



FINHEEC

Principles and Practice of Student Engagement in Quality Assurance: ENQA's Perspectives and Finnish Example

22.7.2013 Tokyo

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WHY? - Conceptual changes

- ❑ Learning has replaced teaching as the preferred education paradigm.
- ❑ Student is perceived as the creator of knowledge.
- ❑ The responsibility of learning, including evaluating his or her learning process, is transferred to the student.
- ❑ Education also aims at personal development. Inclusion, participation and ability to critically assess oneself, are necessary prerequisites for the achievement of transferable skills and personal development.
- ❑ Higher education contributes to the development of a democratic society => input is sought from everyone involved.
- ❑ Knowledge Society: future higher education has been described as recurring, situational and initiated by students, challenging institutional control of education and affecting the evaluation of education.



ENQA's Perspectives

ENQA – the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ESG – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

The strategy, policy and procedures for **internal QA of institution** should include a role for students. The **quality assurance of programmes and awards** are expected to include participation of students. **External review processes** should include participation of students and also, the **external assessment group of experts** should include, as appropriate, a student member. The expert panel of ENQA coordinated **external reviews of member agency** will always include a student member, proposed by the European Students' Union (ESU).



Classification of student participation

1. Student as an Information provider
2. Student as an Actor
3. Student as an Expert
4. Student as a Partner



History

How did Finnish Students become such important players in Higher education?



National Student union - SYL

- National Union of University Students in Finland (SYL) was established in 1921 by 2 local student unions.
- Represented Finnish students at international meetings.
- Already at the 1930's SYL organised **international student and trainee exchange** and had active co-operation with its neighbouring countries.
- Until the WWII international activities were the major priority in SYL but afterwards **social welfare** and **education politics** became more important. SYL has always been actively involved and taken initiative in all matters concerning students and education, for example student health services, housing, study support and grant system, environmental issues and equality.
- After the WWII a new, global student activism developed. SYL was one of the founding members of the International Union of Students, IUS.



Cold War division in the global scene:

- Two ideologies in the global student activism: **Communist** movement and idea of a **non-political** international agency which would provide **concrete services** to the students of various countries.
- SYL resigned the IUS after the Hungarian Uprising in 1956 (Soviet forces invaded Budapest) and joined the International Student Conference (ISC), the opposing student organization.
- In 1967 it was found out that the CIA had indirectly funded the ISC and recruited students from the United States National Student Association (USNSA) to actively oppose Communism in the IUS.
- The dissolution of the ISC owing to lack of funds became a reality in 1969. Once again, the IUS was the only world-wide student organization.



Revolutionary tripartite system

- In the 1960's students in Finland begin to demand a more significant role in the decision-making of their universities.
- Representatives of professors, students and other staff at all decision making bodies at all levels in Finnish Universities.
- Arrangement was enshrined in the University Act.
- All students automatically become members of their local student union and the unions of institutions are the members of SYL. The local student union is responsible for selecting student representatives to participate in all official decision-making bodies in a university. The position of the student unions is defined in the University Act.
- Student associations at the subject level.
- University is a scientific community: Students are seen more as novice members in the academy than pupils taking classes.



European development



Beginnings

- ESU was founded in 1982 by seven national unions of students was called WESIB, the West European Student Information Bureau.
- The idea of a **non-political international information sharing agency** which would provide concrete services to the students of various countries characterises the beginning of ESU.
- The political **changes in Eastern Europe** at the end of the 1980s affected WESIB as well, as it opened up itself to national unions of students from the former east.
- In February 1990, WESIB dropped the “W” to become the European Student Information Bureau (ESIB).



European Integration and Bologna process

- ESIB to ESU changed from just an information sharing organisation into to a political organisation that represents the **views and interests of students**.
- Today the European Students' Union (ESU) is the umbrella organisation of 47 national unions of students' from 39 European countries.
- ESU promotes and represents the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of 11 million students to all key European decision-making bodies: the European Union, Council of Europe, UNESCO and the Bologna Follow Up Group.
- ESU is a professional advocacy and capacity building organisation that is influential and recognised as an important stakeholder at the European and international level.



ESU's aims and activities

- ESU aims to ensure and strengthen **students' participation** and to **increase the student input into higher education policy** and **decision making** at the local, national and European level.
- ESU promotes a higher education system based on the values of **quality**, **equity** and **accessibility** for all.
- ESU as a **source of expertise** on higher education policy at all institutional levels and to build links and foster an exchange of information, ideas and experiences among students and student platforms at a regional and global level.



Strengths and Challenges of student involvement



Strengths of student involvement

- **Expertise:** Students represent the expertise of studies and student matters which cannot be replaced with other expertise in the planning and implementation of the evaluations.
- **Credibility:** The strong role of the students gives the evaluations credibility, not only in the eyes of the staff, but also in the eyes of students.
- **Impact:** By participating in the evaluations, the students have an opportunity to influence the development of education. When the evaluation has been completed, the students have a role in promoting the results of the evaluations.



More strengths:

- **Partnership in the academic community:** Participation in the evaluations strengthens the student role as an equal member in the academic community.
- **Learning process:** Participation in the national evaluation projects provides the students with a unique opportunity to enhance their individual and collective competence. Although the evaluations often demand hard work, the students and student unions participating in them have been very satisfied with the experience.



Challenges of student involvement

- **Turnover and training:** Most students spend only two to three years working for student unions. Continuing need to train new students in the evaluation tasks.
- **Motivation and reward:** Sometimes students need to be motivated to take part in the self-evaluation processes.
- **Representativeness:** Students are not a homogeneous group but have many views.
- **Limited perspective:** Students has less experience in education than education professionals and others evaluation team members.



Thank you for your attention!

