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Both authors will present the paper at the Forum.

Proposal

Title: Competences and Qualities for Student Experts: a View from QA Agencies

Abstract (150 words max):

Presumably we want each expert in external quality assurance procedure to be a great one. And here the hard part arises – what is a great expert? This paper provides research to the question: what competences and qualities for students experts as vital stakeholders and at what degree are important to higher education quality assurance agencies. To achieve this goal Kano model is used.

Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? If yes, give details. No.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

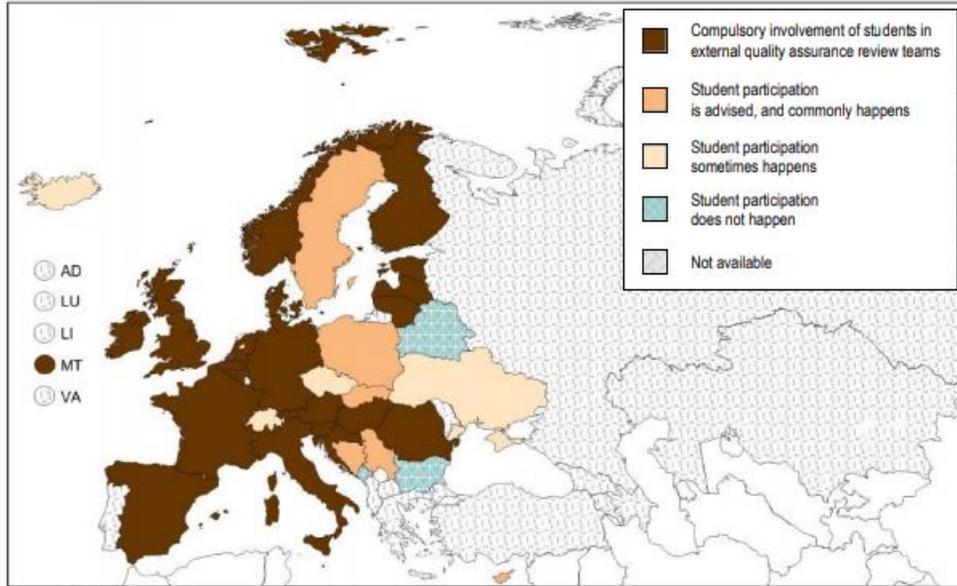
Introduction:

Over the last couple of decades quality assurance (QA) has solidified in the European higher education area (EHEA). Students being vital stakeholders in higher education also do participate in quality assurance procedures such as accreditation. All stakeholders are willing to acquire the best possible experts in each of the external quality assurance procedures. It is important that students in these quality procedures are perceived as equal experts therefore they also need to have certain competences and qualities. The research question is what competences and qualities student experts should have and at what degree from the point of view of quality assurance agencies. This is important as there always will be limited resources so focus is needed on some of the competences and qualities. To achieve the set objective a questionnaire and the Kano model are used.

Status quo of student experts' role in QA procedures in HE:

It is hard to say how student experts are perceived as each case is quite different. However, in a long-term they have become a solid stakeholder in EHEA. One of the brightest examples of this is the comparison of Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) versions 2005 and 2015. ESG 2015 has a part about peer-review experts that clearly states that external QA should be carried out by groups of experts that include (a) student member(s). The 2005 ESGs student participation in external assessment was mentioned in a different criterion that is “an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s)”. This point does not include possible roles of students in such a group, e.g. ability to be the chair of expert board as well as factors regarding salary for experts if such is applicable.

2018 Bologna Process Implementation report as well as 2018 report Bologna with Student Eyes stresses the fact that students in external QA are not considered as equal members. This conclusion arises from the fact that not in all EHEA countries involvement of students in external QA review teams is compulsory (see Fig. 1) as well as that 71% of ESU member countries have students involved as full-members within the external review panels, although this does not mean that students can take the position of chair and secretary of the external review panel (see Fig. 2).



Source: ESU data collection.

