External quality assurance as a more efficient process

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EFFECTIVE – Successful in producing a desired or intended result.

(Oxford dictionarry)

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

„(...) This ensures that the quality assurance agencies in the EHEA adhere to the same set of principles and the <u>processes and procedures are modeled to the purposes and requirements of their contexts</u>."

When dealing with efficiency/effectiveness:

- we need to clarify first **what it is** that we want have as more *efficient process* in place and we need to agree on

- **what requirements** we would need to address/outline while dealing with the issue?

- Clearly expressed **aims** of QA (*understanding of quality*)
- **Communication** of the aims to all stakeholders
- **Procedure** of QA described clearly and in details
- Well-trained,professional and competent **staff** (guidelines for staff development, internal trainings, mentoring of new staff)
- Appropriate **IT tools** (for submission of self-evaluation documents, for publishing reports…)
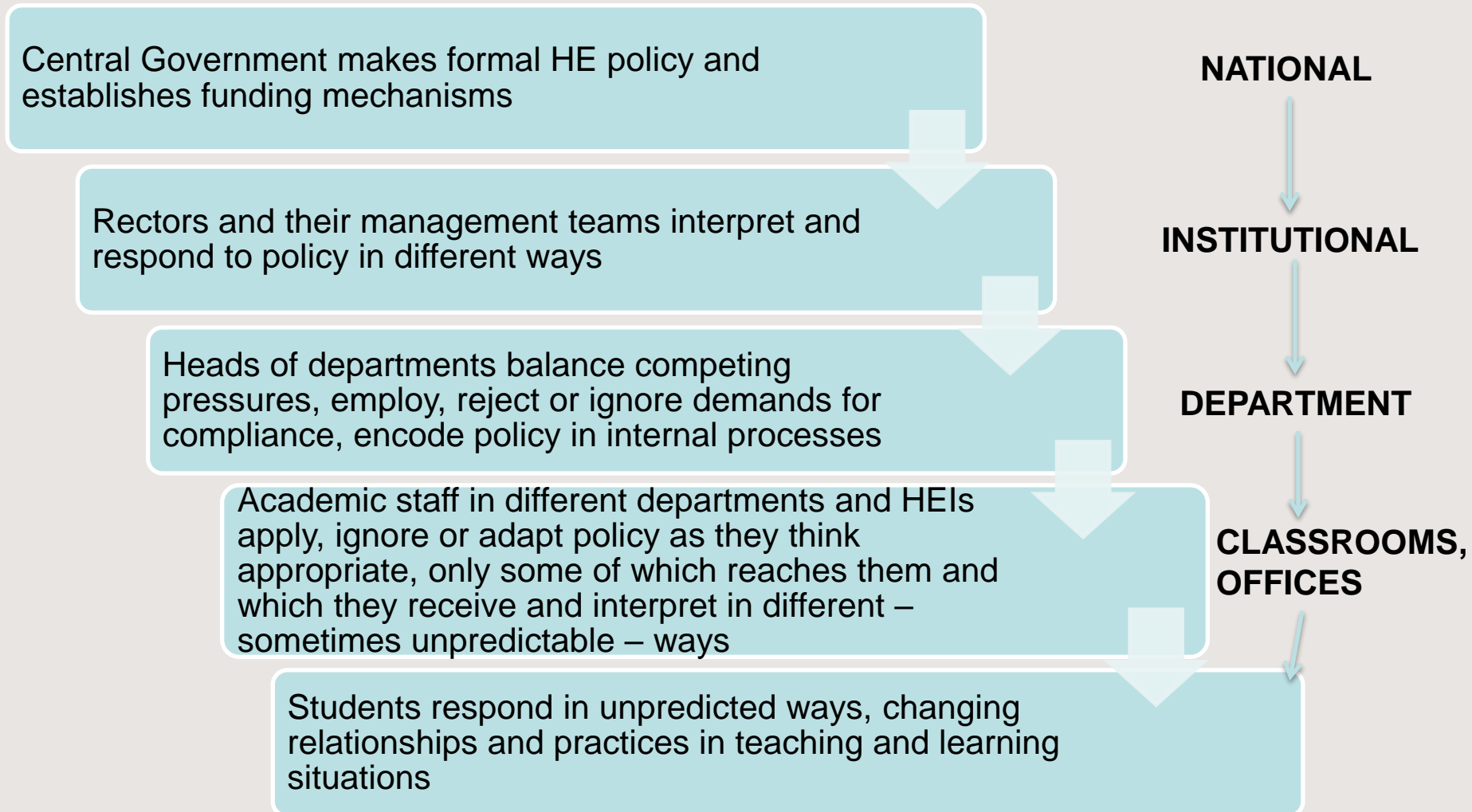
Internal and external process and criteria to:

