Students as Stakeholders in the policy context of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutions

A comparative case study of a Dutch and German Higher Education Institution

Master Thesis

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Abstract

This study examines the role of students as stakeholders in higher education institutions' internal quality assurance procedures in the policy context of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. It was the aim of this study to explore students' diverse stakeholder position in internal quality assurance systems at two different higher education institutions, one in Germany and one in the Netherlands. This study is an exploratory qualitative study which employs a comparative case study design to investigate students' role as stakeholders in different higher education settings. To determine students' stakeholder position, this study applies the stakeholder theory of Mitchell et al. (1997) who distinguish between three different stakeholder typologies. For data collections, this study includes findings from documentary desk research such as empirical data from 8 semi-structured interviews and a student survey. The combination of the institutional and student view allows this study to draw a valid picture about students' role as stakeholders in the investigated internal quality assurance systems.

Findings have revealed that the role of students as stakeholders majorly differs between the studied HE institutions. While students in the Dutch case study enjoy a rather high stakeholder position as weak Definitive stakeholders, students in the German case study have a comparatively low stakeholder position as weak Dependent Stakeholders. In both cases, internal quality assurance systems are majorly in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, though higher education institutions' compliance evolves rather unconsciously.

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Abbreviations

BFUG	**Bologna Follow-Up Group**
CUM	**Central University Management**
E4	**Consist of ENQA, ESU, EURASHE and EUA**
EHEA	**European Higher Education Area**
ENQA	**European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education**
ESG	**European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance**
ESIB	**European Student Information Bureau**
ESU	**European Student Union**
EUA	**European University Association**
EURASHE	**European Association of Institutions in Higher Education**
IHEQN	**Irish Higher Education Quality Network**
IQA	**Internal Quality Assurance**
IQAS	**Internal Quality Assurance System**
GETE	**Guidelines for the Evaluation of Teaching and Education**
HE	**Higher Education**
HEI	**Higher Education Institution**
IBAR	**Identifying barriers in promoting the ESG at institutional level**
KMK	**Kultusministerkonferenz**
NAO	**Netherlands Accreditation Organization**
NSS	**National Student Survey**
NVAO	**Netherlands-Flanders Accreditation Organization (NVAO**
OMC	**Open Method of Coordination**
OER	**Teaching and Examination Regulations**
OKC	**Academic Quality Committee**
R&R	**Rules and Regulations of the examination board**
SMG	**Student Charter**
UNESCO	**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**
WHW	**The Higher Education and Research Act**

1. Introduction

Since the early 1990s, the importance of quality assurance in higher education (HE) has steadily increased on the European higher education policy agenda (ESU, 2010). Especially the Bologna Process, launched in 1999, supported the development of common European quality principles in higher education, as the introduction of a common three-cycle degree structure urged the need for greater comparability in quality standards amongst European higher education institutions (HEIs) (Corbett, 2003). Moreover, in order to become the most competitive and knowledge based economy in the world (Lisbon, Strategy, 2000), Europe had to assure the high quality of its HE systems to face the challenges of increasing international competition in higher education and to maintain its economic competitiveness (Keeling, 2006). The adoption of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) in 2005 constituted the peak in the Bologna Process's achievements for the spread of European wide quality standards. Thereby, the ESG especially promote the greater engagement of stakeholders in quality assurance processes, including "higher education institutions, students and labour market representatives" (ENQA, 2005, p.7).

When analysing the ESG provisions, it is striking that the role of students as equal stakeholders in HEIs internal quality assurance processes is substantially highlighted (Westerheijden et al., 2013). The ESG's high appreciation of student involvement in internal quality assurance confirms scientific findings, which ascertain the ameliorating effect of student involvement on the quality of education and teaching in HE (Hounsell, 2007). Thus, as recommended by the ESG (2005), a greater involvement of students in internal quality assurance is to have beneficial effect on enhancing quality in European HE, as it is confirmed by several authors (Klemenčič, 2012; Murray, 1997).

Though the engagement of student in HEIs internal quality processes comes as an important factor to achieve the Bologna objectives regarding quality, up to now only little research has been conducted on HEIs' real integration of students as stakeholders in internal quality assurance procedures (Kohoutek, Land & Owen, 2013; IBAR, 2013), Thus, little is known about students' real position or influence in internal quality assurance processes or HEIs' accreditation of their input to arrive at a high level of quality in education and teaching. As such findings would be of great scientific value to evaluate students' current position in European internal quality procedures and HEIs efforts to comply with the Bologna targets regarding quality assurance, this thesis aims at broadening this research gap by providing a first insight into students' position as stakeholders in internal quality assurance processes at European HEIs.

To address the frequently described research issue, the study incorporates the following central research question:

"To what extent are students perceived as stakeholders in internal quality processes at different higher education institutions within the framework of the European Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance?"

As the central research question is kept rather broad, the following sub-questions are asked to substantiate this research:

- What internal policies, documents or platforms exist at higher education institutions that promote the involvement of students in internal quality assurance processes?
- How are students actively involved and influence internal quality assurance at higher education institutions?
- In what way do national policy documents support the involvement of students in internal quality assurance processes at higher education institutions?
- To what extent do higher education institutions consider the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance regarding student involvement to internal quality processes?

Students' stakeholder position will be investigated with respect to the following three ESG (2005) standards:

1. **Policy and procedures for quality assurance,**
2. **Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes,**
3. **Quality assurance of teaching staff.**

Moreover, the stakeholder typology by Mitchell, Alge & Wood (1997) will serve as an analytical framework to determine students' role as stakeholders in HEIs. To answer the research question, we conduct a comparative case study between a German and Dutch higher education institution by triangulating the institutional and student opinion on student's role as stakeholders in HEIs internal quality assurance systems (IQA).The thesis is structured as follows: After the introduction, the second chapter reflects on the development of internal quality assurance standards within the Bologna process by putting a special emphasis on student engagement in the process. The second chapter also depicts students' role in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. The third and fourth chapters describe the theoretical and methodological underpinning of this study, while the

fifth chapter contains the case studies of the two studied cases. The comparison of the two case studies and the discussion of assumptions are embedded in chapter six. Finally, the research question of this study is answered in the concluding chapter.

2. The Bologna Process and the development of a European approach towards quality assurance

In the following, chapter 2.1 will discuss the emergence of the issue of quality assurance within the context of the Bologna Process by highlighting the role of students therein. Section 2.2 provides for a basic introduction to the ESG while paragraph 2.3 contains a detailed description of the ESG relating to internal quality assurance in higher education institutions.

2.1 The Bologna Process and quality assurance

The Bologna Process[1] constitutes the most important intergovernmental agreement in the history of European higher education cooperation, by gradually introducing a joint European three circle degree structure and resulting in the proclamation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010. Currently 47 European states, the European Commission and eight advisory organizations namely the Council of Europe, the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Student Union, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and BUSINESSEUROPE are listed as official members of the Bologna Process (EHEA, 2014). Overall, the achievements and obstacles of the Bologna Process have been discussed by several authors such as Ravinet (2006), Van der Wende (2000), Keeling (2006), Froment (2003), Pechar (2007), Corbett (2003), Beerkens (2008) or Van Vught (2009).

Retrospectively, the Bologna Declaration is the successor of the Sorbonne Declaration[2] and was jointly adopted by 30 European countries to establish "the European Area of Higher Education" for promoting the European system of higher education in the world (Van der Wende, 2000, p.2)". Accord-

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[1] Despite the fact that the policy field of education strictly falls within the regulatory competences of each individual European nation state, the European Commission has always acted as the sole supranational advisory body to further national cooperation in the Bologna Process (Keeling, 2006). Still, as according to the principle of subsidiarity, the European Commission has no decision making power, as the Bologna Process constitutes an intergovernmental bottom-up policy approach (Westerheijden et al., 2010).

[2] The Bologna Process constitutes the follow-up agreement of the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, by which the German, French, Italian and British heads of governments jointly agreed on enhancing the intergovernmental cooperation in European higher education to create a European Higher Education Architecture. Thus, Sorbonne can be defined as the founding event of the Bologna Process (Ravinet, 2005).

ing to Pechar (2007), the Bologna Process aims at creating a coherent and transparent European Higher Education Area by constituting "the most powerful policy change process ever in the field of Europe" (Ravinet, 2006, p. 1). The Bologna Declaration includes ten actions lines introducing the Anglo-Saxon Undergraduate (Bachelor) and Graduate (Master) cycles to HEIs and a European Credit Transfer System to facilitate student mobility (Ravinet, 2006; Van der Wende, 2000; Froment, 2008). Via these measures, existing barriers regarding educational mobility of students and teaching staff were to be eliminated (EHAE, 2014). The entire set of Bologna policy measures is based on voluntary national harmonization approaches, not including any legally binding commitments or sanctions (Ravinet, 2006).

Besides Bologna's focus on the harmonization of European higher education systems, quality assurance became a vital issue on the agenda of the subsequent Bologna follow-up group (BFUG) meetings[3] in order to arrive at a comparable level of educational quality in Europe (Pechar, 2007). Moreover, the convergence towards the joint degree system lead to an increasing need for the creation of comparable quality standards for envisaged degree levels (Kehm & Teichler, 2006). In the following, the importance of quality assurance and student engagement on the agenda of the BFUG meetings is illustrated.

During the first BFUG meeting in Prague in 2001, the issue of quality assurance was highlighted but not extensively substantiated. Nevertheless, the BFUG agreed that within the Bologna Process, students are to be regarded as important stakeholders at all levels and especially regarding quality assurance processes (EHEA, 2014). In its entirety, the Bologna reforms reflect a shift towards a more student centered approach as students are to range at the center of higher education reforms (Keeling, 2006).

During the second BFUG meeting in Berlin in 2003, a special focus was put on the prospective promotion of a common European quality assurance system. The Berlin Communiqué (Bologna Process, 2003) also strengthened students' position in quality assurance by making student participation in

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[3] The Bologna follow-up meetings were organized every two years to reflect on countries' accomplishments regarding the realization of the Bologna targets and to add new agenda points to the Bologna portfolio. In between those two years, the so-called "Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG)" was to supervise countries' compliance to the set Bologna targets. The Bologna follow-up group met every six months by hosting three representatives of each member state, representatives of the European Commission and members of the eight advisory bodies. As one of the advisory bodies, ESU and thus students were involved into the monitoring and furthering of the Bologna Process from the very start.

quality assurance a core requirement of the Bologna Process, as students are to be regarded as **"full partners in HE governance (Stukalina, 2012, p.86)"** and "important stakeholders regarding quality monitoring and assessment processes (ESIB, 2003, p.20)".

This mission was further fortified in the BFUG meeting in Bergen in 2005, which can be defined as an important milestone in the introduction of joint quality assurance standards in European Higher Education. The Bergen Communiqué promoted the idea of "a European Higher Education Area" based on the principles of quality and transparency (Bologna Process, 2005). Moreover in Bergen, European education ministers adopted the European Standards and Guidelines[4] for quality assurance, which were to assist states in reforming their domestic quality assurance policies. Accordingly, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance were added as an additional document to the Bologna Declaration (EHAE, 2005). The Bergen Communiqué also reinforced "the importance of partnership, including stakeholders - students, HEIS, academic staff and employers" (EHEA, 2014) by claiming that all actors, and especially staff and students, are to be treated as equal partners in the framework of the Bologna Process.

In the subsequent BFUG meeting in London in 2007 it was concluded that the ESG were welcomed by all Bologna countries, as almost all states had started to implement parts of the ESG provisions in their national systems, especially those relating to external quality assurance issues. Moreover, heads of states agreed on the creation of a European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) to better control the emergence of national quality assurance agencies (EHEA, 2014).

In the fifth BFUG in Leuven in 2009, member states agreed to put a focus on enhanced student centered learning, social dimension and employability (Bologna Process, 2009).
Finally in 2010, the European Higher Education Area was officially called into existence, as the main objective of the Bologna Declaration, namely the introduction of a three-cycle qualification system, had been successfully accomplished. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of 2010, the Bologna Project was continued in several Follow-Up meetings by putting a special emphasis on better higher education quality to an increasing number of European students (EHEA, 2014).

2.2 The role of students in quality assurance in the Bologna Process

According to Klemenčič (2012, p.1) "Student participation in HE governance is considered one of the foundational values in European HE" with students being nowadays represented in all HE systems of the Bologna countries. As already indicated in the previous chapter, under the Bologna Process the

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[4] An in depth description of the ESG follows in chapter 2.2

influence of students on HE and especially quality assurance gradually increased. According to Stuka-lina (2012), with the development of the Bologna Process, students were more and more accepted as important stakeholders in quality monitoring and assessment processes. Hereby, especially the grow-ing competition amongst HEIs for students, due to the newly introduced common degree-cycles, increased HEIs awareness of the importance of student involvement and the accreditation of their interest (Froment, 2008). Thus, nowadays students are mostly integrated in HEIs' internal quality assurance processes via regular satisfaction survey or course evaluations, with their interests being represented by local student associations in institutional committees (Klemenčič, 2012). Moreover, since the introduction of the ESG (2005), higher education institutions have even increasingly en-gaged in considering student opinions and their satisfaction levels regarding the quality of education and their teaching environment (Brookes, 2003)

Concerning the highlighting of students' role in the ESG it has to be stressed that the European Stu-dent Union (ESU), which had been engaged in developing these guidelines (see subchapter 2.3), had had a significant influence on the increase of student involvement to quality assurance processes by emphasizing students beneficial input on quality assurance during BFUG consultation (ESU, 2009; ESIB, 2003). According to ESU (2009), the involvement of students in quality assurance processes comes as a logical consequence of proper quality guidance at European higher education institutions. The ESU considers students as the main recipients of higher education, which turns them into most suitable actors for objectively evaluating the quality of education and teaching (Reichert & Tauch, 2003). According to Murray (1997), higher education institutions support this claim by ascertaining that the regular evaluation of students' satisfaction with study programmes and courses leads to a measurable increase of quality in education. In addition to that, students themselves have a major interest in the safeguarding of high quality in HE, as students' employability potential and knowledge pool depends on the quality of education offered by a higher education institution (ESU, 2009). Therefore, students have a self-induced interest to be involved in quality assurance of higher educa-tion (ESU, 2009). Moreover, as according to the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB) (2003), students oppose their frequent classification as pure consumers of HE and would rather be perceived as stakeholders to higher education. Students objection towards the client concepts strives from the fact that students want to actively contribute to the development and maintenance of educational quality, instead of being regarded as ignorant recipients of education. Thus, students wish to be ac-credited as constructive partners in quality assurance by policy makers and higher education institu-tions (ESU, 2012).

Overall, the Bologna Process successfully enhanced students' influence on quality assurance, as over time, European higher education institutions significantly up-scaled the involvement of students to existing quality assurance procedures in order to:

- Improve study programmes by granting students the possibility of evaluating their study
- Encourage student reflection on their learning
- Allowing institutions to develop benchmarks raising the reputation of higher education institutions on the higher education market
- Offer students a channel to express their satisfaction level (Iheqn, 2009).

Thus, greater student involvement in internal quality assurance procedures seems to go "hand in hand with the development of a culture of continuous quality improvement" (Brookes, 2003, p.18). Nevertheless, even though student involvement in internal quality assurance processes in the HEIs of the Bologna countries has improved, the majority of higher education institutions still lack behind regarding this issue of student integration, which seems to have become a necessary tool in times of growing higher education competition (Haug, 1999 & ESU, 2009). Overall, traditions and mindsets regarding student involvement in quality assurance majorly differ between national higher education systems, with some European countries appreciating an increasing input of students more than others (Curaj et al., 2012).

To conclude, since the establishment of the Bologna Process, students' integration in internal quality assurance processes has significantly increased, though major differences in the degree of student involvement can still be ascertained between Bologna countries and amongst HEIs. The next paragraph provides for a detailed description of the ESG standards and students role therein.

2.3 The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

As already mentioned in the previous paragraph, the European Standards and Guidelines[5] for Quality Assurance were added as an additional document to the Bologna Declaration in 2005, to assist Bologna countries in improving their existing quality assurance systems (EHAE, 2005). According to Terry (2008), quality in higher education constitutes a generic term with no universal definition.

Despite the great variety of definitions and a missing consensus on its' universal meaning, the ESG are targeted at four broad purposes: accountability, compliance, control and improvement by being based on the principles of fulfilling the interest of students, employers and society regarding good quality in higher education (ENQA, 2005). The ESG include twenty-three quality assurance standards which are sub-divided into the following three main quality assurance disciplines:

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[5] An in depth description of the ESG follows in chapter 2.2

- Standards for external quality assurance at higher education institutions (eight standards)
- Standards for external quality assurance agencies (eight standards)
- Standards for internal quality assurance of higher education institutions (seven standards) (ENQA, 2011).

Each ESG standard is underpinned by several specific guidelines and evaluations, substantiating the context of each ESG principle (Terry, 2008). Hereby: "*The standards reflect basic good practice across Europe in quality assurance, but do not attempt to provide detailed guidance about what should be examined or how quality assurance activities should be conducted* "(ENQA, 2005, p.15) which implies that the ESG constitute a set of non-binding guidelines which are to support higher education institutions, nation states and accreditation agencies in the development of their own quality assurance systems (European Commission, 2009). (See Chapter 3 for further information).

As previously stated the ESG constitute the peak in the Bologna Process's efforts towards greater quality assurance harmonization in European HE (EHEA, 2014). The explicit content of the ESG was developed from 2003 till 2005 by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the so-called E4[6] partners, including the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). In addition, the European Commission constitutes a non-influential but strong supporter of the European wide implementation of the ESG standards (Ravinet, 2006).

In the last ministerial Conference of the Bologna Process in Bucharest in 2012, all ministers of education agreed to launch a revision of the originally adopted ESG document from 2005, based on the finding of the "Mapping the Implementation and Application of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (MAP-ESG)" (ENQA, 2011, p.1) project compiled by the E4 members. It is the aim of such reforms to "make the ESG clearer, particularly in terms of their structure and in order to avoid potential confusion with their interpretation (EHEA, 2014)".The final revised version will be presented in 2015 at the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan. Due to the currently ongoing revision of the ESG, the following description of the ESG standards refers to the original document from 2005 (EHEA, 2014).

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[6] The E4 group constitutes a cooperation between the main stakeholder groups of education and acts as an advisory group to the BFUG, especially regarding quality assurance(EURASHE, 2014)

In the ESG of 2005, the provisions for **external quality assurance agencies** were foremost developed to counter the boom of quality assurance agencies in the 1990s, to ensure the credibility, professionalism and transparency of such agencies in Europe (Kohoutek, 2009). The ESG for **external quality assurance** at HEIs are to provide for greater accountability regarding HEIs' employed quality standards by incorporating objectives and motivations for improving institutional quality assurance processes. As the focus of this study lays on the ESG for **internal quality assurance,** which are discussed in the following, this study will not further evaluate on the ESG for external quality assurance agencies and external quality assurance,

According to ENQA (2009), the ESG's standards for **internal quality assurance** are developed to assist higher education institutions in the design of well-functioning internal quality assurance systems, aimed at safeguarding the high quality of education, teaching and the systemic transparency of quality assurance procedures (ENQA, 2009; Terry, 2008). The development of the internal quality assurance part of the ESG constitutes an important issue within the Bologna Process, as higher education institutions constitute the on-hand safe guarders and implementers of internal quality assurance measures. In general, internal quality assurance refers to all measures and policies an institution maintains in order to monitor and guarantee the quality of education and teaching of courses or study programmes on hand (Kohler, 2003). Internal quality assurance processes are to assure the regular evaluation of academic programmes, teaching staff qualification and student learning services, by prioritizing student and graduate opinions when evaluatinh the quality regarding these issues (EUA, 2011). Thus, the dissemination of internal quality standards amongst European higher education institutions poses a vital element in the creation of a common European quality assurance framework and the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (ENQA, 2009; Reichert & Tauch, 2003). Hereby, important key issues of internal quality assurance system constitute efficiency, goal acknowledgment, basic quality excellence, structural processes and transparency (Redder, 2010).The explicit standards for internal quality assurance of higher education institutions and the involvement of students therein are analyzed in the following paragraph.