Figure 1. The European Students' Union's perception of student participation in external QA, 2016/2017 (Bologna process implementation report 2018) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018)

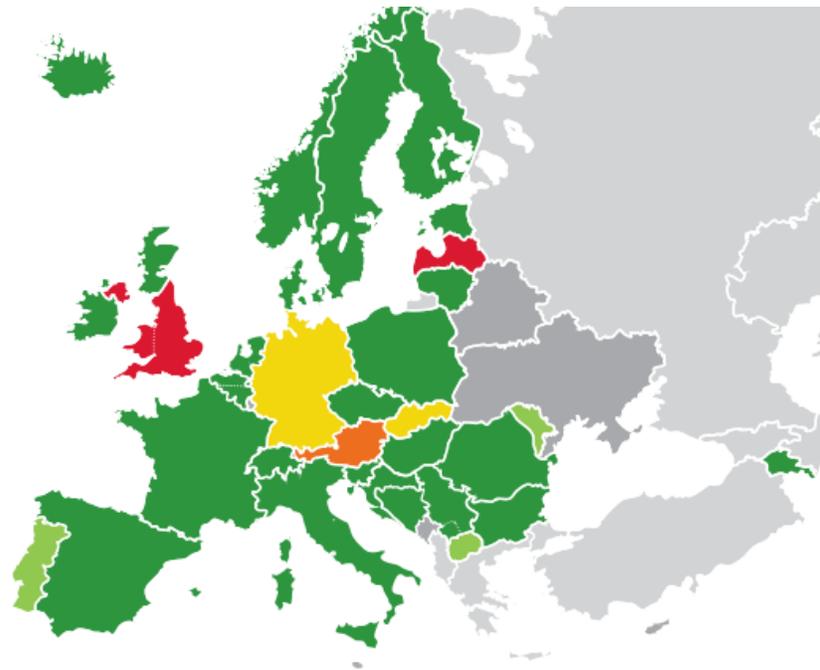


Fig. 6.3: How are students involved in the external QA processes?

Legend:

- EHEA country with no ESU member
- Not applicable
- As full-members within the external review panel
- As an information source (as in interview during external reviews, etc)
- As observers within the external review panel
- Students can take the position chair/secretary of the external review panel
- Other

Figure 2. How are students involved in the external QA processes? (Bologna with Student Eyes 2018) (European Students' Union, 2018)

One way how to develop student-expert competences and qualities is through QA expert pools. In 2018 there were 19 unions that reported the inclusion of students in QA expert pools, while 13 stated that there are no QA expert pools or they do not include students (see Fig. 3). This differs from country to country as some of them have separate National Union of Students QA pools and some have QA pools that are operated solely by QA agencies. It is important to note that the European Students' Union also does QA pool training for their expert pool.

