



Agència
per a la Qualitat
del Sistema Universitari
de **Catalunya**

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Independence of Quality Assurance vis a vis different stakeholders

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Independence is the right word?

Independence means ...

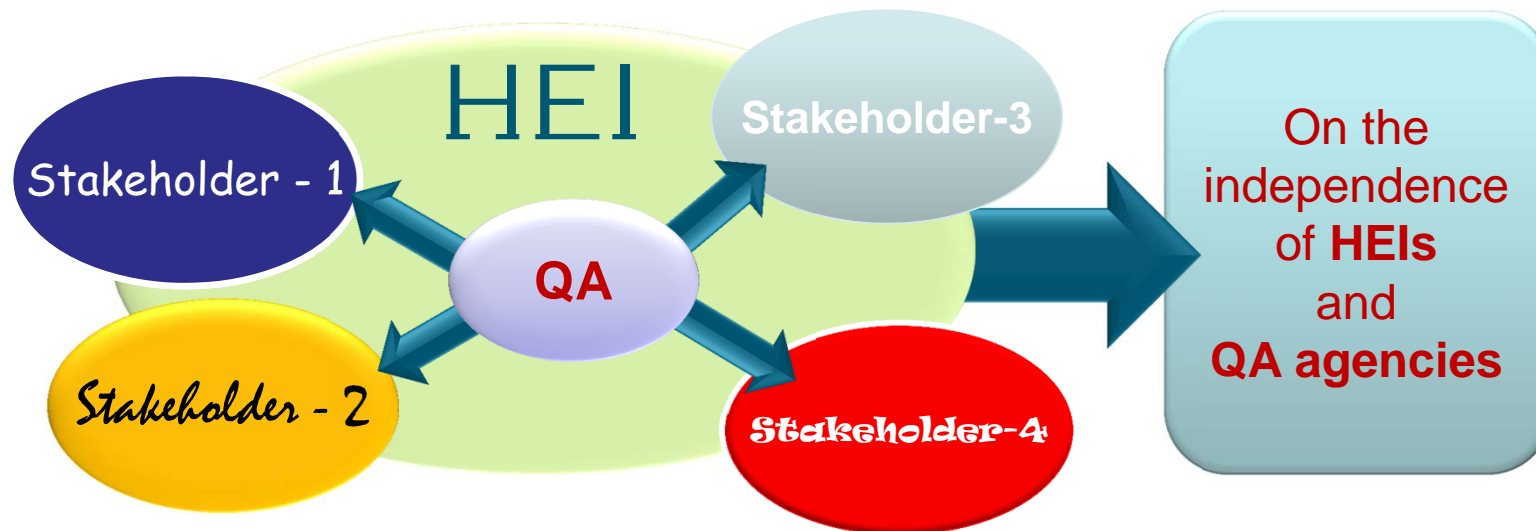
- ... not connected with another, separate?
- ... free from outside control, not subject to another's authority?
- ... capable of acting or thinking for oneself?
- ... not looking to others for one's opinions or for guidance in conduct?
- ... self-governed, autonomous?
- ... equitable ... objective ...impartial ... unprejudiced?
- ... unbiased?

Independence is OK, but probably ...

- ... this is not the only word we can use **to mean what we want to say !**

What “Independence” our stakeholders are thinking about?

The primary expectation of the stakeholders of an organization is not the “independence” of the organization
... but how that organization can serve their interests!



Steps towards a practical definition of an “i-QA agency”

Step 1: the independence of QA agencies is built ...

- over the same grounds
- with the same building blocks

... than the independence of HEIs is !

Step 2: how can we recognize an independent HEI?

... somebody ...

- assigns a mission
- allocates resources (€ and rules)
- asks for results

... the HEI cares to ...

- mission + vision + values = strategy
- internal organization and methods
- transparency and accountability

• both, jointly, evaluate the results, and reassign the mission and resources

Steps towards a practical definition of an “i-QA agency”

Step 3: who is **somebody** ? ... and some related questions

(1) Who assigns the mission to HEIs + resources and asks for results?

