

**Quality Assurance:  
Role, Responsibilities, and Means of  
Public Authorities,  
with a view towards  
Implications for Governance of  
Institutions and Systems**

Council of Europe Higher Education Forum:  
Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education –  
The Role of Public Authorities and Institutions

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# I. The Topic – Approaches: Items to consider

## Prime Tasks: Identify

- the object:  
what is ‘quality assurance’ of which concrete objects;
- the agent:  
who are, or could be seen as, ‘public authorities’;
- the action and the objective:  
how, and why are roles, responsibilities, and means – de facto or optimally – attributed, shared, and used by public authorities.

## Subsequent Challenge: Consider

- implications for governance of institutions and of systems

## Scope/Expected outcome

- Asking Questions, Defining the Issues
- Mapping, Systematizing
- Methodology of Validating Answers
- Not: Providing ‚Blueprint‘ Answers

## **II. The Object in Focus: Quality Assurance**

### **1. What:**

#### **- Possible Objects**

- (a) Staff
- (b) Programmes
  - (aa) Concrete programmes
  - (bb) Model curricula: templates and standardization
- (c) Institutions
- (d) Quality processes
- (e) System assessment

## 2. What:

### - Possible Perspectives:

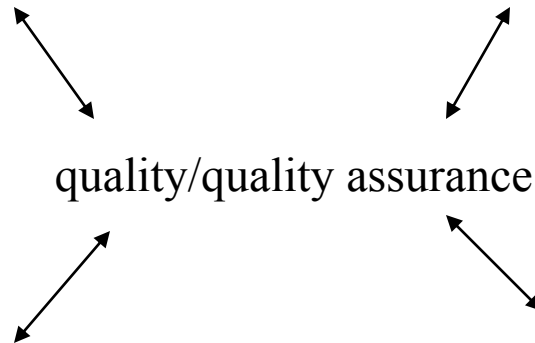
- (a) Internal Evaluation and external assessment
- (b) Consequences of quality: advisory, or licensing
- (c) Interests of various participants →

## Higher education institution (HEI)

- providing optimized programmes
- ensuring accountability
- procuring effectivity/efficiency

## HEI support institution (state)

- inducing optimal programmes
- demanding accountability
- checking effectivity/efficiency



