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Quality Assurance of Joint Educational Programmes

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Outline of presentation

Quality assurance is both an internal and an external process.

- Quality assurance of joint programmes: why, what, when, how.
- Accreditation /Approval of joint programmes
- Governance within joint programmes

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Why do we need a QA system?

- **To improve the programme**
- Good international practice (Bologna-Process, ESG-standards)
- Sustainability of the programme
- Legal obligations (the agreement, national legislation, national accreditation)
- Recruitment/PR (good evaluations = good PR)
- External stakeholders want it
- Individual institutions want it
- Students want it
- Teachers want it

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Bologna Process – Quality Assurance

- Promotion of **European co-operation in quality assurance** with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies. *(Bologna Declaration)*

- "We adopt the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher education Area as proposed by ENQA" (Bergen Communique, 2005)

- "We adopt the **overarching framework for qualifications** in the European Higher Education Area, comprising **three** cycles (including with national context, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), **generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences**, and, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles. (Bergen Communique, 2005)

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European Standards and Guidelines for QA (ESG)

Institutions should have a **policy and associated procedures** for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards.

They should also commit themselves explicitly to the **development of a culture** which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work.

To achieve this, institutions should **develop and implement a strategy** for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

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European Standards and Guidelines for QA (ESG)

Fundamental principles permeate the European Standards and Guidelines:

- the interests of students as well as employers and the society more generally in good quality higher education;
- the central importance of institutional autonomy, tempered by a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibilities;
- the need for external quality assurance to be fit for its purpose and to place only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions for the achievement of its objectives.

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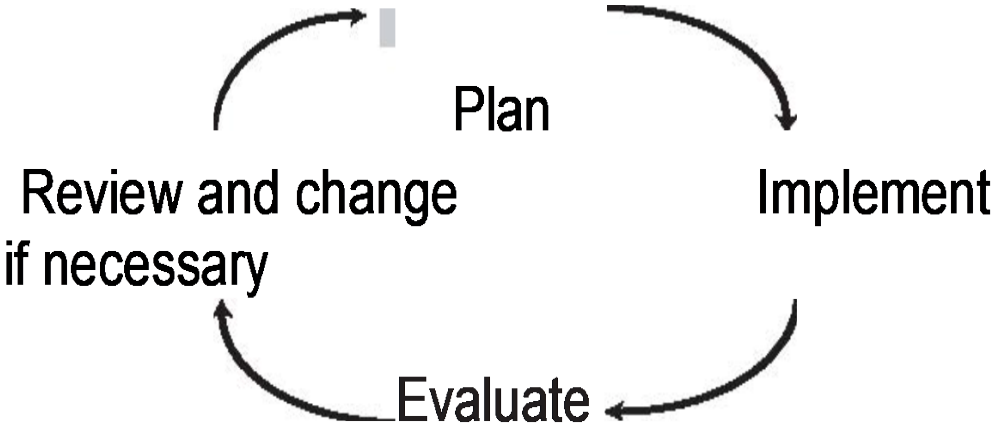
Quality assurance system

- Quality assurance should take place in accordance with a plan that ensures continuity and an overview. It should be a recurring process.



Good practice examples: Tuning projects, JOIMAN, EUA Guidelines for Quality Enhancement in European Joint Master Programmes, EM Excellence Website

