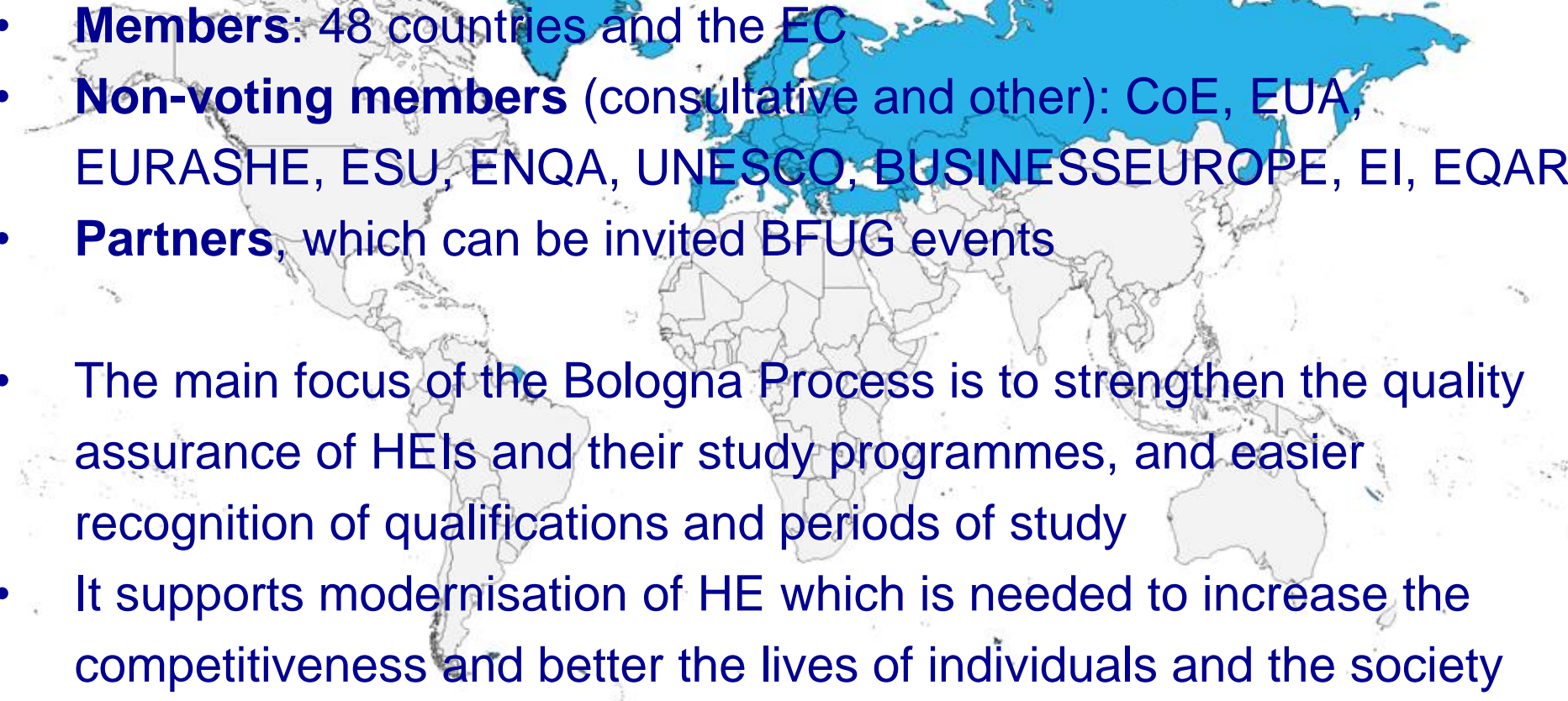# Analysis of national self-certification reports and impacts of the Bologna Process

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International conference – IMPACT OF NQFs ON EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction to the Bologna Process

- **Members**: 48 countries and the EC
- **Non-voting members** (consultative and other): CoE, EUA, EURASHE, ESU, ENQA, UNESCO, BUSINESSEUROPE, EI, EQAR
- **Partners**, which can be invited BFUG events

- The main focus of the Bologna Process is to strengthen the quality assurance of HEIs and their study programmes, and easier recognition of qualifications and periods of study
- It supports modernisation of HE which is needed to increase the competitiveness and better the lives of individuals and the society
- It supports integration of education and scientific activities, innovation, technology development and social dimensions

