

Challenging Formal and Actual Independence of QA agencies – CEENQA study



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za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

**CEENQA General
Assembly**
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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.**



**Capability to
decide on
matters of
someone's
responsibility
without
interferences**

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...

**Investigating
independence
of QA
agencies at
global and
EU level**

European level: ESG, standard 3.3

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**.

Evaluated agencies and the general overview of the assessment of standard 3.3

- Organisational independence
- Operational independence
- Independence of formal outcomes

**ESG
2015**

| IME AGENCIJE | ESG | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2.1. | 2.2. | 2.3. | 2.4. | 2.5. | 2.6. | 2.7. | 3.1. | 3.2. | 3.3. | 3.4. | 3.5. | 3.6. | 3.7. |
| VLUGHR QA (Belgija) | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| ACSUG (Španija) | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| AKKORK (Rusija) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| KAA (Kosovo) | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| AAC-DEVA (Španija) | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| QQI (Irska) | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| ANVUR (Italija) | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| A3ES (Portugalska) | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| AQ (Avstrija) | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| CTI (Francija) | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| EVALAG (Nemčija) | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| NCPA (Rusija) | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| AHPGS (Nemčija) | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| NCEQE (Gruzija) | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| EUA-IEP (EU)* | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| UNIBASQ (Španija) | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| CYQAA (Ciper) | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| SQAA (Slovenija) | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| PKA (Poljska) | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| RCVS (VB) | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| HAC (Mađarska) | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| ARACIS (Romunija) | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| NOKUT (Norveška) | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| AIC (Latvija) | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| QAA (VB) | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| NQA (Nizozemska) | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| EAEVE (EU) | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| CAQA (Srbija) | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| NEAA (Bolgarija) | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| EKKA (Estonija) | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |

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.

METHODOLOGY FOR ANALYSING INDEPENDANCE OF QA AGENCIES



What are areas of our analysis?

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

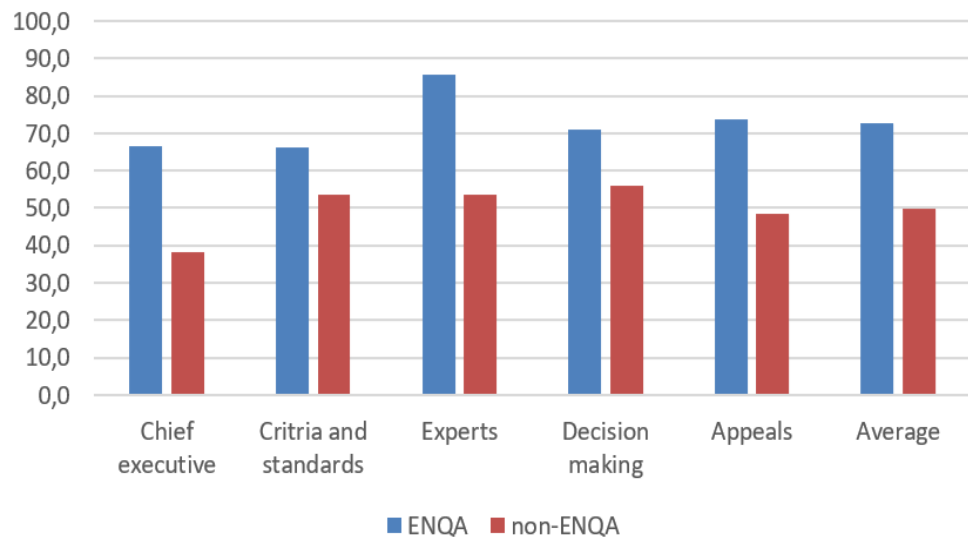
- 1) The **appointment of chief executive**
- 2) The process of **preparing and adopting criteria / standards**
- 3) The **appointment of experts**
- 4) The **decision-making procedures**
- 5) The **appeal procedures**

