

European Standards and Guidelines The independence of the QA agencies and collaboration with stakeholders

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Part 1: European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions

1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance:

Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards: Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

1.3 Assessment of students:

Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

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1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff:

Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

1.5 Learning resources and student support: Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

1.6 Information systems:

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

1.7 Public information:

Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

Part 2: European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education

2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures:

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

2.3 Criteria for decisions:

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

2.4 Processes fit for purpose:

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

Part 2: European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education

2.5 Reporting:

Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

2.6 Follow-up procedures:

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

2.7 Periodic reviews:

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

2.8 System-wide analyses:

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

Part 3: European standards for external quality assurance agencies

3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education:

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

3.2 Official status:

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

3.3 Activities:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

3.4 Resources:

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

Part 3: European standards for external quality assurance agencies

3.5 Mission statement: Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

3.6 Independence: Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies: The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include: a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process; an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency; publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes; a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

3.8 Accountability procedures:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

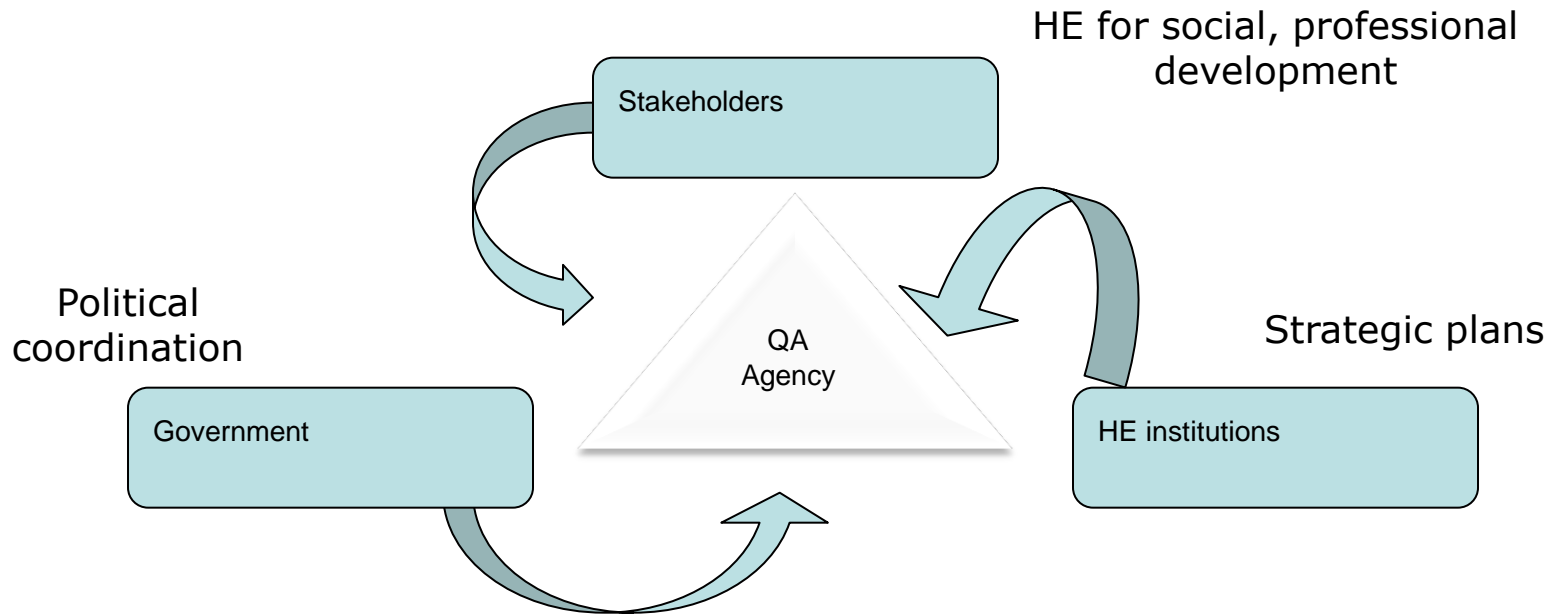
The concept of independence in the ESG 3.6

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that:
they have **autonomous** responsibility for their operations

