



Perspectives on the future development of QA in the EHEA and the global education market

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My background

- Professor Educational Sciences Ghent Uni (B) (1995-)
- Advisor and Director of Cabinet to several Flemish education ministers (1992-2008)
- Director of VLIR, Flemish Rectors' Conference (2000-03)
 - Also the QA agency for Flemish universities
- Functions in QA:
 - Board member of INQAAHE (2002-03)
 - Expert work for OECD, UNESCO, IAUP, EUA, etc. on QA (1999-2008)
 - Member of Board of QANU, Agency for QA of Dutch universities (2003-)
 - Member of Scientific Board of AQA, Austrian QA agency (2003-08)
 - Member of Evaluation Committee for University of Luxembourg (2006-09)
- Head of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) at OECD in Paris (since 2008)

Overview

- *Where are we...*
 - Achievements
 - Drawbacks and risks
- *...and where are we going to...*
 - Changes in the HE systems and new challenges for QA systems
- *...and what will all this mean?*
 - In terms of purpose and governance of QA.

Achievements

- The quality imperative has pervaded the higher education systems
 - Most institutions have established internal QA procedures
 - Most programmes/institutions are subject to formal external QA procedures
 - Most academic staff is conscious of a stronger QA regime and comply with it
 - Most students do not actively participate to, but acknowledge the existence of QA systems

Achievements

- A common European approach to QA has been developed and institutionalised
 - General acceptance of some basic rules; ESG are an extremely important step
 - Crucial role of ENQA
 - High credibility within the Bologna Process
 - Still too many national idiosyncrasies, endangering the automatic mutual recognition of QA decisions and, in turn, the automatic recognition of degrees
 - Assessment of agencies in accordance with ESG and inclusion in EQAR may still take some time

Achievements

- Internal and external QA have a positive impact on the quality of education provision at programme and institutional level
 - Ensuring that most programmes meet threshold quality standards and sub-threshold provision has been improved or closed down
 - QA has successfully addressed the education function of HE, balancing the strong priority for research
 - Institutional leadership with regard to quality has been strengthened as part of general reinforcement of strategic management capacities

Achievements

- In establishing QA, institutions and governments have successfully realised an exchange between increasing autonomy and greater accountability
 - QA has been accepted by institutions and the academic community as a necessary trade-off for more autonomy
 - Governments have embarked on, but not always completed, the road to more distant forms of governance

Risks

- Bureaucratisation, formalism and ‘legalism’
 - QA has been ‘captured’ in procedures and regulations, in which completing forms and replying to standardised questionnaires becomes the norm
 - Many procedures still give ample space to window-dressing behaviour or superficial compliance
 - Legalistic procedures lead to extreme formalism and avoid risk-taking behaviour of evaluators
 - Each new review or assessment has to cope with the collective learning process to better survive the test

Risks

- Balancing accountability and improvement functions has proven to be quite difficult
 - Stringent external accountability functions endanger internal improvement functions, expose the academic professionals, and threatens the legitimacy of the QA regime in the academic community
 - Too much emphasis on improvement and enhancement functions take the critical edge off the evaluation process

Risks

- Cost and workload involved may be very high
 - Cost is an issue in many countries, but direct monetary cost is in most cases still acceptable
 - State funding for QA agencies is sometimes seen by institutions as diverting their legitimate resources
 - Non-monetary cost in hidden staff time and all kinds of ‘grey’ activities probably is very high

Risks

- Most QA schemes still rely too much on input and process standards
 - QA standards and procedures defined from a supply-side or delivery perspective: is what is delivered to students of sufficient quality?
 - Tendencies towards learning outcomes still very hesitant: AHELO (OECD) projects needs more institutional and political support, because it could nurture QA with empirical evidence on actually achieved learning outcomes

Risks

- Most QA schemes apply standards situated at threshold level
 - Little support and acceptance of attempts to diversify quality statements or labels above threshold level
 - Little incentives generated by QA for good programmes to further improve themselves towards excellence and to market themselves as such