Needs for QF-EHEA self-certification

- **Importance of QA mechanisms** – many HEIs modernised study programmes, implemented QA standards and strengthened their QA mechanisms
- Most of HEIs **still need to do a lot** in order to be competitive compared to HEIs in other well-developed countries
- Many students **still face obstacles** in having their qualifications recognised for work or further studies
- **QF-EHEA** – an instrument designed to improve transparency of qualifications, to support LLL and mobility, based on QA
- The success of the Bologna Process in a country and in Europe **depends on trust and confidence** amongst all key stakeholders in the country and internationally – which further depends on **transparency of self-certification processes** in different countries

- Thus, there are **agreed common criteria and procedures for self-certification to the QF-EHEA**

Motivation for this study

- To support understanding and discussion on the **self-certification processes (and reports) to the QF-EHEA** – by presenting some introductory results of the self-certification processes
- To support self-certification processes in countries that are still in the first stages of the process
- **Sources for this study** – self-certification reports (separate or integrated with EQF referencing reports) and background documents
- Several aspects have been analysed:
  1. Self-certification reports in **relation to the EQF** referencing reports
  2. Role, structure and involvement of **international experts** during the self-certification processes
  3. State of play of the implementation of **VNFIL**
  4. **Use of Learning outcomes (LO)** by HEIs
  5. Implementation of QA processes, as defined by the **ESG**

1. Self-certification in relation to the EQF

- There are **similarities and differences**
  - For example, differences in the legal, political basis and in their geographical scope
  - For example, similarities in the idea of giving their sets of criteria and procedures
- Designated authority: C-1, C-7 (QF-EHEA) correspond to C-1 (EQF)
- Descriptors, demonstrating clear links: C-2 (QF-EHEA) – C-2 (EQF)
- LO and credits: C-3 (QF-EHEA) – C-3 (EQF); EQF in addition – VNFIL
- Transparency: C-4 (QF-EHEA) – C-4 (EQF)
- QA principles and procedures: C-5 (QF-EHEA) – C-5 (EQF)
- Mechanisms to certify learning process: C-6 (QF-EHEA) – C-10 (EQF)
- Report: P-1, P-4, P-5 (QF-EHEA) – C-8 (EQF)
- QA bodies: P-2 (QF-EHEA) – C-6 (EQF)
- International experts: P-3 (QF-EHEA) – C-7 (EQF)
- Diploma Supplement: P-6 (QF-EHEA) – C-10 (EQF)
- C-9 (EQF) and C-8 (EQF) partly – not directly linked to QF-EHEA criteria and procedures

1. Self-certification in relation to the EQF

- **QF-EHEA objective** – to show that national NQF-HE matches to QF-EHEA (even a kind of a harmonisation with QF-EHEA is expected) **For EQF –** national qualifications system should demonstrate how it relates to the EQF but without any prescribed or implied convergence.

- For **QF-EHEA**, the process is based on the assumption that once the compatibility of a NQF-HE is self-certified, the link between the national levels of qualifications should be taken as proven. Another country doubting the linkage of that NQF to QF-EHEA would be required to show **substantial difference**.

- **Reporting of EQF and QF-EHEA** process may be kept **separate or it can be combined** in one document with separate sections for each process. One single report is seen as a tool for increased transparency – indicating that the processes have been closely coordinated and agreed by stakeholders.

- The **self-certification process** was envisaged in the EHEA ministerial communiques as a **one-time only event**. In the EQF process there have been discussions about how continuing referencing might be accomplished, etc.

Types of reports – Study

- **Integrated** with the EQF referencing reports (*most countries*):
    - Explicit response to the QF-EHEA criteria and procedures
    - Implicit response to the QF-EHEA criteria and procedures (i.e., explicit response only to the EQF criteria for all education sub-systems)
    - No explicit nor implicit response on fulfilment of the QF-EHEA criteria and procedures for the HE

- **Separate** self-certification reports:
    - Explicit response only to the QF-EHEA criteria and procedures
    - Partly response to the QF-EHEA criteria and procedures
    - Explicit response to both: QF-EHEA criteria and procedures, and EQF criteria

Type of reports

Separate report on QF-EHEA

Common report (QF-EHEA included in report's title and explained in separate chapter)

