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DIVERSIFICATION OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EHEA

HERE NATIONAL BOLOGNA EVENT

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INTRODUCTION

EQA: all activities that provide for continuous improvement of HE (i.e., assurance and enhancement activities) → ultimately, serving stakeholders

- Last three decades: developments in EQA at varying paces across Europe
- Compliance with the ESG & registration in EQAR an established and accepted part of HE systems in the EHEA
- (Not so) recent discussions: marketisation of EQA (theoretical option of selecting a QA agency that will better fit the needs of a HEI); a more responsive EQA; a call for more innovation in external QA; coverage of other key missions in HE (research, third mission)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To what extent there is a discussion ongoing in QA agencies regarding the diversification of their external QA activities?

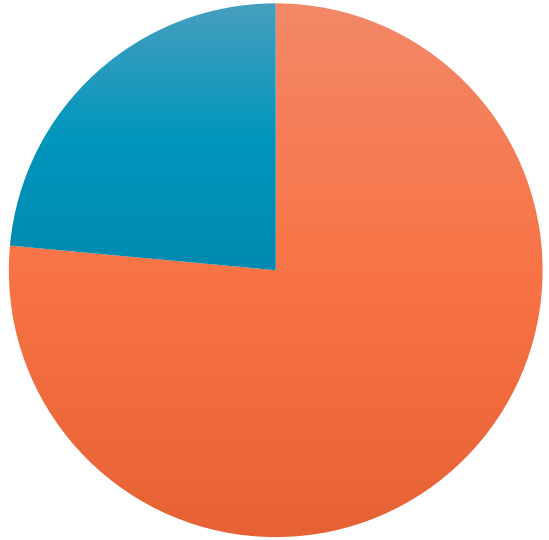
What are motives for, and characteristics of, such diversification?

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

- External reviews of QA agencies as conducted by ENQA in 2020 and 2021
- 17 agencies, 11 countries within the EHEA
- Screening of SARs

CURRENT ACTIONS AND/OR PLANS FOR FUTURE DIVERSIFICATION OF EQA

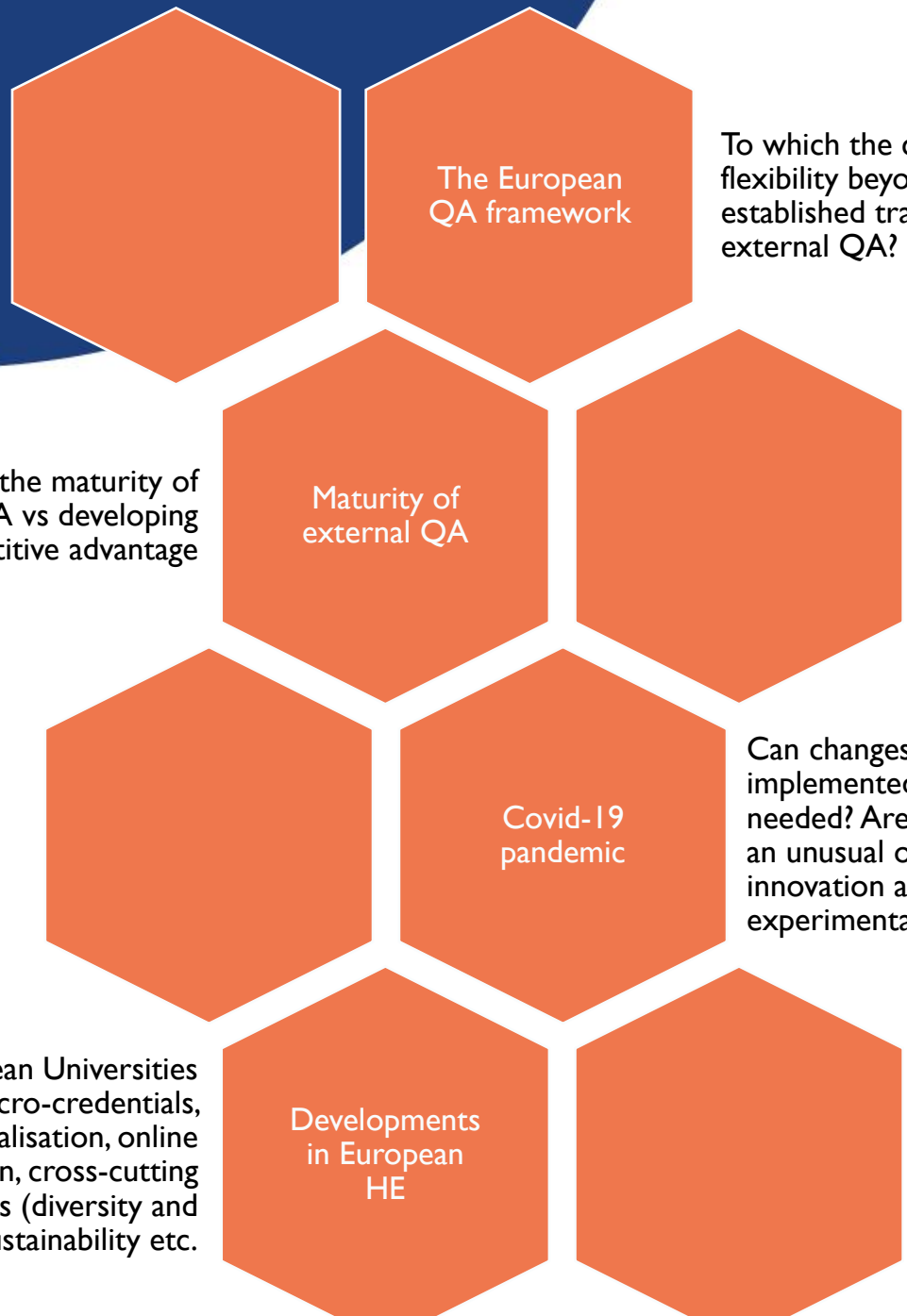
- Large majority of the agencies in the sample reflected on the need to diversify their external QA activities in the future (13 out of 17 agencies)
- Areas of action and/or plans:
  - Foster the response of learning and teaching to society's current challenges
  - Changing nature of agencies as organisations (monitoring and advisory function, sector analyses, centre of competence)
  - →what expectations can reasonably be placed on (E)QA?



MOTIVES AND/OR CAUSES OF DIVERSIFICATION OF EQA

- Addressing the 'evaluation fatigue' among higher education institutions → the need to maintain the relevance of external quality assurance (in half of observed QA agencies, and mostly in national QA bodies)
- Responding to the recent major policy-level developments in the external QA systems (Germany, France) or at the European level (introduction of European University Alliances) – 'marketisation of EQA', support to 'alternative procedures'
- Exploring new dimensions to EQA (e.g., the social dimension of HE and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals) → agencies to lay the first stone and serve as a model?
- Digitalisation of higher education provision → is EQA sufficiently following?
- Relevance of big data, data management, and automation of information flows that lead to new EQA activities and change the nature of agencies as organisations

DRIVERS BEHIND THE OBSERVED CHANGES



All-in all, when are conditions right for innovation to be beneficial rather than disruptive? At what point does the balance tip in favour of the desire to shake up the status quo?

THANK YOU

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