2.4 Student involvement in the ESG

The European internal quality assurance guidelines constitute the first part of the ESG's portfolio and majorly strengthen the role of students within IQA procedures in HEIs. The ESG criteria highlight the engagement of students as stakeholders to the following key areas (ENQA, 2009):

- **Policy and procedures for quality assurance**
- **Approval, monitoring and periodic reviewing of programmes and awards**
- **Quality assurance of teaching staff**
- **Learning resources and students support**

- **Information systems**
- **Assessment of students**
- **Public Information.**

Regarding the guideline for internal **policy and procedures for quality assurance**, it is stated that higher education institutions have to actively involve students in existing internal quality assurance structures as "The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and should also include a role for students and other stakeholders (ENQA, 2009, p.16). Students should also be involved in all internal quality assurance bodies responsible for the monitoring of internal quality assurance systems as the "the responsibilities of departments, schools, Faculties and other organisational units and individuals for the assurance of quality (ENQA, 2009, p.16)". In addition, students' contribution is also emphasized in the ESG guideline for the internal **approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes,** which is aimed at fostering the regular evaluation of study programmes at higher education institutions. Thus, the "participation of students in quality assurance activities (ENQA, 2009, p.17)" is explicitly recommended to improve at educational quality as it strengthens students' confidence in the overall quality of education system. Moreover, the third guideline stresses that the **quality assurance of teaching staff** should constitute a high priority to higher education institutions as students expect to receive high quality education. According to the ESG, teachers constitute "the single most important learning resource available to most students, teaching staff should be given opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity (ENQA, 2009, p.18)". With regard to **learning resources and student support**, higher education institutions should pay close attention to the needs of students, while students' overall satisfactions levels should be collected via fortified **information systems**. Concerning the last two guidelines, students are to be clearly informed about the applicable **student assessment** strategies while HEIs have to provide comprehensive information on study programmes and related learning outcomes **via public information** sources. This thesis will focus on the three guidelines of:

- **Policy and procedures for quality assurance**
- **Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes** and
- **Quality assurance of teaching staff** (See Methodology Chapter 4).

Overall, it is explicitly stated that HEIs themselves hold the primary responsibility for their compliance to IQA provisions of the ESG, while all internal quality processes are to be monitored by specifically created internal bodies accommodating professors, teachers, staff and students (ESIB, 2005;

ENQA, 2009). Thus, the ESG primarily serve as a self-evaluating and innovation tool for higher education institution (Reichert & Tauch, 2003).

When analysing the IQA provisions of the ESG, it is striking that the importance of student involvement and the protection of students' interest is highlighted rather extensively throughout all the mentioned guidelines. Already in the introduction of the ESG (ENQA, 2009) it is emphasized that higher education institutions should engage in comprehensive constant quality assurance procedures to improve the quality of education offered to students. Moreover, the integration of ESU to the E4 group serves as acknowledgment of students' stakeholder position in all internal quality assurance procedures, with students belonging to the official group of higher education stakeholders (Westerheijden & Kohoutek, 2013). Nevertheless, despite the supportive provision of the ESG, ESU (2009) criticizes that HEIs often grant students a pure advisory role in IQAS by denying them an influential position within internal decision making procedures or denying them information on quality assurance developments (ESU, 2009). This is why ESU highly promotes a greater consideration of the ESG as a sort of check-up list to monitor HEIs' level of student involvement (ESU, 2012).

Overall, this chapter provided for a more in-depth illustration of quality assurance in the Bologna Process, the ESG for internal quality assurance and the role of students as stakeholders therein. Hereby it was highlighted that within the whole Bologna Process and especially via the ESG, the position of students in internal quality assurance procedures at HEIs is highly promoted.

3. Conceptual Framework

To further substantiate students' role in HEIs' internal quality assurance processes the following chapter provides for this study's conceptual concepts to investigate students' position as stakeholders in IQA at HEIs. Chapter 3.1 provides for a short description of the ESGs' policy implementation staircase, to better understand the ESG's political significance. Secondly, a short introduction to stakeholder theory is provided while the focus is put on the illustration of Mitchell et al. (1997) stakeholder categorizations, which serve as the theoretical underpinning to determine students' stakeholder position in HEIs' internal quality procedures.

3.1 Policy implementation of the ESG

As part of the Bologna process, the implementation of the ESG follows the principle of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) within a multi-level governance framework, including various institutions, agencies and actors (Hoareau, 2011; de Boer & File, 2009). The OMC was formally adopted in 2000 by the Lisbon European Council as a soft policy approach, by defining implementation as

"an evolutionary process in the sense of a learning process (Veiga & Amaral, 2010, p.284)". Thus, all provisions launched under the OMC by a superior European intelligence are of non-binding nature and solely targeted at the spread and exchange of best practices amongst European countries (Rodriguez, 2001). These principles also hold for the implementation of the ESG, whose standards and guidelines are non- prescriptive to HEIs and acknowledging the importance of institutional autonomy (Westerheijden & Kohoutek, 2013).

Thus, the realization of the ESG depends on its voluntary consideration by all higher education institution within the framework of national regulations and other influencing factors, such as organisational culture or HEI leadership. As depicted in Figure 1, the ESG are embedded in a multilevel governance framework consisting of the supranational, national and institutional level.

Figure 1: Implementation scheme of ESG according to the Open Method of Coordination

Supranational

ESG

developed by E4 group, European Commission (silent supporter)

National

National education HE law, national accreditation agencies and national accreditation regulations

Institutional

National higher education instutions, faculties, management departments, staff´

HEI leadership, organisational culture, national HE tradition

Source: Own Figure on the basis of Trowler (2002)

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the ESG standards were designed at the supranational level by ENQA and the E4 group who put the practical implementation of the standards into the responsibility of each member state within the framework of the OMC (ENQA, 2011).

At the national level, the effective ESG implementation depends on the policies and voluntary cooperation of domestic education ministries and external accreditation agencies (see Figure 1). As governmental bodies, national education ministries are responsible for the on hand implementation of

the ESG guidelines to national HE legislation, by making the implementation of the ESG obligatory or advisable to national higher education institutions (ENQA, 2011). According to EURASHE (2012) and the ESU (2012), in some European countries the ESG had an influence on the development of national quality assurance policies, which especially applies to national internal quality assurance systems (IQAS) which are revised or developed after 2005. Besides domestic education ministries, national accreditation agencies are in charge of taking the ESG into account[7] and thus act as mediators for the implementation of the ESG in higher education institutions (ENQA, 2011).

As depicted in Figure 1, the lowest level of ESG implementation rests with the individual higher education institution. Hereby, the HEIs are the actors which put the ESG into practice on a voluntary basis and within the framework of national HE legacy (EUA, 2008). As noted by EURASHE (2012), the majority of HEIs use the ESG as a more theoretical framework, while others perceive the ESG as a very practical instrument (EURASHE, 2012). The difference in HEIs' interpretation of the ESG is reflected in students' opinion as according to ESU (2012), HEIs' operating internal quality assurance procedures are mostly in line with the ESG, though the formal adoption of the ESG does not automatically lead to the realization of the ESG targets (ESU, 2012). According to ENQA (2011) this confirms HEIs' general autonomy regarding the maintenance of IQA procedures. Still, it also fosters a general criticism on the OMC ,which was raised in the Kok report (2004), claiming that" though producing movement " the OMC " might not guarantee good levels of coordination (Amaral & Veiga, 2006). Furthermore, as put by Van Vught (2009), additional factors such as the institutional contexts and cultural norms, also pose decisive factors for the translation of the ESG into institutional settings. This implies that cultural HE environments and organization settings have a decisive influence on the voluntary consideration of the ESG by each individual HEI (Westerheijden & Kohoutek). Nonetheless, according to EURASHE (2012) and IBAR (2013), a rather high number of HEIs comply to the ESG, which indicates that HEIs consider elements of the ESG as essential components of internal quality assurance systems.

To conclude, this paragraph demonstrated that the ESG are to be considered a soft policy tool, whose application heavily depends on the individual autonomy of the HEIs and the translation of ESG guidelines into national policy frameworks.

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[7] In 2008, the so-called European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR) was endorsed by the Education Ministers of the Bologna countries to better control the compliance of European accreditation agencies to the ESG (ENQA, 2011). To guarantee that national assurance agencies comply with the ESG, they have to undergo a cyclical external review, taking place every five years. Hereby, the external investigation can be either conducted by a national agency, to account for the principle of subsidiarity, or by ENQA (ENQA, 2005).

3.2 Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory emerged from the management literature dominating in Business Studies. Hereby, Edward Freeman (1984) can be mentioned as the author coining stakeholder theory by his publication "Strategic Management - A Stakeholder Approach" in 1984. According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders are to be defined as "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p.46). Furthermore, Freeman (1984) also defines stakeholder theory as "The Principle of Who or What Really Counts". The theoretical understanding of the influence and concerns of stakeholders was perceived to be vital to effective economic business management, as entrepreneurial managers are dependent on the support of important influential groups, such as employees, customers or society as such. Thereby, the fulfillment of stakeholders' objectives is linked to economic "long term success" (Freeman & McVea, 2001, p.5). Consequently, a stakeholder approach in management is to incorporate processes which are to satisfy the expectations and interests of those interest groups claiming a stake at a company, namely the stakeholder (Freeman & McVea, 2011). The balancing of the probably diverse interests of different stakeholder groups poses the greatest challenge to economic stakeholder management.

Overall, business literature provides for a wide range of different stakeholder approaches evolving from corporate planning literature, systems theory, corporate social responsibility or organization theory. Hereby, each theoretical approach is marked by a normative core (Freeman, 1994). Besides diverse research rudiments there also exists a wide range of differing stakeholder definitions, as for example the one provided by Mitchell et al. (1997), claiming stakeholders to be "those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist" or Savage et al. (1991, p.66) stating that stakeholders "have an interest in the actions of an organization and the ability to influence it".

Relating to this study, we will apply the broader stakeholder definition provide by Freeman (1984) which is cited above. I opted for this definition, as it leaves the notion of "stake" open to interpretation, meaning that a stake can either be considered as having the potential of affecting or being affected by a certain action, while mutually leaving room for a wide range of stakeholder inclusion in which any group can be defined as posing a stakeholder to a certain entity (Mitchell et al., 1997). In addition, via a broad stakeholder definition it is assured, that no indirect or direct stakeholder influence is neglected (IBAR, 2012). The term "stake" can be simply described as a share, interest or investment that a certain party attributes to an entity (Freeman, 1984, p.9). Nevertheless, we will complement Freeman's (1984) theoretical stakeholder approach by the stakeholder categorization by Mitchell et al. (1997), who rank stakeholders according to their salience and influence potential. In the following, I will shortly summarize the theoretical framework developed by Mitchell et al. (1997).

In a second step this theoretical framework will be used to define students' different stakeholder positions in internal quality standards at HEIs.

All in all, Mitchell et al. (1997) make use of a dynamic identification typology aimed at explaining what makes manager's prioritize certain stakeholder relationships. According to Mitchell et al. (1997), there are many entities which can be identified as having stakeholder potential ranging from persons, organizations or institutions up to the natural environment as such. Moreover, the authors also claim that the definition of "stake" is not as clear as it seems as, also relating to Freeman's definition, a "stake" is going to determine "what counts" (Freeman, 1984). According to Mitchell et al. (1997), a stake has to be something that is of greater value to the stakeholders, while at the same time a stake has to be linked to the potential of loss and risk as "without the element of risk there is no stake" (Mitchell et al, 1997, p.857). Furthermore, Mitchell et al. (1997), distinguish between a broad and narrow definition of stakeholders. Hereby, the broad definition resembles the softer definition provided by Freeman (1984). Opposed to that, a narrow definition of stakeholder claims that stakeholders are those groups, which are formally vital for the survival of an organization or company, meaning that an economic dependency from an entity to a certain group is present. Thus, in the narrow stakeholder sense some form of investment must have been induced by the stakeholder and the relationship must be dominantly of economic nature (Clarkson, 1994). In addition, stakeholder theory as such has to provide answers to questions: "What are the important stakeholder groups", "Which of their interest are most important" or "How these interests can be balanced" (Mitchell et al., 1997, p.156).

In short, Mitchell et al.'s (1997) identification typology employs a three-stage criteria catalogue to provide an answer to these three questions, to create a stakeholder hierarchy. This ordering is to assist researchers and managers in the task of investigating, what stakeholder group is vital to an entity's survival, what are the stakeholder's preferences and how influential certain stakeholders can be. The three criteria employed by Mitchell et al. (1997) in their three-stage model are: **power, legitimacy and urgency**. Hereby, power is defined as a party's influence potential "to the extent that it can gain access to coercive, utilitarian or normative means" (Mitchell et al., 1997, p.856) to impose its will on the company. Secondly, legitimacy is described as "socially accepted and expected behaviour" (Mitchell et al., 1997, p.866) which is often coupled with the idiom of power to establish an actor's authority, but may as well develop independently. Moreover, it describes a party's involvement at all important decision making levels. At last urgency, which adds the dynamic component to the authors' theoretical model, is defined as "the degree to which a stakeholder claims call for immediate attention" (Mitchell et al., 1997, p867). Consequently, urgency comprises attributes such as

time sensitivity, in which a task related managerial delay is unacceptable to the stakeholder, or criticality, depicting the importance of a certain issue regarding stakeholder satisfaction. Mitchell et al. (1997) stress the unsteady nature of all these attributes as they are socially constructed. Based on the three criteria of power, legitimacy & urgency, the authors aim at explaining the attributes of stakeholder salience, whereby salience is defined as "The degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholder claims" (Mitchell et al., 1997, p.868). In order to determine stakeholders' salience potential, the authors develop a dynamic identification typology, including the three variables of power, legitimacy and urgency. Hereby, the degree of salience depends on the cumulative addition of all three stakeholder attributes.

Due to presence or absence of certain attributes, stakeholders can be sorted to different classes, with stakeholder groups being ranked according to a higher or lesser degree of salience. Mitchell et al. (1997) distinguish between seven incremental types of stakeholder and three major stakeholder groups. Figure 2 provides for an overview of the entire set of stakeholder types by indicating groups command over the number of the three variables of power, legitimacy and urgency.

At the lowest scale of the stakeholder salient alignment ranks the **Latent Stakeholder** group which is depicted in the upper column of Figure 2. Stakeholders from this class are only in the possession of

Figure 2. Stakeholder categorization
by Mitchell et al. (1987)

	Power	Legitimacy	Urgency
Latent Stakeholder			
Dormant Stakeholder	x		
Discretionary Stakeholder		x	
Demanding Stakeholder			x
Salient/ Expectant stakeholder			
Dominant Stakeholder	x	x	
Dependent Stakeholder		x	x
Dangerous Stakeholder	x		x
Definitive stakeholder			
Definitive Stakeholder	x	x	x

Source: Own illustration based on Mitchell et al. 1997

one of the three fundamental attributes. From the management perspective, influence and salience

of these stakeholders is rather low, as managers may not do anything to fulfill latent stakeholders' interest or even refrain from considering them completely. Stakeholders who can only claim the attribute of power are called **Dormant Stakeholders**, which could be actors having the capacity of spending a lot of money. According to Mitchell et al. (1997), Dormant Stakeholder could be of greater relevance, especially if they have the potential of gaining another attribute. Stakeholders solely decreeing over the attribute of legitimacy are considered as **Discretionary Stakeholders** and are often associated with promoting social responsibility. In reality, managers are not at all obliged to pay attention to these stakeholders, as no hard pressure is present. Last but not least, so-called **Demanding Stakeholders** are marked by the attribute of urgency and are thus the ones having urgent claims. They constantly try to arouse the managers' attention without any major success. The second class of stakeholders constitutes the so-called moderately **Salient or Expectant Stakeholders** group, which is depicted in the middle column of Figure 2. Stakeholders of this group decree over two of the three relevant attributes and thus enjoy a higher degree of salience. Also, this class accompanies three different kinds of stakeholder types. The first moderately salient type is the **Dominant stakeholder**, marked by the attributes of power and legitimacy. The combination of these two attributes is considered as a "dominant coalition" which will definitely arouse managers' attention, as these actors have the ability to enact their legitimate claims. Moreover, they aim at establishing themselves as the most important stakeholder group within an entity. The second moderately salient type is the **Dependent Stakeholder**, who is marked by the attributes of urgency and legitimacy, while still being dependent on powerful actors to realize their claims. Thus, it is the highest aim of Dependent Stakeholder to look for powerful companies sharing the same claims and interests. The third type is the **Dangerous Stakeholder**, engrossing the attributes of urgency and power. These stakeholder groups can become extremely forceful and coercive to push through their interests and thus enjoy a rather high degree of salience. The last and top class of Mitchell et al. typology is the **Definitive Stakeholder**, which is depicted in the last columns of Figure 3. Definitive Stakeholders decrees over the entire set of attributes and will be highly salient to managers, meaning that ultimate priority is given to the interests of such stakeholders

Overall, it should be considered that Mitchell et al.'s (1997) concepts are not exclusive and that any of the lower stakeholder groups can rise up to become a Definitive Stakeholder by acquiring the missing attributes. Thus, it also depends on stakeholders' strategic actions to climb up the staircase (Mitchell et al., 1997). In the ESG "The view of the stakeholders … is that of Definitive Stakeholders who are fully engaged as legitimate participants and who hold urgency and power in decision-making processes around quality of education" (Leisyte et al., 2013, p.1).
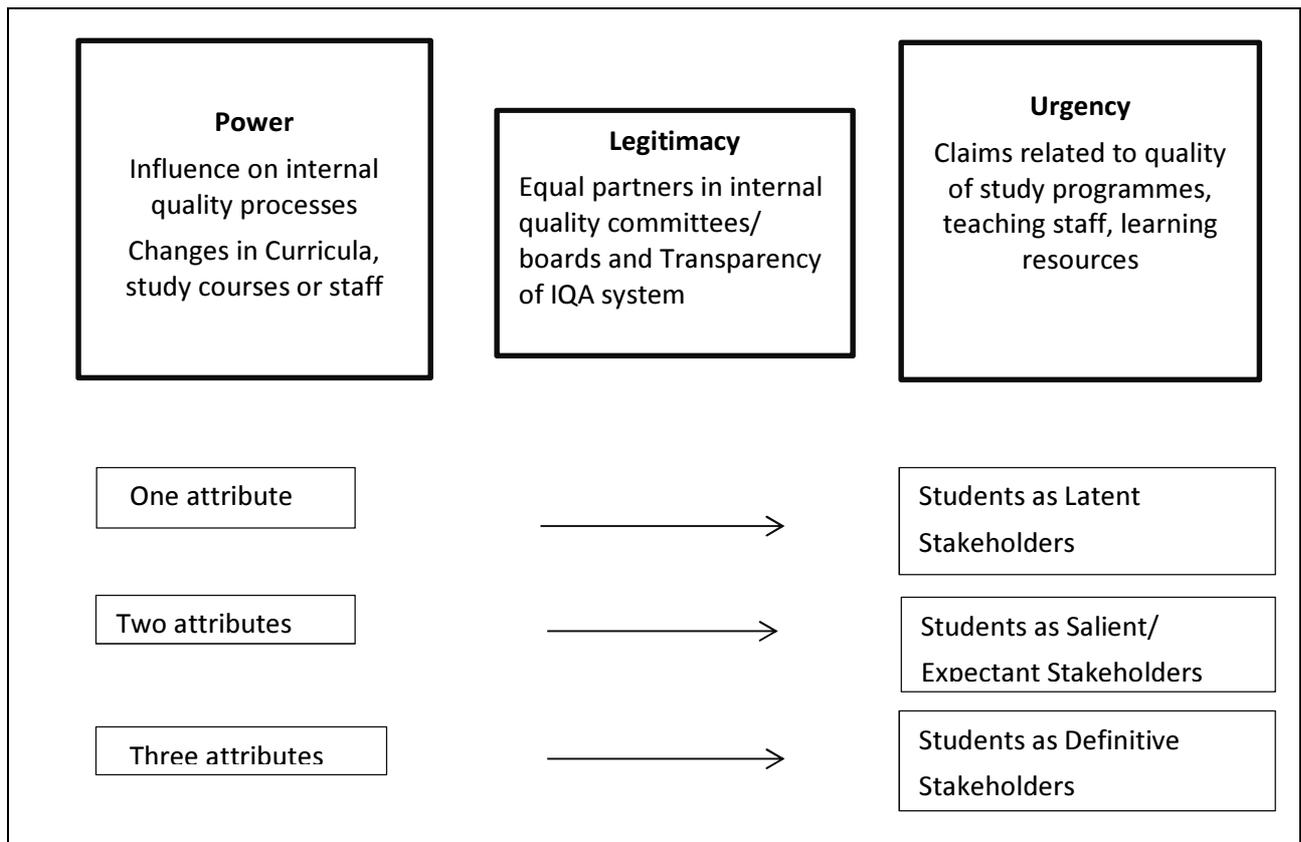
3.2.1 Theoretical application: Students as stakeholder in internal quality assurance

Over the last decades, higher education institutions have undergone a huge transformation process towards the so-called marketization of higher education. This implies that higher education institutions have been turned into collaborative actors, marked by competitive goal oriented actions and stakeholder incorporation (Krücken & Meier, 2006; Beerkens, 2006). Due to these trends, the interests in external and internal actors and especially stakeholders has become increasingly important to higher education institutions, such as the accumulation of research funding, governmental sponsoring or the attraction of students (Beeneworth & Jongbloed, 2009).

Even though emerging from the scientific field of marketing, stakeholder theory has been applied by several authors to investigate the role of students as stakeholders in higher education and students' positioning therein (Amaral & Magalhaes, 2002; Beerkens, 2006; Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2008; McDowell & Sambell, 1999). The recognition of students as stakeholders has firstly appeared in the scientific literature in the year 1975, ten years before tuition fees had been primarily charged in the UK (Douglas et al., 1993). According to Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, (2008) today's higher education institutions have to respond to a number of groups of individuals, with students posing the most important core stakeholder group to universities. As stated by Haug (2003), in times of growing global higher education competition, the integration of students and the safeguarding of their interest has become a necessary tool to stabilize the influx of new students. Consequently, due to the growing importance of stakeholders to higher education, universities are expected to be engaged in a constant dialogue with relevant stakeholder groups, while having to provide for accountability, quality, effectiveness and efficiency (Jongbloed, Enders & Salerno, 2008). This premise is also supported by McDowell & Sambell (1999) and Hill (1995), all stating that students are to be considered as valid stakeholders, especially related to issues of internal quality assessment.