Common report (QF-EHEA explained in separate chapter but not included in the report's title)

Common report (QF-EHEA included in the report's title but no separate chapter)

Common report (QF-EHEA not included in the report's title and no separate chapter; only implicitly responded)

Common report (QF-EHEA not included in report's title and no separate chapter; not aware to the QF-EHEA)

2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018

2. Involvement of international experts

- **QF-EHEA** aims to improve transparency and international understanding of qualifications in all countries
- **International experts** – have a clear defined role in making sure that these expectations defined by QF-EHEA criteria and procedures have been met
- Experiences:
  - International experts **have not been in all cases** involved **in all stages**
  - Most of international experts have been involved in the process to make reports **more transparent and understandable** by readers from other countries
  - There is not a fixed template for the involvement of international experts; experiences varies

2. Involvement of international experts

- From 2 – 5 experts (sometimes there are no experts with a clear experiences within HE)
- From only surrounding countries – up to – various countries
- Without international organisations – including several international organisations (CoE, Cedefop, ETF, etc.)
- Without written role of experts – clear descriptions of the role (usually participated in several meetings; in some cases, able to provide their opinions; presentations of opinions varied; in some cases addressing specific criteria and procedures; etc.)
- Without written opinions from experts – to very detailed
- Only positive opinions – to negative review (which happened to be a good idea)
- Etc.
- **Study → number** of international experts involved; the **role**; written **opinion**