&

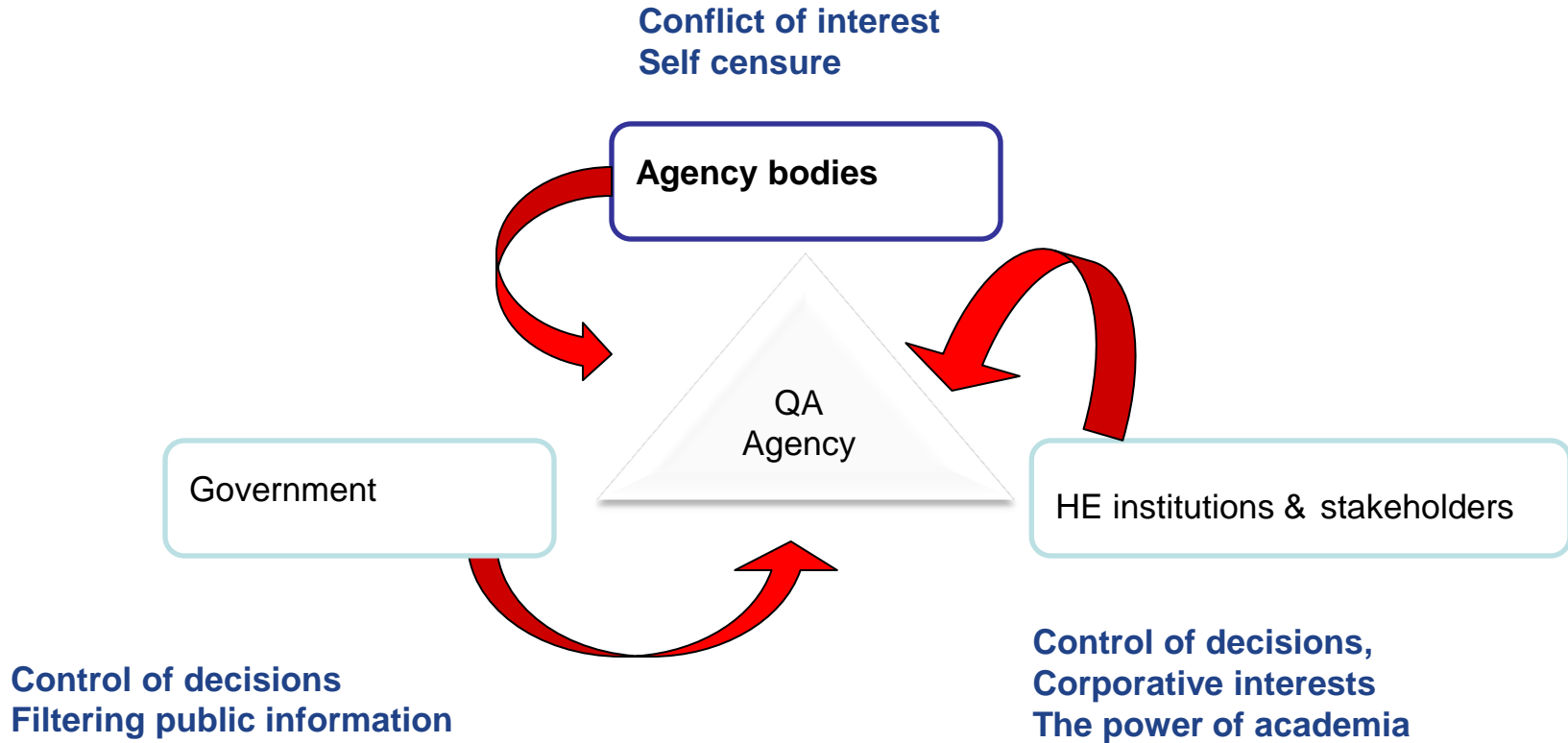
that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports **cannot be influenced** by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders

QA Agencies cannot be isolated: there are positive interactions.
Democracy and social needs should be considered; national and international stakeholders contributions...



Important: The standard helps to strengthen the credibility and the strategic position of the agency, promoting and preserving independence in some critical points...

independence is threatened when...



3.6 Standard guidelines:

its **operational independence** from HEI's & governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);

- Definition & operation of its procedures & methods,
- Nomination & appointment of external experts,
- Determination of the outcomes of its QA processes

They are undertaken **autonomously & independently** from governments, HEI's, & organs of political influence;

while relevant stakeholders in HE, particularly students/learners, **are consulted** in the course of QA processes, the final outcomes of the QA processes remain the responsibility of the agency

Autonomous responsibility of their operations and the governance in the agency decision-making bodies:

Independence is granted in official documents (yes) but....more precisely it's interesting to observe:

- The **balance** in the composition of the decision making bodies: Society representatives, students, international members, representatives from HEIs, representatives from the Ministry... **The representative roles**
- The **expertise role** in the decision making bodies
- The **selection** and **appointment** processes of the members for those decision-making bodies. Who selects and appoints? And how is it done for representative and expertise roles?
- Mechanisms to **avoid the conflict of interest** at different levels of the organisation.

Autonomous responsibility of their operations... other aspects:

- 1) How QA agency makes requests for adequate resources to undertake its work?
Is the funding system a potential source for the conflict of interests or a limitation for the QA functions development?
- 2) the process for appointing external experts?
- 3) Definition of QA procedures (methodology, criteria...) how is it done?
- 4) External QA methods should be able to demonstrate: a) positive impacts on HE and b) reliable information about the quality of HE to national and international stakeholders. (Std. 3.3 activities)

Final outcomes of the QA processes remain the responsibility of the agency. How to see that?

What is the level of transparency of positive interactions?

How those opinions and views are integrated by the QA agency decision-making bodies?

Does the QA agency collect appeals, complaints? (if yes, see how QA agency deals with those issues)

But at the end of the day...

independence is a **question of ethics**.

Ethics for the organisation (Board, panels, staff...)

and **commitment** of the agency and its decision-making bodies and staff (experts and officers) to enhance the quality of HE, and to facilitate the accountability of HE.

Thank you!