- Ensure minimum standards (**accountability**)
- Support quality **enhancement**
- Provide reliable and transparent **information** to users and stakeholders (consumer protection)
- **Create trust** in the HE system and its components
- **Ensure**, fundamentally, that students (can) reach the intended learning outcomes (minimum standards)

- The term "**quality**" has shown to have different meanings - based on the people, experts, stakeholder involved.

- Different **definitions**, meanings led in turn to different **approaches** - strongly linked to different **purposes** of EQS - in the **operationalization** / the design of **methodologies** and the measurements of the **quality** (concept).

Implementation and Translation

Central Government makes formal HE policy and establishes funding mechanisms

NATIONAL

Rectors and their management teams interpret and respond to policy in different ways

INSTITUTIONAL

Heads of departments balance competing pressures, employ, reject or ignore demands for compliance, encode policy in internal processes

DEPARTMENT

Academic staff in different departments and HEIs apply, ignore or adapt policy as they think appropriate, only some of which reaches them and which they receive and interpret in different – sometimes unpredictable – ways

CLASSROOMS, OFFICES

Students respond in unpredicted ways, changing relationships and practices in teaching and learning situations

Implementation staircase. (adopted from Trowler (2002)

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The **concept** of (educational) **quality**/the concept of **higher education** / the concept of **governance/steerin**g of higher education is **context dependent** / embedded in economical / (political) / social environment. (> **Manifested** in laws on higher education, laws on external quality assurance > legislation and frameworks)

Therefore - what is efficient, what can be *more* efficient in external quality assurance is:

- open to **diversity** & **context** based

- "**Sense-making**" of EQA - led to the need to understand quality (assurance) - as a "**social" process** - which is implicit, since we operate in/with systems/organizations (national/higher education etc.) - we do operate in/with systems/organizations - respecting the range of (**diverse**) **stakeholders** (and interests and various **concepts of (educational) quality**.

- "Sense-making" - EQA needs to find (the efficient) place in the landscape of quality within which (educational) quality can be situated.

(see Marshall, 2016)

- Diverse interests - stakeholder need to create a *common narrative (about quality and (assurance) processes)*

- e.g. what is the **purpose** of accreditation vs. audits?

- what **procedures** do we (*really need*) for the different processes? ...

- **Communication** requires time / platforms - these might have an (challenging) impact on efficiency:
  - how much time can we spent on (in-depth) communication with our stakeholder ?
  - what kind of narratives of experts' exchanges exist?
  - Do we share the same narratives within an agency (shared understanding by QA staff)?

2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

- Standard: EQA should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its **fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it**, while taking into account *relevant regulations*. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

Guidelines: In order to ensure effectiveness and objectivity it is vital for EQA to have **clear aims** agreed by stakeholders.

- The aims, objectives and implementation of the processes will - bear in mind the level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions; - take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality;   - allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement; - result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up.

- The system for EQA might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.

The procedures/processes applied, the designed methodologies should be **modeled to the purposes** and **requirements** of their **contexts**

EQS procedures – should underpin the aim/purpose of EQ

ENQA staff development - working group outcome paper (April 2014):

- *„(...) staff development activity should be progressed in the context of the expected competencies, values and behaviors of agency staff, that is, development should be focused on activities, which help agencies deliver their mission and strategy.*

- *It also outlines a framework in which to consider staff development in a proactive way to ensure that staff are effective in as short a time as possible after appointment, and remain effective, through continuous development, during their employment."*

For making <u>internal processes </u>work more effectively:

- for submission of self-evaluation documents

- for getting statistical data

- for publishing reports

- for monitoring of workload

- …..

- External quality assurance processes are (better) *constructively aligned* with the context - the aim(s) – purpose(s)?
- Is EQS then (more) efficient – or are we starting again to search for more efficency / effectivness of EQS?

So:

- What should be *efficient* in particular?
- What we are *aiming at*, when thinking about efficiency?

ESG 2015

ESG as guidance to (more) efficient processes

QUESTIONS?