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SOCIAL DIMENSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL QA

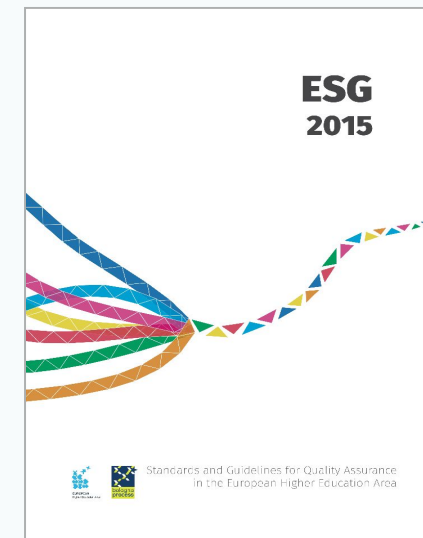
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SOCIAL DIMENSION OF HE IN THE ESG

Keep in mind:

- The ESG are the agreed framework for QA of HE in the EHEA
- The ESG apply to learning and teaching, including the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation
- The ESG are generic in order to apply to all forms of provision and contexts
- The Standards set out agreed and accepted practice
- The Guidelines describe how standards might be implemented, which will vary depending on the context



SOCIAL DIMENSION IN THE ESG

For HEIs

Standard 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Guidelines state that the policy should support ‘guarding against intolerance of any kind or discrimination’

SOCIAL DIMENSION IN THE ESG

For HEIs

Standard 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Covers the principle of students taking an active role in their learning process. In the guidelines this includes respecting and attending to ‘the diversity of students and their needs’ and for assessment to ‘take into account mitigating circumstances’.

SOCIAL DIMENSION IN THE ESG

For HEIs

Standard 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

The guidelines cover the ‘**recognition of informal and non-formal learning**’

SOCIAL DIMENSION IN THE ESG

For HEIs

Standard 1.6 Learning resources and student support

The standards covers various forms of learning support and ensuring that this is adequately resourced. The guidelines make specific reference to the ‘needs of a diverse student population, including students with disabilities (as well as mature, part-time, employed and international students)’.

