

# Quality assurance in line with Standards and Guidelines in the European Higher education Area

## Challenges in developing a national quality assurance system in line with the Bologna Process

Tove Blytt Holmen, NOKUT and ENQA. Kiev 7 - 8 April 2016: University QA internal systems and QA Agency

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# What is ENQA?

- ENQA is the largest **membership organisation** of external Quality Assurance Agencies in Europe
- 48 full members from 26 EHEA countries, 46 affiliates from a further 15 countries
- ENQA is representative of 41 of the 48 members of the EHEA/Bologna-countries
- Affiliates in the USA, Ecuador, Hong Kong, Israel and Jordan
- The criteria for membership is that an agency undergoes a successful **external review** against the 2015 **European Standards and Guidelines** (ESG) every five years

# ESG = The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

**The ESG 2015** where adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in the European Higher Education Area – **EHEA** - in May 2015.

**ESG 2015** is based upon the four principles for quality in the EHEA:

1. The HEI itself has primary responsibility for the quality of the institution's provision and its quality assurance;
2. Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;
3. Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;
4. QA takes into account the needs (experiences) and expectations of students all stakeholders and society;

Agencies that apply for membership in ENQA undergo an external review for which the ESG provide the criteria.

Also agencies that apply for inclusion in the European Quality Register, EQAR, relies upon compliance with the ESG

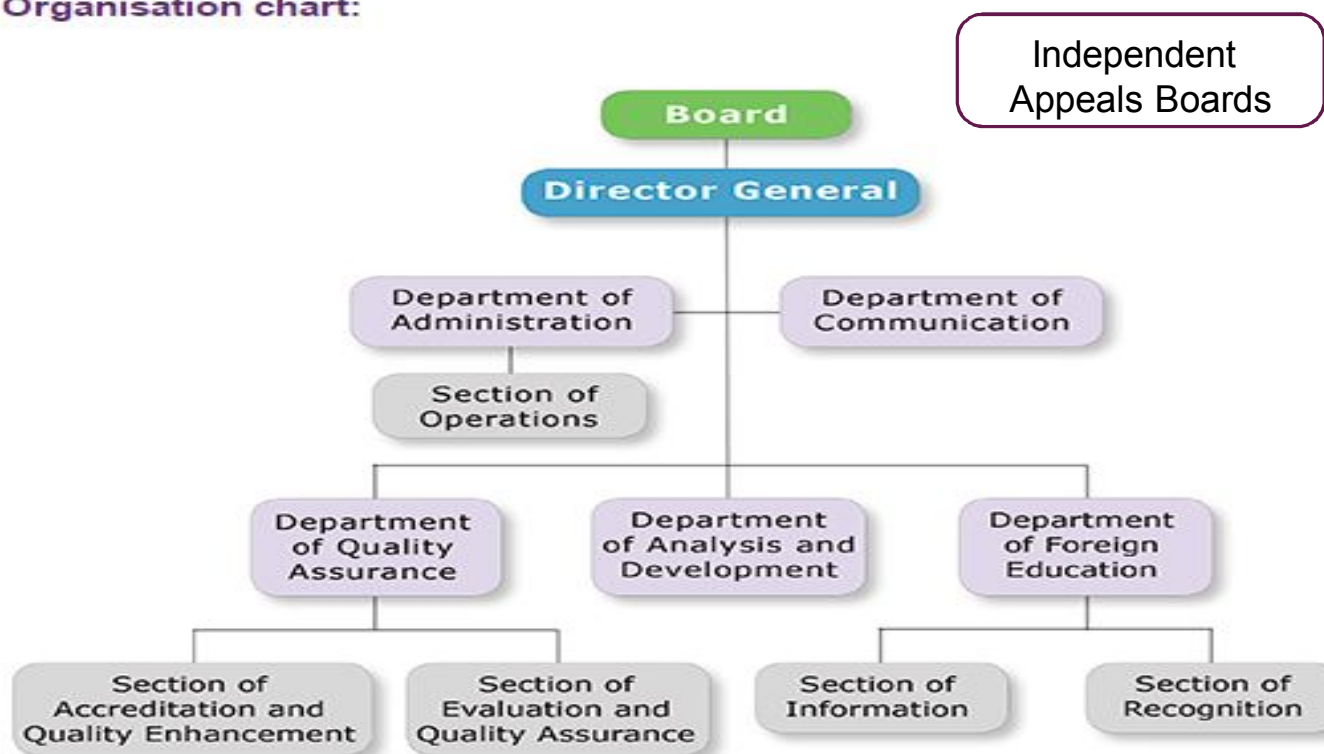




- Institutional accreditation, a six year, cyclical assessment of the institution's quality assurance system and its implementation
- Initial program accreditation
- Revisions of accreditations
- The National Student Survey
- NOKUT-portal: sector-wide factual information at program- and institutional level
- Annual award for best quality work
- Centers for excellence in education
- Various analysis
- Various projects given by the MoE

NOKUT is fully financed by the State. NOKUT has a staff of about 100 people, and each year contracts around 200-300 reviewers for various evaluation and accreditation processes. The Board has ultimate responsibility for all decisions.