# Involvement of international experts
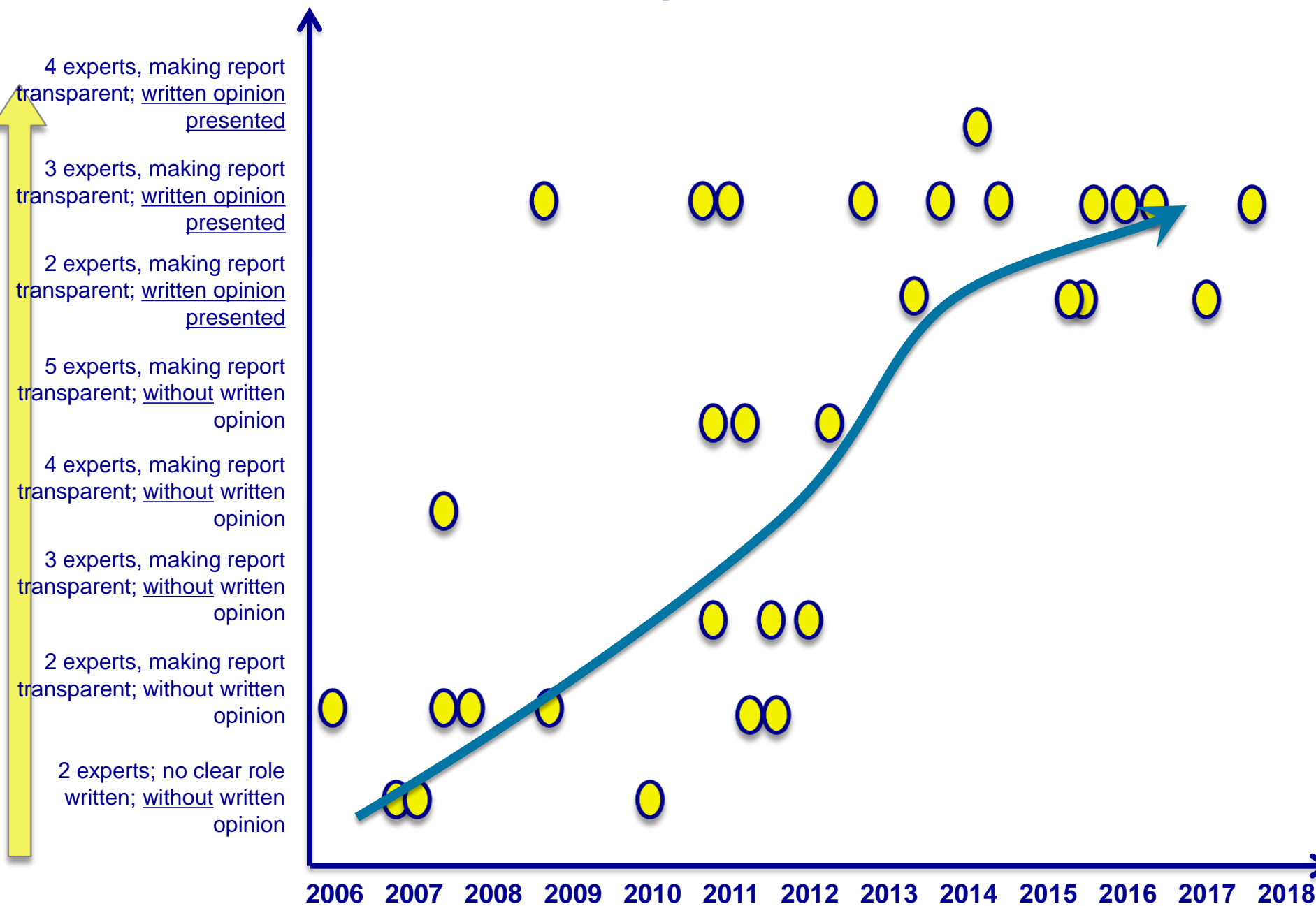
3. Validation of NF and IF learning

- There is a **wide spectrum** of approaches for the VNFIL
- Only some of countries used this concept systematically (even less of them within HE systems)
- **Different understanding** of the concept, and different terms used in different countries for this process, such as:
  - *Recognition of prior learning*
  - *Recognition of NF and IF learning*
  - *Validation of NF and IF learning*
  - *National credit rating*
  - *Institutional alignment,* etc.
- Within the QF-EHEA this process is guided by the new ESG (2015, S-1.4) (by the EQF, C-3, in relation to C-4 and C-5); C-5 is very important for development of trust in validation process

