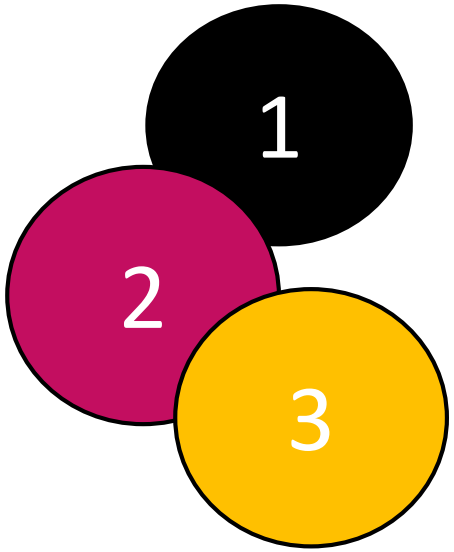
Institutional quality assurance frameworks, strategic development and the governance of internal quality assurance

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IEGULDĪJUMS TAVĀ NĀKOTNĒ

Outline

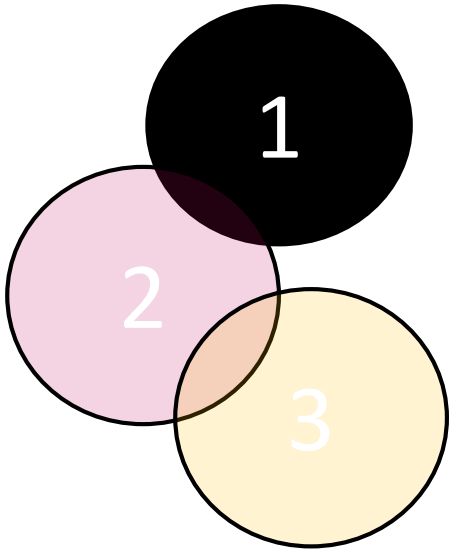


Introduction: from programme accreditation to institutional review

Developing an efficient internal quality assurance system (IQAS)

Questions from previous seminar

Outline



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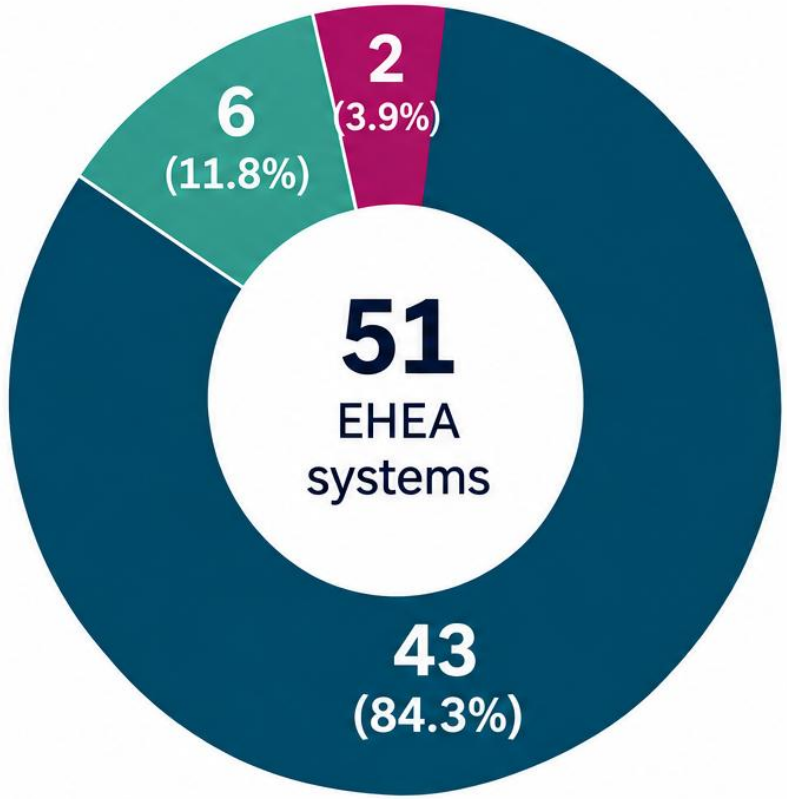
Questions from previous seminar

