INQAAHE
Since 1991

QA fundamentals workshop: Practice and contemporary issues

Name: Dr. Fabrizio Trifiro' and Dr. MaryCath Lennon
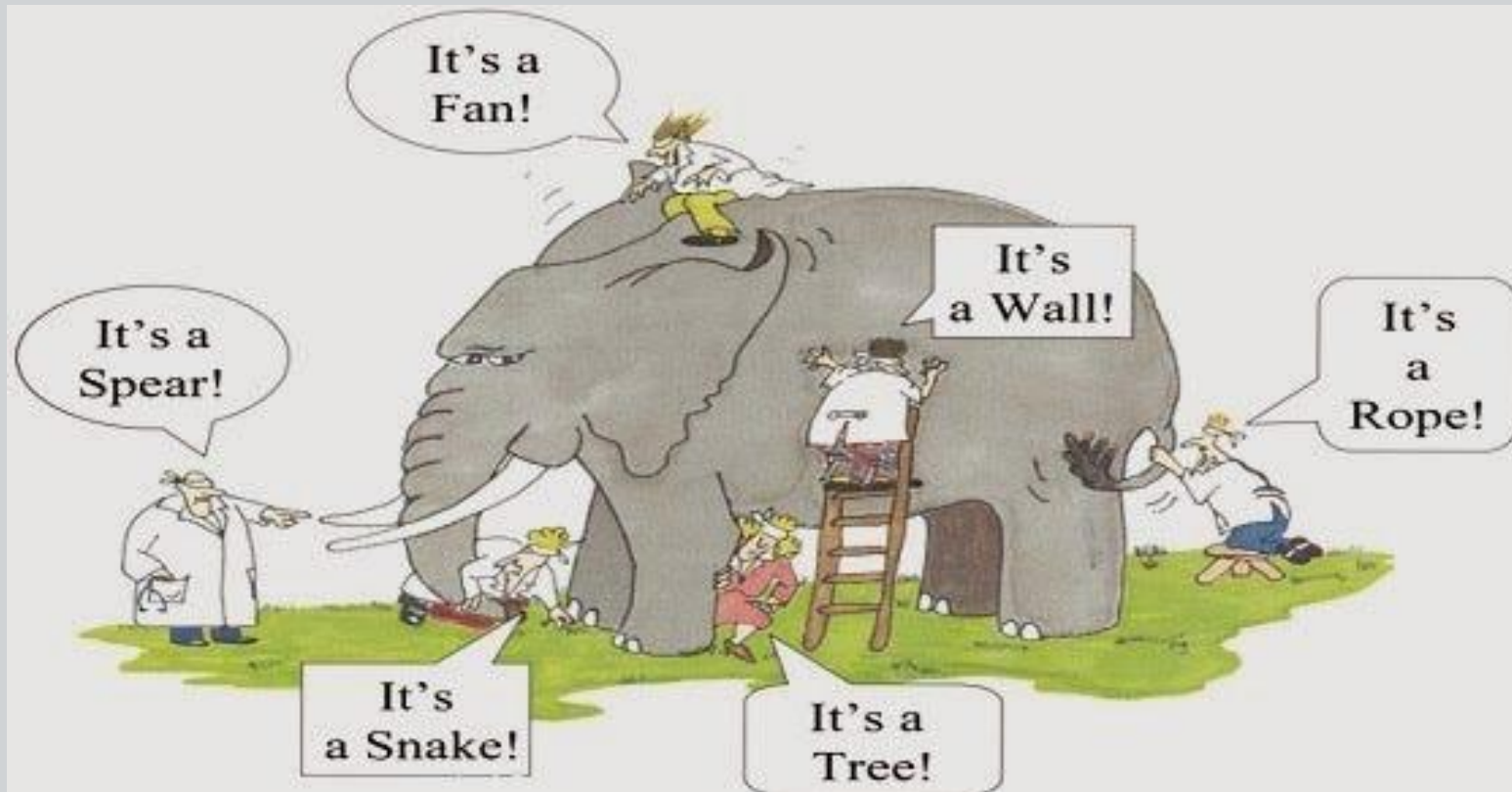
INQAAHE 2024 Forum, Bucharest

