# External QA in Europe – "unity in diversity"

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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
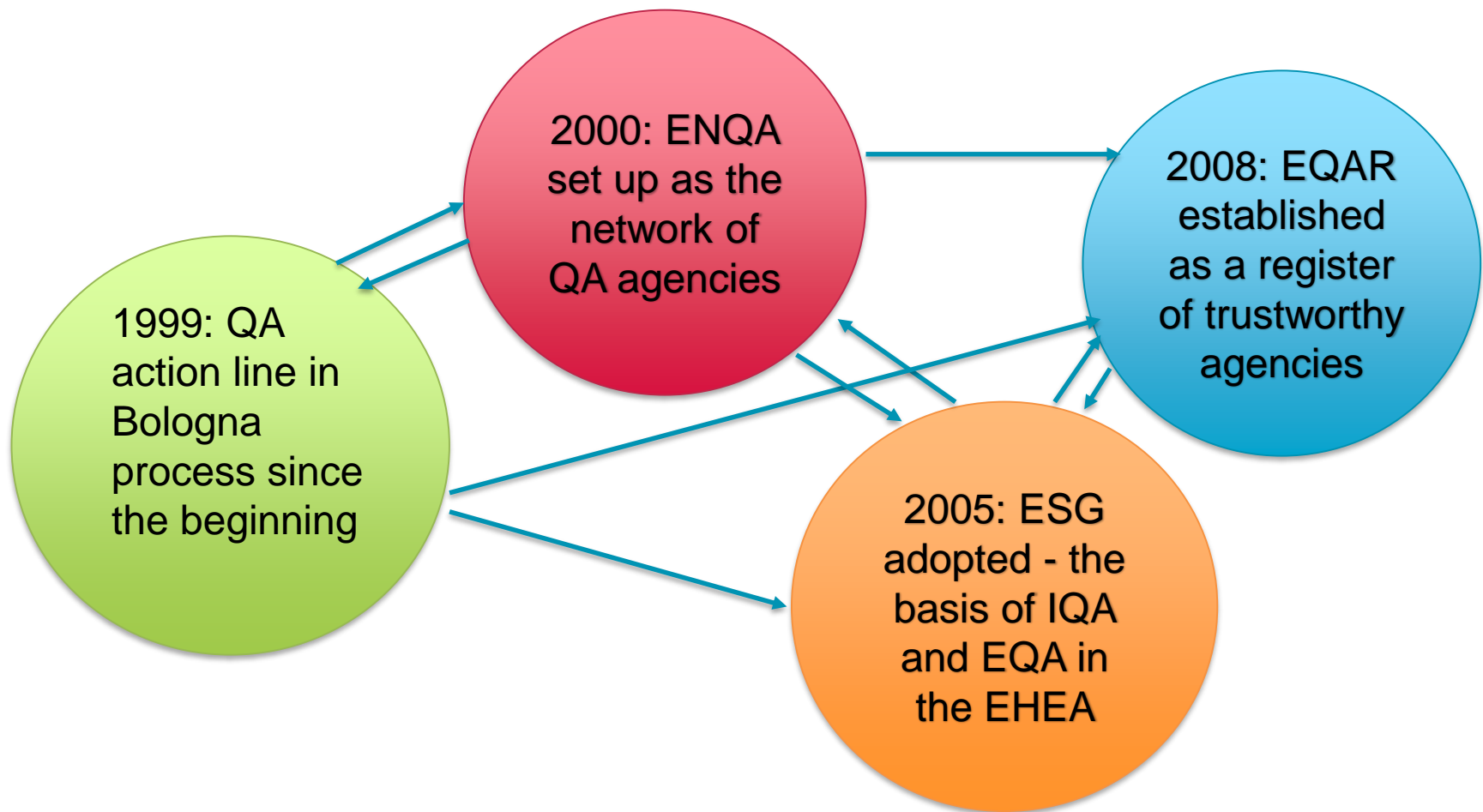
# What are the ESG?

*Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area*

PURPOSES

- **Set a common framework** for quality assurance systems
- **Enable the assurance and improvement of quality** of higher education
- **Support mutual trust** ($\rightarrow$ recognition and mobility)
- Provide **information on quality assurance in the EHEA**

SCOPE

- **Cover** IQA, EQA and IQA and operation of QA agencies
- **Generic principles** $\rightarrow$ allow for diversity of implementation (sufficient common basis of **trust**)
- **Apply to all** HE, independently of place (TNE) or mode (elearning) of delivery
- **Focus on learning and teaching** (links to research and "learning environment")
- Strong focus on student centered learning and learning outcomes

*Most agencies in the EHEA have proven to be ESG compliant (ENQA/EQAR).*

# The principles for QA in the EHEA (ESG)

- **HEIs have primary responsibility** for the quality of their provision and its assurance
- QA **responds to the diversity** of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students
- QA supports the **development of a quality culture**
- QA takes into account the **needs and expectations of students**, all other stakeholders and society

- **Independence of QA agencies**!

Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.
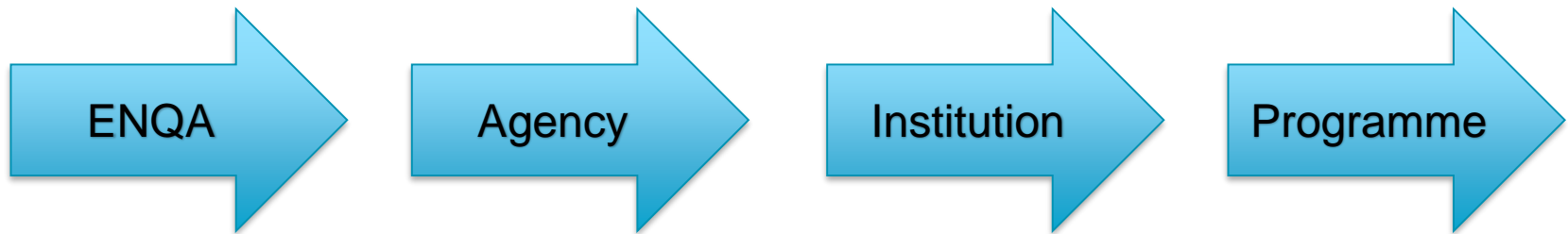
(William A. Foster)

izquotes.com

# The three parts

Part I - Internal QA within HEIs

Part II - External QA by QAAs

Part III - Internal QA and operation of QAAs

ENQA → Agency → Institution → Programme →

# Main purposes of QA

- **Providing public accountability, public information, and public confidence** in (public) HEIs

- **Increase transparency and accessibility of information** on the quality of HEIs and programmes

- **Protecting students' rights and the interests of the society**

→ **Promoting <u>trust</u> → recognition, mobility, employability …**

- Ensuring **minimum standards as well as supporting enhancement** and pursue of excellence
  – Contributing to quality enhancement internally
  – Encouraging HEIs to enhance their quality through EQA
  – Promoting the sharing of good practice
  – Supporting the (further) development of IQA systems at HEIs

# EQA and IQA – a collaborative relationship

- **Primary responsibility of HEIs** for quality and quality assurance of their own provision

- Role of external QA is to:

  – Provide a way for autonomous institutions **to demonstrate their accountability externally**

  – **Support the HEIs in constant enhancement** of HE provision and its quality assurance

- **Build on each other**: EQA can only be successful if it takes into account and is informed by IQA – IQA can be further developed and supported by EQA

- The agency is **not in charge of implementing Part 1**

*Concentric circles, one smaller only for sphere of activity, not for importance!*

# ENQA and EQAR – brining EQA together

| ENQA | EQAR |
|---|---|
| A membership and representative organisation of **QA agencies in the EHEA** | Members of EQAR are EHEA governments and stakeholder organisations |
| Established in 2000 by agencies | Founded in 2008 by the E4 (stakeholders) |
| Governed by agencies | Governed by stakeholders and ministries |
| Private organisation, in interest of members | Public organisation, in public interest |
| Activities different membership services | Management of a register of agencies |
| Consultative member of the Bologna Process | A legal entity born out of the Bologna Process |
| Coordinates agency reviews | Most reviews ENQA coordinated |
| **Uses the ESG as (membership) criteria** | **Uses the ESG as (registration) criteria** |
| To support and bring together agencies, to improve EQA in Europe | To increase trust in QA and HE systems, a formal basis (recognition) |

# Role and involvement of stakeholders in European QA



- ESG
  - Drafted by stakeholders ("the E4")
  - Requirements on HEIs and QAAs

- EQAR – stakeholder managed

- Internal and external stakeholders
  - Student participation at all levels is fundamentally important (but still not fully achieved across the EHEA)
  - Engaging academics (quality culture)
  - Employers/labour market (biggest challenge, but important for relevance and employability)

- Stakeholder participation in QA practices in the QAAs is important for the **transparency + accountability (of the QAA)**

- Stakeholders participation in the QA policy leads to **co-responsability and legitimacy of the process (and outcomes) of the QAA and the HE system**

# Thank you!

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