Setting the context

- A common framework for QA in EHEA, but not a common accreditation model;
- The ESG establish shared principles, while national systems continue to differ significantly;
- Part I: Standards and guidelines for higher education institutions;
- External programme accreditation - direct scrutiny of programme quality. However, where internal QA is well developed, repeated programme evaluations may duplicate efforts, consume resources and limit institutional responsibility;
- The institutions need to have reliable mechanisms to assure that programmes are consistently **designed, monitored, reviewed and improved.**



External Quality Assurance in the EHEA:
Most Systems Combine Institutional and Programme-level Reviews



Both institutional and programme-level QA	**43** (84.3%)
Institutional-level QA only	**6** (11.8%)
Programme-level QA only	**2** (3.9%)
Total	**51** (100%)

Source: EQAR / IMINQA (2023), based on EQAR Knowledge Base and DEQAR data (December 2022).
Classification refers to mandatory external QA requirements, not necessarily accreditation.

AEQES – An Illustrative Case

A gradual transition to an external QA system focused at institutional level

Diagram showing the development of the QA model in the WBF



Source: AEQES Self-evaluation Report (2026). https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/20260626-SAR-AEQES-English.pdf?utm

Programme-based External QA vs Institution-centred External QA

Dimension	Programme-based External QA	Institution-centred External QA
Unit of assessment	Individual study programme or study field	Institution and the effectiveness of its IQAS
External review	External agency directly evaluates individual programmes or study fields	The institution demonstrates its capacity to systematically assure the quality of all its programmes.
Programme monitoring	Often organised around external accreditation cycles	Regular internal responsibility, independent of external evaluation cycles
Decision-making	Primary focus on programme management and programme-level decision-making bodies	Clear connections between programme, faculty and institution-level decision-making
Data and evidence	Data collected and analysed primarily at programme level	Integrated information enabling analysis and decision-making across programmes, faculties and the institution
Risk management	Risks primarily identified and addressed at programme level	Systematic identification and management of risks across programmes, faculties and delivery locations
Stakeholder engagement	Participation in programme design, evaluation and improvement	Stakeholder contributions linked to programme-level and institution-wide decisions
Resources	Adequacy considered for a programme or field	Demonstrate strategic allocation, sustainability and responsiveness to quality evidence

WHAT DOES THE EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW EXAMINE?

HOW DO YOU MAKE SURE THAT…..?

INSTITUTIONAL IQAS

DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES



Evidence of actual implementation

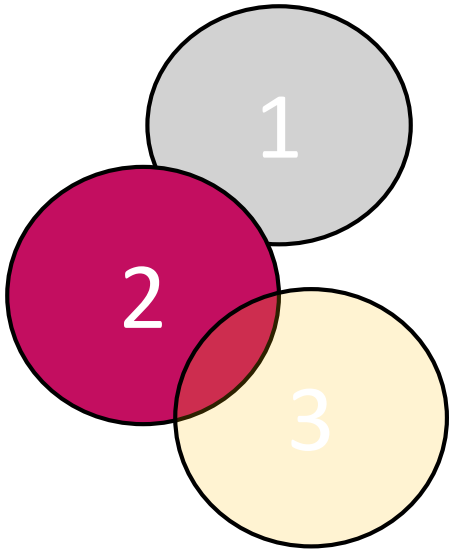
Triangulate evidence with stakeholders.

- QA policy
- Design, approval, monitoring, review of programmes
- Student Support and engagement
- Student "life cycle"
- Learning resources
- Competence of the staff
- Meaningful use of data and transparency
- Follow-up

THE PANEL SPEAKS WITH STAKEHOLDERS:

Management | Teaching staff | Students | Employers | …

Outline



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3 practical recommendations for developing an efficient IQAS (universities)

1. Establish a common institutional QA framework while allowing disciplinary flexibility.

2. Map quality-related decisions and responsibilities across institutional levels.

3. Use one institutional quality calendar to align programme review, faculty planning, resource allocation and strategic monitoring.