The stakeholders

(2) Who are the stakeholders of HEIs? (... not in alphabetical order)

(a) Society, (b) Public authorities, (c) Students, (d) HEI's employees

(3) What they expect from HEI?

Three missions: (1) Teaching, (2) Research, (3) Civil society engagement

(4) Which specifications?

(a) Fitness for purpose, (b) Value for money, (c) Excellence, (d) Perfection,
(e) Transformation ... this depends on the stakeholder's point of view!

(5) To which extent?

As much as possible/€ ... **this is the only thing all of them agree !**

Steps towards a practical definition of an “i-QA agency”

Step 4: an independent QA agency? ... **to do what?**

- What is our mission?
- Which are our expected results?
- Where our money comes from?
- Who are our stakeholders?

(1) Who are our stakeholders?

The same as the HEI's stakeholders + **HEI themselves**

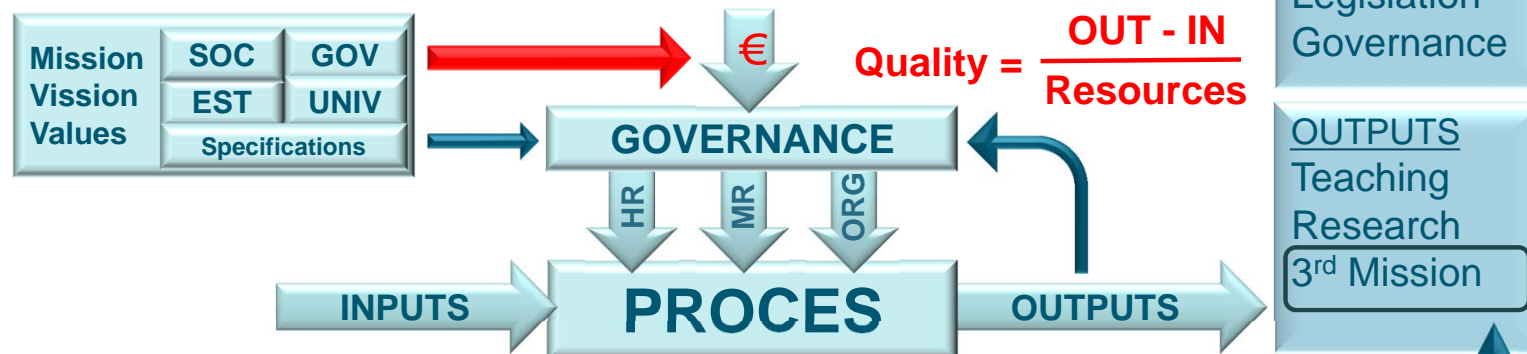
(2) Where our resources (€ and rules) come from?

The same source as the HEI's resources come from

(3) What is our mission?

To help HEIs to achieve their mission ... with the highest quality !

How QA agencies can help HEIs ...?



1) To reconcile stakeholders expectations into a feasible set of specifications

2) To promote a continuous improving strategy

3) To provide by means of external evaluations answers to :

- Everybody is working hard to reach specifications?
- Are specifications really achieved?
- It is worth to keep the process running? The results obtained pay the effort?

4) To strengthen the leadership and recognition of the HEIs by means of :

- Transparency, accountability, and communication

Steps towards a practical definition of an “i-QA agency”

Step 5: how QA agencies can help HEIs to better achieve their mission?

(1) To reconcile stakeholder’s expectations into a “feasible” set of specifications

(2) To promote (if there is no evidence of it)
to consolidate (if there are already good practices)
to develop a **continuous improving strategy**
to accredit it !

(3) To provide periodically **answers** to three questions
- everybody is working to reach specifications?
- are specifications really achieved?
- it is worth to keep this process running?

(4) To strengthen the social leadership and recognition of the HEIs by means of
- accountability
- transparency and communication

The QA agency needs to
be independent to do this !

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Steps towards a practical definition of an “i-QA agency”

Step 1: the independence of QA agencies is built ...

