



LEPL - National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement

Executive Summary

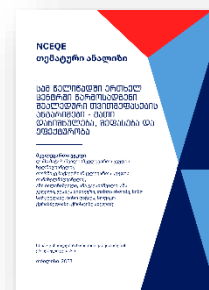
Thematic Analysis

3-year progress reports – their goal, evaluation and efficiency

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Rationale for the Thematic analysis

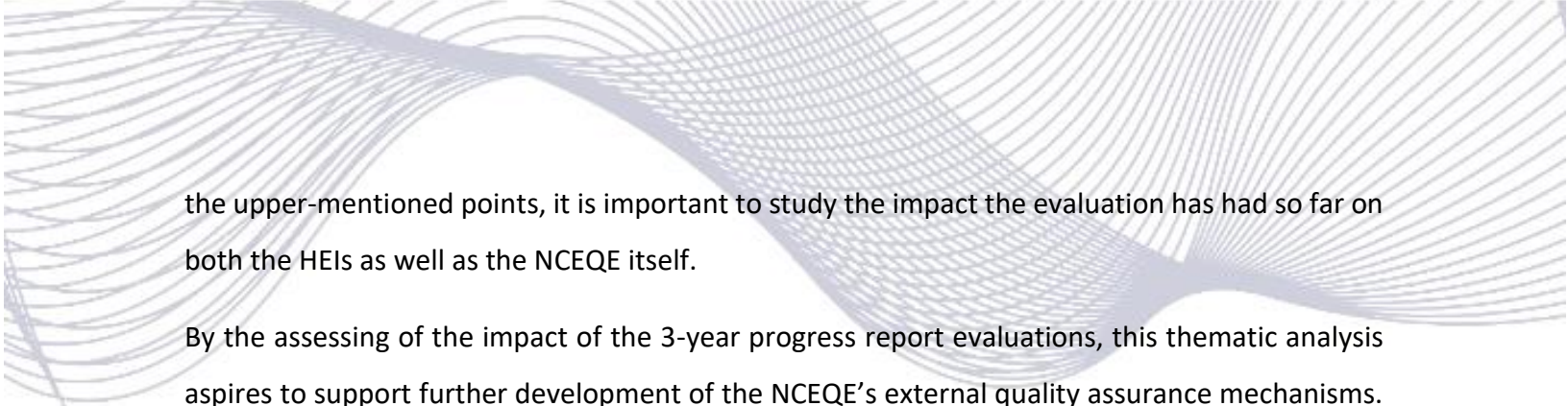
The ESG 2015 emphasizes the importance of the follow-up evaluations within the existing QA frameworks. The National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), received a recommendation concerning follow-up activities within the ENQA evaluation of 2018 and has, since then, achieved a significant progress in this regard, with both, further developing its already existent follow-up mechanisms, as well as introducing the new ones. The NCEQE's institutional (further referred to as authorization) and programme-based (further referred to as accreditation) evaluations apply several types of follow-up evaluations.

In cases of both authorization and accreditation, the HEIs are required to submit a report on the fulfillment of the recommendations provided for the HEIs/educational programmes. Besides these, planned and case-based monitoring evaluations are also carried out for specific HEIs and programmes which are mostly defined by the council decisions, but can also occur due to the reasons like filing a complaint, etc.

Besides the upper-mentioned evaluation mechanisms in 2021 the NCEQE started to conduct evaluation of the 3-year progress reports, which had already been introduced within the legislation back in 2017. The rationale behind the given evaluation was: "to facilitate the establishment of systematic self-evaluation process within higher education institutions to facilitate the development of internal quality assurance mechanisms and planning of evaluative and supportive activities based on the needs of higher education institutions".

The given evaluation has some distinctive features that differentiate it from other types of evaluations, the most important of which are those within the process of the evaluation of the 3-year progress reports, the reports are studied by the authorization/accreditation experts and the report is written, yet the results of the evaluation are not presented to the respective councils. What is more, the HEIs do not have to pay any fees for the evaluation.

The NCEQE has been carrying out the 3-year progress report evaluations for about 2 years already, amassing the experience of such evaluations. It is also important to note that the evaluation increased both the NCEQE's as well as the HEIs' staff workload. Considering both of



the upper-mentioned points, it is important to study the impact the evaluation has had so far on both the HEIs as well as the NCEQE itself.

By the assessing of the impact of the 3-year progress report evaluations, this thematic analysis aspires to support further development of the NCEQE's external quality assurance mechanisms.