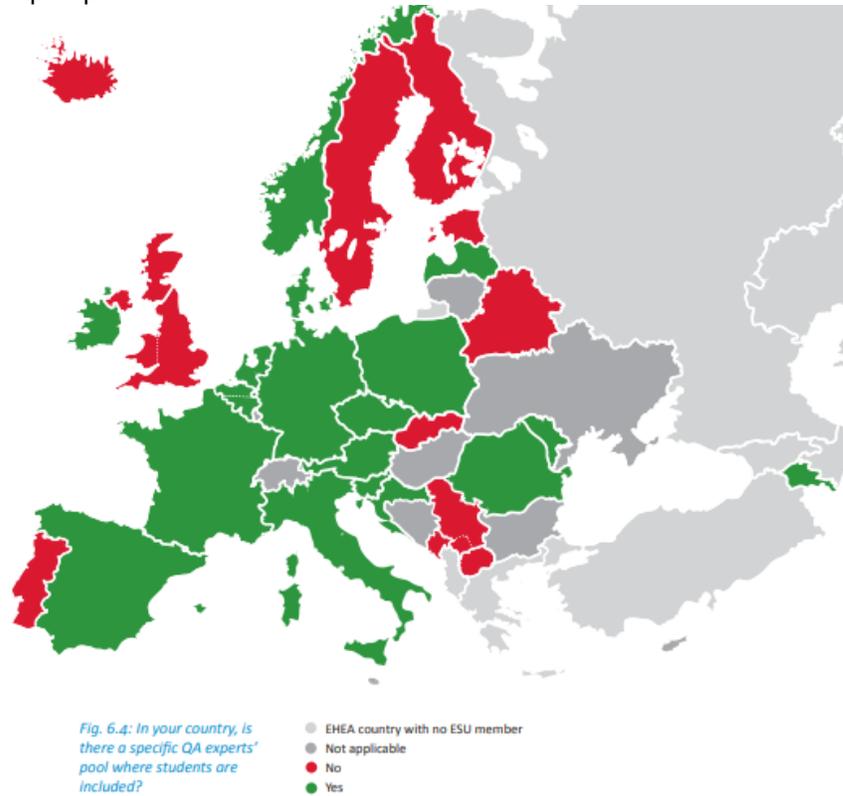


Figure 3. Information about QA expert pools in ESU member states (European Students' Union, 2018)

Figure 4 also shows problems with full inclusion of student experts – half of the students' unions in 2018 Bologna with Student Eyes reported that students are not seen as full members of the academic community and 42% reported that there is no training about quality assurance.

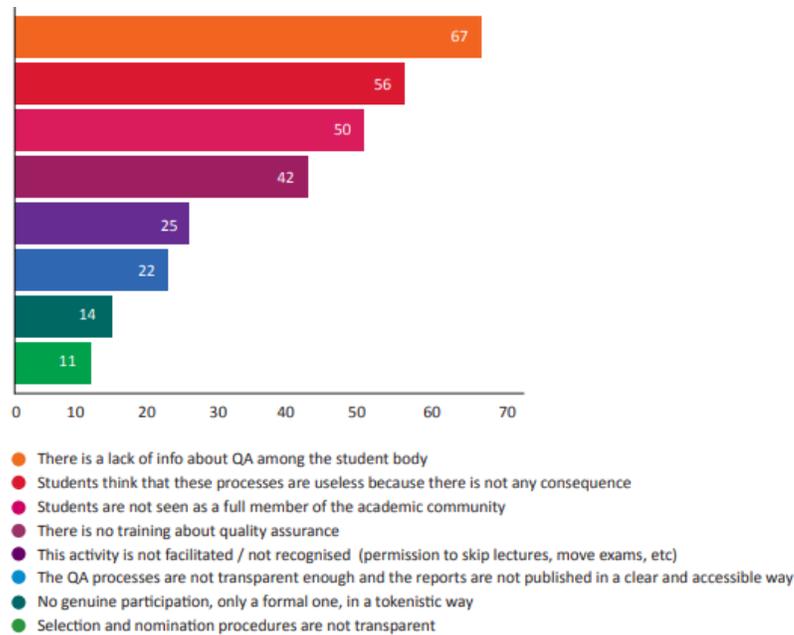


Figure 4. What are the main barriers that students find in their involvement in QA (Multiple Choice)? (European Students' Union, 2018)

Analysis of student involvement in external QA suggests that students are getting more and more involved as full members – also with the option to be chair and secretary of the external review panel, but there are still some difficulties to overcome. As the training of student experts is considered as one of the biggest barriers, it is important to find out what competences and qualities could be more important to succeed at the goal of a *good* student expert.

Review of student experts in QA and the Kano model

To the best knowledge of authors there are no publications that indicate exactly what competences and qualities are more vital for high quality experts (the same for student experts) therefore this could be considered as a research gap. However, research suggests that involving students in QA benefits the system, as all stakeholders have the same end goal and even though students might lack academic knowledge they can compensate it, for example, with their understanding of the importance of modern learning methods (Emmi et al., 2006; Laura Fedeli, 2016).

To achieve the set goal of this research, the fuzzy Kano model was used. It is a method to understand requirements by asking functional and dysfunctional questions (see Fig. 5) and addressing requirements in a 5 x 5 table. These requirements are classified into five categories (Lee, Sheu, & Tsou, 2008; Löfgren & Witell, 2017):

- Attractive quality attributes or quality elements. If these attributes are present, customers will be satisfied, but if they are not present, customer would still accept without dissatisfaction;
- One-dimensional quality attributes or elements. Customers are satisfied in a proportional level of fulfilment “the-more-the-better”;
- Must-be quality attributes or basic quality elements. These attributes are taken for granted. If they are not present, dissatisfaction will occur;
- Indifferent quality attributes or elements. Customer satisfaction will not be affected by these attributes therefore they are neither good nor bad therefore these elements should not be in the focus of developing;
- Reverse quality attributes. If these are present customers will be dissatisfied.

