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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

PRINCIPLES, FRAMEWORK AND LATEST
DEVELOPMENTS

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enqa.

HISTORY – INTERNAL QA

- The commitment to maintain quality standards in higher education is as old as the medieval universities.
 - At *Universitá di Bologna* (**1088**) students were organized in associations with the aim of making sure that the **quality of education** received is worth the money that they were paying - if a professor failed to secure **an audience of five for a regular lecture**, he was fined as if absent, while teachers guilds would be in charge with admitting new masters into profession.



The entry of some students in the Natio Germanica Bononiae, the nation of German students at Bologna (miniature of 1497)

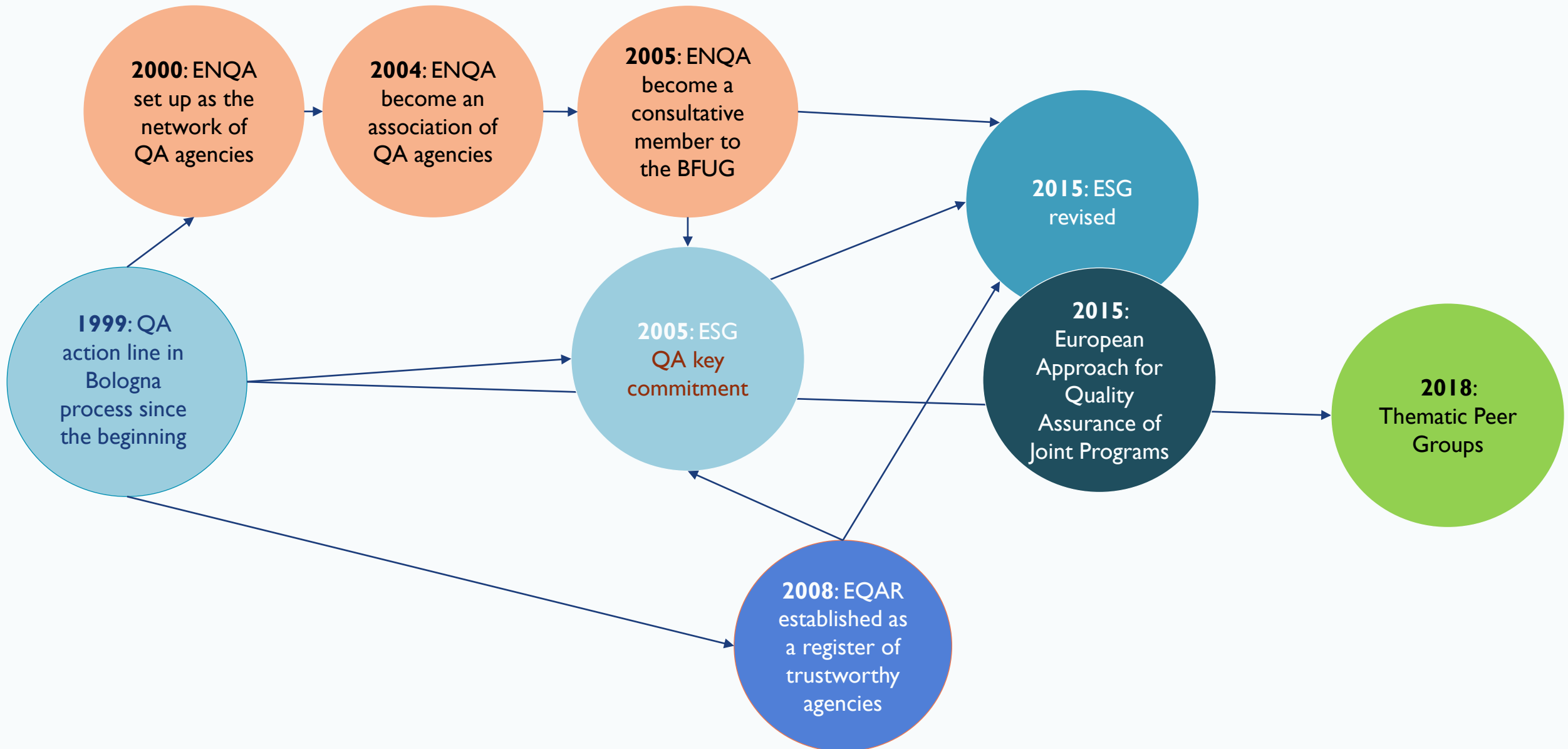
HISTORY – EXTERNAL QA

- *University of Berlin (1810)* and *Université de France (1808)* – established by state program review, evaluation and assessment of the medieval universities;
- **1871** – membership of the Church of England as a requirement for degrees and faculty promotion was removed, and only certain universities like *Oxford* and *Cambridge* received rights in awarding diplomas.
- The *Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons* was established in **1844** by Royal Charter to be the governing body of the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom – with attributions in the field of EQA;