When applying Mitchell et al.'s (1997) stakeholder typology to our research context, we specifically turn to the degree of students' salience as stakeholders in HEIs' internal quality assurance processes Formally, students can be assigned to any of the seven stakeholder groups described by Mitchell et al. (1997) being Dormant-, Discretionary-, Demanding-, Dominant-, Dependent-, Dangerous- and Definitive Stakeholders. The previously described attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency are central in this regards. Figure 3 provides for a short summary of the three attributes in the context of students as stakeholders.

Figure 3. Students as stakeholder according to Mitchell et al. (1997)

As illustrated in Figure 3, students' power is manifested in their potential of urging changes to study programmes, courses or HEIs' internal quality assurance processes. Such influences may be manifested in the change of the structure or content of a course.

Students' legitimacy is strengthened by their equal representation in internal quality assurance bodies and the transparency of IQA procedures to students. The ESG also specifically highlight students' legitimate involvement in IQA processes (ENQA, 2009). Students' urgency is articulated by students' claims for higher quality in HE including courses, study material or the level of teaching. Thus, students' urgent claims are to encompass the demand for good quality in higher education which is invoked by the ESG (ENQA, 2009).

Based on Mitchell et al. (1997), the following three propositions are made to determine students' stakeholder salience (see Figure 3). The first proposition claims:

- *"If students are perceived as Definitive Stakeholders, students have an influence on internal quality assurance processes in the HE institution".*

In case students are considered as Definitive Stakeholders, they direct overall all three stakeholder attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency. Thus, as Definitive Stakeholders, students are able to

exert a direct influence on institutional internal quality assurance processes, as their needs and interests are of high importance to higher education institutions. This might include frequent changes in study curricula, course structure or teaching staff. In addition, the second proposition holds:

- *"If students are perceived as Salient/Expectant Stakeholders, students have a limited influence on internal quality assurance processes in the HE institution".*

Hereby, students are to direct over only two of the three stakeholders attributes, such as for example urgency and legitimacy by lacking the attribute of power. Thus, students can be either classified as Dependent, Dangerous or Dominant stakeholders, meaning that their influence on internal quality assurance processes is rather limited and their needs are not of very high importance to the HEI institution. The third proposition holds:

- *"If students are perceived as Latent Stakeholders, students have no influence on internal quality assurance processes in the HE institution".*

This implies that students as stakeholders only direct over one of the three stakeholder attributes, which lowers their salience regarding IQA in the HEI. Thus, students can be classified as Dormant-, Discretionary or Demanding stakeholders.

As noted in the previous chapters, the ESG guidelines highlight the role of students as stakeholders to internal quality assurance processes in higher education institutions. Linking ESG's promotion of students' stakeholder position to the above insights from stakeholder theory we pose the final proposition

- *"The more HEI's internal quality assurance processes are in line with the ESG, the stronger students' position as stakeholders in assuring internal quality in the HEI".*

Hereby, the independent factor of this assumption constitutes HEIs' consideration of the ESG which is expected to have an impact on students' role as stakeholders in IQA processes. Overall, the concept of Definitive Stakeholders comes closest to the ESGs' targets regarding students' involvement to internal quality assurance processes. As depicted in previous paragraphs, the ESG do not constitute binding guidelines and are regarded as a soft policy tool following the principle of the OMC. Thus, we assume that HEIs' consideration of the ESG must be supported by certain national or internal institutional policies. In Chapter 5 and 6, the listed propositions will be investigated by means of two case studies of different higher education institutions in two Bologna countries.

4. Research design & methodology

A comparative case study will be conducted to answer the underlying research question by means of a limited number of cases (Schnell, Hill & Esker, 2011). The comparative approach is aimed at investigating, if students' involvement as stakeholder in internal quality assurance procedures differs between European HEIs within the policy context of the ESG. We choose for this research design, as case studies facilitate "the intensive (qualitative or quantitative) analysis of a single unit or a small number of units (the cases), where the researcher's goal is to understand a larger class of similar units" (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p.296). Furthermore, a case study can be considered useful if "the in-depth examination of a single instance of some social phenomenon is intended" (Babbie, 2006, p. 298). Thus, a comparative case study design is well suited for investigating my research problem, as up to this point in time only little research has been conducted on this specific scientific topic (Gerring, 2004). Moreover, a comparative case study design is well suited to demonstrate the expected heterogeneity in student involvement and ESG consideration at different HEIs due to the ESG's soft policy character.

4.1 Case selection and sampling

Case selection and sampling for case studies fulfils the purpose of identifying "a representative sample" and a "useful variation on the dimension of theoretical interest"(Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p.296). For the comparative case study we chose two equivalent departments from two European HEIs in different Bologna countries. The units of analysis of this study are "European higher education institutions in different Bologna countries" while the units of observation are "Departments of European higher education institutions". To select my units of analysis we chose for the non-probability sampling approach of extreme case sampling as "concepts are often defined by their extremes, that is, their ideal types (Gerring, 2006, p.101)". Via this approach, I selected one German and one Dutch HEI as my units of analysis, as those are the countries in which HEIs constitute rather opposing example of ESG consideration. According to ESU (2009), Dutch HEIs are perceived as forerunners in ESG consideration by "fully matching the ESG model (ESU, 2009, p.57)". Concerning Germany, concerns regarding HEIs' consideration of the ESG are rather high as "Student unions expressed their concerns regarding the internal quality assurance systems in Germany (ESU, 2009, p.57)". Thus, as highlighted by ENQA (2009), the Netherlands can be considered as an example of good practice regarding ESG application, Germany still seems to struggle with the realization of the ESG. To determine the units of observation of my study and increase their validity, I purposively chose the smallest entity to which quality assurance is delegated at both studied HEIs. Hereby, we selected two units of observation offering similar academic disciplines and showing a rather identical student population. For the

Dutch case study, a Faculty offering Economic, Political and Social Sciences, with a student population of around 2200 students, was selected. For the German case study, a German Faculty Institute offering similar degrees to around 1600 students was selected. The German Institute belongs to the Faculty of Educational and Social Science by constituting the smallest entity to which the responsibility of quality assurance is delegated at the HEI. Concerning the two selected entities, the research obstacle of accessibility of data is absent.

Regarding the sampling of my ESG standards, I choose for the following three guidelines to answer my research question:

- **Policy and procedures for quality assurance**
- **Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes**
- **Quality assurance of teaching staff.**

We chose for these three ESG guidelines, as the content of these standards explicitly refers to the involvement of students as stakeholders to internal quality assurance, by highlighting students' important role in such procedures (Westerheijden et al., 2013).

4.2 Data Collection

The data collection consists of desk research, semi-structured interviews and a survey to describe HEIs' internal quality assurance system in the study year of 2013.

Table 1: Summary: Instruments of Data Collection

Desk research	Semi-structured interviews	Student survey
-National and institutional documents on internal quality assurances (national HE legacy, central HEI management documents or institutional quality statutes) -Webpages, books, scientific articles	-6 face to face interviews with internal quality assurance staff at both HE institutions (3 at the Dutch Faculty and 3 at the German Institute) -Interviewees: Internal quality assurance officer, Internal Quality Assurance Staff, Professors -2 face to face interviews with student associations at both studied HE institutions	-176 students of all disciplines at both studied HE institutions -93 students from the Dutch and 83 of the German Institute -Dutch Faculty: 50 per cent of respondent were female, 30 male and 20 per cent are unknown. The average age of respondents was 23 and respondents were enrolled in 19 different study programmes. -German Institute: 66 per cent of respondents were female and 34 were male. The average age of respondents was 22 and respondents were enrolled in 14 different study programmes

Desk research comprises national and institutional documents on internal quality assurances, including national HE legacies, central HEI management documents or institutional quality statutes. Hereby, webpages (of HEIs, national ministries or national quality assurance bodies), books and scientific articles on internal quality assurance and student involvement served as additional sources of qualitative data to answer the research question. All quoted scientific articles are derived from data bases such as Picarta or Google scholar.

Furthermore, eight **semi-structured interviews** with internal quality assurance staff, professors and student associations of the studied HE institutions were conducted to arrive at the institutional appraisals of students' role in internal quality assurance. All interviewees were selected according to a judgmental sampling approach to assure that interviewees are closely aligned to the maintenance of the internal quality assurance system to secure the validity of responses (Punch, 2005).

The **student survey** is employed to reflect students' own perception of their stakeholder involvement in internal quality assurance. This research instrument was chosen as according to Babbie (2005)

"Survey research is the best method available…in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly"(Babbie, 2005, p.244)". The survey questionnaire encompasses 24 closed ended-questions with questions being based on the National Student Survey (NSS), constituting the most frequently circulated student survey in the United Kingdom. As the NSS model did not provide for the coverage of all three selected ESG criteria, some self-developed questions were added. The final survey questionnaire, see Appendix A, is aligned to the predefined variables of Mitchell et al. (1997) and subdivided according to the three ESG criteria under study.

Survey respondents were sampled according to a convenient sample approach by which questionnaires were either distributed via the online tool Lime Survey or handed out to students in hard copy. Due to the lottery it was verified that the questionnaire was not filled by the same person twice. Overall, 176 students of both Faculties filled in the survey, 93 of the Dutch and 83 of the German Institute (see Table 1). In the Dutch survey, 50 per cent of respondents were female while 30 per cent were male. The remaining 20 per cent did not provide for this information. The average age of respondents was 23. The majority of students was in their third year of studies and respondents were enrolled in 19 different study programme. In the German survey, 66 per cent of respondents were female while 34 per cent were male. The average age of respondents was 22 years. The return rate of the online survey was rather minor around 20 per cent while the return rate regarding the directly handed out questionnaires was 100 per cent.

4.3 Data Analysis

 To operationalize HE Is' consideration of the three studied ESG guidelines regarding student involvement, the following criteria are employed, which are summarized in Table 2. Regarding **policy and procedures for quality assurance** I expect this guideline to be met, if students are installed as equal partners to all major internal quality assurance bodies and procedures (ESIB, 2003; Stukalina, 2012). To fulfill the guideline of **approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes** higher education institutions should maintain a thorough quality assurance system in which the opinion of students is actively accumulated and embedded. According to Brookes (2003), students satisfaction survey constitute the most common instruments used by higher education institutions to measure students' satisfaction with the quality of education. Concerning the guideline for the **quality assurance of teaching staff**, HEIs should also engage in collecting students' opinion on staffs' teaching abilities, which could also be captured via student surveys or other internal quality assurance measures.

Table 2: Operationalization Scheme of the ESG

Guidelines	Consideration of the ESG
Policy and procedures for quality assurance	Equal representation of students in internal quality procedures and bodies
Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes	Accumulation of students opinions on quality of courses, study programmes by means of a survey
Quality assurance of teaching staff	Accumulation of students opinions on quality of teaching by means of a survey or other tools

For the **data analysis of desk research**, qualitative content analysis was employed, as Babbie (2005) defines content analysis as "the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings and laws". In my study, a special focus is put on the manifest and latent meaning of the qualitative data set. Hereby, manifest coding is described as the "visible surface content" of a communication, while latent coding is aimed at identifying "the underlying meanings" implied (Babbie, 2006, p. 325). Via this method, I try to filter information regarding the role of students as stakeholders within the internal quality system of the studies HE entities.

For the analysis of semi-structured interviews a deductive coding scheme is used, following the qualitative content analysis approach by Mayring (2010). To analyse the data from semi-structured interviews, all questions were aligned to the predefined variables of power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell et al., 1997) and sub-grouped according to the three studied ESG criteria. Table 3 depicts the 9 codes which were derived from Mitchell et al.'s (1997) variable set to determine students' role a stakeholders in internal quality assurance. As illustrated in Table 3, each of the three variables of power, legitimacy and urgency were further subdivided into a fully, limited and non- applicable category (e.g.: Power, Limited Power, No Power).

Table.3 Coding scheme for analysis of semi-structured interviews

Power	Limited Power	No Power
HEI initiates changes to study programmes/courses/teachers based on student feedback	HEI not necessarily initiates changes to study programmes/courses/teachers based on student feedback	HEI does not initiates changes to study programmes/courses/teachers based on student feedback

Legitimacy	Limited Legitimacy	No Legitimacy
Students are equal members in internal quality assurance boards/committees – all information is directly communicated to them	Students are not always equal members in internal quality assurance boards/committees – not all information is directly communicated to them	Students are not members in internal quality assurance boards/committees – no information is directly communicated to them

Urgency	Limited Urgency	No Urgency
The maintenance of quality of education and teaching is of high importance to students – students issue proposal for improvement	The maintenance of quality of education and teaching is of minor importance to students – students are not that active in issuing proposal for improvement	The maintenance of quality of education and teaching is of no importance to students – students do not issue proposal for improvement

Due to the small data set a reliable numerical analysis was not possible. All codes are documented in a codebook, see Appendix CI. During the analysis of the data some inductive codes were derived as well which are added to the codebook. The data analysis software Atlas was used for the coding process and the generation of a subsequent code frequency distribution to depict a numerical frequency of the 9 coding variables.

For the analysis of the survey data, the software programmes Excel and LimeSurvey were used to arrive at descriptive statistic for all questions. The survey questions were analysed according to an ordinal measurement level by employing the following Likert Scaling which is also applied by the NSS approach survey:

Table 4. Likert Scaling survey

++	Definitely agree	-	Mostly disagree
+	Mostly agree	--	Definitely disagree
0	Neither agree nor disagree		

To align the results of the descriptive statistics to the variable set, the same 9 codes were employed.

Open Coding will be applied to the answers emerging from the open ended questions, in order to identify some representative categories.

4.4 Reliability and validity of the study

Reliability is to verify that research findings would occur repetitively in other research circumstances. In qualitative research, reliability is regarded as a fit between what researchers' record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting (Bryman, 2008). In general, a small sample size constitutes a threat to reliability in a study (Babbie, 2006). To encounter this issue and enhance the reliability of my study, we integrated multiple data sources as according to Stenbacka (2001) research bias can be minimized by corroborate and triangulating findings of different data sets. Therefore, the combination of quantitative survey finding and qualitative interview findings with desk research, increases the reliability of my study, which is a vital element of qualitative research (Patton, 2010).

Besides reliability, this study also accounts for validity which is defined as measuring what is intended to measure (Babbie, 2006). In research there exist different types of validity and for my qualitative research, the following validities are of major importance: construct and external validity. Construct validity is defined as "The validity of inferences about the higher order construct that represent sampling in particular" (Shadish Cook & Campbell, 2011, p.38), thus drawing inferences from the findings of a study to a higher order construct. To strengthen construct validity, this study relied on literature and theoretical unpinning to adequately explain its constructs to prevent for incorrect inferences between construct and operation (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2011). According to Yin (1994), an explicit explanation of construct is of special importance when triangulating data, which is the case in this study, to ensure that concepts measure the same in different data sets. Special attention was also paid to external validity, which refers to the generalization of findings to other settings and contexts (Shadish, Cook & Campbell, 2001). As this study is of exploratory nature and is not aimed at arriving at empirical generalizable data, close attention was paid to avoid any form of generalization to other HE institutions or countries, in order to account for the external validity of data. Due to the explorative nature of the study, internal validity was not of a concern as internal validity refers to "causal effect between one variable and another" which was not an aim of this study (Yin, 1994).

5. Empirical Chapter: Comparative Case Studies

The following chapter illustrates the empirical findings of my comparative case study. The chapter starts with an introducing of the national IQA regime in the Netherlands. Subsequently, students' role as stakeholders in the internal quality assurance processes at a Dutch HEI Faculty is illustrated. The second part of the chapter follows the same structure, by illustrated the findings of students' position in the internal quality assurance processes in a German HE Institute.

5.1 The Netherlands: Internal quality assurance and student involvement

In the **Netherlands** the management of internal quality assurance systems at the existing 14 public research universities follow a centralized-decentralized approach. Overall, the state is in charge of setting the basic internal quality guidelines, though the main responsibility of implementation is delegated to the universities. Hereby, each University may decide if internal quality assurance is centrally governed by the University management or if on hand procedures are delegated to each Faculty (Redding, 2010). Overall, the issue of quality assurance has been well-integrated into the Dutch policy frameworks since the early 1980, as the Netherlands are quoted as a European forerunner in quality assurance procedures in higher education (Westerheijden, & Leegwater, 2003). As defined in the Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) (1993)[8] the Minister and the State Secretary of Education define a regulatory framework to which universities have to adhere when setting up their internal quality systems. Nevertheless, higher education institutions enjoy independence regarding their individual management of such processes (Redding, 2010). The active engagement of students in internal quality assurance procedures is openly promoted by the Dutch higher education legacy, as since 1992 "Students' judgements on the quality of education are a necessary part of the quality assessment (WHW, 1992, art. 1.18,)". This implies that students are regarded as essential partners in internal quality management and have to be integrated into existing quality assurance procedures (Westerheijden, Epping & Leisyte, 2013).

Since 2003, all Dutch study programmes have to be accredited by the independent body of the Netherlands Accreditation Organization (NAO), which was later on transformed into the Netherlands-Flanders Accreditation Organization (NVAO)[9] (Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2004; NVAO, 2013). Regarding student involvement to internal quality assurance procedures, the NVAO states that "The set-up and organisation of the internal quality assurance is aimed at systematically improving the

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[8] The WHW defines the governance relationship between the state and higher education institutions,
[9] In 2005 the NAO mergedwith the Belgium "flanders accreditation agency" by turning into the NVAO. The NVAO is composed of independent higher education and quality assurance members[9] and is to act as an external accreditation control scheme to monitor institutions' adherence to ascertained internal quality standards, which are set by the NVAO and are line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (Court of auditors, 2008; NVAO, 2013).

programme with the involvement of the relevant stakeholders … including employees, students, alumni and the relevant professionals (NVAO, 2013a, p.7)". Thus, the NVAO officially grants students a stakeholder position within internal quality assurance processes. In addition to that, the NVAO actively promotes students participation in accreditation procedures by stating "During the site visit, the assessment panel speaks with all those directly involved with the programme and this includes students (NVAO, 2013a, p.8)". Moreover, the NVAO's basic standards for the successful institutional quality assurance accreditation also highlight the incorporation of students to internal quality processes.

In a nutshell, the Dutch national legal framework actively promotes the perception of students as stakeholder to internal quality assurance processes at Dutch higher education institutions via existing accreditation procedures and central guidelines for internal quality assurance.

5.1.1 Case 1: Quality assurance in a Dutch Faculty

In the following subchapter the internal quality assurance system of a Dutch HEI Faculty is depicted. Hereby, an emphasis is put on the role of students in the institution's internal quality assurance processes my means of the three stakeholder variables by Mitchell et al. (1997): power, legitimacy and urgency. As described in Chapter 3, power relates to students' ability to have a direct influence on the HEI's internal quality assurance matters, legitimacy describes students' equal representation in internal quality assurance bodies and urgency concerns students' vivid claims regarding internal quality assurance.

The chosen Dutch research University was established in the 1960s and follows the national guidelines on quality assurance. The Faculty under study belongs to a public Dutch higher education institution, offering study programmes in the fields of public administration, political and business sciences with 2,200 enrolled students and 350 employed staff members. The Faculty is managed by a management team consisting of a dean and executive director and several subordinated executive bodies. The institution was charging an annual tuition fee of 1835 Euros for European citizens of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies in the Academic Year of 2013. At the moment of this study, the University's internal quality assurance system followed a decentralized approach, in which each Faculty was in charge of conducting and supervising its internal quality assurance measures independently within the framework of central University guidelines (I2 & I3, 2013).

In the subsequent subchapters the internal quality assurance system of the selected Faculty is analysed by comparing the institutional and students view on student involvement in internal quality assurance processes. Students' role is analysed regarding the three internal ESG criteria of

1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance; 2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes; 3. Quality assurance of teaching staff (see Methodology Chapter). Findings of the institutional view result from a combined analysis of desk research and semi structured interviews with a faculty council member (I1, 2013), the internal quality assurance officer (I2, 2013) and a professor (I3, 2012). Citations of interviewees' are marked by reference abbreviations which are indicated in brackets. Students' view is derived from the results of the conducted student survey (see chapter 5.3) and an interview with the head of the student association (I4). In the end, findings of both parties are used to determine students' role as stakeholders in internal quality assurance and the Faculty's consideration of the investigated internal ESG standards.