As time passes, customers get more acquainted with different attributes and so the categories change – from attractive to one-dimensional to must-be (Muncaster, 2008).

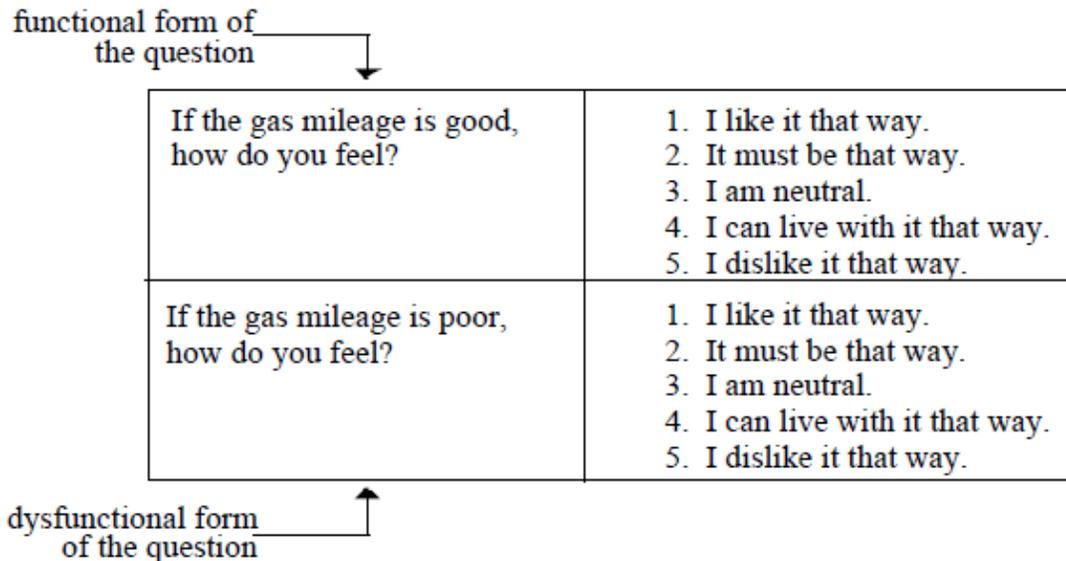


Figure 5. An example of a pair of questions for understanding customer requirements (Boger et al., 1993)

The Kano model is used in numerous studies, particularly in total quality management, as a method to understand what influences customer value. It is important as authors have acknowledged that it is difficult to define customer value (Mikulić & Prebežac, 2011). Therefore this method helps to understand what should be focused upon and which trade-offs are acceptable from the perspective of clients (Shahin, Pourhamidi, Antony, & Park, 2013).

One of the biggest flaws of Kano models conventional approach is that it has only five different possible answers for functional and dysfunctional questions. This approach is not the best in terms of understanding the situation in between two categories. (Lee & Huang, 2009) has proposed a different way how to address this issue – by having answers between five answers instead of them being fixed. This way delivers percentage of factors which enables more answers being implemented in the same analysis as well as eases the process of choosing between two possible answers.

Kano model is one of the most known and used tools to access value of certain criteria to a product or service. Therefore it is viable as a solution to decrease the research gap that exists regarding competences and qualities student experts in higher education quality assurance should have.

Methodology of the research:

The process of conducting this research involved creation of a questionnaire which was based on investigation of the best Kano practices. The questionnaire used qualities and competences that were result of the European Students' Union QA Pool and Student Union of Latvia QA Pool training session where student experts were discussing different parameters student experts should have. The authors propose to divide qualities and competences into three groups – qualities, research and social competences and assessment competences (see table 7).

The way how answers were afterwards analysed is shown in Figure 6. At the beginning answers to the questionnaires were gathered; which was followed up by mapping of each answer to percentages (for clarification see the example of an answer analysis). Calculating the average of multiple answers was followed by creation of graphics. Graphics were created by using the following formula.

$$AxisPosition = (\% \text{ of like}) * 1 + (\% \text{ of must}) * 2 + (\% \text{ of neutral}) * 3 + (\% \text{ of live with}) * 4 + (\% \text{ of dislike}) * 5$$

Usage of this formula could be seen in Figure 6. Due to limitations of questionnaire applications there were chosen only two states in between answer categories therefore this is a customized Kano model which is based on the fuzzy concept approach, not the conventional one.

