

External QA in Europe – the role of ENQA

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The wider European context of HE

- The **European Union** has 28 (27) member states
 - The **European Higher Education Area** has 48 signatory countries (including all EU member states, and the European Commission) → a voluntary intergovernmental process (the “Bologna Process”)
 - **European Union**, through the European Commission, supports higher education reforms, and harmonisation efforts, but in particular, since 30 years, student (and staff) mobility (to create “European citizens”)
 - Education policy, including HE, is **an area of autonomy of the EU member states**
- the European Union **can only support, add value, promote common agendas** etc. through funding and the “Open method of coordination” (benchmarking, European projects, studies, data...)
- Also for EHEA and the Bologna Process: **no legal tools to enforce implementation** (voluntary → peer pressure and support)

53 Members in 29 countries



Unity in diversity in external QA

- Different approaches to EQA: evaluation, audit, **accreditation**
- **Programme** level and / or institutional level
- **Subject specific / multidisciplinary** methods *and agencies*
- European, national, and regional agencies

- **Outcomes of quality assessments vary:**
 - Permission to operate/award degrees
 - Impact on funding
 - Recommendations for improvement...

- Compliance with standards vs. excellence
- Agencies building a profile through thematic elements

- Main purpose always double: accountability **and** enhancement



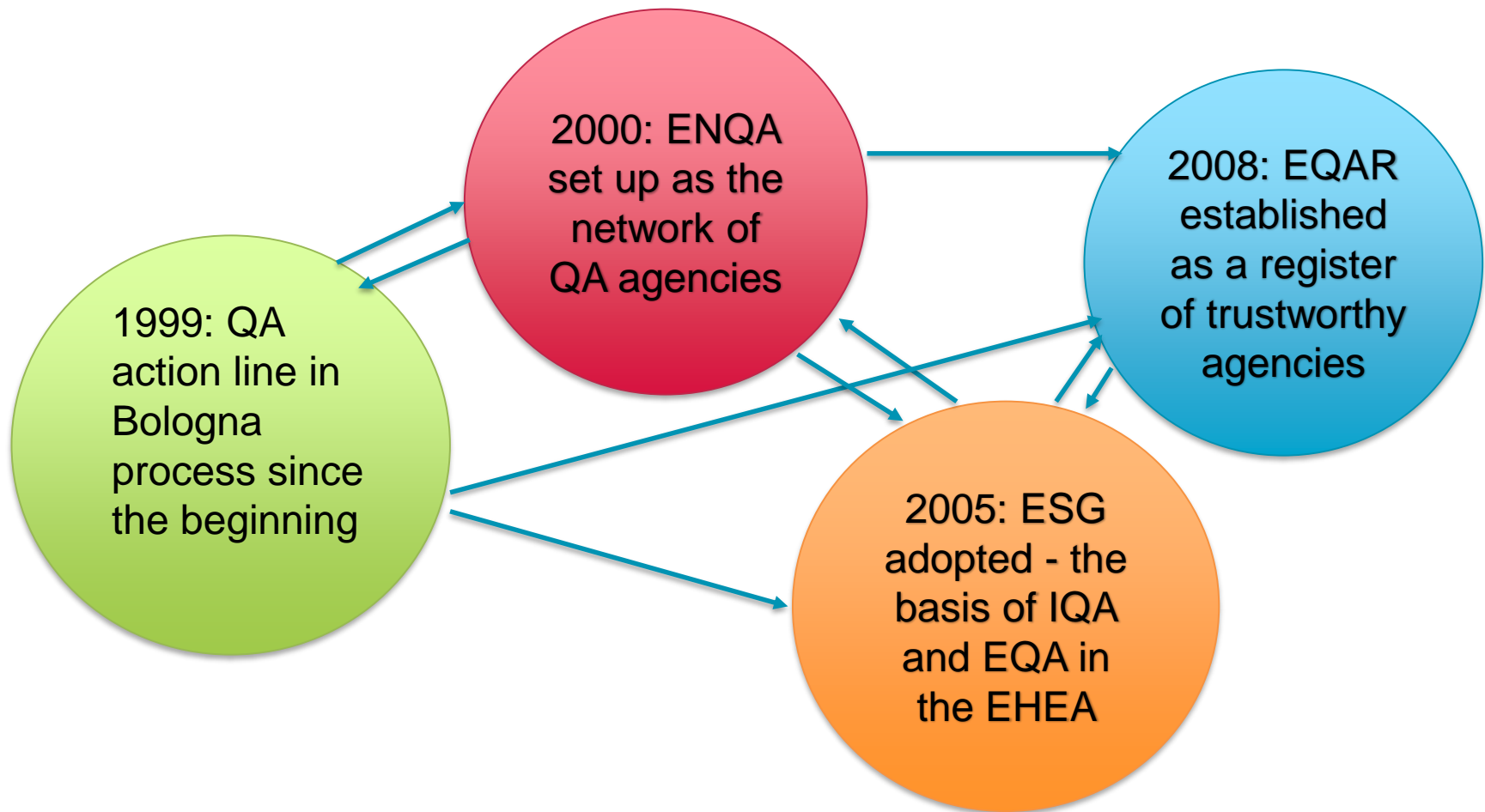
Diversity and constant evolution of QA

- Different levels of autonomy and capacity of HEIs for IQA
- Different levels of independence and capacity of QAAs for EQA
- Different **cultural contexts, history, and traditions (languages!)**
- Innovation and the “QA pendulum” (different stages of development → no univocal “direction”)

→ *Need for a common framework*



Unity in diversity – the European Quality Assurance Framework



What is ENQA?

- The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- **A membership and representative organisation** of QA agencies in the EHEA (founded by agencies (in 2000); governed by agencies)
 - 53 members from 29 European countries
 - 50 affiliates from a further 12 European countries
 - ENQA is representative of 40 of the 48 countries of the EHEA
 - Affiliates in the USA, Ecuador, Hong Kong, Israel and Jordan
- The criteria for membership is that an agency undergoes a successful **external review** against the 2015 **European Standards and Guidelines** (ESG) every five years

ENQA's structure and mission

STRUCTURE:

- Secretariat of 6 in Brussels
- Board of 9 elected members (rotation)
- Appeals committee
- General assembly



MISSION:

- to drive the development of quality assurance
- represent agencies internationally, supporting them nationally
- promote the enhancement of quality and the development of a quality culture in higher education

ENQA's main activities

- Representation of members and their interests in policy making
- European and international projects to support development of QA globally (exchange of good practice, analyses, capacity building, innovation...)
- Workshops, seminars, conferences and networking events for members and stakeholders