SOCIAL DIMENSION IN THE ESG

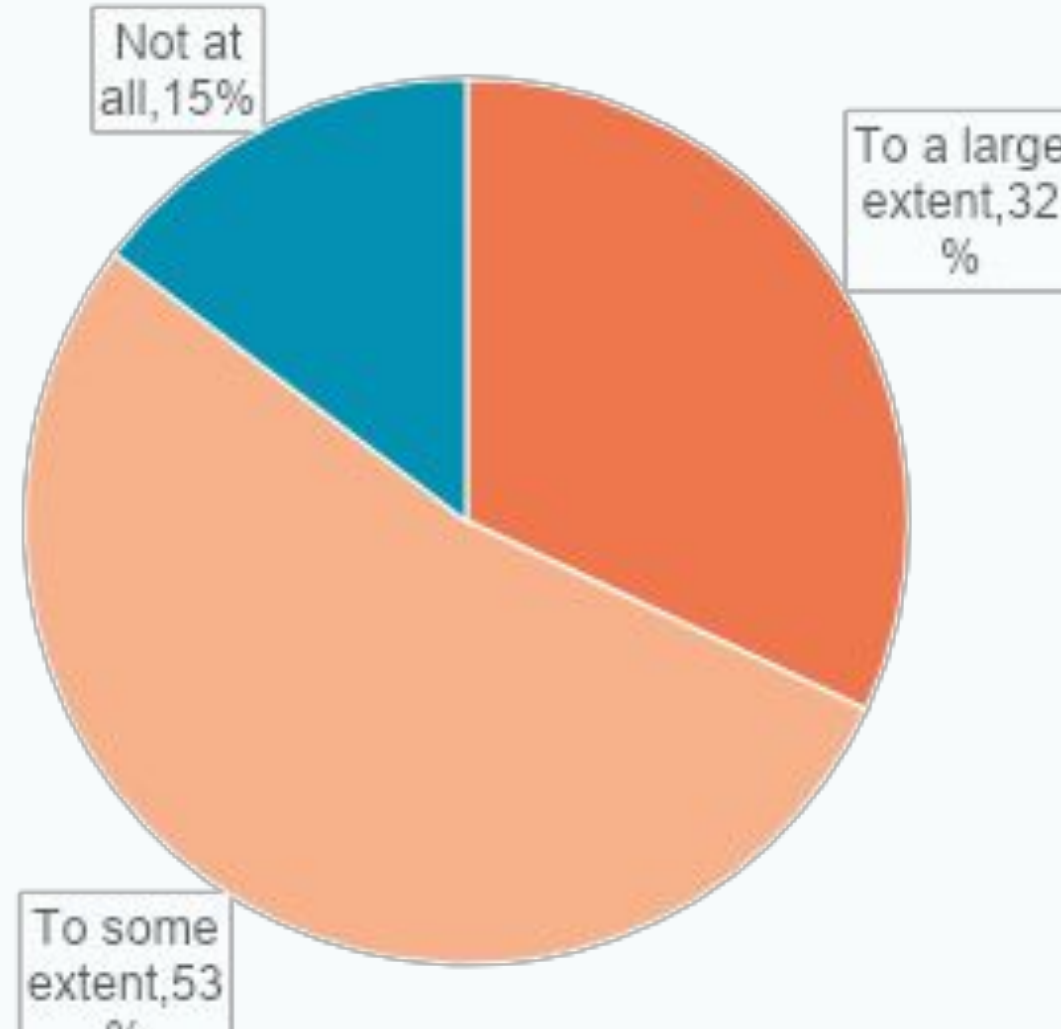
For QA agencies

Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part I of the ESG.

EXISTING ACTION BY AGENCIES

Does your agency address social dimension of HE?