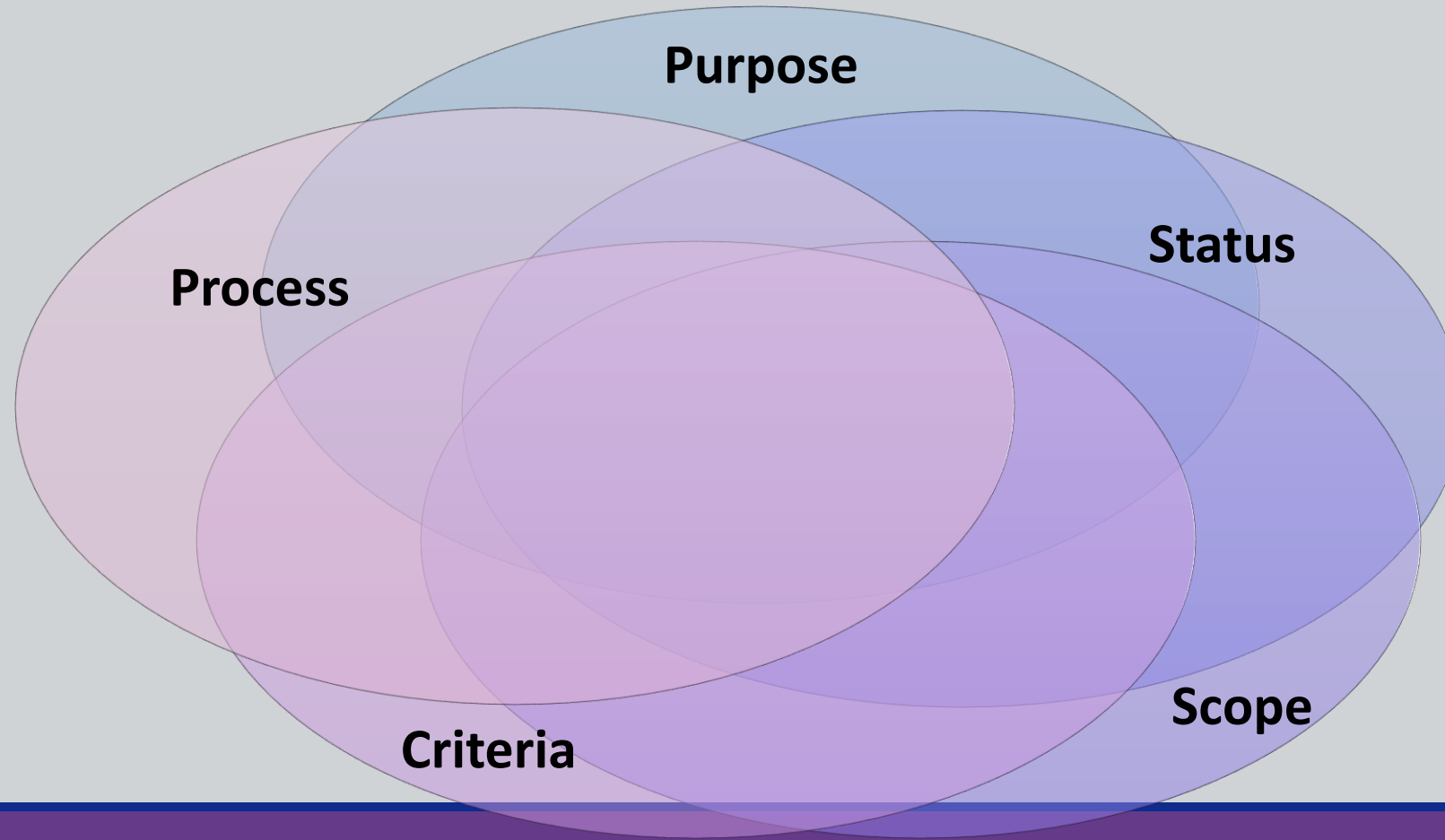10 June 2024

Workshop Learning Outcomes

At the end of this workshop participants will have had the opportunity to reflect on:

- the main dimensions and features of external QA, and benchmark their own QA systems against other ones and international practice
- appreciate the challenges and opportunities posed to external QA by innovation in HE provision, with a focus on Transnational Education and Micro-credentials
- understand the implications of the Global Recognition Convention for quality assurance and innovation in education provision
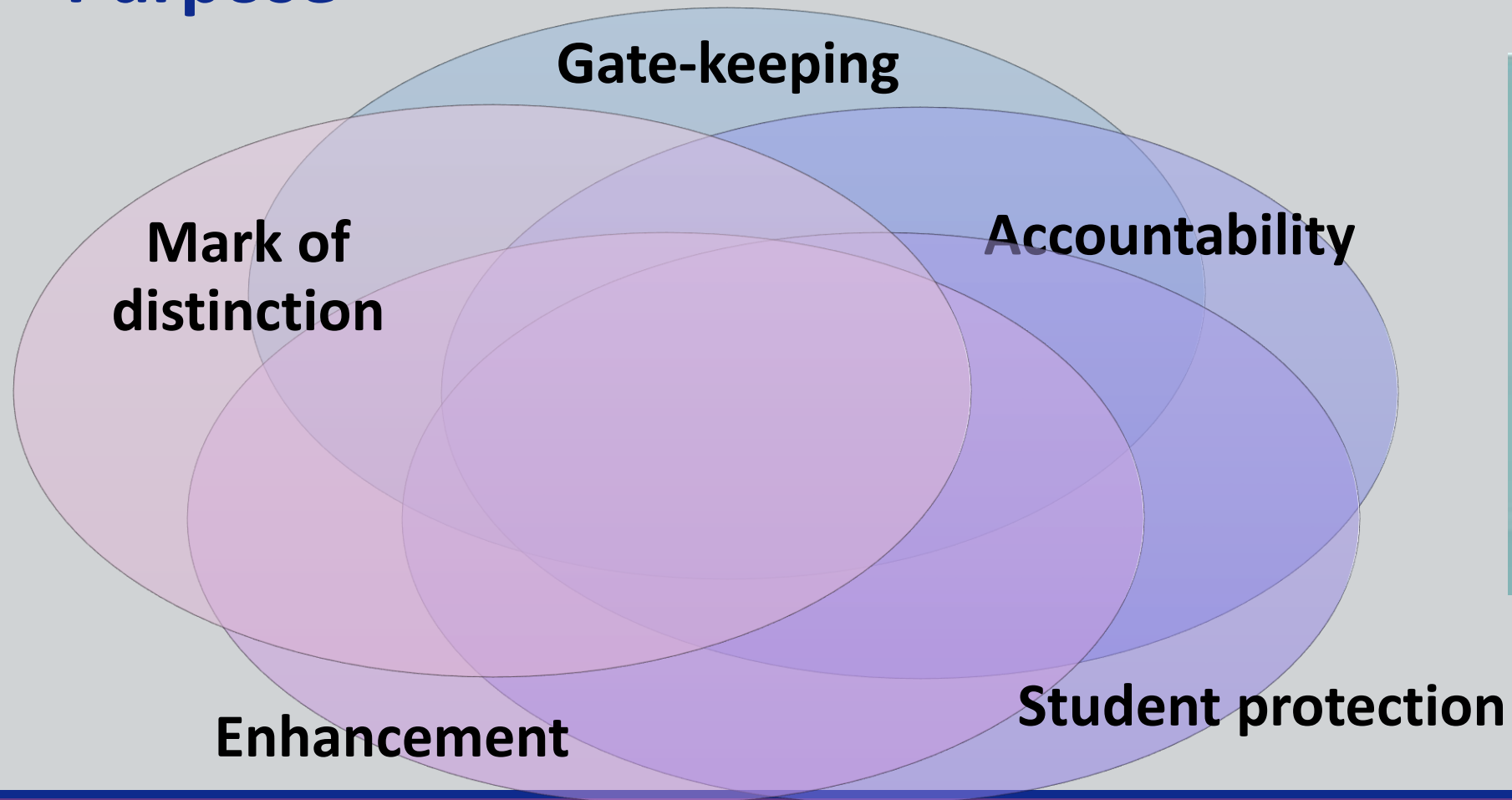
What is quality assurance?

Key dimensions of quality assurance

Purpose

Status

Process

Scope

Criteria

Purpose

Gate-keeping

Mark of distinction

Accountability

Enhancement

Student protection

Gatekeeping

Exercised by national regulators to entitle providers to be part of a national education system, awarding national qualifications, and accessing a range of benefits, such as public funding or eligibility to recruit international students.

Professional bodies similarly exercise a gatekeeping function when regulating access to professions through accreditation.

Accountability

Ensuring accountability for the different entitlements granted to education providers or broader social expectations (e.g. preparing graduates with right skills/competencies)