Step 2: how can we recognize an independent HEI?

Step 3: who is somebody and related questions?

Step 4: an independent QA agency, to do what?

Step 5: how can QA agencies help HEIs to better achieve their mission?

Through five steps we have shown that ...

The QA agencies **should be**
independent to achieve their mission

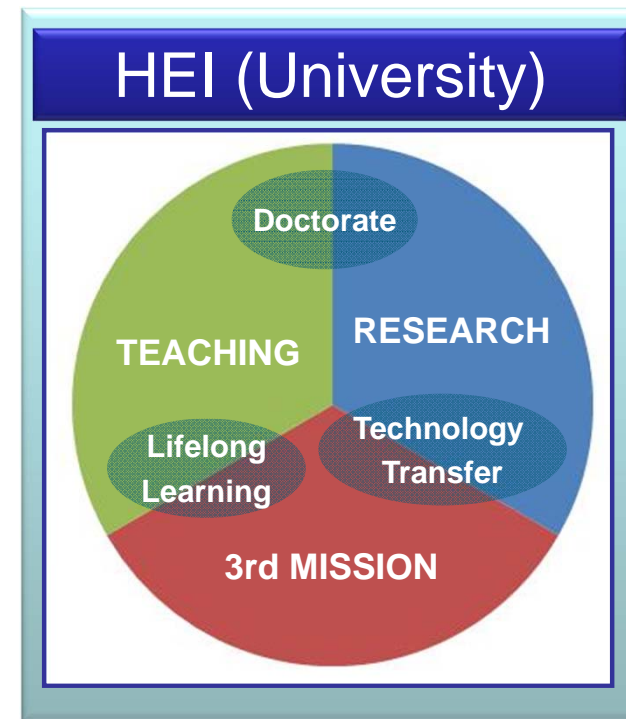
Now we can take some steps further to
investigate

What QA agencies can do **to preserve**
and **to increase** their independence?

Further steps towards an “i-QA agency”

Step 6: QA agencies may **broaden the scope of their activities** to span the full multi-dimensional space of QA in a HEI.

- (1) The **quality of teaching**, is our essential activity, but many HEI have a strong focus on research and all of them are engaged with the civil society
- (2) There is a smooth path connecting the three missions: the **quality of teachers**, involving the evaluation of their ...
 - (a) teaching activities ... obviously, and also
 - (b) research activities, and
 - (c) 3rd mission activities (TT + other activities)



Further steps towards an “i-QA agency”

Step 7: QA agencies may **move the target of their activities beyond the QA procedures to penetrate into the processes** where the QA procedures are applied, and into the **outputs** of the processes

QA agencies have been generating over the last years a lot of expertise on QA methodologies and procedures that can be applied to a variety of processes in the HEIs, but ...

- (1) QA agencies should not be neutral with respect to the selection of the list of process are put under magnifying glass of QA procedures.
- (2) QA should be interested in the real improvement of the **processes** and their **outputs**, and should care not to be dazzled by the application of some (sophisticated) procedures.
- (3) While QA procedures may be more universal, the processes that require attention are much more institution-dependent or context-dependent

Further steps towards an “i-QA agency”

Step 8: QA agencies may be proactive in the **generation of knowledge** ...

- about their own QA procedures and about the HEIs QA procedures
- but also about the HEIs processes that deserve the application of QA procedures

(1) Procedures are easy to “import” through benchmarking and cooperation with other HEIs, but also with other institutions or organizations

(2) The generation of knowledge about the processes requires a specific effort (which may be very institution or context dependent) in order to ...