## Students

- guaranteed quality
- transparent information
- (external) acceptance

## Society (e.g., labour market)

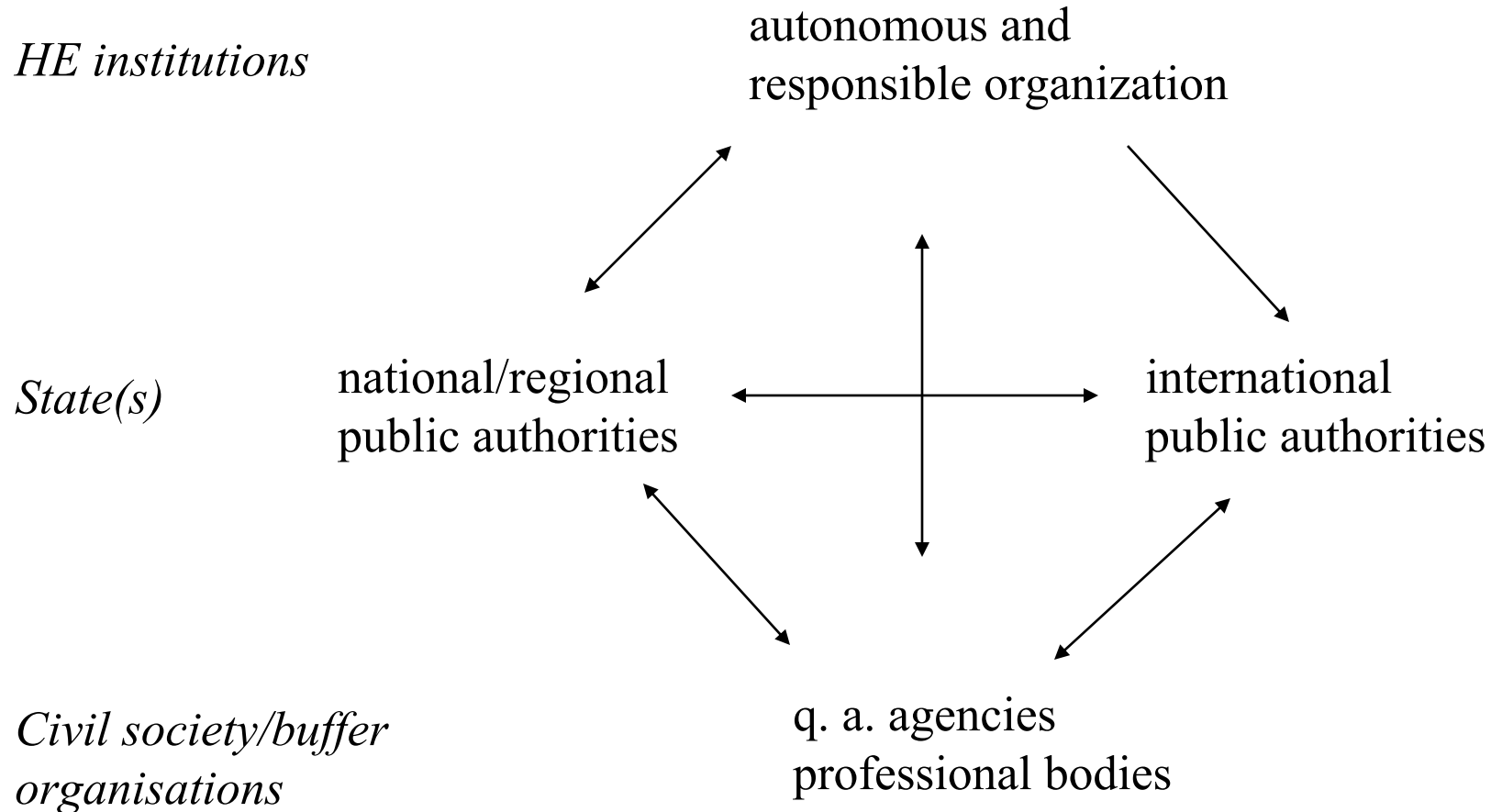
- guaranteed quality
- transparent information
- matching needs

# **III. The Agent:**

## **Public Authorities – Identification:**

- Higher education institutions
- Nation state(s)/national ministries
- International public organisations
- Quality assurance agency(ies)
- Professional organisations

# Overview of the Relevant Agents





## **IV. Objectives and Action: Roles, Responsibilities, and Means**

1. „Form follows function“, i.e. purpose:  
Need to Address „quality“ of HE operations
2. Key approach: What are higher education functions, i. e. ulterior purposes?
3. What ist understood by ‘Quality’? →

**3a) ‚Quality‘ as ‚fitness for purpose‘  
(„purposefulness“) → Relevance of HE  
aims and mission:**

- to be productive in research and learning and to enhance quality and quantity in these fields;
- to support individual students’ personal development;
- to aim at meeting cultural needs and international, national, or regional advancement of society (“democratic citizenship”),
- also in economic terms (among others, by securing ‘employability’)

### **3b) ,Quality' (of teaching and learning): an ambiguous concept; proposals:**

- excellence
- fitness of, and for purpose
- matching directives (complying with curricular templates)
- meeting thresholds (complying with standards)
- client/customer satisfaction
- value for money/time invested (efficiency)
- individual enhancement (transformation)
- (institutional) capacity for change

### **3c) Significance to governance and management choices at system level:**

- Implementation management; or
- Entrepreneurial style of governance and management