5.1.2 Policy and procedures for quality assurance in the Dutch Faculty

According to the Faculty's (2013) official statement on internal quality assurance, the ongoing preservation of high quality in education and teaching is the priority for the institution with "The student's opinion on the content and conduct of the study units " constituting an important aspect of the quality assurance system (SMG, 2013, p.109)". Hereby, the Faculty maintains a comprehensive internal quality assurance system, targeting the full evaluation of all courses and study programmes. The overall set-up of the internal quality assurance system is in line with national legislation regarding internal quality assurance, such as the WHW in 1992 (Faculty Regulation, 2010). The regulations guiding internal quality assurance processes and internal responsibilities are put down in the following regulatory documents: the Faculty Regulation, the Student Charter (SMG), the Teaching and Examination Regulations (OER) and the Rules and Regulations of the Examination board (R&R). These documents contain references to operating internal quality assurance instruments (see Chapter 6.1.2) by mutually defining the responsibilities of certain internal boards and committees. Such committees shall also supervise the functioning of internal quality procedures and academic staff's adherence to such guidelines. In the following, those internal bodies are depicted by highlighting students' position therein.

According to Article 9.18 of the WHW and Article 13 of the Faculty Regulation, every study programme has to be supervised by **a programme committee** which closely monitors the quality of the relevant study programme. Programme committees[10] are to advise the dean and the programme directors on programme related issues and possible shortcomings in internal quality procedures (Faculty Regulation, 2010). Hereby, student evaluations (see next paragraph) serve as basis for the programme committees to make their decisions and launch proposal for quality related improvements. A programme Committee "has to consist of three staff members and three students (Faculty

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[10] The programme committees provide advice on a self-motivated basis or on demand by the dean

Regulation, 2010, Article 13) and is thus composed of an equal number of staff and students [11] by additionally accommodating a spokesperson from the student associations (Faculty Regulation, 2010). Thus, students are legitimately represented in the programme committees by enabling students to "express their input in the programme in terms of rights and obligations in a number of ways (SMG, 2013, p.8)".

Another important body for institutional quality assurance is the so called **examination board** which is, according to Article 14 of the R&R, in charge of ensuring the quality of exams, the collection of exams results such as the enforcement of internal examination rules and regulations. Students are not part of the examination board but may launch an appeal against the examination board (Student Charter, 2013, p.21). Students may also ask for specific course exemption or an individual examination methods, but such claims have to be supported by a relevant study advisor (Student Charter, 2013).

Another very important institutional quality assurance body is the **"academic quality committee (OKC)".** The OKC is in charge of coordinating and administering course evaluations and panel discussions, by ensuring that the evaluation process is constantly improved (SMG, 2013, p.109). Overall, the OKC is a strong tool of student involvement in internal quality assurance, as students jointly administer the analysis of course evaluations with the head of the OKC (I2, 2013). As, the work of the OKC is largely carried out by student assistants, students' legitimate involvement in internal quality assurance processes is strengthened with staff and students working jointly together in professional teams to maintain the functioning of the internal quality assurance system (OKC, 2013; I2, 2013).

Moreover, the Faculty's two **students associations** ensure the representation of the students in the internal quality assurance system. They collect students' complaints about study related issues and communicate those to the Faculty management (Faculty Regulation, 2010). Such complaints are a rather strong source of power for students, as as according to Article 23 of the Faculty Regulation (2010), the Faculty management is obliged to react on such complaints. According to interviewees' (I1, I2, & I3), the number of student complaints constantly increased, as students suffer from too high learning pressure due to the introduction of new learning models (I2, 2013).[12] Students' vivid use of this communication channel demonstrates, that the quality of education is of vital interest to stu-

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[11] Three staff member and three students
[12] One point of critique mentioned by staff members was that students' feedback is sometimes not constructive or of bad quality

dents by constituting an urgent issue. Still, according to a member of the Faculty committee (I1, 2013), students do not yet fully exploit their power potential via the student association (I2, 2013).

Last but not least, the **faculty council** is an institutional board which represents the opinions and vital interests of employees and students regarding the internal Faculty management (Faculty regulation, 2010; WHW, 1992, Article 9.37). The faculty council is composed of an equal number of staff members and students with all 10 members being formally elected by students and employees on a one to two year basis[13], which supports students' legitimate position. The faculty council acts as an advisory body to the dean and carries out the quality monitoring of internal quality assurance procedures (I1, 2013). Moreover, in the faculty council students may approve or veto the dean's decisions regarding new measure for internal quality (Faculty Regulation, 2010, Article26).

Overall, the Faculty's internal policy regulations grant students a legitimate and equal position within the internal quality assurance system, which is also supported by the answers of all interviewees (I1, I2, & I3, 2013)

5.1.3 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes & courses in the Dutch Faculty

In order to sustain and closely monitor the good quality of education, the Faculty makes use of several quality assurance instruments (SMG, 2013). Hereby, the Faculty majorly relies on student feedback to check the quality of courses and study programmes, which indicates that students are regarded as powerful and legitimate partners in internal quality assurance. The following statement made by the Head of the OKC (2013) well defines the Faculty's dependency on students: "We have to care about students, otherwise they go" (OKC, 2013). Thus, "student input is an important part of improving the curriculum (SMG, 2013 ,p.8)", as students' satisfaction level and enrolment numbers constitute a major concern to the Faculty management, as a reduction of student numbers would also induce major financial losses[14] to the Faculty (Jongbloed et al., 2008). This fosters students' power potential,

In accordance to Article 10 of the Faculty Regulation (2010), the safeguarding of the quality of study programmes is delegated to a so-called programme director, who is in charge of closely monitoring the quality of each single course and the entire study programme.

The programme director makes use of the outcomes of the Faculty's two major internal quality assurance instruments:

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[13] Students are elected each year while employees are elected on a two year basis (I1, 2013)
[14] In the Dutch HE system a decrease in student numbers is linked to a limitation in state funding

- student course evaluations and
- course panel talks.

Student course evaluations constitute the key tool of the Faculty's internal quality assurance system. The evaluations enables students "to highlight both the strong points and any problem areas in order to improve the course where possible (SMG, 2013, p.6)". The Faculty targets the evaluation of all study courses via this internal instrument. Courses are to be evaluated after each quartile[15] (OKC, 2013). Students use the evaluation forms to assess the overall quality of a course, including the structure, achieved learning outcomes or quality of the teaching material (SMG, 2013). Students' participation in course evaluations is high, which again signals that the quality of education and teaching poses an urgent issue to students. This is strongly supported by all interviewees (I3, 2013).

The current survey questionnaire is standardized for the whole University and centrally developed by one of the University Faculties, though teachers may add additional questions on a voluntary basis (I2, 2013). In the evaluation forms, students may rank their answers according to the Dutch grading system on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 constituting the lowest and 10 the highest possible ue[16].Evaluations outcomes show that students mostly wish for an improved dissemination of course information, a rise of academic standards or better learning materials.

 The management and comprehensive administration of the course evaluations is conducted by the so-called Academic Quality Committee (OKC), which was already mentioned in the previous paragraph. The OKC safeguards the full evaluation of all courses and conducts the subsequent analysis of evaluation results (OKC, 2013). The OKC produces a final evaluation report containing the statistics from the evaluation forms for each course. This report is then forwarded to each teacher, the programme committee and the relevant programme director. Results of these evaluations are discussed with students in the programme committees (I3, 2013). The programme director "conducts periodic interviews with instructors based on survey results (SMG, 2013, p.109)". As in line with the Faculty Regulation (2010), the programme director has to react upon students' dissatisfaction to identify and eradicate the problematic aspects of a course. Thus, student evaluations serve as a basis for consulting talks to discuss students' satisfaction with courses and teachers (I2, 2013).

In 77 per cent of interviewees' answers, student feedback is mentioned as having a strong influence on internal quality matters, as course evaluations urge frequent changes in the structure or content of courses and study programmes. Hereby, student feedback is most powerful, if results of course

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[15] In the Dutch HE system the study year consist of 4 quartiles. One Quartile lasts 10 weeks, 8 weeks for lectures and two weeks for examination

[16] Students also have the possibility to make some open recommendation on how to improve a course or may emphasize the valuable elements of a track

evaluations fall below the 5.5 margin (I3, 2013). According to a programme Director (I3, 2013), changes to courses are introduced three to four times each quartile based on the feedback received from negative curse evaluations (I3, 2013).This high frequency of implemented changes points towards students' major influence on internal quality assurance and thus ascertains students' high power potential. Still, as mentioned in 22 per cent of the interview answers, students' power is more limited regarding courses exceeding the 5.5 evaluation threshold as such courses are regarded as meeting the minimum standards of quality, though their mark as such is pretty low. In such cases, students solely depend on the voluntary cooperation of lecturers (I1, 2013). Hereby, lecturers' cooperation potential might depend on their individual s career advancement ambitions. When considering the promotion of academic staff, the Faculty management has to take the results of student evaluations into account (I3, 2013). Nevertheless, the power of students' increases in the long-term, as lecturers who repeatedly receive unsatisfactory evaluation results may even be withdrawn from a course, if all previous attempts of increasing student satisfaction failed (I3, 2013).

Besides the programme director's consideration of evaluation results, each quartile the OKC compiles an overview of the evaluation results of all courses, graduation percentages and statistics regarding the achievements and learning goals. This overview is sent to the dean and the examination committee for further examination. If the overall grade of a course is lower than 5.5, a course is not meeting the Faculty's targeted quality standards and monitoring of such courses will be intensified. This implies that in such cases, the concerned teachers are obliged to agree to draft a proposal on how to improve the course in the future, which has to be submitted to the OKC (I2, 2013). The agreement between the Head of the OKC and the teacher is then put in a dossier for further follow-up, with the head of the OKC closely observing the progress and students' satisfaction with the course. This implies that the internal top down monitoring for underperforming course is enhanced which in return strengthens students' power position (I2, 2013). In addition to that, results of student evaluations also serve as a source of information for relevant external accreditation procedures, which take place every five years (I1, 2013).

Panel talks: The so- called **panel talks** constitute the Faculty's complementary instrument of internal quality assurance. It serves as a communication platform for teachers and students to discuss the quality of a course and potential points for improvement. According to the Student Charter (2013) "panel discussion is an extremely effective option for students to express their opinions on a course in a constructive and direct manner" (SMG, 2013, p. 109). Panel talks are either launched:
1. on the basis of non-sufficient outcomes of student evaluations, 2. on a request by the student association, based on a high frequency of collected student complaints, 3. or initiated by a teacher to

voluntary improve a course. Moreover, panel talks constitute a standard procedure for the evaluation of new courses (I1, 2013). Panel talks are attended by the teacher of the course, a number of voluntarily appearing students, the programme director and a student member of the OKC. Two to three panel talks take place each quartile (I3, 2013; SMG, 2013). Thus, students are included as legitimate partners in the talks. During the meetings, strength and weaknesses of a course are discussed and documented in minutes. These minutes constitute an agreement on which basis the relevant course has to be improved. The programme director is in charge of monitoring the implementation of the agreed points for improvement (I3, 2013). The close top-down supervision of lecturers' performance via this internal quality instrument assures that "teachers have to justify their actions (OKC, 2013)" which strengthens students influence and power potential.

Overall, the Dutch Faculty considers panel talks as a very effective tool of internal quality assurance and student engagement (SMG, 2013). Nevertheless, 45 per cent of interviewees' answers points towards students' limited legitimate role in panel talks. According to the Head of the OKC (2013), students' do not have general access to panel talk minutes[17] ,as only those students who participated in the talk receive these documents. Moreover, the Faculty provides students with no information about the implementation and realization of their feedback, which limits students' legitimate position as their have no access to such information (I2, 2013). The obligation to inform students about such measures is also absent in the internal quality regulations (Faculty, Regulation, 2010; SMG, 2013). This implies that the current internal quality assurance system is of rather non-transparent nature, with students being not able to follow-up on what happens with their course evaluation results. According to an interviewee (I2, 2013), this is a matter "that can still be improved". Moreover, students' legitimacy position is further constrained by the lack of an open quality culture in the Faculty, as students are sometimes afraid to openly communicate their criticism in front of the teacher during panel talks, as students cannot communicate their criticism anonymously. Thus, students are more hesitant to express their opinion, as they fear consequences for their grading (I2, 2013).

These reservations might have a negative impact on the overall feedback potential of panel talks. Therefore, students' legitimacy position regarding panel talks is rather limited, though it definitely serves as a source of power and influence on quality matters to students.

The frequently evaluated internal quality assurance instruments are complemented by **so-called programme days**, in which students may communicate their wishes for the further quality improvement of their study programme. Moreover, a student satisfaction survey is held on a regular basis to **identify problems in study programmes** (SMG, 2013, p.109). Results of this survey are also taken

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[17] The minutes of the interviews are solely send to those students who have participated in the panel interview and are not openly accessible or published for the entire student population.

into consideration by the programme director in setting up the curricula for the upcoming year (I3, 2013). In a nutshell, students are majorly involved in the monitoring of the quality of study courses and programmes.

5.1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff in the Dutch Faculty

The measures for monitoring the quality of study courses and programmes are also used for the safeguarding of high teaching quality, though to a minor extent. According to the Exam Commission (2013), course evaluations contain several questions which are targeted at latently examining if the level of teaching has been adequate. Such questions incorporate the ranking of the overall level of examination, the time plan or questions regarding students' perception, if learning outcomes have been achieved. In case a teacher underperforms on these issues, the same internal quality assurance procedures are launched as stated in the previous paragraph. This implies that students' power potential is again rather high (I1; I2 & I3). Nevertheless, according to an interviewee (I2, 2013), overall the possibility of students to evaluate lectures' teaching abilities has decreased, as questions regarding teachers' motivations during class or didactic skills have been recently abolished. Besides the evaluation of lecturers' teaching abilities, the Faculty offers a wide range of job trainings to the teaching staff, to assist teachers in improve their didactic skills or English language skills. Moreover, the exam committee closely monitors the adequacy of exams by keeping teachers updated about vital regulations for examinations.

5.1.5 Students as stakeholder in the Dutch Faculty: The Student View

In the following, students' own estimation of their degree of stakeholder salience is depicted based on the interview findings of the student association (I4, 2013) and results of the student survey (see Methodology Chapter 4). Again, findings of students' stakeholder salience have been analysed in terms of power, legitimacy or urgency and haven been related to the three ESG standards of: 1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance, 2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes and 3. Quality assurance of teaching staff.

5.1.6 Students and the policy and procedures for quality assurance (NL)

In the following it is reflected on students own perception of their role in the Dutch Faculty's internal quality assurance system and existing policy procedures.

According to survey finding, over 50 per cent of students confirm that they are able to participate in the Faculty's internal quality assurance committees and procedures. Around 40 per cent of respondents even state that students are well represented in internal quality assurance processes. The student association (I4, 2013) supports this claim by ascertaining that students are well represented within all internal quality assurance bodies. Thus, overall students seem to consider themselves as

legitimate partners in the institution's internal quality assurance organs, though almost 45 per cent of respondents would even be in favor of a higher degree of student involvement.

Though students are of the opinion to be well represented in internal quality procedures, they raise some criticism regarding the transparency of internal quality procedures. When asking respondents about the re-communicated of evaluation results to students, 65 per cent of students state that results of quality evaluation instruments are not re-communicated to students. This rather negative evaluation is illustrated in Figure 4 below. As seen in Figure 4, one fourth of respondents even strongly criticized this lack of information.

Figure 4: Results of evaluations are re-communicated to students (NL)

<div align="right">

Source: Student survey (2013)

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The student association also confirms the lack of communication regarding the implementation of student feedback, as student associations themselves are not informed about the realization of students' claims. Thus, the current non transparent characteristics of the Faculty's internal quality system is lowering students perception as legitimate partner in quality assurance, as the implementation of student feedback is not sufficiently disseminated to students and the student associations, as only some results of course evaluations are openly published on the Faculty website.

Regarding students' opinion on the Faculty's overall responsiveness towards their needs within internal quality procedures, Figure 5 shows that 75 per cent of interrogated students state that they have the feeling that the Faculty cares about students' demands.
This implies that students believe to have power as they are aware of the Faculty's efforts to satisfy their expectations.

Figure 5: Faculty's responsiveness towards students' needs (NL)

Nevertheless, when asking students' about their potential to draw attention to their needs, respondents are rather sceptical (see Graph 7). Hereby, 42 per cent of respondents believe that students are able to draw attention to their needs, which affirms students' power potential. Nevertheless, 43 per cent of respondents remain undecided, implying that students are repeatedly unsure about their power potential in requesting academics to meet their needs.
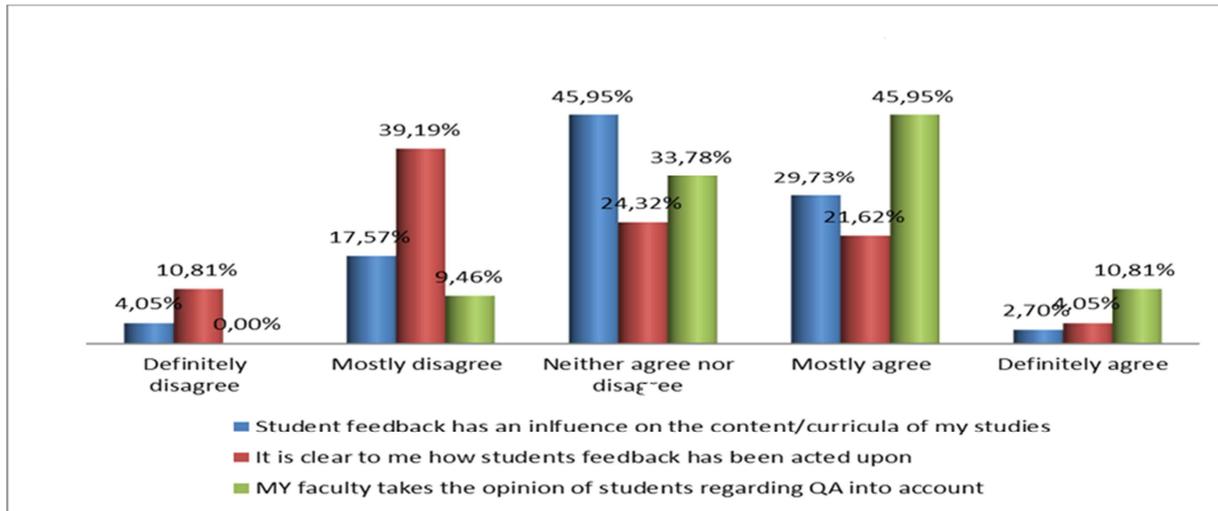
5.1.7 Students and the approval, monitoring and periodic review of study programmes & courses (NL)

In line with the Faculty's internal quality assurance policies, 70 per cent of students confirm that study programmes and curricula are regularly evaluated by them in course evaluation and panel talks. Hereby, 70 per cent of students state that the evaluation of study courses takes place at the end of each quartile[18]. In total 63, 5 per cent of students agree that they have the possibility to provide feedback on the quality of study programmes, with 10 per cent even strongly agreeing with this statement. This implies that students perceive themselves as legitimate partners in internal quality assurance when it comes to course evaluations and panel talks. Students' legitimacy position is also confirmed by the student association, stating that students are able to communicate their opinion on internal quality assurance within the internal quality system. Students strong involvement in the monitoring of quality also coincides with their own interests as 85 per cent of respondents claim that the possibility to provide feedback on the quality of education constitutes an important issue them. This proves that students have urgent claim to safeguard the quality of education.

Moreover, students' perception of the Faculty's interest in guaranteeing quality of education and teaching is rather positive as 66 per cent state that academics are interested in improving curricula and study programme. Nevertheless, students' answers are a bit less enthusiastic when it comes to

the question, if student feedback influences the Faculty's quality actions. Students' answers are illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Perceived influence and implementation of student feedback (NL)

In total around 55 per cent of students have the impression that the Faculty makes use of students' feedback, while 30 per cent of students neither agree nor disagree to this statement.

Thus, one third of students are rather undecided on this question while 10 per cent even disagree. This point towards a great uncertainty amongst students regarding the Faculty's incorporation of student evaluation for the safeguarding of internal quality. Students' answers are a bit clearer concerning the questions, if the Faculty acts upon students' feedback. As illustrated in Figure 6, around 50 per cent of students claim not to know how students´ feedback has been acted upon or if certain quality improvements have been initiated based on student feedback (see Figure 6). Around 25 per cent of students are undecided on this issue. This implies that the majority of students are left in ignorance as to whether the Faculty pays attention to students' opinion, when assessing the quality of education. This negative trend is slightly supported by the fact that 25 per cent of students are of the opinion that student feedback does not have an influence on the quality of education, though the majority of students remains undecided on this topic (see Figure 6). Therefore, students´ perceived power position regarding their influence potential on the quality of education is rather weak. The students association supports students' overall critical estimation of students' power potential regarding the monitoring of the quality of education. Hereby, students' power position is especially weak, if a teacher refrains from taking students feedback into account. Students do not direct over any enforcement measures to push through their interests and may solely repeatedly point towards a problematic issue via the existing quality assurance instrument (I4, 2013). Moreover, the head of

the student association was not able to name one single quality issue, which was changed based on student feedback. Thus, according to the student associations, students are rather powerless in their influence on the quality of education, by highly depending on the check-up features of the existing internal quality system. Still, around 55 per cent of students are of the opinion that the Faculty takes the opinion of students regarding IQA into account which opposes the previous negative estimations of the student association (see Figure 6).