The analysis seeks to answer the given research questions:

- How much are the results of the 3-year progress report evaluation in line with the goals of the given evaluation, written within the authorization and accreditation charters?
- To what extent do the stakeholders agree about the effectivity and efficiency of the 3-year progress report evaluations?
- How could the 3-year progress report evaluation be enhanced in the future?


The results of the study will be used for the further development of the 3-year progress report evaluations considering the principles of evidence-based decision-making.

Methodology and Data Analysis

In line with the research questions, qualitative methodology was applied within the study, encompassing two methods: Document analysis and In-depth interviews.

Within the authorization 3-year progress report evaluation analysis, the recommendations and suggestions from the 3-year progress report evaluation reports were systematically compared and analyzed against the recommendations and suggestions from the authorization reports of the same institutions. The sample involved all of the HEIs which underwent the authorization 3-year progress report evaluation in 2021-22. Total number of such HEIs was 13.

Within the accreditation 3-year progress reports, as the number of these evaluations were extremely high, the programmes were selected from the HEIs, which underwent the authorization 3-year progress report evaluations and in this case only the 5th accreditation standard was considered, which deals with the continuous quality assurance and improvement of the programmes.



Additionally, the strategic action plan implementation reports that are submitted together with the 3-year progress reports, have been analyzed. Finally, the experiences and practices on the follow-up evaluations of the three countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and their quality assurance agencies were analyzed to gain the insight from their experiences.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with main stakeholders involved in the process, resulting in the 9 interviews with HEI representatives, 5 interviews with experts and 3 interviews with the NCEQE staff. In the cases of all three stakeholder groups, people with experience in both authorization and accreditation 3-year progress report evaluations were prioritized.

As of the analysis of the gathered data, the excel database was created, based on the pre-set coding system (involving suggestions/recommendations, standard components, 3-year progress reports/initial reports). The analysis was done according to the standards' structure and was mainly focused on identifying the similarities (1), differences (2) and the replications of the recommendations and suggestions from the initial report as well as the completely new recommendations and suggestions.

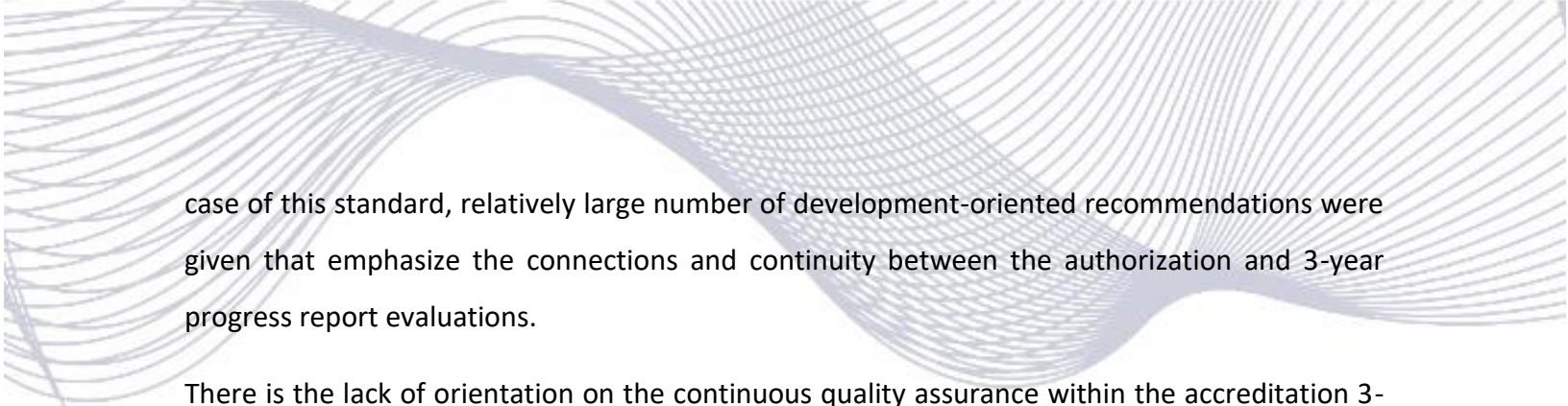
As of the interviews, the transcripts of each interview were produced and each of the transcripts were analyzed via the thematic synthesis and comparison to the pre-defined semi-structured interview guidelines.

Results of the study and conclusion

Document Analysis

According to the results of the authorization 3-year progress reports and authorization reports analysis, in most of the cases, no recommendations or suggestions are given within the 3-year progress reports, while in those cases when the recommendations and suggestions are given, content-wise those are mostly in line with the recommendations and suggestions given within the authorization of the same HEIs and in certain cases the recommendations are literary the same.