- Reviews of member or applicant agencies against the European standards for QA, including training of reviewers, management of reviewer database, coordination of review processes (10-15/year)
- Sharing of good practice and mutual learning among members
- Source of information on QA

Learning outcomes and the EHEA reform agenda – connecting QA and QF

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Learning outcomes in the EHEA

- **Conceptual shift to student-centered learning** (from teaching to learning and from inputs to outcomes)
- **Learning outcomes a tool to support (and enable) student-centered learning:**
 - course design
 - delivery and teaching methods
 - assessment methods adapted to measure achievements
 - calculation of workload based on time needed to achieve LOs (ECTS)
 - Etc.
- **Essential for flexible and lifelong learning:** recognition of mobility, workplace learning, informal and non-formal learning,...
- Accepts and supports the diversity of students, teaching methods, systems...
- LOs are the “glue” putting together QA and QF – both need and use LOs for assessment, and both are needed to create a consistent picture of a qualification

LOs and qualification frameworks

- LOs help to create **clear standards** for describing the level of **programmes** and facilitate comparison between programmes at the same level
- NQFs give a framework for the skills, knowledge and competences **per level**
- QF **one of the “transparency tools” in European HE**: give information on levels, progression possibilities, and positioning of qualifications in a system (and between systems)
- Together with QA, support and enable recognition (trust in quality and understanding of the level and position)

LOs and quality assurance

- LOs considered **a useful tool in assessing programme quality**: enable assessment of level and cohesion of the programmes and labour market relevance.*
 - **5/10 standards of ESG Part 1 refer to learning outcomes**
 - One specific standard (1.3.) entirely on SCL learning, teaching and assessment
 - Standard 1.4 on student admission, progression, recognition and certification refers to qualifications needing to explain “achieved learning outcomes” and “the context, level, content and status of the studies”
 - Standard 1.8 on public information requires HEIs to publish information on “LOs, qualifications awarded and learning opportunities available”
- IQA needs to make sure this happens
- EQA need to make sure IQA does its job
- Integration of LOs into programme evaluations is more intuitive and natural: wide-focus institutional audits may not be so easily able to provide sufficient attention to LOs

QFs and quality assurance

- The ESG – standard 1.2 – design and approval of programmes

*“The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and **refer to the correct level of the national qualifications** framework for higher education and, consequently, to the QF-EHEA”*

- QA can (and should) **ensure that levels are designed, assessed and delivered correctly, achieving the intended LOs:**
 - positioning of programme in QF appropriate
 - description of LOs right compared to national requirements
 - credits/workload realistic to achieve the intended Los etc.
- Many QA agencies in Europe have played an active role in designing and implementing NQFs



Thank you!

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