5.1.8 Students and the quality assurance of teaching staff (NL)

Students' opinion regarding their possibilities to provide feedback on the teaching quality of lecturers is rather positive. Almost 80 per cent of respondents agree to the statement that students are able to provide feedback on the quality of teaching. This strengthens students' perception of their legitimacy position. Moreover, students' ability to provide feedback on the teaching quality is of special importance as, according to the student association, the safeguarding of high teaching quality constitutes and urgent issues to students, as most complaints which are received by the student association, concern the quality of lecturers' teaching proficiencies.

Nevertheless, respondents' answers are a bit dispersed when evaluating the impact of students` feedback on the quality of teaching. In total, 30 per cent of students claim that students' feedback does have an influence on lecturers' teaching quality, while 30 per cent oppose this opinion and 40 per cent remain undecided. Therefore, it is really hard to conclude, if students think that they direct over a power potential regarding the ascertaining of staff's teaching abilities or not. The diversity in responses could strive from the fact that regarding this issue, huge differences between study programmes are present.

5.1.9 Sub-Conclusion Dutch Faculty

In the following, students' stakeholder position according to the stakeholder typology of Mitchell et al. (1997) is determined by a joint comparison of the institutional and student perspective by triangulating the three data sources (see Table 5). Table 5 summarizes the institutional and student opinion on students' power potential, legitimacy status und urgency as stakeholders.

Table 5: Summary of data analysis: Students as stakeholder in the Dutch Faculty

	Desk research (institutional view)	Semi-structured interviews (institutional view)	Student Opinion (survey and students association)
Power	- Programme Director has to react on student feedback - Internal check-up system - Institution wants to meet students' needs keep student numbers stable	- Students`have power: Frequent changes to courses and study programme based on student feedback. - Influence on teachers promotion potential	-Limited Power (Students do not know if their feedback has an influence on the quality of education or have a low estimation of their power potential)
Legitimacy	-Integration of students in all major internal quality assurance bodies (Faculty Regulation, 2010)	- Students legitimate partners in all major internal quality assurance bodies – -lack of transparency regarding feedback implementation	-Legitimate partners in all major internal quality assurance bodies - Lack of transparency regarding feedback implementation
Urgency	-Possibility of complaints via Student Association and Examination Committee	-Students have urgent claims (fast participation in quality evaluation instruments)	-Safeguarding of the quality of education and teaching is important

Source: Desk research, semi-structured interviews & student survey (2013)

According to the analysis of semi-structured interviews and desk research it can be ascertained that in the institutional view, student feedback is of major importance for internal quality processes, while the implementation of IQA measures is closely monitored by several internal quality assurance institutions including the programme director, the OKC or the programme committees. These internal check-up mechanisms strengthen students' **power** potential, as academic staff has to take into account students' opinion. Thus, the Faculty`s comprehensive internal quality check-up system strengthens students power potential as teachers have to justify unsatisfactory evaluation results in front of several internal quality instances (OKC, 2013; Faculty Regulation, 2010; SMG, 2013). Interview findings also confirm that changes to study programmes and courses are frequently introduced based on students` feedback and that staff's promotion is also tied to results of student evaluations
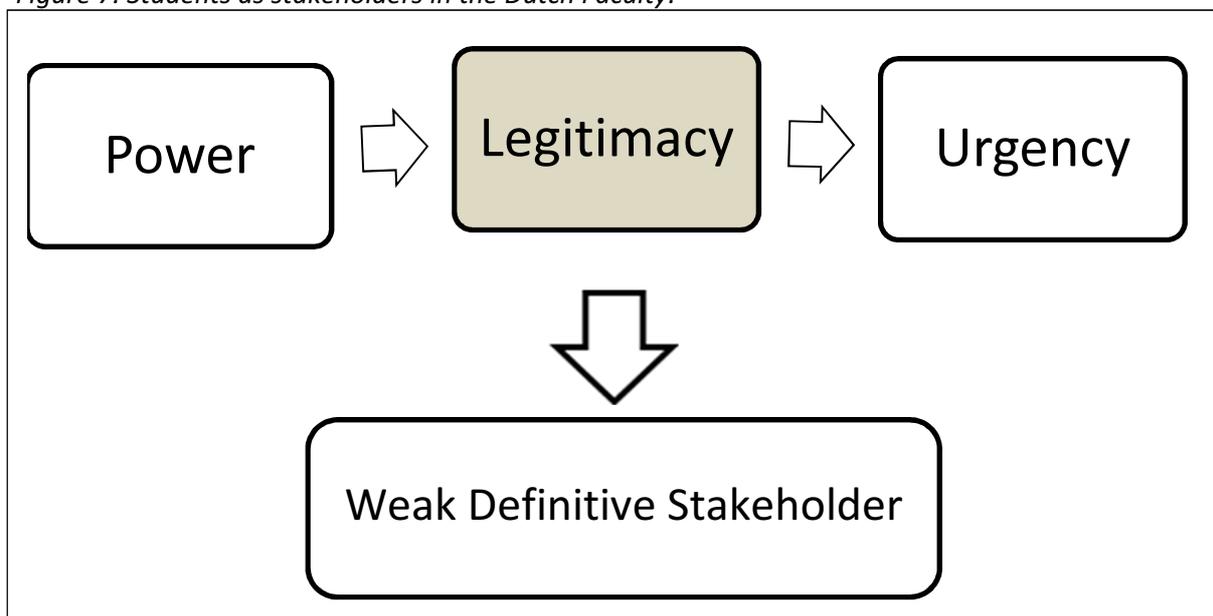
(I,3 2013). In addition, the Faculty has an interest in maintaining students' satisfaction levels, to prevent students from leaving the institution which again strengthens students' power and influence on internal quality assurance matters. Moreover no answers of interviewees' indicated the absence of student's power. Concerning students' **legitimacy** position, the analysis of desk research and interviews show that students' are formally represented as legitimate partners within all internal quality assurance committees of the Faculty which is also promoted by national legacies. Nevertheless interviewees' point towards a lack of transparency within the IQAS, as quality improvements are not sufficiently re-communicated to students. The missing re-communication of quality improvements derived from course evaluation and panel talks limits students legitimacy position. Regarding **urgency**, all interviewees supported the institution's perception that the high quality of education and teaching constitute a vital issue to students. Hereby, students' valorization of quality in education is demonstrated by students' high participation in internal quality assurance measures, including course evaluations and panel talks. Moreover, the Faculty offers students a wide range of channels to communicate their claims, as via the student association or the examination board. Students' most common urgent claims concern the quality of teaching, the academic levels of courses, such as the availability and quality of teaching material. Based on these finding is can be summarized that from the institution's perspective, students can be regarded as **weak Definitive Stakeholders**, by directing over the attributes of power and urgency but being marked by a limited legitimacy potential.

Concerning students' perception of their own stakeholder position, the following conclusion can be drawn. Survey results show that students have a really minor estimation of their power potential in internal quality assurance procedures. Hereby, students do not know if their provided feedback is duly implemented by the Faculty or changes to the quality of study programmes and courses are introduced. The majority of students' is not even able to provide for a clear estimation of students' power and influence potential. The student association confirms students' perception as rather non powerful actors, by claiming that students depend on the voluntary cooperation of teachers and other internal quality assurance bodies to realize their claims. Concerning **legitimacy,** students' opinion is rather positive. Overall, according to the student association and findings from the survey, students confirm that they are well integrated into the internal quality assurance system by posing equal members in all major internal quality committees. Nevertheless, also survey results indicate that students are left in ignorance about the measures that are implemented based on their provided feedback, which denies students a proper follow-up on the realization of their internal quality claims and devalues their legitimacy status. Regarding **urgency,** students confirm to have urgent claims by having an interest in the safeguarding the quality of education and teaching. Thus, students

consider themselves as Dependent Stakeholders by having urgent claims and posing legitimate part-ners in internal quality assurance processes, but having a rather low power and influence potential.

When combining the findings of the institutional and student view on students' salience as stake-holders, the following conclusion can be made. Despites students' antithetic perception, students do direct over the attribute of power within the Faculty's internal quality assurance system which is confirmed by the answers of interviewees and desk research. The later affirm students' influence potential on internal quality assurance matters. Secondly, both parties confirm that students have urgent claims to safeguard the quality of education and teaching. Concerning legitimacy, both parties acknowledge that students pose vital and legitimacy partners in internal quality assurance process (Faculty Regulation, 2010). In addition to that, the non-transparency of internal quality measures and the non-communication of implemented measures to students is jointly criticized by students and interviewees'. Thus, student's legitimacy position is limited (see Figure 7). Due to students' existing power potential, urgent claims and their limited legitimacy position it can be concluded that students pose **weak Definitive Stakeholders within IQA** processes at the Dutch Faculty as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Students as stakeholders in the Dutch Faculty:

Source: Desk Research, Semi-Structured Interviews & Student Survey (2013)

To conclude, students enjoy a rather high degree of stakeholder salience in the Dutch Faculty and can be extremely forceful in pushing through their interests due to their combined values of power and urgency, which is supported by their legitimate representation in all major internal quality assur-ance committees. Still their limited legitimacy status denies them an accreditation as full Definitive Stakeholders.

5.2 Germany: Internal quality assurance and student involvement

In **Germany** the debate about quality assurance in HE did only emerge in the late 1980s, when quality assurance was discovered as an important vehicle to provide students and employers with information about the quality of qualification (KMK, 2012). In contrast to the Netherlands, the governance of HE follows a purely federal governance structure in Germany. This implies that not the state but the regional educational ministries of the "Länder" are in charge of supervising HEIs' actions and adherence to existing quality assurance guidelines (Nickel, 2007). Internal quality assurance guidelines are developed by each regional educational ministry in the so-called"Higher Education law of the Länder (Landeshochschulgesetz)". These legal provisions are solely applicable to higher education institutions being located in the specific region. Though the guidelines for quality assurance are set by the Länder themselves, all regional educational ministers regularly meet in the so-called "Cultural Minister Conference (KMK)", constituting a collaborative committee aimed at harmonizing and spreading best practices of quality assurance amongst all German region. Decisions which are taken by the KMK can be voluntarily implemented by each regional educational ministry, but have a non – binding legal character.

In 1998, accreditation procedures to ensure the quality of HE were introduced in Germany in response to the emerging Bologna Process. Since then, study programmed have to be evaluated by independent external accreditation agencies, which are under the supervision of a national accreditation council. Hereby, student representation constitutes an obligatory requirement of all accreditation procedures to which students have to be integrates as member with full "voting rights (Witte, 2008). Overall, student involvement regarding the evaluation of education and teaching has become a common practice in all Länder, with teaching staff being admonished to carefully take students input into account. This implies that students' involvement in internal quality assurance is appreciated by German policy makers (Witte, 2008). Though external quality assurance agencies and guidelines acts as a major promoter of quality assurance, also in Germany the main responsibility of internal quality assurance is delegated to higher education institution[19] themselves (Stifterverband für die deutsche Wissenschaft, 2013). Moreover, the implementation of internal quality measures is mostly even further delegated to the individual Faculties or institutions. Hereby, in line with the principle of academic freedom, professors and junior professors are exempted from binding quality assessments regarding research and teaching (KMK, 2012, p.233). Despite Germany's federal governance structure in HE, in the past the national ministry of education has provided for several impetuses to enhance internal quality assurance at German HEIs, by adding the evaluation of research and teaching

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[19] Higher education institutions come together to cooperate and discuss issues of internal quality assurance within the framework of the "Hochschulrektorenkonferenz" (Nickel, 2008).

as an essential requirement to the German law on higher education and supporting the improvement of study conditions and quality of teaching in the quality act of 2011 (Nickel, 2008).

Thus, overall the state tries to exert an increasing impact on quality assurance developments at German HEIs. Still in both systems the main responsibility of quality assurance is delegated to the individual HE, while student integration constitutes an important element in both QA systems.

5.2.1 Case 2: Quality assurance in a German University Institute

In the following subchapter the internal quality assurance system of a Germany University Institute is depicted. In line with the previous case study, an emphasis is put on how much does the HEI involve students in internal QA assurance processes by means of the three stakeholder variables by Mitchell et al. (1997): power, legitimacy and urgency. Hereby power relates to students' ability to have a direct influence on the HEI's internal quality assurance matter, legitimacy describes students' equal representation in internal quality assurance bodies and urgency concerns students' vivid claims regarding internal quality assurance matters.

The political science Institute under study belongs to a public University in Germany. The Institute offers study programmes in the field of Political Science and Public Administration. Established in the 1960s, in 2013 it had 1,700 students and 350 employees. The Institute is led by a dean and several subordinated executive bodies. As the institution is public it does not charge tuition fees. At the moment of this study, the University's internal quality assurance system followed a decentralized approach, though the central University management sets the basic guidelines for internal quality assurance practices via the Evaluation Statute and the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Research and Education. The set-up of a central internal quality assurance catalogue is aimed at harmonizing internal quality assurance practices at all University Institutes and Faculties. Moreover, the central HE management highlights that the University's entire quality assurance strategy is in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (CUM, 2014).

As put down in Article 3 of the Evaluation Statue (2009), the main responsibility and implementation of quality assurance measures is delegated to the University Institutes[20] which belong to a respective Faculty. The Faculty is in charge of supervising internal quality assurance practices at its subordinated Institutes. The studied Institute belongs to the Faculty of Educational and Social Science, which accommodates 4 different Institutes. In line with the University guidelines, the conduction of course evaluations and quality assurance is delegated to the Institutes.

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[20] University Institutes are responsible for the development and of study curricula

In the subsequent chapter, the internal quality assurance system of the selected Institute is analysed by comparing the institutional and student view regarding student involvement in internal quality assurance. Students' role is analysed regarding the three ESG criteria of 1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance; 2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes and 3. Quality assurance of teaching staff (see Methodology Chapter 4). Findings of the institutional view result again from a combined analysis of desk research and semi -structured interviews with academic staff and quality assurance officers. Interviews were conducted with the Head of Internal Quality Assurance (I5, 2013), a member of the Quality Assurance Staff (I6, 2013) and a professor (I7, 2013). Citations of interviewees' are marked by the reference abbreviations indicated in brackets. Students' opinion is derived from the results of the student survey (see chapter 5.3) and an interview with the student association at the Institute (I8, 2013). All data is triangulated to determine students' position as stakeholders in the Institute's internal quality assurance system

5.2.2 Policy and procedures for internal quality assurance in the German Institute

For the maintenance of its' internal quality assurance system the Institute complies to the central Programme Evaluation Statute (2009) of the University and the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Teaching and Education (GETE, 2007) (German Faculty Website, 2013). Both documents are in line with the provisions of Paragraph 6 of the Landeshochschulgesetz[21], stating that all higher education institutions are obliged to establish an internal quality assurance system to regularly evaluate the quality of study courses and teaching. Accordingly, the Institute's internal quality assurance practices are aimed at assuring the quality of education by employing transparent measures and guaranteeing a good counselling situation for students (Evaluation statute, 2009, p.87). Hereby, the active contribution to internal evaluation practices constitutes "an obligation to teachers and students (Evaluation Statute, 2009, p.87)" and is made obligatory by external accreditation.

Overall, 58 per cent of interviewees confirm students' legitimate position in internal quality assurance committees, which is in line with the central University provisions demanding that: "Students are to be duly integrated in internal quality evaluation processes to assess students' opinion of the quality of offered courses and study programmes (Evaluation Statute, 2005)".

Still, the Institute majorly focuses on the legitimate integration of members of the students association as according to a professor (I7, 2013): "The Institute has a rather long tradition of active student association involvement to internal quality assurance processes" with the internal quality officer (I5,

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[21] In Germany the regional educational ministries of the "Länder" are in charge of supervising HEI's actions and adherence to quality assurance guidelines (Nickel, 2007). Internal quality assurance guidelines are developed by each regional educational ministry in the so-called"Landeshochschulgesetz". These legal provision are solely applicable to higher education institutions in this land (see Chapter 6.1)

2013) confirming that: "we do not question every student on internal quality assurance matter". Thus, the single student as such is not majorly integrated in the Institute's IQA proceedings.

Article 8 of the Evaluation Statute (2009) obliges all Institutes to elect their own **internal evaluation committees**, which are to supervise the evaluation of courses. The inclusion of students in such-committees is explicitly mentioned in the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Teaching and Research (2007), though such provisions are rather vague. According to Article 8 of the Evaluation Statute (2009), internal evaluation committees should "account for a balanced staff composition" by integrating an "adequate" number of students (Evaluation Statute, 2009, Article 8)". Hereby it is not clearly defined, what an "adequate number of students" entails, as the total number of commission members should not exceed 9 members (Evaluation Statute, 2009). The absent definition of a threshold for student members in such committees limits the latters' legitimacy position.

In line with Article 8, the Institute sets-up its own internal evaluation committee, the so called "AG-Lehre" in which staff and student representatives of the student association meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of internal quality assurance. The AG-Lehre has no decision making power but acts as an advisory body to the Institute's director. According to the internal quality assurance officer (I5, 2013), student representatives are duly integrated into such committees, with the members of the AG-Lehre closely listening to the wishes and proposal of students. This confirms the Institute's valorisation of students' opinion and their legitimacy position in internal quality matters. Nevertheless, in the AG-Lehre only two places are reserved for student representatives. Thus, students are not equally represented in this committee and heavily depend on the support of other committee members to strengthen their claims. This implies that students' interests can be easily neglected, in case their claims are not considered feasible by staff and professors (I7, 2013). This dependency limits students' legitimacy position and is also supported by 42 per cent of the interviewees' answers. Moreover, students' power position is limited, as due to their underrepresentation, it is harder for them to push through their interests.

In addition to students' participation in the AG-Lehre, one student representative of the student association is also integrated to the Institute's **internal quality steering committee,** by additionally including three professors and one research assistant. Thus, students are again not equally represented. The steering committee manages the content of evaluation questionnaires and defines the time schedule for the Institute's evaluations. Such results pose an integral part to internal evaluation reports, which act as a tool of internal competition between all University Institutes. The central University management takes the results of evaluation reports into account when allocating funding

(GETE, 2007). Results of evaluation reports may also lead to the set-up of action plans to improve the quality of study programmes or courses. The implementation of such changes is to be supervised by the director of the Institute (Evaluation Statute, 2009). Nevertheless, internal quality reports are not publicly published and solely discussed in relevant internally committees or with external experts in case of external assessment. Thus, students' legitimacy position is limited, as the Institute is withholding this information from them.

Besides internal quality assurance committees, the Institute also appoints one academic staff member as **internal quality assurance officer**. The internal quality assurance officer is in charge of the supervision of the comprehensive evaluation of all study courses and takes preparatory actions for prospective accreditation procedures of study programmes. To support the latter, one research assistant is entrusted with the administration and analysis of student course evaluation (see next subchapter), the so- called **quality assurance assistant.**

As already mentioned representatives of the s**tudent association** are integrated in the Institute's internal quality assurance procedures. Moreover via the Institute's student association, students have the possibility to file complaints against the quality of courses, teaching or examination standards. The student association may directly contact the teachers or relevant study programme counsellors to discuss the criticized issues. This serves as a source of power to students. The current student association is quite active in communicating students' complaints regarding quality issues to the Institute's directory (I7, 2013). Thus, the Institute is aware that students have urgent claims, which is supported by all interviewees (I5; I6 & I7). Nevertheless, according to the quality assurance officer (I5, 2013), there persists a general mismatch between students claims and the interest of professors, as students always desire a better quality education, though professor priority lies in the production of research.

Another factor degrading students' power are the Institute's excessive student numbers. Due to the high number of students, the Institute is not forced to grant students more influence, as the influx of students remains stable even if students' claims are neglected. Thus, the excessive number of students decreases students' power potential.

5.2.3 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes & courses in the German Institute

The Institute employs two major internal quality assurance instruments namely the centrally administered student study course evaluations (Studentische Lehrveranstaltungskritik) and the student

satisfaction survey which takes place every 3 years for the sake of prospective study programme accreditations. Via **study course evaluations** students are asked to assess the quality of lectures and seminars which is to enhance the transparency of study programmes and ascertain the quality of teaching (Institute Website, 2014). Results of student evaluations constitute the Institute's major source of empirical data to determine and improve the quality of education and teaching. This is confirmed by all interviewees (I5; I6 & I7).

In line with the central University guidelines the steering committee of the Institute develops the evaluation questionnaire by involving one student representative in this process. Thus, the Institute pays attention to students' recommendations, though the main responsibility for the development of the questionnaire is delegated to the professors (GETE, 2007).The same questionnaire is used for all courses types, granting students the possibility to rank the didactical teaching skills of lecturers, the quality of education and the quality of lecturing material by means of the German school grading system in a margin from 1 to 6, with 6 meaning insufficient and 1 very good**.**

At the Institute academics are advised to evaluate each course once during each study year. Hereby, the lecturer is in charge of distributing the questionnaires to students' and send the collected evaluation forms to the quality assurance assistant of the Institute. All course evaluations are automatically analysed and processed by an online tool. The results of evaluations are summarized in a final quality report which is then forwarded to the teacher and the dean. The administering quality assistant is not obliged to follow-up on the results of evaluations or the implementation of quality changes. Evaluation results are openly published on the website of the dean (German Institute Website, 2014). Thus students have access to the results of course evaluations, which strengthens their legitimacy status.

