

The notion of independence

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The concept of independence in the ESG 3.6

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that:

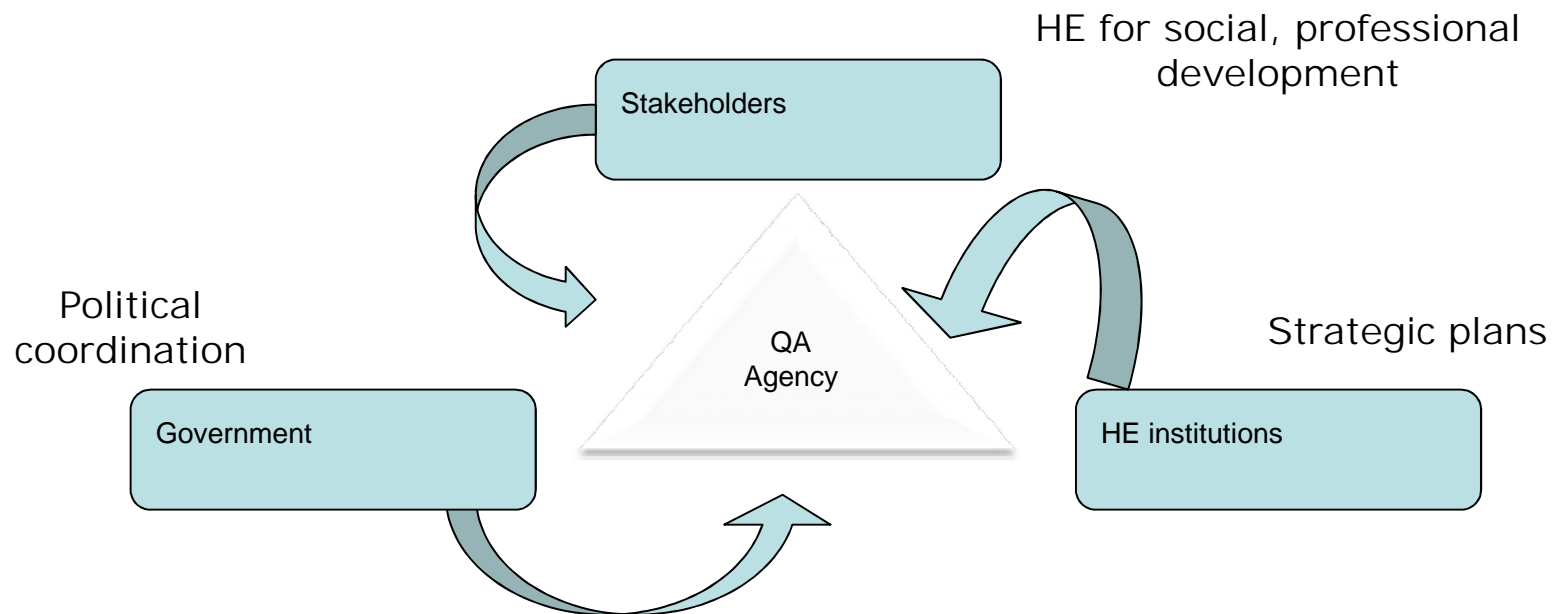
they have autonomous responsibility for their operations

