European Quality Assurance
Register for Higher Education

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European Instruments: Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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Riga, 14 September 2013

LSA QUEST training

Outline

1. A bit of history
2. European principles
3. Role of EQAR
4. International QA
5. Estonian case
6. QA and recognition
7. A bit about future

HISTORY

In the beginning...

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..there was higher education,

then it exploded.

Short history (1)

- Quality assurance and accreditation mainly started in the US in 1960s
- In Europe, UK, Denmark and the Netherlands were leading countries
- Formed QA agencies started cooperation in early 1990s
- European Commission pushed towards exploration of cooperation and common practice in mid- 90s

Short history (2)

- QA agencies and governments formed a network of cooperation through a series of European Projects
- ENQA – European Network for Quality Assurance was founded in 2000
- By 2003, ENQA had changed into an association of agencies
- In 2003, Bologna Process led to the development of European Standards and Guidelines

Short history (3)

- ESG were adopted my ministers in 2005, consequently, ENQA started to use them as membership criteria, to be the gatekeeper
- But with the ESG, a proposal for a European Register was also made. That was also developed and was approved in 2007
- Since 2008 both ENQA and EQAR use ESG as criteria

But why quality assurance?

- Mainly as a response to rapid expansion of higher education
- „Never before have the expectations of the universities potential contributions been so high, and never before have doubts about their quality and performance been so serious and widespread“ (Van Ginkel 2011).

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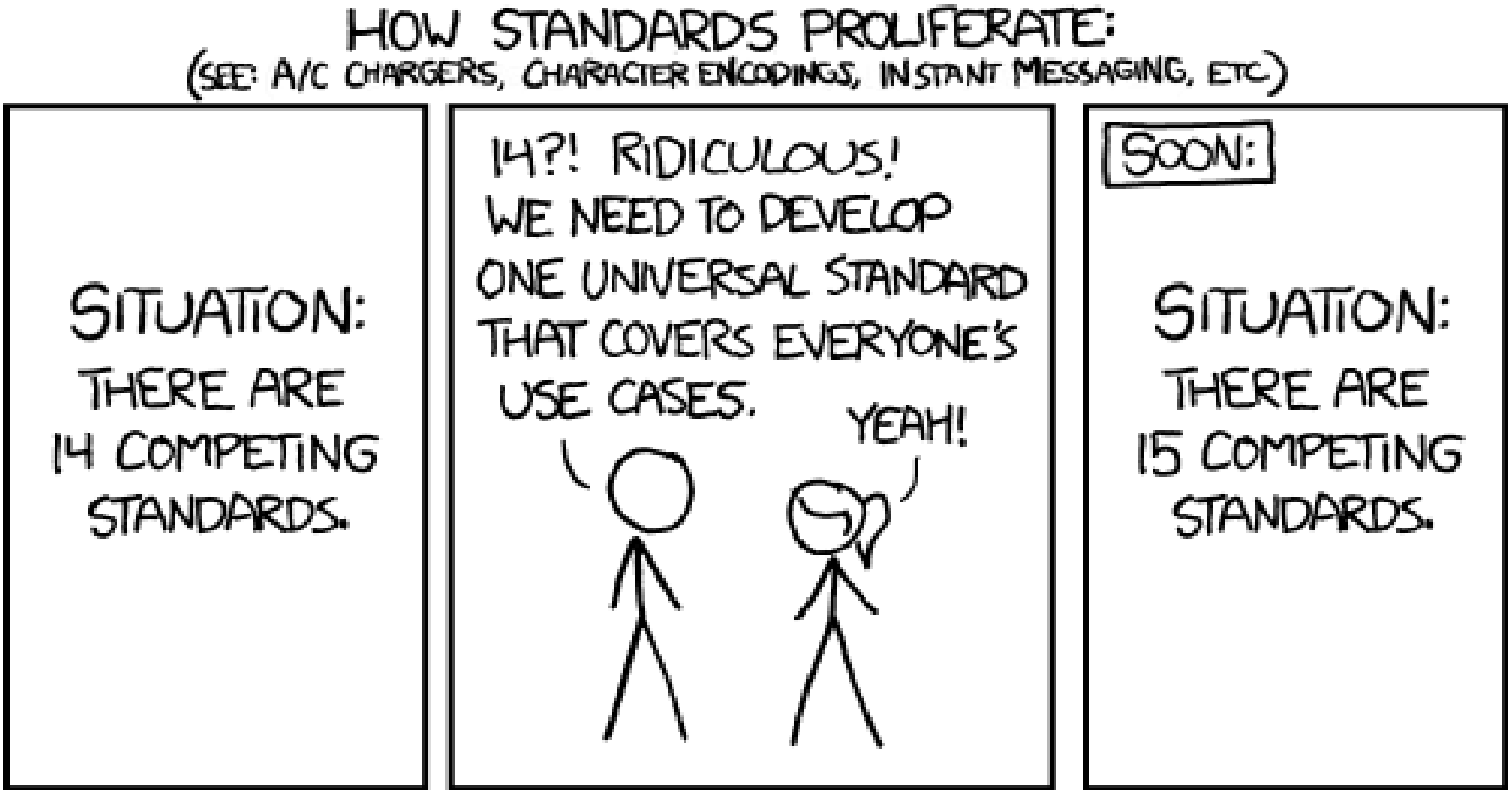
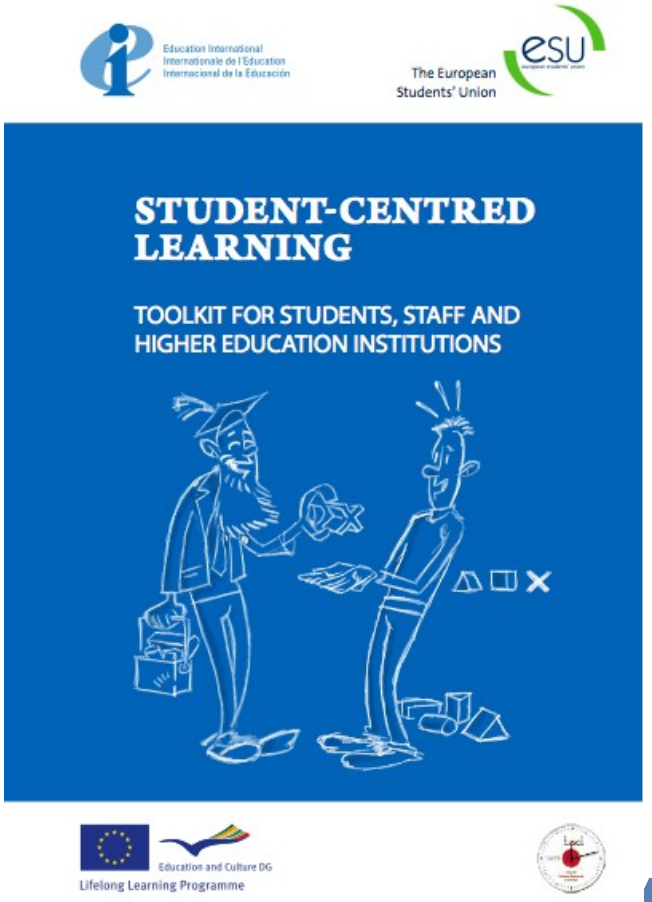
EUROPEAN STANDARDS