Risks

- Limits of peer review methodologies
 - Peer review is a very powerful method of inter-collegial assessment in professional environments
 - But it's also very dependent on personal opinions and existing debates in a disciplinary field
 - Generational dimension: aged colleagues coming to assess younger colleagues/rivals
 - Independence of peers in some cases still is an issue, because of impact of networks, friendship or hostility and rivalry in the academic profession
 - Use of international peers limited due to cost and language

Risks

- Still limited internalisation of ‘quality culture’ in institutions
 - Emergence of formal QA regimes may have eroded informal collegial control
 - Still relatively high internal tolerance for visible and sometimes acknowledged lack of quality

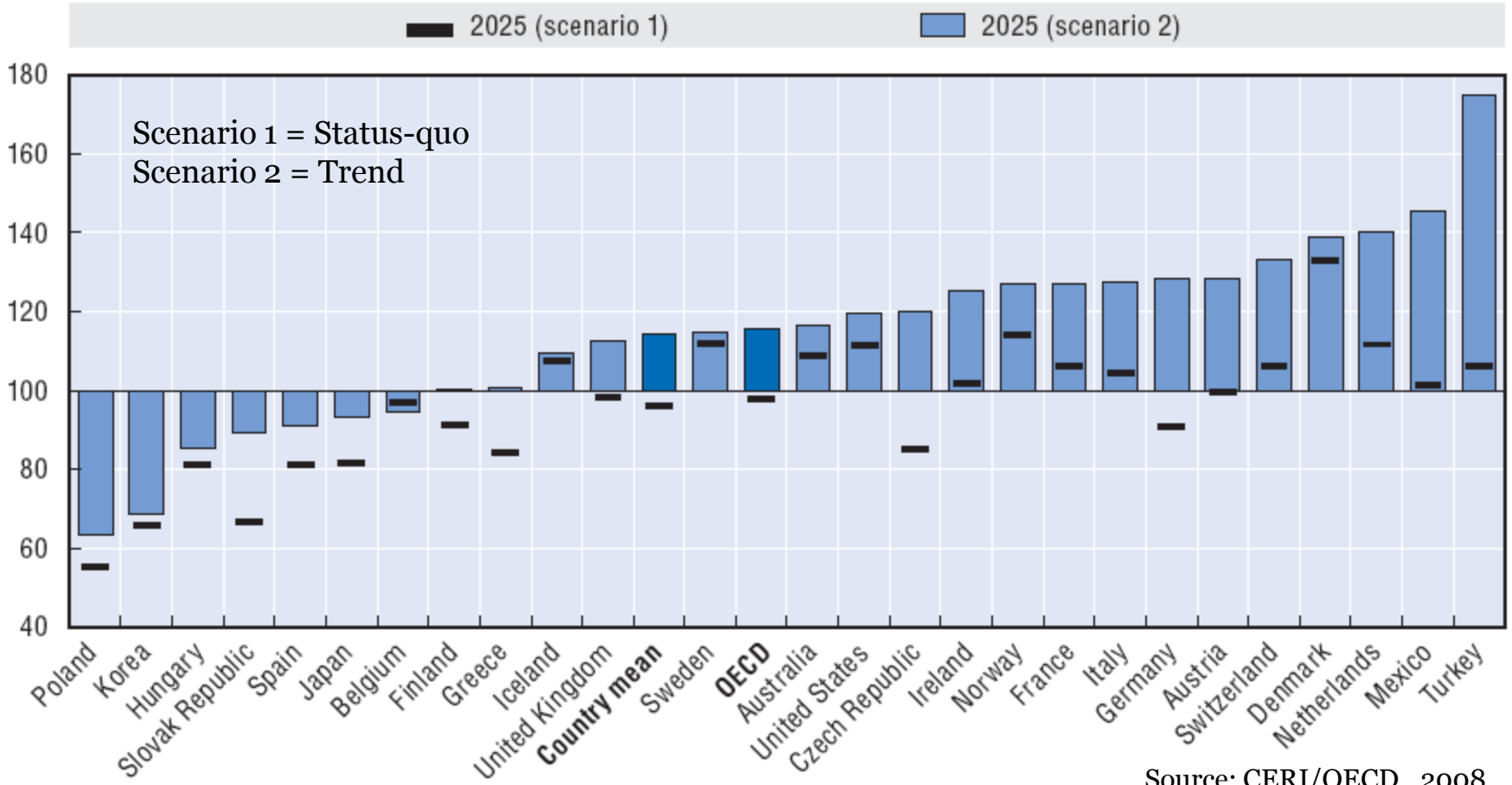
New challenges

- What is the impact of future trends in higher education on QA?
- In what ways do QA systems have to adjust to changing needs and realities?