3. Validation of NF and IF learning

- VNFIL has not been described in separate self-certification reports

- Some countries described, but there are:
    - Terminology and conceptual issues
    - Linked to adult learning
    - Using terms "*non-formal qualification*" or similar
    - Etc.
- There are examples with clear concepts and according to EU principles (in common reports)
- Most of countries – just declaration to include VNFIL
- In HE used for: access, part of programmes, but there examples where it is possible to achieve (in theory) full qualifications

Validation of NF and IF (VNFIL)
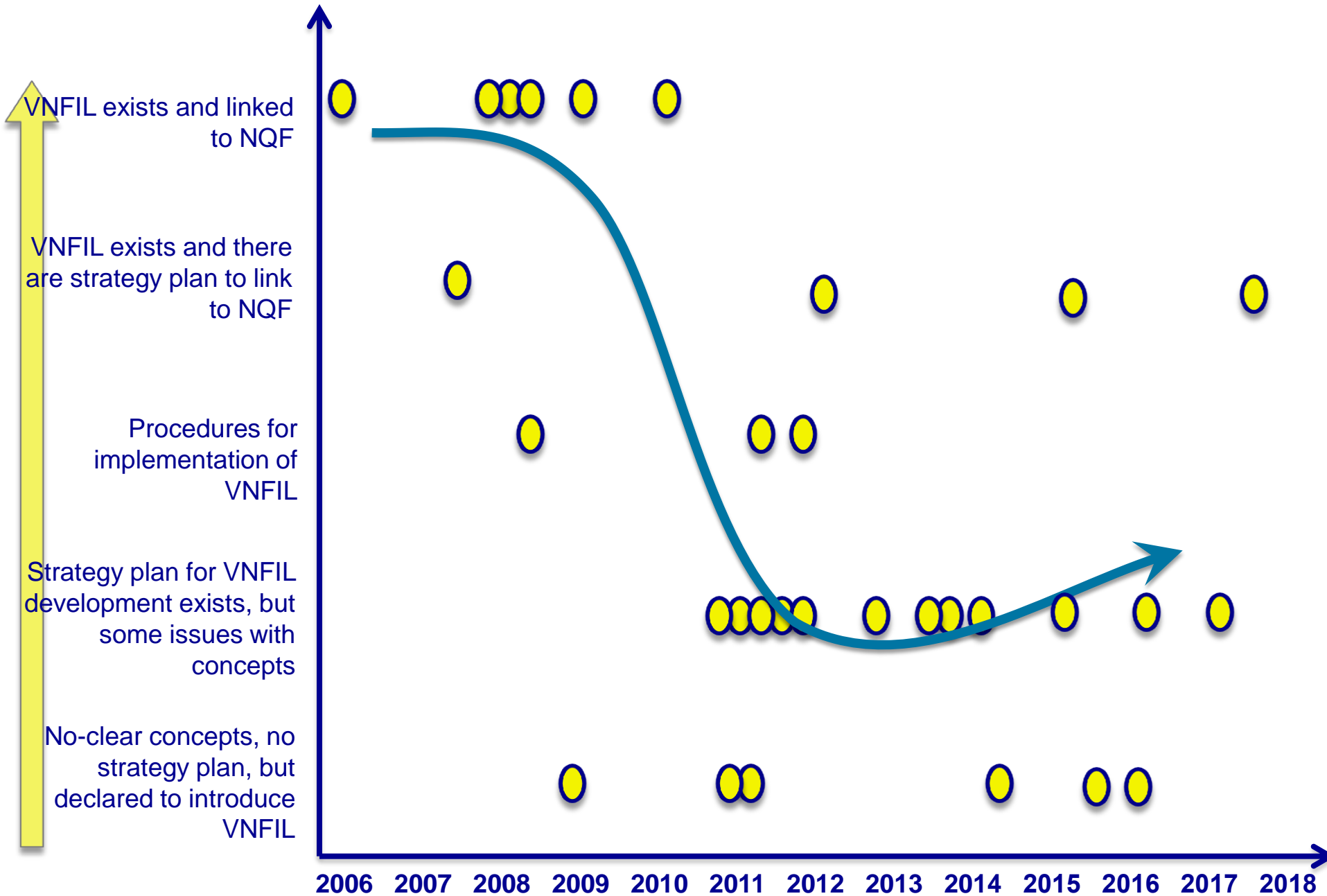
4. Learning outcomes (LO) used in HE