Standards


HOW STANDARDS PROLIFERATE:
(SEE: A/C CHARGERS, CHARACTER ENCODINGS, INSTANT MESSAGING, ETC.)
SITUATION: THERE ARE 14 COMPETING STANDARDS.
14?! RIDICULOUS! WE NEED TO DEVELOP ONE UNIVERSAL STANDARD THAT COVERS EVERYONE'S USE CASES.
YEAH!
SOON:
SITUATION: THERE ARE 15 COMPETING STANDARDS.

What do we need standards for?



European Standards and Guidelines for QA (ESG)

- Adopted by Bologna ministers in 2005
- Based on a proposal by the key stakeholders (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE - “E4 Group”)
- Agreed principles for quality assurance (QA) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)
  - Twin purpose of QA: quality enhancement & accountability
  - Subsidiarity principle – not prescriptive, no uniform system
  - Standards for QA processes – complementary to Qualifications Framework for the EHEA (QF-EHEA) and European Qualifications Framework for LLL (EQF)

ESG – the why and the how?

Adopted and developed by whom? - ownership

For what purpose?

Where are the actual challenges and developments? – question of suitability

How does it link with the Bologna Process? – policy goals

How should we implement them?

The E4 Group

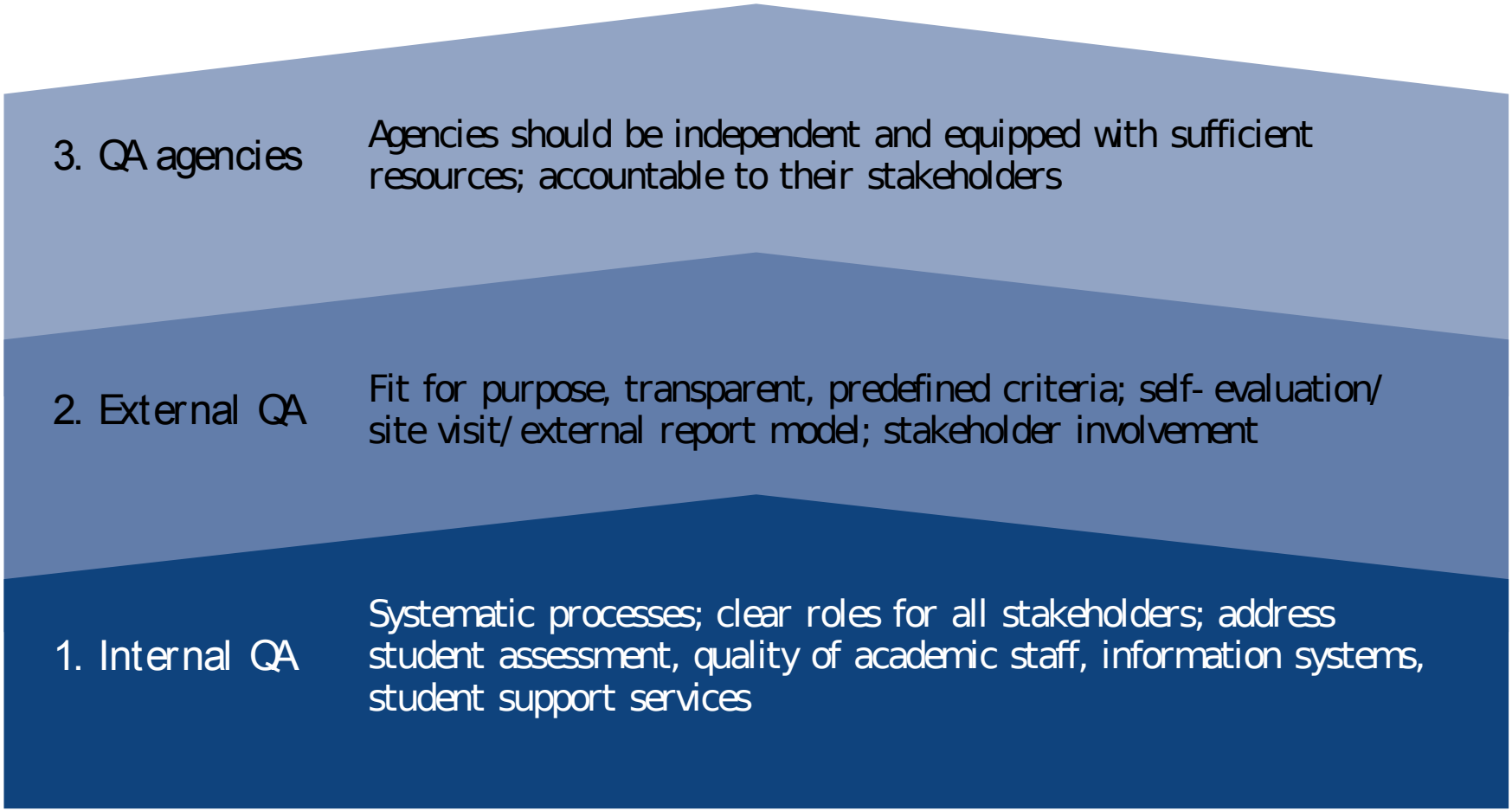
European Students' Union (ESU)

European University Association (EUA)

European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

ESG – Essential Principles



Common points with EQF

EQF Common Principles	European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)
External monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review.	EQAR registration renewed every 5 years 3.8 Accountability procedures
Quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes	1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards 1.3 Assessment of students 1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff 1.5 Learning resources and student support
Quality assurance systems should include the following elements: – clear and measurable objectives and standards; [...] – widely accessible evaluation results.	 2.3 Criteria for decisions 2.5 Reporting

… and Differences

- EQF Common Principles:
  - Explicit focus on Learning Outcomes

- European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)
  - More detailed, especially guidelines
  - Independence of QA agencies

  NB: ESG are currently being revised (new edition in 2015)

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SOON:
SITUATION: one really thick standard with 14 independent chapters.

EUROPEAN REGISTER FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)

Register of quality assurance agencies that comply substantially with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

- Established by E4 at Ministers' request
- Jointly governed by stakeholders (E4, social partners) and EHEA governments
- External review of agencies by independent experts
- Independent Register Committee
  - Composed of 11 quality assurance experts
  - Coming from different stakeholder perspectives
  - Take all decisions related to registration

Mission and Objectives

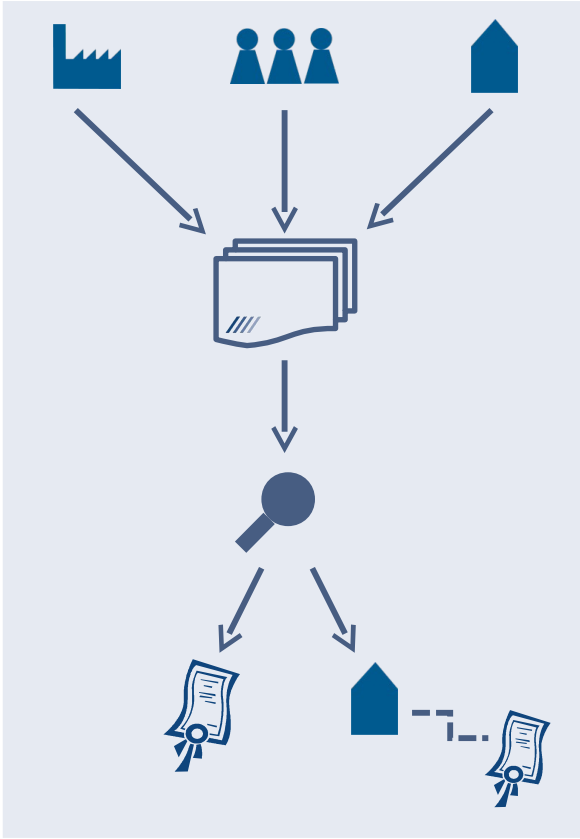
Promoting the further development of a coherent and flexible quality assurance system for Europe as a whole

