Safeguarding Quality Assurance Principles in Higher Education

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QA in HE and VET: Promoting Trust Between the Sectors?

Outline

1. European principles for QA in HE – the ESG

2. How are they safeguarded – the role of EQAR

3. Tying it together – QA as a key tool to support QF

1. 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 – Essential Principles

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3. QA agencies — Agencies should be independent and equipped with sufficient resources; accountable to their stakeholders

2. External QA — Fit for purpose, transparent, predefined criteria; self-evaluation/ site visit/external report model; stakeholder involvement

1. Internal QA — Systematic processes; clear roles for all stakeholders; address student assessment, quality of academic staff, information systems, student support services

Common points …

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)

2. 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
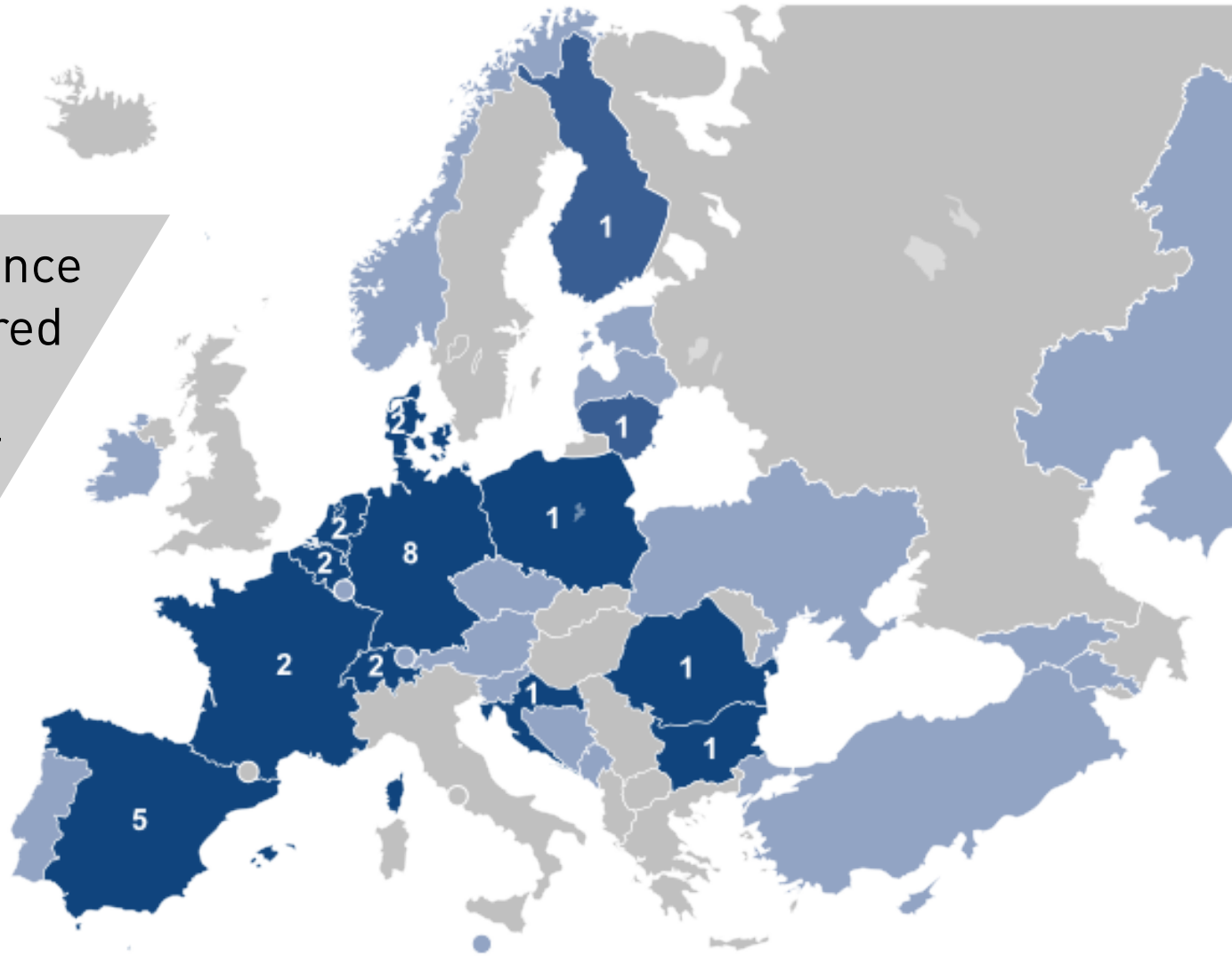
Trust and Recognition