1. Establish a common institutional QA framework while allowing disciplinary flexibility.

Define institution-wide minimum requirements for programme monitoring, periodic review, student participation, data management and follow-up, while allowing faculties to adapt their methods to disciplinary needs.

- E.g. different study fields: A medical faculty (clinical placements, supervision,…); an engineering faculty (laboratory facilities, industry collaboration,…); a faculty of humanities (research-based teaching, critical thinking,…). All faculties regularly evaluate the quality of their programmes, use relevant evidence, involve students and other stakeholders, and take action when improvements are needed;
- E.g. student participation is required but mechanisms can differ (programme committees with student representatives, regular student–staff meetings, focus groups, structured feedback discussions,…);
- E.g. data management. The university should agree on common definitions of key indicators, such as retention, dropout, completion rates; individual faculties should be free to introduce additional indicators relevant to their disciplines. They must collect a minimum set of comparable information, follow an agreed review cycle and report their findings and improvement actions through a common institutional framework.

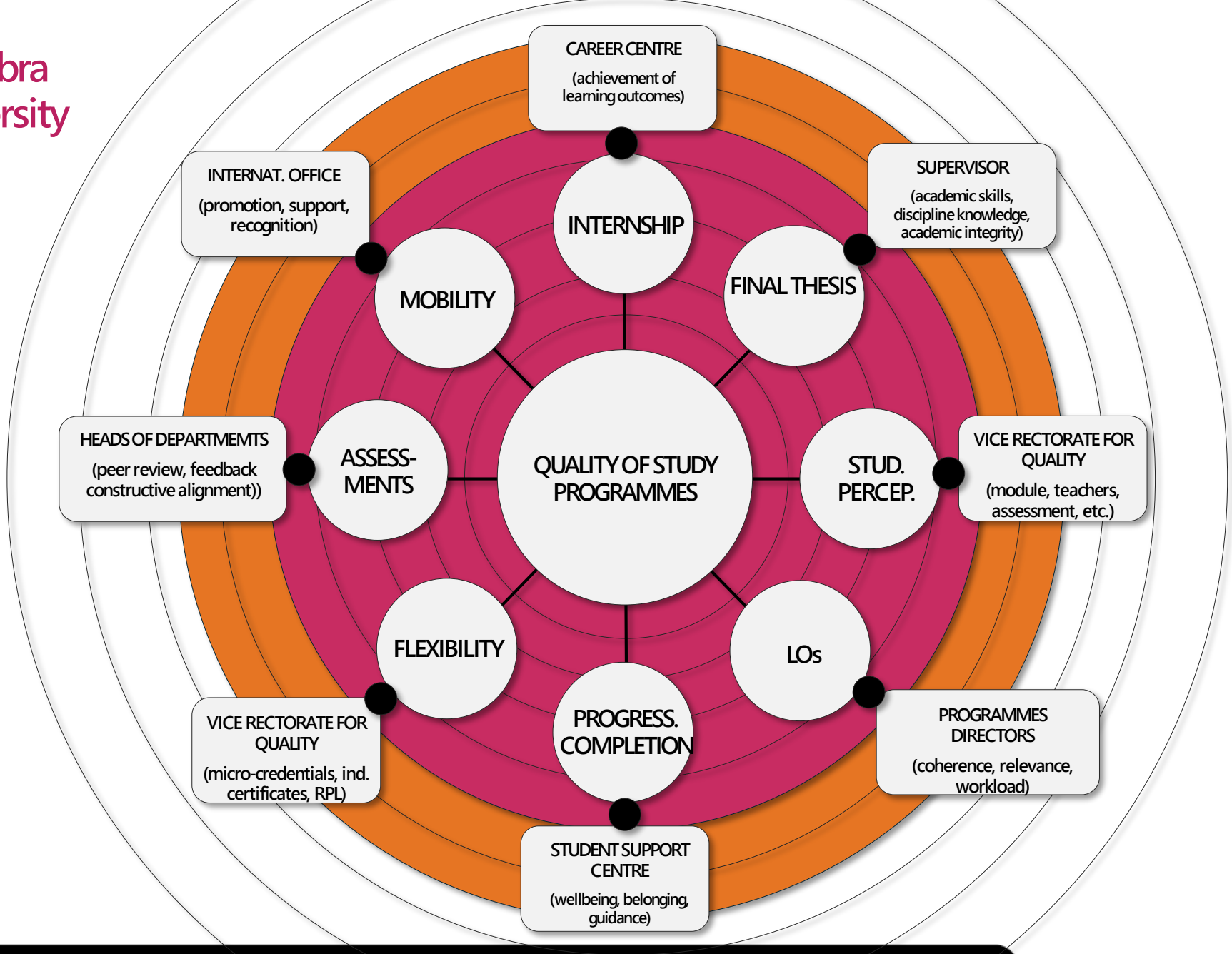
2. Map quality-related decisions and responsibilities across institutional levels.