Transparency and Information

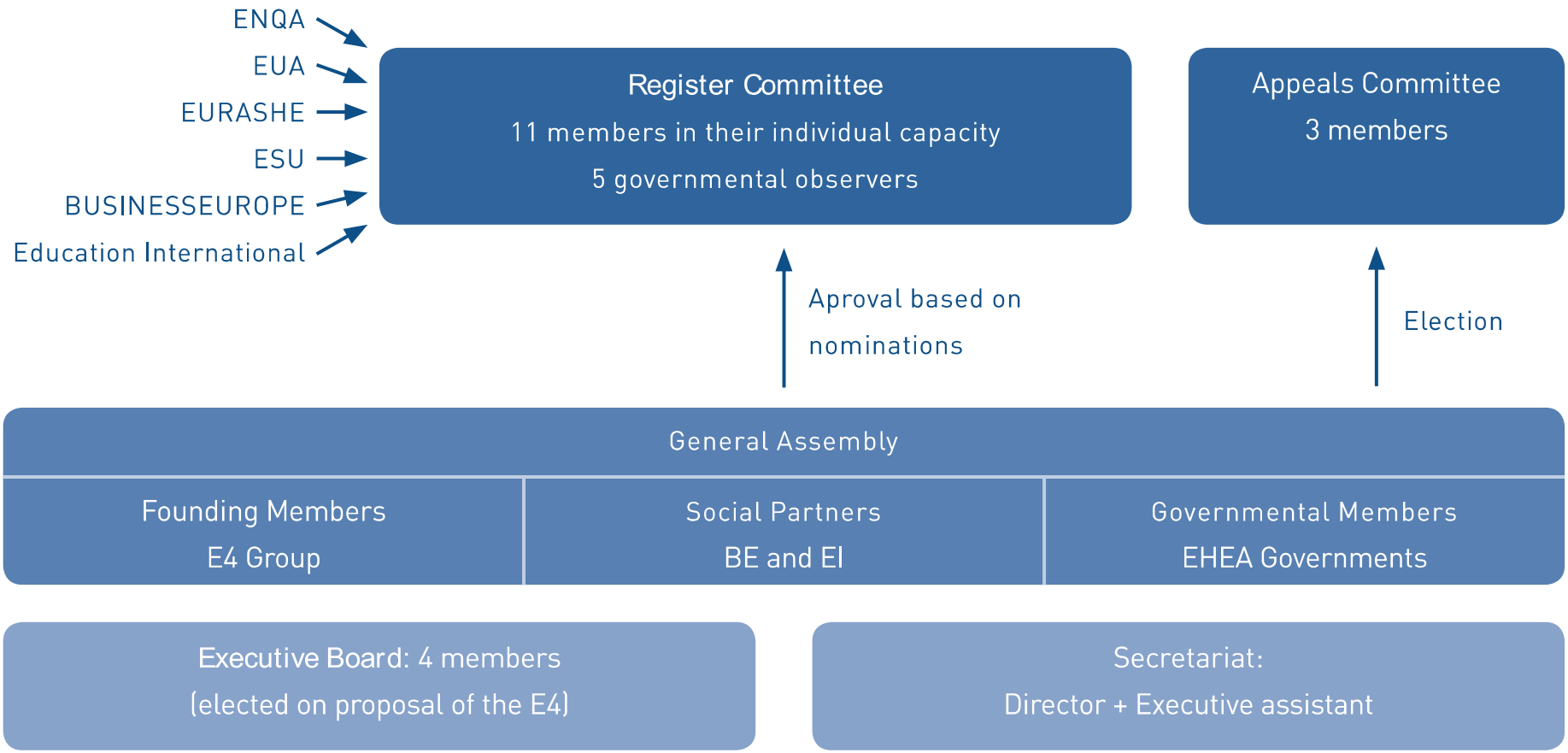
- Information on bona fide agencies
- Prevent „accreditation mills“ from gaining credibility
- Institutions to choose a QA agency

Trust and Recognition

- Enhance mutual trust amongst quality assurance (QA) agencies and institutions
- Acceptance of QA results/ decisions
- Support recognition of qualifications and periods of study
- Allow registered QAAs to operate across the entire EHEA