New challenges

- Trend 1. **Widening access and improving success**
 - Further increase of participation to HE is expected
 - Stronger social and political pressures to redress social inequity in access and success and to make real efficiency gains
- QA: debate needed on definition of standards, quality and intrinsic notions of exclusiveness
 - Will QA protect and even strengthen traditional notions of academic quality and selectivity?
 - Or will QA support the development of more successful teaching and learning arrangements?

Figure 2.2. Trends in student enrolments between 2005 and 2025
on the basis of scenarios 1 and 2
(2005 = 100)



Source: CERI/OECD, 2008

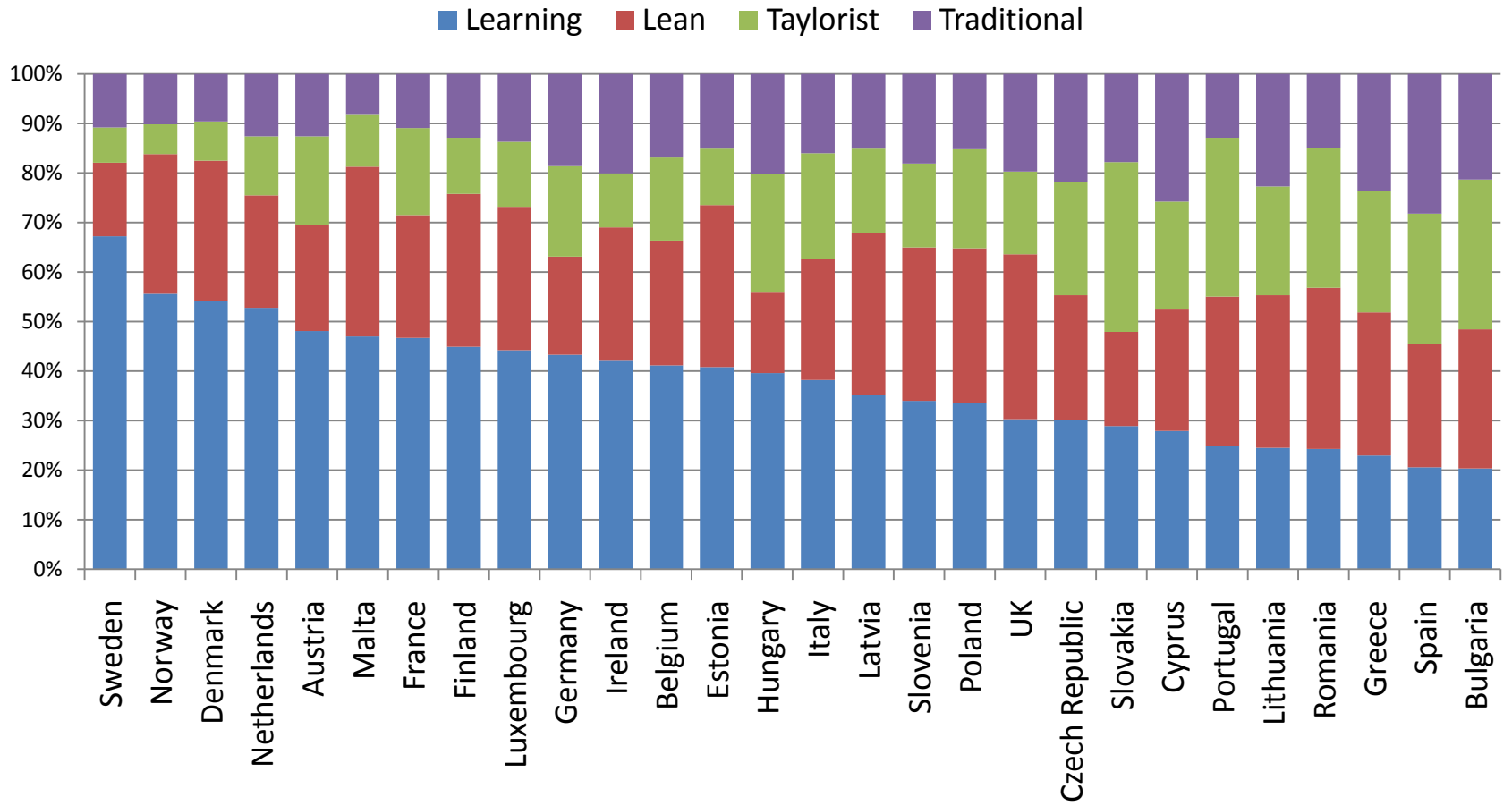
New challenges

- **Trend 2. Innovating teaching and learning**
 - Increasing pressures and opportunities for innovation of T&L arrangements (including use of technology, OERs, new delivery modes, etc.)
- QA: need to pitch QA to innovation
 - How to redesign QA away from intrinsic conservatism, prejudices with atypical practices and risk-avoiding behaviour
 - Towards more support for innovative and experimental teaching and learning modes

New challenges

- **Trend 3. Educating for the knowledge society**
 - Pressures to redesign teaching and learning (new skills in curricula, trans-disciplinary approaches, professional mobility, lifelong learning, ...) in order to prepare learners for the knowledge society
- **QA: how to tune QA to new demands**
 - Contemporary QA still is very influenced by role and power of disciplines, has difficulties in addressing creativity, does not yet really focus on lifelong learning

Distribution of labour force in companies over organisation types (2005)



New challenges

- **Trend 4. Internationalising higher education**
 - Traditional modes of internationalisation face a standstill, but globalisation and emergence of global market for research and education will produce new developments in internationalisation
- **QA: time to push QA into international dimension**
 - Domestic agendas are still dominating QA regimes
 - While QA could be a driver for internationalisation in higher education

New challenges

- **Trend 5. Diversifying the institutional landscape**
 - Bologna-process has encourage convergence and institutional similarity, but now more diversity in mission and profile will be needed
 - Rankings and transparency-enhancing initiatives
- **QA: debate needed on tuning QA to diversity**
 - Will QA continue to implicitly homogenise and normalise programmes and institutions?
 - Or will it redesign itself to allow for more difference on various dimensions?

New challenges

- Trend 6. **Competition and marketisation of HE**
 - Although the public good perspective will remain dominant, there will be an increasing competition with market-like arrangements and institutional behaviour
- QA: public functions come under pressure as institutions increasingly care about reputation
 - Huge quality risks with more competition and market mechanisms, but will institutions still accept a strong QA arrangement in a competitive environment?
 - Public accountability and feedback will remain crucial

global/international

Four scenarios for the future of higher education

Higher Education Inc.