Interdependence with understanding of programme quality →

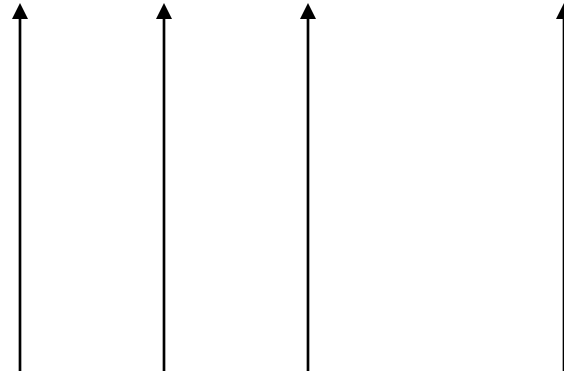
- **Features of a ,compliance-based approach‘:**

*Model template (t):*

features  $a(t) + b(t) + c(t) + \dots + z(t)$

*Criterion:*

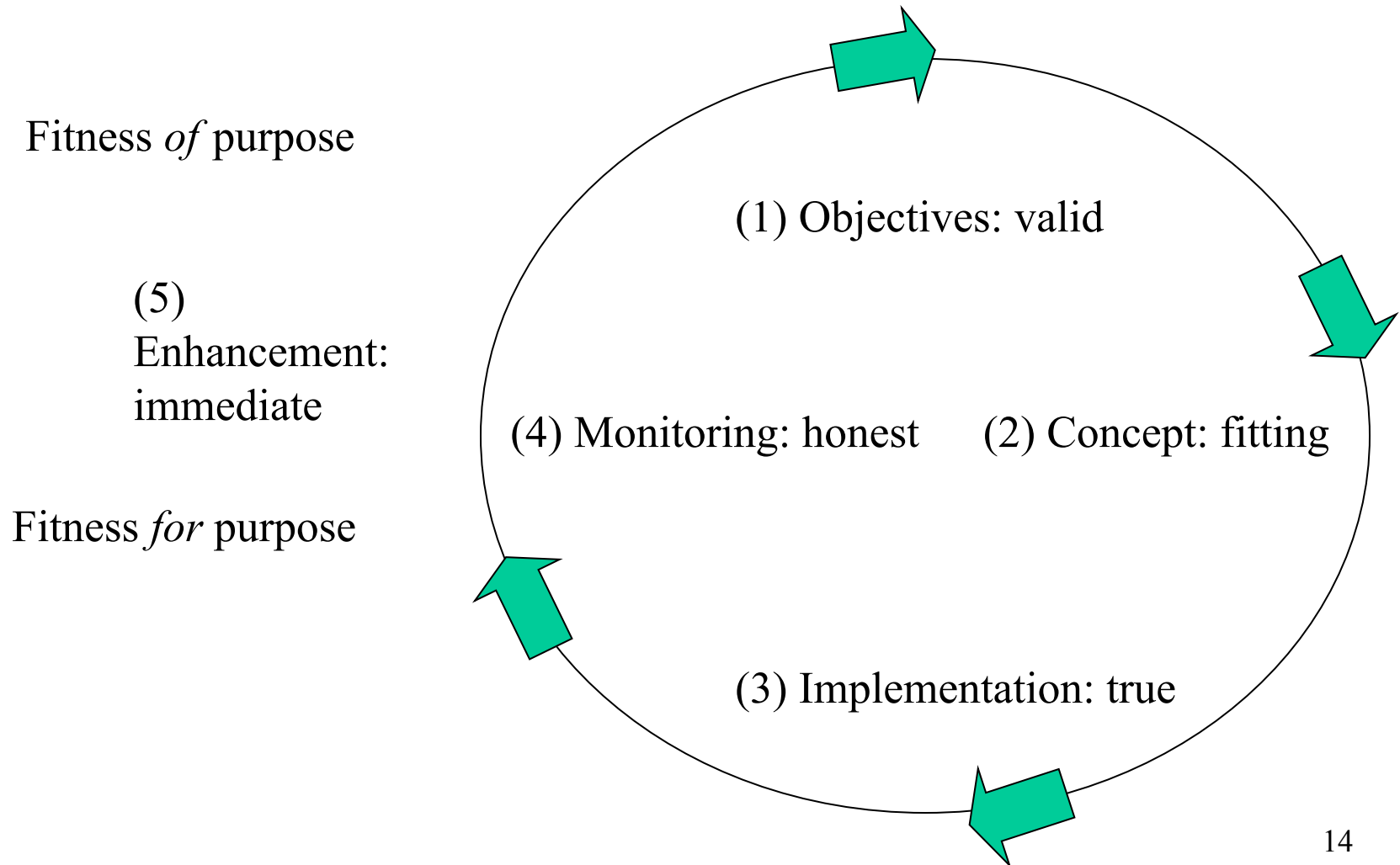
*compliance/identity*



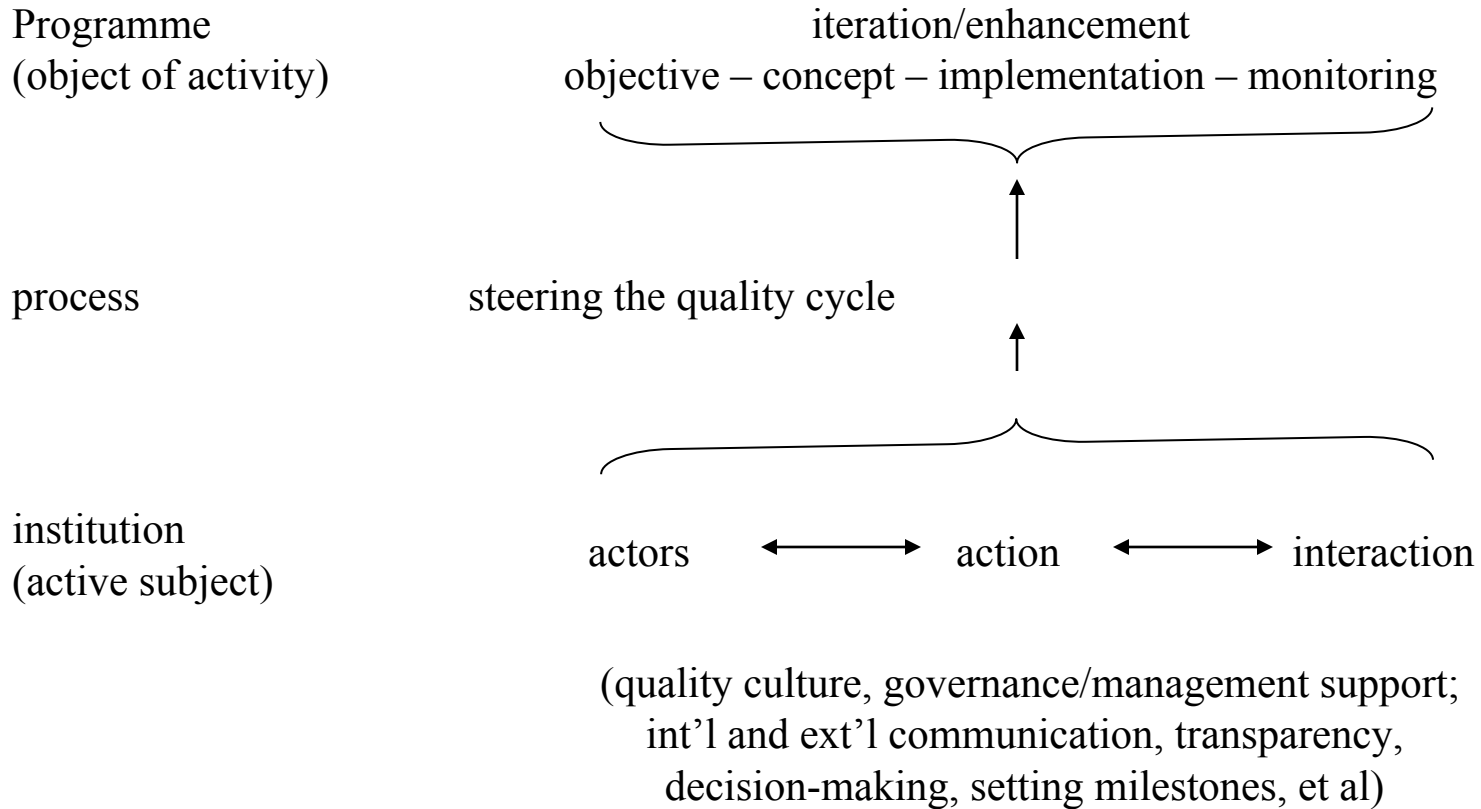
*Concrete programme (p):*

features  $a(p) + b(p) + c(p) + \dots + z(p)$

- **Fitness of, and for ‘purpose approach’ – an open concept following the ‘quality cycle’:**



- Linking ,programme quality’  
 (institutional ‘function’) and ‘institutional  
 quality’ (institutional ‘form’)**



## 4. Observing quintessential and circumstantial features: embeddedness of HE

- Freedom of research and teaching/learning: prerequisite for progress and innovation;
- Free individuals whose integration into a team is a major challenge;
- Change of paradigm towards the “entrepreneurial university”
- Increasing costs and advanced communication: ‘concerted’ structures (franchising systems, “chain-stores”, and “trusts”)?
- Difference between legitimacy to be involved (de-jure-competence) and ability to be involved (de-facto-competence) – adequate role-sharing
- Not only national/regional politics, also society as such as stakeholders.



