



Feedback on SERs by the expert committee

Subproject 12SUB03

Training HEI on IQA, 12 September 2012 (day 3/3)

Yerevan/The Hague, 26 June 2012

Review Self Evaluation Reports (SERs) Armenia Tertiary Level Institutes (TLI).

The panel received SERs and summaries of SERs by the following institutions:

- Armenian State Agrarian University (ASAU)
- Linguistic University
- Northern University
- State Engineering University of Armenia (SEUA)
- Yerevan Gladzor University
- Yerevan State Conservatory (YSC)
- Yerevan State Medical University (YSMU)
- Yerevan State University

These SERs have been reviewed by three experienced experts on Institutional Audits from the Netherlands and Flanders. In addition two NVAO employees also reviewed the SERs.

Eternal experts

- Klaas van Veen, associate professor ICLON Leiden;
- Jenny Brakels, senior policy advisor TU Delft;
- Paul Garré, director quality and education at Hogeschool-Universteit Brussel.

NVAO

- Irma Franssen, senior policy advisor NVAO;
- Frank Wamelink, senior policy advisor NVAO.

The experts have been asked to study the SERs (each SER by one expert) and to come up with general observations and three weak and three strong points on each SER. The results have been discussed during one session. The feedback on the SER given below is a report of this discussion.

Questions

Two questions have been answered in the review:

1. Does the SER provide sufficient information at an appropriate level for a committee to start its assessment?
2. What are the strong and weak points of the individual self evaluation reports? Report in September.

Ad 1. general remarks on the quality of the SERs

The first question resulted in several general remarks.

The main points are:

- Some SERs definitely need a revision on English
- Lack of a self critical approach/attitude
- Emphasis too much on vision, plans and future policy
- Affirmation of compliance is not substantiated by facts
- Formulate clear and realistic priorities
- Give more context on the institution and the process of writing of the SER

These points are elaborated below:

- The committee members want to emphasise that the SERs demonstrated a great willingness and drive to develop an appropriate internal quality assurance system.
- If it is the intention to include external experts, from abroad, these experts will need more information on the institution. There is however no need for extensive information on the institution. A factsheet and organisational chart will be sufficient.
- Provide the external experts also with clear definitions of the central concept in QA. Formulate clear and realistic priorities.
- Most of the SERs show that there is still lot of work to be done to implement the internal quality assurance system and to build acceptance and participation.
- The experts doubt if the time span for implementation of the quality assurance system will be sufficient.
- Development of a sustainable quality assurance system will take a considerable amount of time.
- A number of the SERs need revision on the English language. Argumentation is obscured by poor English, words and concepts seem to be inappropriately used, the intention of the author of the document is at moments very difficult to grasp.
- The most important data must be part of the text of the SERs.
- The emphasis is too much on vision and future plans. Factual information on the realisation is lacking. Peers will not be able to establish if the TLI complies with the standard.
- It might be helpful to start writing from what is in place.
- The argumentation should be concise and to the point. The SER should demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance. This starts with clarity of the objectives and a self critical analysis of their achievement, based on a condensed presentation of the analysis of results.
- Some of the SWOTs show the appropriate self-critical attitude and are a good example of how to reflect on the criteria. In some cases the SWOT clarifies the text. Sometimes it could be helpful to start with the SWOT, since it provides the sort of information that a committee member will be looking for.
- The tone of the SERs could be more sober emphasising matter-of-fact information.
- Present: what is in place, what is still needed, what has to be done and when that will be achieved.

- Be clear about what is lacking in relation to the standards. Committee members will consider it as an indication of an inappropriate quality assurance system if weaknesses seem to be hidden or not addressed. Good internal quality assurance starts with a self-critical attitude.
- Avoid verbose rhetoric, it will give the committee members the impression that the actual facts are not addressed. This will jeopardise a positive assessment by the committee of experts. Quality cannot be demonstrated by policy documents only!
- A good SER will direct the committee members in their assessment. Be clear on what the TLI intends to achieve, what are the goals? Demonstrate that these goals are in line with expectations of external stakeholders, the national qualification framework and other relevant standards. Do not forget to be clear about the specific context and difficulties that might arise from this context. Demonstrate that the institution is fit for purpose by the presentation of analysed and to the point results.
- Internal quality assurance systems, as presented in the SERs, seem to lack general support and participation of staff and students (and other stakeholders) within the institutions. This makes the internal quality assurance rather theoretical and technocratic. Quality culture also touches on shared values and concepts.
- In these situations the complexity of the instruments might hinder participation. Simple and straightforward principles and feedback mechanisms might help to increase the participation.
- The SER should be the result of an internal dialog on quality.
- Be realistic on what can be achieved within a certain period of time.
- Although most of the institutions established specific units dedicated to the internal quality assurance, the stage of development of internal feedback mechanisms differs widely. In some institutions the systematic and periodic evaluation of results is still lacking or meagre or just starting. These institutions will have serious problems to prove that the quality assurance is fully cyclical (PDCA).
- Units for quality assurance seem to be rather understaffed in some cases.
- Although it is important to define and describe working processes as a part of quality assurance, in some SERs the emphasis is too much on the presentation of a plethora of policy documents on all sorts of aspects. Any convincing arguments on a successful implementation are lacking.
- Pilots are not yet proof of a sustainable quality assurance system.
- Institutions do not demonstrate that they are in compliance with the appropriate level of the National Qualification Framework. Especially the requirements for the achievement of the master level (level 7) seemed to be not in place by several institutions.
- Some new concepts are avowed/affirmed: like student centred learning and intended learning outcomes, there is however very little indication that these concepts are assimilated in the design and development of the educational programmes and the delivery of teaching. Taking aboard of these concepts is important for the modernisation of education.
- There is little information on professional development and research and other academic activities of the teaching staff.
- If the concept of intended learning outcomes is adopted then there should also be a method to establish if they are achieved.

Additional remarks

- The reviewers found some of the standards not very clear. The assessment framework also results in redundant argumentation.
- Examples are: 1.3 which seems to be very similar to criterion 10: Internal Quality assurance. "achievement" might be replaced by "appropriateness" (in relation to recent developments in the context of the institution). 10.6 could be reformulated to match the intention of the ESG better: Institutions should provide up to date, impartial and objective information of these programmes.
- It is unclear to what extent the institutions implemented the two cycle: bachelor and master system. ECTS are adopted, but institutions are not clear on how to position a master programme.
- In the text in the SERs the perspective of the institution and the perspective of the programme mix.