Open Networking

state

market

New Public Responsibility

Serving Local Communities

local/national

New challenges

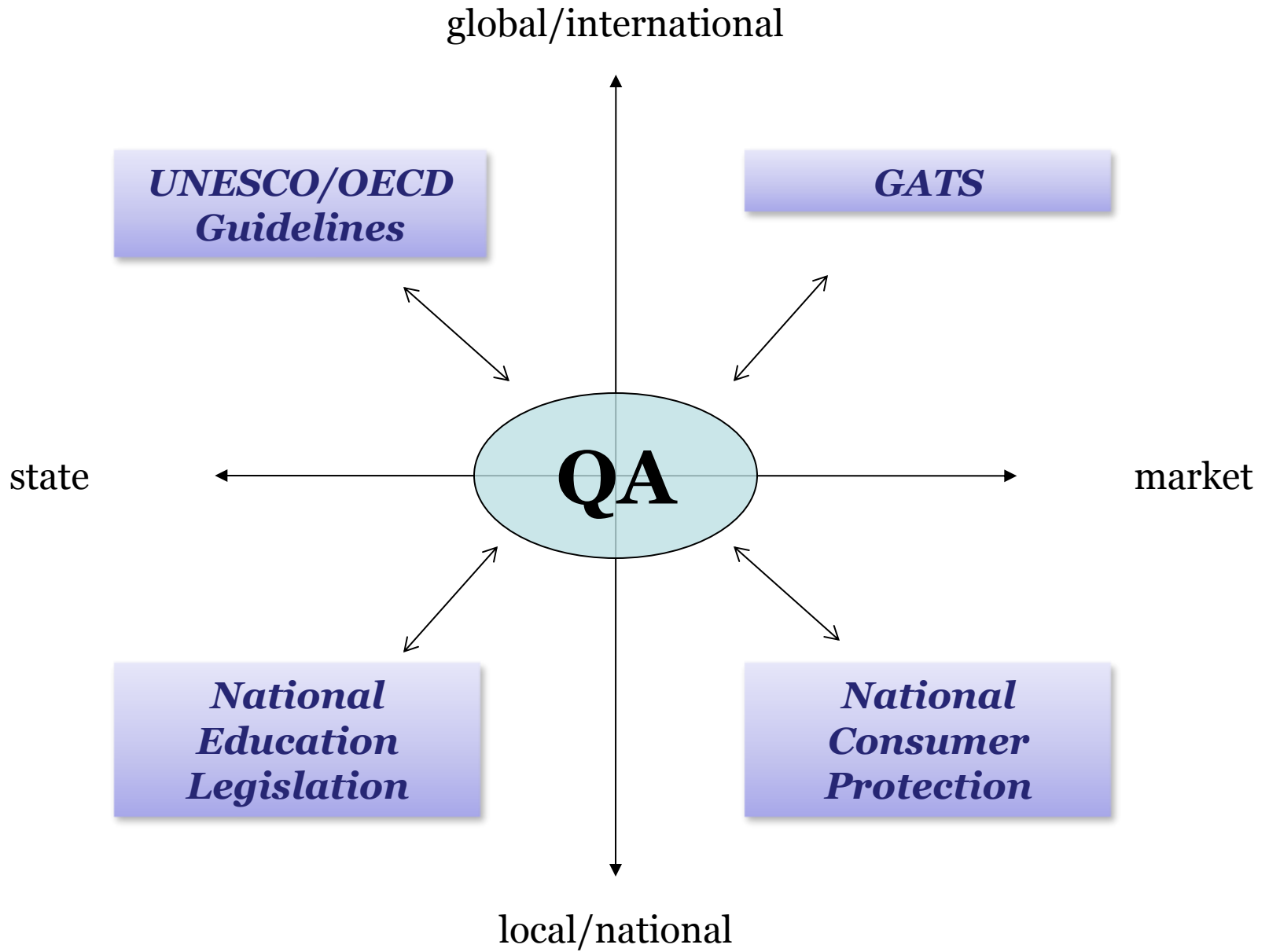
- Next generation of QA arrangements will have to
 - Be less bureaucratic, less costly, less cumbersome
 - Be more flexible in order to support innovation, widening access and improving success
 - Be less interested in input and process, but really adopt learning outcomes as its currency (AHELO)
 - Be more international
 - Combine public functions with competitive concerns from institutions and private interests from learners and industry

Purpose and Governance

- The potential of QA for change and innovation
 - In struggling to cope with massification higher education institutions have adapted to a mode of operation characterised by standardisation, and QA arrangements have been helpful in this
 - The risk of institutionalisation and mainstreaming of QA is that it has become part of the system, with carefully negotiated checks and balances between disciplines, institutions and national governments
 - But in my view QA has the potential to become the driver for change again, because the notion of academic quality itself is intrinsically critical and open to change

Purpose and Governance

- In terms of governance, QA agencies will have to take into account new power fields besides those of governments and institutions
 - Local and regional communities
 - Employers and other stakeholders
 - Students and families
 - The international market
 - International public regulatory frameworks
 - Regulation of private trade in education services
 - Etc.



Finally...

“The longevity of the university is not a result of never changing – but rather a credit to its ability to evolve, adapt, and change over time”

(Clark Kerr)

Thank you !

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