Quality Assurance and accreditation in EHEA

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AQU Catalunya (www.aqu.cat)

Agency for Quality Assurance in the Catalan University System
Established in 1996

Funded by the Government of **Catalonia**
Headquarters in **Barcelona**

Working on QA for 12 universities (> 200.000 students)
QA of institutions, programmes and teaching staff

Full member of ENQA (since 2000)

Included in EQAR (2008)

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Political context

- **Higher Education** is a **driving force** for the future of economic and social well being of Europe.

- Challenging economic environment HEA needs to be internationally **competitive.**

- **Autonomy of HEI** in favour of innovation, high quality, flexibility.

- Autonomy relies on the **public's confidence** in the capacity to deliver quality education outcomes.

- Achieving that **confidence is by promoting a culture of quality** within HE sector.

- In time of great economic uncertainty**, the role of effective external** quality assurance is crucial.

Political context

The **Berlin Declaration 2003** reads as follows "The quality of HE has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a EHEA.

The ministers also stress that "consistent with the **principle of institutional autonomy the primary responsibility of QA** lies with each institution itself¨ and emphasise that "this provides the basis for **real accountability**¨.

Consider the importance of the **role of public funds** for HE institutions in Europe!

Political context

In Berlin 2003 the Ministries of Education agreed that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

· A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

· Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results.

· **A system of accreditation**, certification or comparable procedures.
· International participation, co-operation and networking.

Political context

In Bergen 2005 the Ministers adopted the ESG:
Standards and guidelines for QA agencies and external QA
Development of internal QA at higher education institutions

In Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve 2009, the Ministers of Education agreed that:
quality assurance and recognition, which will remain our priority, should be based on **comparable data** and **adequate indicators** to describe the **diverse profiles** of higher education institutions and their programmes

Other transparency tools

Rankings

Benchmarking exercises

Classifications
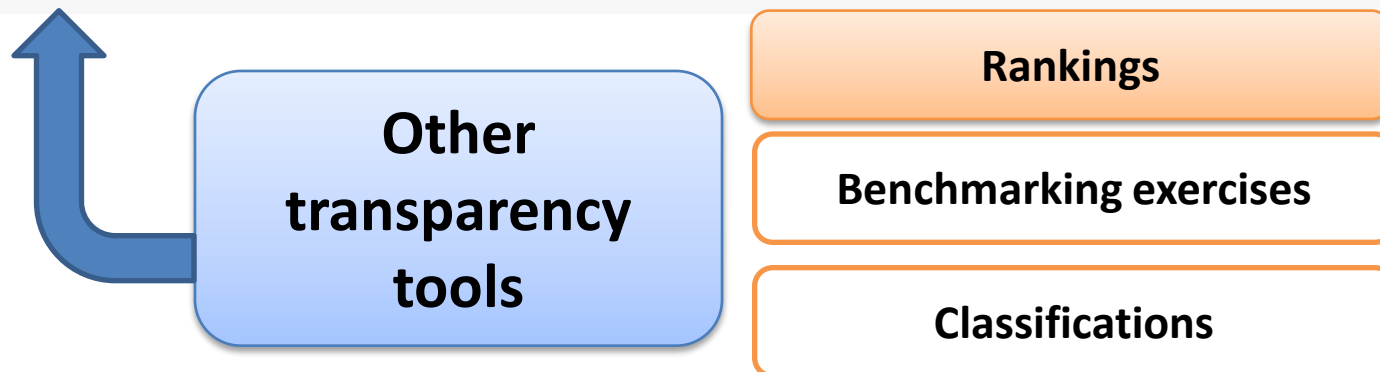
Accreditation definition

The terminology of external quality assurance is anything but unified.

In the past the term accredited was not used for public institutions. European Governments granted public and (private in some cases) HE institutions with the capacity to issue degrees (give certifications to the students).

At the moment, Accreditation is increasingly defined as every **formalised decision** by an appropriately **recognised authority** as to whether an institution of higher education or a programme conforms to certain standards (using an external assessment procedure).

Accreditation definition

The present concept of accreditation in EHEA works to

• Ensure or facilitate recognition of credits and university degrees (promotes mobility).

• Inform current and prospective students on the value of certain study programmes (consumer protection)

•Allow employees to check the value and status of qualifications

•Give institutions of HE the opportunity to demonstrate appropriate allocation and use of public funds.

