Challenging Formal and Actual Independence of QA agencies – CEENQA study

CEENQA General Assembly
23 and 24 September 2022, Istanbul
Why independence in higher education (universities, agencies)?

- **Academic freedom** and **institutional autonomy** as fundamental values of higher education.

- Independence as a’ **capability to decide** on matters of their responsibility without (political/other stakeholders) interferences.

- **The role of quality assurance** agencies in considering institutional autonomy.

- Independence of the agency’s work from third parties.
Global level

Guidelines of Good Practice:
‘The composition of the decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensures its independence and impartiality’ (INQAAHE 2016).

Some global studies and analyses:
- An Independence Index of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education: European and Latin American countries compared
- EUA: University Autonomy in Europe
- QA agencies: CHEA, AQU, INQAAHE...
Agencies should be **independent and act autonomously**.

They should have **full responsibility** for their operations and the outcomes of those operations **without third party influence**.

- Organisational
- Operational independence
- Independence of formal outcomes

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What we started?

- Exploring **key aspects of the independence of QA agencies** and analysing responsibilities in different processes at QA agencies.

- Our main focus: **political influence**.

- **Research methods**: open-ended questionnaires, interviews, ENQA reports, regulations on accreditations and evaluations and self-evaluation reports.

- **Included: 28 QA agencies**; 22 out of 28 are CEENQA members. 14 out of 28 are members of ENQA.

- **Thematic analysis of 5 main areas** of independence.
What are areas of our analysis?

**General background:** status (private / public / dependant entity), organisation, background of the QA agency

1) The **appointment of chief executive**
2) The process of **preparing and adopting criteria / standards**
3) The **appointment of experts**
4) The **decision-making procedures**
5) The **appeal procedures**

Exploring main areas of the independence of QA agencies
RESULTS

Average values (28 agencies in the sample):
- ENQA members (14): 72, 4
- Non-ENQA members (14): 49, 9
- ENQA assessment (13): 93
- Our method (13): 74

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<td>Non-compliant</td>
<td>Dependant</td>
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Independent Examples:

- The chief executive is nominated by the board of directors, where none of the stakeholders has a predominant role (Ex. 2/9).

- The Agency follows autonomous legal act.

- Standards and criteria are independently defined.

- Agency decides independently on the implementation of the evaluations, the methods used, the members of the evaluation teams, timetables, content of reports.

- The selection of experts and evaluation committees is conducted transparently.

Government does not have strong influence
Mostly independent

Examples:

- The chief executive is nominated by the board of directors, where none of the stakeholders has a predominant role (Ex. 4/9).
- The agency independently prepares criteria for accreditations abroad, but not also on the national level.
- The experts in evaluation procedures are mainly national experts.
- The register of potential experts is prepared by the ministry, the agency selects the experts from the register.
Partially independent

Examples:

- The chief executive is nominated by the board of directors, where one of the stakeholders has a predominant role (Ex. 5/9).
- The agency is located within the offices of the ministry, and its staff are formally employees of the ministry.
- Ministry propose and negotiate about possible candidates for the chief executive.
- Agency is expected to do additional government assignments every year (such as thematic analysis).
Dependent Examples:

- The chief and the deputy chief are appointed by the government.
- The government can dismiss the chief executive without a serious reason.
- The criteria are prepared by the chief executive, who is appointed by the government.
- The criteria required for formulating evaluation plans are issued by government decree.
- It is not possible for institutions to appeal any formal decisions made by the agency.

Qualitative conclusions

Government has a strong and predominant influence
Why we want to continue?

Example: Actual and formal independence of one QAA

- weak formal independence (government appoints the chief executive of QAA), strong actual independence (independent administration at the ministry coordinates the procedure of the appointment)
Some conclusions...

- A great diversity of quality assurance agencies.
- Positive effect of the ENQA membership.
- Positive correlations with ENQA assessments.

Further study:

- Study the correlations between actual and formal independence.
- Explore differences between private and public agencies.
- Explore organisational culture, attitudes, values...
Thank you for your attention.

GOOD BYE!

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