders (employers and other partners) through activities undertaken by the established Career center. Procedures for recruitment and assessment of teaching staff have been updated.

6. Results from different reviews are base for:

- Proposals for modernization of the content of curricula;
- Proposals for rethinking and introducing new methods of teaching and evaluation;
- Proposals for area of improvement for the faculty (during the procedure of faculty evaluation).

7. Both students and employers are noticeably interested in the programs. Their opinion is taken into account, as existing programs are improved and new ones are developed.

3.10 ESG 1.10: Cyclical external quality assurance

External quality assurance procedures support institutions in their effort to maintain quality. Audits at institutional and program level are conducted every 5 years (provisions in Chapter 10 of Bulgarian Higher Education Act). Financial audits are conducted by the responsible governmental bodies on a regular basis. Audits are taken into account in SERs prepared by institutions. HEIs involve students in program monitoring and review procedures. This can be described as follows:

- Involved as full members of bodies responsible for program monitoring and / or review (50%);
- Fill in course evaluation surveys (75%);
- Regularly receive feedback on findings from course evaluation surveys (37%);
- Are regularly informed about measures to be taken as a result of course evaluation surveys (37%);
- Propose measures to improve curricula and teaching/learning methods (75%).

External stakeholders are involved in program reviews. They:

- Are involved as full members of bodies responsible for program monitoring and / or review (in some fields of study 50%);
- Are involved as members of advisory / consultative bodies (in all fields of study 75%);
- Provide feedback on the knowledge, skills and competences of graduates employed (in all fields of study 75%).

External QA provided by NEAA supports and encourages development (88%). Issues are related to the need to streamline the EQA system for example by creating an integrated system of institutional and program accreditation. This required legislative changes which have been proposed by NEAA.

Furthermore, external QA can be enhanced as follows (based on the opinion of responding HEIs):

1. The external evaluation methodology of Bulgarian NEAA is too complicated, bureaucratic and slow. It needs to be more simple and clear.
2. Procedures for institutional and program accreditation are severe. The information is duplicated in both procedures and sometimes contradicts itself. The requirement to submit information for institutional and program accreditation one year in advance leads to its expiration at the time of the procedure and results in additional effort on both sides to provide timely and objective information. Repetition of the information required by different criteria. Prevalence of quantitative to qualitative indicators to assess some of the criteria. In the criteria system requirements are included that are not adequate to the established practice in the Bulgarian higher education space. Some indicators of the criteria system lead to disadvantage for universities, which are with different form of ownership - public and private.
3. It is necessary that the participants in the expert groups for accreditation are constantly qualified in order to analyze and report the accreditation criteria and indicators in a proper way and submit an objective final result. It is recommended to establish constant expert groups for accreditation whose members are not university teachers in order to avoid conflict of interests. It is recommended to involve foreign participants in the expert groups
4. The new Criteria for institutional accreditation, Criteria for program accreditation of professional field and programs from regulated professions; Criteria for program accreditation of doctoral programs and criteria for assessing a program in distance form of learning in a professional field that have been approved by the Accreditation Council of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency in the period 2011-2013 are quite detailed, wide-ranging and incorporate in itself standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.
5. External QA can be improved:
 - 5.1 By integrating the program and institutional accreditation;
 - 5.2 By improving the balance between quantitative and qualitative indicators;
 - 5.3 By carefully analyzing tendency for underestimating the teaching process in favor of research and introducing equally weighted measuring proportion, having in mind the importance of teaching and different missions of the educational institutions.
6. National software application can be introduced with the purpose of optimizing the implementation of accreditation procedures. This will lead to:
 - Providing conditions for faster data collection for the accreditation procedures and a more effective communication between the evaluated institution and the national evaluation agency, focused on the evaluation objects and criteria;
 - Shortening the time for conducting the accreditation procedures;
 - Automated evaluation of some indicators of the criteria systems, which will minimize the possibility of errors.