**Exploring
main areas of
the
independence
of QA agencies**

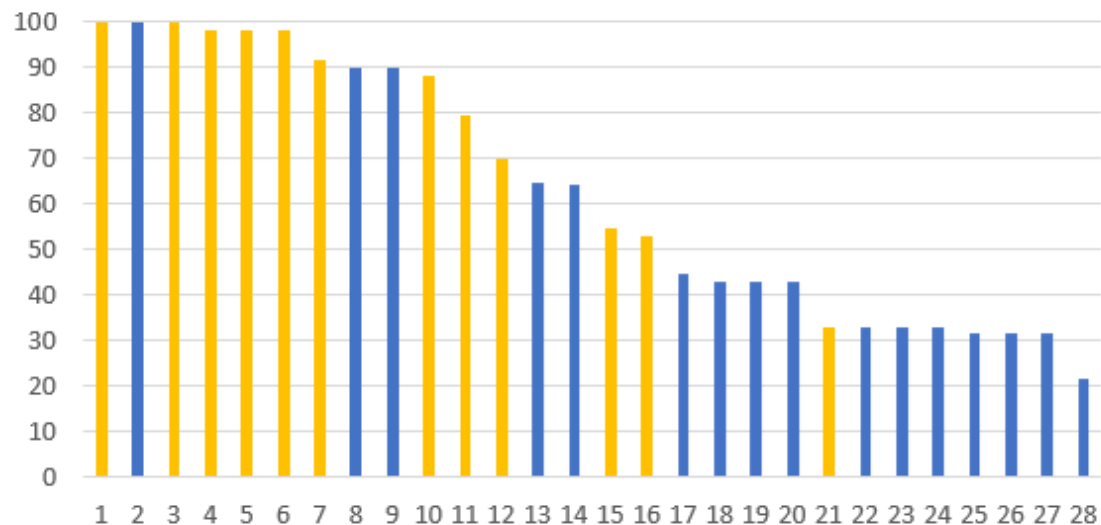


RESULTS

ENQA and non-ENQA members



All agencies: ENQA (yellow) and non-ENQA members (blue)



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

| Rating scale | Level of independence | % |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----|
| Compliant | Independent | 100 |
| Substantially Compliant | Mostly independent | 66 |
| Partially Compliant | Partially independent | 33 |
| Non-compliant | Dependant | 0 |

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.

1

**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.

2

**Government
has minor
influence.**



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).



Government has a strong, indirectly predominant influence

Dependent

Examples:

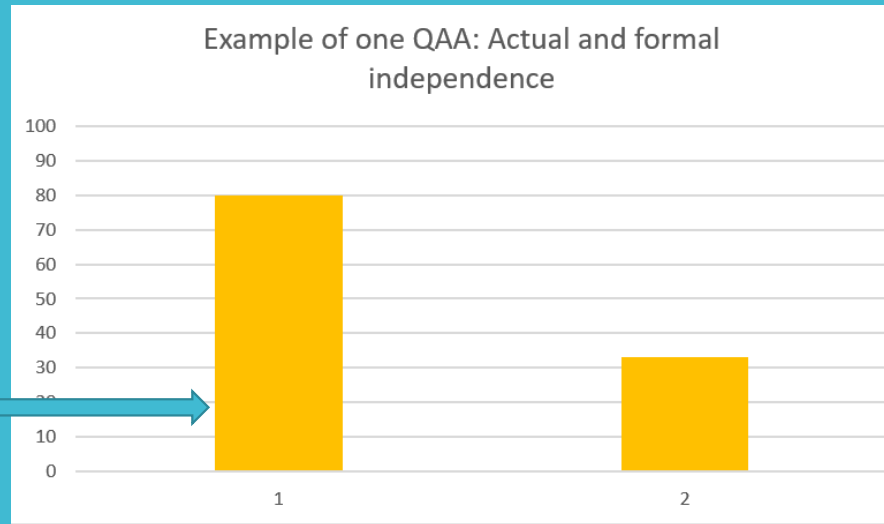
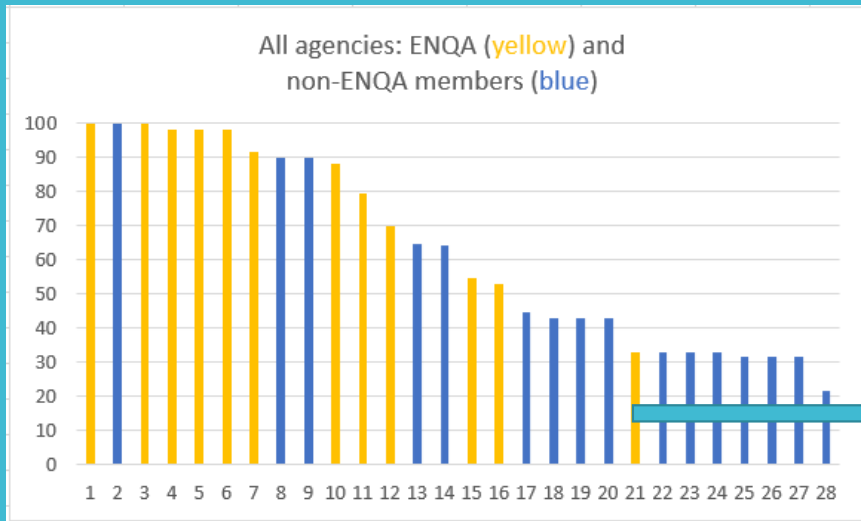
- **The chief and the and deputy chief are appointed by the government.**
- The government **can dismiss** the chief executive without a serious reason.
- The criteria are **prepared by the chief executive, who is appointed by the government.**
- **The criteria** required for formulating evaluation plans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