Clearly define who identifies quality issues, who has the authority to decide, who implements improvements and who evaluates their effectiveness. Establish transparent reporting and escalation mechanisms between programmes, faculties and central university management.

Quality-related decision	Initiation and analysis	Decision-making authority	Implementation and follow-up
Revision of course content	Programme director	Quality Committee	Programme director
Major curriculum revision	Programme committee	Senate	Programme director
Response to high dropout rates	Quality Committee	Senate	Student support services
Assessment policy	Quality Committee	Senate	Teaching staff
Resources for student support	Faculty management	Responsible budget authority	Student support services
Student survey feedback	Institutional QA office	Quality Committee	Teachers/ Institutional QA office

Note: Illustrative allocation of responsibilities.

Example: Algebra Bernays University



3 Integrated Institutional Quality Calendar

Use one institutional quality calendar to align programme review, faculty planning, resource allocation and strategic monitoring.

JUL–SEP

1

Department planning

- Standard templates and common data sets
- Aligned with institutional strategy and annual action plans

FEEDS INTO

Approved departmental plans

OCT–DEC

2

Teaching & engagement

- Joint Welcome Day, International Students Day,…
- First student survey after midterm exams

FEEDS INTO

Early student feedback and evidence for mid-year adjustments

JAN–MAR

3

Programme monitoring

- Analyse student survey results
- Review progression, completion, feedback and other KPIs

FEEDS INTO

Identified strengths, risks and proposed programme improvements

APR–JUN

4

Review & action planning

- Departments discuss findings
- Define improvement actions and resource requests

FEEDS INTO

Agreed improvement priorities, actions and resource implications

JUN–JUL

5

Institutional reporting

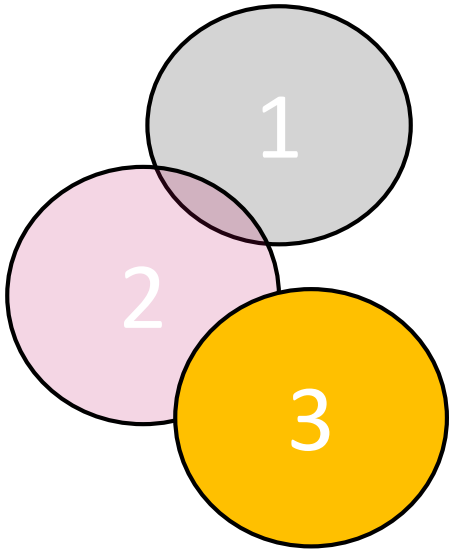
- Consolidate quality findings across programmes and departments
- Annual analysis and follow-up on action plans

FEEDS INTO

Evidence for strategic monitoring and the next planning cycle

Illustrative annual cycle.

Outline



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Questions from previous seminar – to sum up

Implications for universities: Institutional Accreditation, Frameworks, and HEI Diversity

✓ *How can existing IQAS processes be integrated into institutional accreditation, and what elements should be kept, merged, or transformed? How can institutions avoid losing critical information and focus on the study programme and study field levels during institutional evaluation?*

- **Keep effective programme-level** monitoring, periodic reviews, student participation and disciplinary-specific QA practices.
- **Merge overlapping** procedures, duplicated reporting requirements, fragmented data collection and parallel QA structures where they add little value.
- **Transform programme-focused** QA into an integrated institutional framework with common minimum requirements, shared data definitions and coordinated monitoring.
- **Clarify responsibilities** and define how quality-related decisions move between programmes, faculties and central university management.
- **Connect programme** reviews and faculty-level findings with **institutional** strategic planning, resource allocation and improvement priorities.
- **Show** how the university identifies institution-wide challenges, makes decisions and monitors the impact of improvements.