Instrumental to supporting the gatekeeping function to ensure that only those providers that can demonstrably meet set requirements about quality and standards retain privileges granted to them
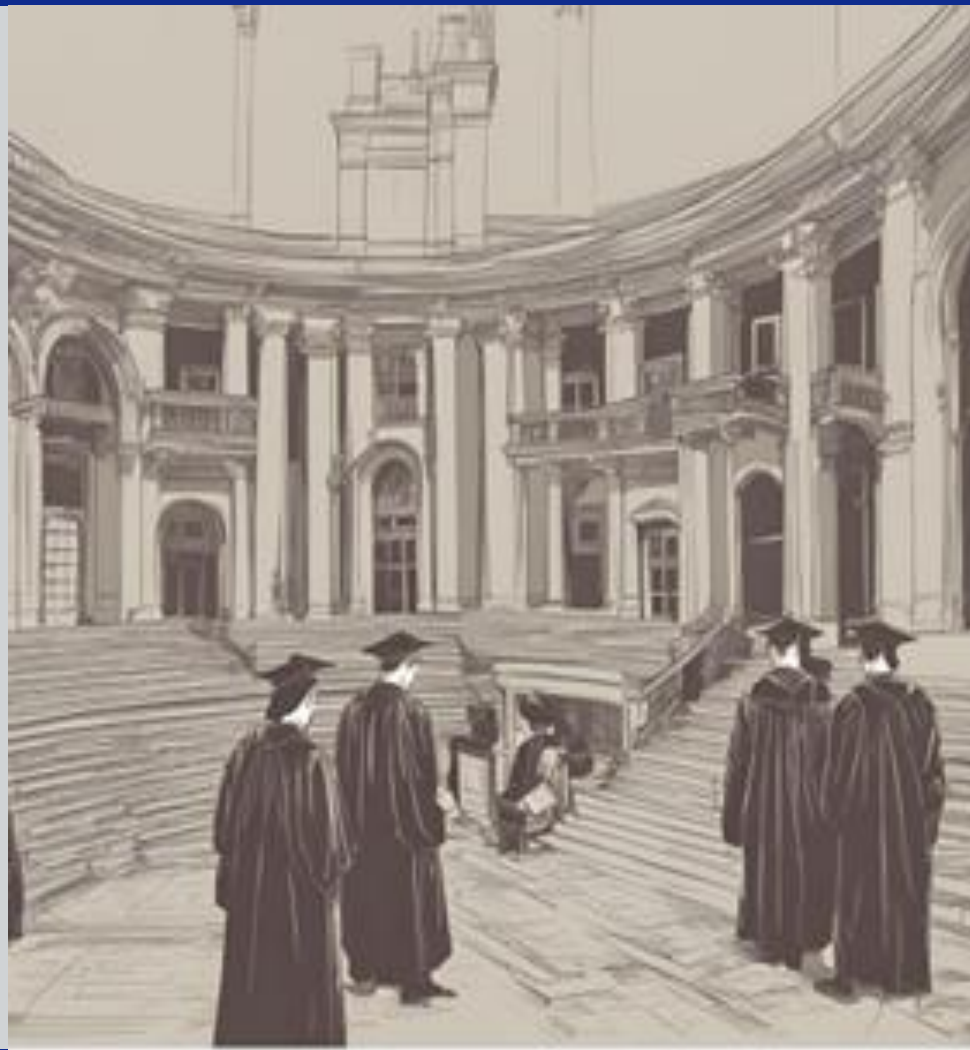
Student protection

Ensuring students get the best possible learning experience

Critical for providers to prepare competent graduates, and safeguard students' investment of time and resources (particularly important where students carry the financial burden of their education)

Enhancement

Informing and supporting enhancement or continuous improvement

QA bodies bodies engaging in enhancement activities typically support education providers by providing a range of guidance and advice services in different areas of teaching and learning

Mark of distinction

Ensuring students get the best possible learning experience

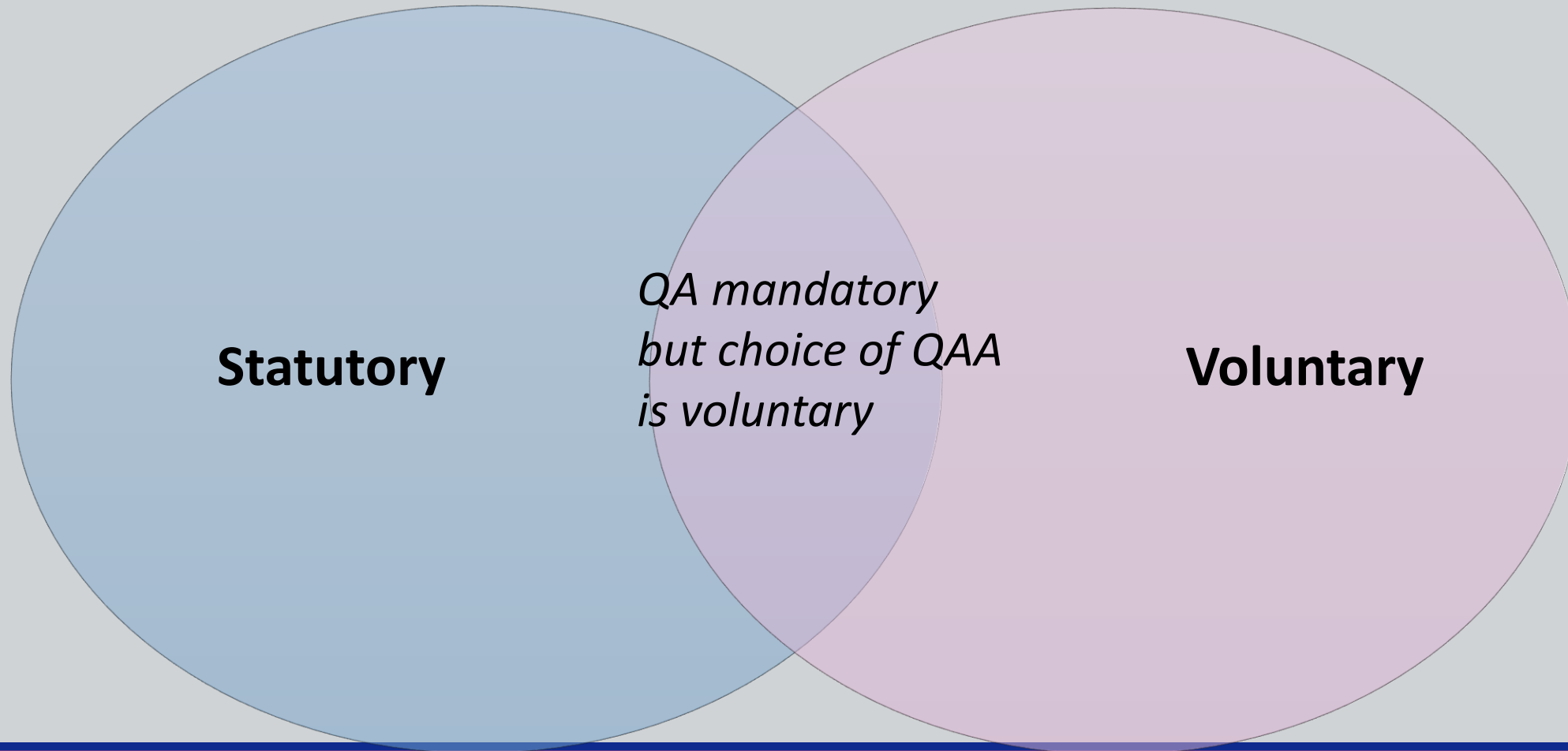Critical for providers to prepare competent graduates, and safeguard students' investment of time and resources (particularly important where students carry the financial burden of their education)