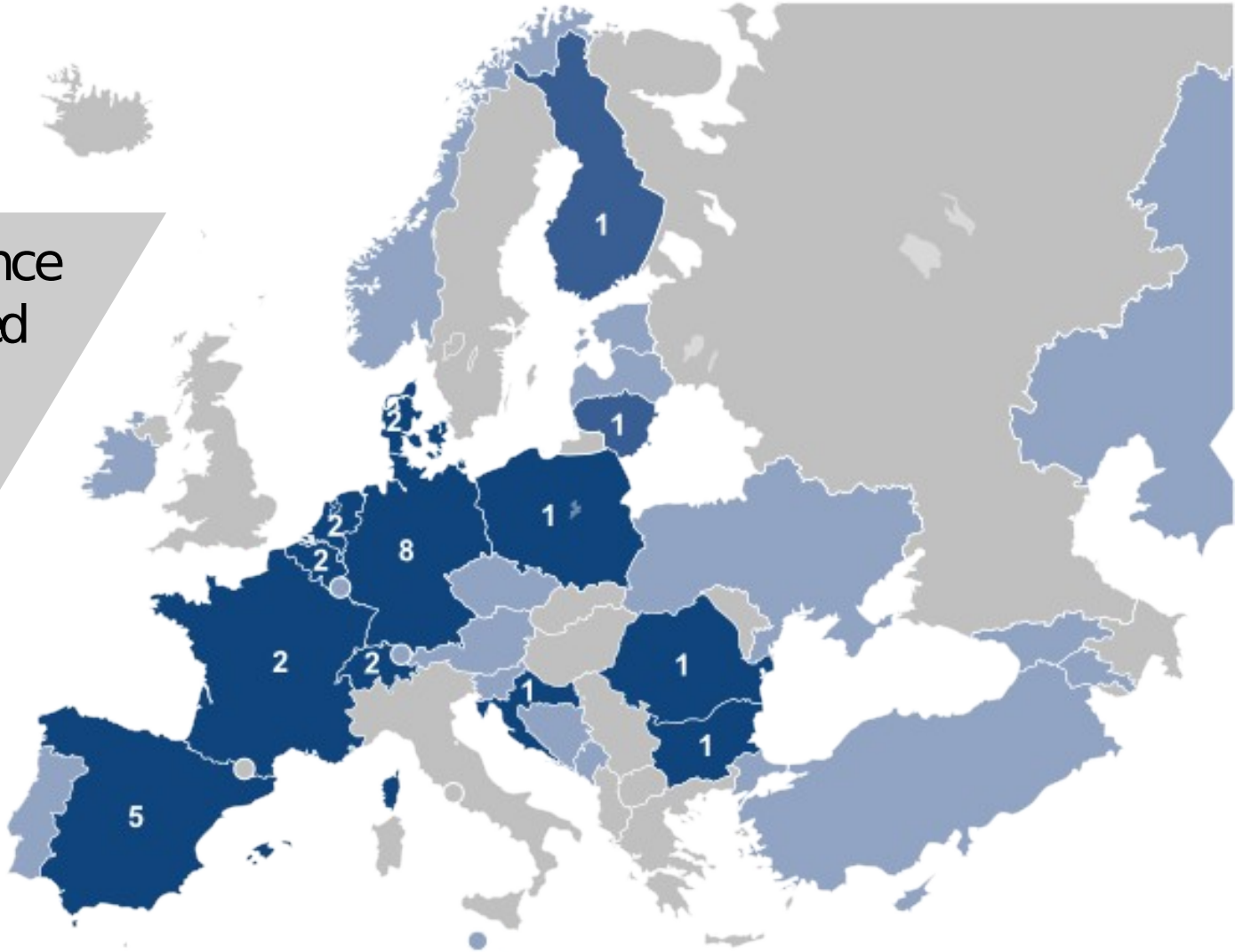


EQAR Organisational Structure



Agencies and Governments

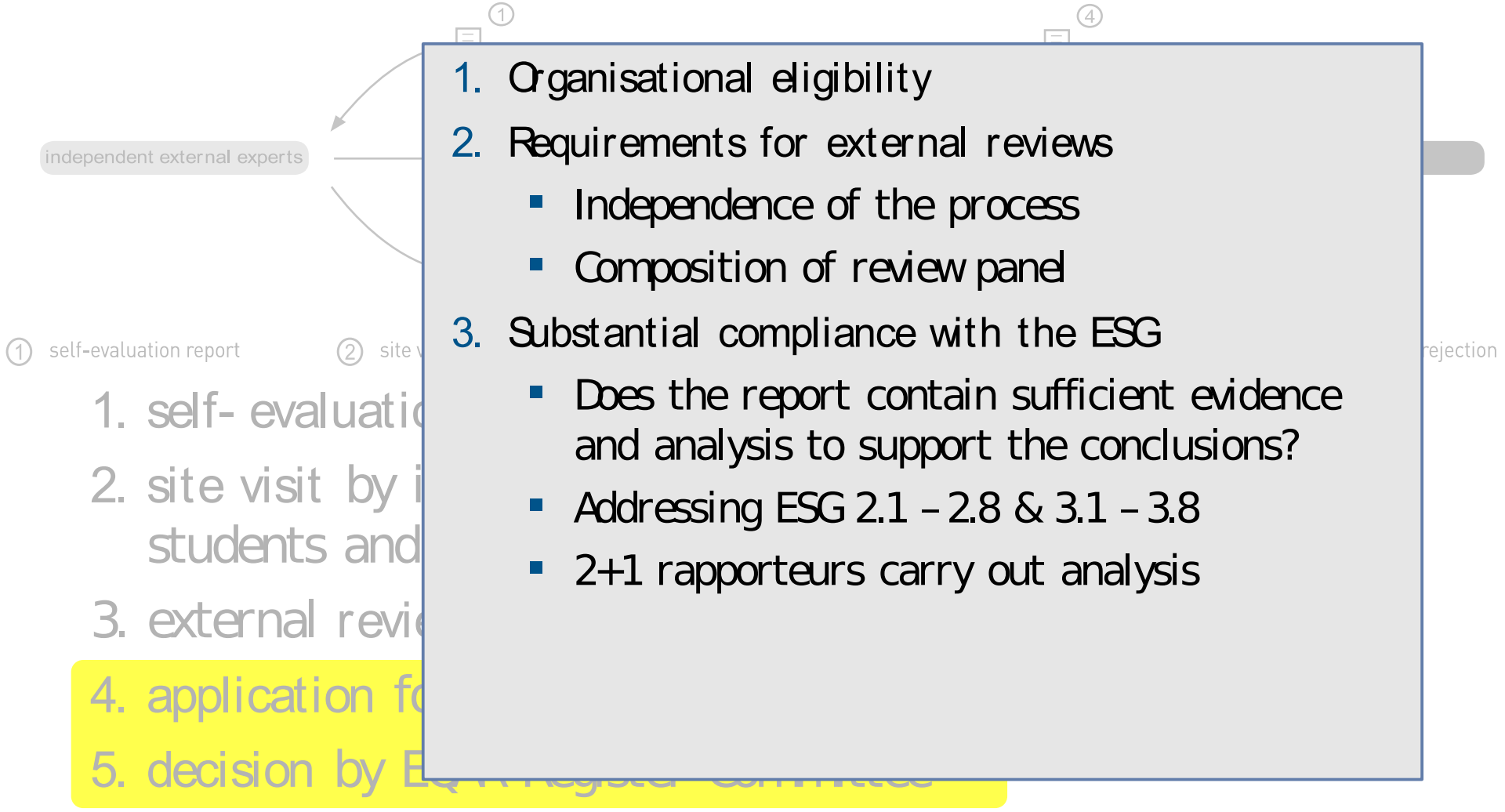
- 29 quality assurance agencies registered
- 31 Governmental Members