Implications for universities: Institutional Accreditation, Frameworks, and HEI Diversity

✓ *How will experts account for HEI size, status (public vs. private), type, discipline focus, and governance model during evaluations?*

- Same quality requirements to all HEIs (in terms of standards), regardless of institutional characteristics but! **Context matters**: institutional mission, size, educational profile, resources and organisational complexity.
- Recognise differences in educational **objectives** (institutional strategy), **research** expectations (profile of institution), **professional** requirements (profile of study programmes) and learning **environments** (educational profile).
- All HEIs comply with appropriate **legal** requirements; assess the **effectiveness** and sustainability of governance and QA arrangements, regardless of the institution's ownership model. Assess whether responsibilities, decision-making processes and accountability mechanisms work effectively, rather than expecting identical structures.

Implications for universities: Institutional Accreditation, Frameworks, and HEI Diversity

- ✓ *Which quality management system models or standards (e.g., ESG, ISO, EFQM) should HEIs use as a foundation?*



Implications for universities: Institutional Accreditation, Frameworks, and HEI Diversity

✓ *Who should lead accreditation prep across studies, research, and lifelong learning, and how should working groups be structured?*

- The **Rector** (or designated Vice-Rector) leads the process, ensuring institutional ownership, alignment with wide strategic objectives and institution's profile.
- The **QA office** – coordination; methodology, evidence collection, documentation, timelines and consistency of reporting. Use common templates, data definitions and evidence requirements to prevent fragmented self-assessments.
- **Heads** of institutional units are responsible for studies, research, lifelong learning, student support and other relevant areas.
- Include **internal and external stakeholders**: faculty representatives, programme directors, administrative staff and students, ensuring that different perspectives are reflected. Hold joint meetings to identify cross-cutting issues, reconcile findings and develop an institution-wide assessment.

Implications for universities: Institutional Accreditation, Frameworks, and HEI Diversity

✓ What valuable lessons can be drawn from other countries' institutional accreditation experiences?

- **Greater autonomy, greater responsibility**: Institutions gain more freedom to manage programme quality but must take on more responsibility for systematic monitoring and improvement.
- Institutions need to organise rigorous **internal programme reviews** themselves, involving external experts, students, employers and other relevant stakeholders.
- **Greater flexibility for partnerships**: Strong institutional QA can facilitate joint programmes, European University Alliances and other transnational collaborations, although national regulatory requirements still apply.

Implications for universities: Quality Culture, Governance, and Change Management

✓ *How can HEIs foster a genuine quality culture where students, academic staff, and administration understand their roles and shared ownership? How can quality culture be nurtured during organizational change and effectively introduced to new staff members?*

- Consistent **leadership** commitment; **building** on good practices - it takes time to develop a genuine quality culture;
- Involvement of **stakeholders** in shaping common approaches, developing a shared understanding of quality; shared institutional goals and confidence that QA contributes to better learning and teaching.
- Transparent **communication** about how feedback has influenced decisions.
- Environment of **trust** and openness where weaknesses can be discussed constructively without fear of blame.
- **A genuine quality culture emerges when the commitment to quality becomes part of how people think, work and collaborate, rather than something they do only when preparing for external evaluation.**

Implications for universities: Quality Culture, Governance, and Change Management

✓ *How can a unified quality understanding be achieved in large or decentralized HEIs while respecting faculty autonomy?*

- Establish common **institutional requirements** and clearly defined responsibilities, while allowing faculties to adapt their approaches to disciplinary needs.
- **Regular communication**, shared data definitions, coordinated monitoring and joint discussions of quality-related findings can help develop a common understanding and sense of institutional responsibility.
- Faculty autonomy should be preserved in academic **decision-making**, but within a coherent **institutional framework** that ensures transparency, accountability and consistent quality expectations.
- The objective is consistency in quality standards and outcomes, not uniformity of procedures.

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