# **V. Implications for Governance of Institutions and Systems**

1. Towards a methodology of exploring „good governance“

## a) What to do?

Sequence suggested:

- consider,
- explore,
- define,
- correlate,
- translate into governance and management structures,
- integrate into synergetic forces,
- test-run.

## b) How to categorize?

- Basic and overriding points of orientation
- Concrete operational challenges: functions, actors, action, and interaction.

## 2. Basic and overriding points of orientation

a) In substance: Key orientation of judgment on organizational quality: to be based on aptness

- to identify valid aims ('fitness of purpose'), and
- to achieve them by suitable means ('fitness for purpose');
- while distinguishing between strategic dimension ('capacity for change [for the better]') and managerial operations; and
- while observing 'embeddedness': societal expectations, legal framework, funding, mentalities of partners, stakeholders, employees.

## b) In maxims: governance based on, and supporting

- motivation rather than external control ('ownership');
- transcending from managerial mechanisms to spirit ('quality culture');
- blending of leadership and responsiveness to staff incentives ('bottom-up, top-down');
- self-balanced system rather than permanent intervention;
- responsibility (rights) and accountability (liability) inseparable;
- values, e.g. observing ethics and education for democratic citizenship;
- permanence of review and updating (move from quality assurance to quality enhancement);
- effectiveness and (cost-)efficiency.

c) In process: transparency and integration, i.e.

- monitoring of and reporting on activities;
- internal and external communication and responsiveness.

d) In organizational clarity: Defining structures, organs, actors, action in terms of

- creation
- selection and election
- attribution of rights and duties
- interfaces and interaction
- responsibility, accountability, and liability
- cancellation, revocation
- this itemization to be concretely applied to all fields of activities.

### **3. Operational challenges/choices relating to concrete functions, actors, action, and interaction**

- a) internality and externality
- b) leadership, integration, and the individual
- c) centralization and devolution



## d) In particular: Choice of steering and learning devices:

- legalistic/normative standards: regulation, and contract management
- economic/funding: distributive and/or competitive success, reward systems
- communicative: feedback, creating conviction, rallying support
- expertise: substantial competence
- responsibility: personal ownership and liability
- political: external values and directives given