

Presentation at the ENQA training of agency reviewers
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The independence of the QA agencies

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Overview

- a) Why your expertise is important?
 - b) Independence: is the right term?
 - c) The standards and its guidelines
 - d) Your role as reviewers
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Why ENQA needs your expertise?

1. **No single scheme** addressed to fulfill the standard (Governance, decision making processes...)
 2. A scheme could formally fulfill the standard but there is a need to check **how procedures work** under that particular scheme.
 3. There is a need to combine **the national and the international interpretation**.
 4. The standard **does not work “independently”**. What happens in the fulfillment of other standards is important.
 5. The concept of independence **needs to be reviewed wisely**...
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The concept of independence in the ESG

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.**
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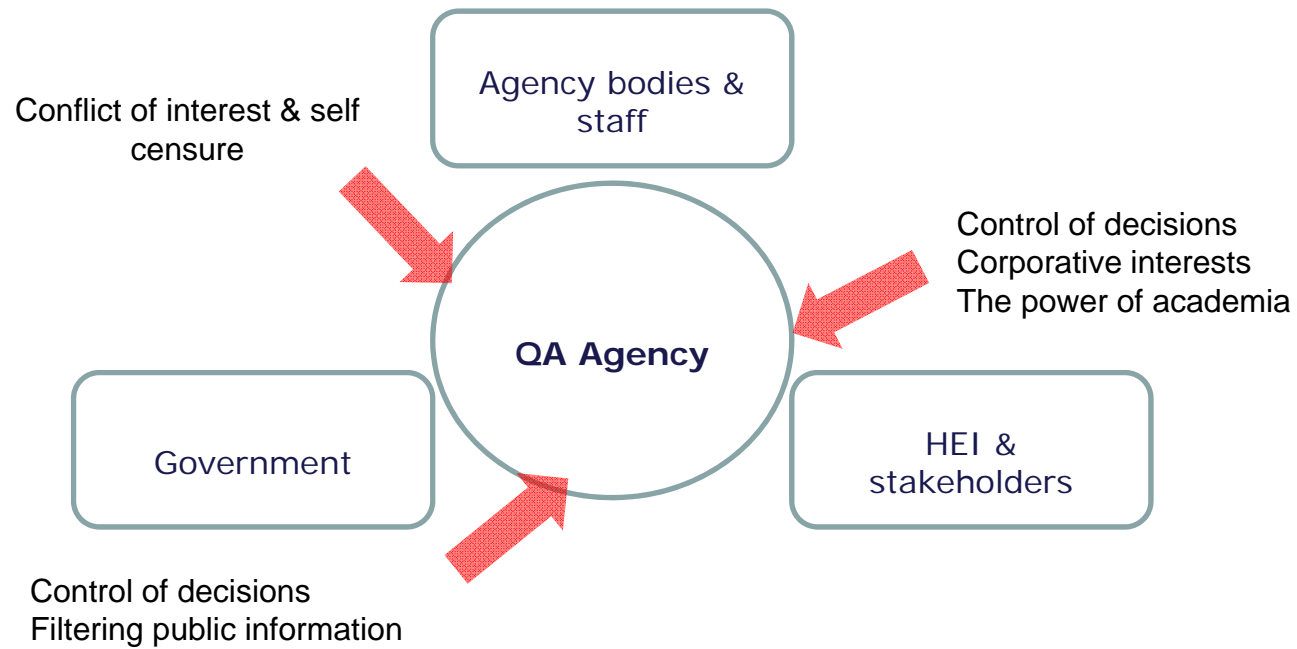
QA agencies cannot be isolated: there are positive interactions.

Democracy and social needs should be considered.
 National and international stakeholders contributions.



The standard has to be a contribution to the credibility of the QA agency and its strategic position in that scheme.

QA agencies independence is threatend when...



3.6 Standard guidelines

Its operational independence from HEI's & governance 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 and 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

Independence is granted in official documents (yes) but it is recommended to observe:

- The **balance** in the composition of the decision making bodies: society representatives, students, international members, representatives from HEI, representatives from the Ministry... **The representative role.**
- The **expertise role** in the decision-making bodies.
- The **selection** and **appointment** of the members for the decision-making bodies.
(Who selects and appoints the members (with representative role and expertise role?). How is it done?)
- Explicit mechanisms to **avoid the conflict of interest** at different levels of the organisation.

Autonomous responsibility (other aspects)

How QA agencies make request for adequate resources to undertake its work?

Is the funding system a potential source for a conflict of interests?

Or a limitation for the QA development?

The appointment of external experts (balance of views?)

Definition of QA procedures (methodology, criteria...). Inputs, limits, approval...

Effectiveness of external QA? (STD 3.3)

Transparency of external QA (reporting)

Final outcomes of QA processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

Is the QA agency collecting (formally) relevant stakeholders opinions and views concerning its outcomes and procedures (STD 3.8)

What is the level of transparency of those interactions?

Are those interactions integrated by QA agency decision-making bodies?

Is the QA agency collecting appeals and complaints? How is their treatment?

Important:

- a) Panel members are not asked to reach an assessment whether a QA agency is in itself independent, but whether the agency has independent control over its operations and whether “outsiders” can or not **influence (unfairly!)** its conclusions.

 - a) Levels of independence should be assessed against all possible influences:
 - a) Government
 - b) HEI
 - c) Stakeholders
 - d) Internal representatives and staff
 - e) National conflict of interest

 - b) Take into account how big /small is the HE system in which the agency is working (everybody know everybody?)
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But at the end of the day...

Independence is a question of ethics.

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!