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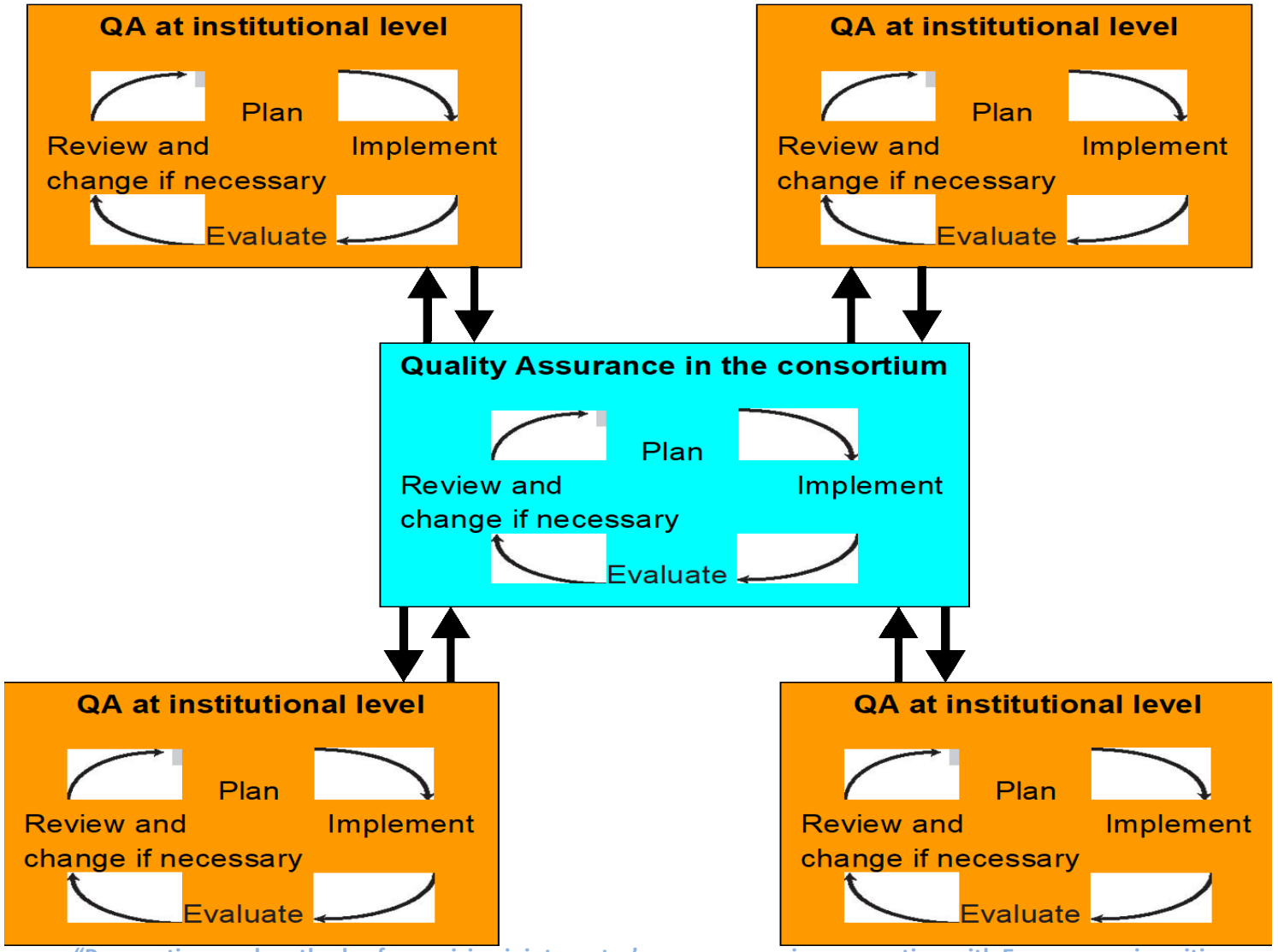
QA of joint programmes



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Quality Assurance: what and when

- Ouality assurance of
  - ✓ the programme as a whole
    - ✓ courses / modules
    - ✓ learning outcomes
    - ✓ workload / use of ECTS
  - ✓ administrativ & support services

- Quality assurance during
  - ✓ the development phase
  - ✓ the implementation phase

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Quality assurance and data security

- Responsibilities of each individual partner
  - ✓ Record of attendance, grades, etc
  - ✓ Secure data transfer
- Responsibilities of the coordinator
  - ✓ Securely collecting data from partners
  - ✓ Keeping records
- Responsibilities of the issuer of the certification
  - ✓ Issuing certificates that are difficult to falsify

Partners must be able to verify the authenticity of a student and a qualification to future employers, etc.

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Quality assurance and documentation

- If issuing a joint certification, the student must be registered at all institutions. It is important that all partners can document which candidates they have issued a qualification to (even if the student has not been there)
- If issuing separate certifications, the student must be registered at the institutions issuing the qualification. The other institutions are not formally part of granting the qualification.