EXISTING ACTION BY AGENCIES

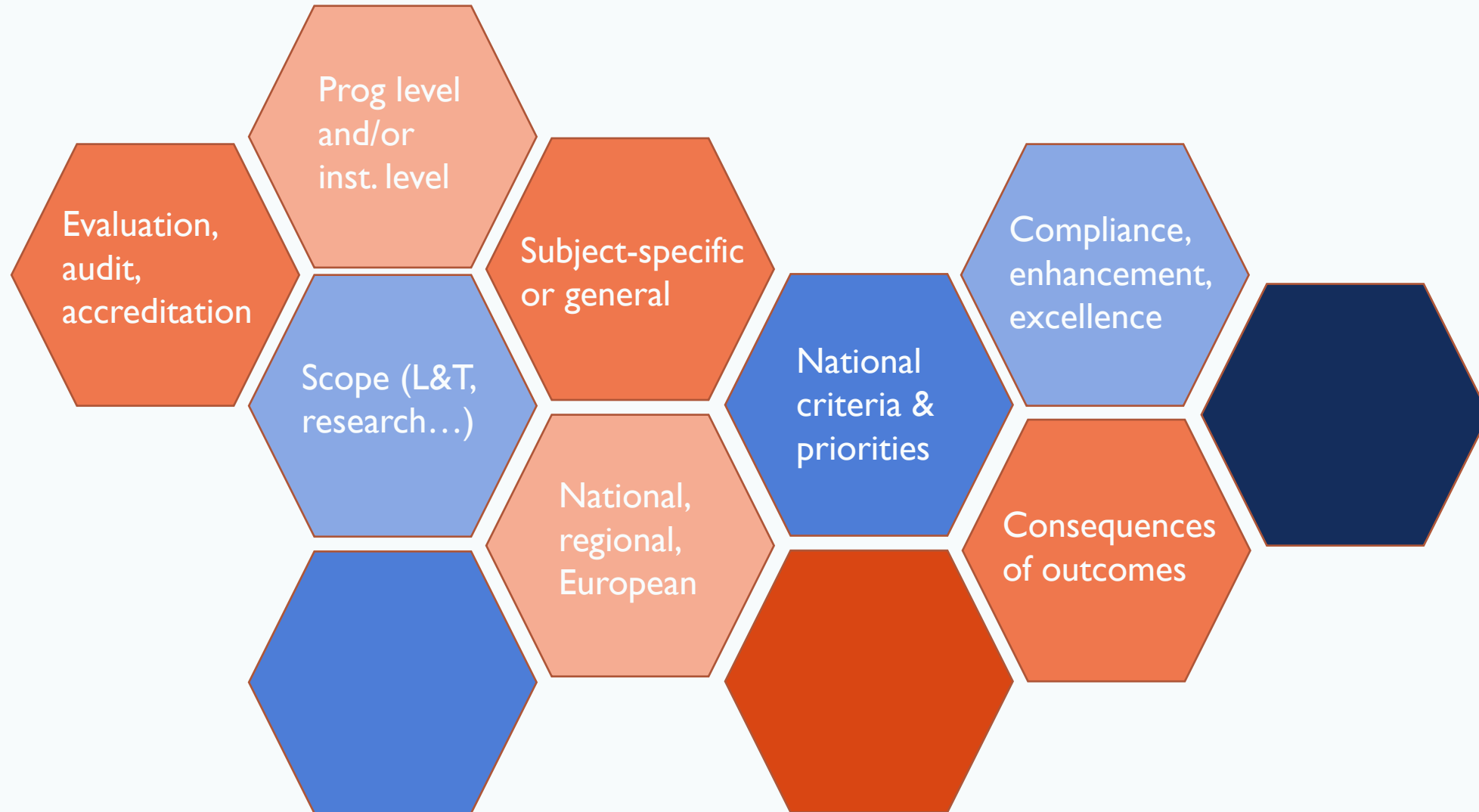
Aspects most commonly addressed

- Policies for students with disabilities
- Student wellbeing
- Completion rate
- Anti-discrimination policies
- Gender equality policies

Aspects least commonly addressed

- Involvement of disadvantaged groups in elaboration & monitoring of SD policies
- Training on inclusion and equity for students
- Training on inclusion and equity for staff
- Data collection on social dimension indicators
- Monitoring concrete targets on SD

DIVERSITY OF EXTERNAL QA LANDSCAPE



QA AGENCY ≠ NATIONAL HE SYSTEM

Expectations for QA agencies need to respect their

- Remit within the national system (if any)
- Operational independence
- Ability to maintain non-conflict of interest with HEIs that they evaluate

Some QA agencies have limited competence to address the social dimension in detail beyond the direct connection with learning and teaching.

PRINCIPLE 1, INDICATOR 5

Quality assurance agencies are required to monitor whether higher education institutions have social dimension strategies and policies (Eurydice, 2022).

- **Quality assurance agencies** have standards and criteria in their external evaluation procedures that check whether higher education institutions have social dimension strategies and policies.
- **Quality assurance agencies** raise the awareness of social dimension principles and guidelines among higher education institutions, **offer needs-based consultation** with the involvement of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff members.
- **Quality assurance agencies provide structured training** on social dimension in higher education to external reviewers engaged in external evaluations. This training should be delivered and co-created with underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff.

PRINCIPLE 2, INDICATOR 4

Quality assurance agencies address the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning in higher education in their external evaluation procedures (Eurydice, 2022).

- Quality assurance agencies have standards and criteria in their external evaluation procedures that check whether higher education institutions recognize prior non-formal and/or informal learning.
- Quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions work jointly on the recognition of prior non-formal and/or informal learning to prevent parallel and opposing procedures, delays, and extra costs for students.

PRINCIPLE 7, INDICATOR 3

Public authority issues guidelines to quality assurance agencies to consider whether social dimension is addressed in the mission and strategy of higher education institutions (Eurydice, 2022).

- The external quality assurance evaluations check whether diversity, equity and inclusion objectives are engrained into the learning and teaching, research, outreach, governance, and management of higher education institutions, and if there is a systematic monitoring in place at higher education institutions on the implementation of these objectives.
- Public authority supports the involvement of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students and staff in internal and external quality assurance procedures.
- Quality assurance agencies have standards and criteria in their external evaluation procedures that check whether higher education institutions offer training on diversity, equity or inclusion to academic and administrative staff and students.

UNINTENDED SIDE EFFECTS

- EHEA Ministers have committed to allowing QA agencies to operate across borders (and many already do) and to allowing HEIs to choose any EQAR-registered agency (also for QA of joint programmes)
- Primary obstacle for this is overly detailed national legislation/criteria
- External QA requirements that are specific to implementation of national policies risk becoming an obstacle for cross-border QA

GENERAL REFLECTIONS

Purpose of indicators:

- Requirements? Guidance? Tool for monitoring and/or mapping?

Terminology for explanatory descriptors/sub-indicators:

- Could be rephrased as guidance, or reflective questions
- Frame them as practical support rather than prescriptive requirements

Number of indicators:

- High number stifles innovation and risks loss of focus, box-ticking, lack of consideration of workload

KEY MESSAGES

- Recognising the diversity of QA agencies and their remit
- Keep in mind the object of external QA (HEI/programme, not the HE system)
- What should be regulated and monitored, at what level, and by who?
- Balance between formal requirements and 'soft' approaches
- Some agencies have already found ways to address the social dimension



THANK YOU

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