External Review & EQAR Application Process

1. self- evaluation produced by the QA agency
2. site visit by independent review team(QA professionals, students and academics)
3. external review report according to ESG parts 2 & 3
4. application for inclusion on EQAR
5. decision by EQAR Register Committee

Three-Step Procedure



1. Organisational eligibility
2. Requirements for external reviews
   - Independence of the process
   - Composition of review panel
3. Substantial compliance with the ESG
   - Does the report contain sufficient evidence and analysis to support the conclusions?
   - Addressing ESG 2.1 – 2.8 & 3.1 – 3.8
   - 2+1 rapporteurs carry out analysis

Further EQAR Procedures

- Periodic renewal every five years
  - Possibility of extraordinary review before
- Obligation to report substantive changes
  - Organisational structure of the agency
  - Change in external QA activities & methodologies
- Complaints Policy
  - Third- party concerns in relation to ESG compliance
- Publication of decisions by the Register Committee
  - More transparency – less misinformation

EQAR and ENQA

- EQAR is a clearing house of agencies while ENQA is a representative membership organisation of agencies
- Though both use ESG as criteria, EQAR is meant to be used as a legal tool while purposes of ENQA are the development of agencies
- Mostly, though, agencies use the same external review to apply to both – these are organised by ENQA

Criteria

- 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education
- 3.2 Official status
- 3.3 Activities
- 3.4 Resources
- 3.5 Mission statement
- 3.6 Independence
- 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies
- 3.8 Accountability procedure

Challenges

- Consistent interpretation of ESG poses a challenge, which is why independence is a major issue for which many agencies are flagged
- Independence seen as a crucial criteria though as that enables QA procedures to be independent from politics within higher education
- Independence in substance, not form!

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS, QUALITY ASSURANCE & INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

National decisions

- Normally, the QA decision of the agency should be considered final – that is what is understood by independence (of the QA procedure)
- Accreditation or licencing of education could be organised on top of that
- Either can happen, but it is crucial to understand that QA procedures are increasingly similar though content and approach are more diverse

National agencies (1)

- Most national agencies have been establised either before 2005 or between 2005 and 2010
- In most cases, national agencies are given a mandate in legislation that corresponds to the HE system
- But a few countries have created competition within their countries like Germany and The Netherlands

National agencies (2)

- It is normally presumed that through a national agency, it is best to keep accountability while it is also believed that a national approach allows to take national and cultural sensitivities best into account
- But as higher education is passing through the national romantic period, agencies must also face a more open market

National agencies (3)

- Resourcing of agencies is normally handled either through government funding or covered by institutions
- That is mostly linked with funding and responsibilities of higher education institutions and states
- But even if institutions pay for the reviews, those funds might be foreseen in the government grants to the institutions

Legislation

- Whether there is a national agency or not, should not be the principled question
- Fitness for, and of, purpose of quality assurance must be set first along with policy goals
- Then, reasonable procedures must be put in place, and it is reasonable these days to assure international openness

- So, forming an national agency that conforms with international standards, is probably a good idea
- Allowing EQAR registered agencies to operate is something that might not be in contradiction and would be a sign of trust, but also establishes more trust towards the higher education system

Fears – but just fears if handled properly

- Competition between agencies will lead to a (price) race to the bottom
- Competition will lead to institutions selecting the most lenient agencies
- Governments give away control over the accountability of higher education institutions
- NONE ARE NECESSARILY TRUE!!!