- Role of LO in HE plays an integral part of LLL strategy to promote different elements, such as:
  - Modernisation of HE
  - Promotion of student cantered learning
  - Award, accumulation and transfer of ECTS (or equivalent) credits
  - Quality assurance
  - Flexible learning pathways
  - Key competences for LLL
  - Validation of NF and IF learning (VNFIL)
  - Credibility for HEIs and employers
  - Etc.

4. LO used in HE

- In most cases, while countries introuced level descriptors, they have not yet systematically implemented LO within HEIs
- **Various representations of LO** exists in different countries; most of them using similar as in EQF (K-S-A/R); there are other innovative represenatations; some of domains in different countries use only different term; various layers of descriptors exists
- Some **descriptors are not completly generic** – some of level descriptors incorporated set of key competences for LLL within level descriptors (i.e., learning, communication, ICT skills, etc.)
- **ECTS** credits are **used differently** (all cycles; or not for third cycle; various number of ECTS or equivalent; etc.)
- 1 ECTS (or equivalent) varies from 20 to 30 hours
- Etc.

# Implementation of LO and their dimensions (ECTS, etc.)
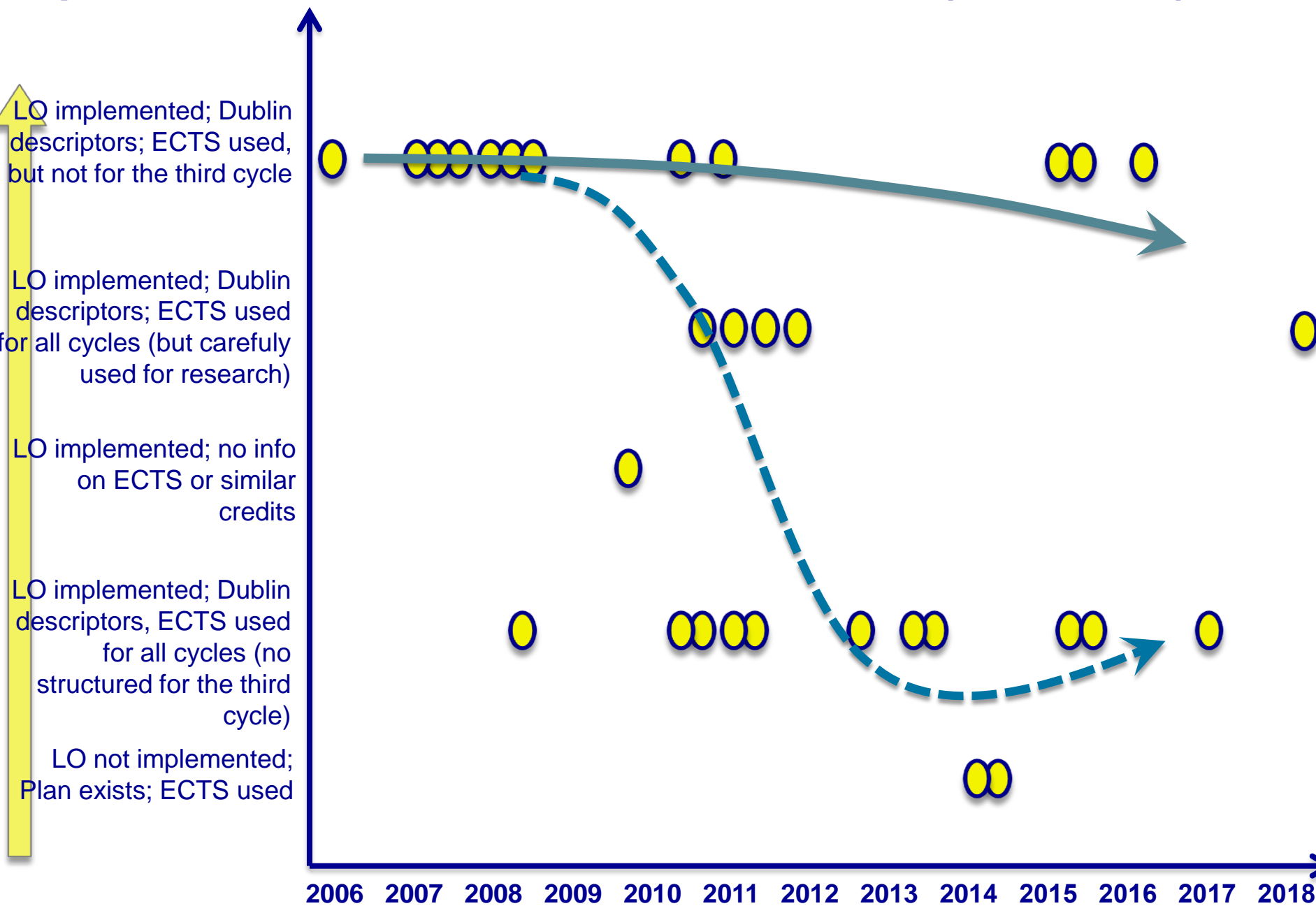
5. Quality assurance

- **QA is crucial** in supporting HE systems and institutions in responding to changing environments while ensuring the qualifications achieved by students remain relevant and at the forefront of institutional missions
- QA – the core componetns for all NQFs for HE
- QA – Criterion 5 (**ESG** for HE)
- Experiences:
  - All countris have establiched some form of external QA, but significant differences in the approach
  - QA moving towards making sure that expected LO are met when a qualification is awarded
  - QA bodies are key stekehodlers in self-certification processes
  - Varying degrees of ESG implementation
  - Etc.

5. Quality assurance

- Most reports described, but not focused to standards and functions of bodies, and some countries without evidences for the statements about QA
- Most countries express link to **ESG**
- Most of countries have a national agency for quality assurance
    - ENQA members, but not all countries
    - Registered in **EQAR**
- Some countries use agencies from other countries
- There are examples of non-transparency of titles