&

that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders

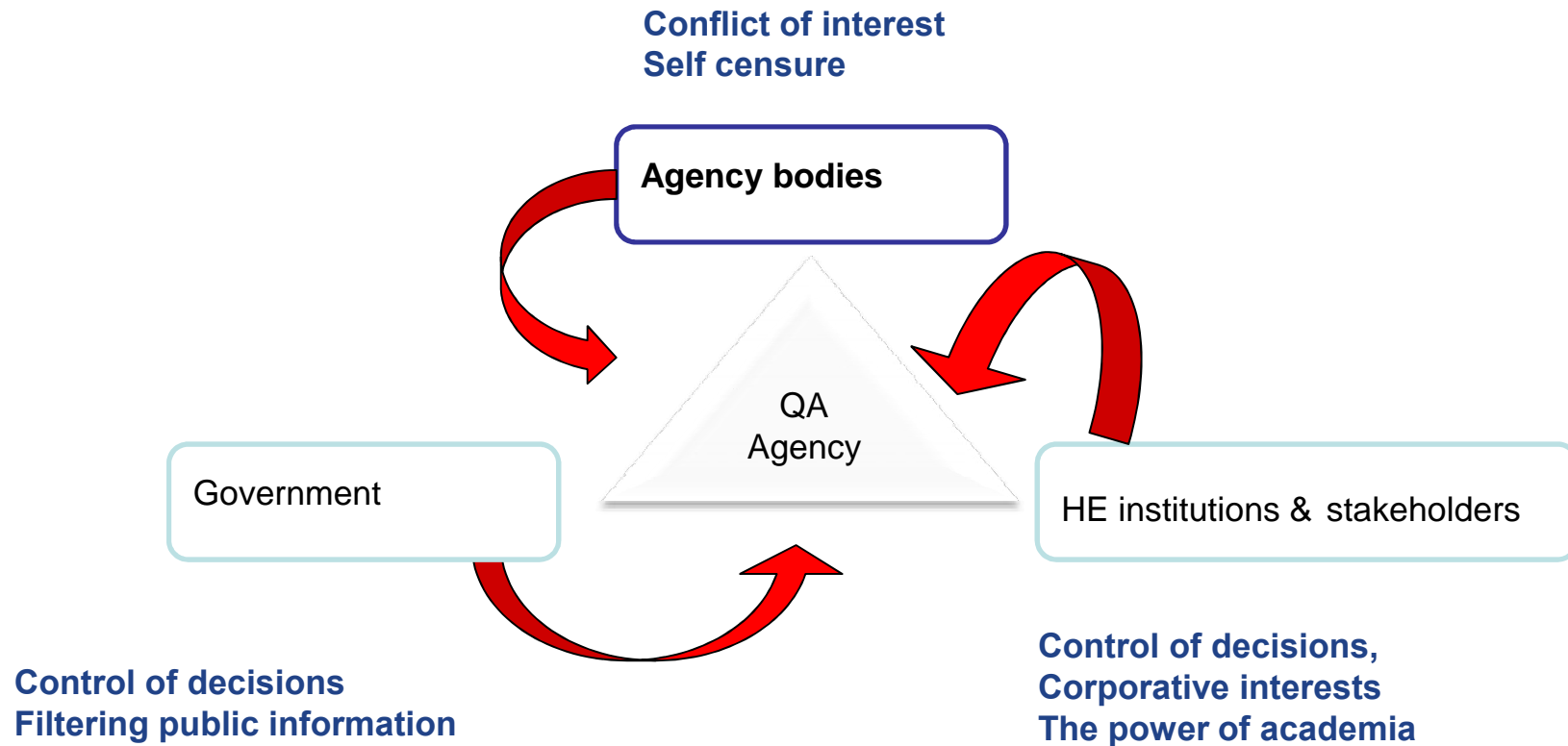
QA Agencies cannot be isolated: there are positive interactions.

Democracy and social needs should be considered; national and international stakeholders contributions...



Important: The standard helps to strengthen the credibility and the strategic position of the agency, promoting and preserving independence in some critical points...

independence is threatened when...



3.6 Standard guidelines:

its **operational independence** from HEI's & governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);

- Definition & operation of its procedures & methods,
- Nomination & appointment of external experts,
- Determination of the outcomes of its QA processes

They are undertaken **autonomously & independently** from governments, HEI's, & organs of political influence;

while relevant stakeholders in HE, particularly students/learners, **are consulted** in the course of QA processes, the final outcomes of the QA processes remain the responsibility of the agency

Autonomous responsibility of their operations and the governance in the agency decision-making bodies:

Independence is granted in official documents (yes) but....more precisely it's interesting to observe:

- The **balance** in the composition of the decision making bodies: Society representatives, students, international members, representatives from HEIs, representatives from the Ministry... **The representative roles**
 - The **expertise role** in the decision making bodies
 - The **selection** and **appointment** processes of the members for those decision-making bodies. Who selects and appoints? And how is it done for representative and expertise roles?
 - Mechanisms to **avoid the conflict of interest** at different levels of the organisation.
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Autonomous responsibility of their operations... other aspects:

- 1) How QA agency makes requests for adequate resources to undertake its work?
Is the funding system a potential source for the conflict of interests or a limitation for the QA functions development?
- 2) the process for appointing external experts?
- 3) Definition of QA procedures (methodology, criteria...) how is it done?
- 4) External QA methods should be able to demonstrate: a) positive impacts on HE and b) reliable information about the quality of HE to national and international stakeholders. (Std. 3.3 activities)

Final outcomes of the QA processes remain the responsibility of the agency. How to see that?

What is the level of transparency of positive interactions?

How those opinions and views are integrated by the QA agency decision-making bodies?

Does the QA agency collect appeals, complaints? (if yes, see how QA agency deals with those issues)

But at the end of the day...

independence is a **question of ethics**.

Ethics for the organisation (Board, panels, staff...)

and **commitment** of the agency and its decision-making bodies and staff (experts and officers) to enhance the quality of HE, and to facilitate the accountability of HE.

Thank you for your
attention!