*Qualitative
conclusions*

4

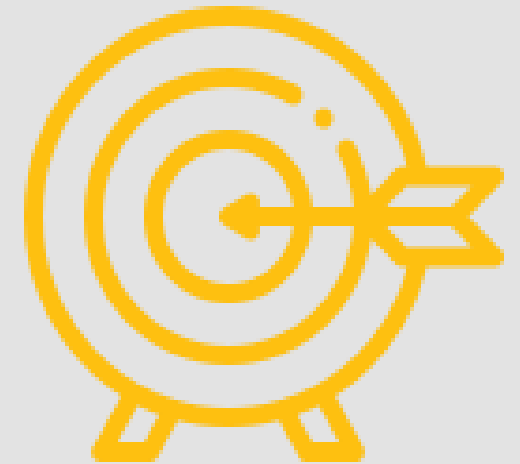
**Government has
a strong and
predominant
influence**

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)

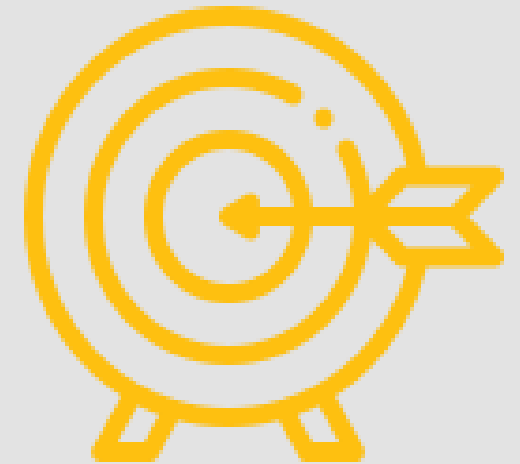


Some conclusions...

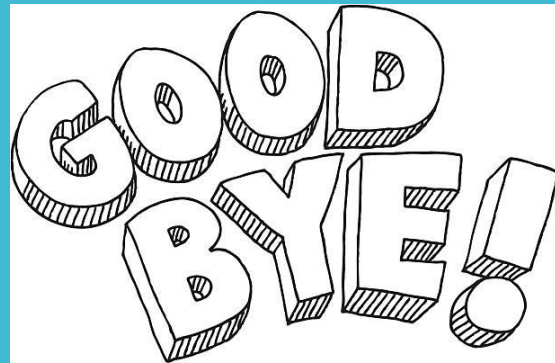
- A **great diversity** of quality assurance agencies.
- Positive effect of the **ENQA membership**.
- **Positive correlations** with ENQA assessments.

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.



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