According to the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Education and Teaching (2007), academics should conduct evaluations in the middle of a course in order to discuss evaluation results with students for further improvements. Nevertheless, only few lecturers meet this recommendation as most evaluations are conducted at the end of each course, implying that evaluation results are seldom discussed. This limits students' legitimacy position (I7, 2013). Nevertheless, some professors provide students with the possibility to provide feedback at the end of a course, but such practices lay in the hands of individual academics (I7, 2013).

Thus, evaluation results are to serve as a source of information to teachers to voluntarily improve the quality of study course. According to a professor (I7, 2013) and the quality assurance assistant (I6, 2013), results of student evaluation are mostly used to address changes to the literature or an overall

modification of the course structure. Moreover, in case the educational quality of a course is evaluated as rather inferior, such results may lead to the dismissal of temporary teaching staff which ascertains students' power potential. Additionally, 43 per cent of interview answers confirm students' power potential in this regard. Consequently, from the Institute's perspective students direct over a certain degree of power, as changes to courses or study programme are introduced based on student feedback.

Nevertheless, 57 per cent of the interview answers can be related to students' rather limited power potential, with 18 per cent evening pointing towards a complete absence of students' power. According to interviewees, students' potential on internal quality assurance matters is limited as students' strongly depend on the voluntary cooperation of teaching staff and especially professors. Though teachers are formally obliged to provide the dean with evaluation results, the internal quality assurance system is not entailing any sanctioning mechanisms which can enforce the submission or implementation of evaluation results (I6, 2013). No higher instance supervises teachers' consideration of course evaluation results, though temporary lecturing staff is still under the closer supervision of the internal quality officer who has access to all evaluation results and considers evaluations as a decisive factor for the prolongation of employment contracts. Moreover, as the freedom of research and education is duly manifested by German constitutional law (German Constitutional Law, Article 5[22]), professors are not obliged to consider students feedback and the Institute has no means of exerting any pressure on the later to act upon students' claims. Thus, all provisions constitute rather soft policy tools which are to animate lecturers to improve their courses on a self- motivated basis (I5, 2013). The Institute's lack of effective check-up mechanisms and students' dependency on lecturers' voluntary consideration of evaluation results limits students' power potential.

Moreover, the Institute's internal quality culture is marked by a general mistrust in students' capacity of objectively evaluating the quality of education, as in the opinion of the internal quality officers (I5, 2013) some students simply do not know what quality is as: "students' are not able to objectively evaluate the quality of education, if a student only knows one to two different universities". This statement is support by a quotation form the central University management, stating that students have to pay attention to fairly evaluate the performance of teachers and should not only evaluate a course to score off a teacher (CUM , 2014). Thus, students' are not regarded as competent equal partners in internal quality assurance by the Institute. Still this position is not shared by the entire Institute staff as according to the professor (I7): "Student evaluations are important as I am indeed aligned with the opinion that students are best capable of evaluating the quality of a course". What is

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[22] Grundgesetz (Constitutional Law)

more, students' extensive participation in course evaluations signal that students have a strong interest in improving the quality of education. Nevertheless, interviewees also point towards some limitations regarding students' urgent claims, by stating that sometimes students have rather split opinions, as some for example favour a greater flexibility in study curricula, while others preferring stricter curricula set-ups. Thus students' urgent claims are perceived as rather diverse by the Institute (I5, 2013).

Besides course evaluations, every three years, the Institute launches students' satisfaction survey to ascertain the quality of entire study programme (Evaluation Statute, 2009). In these surveys, students are asked to evaluate the Institute's general counselling and student facilities, technical equipment and their general satisfaction with educational organisation (I5, 2013). Students' general satisfaction with study programmes is of rather high importance to the Institute, as high drop-out rates can lead to a reduction in Institute funding, which implies that students' satisfaction constitute an important factor to the Institute's management strategy and increases their power.

5.2.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff in the German Institute

As highlighted in the previous paragraph, the course evaluation questionnaire contains specific questions to assess the didactical skills of lectures and assure the quality of teaching at the Institute (Evaluation Statute, 2009). According to interviewees, the assurance of high quality of teaching constitutes an urgent issue to students. Moreover, the Institute offers a wide range of training seminars for teachers to offer them the possibility to improve their teaching abilities on a voluntary basis[23] (I5, 2013). Thus again, students' power potential is limited due to their dependence on teachers' voluntary consideration of their feedback. According to the University management, teacher training programmes are to turn the University into a Teach tank: an entity in which discussion and reflection of quality of teaching is institutionalized including constant training of staff (CUM[24], 2013). Thus the assurance of teaching quality constitutes a central issue on the Institute's internal quality assurance agenda which is supported by the University's central management.

5.2.5 Students as stakeholder in the German Institute: The student view

In the following, students' own estimation of their degree of stakeholder salience is depicted based on semi-structured interview findings with the student association (I8, 2013) and student survey responses (see Methodology Chapter 4). Again, findings of student salience have been analysed in

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[23] Due to the high relevance of research within the German HE system ,especially temporary staff often struggles with participating in such trainings
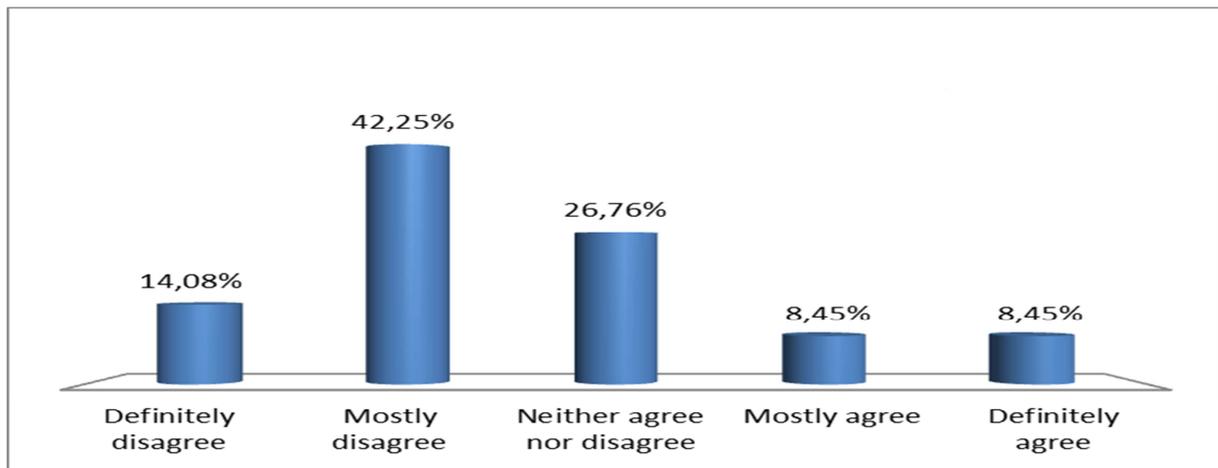[24] Central University Management

terms of power, legitimacy and urgency and haven been related to three ESG standards of: 1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance, 2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes and 3. Quality assurance of teaching staff.

5.2.6 Students and the policy and procedures for quality assurance (DE)

In the following it is reflected on students 'own perception of their role in the Institute's internal quality assurance system and existing policy procedures.

Overall, students' estimation of their involvement to internal quality assurance processes is rather diverse. Approximately 56 per cent of students can neither refute nor confirm that students are well represented in internal quality assurance processes. Around 32 per cent of respondents even claim that students are underrepresented in such processes. The student association supports respondents' opinion of students' underrepresentation in all internal quality assurance committees. Moreover, 30 per cent of students state to not be able to participate in such committee, which adds to students' general dissatisfaction with their current degree of involvement, as 80 per wish for greater involvement of students in internal quality assurance processes. All these findings indicate that students do not perceive themselves as legitimate and equal partners in the Institute's internal quality assurance system. Moreover, the student association also highlights students' strong dependency on other committee members in pushing through their interests in internal quality assurance committees, which again weakens students' power position.

In addition to students' low estimation of their legitimacy status, students also criticize the rather high degree of non- transparency of the Institute's internal quality assurance procedures. As shown in Figure 8, approximately 56 per cent of students claim that results of course evaluations are not communicated to students.
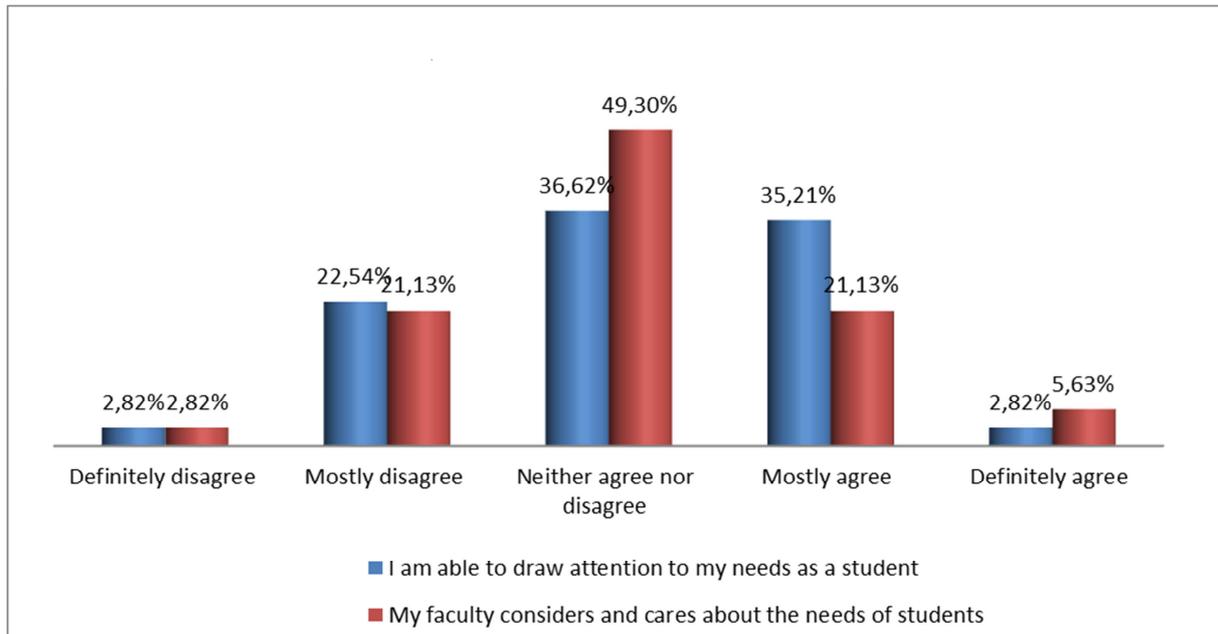
Figure 8: Results of evaluations are re-communicated to students (DE)

Source: Student survey (2013)

One quarter of respondents can neither agree nor disagree to have received information about evaluation results. Thus, despite the fact that results of course evaluations are openly published, students are not sophisticatedly informed about their access to such information. This implies that the results of evaluations are not properly disseminated to students', which hampers students' follow-up potential on the implementation of their claims and limits their legitimacy position.

Concerning the Institute's overall responsiveness to students' needs within internal quality procedures, respondents' opinions are not enthusiastic, which is illustrated in Figure 9. Overall, only 26 per cent of respondents are of the opinion that the Institute cares about students' needs. Thus, students are not of the opinion that the Institute is much engaged in meeting students' wishes and expectation regarding internal quality assurance. In addition to that, students' opinion regarding their ability to draw attention to their needs is also rather divergent.

As shown in Figure 9, around 38 per cent agree that students are able to draw attention to their needs, which implies that students' perceive to have a certain power potential within current internal quality assurance procedures.

Figure 9: German Institute's responsiveness towards students' needs (DE)

Nonetheless, 36 per cent of respondents remain undecided on this issue, while 24 per cent have the feeling to not be able to draw attention to their claims. These results ascertain that students' perceive their power potential as rather limited within the Institute's internal quality assurance procedures.

5.2.7 Students and the approval, monitoring and periodic review of study programmes & courses (DE)
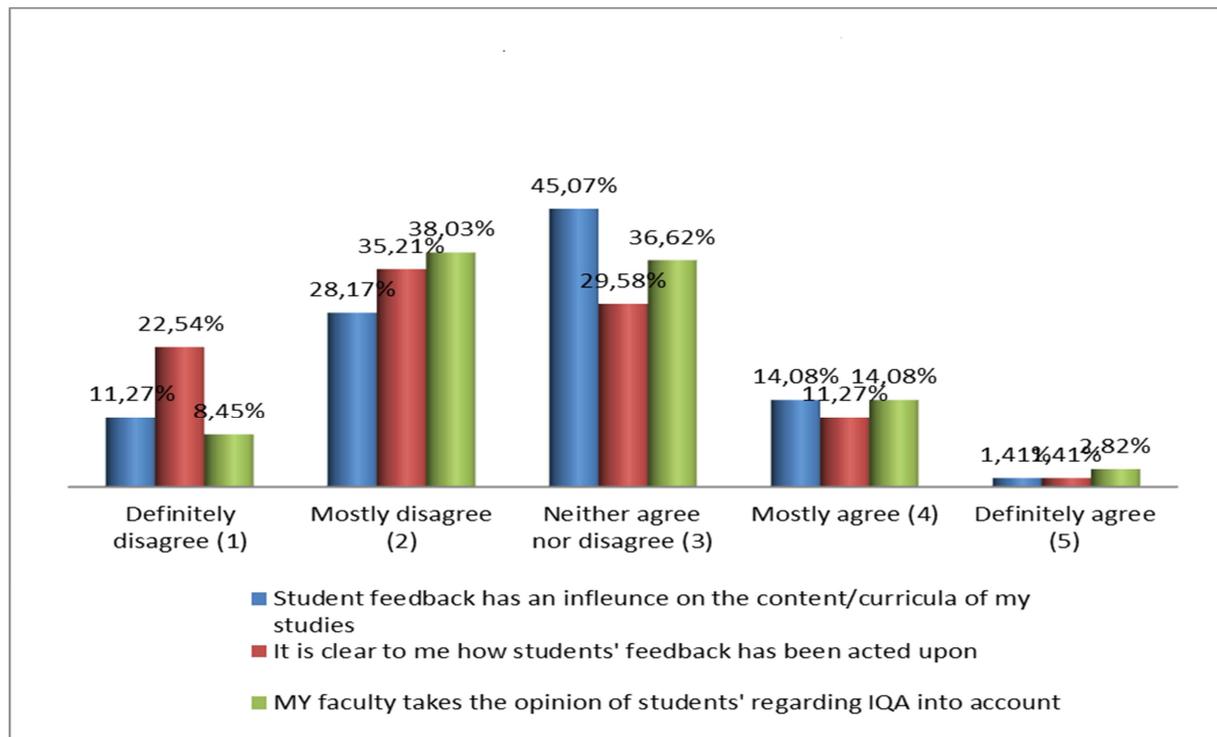
In accordance to the Institute's internal quality assurance policy the majority of students confirm that study programmes and curricula are regularly evaluated. Overall, 60 per cent of respondents confirm that course evaluations take place every semester[25], while 27 per cent confirm that evaluation are launched after each study course. Hereby, 86 per cent of respondents confirm that surveys constitute the Institute's most commonly used instruments for quality evaluation. Approximately 60 per cent of students confirm to have provided feedback on the quality of education, while 24 per cent claim to have been neglected in such practices, which points towards a slight inconsistency in the implementation of internal quality assurance practices. This opposes students' interests, as 80 per cent of respondents claim that the possibility to provide feedback constitutes a vital issue to students. Thus, students' are eager to be involved and contribute to the assurance of internal quality standards. Students' general opinion is also supported by the student association. Hereby, students' claims for high quality education majorly strive from the Institute's competitive selection procedures,

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[25] Students' high response rates regarding semester evaluations strive from differences in the German academic year circle as at the Institute courses are given each semester (6 months) instead of each quartile so as in the Dutch case study.

which increases students' expectations about the quality of education and teaching, as many students put allot of efforts to successfully pass the Institute's admission procedures. Thus, in return for their efforts, students expect to receive high quality education (I8, 2013).

Though students have urgent claims concerning quality in HE, their opinion regarding the Institute's responsiveness towards students' feedback is rather divided. Overall, 53 per cent of students confirm that the German Institute has an interest in improving quality. Still, as shown in Figure 10, around 46 per cent of students are not of the opinion that the Institute considers students' feedback to improve the quality of education.

Figure 10: Perceived influence and implementation of students' feedback by the Institute (DE)

Source: Student survey (2013)

Around 40 per cent of respondents remain undecided. These findings show that students have a rather limited or even low estimation of their power potential, as they are not of the opinion that the Institute considers their feedback to improve the quality of education.

Respondents' negative assessment of students' impact on internal quality assurance is fortified when analysing students' estimation of their concrete influence on internal quality matters. As illustrated in Figure 10 above, in total 40 per cent of students are not of the opinion that their provided feedback has an influence on the quality of education. This negative evaluation is supported by the student

association, stating that students' have rather limited power in inducing changes to the quality of education, due to students' great dependency on the voluntary cooperation of the single teacher. According to the student association, student feedback is only considered by teachers on a self-motivated basis and in case the latter is not maintaining a hierarchical relationships to students (I8, 2013). Hereby, the student association mentioned several examples in which teachers remained ignorant of students' feedback. Adding up to that, the student association could not mentioned one example in which student feedback has led to substantial changes in the quality of education. Thus, the student association supports students' general perception that their feedback is easily abandoned. This implies that students perceive themselves as powerless actors within the Institute's internal quality assurance processes. Students' negative perception of their power potential is supported by their lack of knowledge regarding the implementation of students' feedback, with 58 per cent of respondents stating to not know how students' feedback has been acted upon.

5.2.8 Students and the quality assurance of teaching staff (DE)

Regarding students' opinion on their possibility to provide feedback on the teaching quality of lecturers, a majority of 70 per cent of students confirm that they are able to provide feedback on the teaching qualities of lecturers. This implies that the Institute's internal quality assurance instruments regarding the assessment of teaching are rather comprehensively implemented. Still, similar to previous findings, around 50 per cent of students would even like to be more involved in the evaluation of teaching, which implies that students would like to increase their legitimacy status regarding the quality assurance of teaching. Last but not least, students are again sceptical when estimating their influence on the quality of teaching. Again, 45 per cent of respondents state that students' feedback has no influence on the quality of teaching, with 40 per cent of students remaining undecided on this issue. Consequently, students' estimation of their power potential regarding teaching quality is also rather low with a high number of students feeling that their interests are neglected by the Institute's current internal quality assurance system.

5.2.9 Sub-Conclusion German Institute

In the following, students' stakeholder position according to the stakeholder typology of Mitchell et al. (1997) is determined by a joint comparison of the institutional and student perspective and triangulating the three data sources (see Table 6). Table 6 summarizes the institutional and students' perception of students' power potential, legitimacy status und urgency as stakeholders.