What other purposes could QA systems have?

Discuss in groups the range of functions that your QA agency / system has?

Status

Statutory

QA mandatory but choice of QAA is voluntary

Voluntary

What status does your QA body have?

Scope

HE and/or VET

Institutional

Faculty / discipline

Thematic

Programmatic

Professional, Distance learning, Internationalization, TNE, employability

Micro-credential
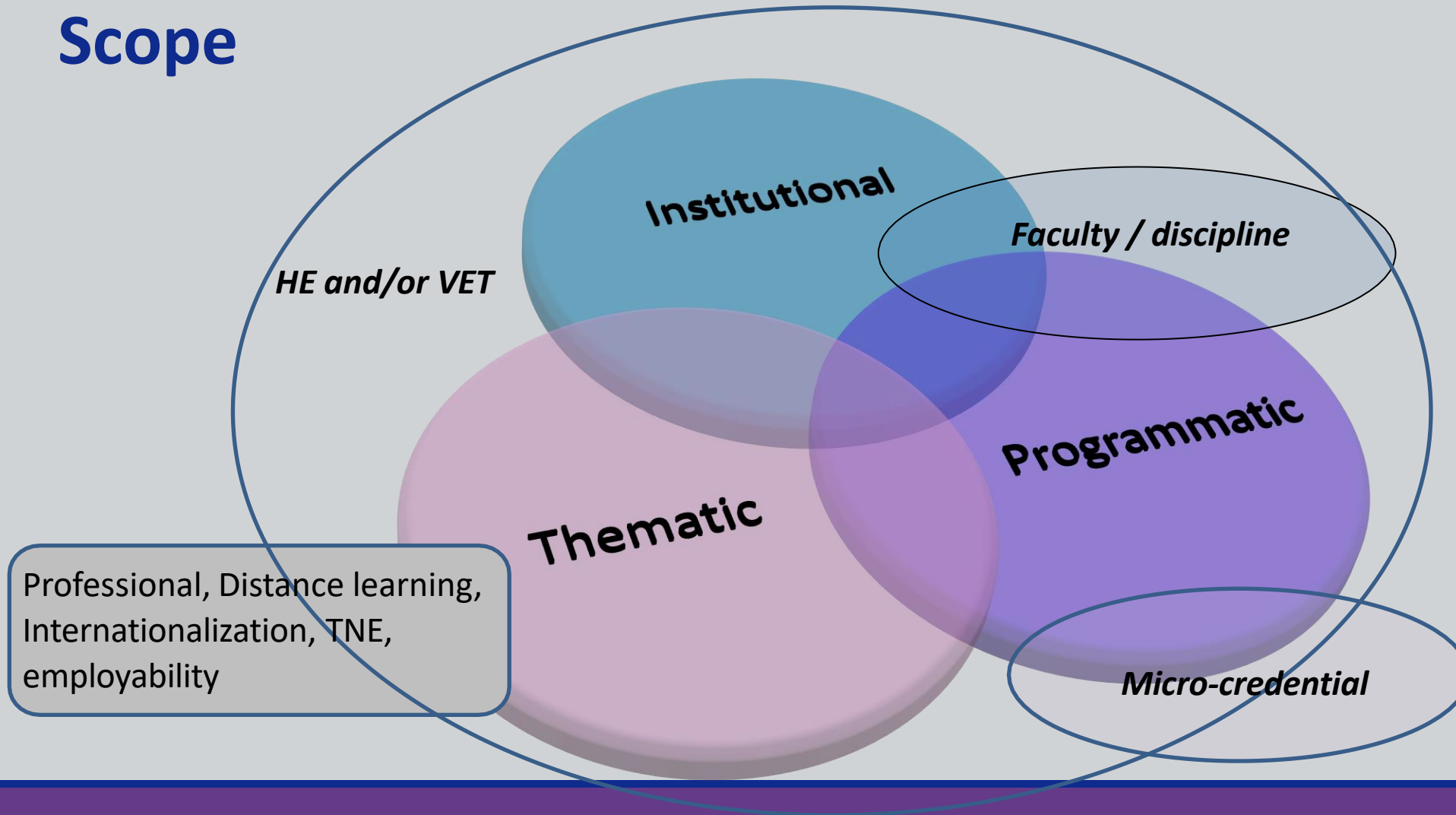
What is the scope of your QA system?