Organisation chart:



Norwegian education (QA agency) Foreign education (ENIC/NARIC)

## Cyclical evaluation

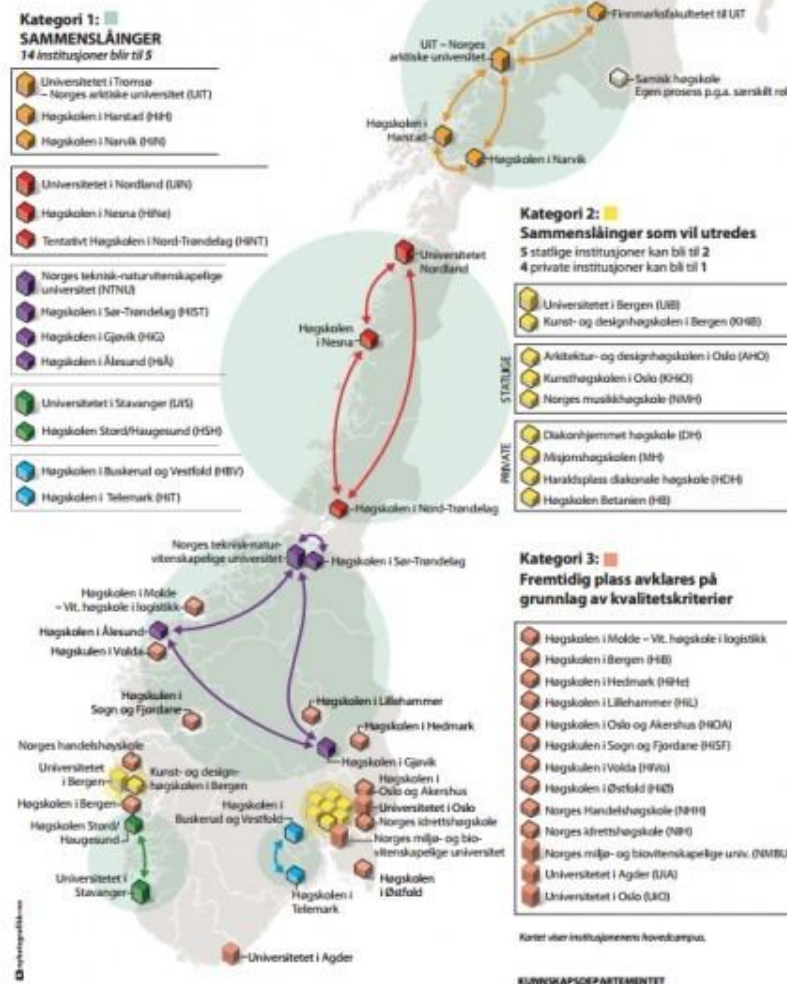
- The Board appoints annually a pool of external reviewers from which the Director appoints four reviewers in each panel
- The panel always include a student and an reviewer from abroad
- The institution is informed by NOKUT six months before they must send in
  - documentation on their systems,
  - documents on implemented quality work as well as
  - documentation of the follow up of results
- NOKUT staff member will prepare the documentation for the reviewer panel
- NOKUT acts as a secretary for the panel when writing the report
- The panel gives advice on approval Yes or No and at the same time gives the institution advices for further development
- The NOKUT Board makes the decision



# Governance of NOKUT and HEIs

1. By law (Act relating to universities and university colleges )
2. By regulations
3. Trough the State budget and the budget allocation letter (annual contract)
4. Minister of education appoints the Members of the Board of NOKUT
5. Governance meeting and dialogue