While in cases of most of the authorization standards, the situation seemed rather similar, the only exception was the 6th authorization standard, which is concentrated on the research. In the



case of this standard, relatively large number of development-oriented recommendations were given that emphasize the connections and continuity between the authorization and 3-year progress report evaluations.

There is the lack of orientation on the continuous quality assurance within the accreditation 3-year progress reports, while the work on the accreditation 3-year progress reports seems to be especially burdening for the HEIs and the signs of Evaluation Fatigue within the HEIs can be detected.

The reports on the implementation of the HEIs action plans varied in their shapes and volumes, yet overall, the HEIs' achievements were mostly well explained and the challenges that remain are also indicated.

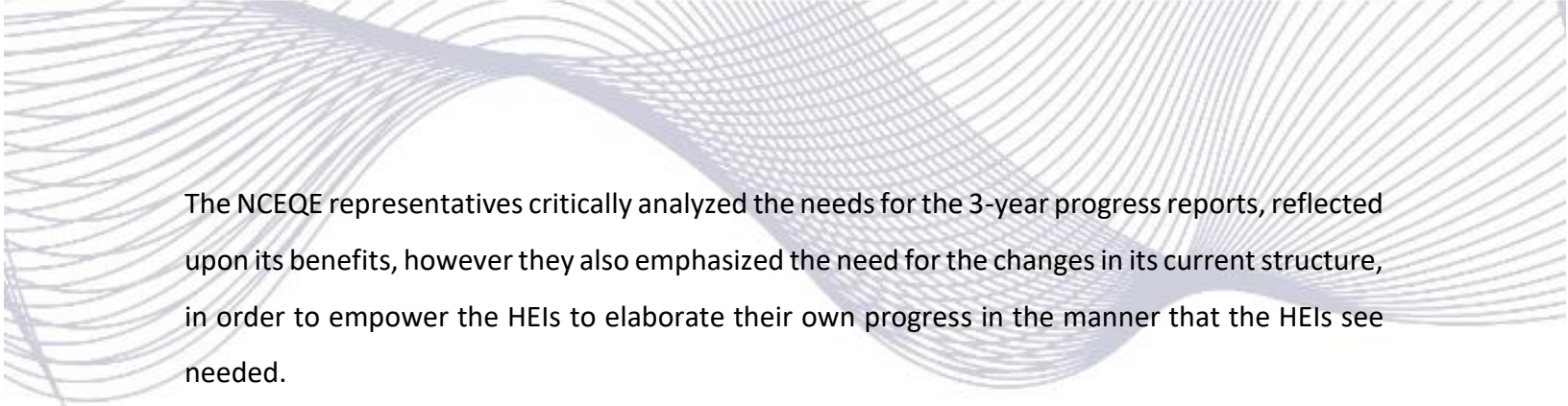
Results of the In-depth Interviews

The interviews with the HEI representatives, experts and the NCEQE staff showcased variety of differences in the perspectives of the different stakeholder groups. All stakeholder groups indicated at positive aspects of the 3-year progress report, mainly outlining its capacity to keep HEIs in “shape” and the potential these evaluations give to the NCEQE for the further supervision of the HEIs.

The Experts mainly focused on the developmental potential of the evaluations, yet indicated that the current shape of the evaluations is not fit to achieve success and support the HEIs developmental needs.

The HEI representatives, despite outlining the developmental potential of the 3-year progress report evaluations, also indicated that it had major impact on their workloads and did not see the resources and energy, needed for the preparation of the reports fit to the benefits it gave to the HEIs.

The HEIs mostly did not find the recommendations and suggestions given within the 3-year progress report evaluations to be useful and also indicated to the lower level of contextualization within them, as the experts study the reports without carrying out the interviews or any other type of communication with the HEI representatives.



The NCEQE representatives critically analyzed the needs for the 3-year progress reports, reflected upon its benefits, however they also emphasized the need for the changes in its current structure, in order to empower the HEIs to elaborate their own progress in the manner that the HEIs see needed.