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Good principles for a QA System

- Partners should adopt a plan for a quality assurance system before the programme starts, in order to ensure **predictability and transparency.**

- Partners should prepare their own courses or develop courses **jointly**. The QA should be the same as for ordinary courses at the institution.
- Courses should be approved by all the partners according to a system **jointly** decided on.

- Quality assurance procedures for all **joint** processes (such as admission, diploma design) should be decided **jointly**.

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Good principles for a QA System

- Each institution should be familiar with the other institutions' procedures for quality assurance of local processes.
- The study programme must be **coherent and holistic**. A system and procedures for regular evaluation of the programme must be prepared jointly.
- The collaborating institutions should establish a governing body that is in charge of the development and quality assurance of the study programme.
- System for reporting and documentation.

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Accreditation / Approval

- **Accreditation:** "a formal and independent decision, indicating that an institution of higher education and/or programmes meet certain predefined standards."

- **Accreditation is achieved through a multi-step process:**

1. self-evaluation or documentation submitted by the unit undergoing accreditation;
2. external assessment by independent experts; and,
3. the accreditation decision.

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European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA)

- ECA's membership consists of fifteen accreditation organisations from ten European countries.
- ECA was established in 2003 with the aim to achieve the mutual recognition of accreditation decisions among the participants.
- At the end of 2007 the first mutual recognition agreements were signed.
- Institutions would only need to apply for accreditation in one of the ECA member countries instead of obtaining accreditation in each country separately.

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Approval

- **Approval**: the higher education institution as been given the authority to establish its own educational programs at all or some levels.
- With this authority comes the responsibility and the expectation that the institution will follow the general standards of quality and accreditation in the country.

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Issues related to acceditation

- Find out/Know which regulations govern each institution/country.
- Find out/Know how long the process takes.
- Find out/Know what it takes (documentation, procedures, guidelines, etc).

All this should be looked at as early as possible in the development/planning stage.

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Models of governance

Levels of integration for management/governance usually depend on the size and complexity of the consortium, and on the choices made on previous levels (curriculum, mobility, kind of students targeted etc.).

Some examples of governing structures:

- Equal "weight" of partners (bilateral cooperation)
- Presence of a coordinating institutions (multilateral cooperation)
- Presence of a Central secretariat and local autonomous secretariats (at central or study programme level)
- Defined decision making bodies (steering committee, selection committee, QA committees, Stakeholders committees, students board etc.)

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Models of governance

Management models and kind of actors to be involved depend on choices made by the consortium, e.g.:

- Students to be targeted (international VS local)
- Financial model and sustainability plan (tuition fees, other sources)
- Application and selection procedures (joint or separate)
- Services for students

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From JOIMAN survey

	International office	Student Affairs office	Financial Office	Consortium secretariat	Other
Application	**23.6%**	**14.6%**	**0.0%**	**48.3%**	**13.5%**
Admission	**18.4%**	**18.4%**	**0.0%**	**46.0%**	**17.2%**
Enrolment and registration	**14.0%**	**54.7%**	**0.0%**	**20.9%**	**10.5%**
Mobility	**38.6%**	**5.7%**	**0.0%**	**39.8%**	**15.9%**
Financial monitoring	**10.3%**	**2.3%**	**34.5%**	**35.6%**	**17.2%**
Extra-curricular activities	**26.8%**	**13.4%**	**0.0%**	**28.1%**	**31.7%**
Certification	**9.6%**	**42.2%**	**0.0%**	**25.3%**	**22.9%**

Other: external services such as students' associations and former students for the organisation of extra curricular activities. And ICT offices for certification

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How QA and Governance are connected

The governance structure of the programme is the «skeleton» which makes it possible the implementation of the programme. The better the governance structure is defined and shared, the highest quality standards the programme will reach.

- joint coordination and external representation of the consortium;
- joint academic supervision and ownership of the programme;
- joint quality assurance (academic and administrative; internal and external);
- joint financial administration and decisions;
- joint student administration
- joint promotion of the programme and joint student recruitment.