Table 6: *Summary of data analysis: Student as stakeholder in the German Institute*

	Desk research (institutional view)	Semi-structured interviews (institutional view)	Student opinion (survey and students association)
Power	-Results of student evaluation should be considered by teachers and used for quality improvements (Evaluation statute, 2005)	- Limited Power: Student feedback may lead to changes but only if voluntarily considered by teachers. -Missing sanctioning system to follow-up on implementation of students' feedback	-Low Power estimation -Students do not know if/how feedback is implemented -Students' claims are often neglected
Legitimacy	-One representative of student association integrated in all major internal quality assurance bodies	-Legitimate due to integration of members of student association - Limited Legitimacy: High dependency due to underrepresentation	-Perceive themselves as underrepresented in internal quality assurance procedures -Criticize non transparency of IQA measures
Urgency	-Institute offers students channels to communicate their needs	-Students have urgent claims (curricula or counselling situation)	- Safeguarding of the quality of education and teaching is important

Source: Desk research, semi-structured interviews & student survey (2013)

Overall, the analysis of semi-structured interviews and desk research shows that out of the Institute's perspectives student feedback constitutes the major source of internal quality feedback. According to internal quality assurance policies, results of evaluation are to serve as a source of information to lecturers on which the later can improve the quality of courses on a voluntary and self-motivated basis. Despite students' involvement, interview findings show that from the Institute's point of view students' real impact on internal quality matters is rather limited, as students' **power** potential majorly depends on the voluntary cooperation of teachers. Hereby, the Institute's soft policy regulations and missing IQA sanctions lower students' power potential, as lecturers face no major consequences if evaluation results are neglected. Students' power is especially low regarding the quality assurance of professors, as their freedom of education and research is manifested by German constitutional law. Concerning students' **legitimacy** status findings of semi-structured interviews and desk research
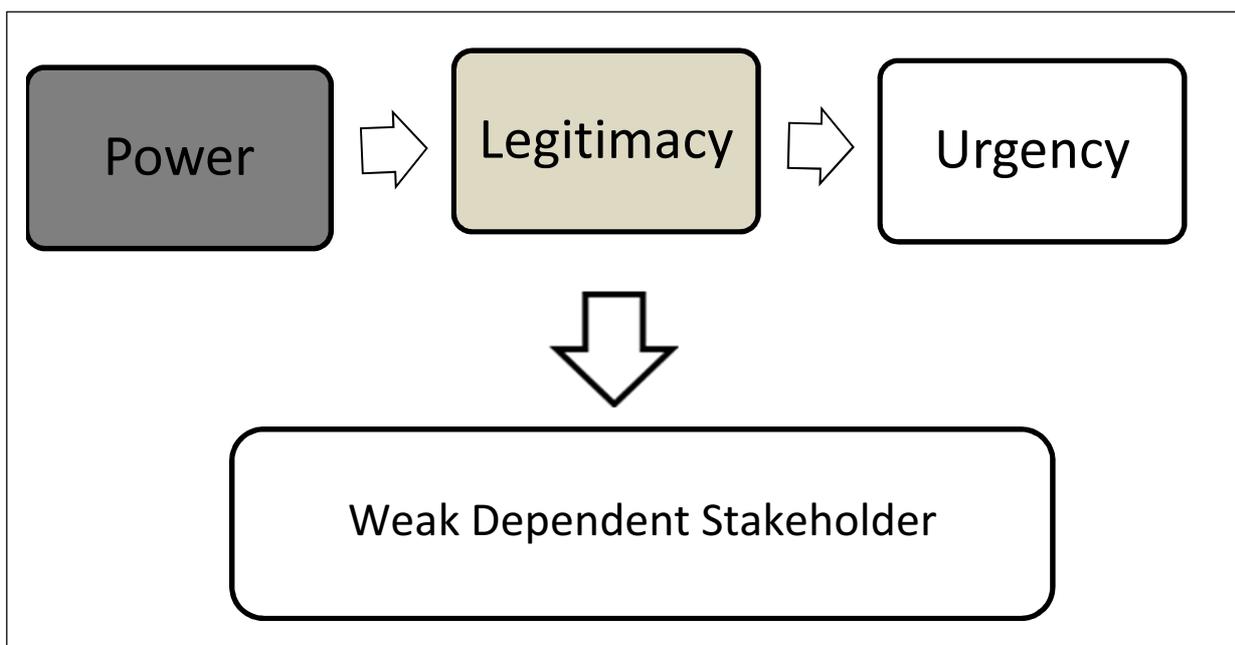
show that student representatives are integrated in all major IQA procedures. Still, students are always underrepresented in all internal quality assurance committees and thus majorly dependent on the support of other committee members, which limits their legitimacy position. Moreover, the Institute's policies majorly concentrate on the duly integration of student association members, while the engagement of the individual student is rather low. Concerning students' interests, the Institute is of the opinion that students have **urgent** claims which mostly refer to the improvement of the counselling situations and general educational quality. Nevertheless, according to interviewees', students wishes are sometimes rather diverse. Based on these finding it can be summarized that from the Institute's perspective, students can be regarded as **Dependent Stakeholders**, by having urgent claims, enjoying a limited legitimacy status and having limited power potential.

Concerning students' own perception of their stakeholder position the following conclusions can be drawn. As shown by survey results, students have a rather low estimation of their own **power** potential, with the majority of students being of the opinion that their feedback has no influence on the quality of education. In addition, students do not know how or if the Institute is implementing their feedback. Students' general low power estimation is also supported by the student association, who claims that teachers often neglect students' opinion and do not necessarily act upon students' feedback. In addition, the members of the student associations could not mention one example in which students' feedback led to any changes in courses or curricula. Concerning students' estimation of their **legitimacy** position within IQA procedures, students in general consider themselves as rather underrepresented in internal quality assurance bodies. This is also supported by students' strong wish for greater student involvement in internal quality procedures. Also the student association criticizes students' general underrepresentation in committees. Moreover, students also denounce a lack of transparency in IQA procedures which denies students a proper follow-up on the implementation of their claims, which again limits their legitimacy status. Regarding **urgency**, students confirm to have strong interest in the safeguarding of quality. Moreover, according to the student association, students have a strong interest in being involved in IQA. Thus, overall students perceive themselves as **weak Dependent Stakeholders**, by lacking power potential, having a limited legitimacy status but having urgent claims regarding the safeguarding of quality.

When combining the findings of the institutional and student view on students' stakeholder position the following conclusion can be drawn. Both parties confirm that students' power potential within the IQA system is rather limited, though students perception of their power potential is minor than that of the Institute. Both parties confirms that the consideration of students' feedback heavily de-

pendents on the voluntary cooperation of each individual lecturer, due to the lacking sanctioning mechanisms existing in the Institute's IQA procedures. Thus, students have a low power potential. Concerning legitimacy, both parties confirm that student representatives of the student association are duly integrated in all major internal quality assurance bodies, though their legitimacy status is limited by their underrepresentation in such committees. This implies that students' claims can be easily neglected, if not supported by other committee members. Students also criticized the non-transparency of the current internal quality procedures, which prevent a sophisticated dissemination of evaluation results to students. Thus, students' limited legitimacy status is ascertained. Concerning urgency, both parties confirm that students have a strong interest in the safeguarding of quality. Thus, overall students at the German Institute can defined as weak Dependent Stakeholders by directing over the attribute of urgency, limited legitimacy and minor power potential (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Student as Stakeholder in the German Institute:

Source: Desk research, semi-structured interviews & student survey (2013)

6. Discussion & comparison of findings

The following chapter contains a comparison of both case studies of Chapter 5, by aligning findings to my theoretical assumptions (see Chapter 3).

Overall, both cases studies demonstrated that students are regarded as stakeholders to internal quality assurance at the Dutch Faculty and in the Germany Institute. Still, students' degree of stakeholder salience majorly differs between the two studied HE institutions.

Overall, students at the Dutch Faculty enjoy a significantly higher degree of stakeholder salience than students' in the German Institute. Table 7 provides for a short summary of students' different stakeholder categorizations, with students constituting weak Definitive Stakeholder in the Dutch case, while students in the German Institute could be categorized as weak Dependent Stakeholders.

Table 7: Summary: Students' Stakeholder Position according to Mitchell et al. (1997)

Institution	Latent Stakeholder	Expectant Stakeholder	Definitive Stakeholder
Dutch Faculty			Power, Urgency, (Weak Legitimacy)
German Institute		Urgency, (Weak Legitimacy) $\rightarrow$ Dependent Stakeholders	

Source: Desk research, Semi-structured interviews & student survey (2013)

As shown in Chapter 5, students at the Dutch Faculty have a quiet substantial influence on internal quality assurance processes which qualifies them as weak Definitive Stakeholder. Hereby my first assumption:

"If students' have an influence on internal quality assurance processes in the HE institution, students' are perceived as Definitive Stakeholders",

is confirmed. In line with Mitchell et al. (1997), students' influence on the Dutch Faculty's internal quality assurance processes is manifest by students' power, limited legitimacy status and urgent claims (see Table 7). Though students at the Dutch Faculty were not well aware of their power potential, student courses evaluations and results of panel talks act as a strong source of power to students. Results of semi-structured interviews and document analysis showed that teachers are under pressure to consider the outcomes of evaluations and improve criticized issues (I2; I3, 2013). Thus, students' feedback has an influence on the quality of education and teaching at the Faculty. These findings are also in with the study of Leisyte et al. (2013), stating that students at Dutch HEs direct

over the attribute of power in internal quality assurance processes. In the case study of this paper, students' power is majorly fostered by the Dutch Faculty's consequent internal monitoring and sanctioning tools for quality assurance. Students' power is supported by students' urgent claims by demanding the constant improvement of quality in education and teaching. Concerning students' representation in the Dutch Faculty's internal quality assurance processes, students' are represented in equal number in all internal quality assurance organs. This fosters students' legitimacy status and strengthens their influence on internal quality assurance. Nevertheless, the great non transparency of IQA procedures limits students' legitimacy status, as students are not aware, if their feedback is implemented by the Faculty or neglected. As according to Leisyte et al. (2013):*"The student … misses feedback about follow-up, although clear procedures for course evaluation via student surveys are in place"* (Leisyte, 2013, p.5). This shortcoming limits students' legitimacy position and thus, their influence potential (Leisyte et al., 2013). Students' limited legitimacy position turns them into weak Definitive Stakeholders, despite students' formal power position and their persisting urgent claims.

In contrast to the Dutch case study, students in the German Institute direct over a rather limited influence potential, which also results in their lower stakeholders position as weak Dependent Stakeholders (Table 7). Hereby my second assumption:

"If students' have a limited influence on internal quality assurance processes in the HE institution, students are perceived as Salient/Expectant Stakeholders",

is confirmed as well. In line with Mitchell et al.(1997), students' Dependent Stakeholder position is articulated by their low power potential, their limited legitimacy status and students' persistency of urgent claims (See Table 7). All data sources from the German case study confirm students' rather low influence potential, which results from their low power in the internal quality assurance system. Hereby, students' feedback is only to serve as an additional source of information on which basis the teacher may voluntarily improve the quality of education. Thus, students influence is minor than in the Dutch caste study, as no sophisticated follow-up system exists, which obliges lecturers to consider students' feedback. Consequently, the German Institute's IQA set-up weakens students' influence potential, while the Dutch IQA strengthened students' power. Moreover, current excessive student numbers in the German Institute also lower students' power potential, as the Institute is not under great pressure to meet students' urgent claims. Besides power, students' limited influence potential in the German case study also strives from their limited legitimacy status. Though student representatives are formally involved in all internal quality assurance bodies, as different from the Dutch case, students are mostly underrepresented in all committees in the German Institute, which generates a

great dependency situation for students on the other committee members. Thus, as according to Leisyte et al. (2013), students' input regarding IQA can be describes as tokenistic, which means that despites students' formal representation they are not able to urge significant changes in internal quality assurance. Moreover, as in the Dutch case, students also criticize the great non-transparency of IQA procedures, which denies them a proper follow-up on evaluation results and also limits their legitimacy status. Due to all these factors, students' limited legitimacy position in IQA procedures and their lack of power turns them into weak Dependent Stakeholders.

My third assumption could neither be confirmed nor refuted, as in both case studies students had a certain degree of influence on internal quality assurance.

Overall, the application of Mitchell et al.'s (1997) stakeholder variables depicts major differences in students' role as stakeholders in both investigated HE institutions. Hereby the next paragraph concentrates on my fourth assumption: ""*The more HEI's internal quality assurance processes are line with the ESG, the stronger students' position as stakeholders in assuring internal quality in the HEI*" by discussing, if an HE institution's consideration of the ESG has an influence on students' role as stakeholder in internal quality assurance.

When comparing the findings of both case studies it can be concluded that each of the two investigated HE institutions predominantly complies to the conditions of the investigated ESG standards, despite students' different stakeholder position. Still, some differences regarding HEIs' consideration of the ESG can be ascertained, which was expected due to the ESG's soft policy approach, which allows HEIs to interpret the ESG autonomously depending on their national and institutional context (see Chapter 3). In the following, the Dutch Faculty's and the German Institute' consideration of three sampled ESG criteria is depicted.

Table 8: HEIs' conformity with the ESG

Institution	Policy and procedures for quality assurance	Approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes	Quality assurance of teaching staff
Dutch Faculty	Fulfilled	Fulfilled	Fulfilled
German Institute	Minor shortcomings	Shortcomings	Fulfilled

Source: Desk research, semi-structured interviews & student survey (2013)

As shown in Table 8, regarding the ESG guideline of **policy and procedures for quality assurance**, both HE institutions follow central or internal quality assurance policies, which urge the regular quali-

ty evaluation of education and teaching. Hereby, the Dutch Faculty mainly follows its own internal Faculty evaluations provisions, which are in line with general University quality assurance policies and national HE legacies, while the German Institute predominately implements central IQA assurance guidelines, set by the central University management. In both cases, documents and provisions demand the active involvement of students in IQA processes and their integration in internal quality assurance bodies which according to Leisyte et al. (2013) ascertains students' important positioning as stakeholders in quality assurance. Still, in the Dutch case study, internal provisions regarding student' involvement are rather precise, which lead to a predominantly equal representation of students within internal quality assurance committees. In contrast to that, provisions in the German Institute are rather vague, which leads to a frequent underrepresentation of students within IQA bodies. Thus, concerning student involvement, the Dutch Faculty complies to this ESG standard to a higher extent.

Concerning the ESG guideline for **the approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes** it can be concluded that both HE departments employ comprehensive quality assurance instruments to assure the regular evaluation of quality standards by integrating students in such processes. Hereby, student course evaluations constitute the main instruments of internal quality assurance at both studied HE institutions. Still, the Dutch Faculty's IQAS is marked by more consequent monitoring procedure, which strengthen students' influence potential (I2, 2013 & I3, 2013). In reverse, the German Institute's missing sanctioning mechanism weakens students' influence potential. The Institute's soft approach might strive from Germany's general domestic HE culture, in which academic freedom and academic autonomy constitute overriding values (Westerheijden & Kohoutek, 2013). Thus, as in line with Westerheijden & Kohoutek (2013), in the German case national policies seem to hamper the full consideration of the ESG. Thus again, the Dutch Faculty's involvement of students regarding this ESG criteria is higher than at the German Institute.

Relating to the ESG criteria of **quality assurance for teaching staff**, both studied HE entities evaluate the lecturing abilities of teachers via student evaluations. Thus, both HE institutions involve students in these processes as recommended by this ESG criteria. As in the previous ESG standards, in the Dutch Faculty students impact on the quality of teaching seems to be higher than that of students in the German Institute.

Overall, it can be concluded that both studied HE institutions majorly comply to the investigated ESG standards, though both entities consider the ESG rather unconsciously. At both HE institutions the ESG are rather unknown, which was also supported by the interview findings and desk research.

HEI's rather unconscious compliance to the ESG standards has also already been considered in previous studies such as by the IBAR project (2013) and Rattray et al. (2013), stating that compliance to the ESG is rather "process-led" with the institutional logics and organizational dynamics serving as key requirement for a HE institution's fulfillment of the ESG. Thus, students' stakeholder position does not seem to be majorly related to HE institutions' consideration of the ESG, but seem to rather depend on national or institutional internal quality assurance policies and cultures.

Still, aligned to my fourth assumption, it can be concluded that in this study a greater congruency of HEIs' internal quality assurance processes.to the ESG provisions seems to strengthens students' position as stakeholder in internal quality processes.

7. Conclusion

It was the major aim of this study to elaborate on students' positions as stakeholders within HEIs' internal quality assurance processes. In this conclusion we aim at answering the major research question of this study. In order to answer the main research question, we will first revisit the four sub-questions.

"What internal policies, documents or platforms exist at higher education institutions that promote the involvement of students regarding internal quality assurance processes?"

Findings of the comparative case study show that both investigated European HE institutions direct over internal quality assurance documents which promote the active integration of students in internal quality assurance processes. In the Dutch case, internal Faculty documents such as the Faculty Regulation or the Student Charter safeguard students' involvement in internal quality assurance processes, by demanding the regular evaluation of courses via course evaluations and panel talks. At the German Institute, students' integration in internal quality assurance processes is enshrined in the central University documents such as the Programme Evaluation Statute (2009) and the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Teaching and Education (GETE) (2007). These documents also recommend the consequent evaluation of the quality of education and teaching via student evaluations. Thus, at both compared institutions the involvement of students in internal quality assurance processes is required by internal policies and documents, though provisions are more specific for the Dutch Faculty than for the German Institute.

"How are students actively involved and influence internal quality assurance at higher education institutions?"

In both cases, student course evaluations constitute the main instrument of student engagement to internal quality assurance. Via this tool, students are asked to evaluate the quality of education and teaching of courses. The influence of student course evaluations differs between the two investigated institutions, as at the Dutch Faculty evaluation results are taken more seriously due to consequent internal monitoring and sanctioning procedures, which safeguard the consideration of students' feedback and strengthen the influence of the latter (I2, 2013 & I3, 2013). The German Institute's soft policy approach, in which lecturers may consider evaluation results on a voluntary basis, weakens students' influence potential. Moreover in both cases, student association play a big role in representing students' quality claims in internal quality procedures and internal quality assurance committees. The influence of student associations is again higher at the Dutch Faculty than in the German Institute, due to students' equal representation in such committees. One shortcoming regarding students' involvement to IQA procedures was ascertained in both cases studies, namely the missing re-communication of quality improvements to students. This implies that even though students are actively integrated in internal quality procedures, they are not informed about their influence on internal quality assurance and the implementation of their feedback.

"In what way do national policy documents support the involvement of students in internal quality assurance processes at higher education institutions?"

As well illustrated in this study, the design and governance of national quality assurance system in Europe can majorly differ. Hereby, the Netherlands show a more centrally guided long tradition in HE quality assurance, while in the federal German system quality assurance practices are rather new.

Still, in both case studies, national legislations promote the active engagement of students in internal quality assurance procedures. In the Dutch higher education legacy it is stated that "Students' judgements on the quality of education are a necessary part of the quality assessment (WHW art. 1.18, sub 1.)" while under the German federal HE system, student involvement in quality assurance has become a common practice in all Länder. Still in both cases the main responsibility of student engagement is delegated to each individual higher education Institute, as in line with Ursin et al. (2008) the role of students highly depends on the active engagement of students at each individual HE institution (Leisyte et al. 2013). Thus, national legislation provides for an impetus regarding student involvement, but the implementation of such measures rests with each individual HEIs. Still, at the German Institute, students' influence on quality assurance is limited by the constitutional protection of the freedom of research and teaching, which makes it easier for academic staff to neglect

students' feedback and thus has a deteriorating impact on students' position in quality assurance (Westerheijden & Kohoutek, 2013).

"***To what extent do higher education institutions consider the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance regarding student involvement to internal quality processes?***"

Both studied entities involve students in the studied ESG components of policy and procedures for quality assurance; the approval, monitoring and periodic review of academic programmes such as the quality assurance of teaching Staff. Nevertheless, findings in Chapter 5 and 6 show that student involvement regarding these ESG criteria occurs rather unconsciously, as at both HE institutions academic staff is rather unaware of the ESG and direct annotations to the ESG are seldom found in internal quality assurance documents. Only in the German case study, the consideration of the ESG regarding internal quality assurance practices was mentioned by the centrally University management. Thus, as in line with Westerheijden et al (2013), a direct influence of the ESG on HEIs' internal quality procedures and student involvement therein is rather absent. The consideration of the ESG and student involvement seems to strive foremost from an institution's general organizational setting and the established quality culture, which implies that "the local implementation and translation" is crucial for the consideration of the ESG criteria (Westerheijden et al. 2013). This also indicates that, due the soft policy character of the ESG's under the Open Method of Coordination, a successful application of the ESG principles majorly depends on HEIs' voluntary consideration of such provisions, as the ESG are not translated as binding guidelines into national legal frameworks. Therefore, the two case studies demonstrate the application of the ESG's soft policy function, as described in the implementation staircase.

After answering the sub-questions the main research question:

"To what extent are students perceived as stakeholders in internal quality processes at different higher education institutions within the framework of the European Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance?" can be answered as follows.

Overall, students are considered as stakeholders in internal quality assurance processes at HEIs. Nevertheless, the ESG cannot be defined as a policy framework for fostering students' role as stakeholder in IQA, as the ESG of 2005 more or less codify "what had already become practice through earlier quality assurance schemes (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004)" at the institutions. Thus, students' integration as stakeholders to IQA does not majorly dependent on HEI's consideration of the ESG, but seems to depend on an Institution's quality assurance polices and the prevailing quality assurance culture. Still in this study, an Institution's greater conformity to the ESG also comes with a higher

stakeholder position for students, though this finding is not generalizable. In this study, the Dutch Faculty's internal quality assurance system was more in line with the ESG guidelines and students enjoy a rather strong stakeholder position as weak Definitive Stakeholders. The German Institute's conformity to the ESG provisions was a bit minor, with students enjoying an inferior stakeholder position as weak Dependent Stakeholders, whose power potential is small and whose legitimacy status is limited by students' high dependency on academic staff to realize their claims.

Overall, the study showed that students are involved as stakeholder in HEIs' internal quality assurance processes, though their actual power and influence potential in their role as stakeholders majorly differs from institution to institution. This implies that the ESG's influence on students' position in institutional IQA processes is rather absent. It remains to see if the revision of the ESG will lead to a more congruent stakeholder position of students in HEIs' internal quality processes in the future.

7.1 Recommendations

Overall, the study showed that the establishment of consequent follow-up and sanctioning measures in institutions' internal quality assurance processes lead to a higher consideration of students' feedback in quality assurance and strengthened the efficiency of IQAS as such. Thus, we can recommended, that HEIs' should:

- Embed internal quality assurance measures in systemic follow-up and sanctioning measures

in order to increase the efficiency of their IQAs and increase academic staff's interest in the implementation of student feedback.

Furthermore, in order to increase student participation in IQA measures, HEIs have to better communicate the implementation of evaluations results to students by demonstrating, what changes have been introduced to study courses or teaching strategies based on students' feedback. Thus:

- In order to secure the participation of students in IQA measures, HEIs have to inform students' about the implementation of their feedback and introduced quality changes.

If HEIs refrain from such an approach, students' could lose their interest in participating in internal quality assurance procedures as "students' participation in quality assurance processes requires transparent procedures and visible results for students" (Popović, 2011, p 6).