Accreditation definition
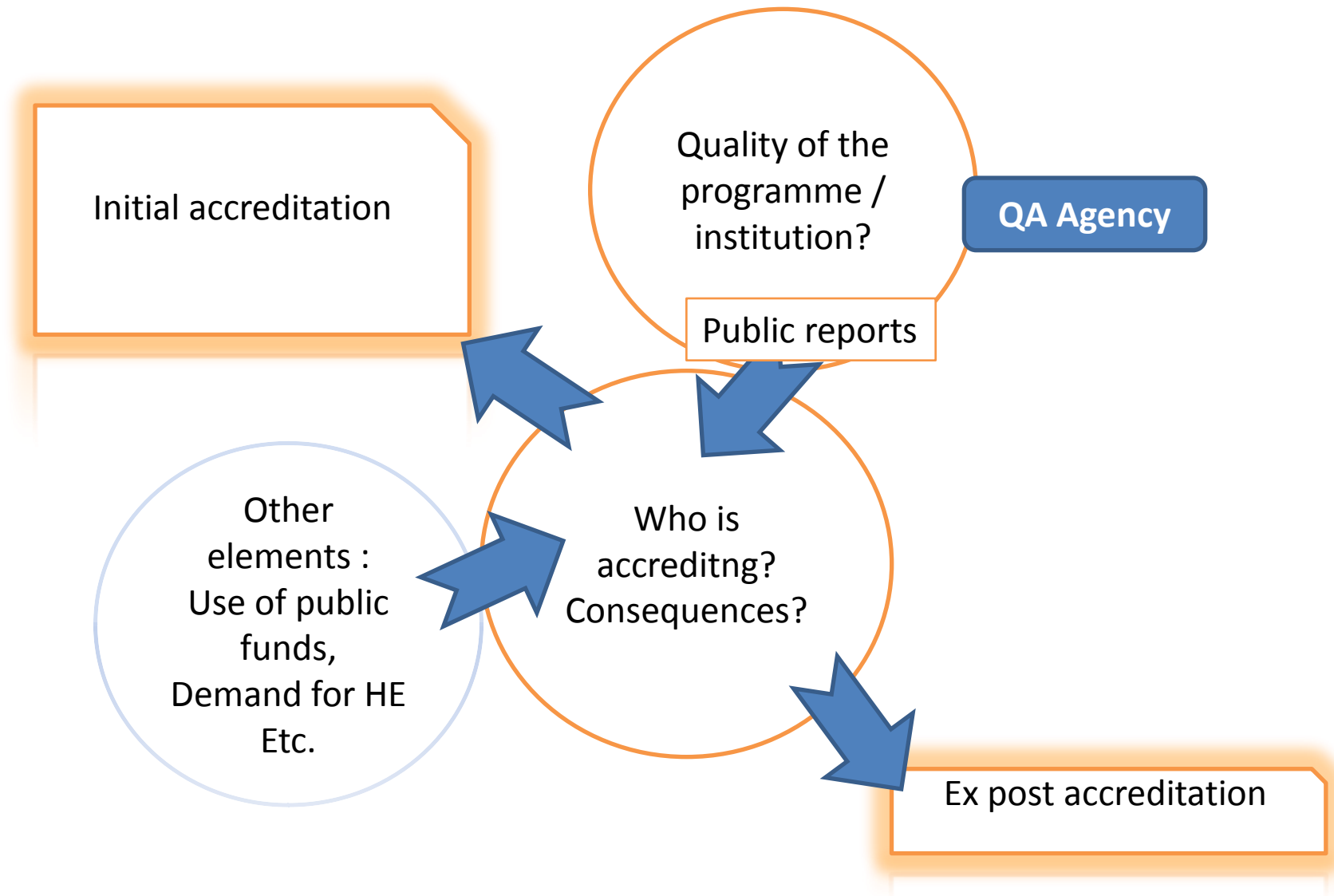
Actors promoting accreditation: ECA

Europe is composed by independent states and education is a competence of the EU States.

In order to facilitate international acceptance of academic institutions, degrees and studies, it will be necessary that future accreditation decisions in one country will also be recognised in another country.

ECA: European Consortium for accreditation : currently has 16 members from 11 countries. All members of ECA are quality assurance agencies that undertake accreditation or accreditation-like procedures

Actors promoting accreditation: ECA

How?

• Code of good practices on external QA
• Qualification framework and shared quality criteria and descriptors
• Publication format
• Selection criteria for external experts

Accreditation using a multi-step process:

• Self-evaluation / documentation
submitted by the unit undergoing accreditation
• External Assessment by independent experts
•The accreditation decision

Actors promoting accreditation: ECA

The Qrossroads Database

Contains quality reviews by accreditation agencies and seeks to make these reviews more accessible to a wider audience.

http://www.qrossroads.eu

Actors promoting accreditation: Labels

In the EU the number of quality labels is rapidly expanding

Attention for quality labels may be stimulated for different reasons:

-the limitation to (the entrance of) registered professions,

-the wish to come to European comparability of the level for bachelors and masters in certain disciplines or,

- to enhance the quality of the programmes

Some facts

Quality Assurance Approach

Pink: Supervisory: granting permission to higher education institutions and/or programmes

Red: advisory improvement oriented.

In the majority of EHEA countries, quality assurance is concerned with granting permission to higher education institutions or programmes to operate on the basis of threshold quality standards. Only a minority of countries exclusively follow an improvement-oriented approach.

Source: Eurydice.

Some facts

QPP Survey 2008:

25 agencies undertaken accreditation of programmes.
23 " "   evaluation of programmes.
14 " "evaluation of institutions.
13 " " Audit of institutions.
12 "   " Audit of programmes.

Formal consequences for accreditation (90% of the cases) but also in evaluation of institutions and programmes (between 54% and 70%)

The most common formal consequence is to follow recommendations: 87% in accreditations; 75 % in evaluations.

In many cases other formal consequences are not in tha hands of QA agencies.

Some facts

Notwithstanding this overall positive development, the **European dimension of quality assurance is still limited.**

There are only a **few examples of institutions seeking evaluation or accreditation from foreign agencies** and only a **few examples of governments opening up quality assurance** in their country to other registered agencies.

As a result, **there is little comparative information which hinders mobility and further quality improvement**

Future

QA (accreditation, evaluation…) should be coherent with the needs of international stakeholders.

Promotion of the autonomy for HE institutions based on adequate internal QA

Cost-benefit of internal and external QA procedures.

Accreditation and better impact on the students' learning processes.

Coexistence of public accreditations with different transparency tools (rankings, private recognitions).

New methodologies for institutional internal and external QA.

Mutual recognition of accreditations.

Thank you for your attention!

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