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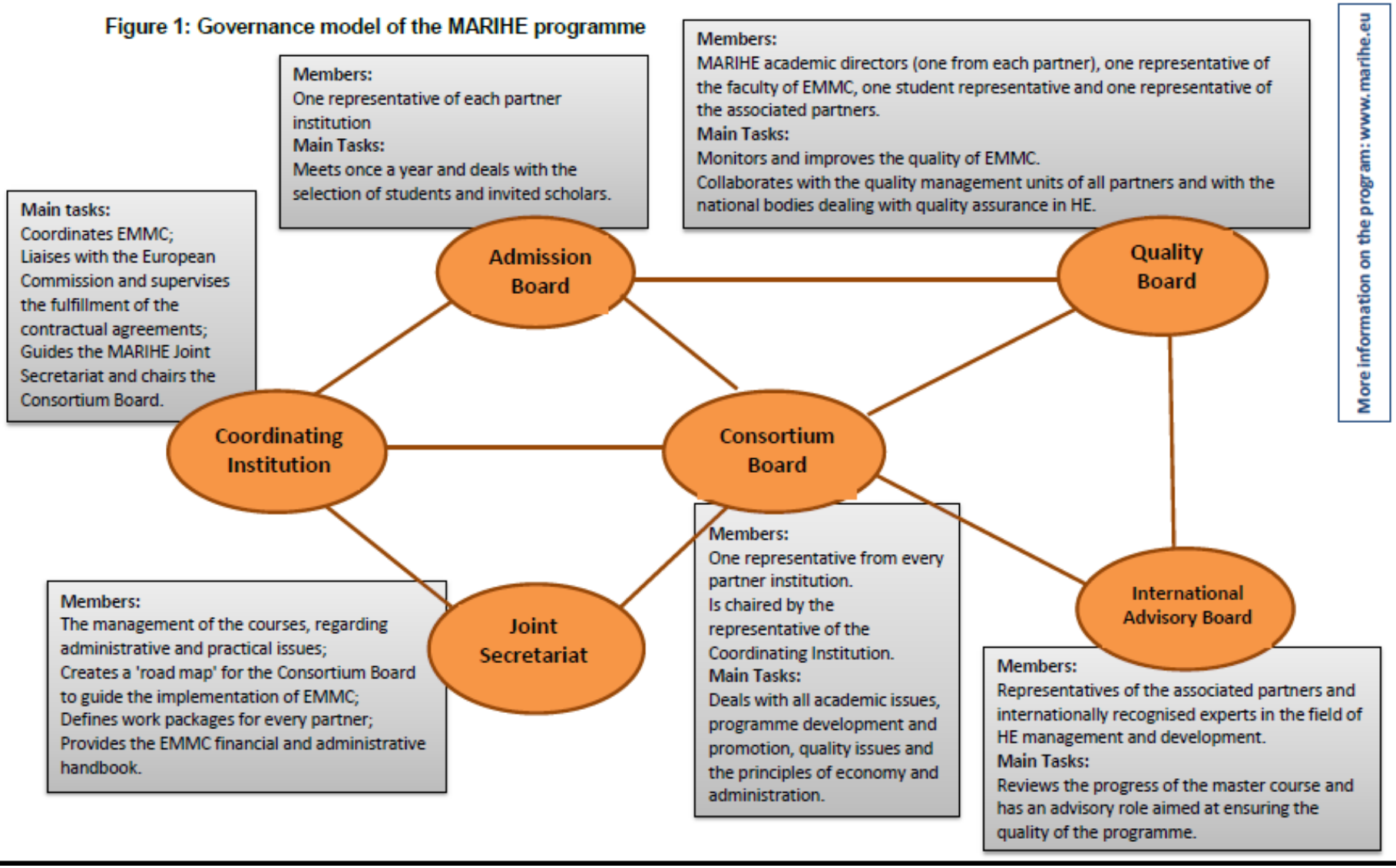
Example

Figure 1: Governance model of the MARIHE programme



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Thank you for your attention.

Useful resources:

- ECA: http://ecaconsortium.net
- Qrossroads: http://www.qrossroads.eu
- Brigde Handbook: http://erasmusmundus.it/files/fileusers/BRIDGE%20HANDBOOK%20WEB.pdf
- JOIMAN: www.joiman.eu