8. Limitations of the study and issues for further research

The major limitation of this study lies in its lack of generalization, as the findings of my comparative case study only hold in the context of the two studied HEI entities, as case studies investigates the "properties of a single case" (Gerring, 2004,p.324). Thus, to prevent for this limitation the study should have investigated the role of students as stakeholders in internal quality assurance at a greater number of HE institutions.

A second major limitation of this study constitutes the small sample size of interviewees and students, which also decreases the reliability of the study. In order to arrive at more representative results of my qualitative data set, more interviews with academic staff should be conducted. Furthermore, a higher participation of students in the survey would have also increased the reliability of my quantitative findings. Due to the small sample size of students, findings of my survey represent the opinion of students in my sample but cannot be generalized to an institution's entire student population (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

Concerning further research, it would be interesting to examine the influence of HEIs' persisting quality culture on students' role in internal quality assurance procedures. Findings of this study indicate that, rather than the ESG, internal organizational structures may have an influence on students' role and influence regarding such procedures. Moreover, the absence or presence of tuition fees could also be included as a determining factor for students' stakeholder position as literature shows, that students' can induce financial losses to higher education institutions via their de-enrolment (Hill, 1995). This could act as a source of power to students', which could increase their stakeholder salience. One last issue for further studies could be student feedbacks' different influence potential on temporary academic staff and professors. Findings of this study indicated, that there seems to exist a difference in students' impact potential on these two groups, with students' power being a bit minor regarding professors than for temporary staff. Such a study could point towards certain shortcomings in an Institution's comprehensive quality assurance measures based on the employment status of academic staff.

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Appendix A: Student Survey Questionnaire

<u>Approval, monitoring and periodic reviewing of study programmes</u>	Study programmes and curricula are regularly evaluated at my Faculty If so by which means: *Open ended question* My Faculty has an interest in improving study programmes and curricula
Policy and procedures for quality assurance	I have the opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of my study programme (**legitimacy**) Having the opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of my study programme is important to me (**urgency**) My Faculty takes the opinion of students regarding the quality of study programmes into account (**power**) It is clear to me how students' feedback on study programmes has been acted upon (**power**) Student feedback has had an influence on the content/curricula of my study programme (**power**) Results of study programme evaluation are re-communicated to students (**legitimacy**) I can participate in an internal quality assurance committee at my Faculty (**legitimacy**) Students are well represented in internal quality assurance processes at my Faculty (**legitimacy**) Students should be more involved in internal evaluation processes at my Faculty (**urgency**) I have the possibility to get attention to my needs as a student at my Faculty (**power**) In general my Faculty considers and cares about the needs of students (**power**)
<u>Student involvement regarding quality assurance of teaching staff</u>	I have the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the teaching qualities of my teachers (**legitimacy**) Student feedback has had an influence on the teaching quality/staff of my study programme (**power**) I would like to give feedback on the teaching quality of my teachers more frequently (**urgency**)
Gender **Age** **Study programme** **Study year**	

Appendix B: Survey outcomes

Survey Outcomes Dutch Faculty according to Mitchell et al. (1997)

	Fulfilled	Partly Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Power	I (q23)	I (q6) I (p8) I (q14) I (19)	I (q7)
Legitimacy	I (q4) I(q10) I (q13)	I (q11)	
Urgency	I (q5) I (q12) weak 1 I(q22)	I (q15)	

Survey Outcomes German Institute according to Mitchell et al. (1997)

	Fulfilled	Partly Fulfilled	Not Fulfilled
Power		I (p8) I (19) I (q23)	I (q7) I (q6) Iq14
Legitimacy	I (q4) I (q13)	I (q11 also weak) I(q10 negative tendency)	
Urgency	I (q5 strong) I (q12) weak 1 I (q15)	I(q22)	

Appendix B I: Survey results (NL)

Graph 5: Student participation in internal quality assurance processes (NL)

Definitely disagree: 5,41% / 4,05% / 0,00%
Mostly disagree: 8,11% / 10,81% / 17,57%
Neither agree nor disagree: 33,78% / 35,14%
Mostly agree: 35,14% / 39,19% / 33,78%
Definitely agree: 4,05% / 12,16% / 13,51%

■ Students are well represented in internal quality assurance processes
■ I can participate in internal quality assurance committees at my faculty
■ Students should be more involved in internal quality assurance processes

Graph 8: Study courses are evaluated at my faculty

After each course: 68,92%
Every semester: 14,86%
Once a year: 13,51%
Every 2 years: 1,35%
No Evaluation: 1,35%

Graph 9: Instruments of quality evaluation

- Survey: 57%
- Evaluation meeting: 37%
- Internal quality assurance board: 5%
- Other: 1%

Graph 10: My Faculty has an interest in improving study programmes and curricula (NL)

Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
0,00%	10,81%	9,46%	66,22%	13,51%

Graph 11: Possibility to provide feedback on quality of education + valorisation (NL)

	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
Having the possibility to provide feedback is important to me	0,00%	4,05%	12,16%	44,59%	39,19%
I have the possibility to provide feedback on the quality of my study programme	1,35%	5,41%	6,76%	63,51%	22,97%

■ Having the possibility to provide feedback is important to me
■ I have the possibility to provide feedback on the quality of my study programme

Graph 14: Student feedback has an influence on the teaching quality (NL)

Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
5,41%	22,97%	40,54%	25,68%	5,41%

Graph 13: Students ability to provide feedback on teaching quality (NL)

Appendix B II: Survey Results German Institute (DE)

Graph 15: Students participation in internal quality assurance (DE)

Graph 18: Study programmes and curricla are regularly evalauted at my institute (DE)

- After each course: 26,76%
- Every semester: 59,15%
- Once a year: 4,23%
- Every 2 years: 1,41%
- No Evaluation: 8,45%

Graph 19: Instruments of quality evaluation (DE)

- Survey: 86%
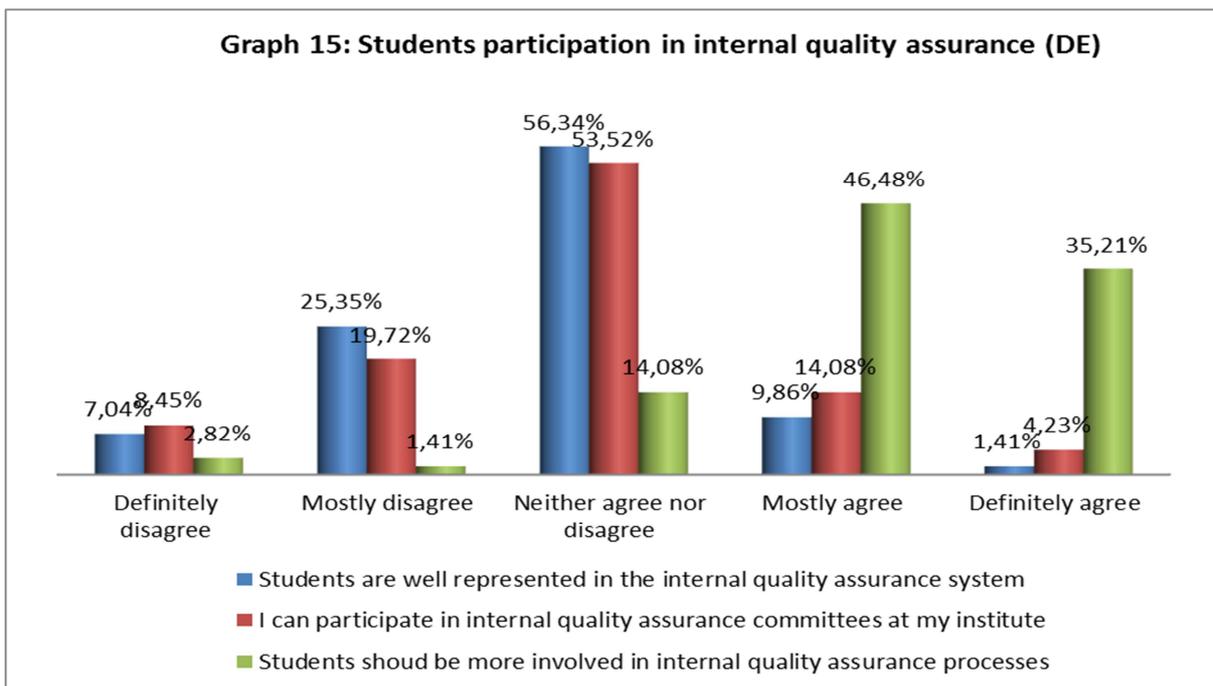- Evaluation meeting: 7%
- Internal quality assurance board: 1%
- Other: 6%

Graph 20: My faculty has an interest in improving study programmes and curricula (DE)

- Definitely disagree: 1,41%
- Mostly disagree: 15,49%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 30,99%
- Mostly agree: 46,48%
- Definitely agree: 5,63%

Graph 21: Possibility to provide feedback on quality of education + valorisation (DE)

	Definitely disagree	Mostly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly agree	Definitely agree
I have the possibility tp provide feedback on the quality of...	0,00%	23,94%	14,08%	52,11%	9,86%
Having the possibility to provide feedback is important to me	2,82%	9,86%	9,86%	38,03%	39,44%

Graph 23: Students' ability to provide feedback on the quality of teaching (DE)

- 50,70%
- 30,99%
- 28,17%
- 21,13%
- 18,31%
- 18,31%
- 15,49%
- 9,86%
- 2,82% 4,23%

| Definitely disagree | Mostly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly agree | Definitely agree |

■ I have the possibility to provide feedback on the quality of teaching
■ I would like to give feedback on the quality of teaching more often

Graph 24: Student feedback has an influence on teaching quality (DE)

- 35,21%
- 39,44%
- 9,86%
- 14,08%
- 1,41%

| Definitely disagree | Mostly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly agree | Definitely agree |

Anppendix C: Interview Questionnaire

Operating internal quality assurance system at the Faculty

- <u>Introductory question</u>: What is your key role/ level of involvement regarding internal quality assurance at your Faculty?

- How are study programmes evaluated at your Faculty and how often?

- Were any important changes recently introduced to improve the internal quality assurance system?

Role of students within the internal quality assurance system

- What is the role of students regarding internal quality assurance at your Faculty? **(legitimacy)**

- What happens to the results of study programme evaluations? **(legitimacy)**

- Are you of the opinion that students should be more involved in internal quality assurance procedures? - If so for what reasons?

Impact of student feedback on quality of study programmes/Curricula

- How is student feedback on the quality of study programmes taken into account by your Faculty **(power)**

- How does student feedback affect the quality of teaching at your Faculty **(power)**

- How often are changes to study programmes introduced based on student feedback? **(power)**

- Can you think of any example when student feedback has had a major impact on the quality of study programmes? **(power)**

General questions

- Of what importance is internal quality at your Faculty?

- Are you familiar with the European Standards and Guidelines for internal quality assurance?

- Can students be seen as stakeholders to study programme evaluations?

- If you had the chance, what would you like to improve regarding the internal quality assurance system at your Faculty?

Appendix C I: Codebook

Code	German translation	Description
Power	Macht	Students are able to exert direct influence on internal quality assurance processes, students' needs and interests are taken into account by the Faculty
Limited Power	Eingeschränkte Macht	Students are sometimes able to exert direct influence on internal quality assurance processes, students' needs and interests are sometimes taken into account by the Faculty
No Power	Keine Macht	Students are not able to exert direct influence on internal quality assurance processes, students' needs and interests are not taken into account by the Faculty
Legitimacy	Legitimität	Students are equal partners (in numbers) in internal quality assurance system /committees/boards at Faculty
Limited Legitimacy	Eingeschränkte Legitimität	Students are not fully equal partners in internal quality assurance system /committees/boards at Faculty
No Legitimacy	Keine Legitimität	Students are not equal partners in internal quality assurance system /committees/boards at Faculty
Urgency	Dringlichkeit der Anliegen	Quality of teaching and education is of high concern to students, as well as the availability of learning resources, information providence and student

		support facilities
Limited Urgency	Geringere Dringlichkeit der Anliegen	Quality of teaching and education is of medium concern to students, as well as the availability of learning resources, information providence and student support facilities
No Urgency	Keine Dringlichkeit der Anliegen	Quality of teaching and education is of no concern to students, as well as the availability of learning resources, information providence and student support facilities
Students as Stakeholder to internal quality assurance	Studierende als Stakeholder in der internen Qualitätssicherung	Students are officially recognised as stakeholders to internal quality assurance
European Standards of Quality Assurance	Europäische Standards und Richtlinien der internen Qualitätssicherung	Are they know to interviewees and what role do they play in the set-up of internal quality assurance systems
Evaluation of study programmes	Evaluation von Studiengängen	Instruments/ means by which study programmes are evaluated
Internal Quality Assurance System at Faculty	Internes Qualitätssicherungssystem an der Fakultät	General information regarding the internal quality processes at the Faculty
Evaluation of courses	Evaluation von Kursen	Instruments/ means by which study courses are evaluated
Utilisation of quality feedback	Nutzung des Evaluationsfeedbacks	Implementation of feedback to improve quality of courses /study programmes
Non-utilisation of quality feedback	Nichtnutzung des Evaluationsfeedbacks	For what is feedback on quality of courses /study programmes not used
Role of interviewee in internal quality assurance process	Rolle des Befragten im internen Qualitätsprozessen	Interviewee's influence/responsibility regarding internal quality assurance
Additional roles of students	Andere Position von Studierenden	Any other of students regarding internal quality assurance processes besides stakeholder position
Improvements internal quali-	Verbesserung der internen	Points of improvement of current

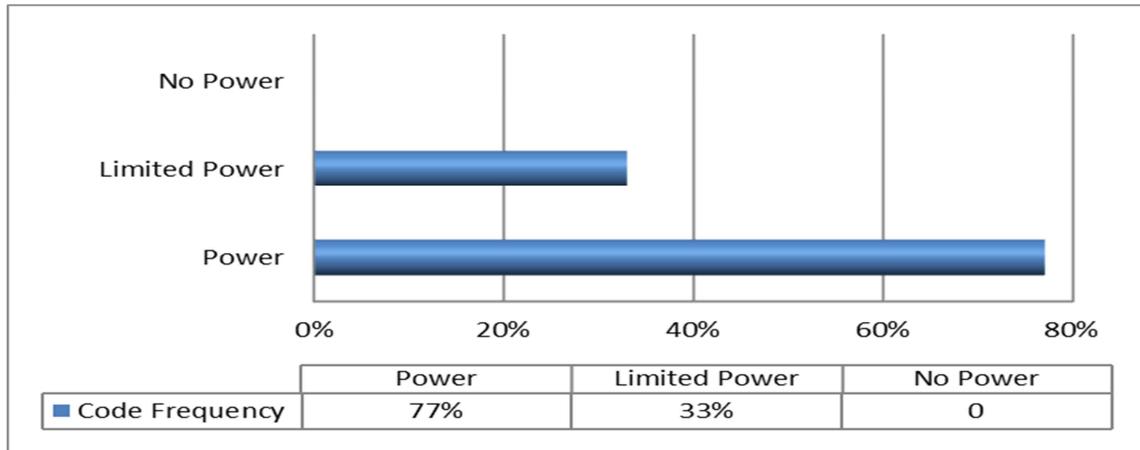| ty system	Qualitätssicherungssysteme	internal quality assurance system
Critique regarding current IQS	Kritik am jetzigen Qualititässicherungssystem	Points of critique on current internal quality assurance system
Importance of internal quality assurance at institution	Stellenwert von internen Qualitätssicherung an der Institution	Overall valorisation of internal quality assurance at institution (high/low)
Critic of student feedback	Kritische Betrachtung des Studierendenfeedbacks	Any objections mentioned which criticise significance of student feedback
Too less transparency	Nicht genug Transparenz	QAS is not transparent enough or some things are not knows to students, missing communication with students
Seize as factor for good quality in HE	Größe einer Organisation als Faktor für gute Hochschulbildung	All comments referring to the influence of the seize if an organization on the assurance of good quality

Appendix C II:

Codes of Interviewees

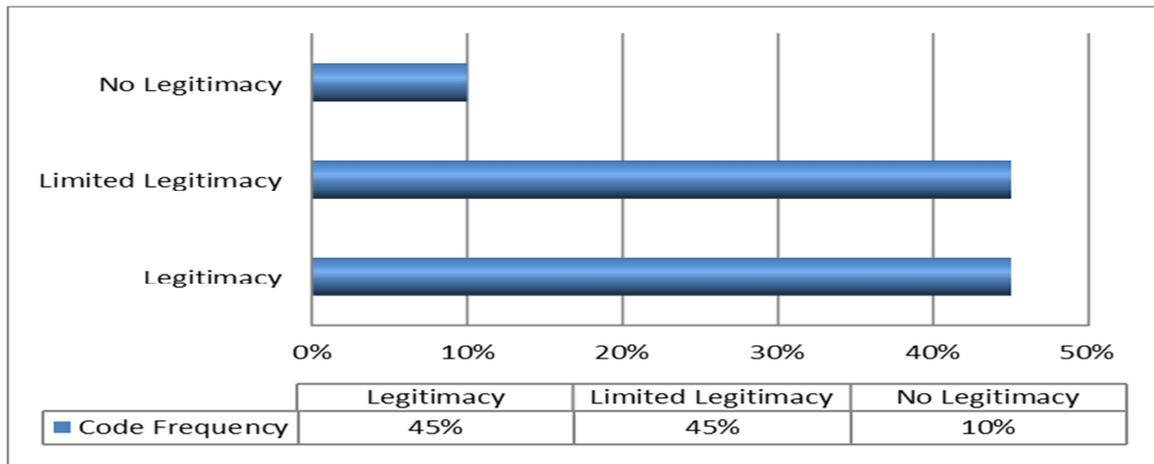| Function	Code
Faculty council member (NL)	**I1**
Quality assurance officer (NL)	**I2**
Professor & Study programme director (NL)	**I3**
Head of student association (NL)	**I4**
Head of internal quality assurance	**I5**
Internal quality assurance ataff	**I6**
Professor & member AG-Lehre	**I7**
Student Association (DE)	**I8**

Appendix C III: Results of semi-structured interviews according to Mitchell et al. (1997)

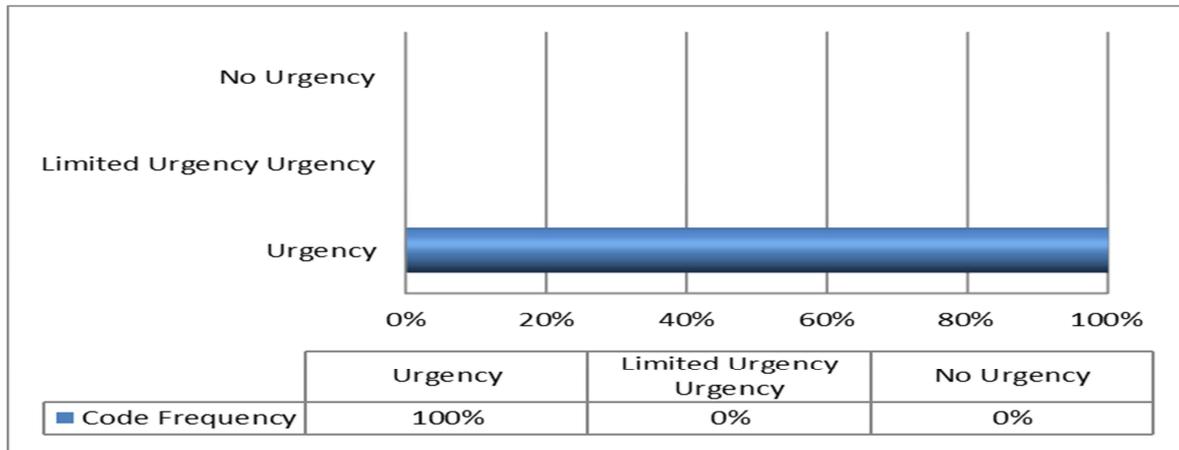**Student Power Potential according to Faculty Staff (NL)**

	Power	Limited Power	No Power
■ Code Frequency	77%	33%	0

Source: Semi Structured Interviews

Legitimacy Position of students according to Faculty Staff (NL)

	Legitimacy	Limited Legitimacy	No Legitimacy
■ Code Frequency	45%	45%	10%

Source: Semi-Structured Interviews

Existence of students' urgent claims according to Faculty Staff (NL)

	Urgency	Limited Urgency Urgency	No Urgency
■ Code Frequency	100%	0%	0%

Source: Semi-Structured Interviews

Student Power Potential according to Institute Staff (DE)

	Power	Limited Power	No Power
■ Code Frequency	42%	40%	18%

Source: Semi-Structured Interviews

Legitimacy Position of students according to Institute Staff (DE)

	Legitimacy	Limited Legitimacy	No Legitimacy
■ Code Frequency	59%	35%	6%

Source: Semi-Structured Interviews

Existence of students' urgent claims according to Institute Staff (DE)

	Urgency	Limited Urgency	No Urgency
■ Code Frequency	86%	9%	5%

Source: Semi-Structured Interviews