- 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
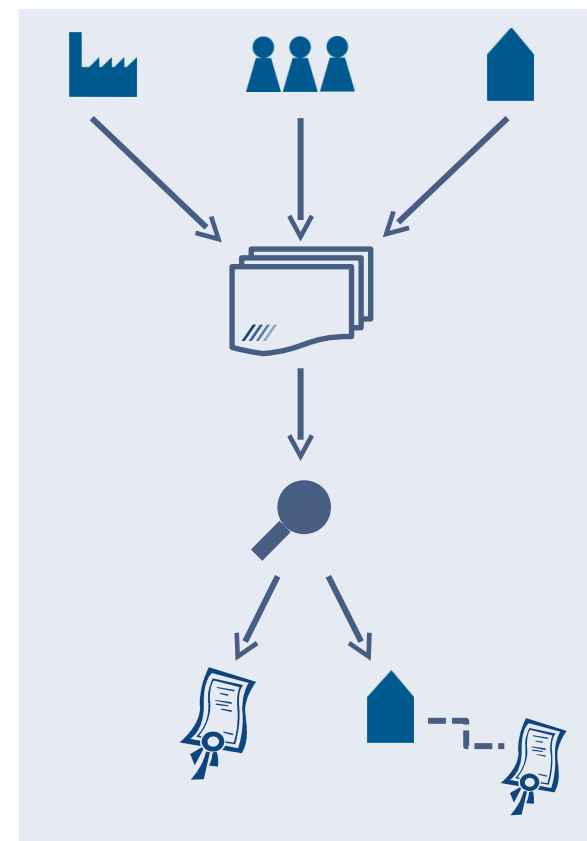
Agencies and Governments

- **29 quality assurance agencies registered**
- **31 Governmental Members**

3. QA and QF Working Together

Bucharest Communiqué 2012:

- **allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activitie**s 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.
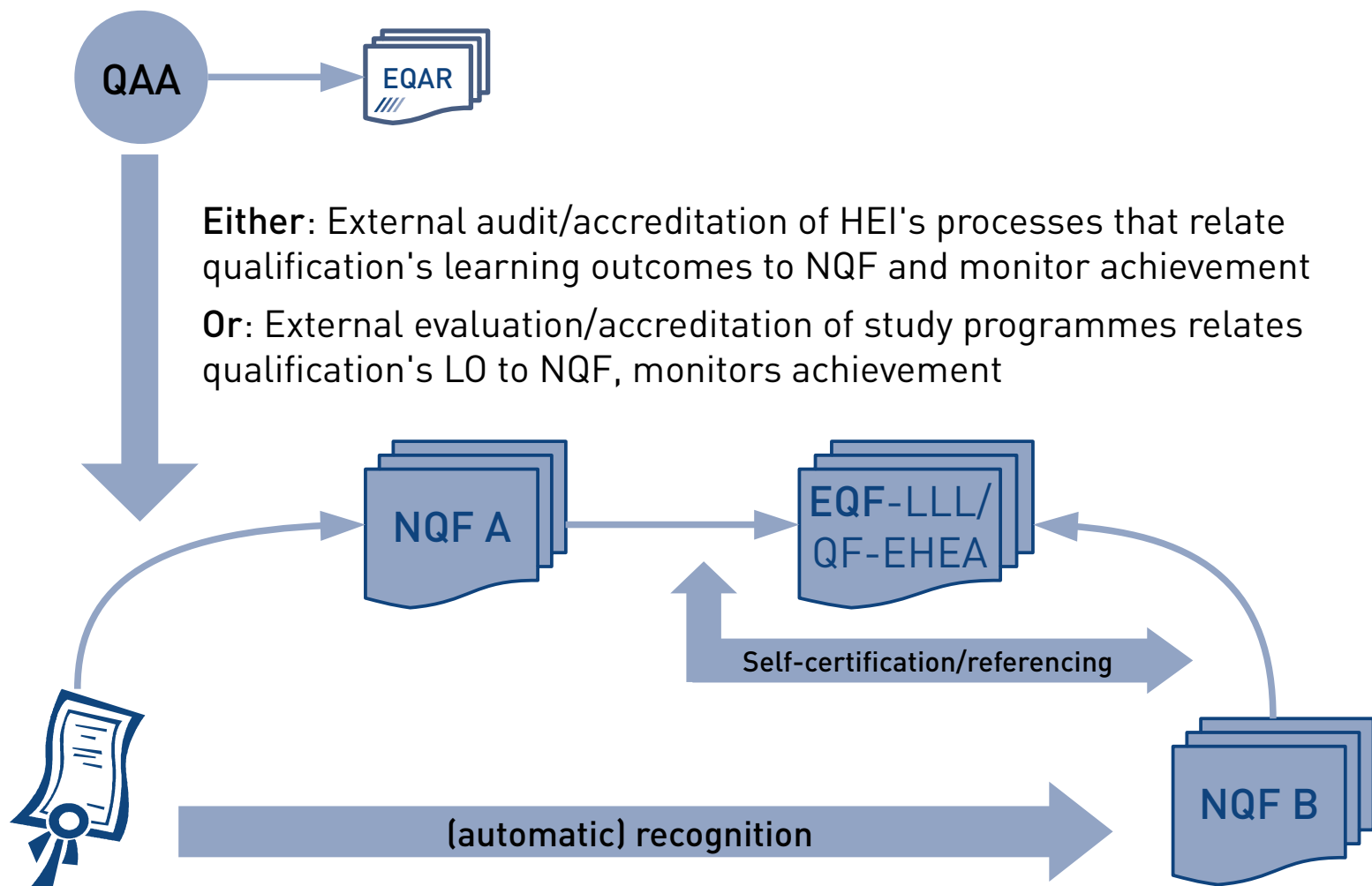
BFUG Work Plan 2012-2015:

- **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

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QAA → EQAR

Either: External audit/accreditation of HEI's processes that relate qualification's learning outcomes to NQF and monitor achievement

Or: External evaluation/accreditation of study programmes relates qualification's LO to NQF, monitors achievement

NQF A

EQF-LLL/ QF-EHEA

Self-certification/referencing

(automatic) recognition

NQF B

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

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Thank you for your attention!