- (a) identify the **critical process** and to collect their relevant data
- (b) define **performance indicators**
- (c) develop a reference framework and to impulse the **critical analysis**
- (d) cast all of this into the culture of **decision making** of the organization

(3) Knowledge is useful when it triggers the change of the HEI connecting with

- (a) their **teaching/research staff** and their internal organization, and with
- (b) the **management staff** and the **strategic positioning** of the HEI

Further steps towards an “i-QA agency”

Step 9: QA agencies may be proactive promoting the transparency and the accountability of HEIs

(1) Stakeholders are more prone to grant autonomy to **transparent** HEI, therefore transparency creates a positive feedback loop with the autonomy of HEI

Transparency is ... “to show the list of all the things we do”

(2) When HEIs take the initiative to show to their stakeholders how **accountable** they are, this action catalyzes

Accountability is ... “to check the list of all the things we do versus stakeholder’s expectations”

Accountability⁺ is ... “to check with the stakeholders the list of (output-input)/resources”

- the conversion of autonomy into more independence
- the flux of resources committed to the institution

Transparency, accountability and communication

- strengthen the social leadership and recognition of the HEIs
- build confidence on the capacity of QA agencies to act as warranty of quality

Further steps towards an “i-QA agency”

Step 10: QA agencies should build their own strategic vision ...

(1) Our **mission**: to help HEIs to achieve their mission ... with the highest quality!

(2) Our **vision**:

... to become the preferred partners of HEIs to develop their QA procedures

... to be recognized by the stakeholders as a warranty of quality

(3) Our **values**:

... **independence**, we are able to provide unbiased opinions based on evidences

... **customer oriented**, our activities create value in the HEI and trust for the stakeholders

... we respect the **diversity** and autonomy of HEI and strive to increase it

... we are **proactive** and our aim is to leader the process of QA in HEIs

... we promote **cooperation**, transparency and benchmarking between QA and HEIs

... we actuate with effectiveness, efficiency and **accountability**

10 steps ... to go where?



When I started preparing these slides, I was quite sure that trying to answer the question ... *what is an independent QA agency?* ... based solely on a **theoretical or conceptual definition** would be lengthy and unproductive.

Then I thought I could direct my effort towards an **operational definition** of what is an independent QA agency (... scientist like operational definitions!)

But this would require to describe all the specific process or set of validation tests that a QA agency has to pass to demonstrate its independence

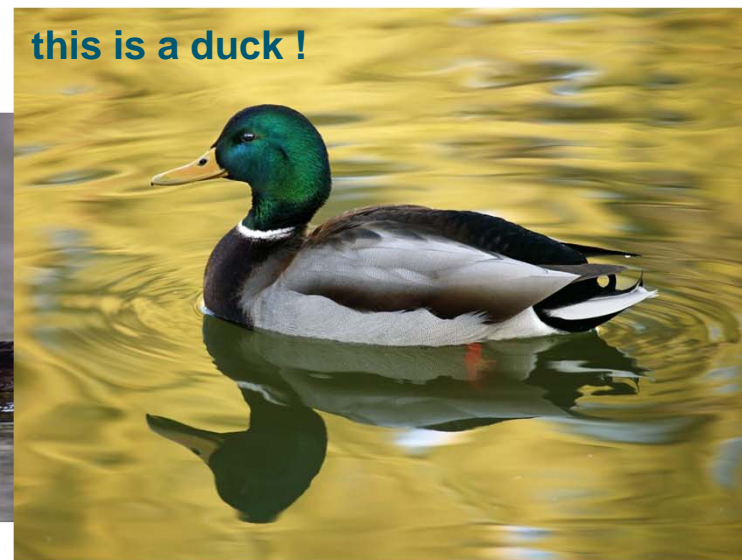
... still nothing very much new, I thought. This has already been written in some of our “founding documents”.

10 steps ... to go where?



Inspiration came accidentally reading a comment about the duck test:

*“If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck,
then it probably is a duck”*



10 steps ... to go where?



... to look like an independent QA agency

... passing all the “independence” tests

... we have also to swim like an independent QA agency

... drawing our own wake

... and we have to quack like an independent QA agency

... speaking by our self

These few slides are a summary of how we at **AQU Catalunya** try to assemble the pieces of this puzzle !



... on the independence

Thank you
very much!



Equipo Crónica, 1970



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La qualitat, garantia de millora.

Thank you very much!