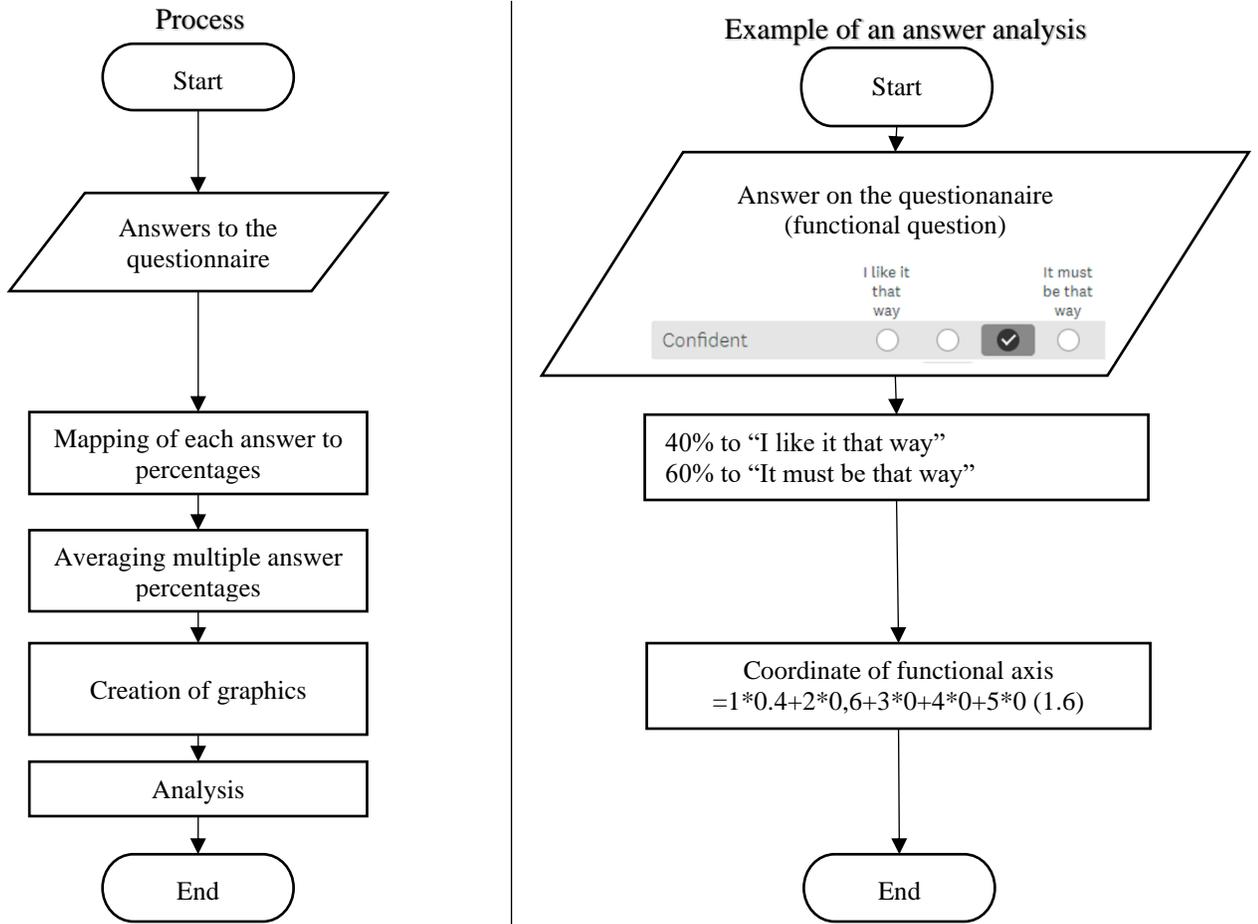


Figure 6. Methodology with an example how to calculate which category the competence or quality is in

The questionnaire was sent out via e-mail to 11 QA agencies that work in EHEA, from which 9 were agencies that are part of European Quality Assurance Register. These agencies were chosen based on recommendations about their possible willingness to participate in the research.

