The role of quality assurance as a “transparency tool“ and the multiple purpose of external quality assurance and quality assurance reports

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Quality Assurance: The origins
Framework conditions for emergence of QA

- obvious quality problems due to massification of higher education
- financial constraints
- Deregulation and accountability

Quality Assurance as

- an attempt to resolve quality problems
- and as
- a steering instrument for higher education systems
As a consequence quality assurance traditionally has been serving two main purposes:

- **Enhancement of quality**: mainly intrinsic motivation. Emphasise on the responsibility of the institutions/ internal quality assurance.

- **Accountability**: demonstrating/documenting quality to students, public authorities and society at large.
Quality Assurance in the EHEA in 2013
External quality assurance in the EHEA:

National external quality assurance regimes and the agencies as main actors are in compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines.

(Stocktaking report 2009; External evaluation of the Bologna process 2010, ENQA survey of agency reviews)
Variety and steady change are key features of external QA in the EHEA

The most common external quality assurance procedures are accreditation and evaluation of programmes, followed at a significant distance by evaluation and accreditation of institutions and by audits. However,

90% of agencies apply more than one approach
75% of agencies changed or change their approach

The emergence of a unified European quality assurance system is unlikely due to diversity of national agendas.
Quality Assurance: Challenges
Due to **competition and diversification** quality has become a core success factor for *institutional* success. Guaranteeing a certain quality or enhancing the quality of a programme/an institution becomes integral part of *regular* management of higher education institutions.

This calls for a strong developmental dimension of quality assurance.
However stakeholders tend to emphasize the accountability dimension.
Challenges from outside higher education: Politics and Transparency tools

- Quality Assurance as tool for policy evaluation?
- Growing interest in accessing detailed and reliable information on the quality of individual study programmes and higher education institutions.
  
  Requested information serve comparison purposes, rather than description of single programmes or institutions.

- Alternative tools: Rankings and AHELO.

Quality assurance and other transparency tools serve different purposes and have to be designed accordingly in order to be fit for purpose.
The last 10 years:

Methodology, Methodology, Methodology
The next 10(?!?) years

Methodology, Methodology, Methodology

Purpose, Purpose, Purpose!
External Quality Assurance: What for?
External Quality Assurance: What for?
Purposes of QA Agencies (David Woodhouse 2010)

1. Assist the higher education institution (HEI) to set up and develop its internal QMS (institutional development or capacity building).
2. Assist the HEI to improve its quality (quality improvement).
3. Evaluate the HEI’s systems for achieving their objectives (ie purposes) or standards, and the effectiveness of these systems (audit).
4. Measure the quality and/or standards of the HEI according to some (internal or external) yardstick (assessment).
5. Provide an explicit comparison between one or more institutions, either within the same country or internationally (benchmarking).
6. Provide a ranking of the HEIs according to some criteria relating to performance (ranking).
7. Determine whether the HEI can be permitted to offer specified programs, or qualify for some other benefit (a gatekeeper role, usually termed accreditation).
8. Exclude potential overseas education from coming into the country (gatekeeper).
9. Close down low quality, low standard institutions (often employed in an early phase of proliferation of small private institutions) (policeman).
10. Define and certify qualifications (qualifications authority).
11. Establish and maintain a framework of qualifications (framework).
12. Assess and record learning, including experiential learning, to enable credit accumulation and transfer (credit accumulation and transfer).
13. Steer the HEI in particular directions, in terms of planning, scope or methods (steering or transformation; relates to fitness of purpose).
14. Provide a report on the HEI as a basis for (government) funding (funding).
15. Provide a report on the HEI to show how it has used the funds and other resources it has enjoyed (accountability).
16. Monitor the financial viability of the HEI (viability).
17. Check the HEI’s compliance with legal and other requirements (compliance).
18. Provide independent information about the HEI for various constituencies (prospective students, employers, etc.) (information provision).
20. Collate the results and outcomes of the activities of other EQAs (co-ordination).
External Quality Assurance: What for?

- To assist HEI in assuring/enhancing its quality; in developing its internal structures and procedures; in achieving various aims
- To measure quality
- To check compliance with certain (legal) requirements
- To assess effectiveness/success of certain policies/reforms
External Quality Assurance: What for?

- To provide independent information for comparing programmes/HEI
- To provide independent information for decision making (funding, enrolment, collaborative work)
- To provide independent information for certain constituencies
- To provide independent information about quality of HEI/programmes/HEI-systems
External Quality Assurance: For whom?

- HEI management
- Teachers
- Students
- Employers
- Cooperation partners
- Political decision makers
- Society at large
- Media
- ...

Consequences for reporting: Various types of information are requested

- summative vs formative conclusions
- descriptive vs. analytical
- quantitative vs. qualitative
- comparable vs. individual
- comprehensive vs. focused
ESG and reports

2.5 Reporting

“Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.”

2.4 Processes fit for purpose

“All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.”
ESG and reports

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Is transparency a purpose of quality assurance as enhancement and accountability are?

or

Is transparency a principle/a standard of quality assurance to be applied in accordance to its purpose(s)?
Thank you for your attention!

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