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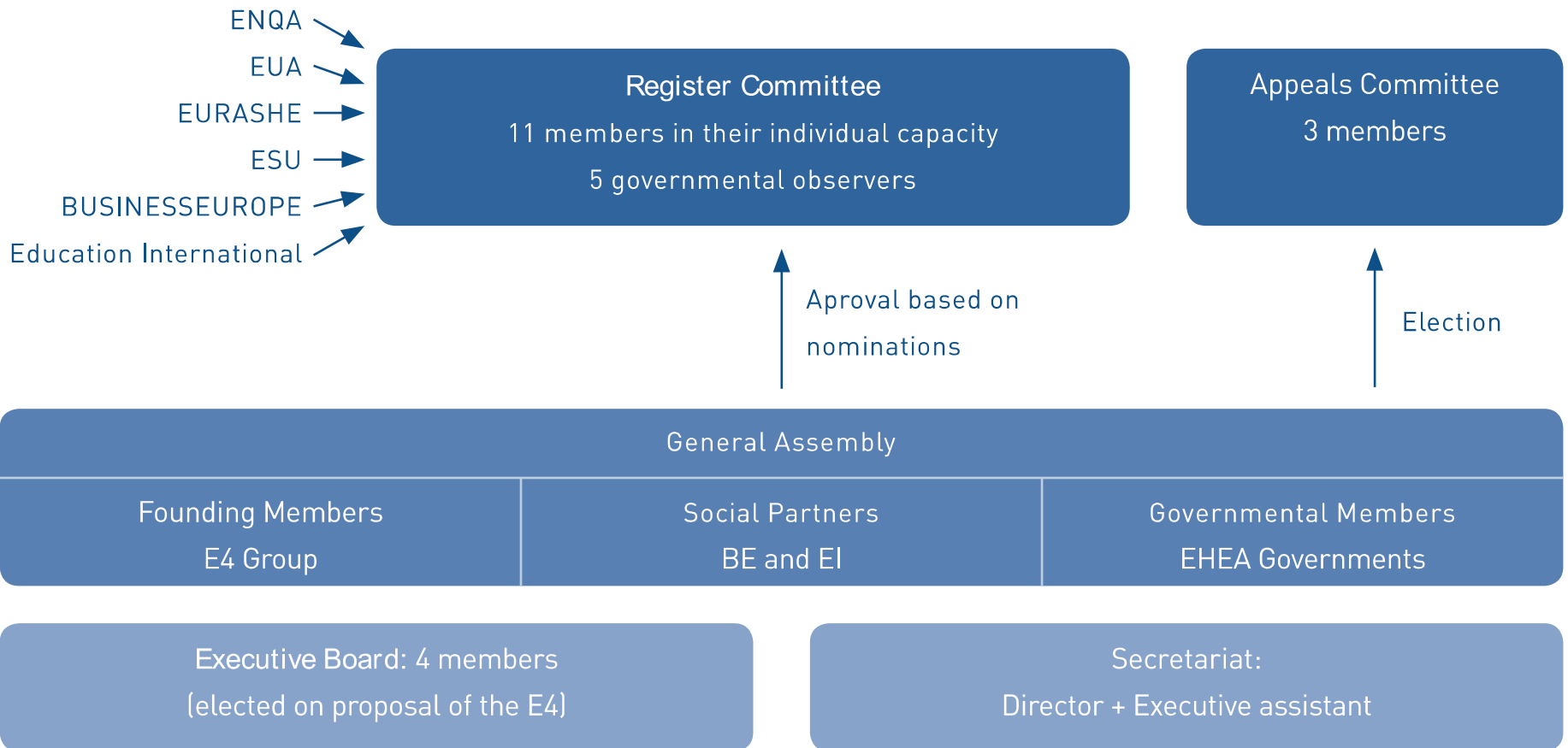colin.tueck@eqar.eu

Recognition of EQAR-registered QAA's

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

EQAR Organisational Structure

ENQA
EUA
EURASHE
ESU
BUSINESSEUROPE
Education International

Register Committee
11 members in their individual capacity
5 governmental observers

Appeals Committee
3 members

Aproval based on
nominations

Election

General Assembly

Founding Members	Social Partners	Governmental Members
E4 Group	BE and EI	EHEA Governments

Executive Board: 4 members
(elected on proposal of the E4)

Secretariat:
Director + Executive assistant

External Review & EQAR Application Process

① self-evaluation report ② site visit by external experts ③ external review report ④ application to EQAR ⑤ acception or rejection

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

independent external experts

① self-evaluation report   ② site v...   ...rejection

1. self-evaluati...

2. site visit by i...
   students and...

3. external revi...

4. application f...

5. decision by ...

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