HISTORY – EXTERNAL QA

- Growing number of students after the Second World War, leading to a huge expansion of university system at the end of **1980s**, led to the increasing of public funds for HEI and the need to put in place mechanisms for public accountability for quality, including the use of professional quality assurance;
- **Before 1990** only few countries had an external quality assurance model in place and the higher education systems were very diverse;
- After the Bologna process started, by **2010, 22** countries have founded QA agencies.

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK



EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

- **Bucharest Communiqué (2012):** “We will allow *EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA*, while complying with national requirements. In particular, we will aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes.”
- **Rome Communiqué (2022):** “We commit to ensuring that our external quality assurance arrangements *cover transnational higher education* in the EHEA with *equal standards as for domestic provision*.”
- **Tirana Communiqué (2024):** “promote a *quality culture* in higher education, fostered by fit-for-purpose quality assurance processes in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).”

ENQA IN BRIEF



Who we are

Membership association of QA agencies:
 62 members in 33 countries
 42 affiliates in 26 countries



What we do

Drive development in external QA
 Promote EHEA commitments/tools for QA
 Represent interests in policy development



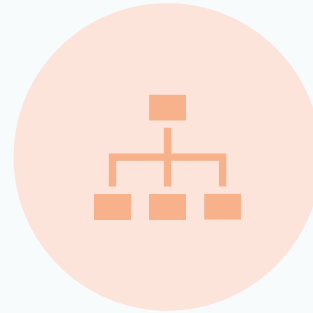
How we do it

Policy input	Projects	Training
Events	Publications	Communication
Working groups	Agency reviews	

WHY DO WE NEED EXTERNAL QA?



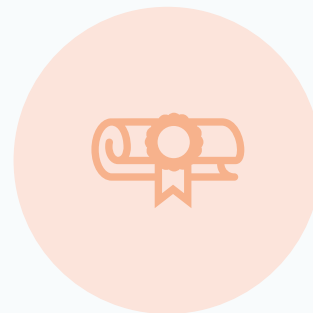
How does your HEI know its internal QA system is working?



How does your HEI demonstrate quality and legitimacy to stakeholders, including to international partners?



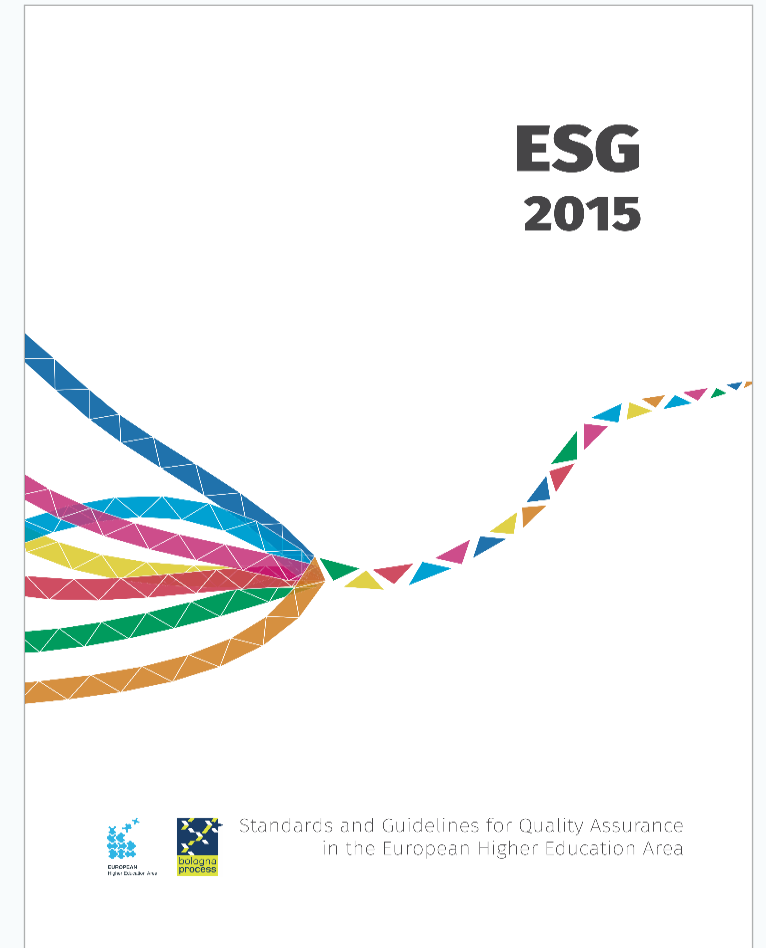
How is your HEI supported to improve?