3.11 ***Most difficult ESG in Part 1***

In this respect, HEIs report a range of issues. The majority of institutions do not find difficulties in understanding and implementing the standards in Part 1 of ESG (62.5%). Needs reported for clarifications of standards (Part 1 of ESG) have to do with 4 standards as follows:

- ESG 1.4 Student admission (12.5%)
- ESG 1.5 Teaching staff (12.5%)
- ESG 1.8 Public information (12.5%)

- ESG 1.10 Cyclical external QA (12.5%)

For more clearness, the correlation can be seen in *Chart 14*:

Chart 14

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	0%	0
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	0%	0
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	0%	0
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	12.5%	1
1.5 Teaching staff	12.5%	1
1.6 Learning resources and student support	0%	0
1.7 Information management	0%	0
1.8 Public information	12.5%	1
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programs	0%	0
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	12.5%	1
None	62.5%	5
HEIs that answered the question		8
HEIs that skipped question		3

Further discussions with respondents have revealed a need for clarification of standard 1.3 Student-centered learning. Interviewees inform that this standard should be made clear with regard to current pedagogy (e.g. post-method condition), educational ideology (e.g. constructivism), educational sociology (e.g. cooperation principle), etc.

65 % of the HEIs do not find difficulties in integrating the new standards for IQA in their local IQA systems.

In line with the abovementioned concerns HEIs report that they find difficult to apply in their IQA systems the following IQA standards:

- ESG 1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment (12.5%)
- ESG 1.5 Teaching staff (12.5%)
- ESG 1.6 Learning resources (25%)
- ESG 1.8 Public information (12.5%).

Chart 15 figures that responses below:

Chart 15

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	0%	0
1.2 Design and approval of programs	0%	0
1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment	12.5%	1
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	0%	0
1.5 Teaching staff	12.5%	1
1.6 Learning resources and student support	25.0%	2
1.7 Information management	0%	0
1.8 Public information	12.5%	1
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programs	12.5%	1
None	62.5%	5
<i>HEIs that answered the question</i>		8
<i>HEIs that skipped question</i>		3

4. CONCLUSIONS

- *IQA General:*

Bulgaria's NEAA has recently been evaluated as fully compliant with the majority of ESGs (substantially compliant with a small number of standards). Interest in implementation of ESGs in IQA is attested by the participation and further involvement in the work of ENQA's IQA Group. Another proof is the participation of NEAA in the QPP Project of ENQA in which good practices at European level were analyzed.

NEAA has developed a system of evaluation and accreditation criteria based on the classical notion of tertiary education being based on the union of teaching/learning and research. It is fully in line with ESG. Thus NEAA integrates traditional educational values and modern innovative issues in QA in EHEA.

- *ESG: Progress made*

Progress made in the implementation of ESG is considerable. Half of the institutions surveyed report using ESG in one way or another. An aspect of improvement is to support institutions in this direction at national and European level.

- *ESG: Accents*

Institutions have IQA systems in place which function uniformly for all faculties/units. At faculty and department levels practices vary. Partial lack of consistency is due to inexperience.

Students are involved systematically in IQA activity (e.g. in expert groups and in bodies of the agency) and student-centered learning in theory is fairly-well understood. The actual implementation of this range of issues is to be addressed more fully in the future.

External stakeholders are involved in IQA. This is an ongoing process and NEAA has made progress in this respect. International experts are also involved in accreditation procedures.

- *ESG: Standards which are not entirely clear*

Respondents have expressed a need for clarification of standard 1.3 Student-centered learning. Interviewees inform that this standard should be made clear with regard to current pedagogy

(e.g. the post-method condition), educational ideology (e.g. constructivism), educational sociology (e.g. the cooperation principle), etc.

HEIs do not find difficulties in integrating the new standards for IQA in their IQA systems at local level. In line with the abovementioned concerns, HEIs report that they find relative difficulty in applying the following 4 IQA standards in their IQA systems:

- ESG 1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment (13%)
 - ESG 1.5 Teaching staff (13%)
 - ESG 1.6 Learning resources (25%)
 - ESG 1.8 Public information (13%)
- *Agency's methodology: Any conclusions concerning possible improvements in the agency's methodology for the assessment of IQA;*

HEIs report the need for support in the area of IQA at national and international level. This can be accomplished by provision of information, consultation and participation of all those involved (the stakeholders). For example support can be provided by publishing a manual on IQA in ESG. It should contain descriptions of proven practices backed up by relevant theory. The manual should be available in the national language.