Implementation of QA mechanisms according the ESG
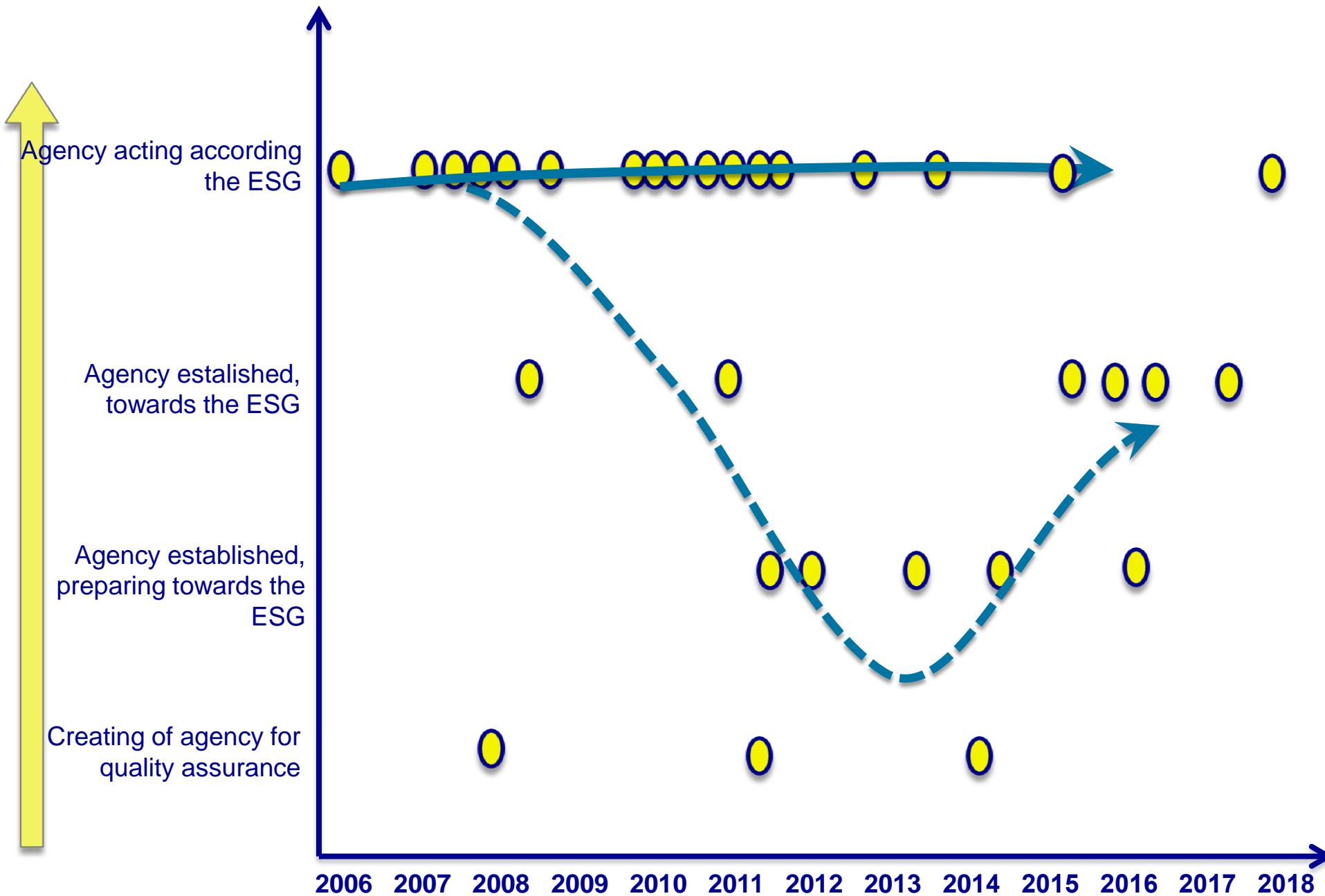
Impacts of the Bologna Process

- Motivation of stakeholders and individuals to participate in the reform of the HE systems
- Use of common concepts and terms
- Improvement of QA systems
- Partnerships within countries and internationally; and within HE and VET
- Peer-learning and development of national experts
- Contribution to increased mutual trust ("*critical international friends*", willingness to give and to receive constructive feedbacks)
- Building transparent systems for recognition of foreign qualifications
- Etc.

Need for improvement

- Understanding of some concepts and terms
  - Related to LO, qualifications, etc.
- Development and implementation of <u>LO</u> and <u>credit</u> system(s)
- Development and implementation of national <u>QA</u> systems (better use of LO, body and their functions, guidelines)
- Levelling of qualifications and transparency of titles
- Understanding and implementation of the system for <u>VNFIL</u>
- Development and implementation of the system for <u>Recognition</u> of foreign qualifications (use of NQFs)
- In some cases – fail to link descriptors, LO, process for levelling, and QA. For example, how QA supports the shift to LO, descriptors, credits, and levelling of qualifications
- Etc.

➔ Peer Learning Activities, common projects, further studies, etc.

Thank you!

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