How do graduates prove to employers or other HEIs that their qualifications are genuine? How can we then use such qualifications for international collaboration and mobility?

THE ESG

- Four main purposes:
 - Set a common framework for QA in Europe
 - Enable assurance and improvement of quality
 - Support mutual trust
 - Provide information on QA
 - allows our HE systems to communicate and cooperate
- Composed of:
 - The introduction
 - Part 1 - Internal QA within HEIs
 - Part 2 - External QA by QAAs
 - Part 3 - Internal QA and operation of QAAs



THE ESG: KEY CONCEPTS

- A key goal of the ...(ESG)... is to contribute to the **common understanding** of quality assurance for learning and teaching
- The ESG are **not standards for quality**, nor do they prescribe how the quality assurance processes are implemented...
- The EHEA is characterised by its **diversity** of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations. This makes a single monolithic approach to quality and quality assurance in higher education inappropriate.

THE ESG: PRINCIPLES OF QA IN THE EHEA

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

THE ESG: PRINCIPLES OF QA IN THE EHEA

- Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other **stakeholders** and society.
 - Stakeholders (1.2, 1.8, 1.9, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.6, 3.7) - Internal stakeholders (1.1), External stakeholders (1.1),
 - Students (1.2, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9, 2.4, 3.3), Graduates (1.8), Staff (1.7)
 - Institutions (3.1, 3.2), HEI (3.1, 3.3)
 - Academic community (2.6), HE system (3.2)
 - External partners (2.6)
 - Competent public authorities (3.2, 3.6), state (3.2), governments (3.3)
 - Interested individuals (2.6)
 - All those concerned (1.9)
 - Public (1.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.5)
 - Third-party (3.3)
 - Society (2.6)

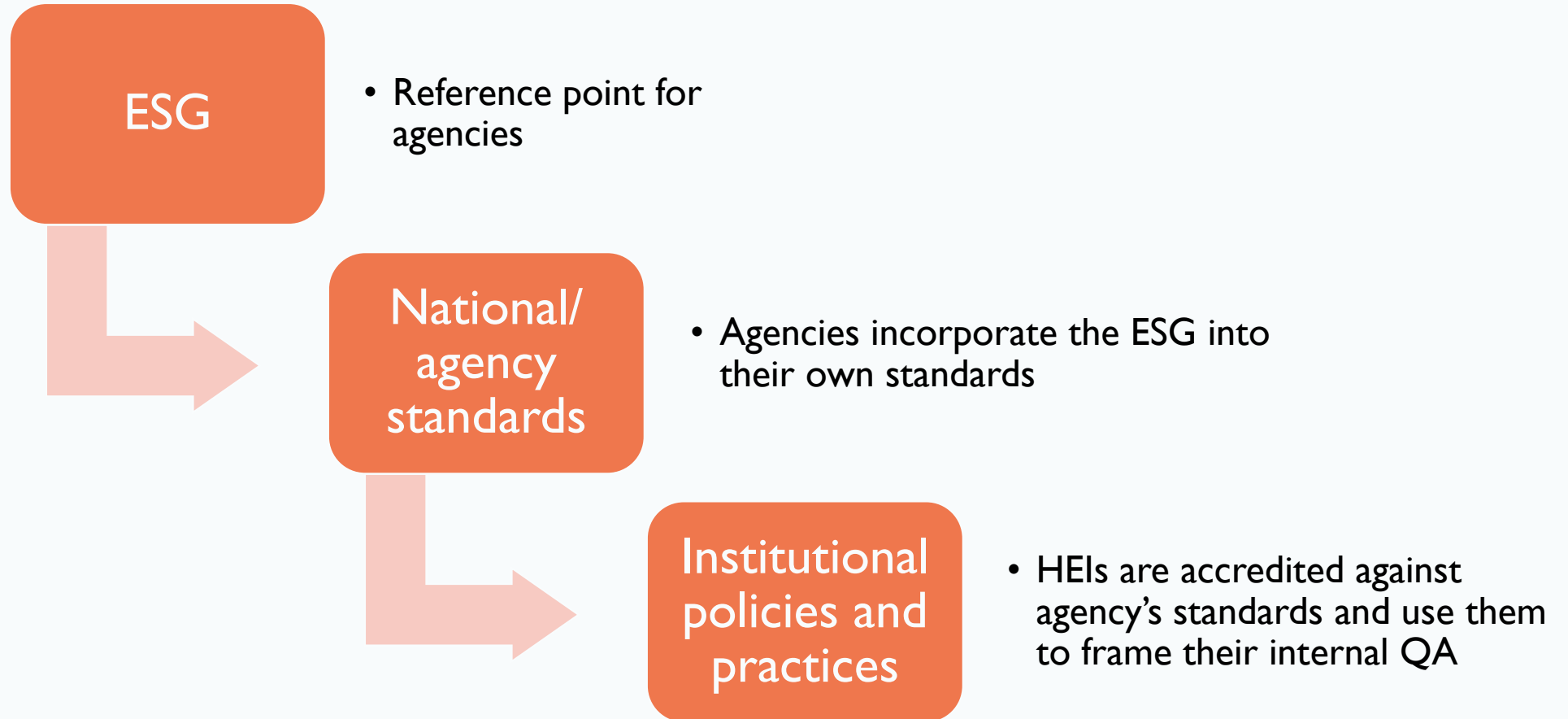
Stakeholders are understood to cover all actors within an institution, including students and staff, as well as external stakeholders such as employers and external partners of an institution.