Criteria

Input   **Process**   **Outcomes**

Size of classes, labs, libraries, staff/student ratio, quals of teachers, etc,,

Governance arrangements, programme development, monitoring and review, assessment, etc..

Continuation, completion, progression into employment, student satisfaction
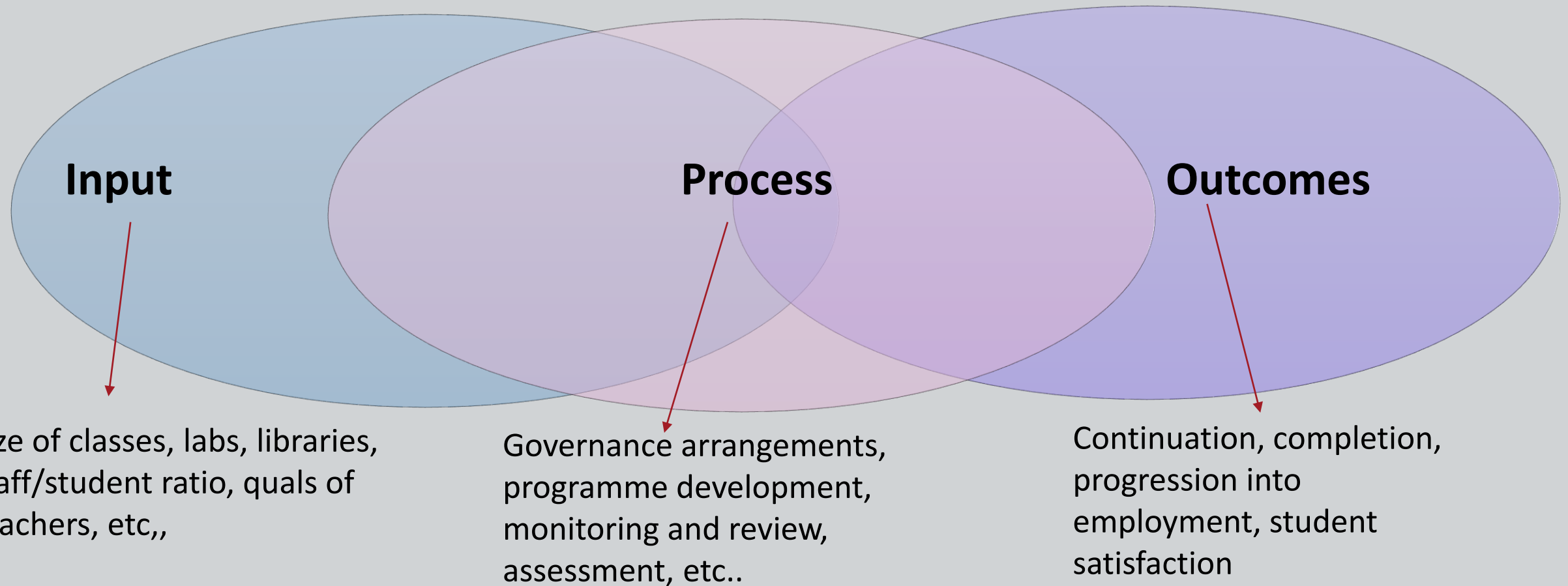
What type of criteria underpin your QA system/approach?

How is your QA system responding to the increasing availability and use of data?

Process (ESGs / ISGs)

Established wisdom based *on cyclical peer-review*

vs.

emerging practice such as *risk-based and metrics-driven*

Self-evaluation

follow-up & cyclical reengagement

Peer review

Desk-based analysis

Findings decision / report

Review meetings

New emerging approaches to QA

Risk-based approaches, metrics-driven and outcome-focused (e.g. Australia/TEQSA and England/OfS)

Not based on peer and cyclical review

Relying on annual monitoring of metrics such as:
- Continuation of studies
- Completion of studies
- Progression into employment,
- sStudent satisfaction

Fundamental principles of external Quality Assurance

HEIs hold the primary responsibility for quality assurance
- *External QA should enable and support HEIs in delivering this responsibility*

Stakeholder engagement in the development of standards and processes
- Key for the development of fit-for-purpose external QA

Transparency of criteria and consistency of implementation
- To underpin public confidence in external QA and its outcomes

Development of standards and processes

How have you developed your standards framework and methodologies?