Research results:

In the given period of time five QA agencies answered to the questionnaire. Because one response consisted only of answers “I like it that way” for the functional question and only of answers “I dislike it that way” for the dysfunctional question, this response was not included into the results.

Category	Quality or competency	Requirement type
Qualities	Motivated	Attractive
	Communicative	Attractive/ Indifferent
	Confident	Indifferent
	Presentable	Indifferent
	Critical	Indifferent
	Watchful	Indifferent
	Open for non-standard situations	Indifferent
	Composed	Indifferent/ Must-be
	Constructive	Attractive/ Indifferent
	Responsible	Attractive
	Polite	Attractive
	Objective	Indifferent
	Critical thinking	Indifferent
Research and social competences	Ability to work in a team	Indifferent
	Ability to express criticism	Indifferent
	Ability to withstand pressure	Indifferent
	Ability to create structured notes	Indifferent
	Qualification in the field of assessment	One-dimensional/ attractive
	Participating in research	Indifferent
	Ability to draw conclusions	Must-be
	Ability to focus	Must-be
	Ability to capture large amount of information	Indifferent
	Ability to be professional	Must-be
	Good language skills (grammar)	Must-be
	Ability to formulate questions	Must-be
Assessment competences	Familiar with ESG	Indifferent
	Knows the Bologna Process	Attractive
	Knows the system of higher education of a country	Attractive
	Experience in organisation of study process	Indifferent
	Experience in internal quality assessment	Indifferent
	Experience in international assessment visits	Indifferent
	Knows procedure and rules	Indifferent
	Has knowledge of context	Indifferent

Table 1. Overall results of competences and qualities and their type

The overall results of categories could be seen in Table 1. Results show that nineteen of competences and qualities are considered as indifferent, five as must-be, five as attractive. Some of the competences and qualities were “in between” two categories therefore they are put in two categories such as “qualification in the field of assessment” which could be considered as either one-dimensional or attractive. The overall results of mapped qualities and competences could be seen in Figure 8.