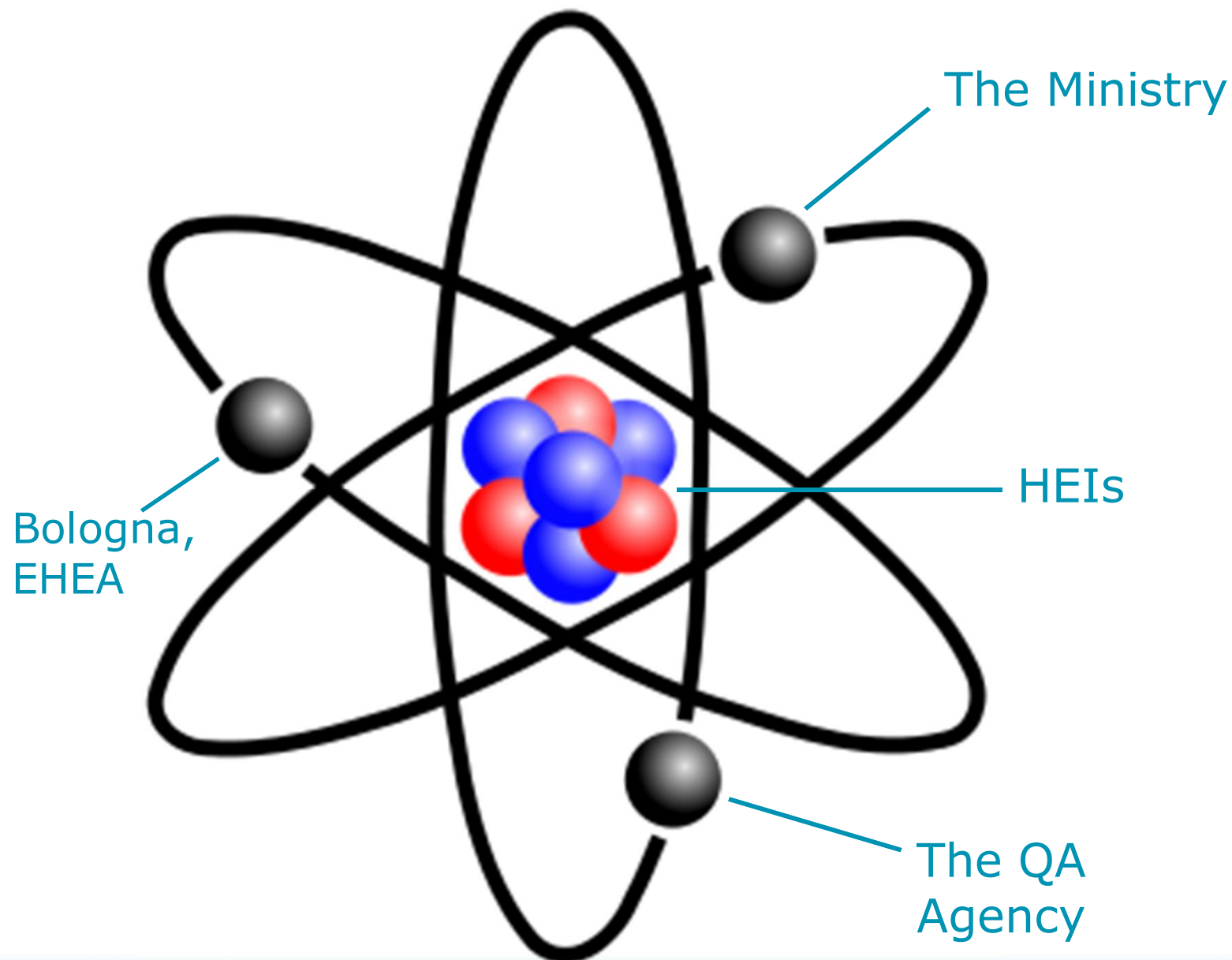
# Mergers in Norwegian higher education



# EQAR – governmental members

Source: <https://eqar.eu/> April 2016





1. Nobody can assess better than the academics themselves!  
Building up the QAAs are competing with resources that the institutions could have for the best of the students!
2. External QA puts an extra bureaucratic pressure on the institutions!
3. External QA, national and international standards like ESG, European Qualification Framework, and ECTS challenges the autonomy of the university!
4. EHEA contributes to uniform higher education!



1. How can QAAs add values to the HEIs and their quality work? How can an external body assess educational quality better than the academics themselves?
2. External QA does put an extra bureaucratic pressure on the institutions in the beginning. How will the HEI benefit from this in the long run?
3. External QA and national and international standards like ESG, European Qualification Framework, and ECTS challenges the autonomy of the university unless the HEIs are actively involved in their national development and implementation?
4. “EHEA contributes to uniform higher education!”: ESG are generic standards for quality *assurance*, not quality itself, developed with the intention to support diversity in a national context.

# Internationalisation EHEA



Internationalisation  
EHEA



Quality assurance  
ESG

Internationalisation  
EHEA



Quality itself



Quality assurance  
ESG

## Key features of QA in Europe

- **Diversity** in developing solutions and strategies (according national regulations)
- Diversity is often connected with **enhancement** oriented approaches: enhancement a priority to almost all QA agencies
- Increased focus on **institutional QA and the creation of quality culture**
- Agencies are more and more open to **involve stakeholders** (by now a “must” – students!)
- **International dimension** is increasingly expected (experts, cooperative QA, CBQA)
- Improvement of information and communication, reports
- Agencies’ scope of activity has broadened (monitoring, consultancy, enhancement)
- **National regulations** still driving the majority of QA agencies’ activities

# Options for quality assurance

Quality assurance as control vs enhancement – or both?

Focus on institutional - or program level – or both?

Degree of autonomy for the institutions: various approaches depending on the size and experience of the institution?

Degree of autonomy for the agency

National/regional agency(-ies) vs openness for foreign QAAs?

# QA must adapt to

Transparency

Involving students

Student centered learning

Others?

# Some challenges for NOKUT

From the latest ENQA review:

- Involving students in all procedures
- Regulations to safeguard the independence of reviewers and NOKUT staff
- To relate to the ESG Part I in a clear and consistent manner

Others:

- How to combine the various QA tools efficiently and in a logical whole



# All things connect, don't they?