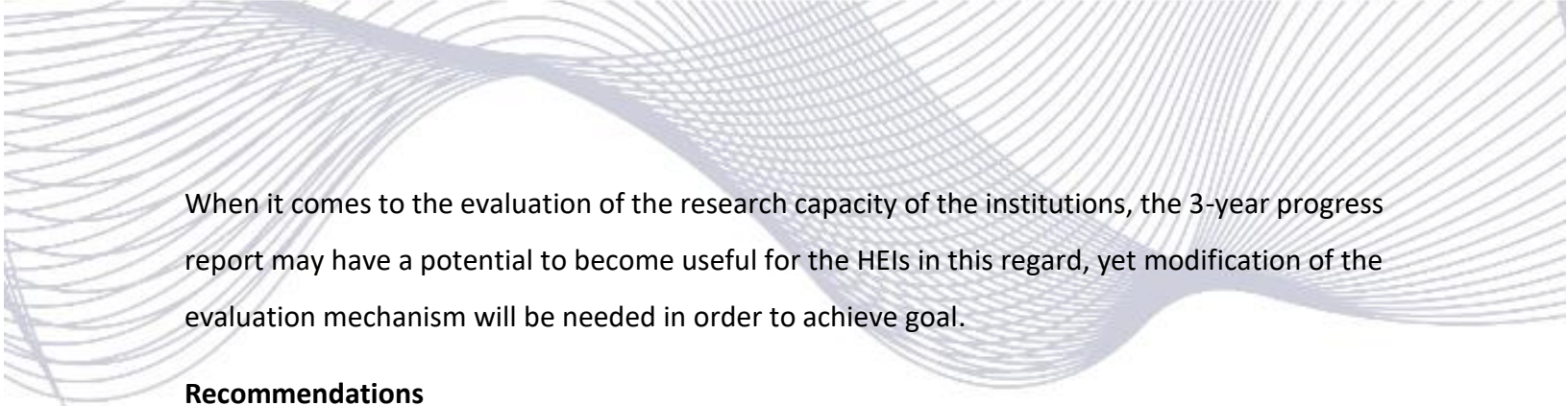
Conclusion

Both the document analysis as well as the in-depth interviews, showcase that despite much potential within the evaluation to become a tool for further development for the HEIs, 3-year progress reports actually become additional administrative burden for both the HEIs and the NCEQE, within which experts' resource and energy is also used without any tangible results being achieved for the HEIs.

Despite the multiplicity of the views on the degrees of usefulness of the 3-year progress report evaluations, none of the stakeholders consider it to be effective, efficient and fit to the purpose. The stakeholders indicate that the 3-year progress reports with its current shape have become an additional bureaucratic burden for all the sides involved in its facilitation and the only reason it is being carried out and with an involvement of all the stakeholders is it being mandatory for the HEIs.

The stakeholders call for more focus on the internal quality assurance and in case the 3-year progress reports are still carried out, would like it to be modified in a way that would give more freedom to the HEIs to present its achievements throughout the 3 years and would not focus on the issues already addressed in other types of the follow-up evaluations.

The need for the changes can also be emphasized by the international experiences studied within the analysis, where the more optimization of the follow-up mechanisms can be seen, instead of the multiplicity of the follow-up evaluations, that subsequently lead to the increase of the concentration on the external evaluations instead of the further development of internal quality assurance mechanisms.



When it comes to the evaluation of the research capacity of the institutions, the 3-year progress report may have a potential to become useful for the HEIs in this regard, yet modification of the evaluation mechanism will be needed in order to achieve goal.

Recommendations

Following recommendations have been devised considering the results of the given thematic analysis:

- It is recommended that the 3-year progress reports not be concentrated on the recommendations given in the previous evaluations, but give HEIs an opportunity and freedom to elaborate their achievements in a manner that suits them.
- It is recommended to optimize the NCEQE's follow-up mechanisms in order to decrease both the HEIs' and the NCEQE's workload and to continue the discussions about the actual need for carrying out the 3-year progress report evaluations considering both authorization and accreditation contexts.
- It is recommended for the NCEQE to focus more on the capacity building of the HEIs' internal quality assurance mechanisms via the trainings, workshops etc.
- In order to better contextualize and explain the challenges within the HEIs concerning the specific criteria (e.g., development of infrastructure etc.), it is recommended that direct interaction between the experts and the HEI representatives be facilitated.
- In case evaluation mechanisms are further developed, 3-year progress report could be a potent way to support the development of the HEIs' research capacity.
- It is recommended that the experts and the HEIs be consulted concerning the purposes of the 3-year progress reports, its initiation and goals.
- It is recommended that digital resources and the monitoring system of sufficient technical development be used for tracking the HEIs' achievements. These systems could also be used for designing the planned monitoring schedules.
- It is recommended to simplify the process of the 3-year progress report, in order to reduce the workload of both the NCEQE staff and the experts.