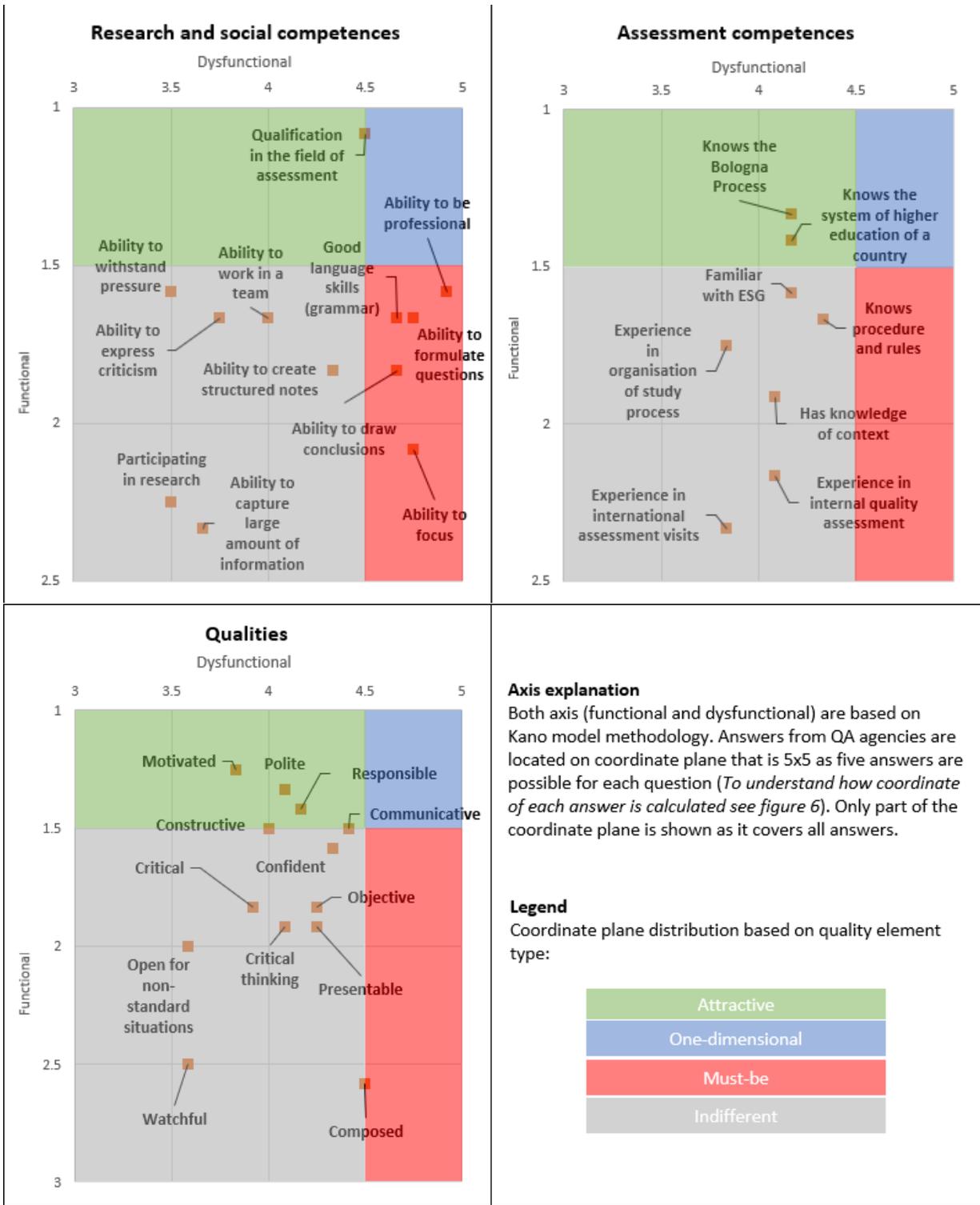


Figure 8. Mapping of qualities and competences based on analysis

Based on the results, student experts from the perspective of QA agencies must be with ability to focus, ability to be professional, ability to formulate questions, ability to draw conclusions and good language skills as well as composed. Qualification in the field of assessment affects how satisfied QA agencies are with the student expert – the more, the better. Attractive attributes for student experts are

being motivated, polite, responsible, knows the Bologna Process and knows the system of HE of a country. On the verge between indifferent and attractive are two qualities – constructive and communicative.

Results show that from the 33 qualities and competences 5 were must-be quality attributes, 5 were attractive quality attributes, 19 were an indifferent quality attributes. 4 of the 33 competences and qualities were on the verge between two quality attributes – two between attractive and indifferent, one between must-be and indifferent and one between attractive and one-dimensional. These could be considered as surprising results as the majority of mentioned qualities and competences turned out to be quality attributes that do not affect the perception of the expert. However it is important to note that all of these qualities and competences came out from an idea generation phase from students therefore it is likely that some are non-important to the process of QA in the eyes of QA agencies.

The reason why students are part of external QA as well as what QA agencies await from them could also influence results. For example, from the eight assessment competences results show that two are attractive factors and six are indifferent. This leads to the conclusion that QA agencies expect other competences and qualities from students more, mainly – research and social competences such as ability to draw conclusions and ability to ask questions. Reasoning behind the fact that competences such as familiar with ESG, knows procedure and rules and has knowledge of context are indifferent factors could be because QA agencies have the possibility to address these competences before the start of an external QA procedure.

It is also important to note that students have received the opportunity to be an expert relatively recently, which could explain why a big proportion of competences and qualities are attractive characteristics.

The results of this research could be used as a guidance in training of experts, and some parts as criteria based on which experts should be chosen.

Conclusion:

This research could be considered as a foundation for in-depth understanding of what competences and qualities experts (in this case – student experts) in higher education QA need to possess. Therefore it would serve as a way for improving QA as a process in the stage of developing experts. It is important to understand what QA agencies look for in student experts, and also how higher education institutions perceive them.

The reason why each of the competences and qualities are in their group should be studied more as well as the fact how different other stakeholders view experts in QA process. As perception of what is quality differs among higher education stakeholders, research like this could boost understanding of importance of QA by ensuring that there are always high-quality experts that do external review which in turn would deliver better QA results.

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