Students are mentioned in **6 standards**
Stakeholders are mentioned in **15 standards**
TOTAL 24 standards

REVISION OF THE ESG

- Update to fit the current context and clarify/revise elements that proved to work not so well in practice
- Stronger emphasis on
 - links between QA of different institutional missions, including social mission
 - digital/technological advancements
 - stakeholder involvement
 - balance between compliance and enhancement
- Draft 2 discussed in the BFUG meeting on 10 March; revision due for completion by end of 2026, and formal approval in May 2027

RELEVANCE OF ESG FOR INSTITUTIONS



PRACTICAL USE – AN EXAMPLE





The screenshot displays the eqar.eu website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for Register, Database (highlighted), Knowledge base, News, and About. The main content area is titled "eqar.eu > Database > Search > By provider". On the left side, there is a sidebar with a "Database" dropdown menu and a "Filter providers" section. The filter section includes a "Clear all" button, a search term input field with the placeholder "name, city, country, ETER", and several filter categories: Category, Agency, Country (with "Czech Republic" selected), QF-EHEA levels, and Status. The main search results area shows "16 providers" and "Results per page" options (10, 20, 50, 100). The results are sorted by Name and displayed as a list of providers with their names, DEQARINST and IETER identifiers, and brief descriptions.

eqar.eu > Database > Search > By provider

Sort by: Name

16 providers

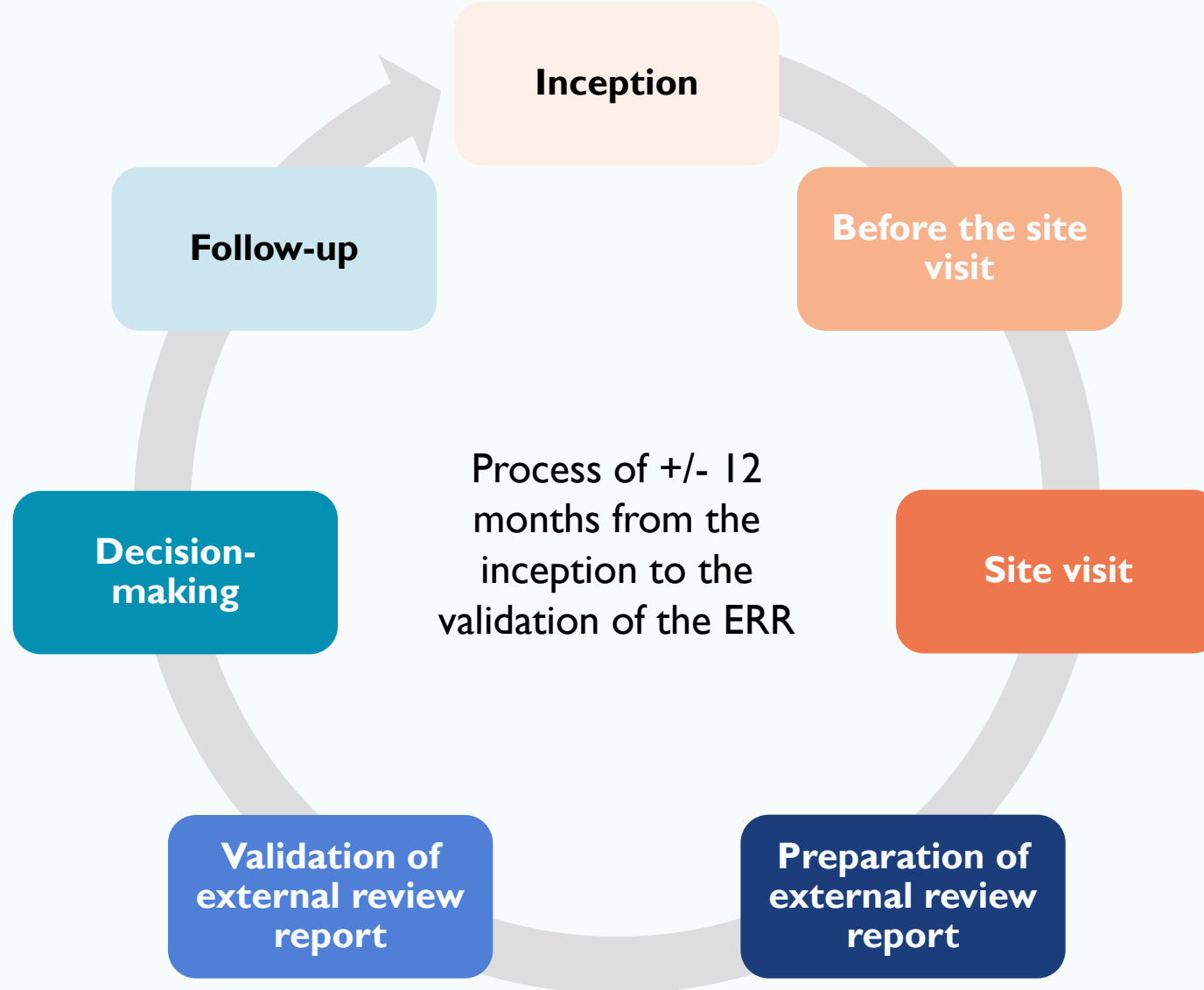
Results per page: 10, 20, 50, 100

 Anglo-American University	DEQARINST0286	IETER CZ0042	>
Anglo-americká vysoká škola, z.ú. Prague (Czech Republic)			
 Brno University of Technology	DEQARINST0269	IETER CZ0025	>
Vysoké učení technické v Brně Brno (Czech Republic)			
 Charles University	DEQARINST0258	IETER CZ0014	>
Univerzita Karlova Prague (Czech Republic) Further location: Plzeň (Czech Republic)			
 Czech Technical University in Prague	DEQARINST0248	IETER CZ0004	>
České vysoké učení technické v Praze Prague (Czech Republic)			