International Cross-Border QA Activities

All EQAR-registered agencies can evaluate/accredit/audit HEI's ...

- ... for all or most external quality assurance obligations in:
  Armenia, Austria, Flemish Community of Belgium, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Poland, Romania
- ... limited to joint degrees or cross-border programmes in:
  Denmark, Germany

Austria	Flemish Comm.	Kazakhstan
Universities can choose freely from amongst EQAR-registered agencies for quality audits	Foreign EQAR-registered QA agency carries out review, but NVAO (national agency) makes final decision	National register of licensed QA agencies, EQAR-registration pre-condition for foreign European agencies

Initial Experiences and Observations

Challenges	Opportunities
▪ Language ▪ Local context ▪ Country-specific rules ▪ Specific degree structures ▪ Types of institutions ▪ Cultural differences	▪ More valuable feedback ▪ QAA fits the HEI's profile ▪ Specialised institutions ▪ Facilitate joint degrees ▪ Higher commitment ▪ Active choice by HEI

EKKA – THE ESTONIAN AGENCY

EKKA

Formed in 2009 and based on the former accreditation council.

Structural unit of a government agency, independent in QA decisions.

Levels of QA

Institutional

- accreditation focused on internal quality assurance
- fulfillment of entrusted tasks
- conformity of administration, management, study and research environment to the objectives of HEI

Programmes

- assessed in study programme groups
- conformity of programmes to standards
- focus on enhancement of programmes

First step

Initial assessment

- HEI must request a licence from government to obtain a right to conduct studies in a specific study programme groups

- focused on meeting formal standards; procedure must be paid by the HEI

Institutional accreditation, or an external evaluation of the functioning of the organisation as a whole and its system of quality assurance, is the main instrument for QA.

The purpose of an external evaluation of higher education is feedback, not the application of sanctions.

Procedures

- Based on the European Standards and Guidelines
- external review panels include representative of students and employers
- international review panel members
- review panel members trained by EKKA
- cyclical reviews within at least once in 7 years
- review reports, including self- evaluation reports published by EKKA
- QA decisions published by EKKA

EKKA in Estonia

National agency

- responsible for the entire QA procedure
- coordinates the work of review panels
- forms a Council that takes a decision based on the reports of the panels
- agency is independent in its decisions on QA

Ministry

- issues licences based on the initial assessment of study programme groups
- has the authority for auditing HEI in which case QA reviews are used as input
- automatically funds all primary functions of EKKA

Reports

- review panels are independent, but the Council might request clarifications
- Council may, if well reasoned, decide on a different outcome than what is recommended by the report

Focus

- first and second cycle
- organisational management and performance
- teaching and learning
- research and development and/or other creative activity
- service to society

Review decision and focus

Reports

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Focus

- first and second cycle
- organisational management and performance
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- research and development and/or other creative activity
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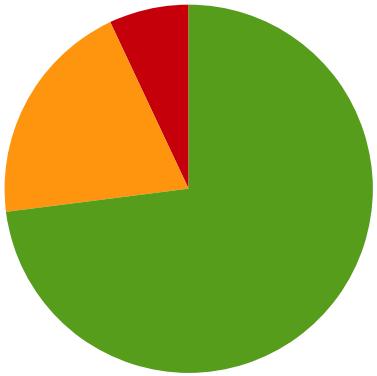
Internationalisation

- EKKA was reviewed against ESG in 2013
- full member of ENQA since 2013
- applying for registration in EQAR
- full compliance with ESG except in two standards

- provision in the law that allows for HEI to request a foreign agency to carry the QA procedure if the agency conforms with ESG, but must be approved by EKKA Council
- EKKA has ambitions to coordinate reviews abroad

IMPACT



Transitional evaluation has resulted in the approval of 73% of evaluations for an unlimited period, with 20% with a limited period and with 7% not approved.

Consolidation

- process of institutional accreditation has started in 2012
- in anticipation, as many will not pass the formal requirements, mergers of institutions have already started with smaller, private HEI eaten up or closed

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BEYOND 2013

Bucharest Communiqué

(April 2012)

Ministers agreed to:

- revise the ESG to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope, [...] based upon an initial proposal to be prepared by the E4 in cooperation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) [...]
- allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements.
- recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes.
- automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA.

(commitments related to quality assurance and EQAR)

Revision of the ESG

Revision carried out by E4, BUSINESSEUROPE, Education International, EQAR until 2015 (Yerevan)

Issues that are being addressed:

- Clarity, applicability, usefulness
  - Technical improvement, consistency, ...
- Scope
  - Link to recognition, QF- EHEA, research, ...
- Changed context
  - New types of provision (online, cross- border, ...)
  - HEI's are choosing the QAA to work with

3. QA and QF Working Together

Bucharest Communiqué 2012:

- allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA; recognise their QA decisions on joint/double degree programmes
- automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal.