Did you engage stakeholders in their development? Which?

Did you undertake public consultation?

Do you regularly review them?

Do you engage stakeholders in these reviews?

Transparent criteria and methodology

Do you publish the criteria underpinning your QA processes?

Do you publish the methodology?

Do you brief HEIs about the criteria and methodology and how these are implemented?

Are you criteria adapted to different scopes and types of QA processes?

Peer-reviewer recruitment and training

Do you have clear and open criteria for the recruitment of peer-reviewers?

Is recruitment through an open process?

Do you involve different stakeholders / perspectives in peer-reviews? (e.g. students, international experts, employers?)

Do you train peer-reviewers?

Self-Evaluation Document

Do you provide clear guidance on their development?

Do you provide templates?

Do you consider institutional burden? (e.g. request only necessary information)

Do you consider burden on reviewers? (e.g. request HEIs to clearly signpost necessary evidence in the SED)

Evidence based reviews and findings (1)

How do you make sure that QA reviews are evidence-based?

Do you triangulate evidence, including review visits and meetings with key stakeholders?

Do your meetings involve all key stakeholders?

Do you have measures in place to ensure that people in meetings can speak freely and openly?
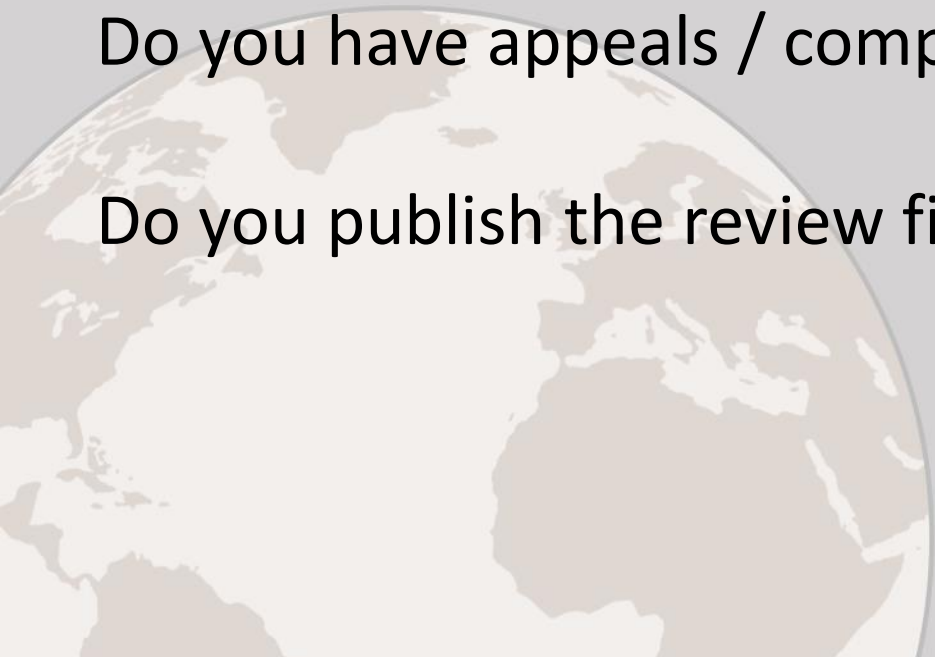
Who makes the final decisions?

Evidence based reviews and findings (2)

Do you allow HEIs to correct any factual inaccuracy?

Do you have appeals / complains policies and processes?

Do you publish the review findings?

Follow-up and cyclical review

Do you follow-up on the findings of the reviews? E.g. recommendations

When and how often? Do you have mid-cycle engagement/check-ins? Do recommendations come with particular timelines?

Are your reviews cyclical? Do you apply the same cycle to all HEIs?

Developments in HE and QA

Transnational Education (or Cross-Border Higher Education)

Micro-credentials

Transnational Education (TNE)

All types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based (UNESCO / Council of Europe *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of TNE*)

QA of **out-bound** TNE vs. QA of **in-bound** TNE

QA of out-bound TNE

Main question:

Ensuring that out-bound TNE is comparable to provision at the home campus (*UNESCO/OECD Guidelines* & *UNESCO/CoE Code of Good Practice*)

Not all sending locations have processes in place to QA out-bound TNE, and those that do use very different approaches (*e.g. USA / Australia / England / rest of the UK / Germany*)

QA of in-bound TNE

Main question:

The extent to which local regulations for national education provision should apply or bespoke additional requirements, or rely exclusively on sending countries' oversight

Not all receiving locations have processes in place to QA in-bound TNE, and those that do use very different approaches (*e.g. Malaysia, Hong Kong, UAE/Dubai, Sri Lanka*)