ENQA AGENCY REVIEWS

- 17-19 agency review processes /year
- to verify agencies' compliance with the ESG (the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*) and to support their further development
- for ENQA membership and other purposes, including registration in EQAR (for 5 years)
- **Result:** an ESG compliant agency is an independent evaluation body that uses procedures that are (among others): fit for purpose and designed with the input of its key stakeholders, are pre-defined, reliable and consistent, are carried out by peers, that act with impartiality and professionalism, and where HEIs are assessed against the explicit and published criteria and can complain or appeal against the published report&decision in case needed.

MAIN STAGES OF THE REVIEW PROCESS



GENERAL QA TRENDS IN EUROPE

- Maturity of systems call for simplification and finding ways to maintain relevance
 - ➔ shift from programme level to institutional level QA
 - ➔ balance accountability / enhancement
- Links between QA of learning and teaching, and QA of other institutional missions and activities
- Quality assurance of diverse educational approaches – online/blended provision, flexible learning pathways, micro-credentials
- Impact of AI
- Renewed impetus for cross-border QA (e.g. joint programmes and TNE)
- Attention to links between QA and recognition
- Synergies with developments in other world regions

CLOSING REMARKS

Quality is not by accident. Quality takes...

- Consistency
- Commitment
- Design
- Reflection
- Co-creation

And is best advanced when institutions, students, staff and other stakeholders collaborate in developing expectations and sharing of effective practice

Quality culture has two pillars - assurance and enhancement. Assurance is necessary for trust, and enhancement makes us better!

RESOURCES

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA ([ESG](#))

[Video](#) explaining the Bologna Process

[Video](#) explaining the review process

[Video](#) explaining ENQA

[ENQA Guidelines](#) for the responsible use of AI in external QA

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