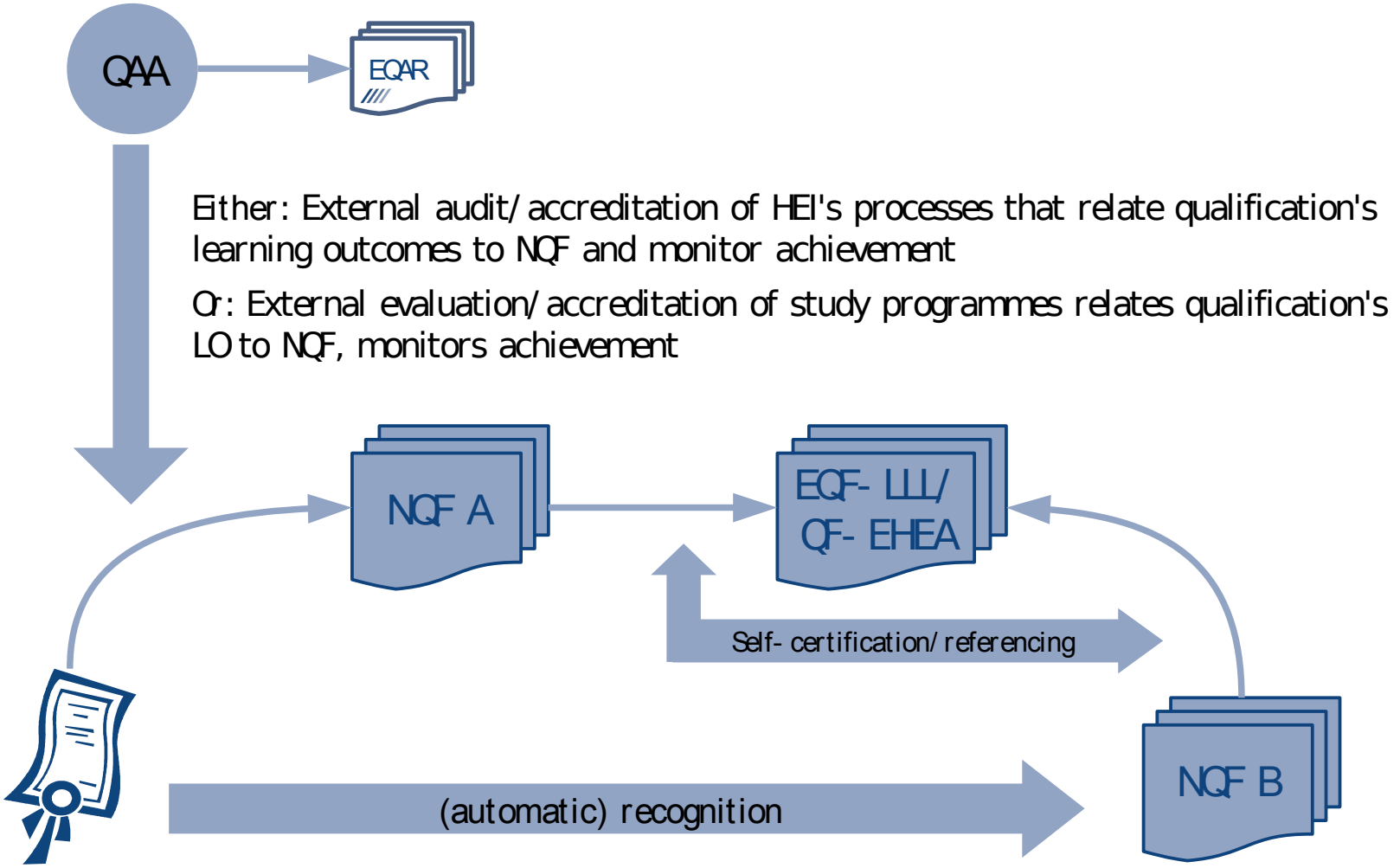
BFUG Work Plan 2012-2015:

- improve the interaction between qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, and the recognition of qualifications and transparency instruments.

Irish Presidency Conference on QA in QF, March 2013:

- review and make proposals to strengthen the common principles of quality assurance to be applied across HE and VET

Forming a Sound Basis for (Automatic) Recognition



Examples: Role of NQF in QA Criteria/Standards

- Germany: “The study programme fulfils the requirements set out in the [NQF]. […] [The curriculum] combines modules consistent with the intended learning outcomes and includes adequate teaching/learning methodologies.”
- Denmark: “Based on the curriculum, the institution must account for the interrelation between the competency profile of the study programme and the requirements for either the bachelor, master's or professional master's level in the provisions of the [NQF].“
- UK: HE providers „ensure that the requirements of [NQF] are met by:
  - positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the framework
  - ensuring that programme outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the framework
  - naming qualifications in accordance with the guidance
  - awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined learning outcomes”

A Bologna Dream Team

- QA is crucial in building the trust needed
  - Validating the link between qualifications and NQF (and thus, EQF/QF-EHEA)
  - Supporting the paradigm shift to learning outcomes
  - Contribute to self-certification/referencing
  - ESG Revision: clarify the link between QF/QA, and the role of QF in QA processes
- Together, QA + QF make automatic recognition work
  - Flemish Community of Belgium: automatic recognition of degrees, based on the QF-EHEA and accreditation by EQAR-registered QA agency

Thank you for your attention!

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