The Golden Rule of TNE: *comparability*

Learning outcomes vs. learning experience (inputs)

uncompromisable expectation vs **student expectation**

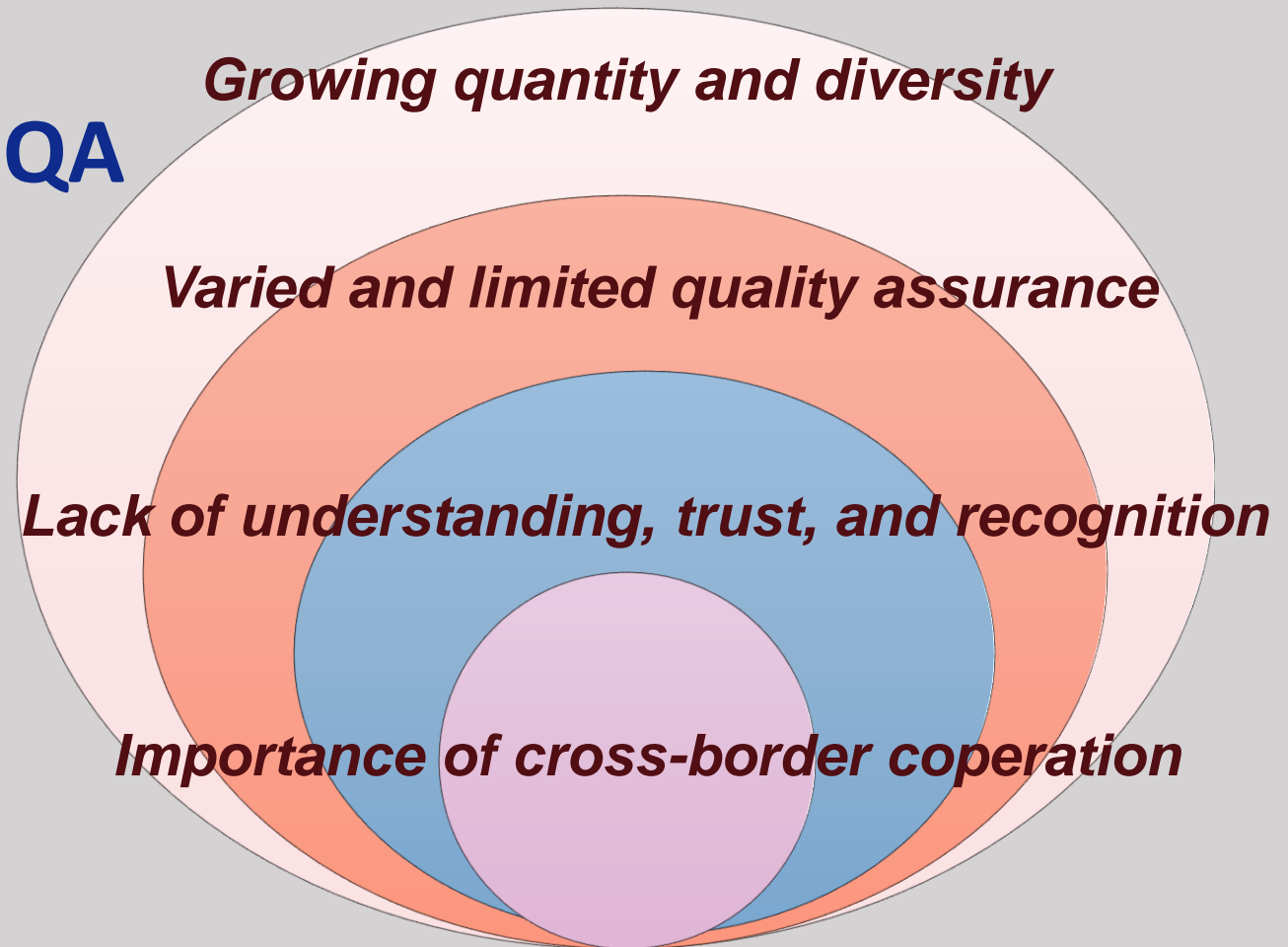Whilst **learning outcomes** *must be* safeguarded across modes/locations of delivery…

…with regards to the **learning experience,** should anything beyond what is required to support students in achieving the expected learning outcomes be regarded as a matter of *student expectation* (and choice)?

TNE and Comparability

What do you think should remain comparable when we say that TNE should be of comparable quality and standards to the provision offered at the home campus?

To what extent should TNE provision be allowed to differ to meet local education/training/skills needs?

The TNE Global Challenge: Importance of cooperation in QA

Growing quantity and diversity

Varied and limited quality assurance

Lack of understanding, trust, and recognition

Importance of cross-border coperation

Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education:
A Toolkit for QA Agencies

The QACHE Toolkit offers practical guidance on:

(1) *Information sharing*

(2) *Cooperation in quality assurance*
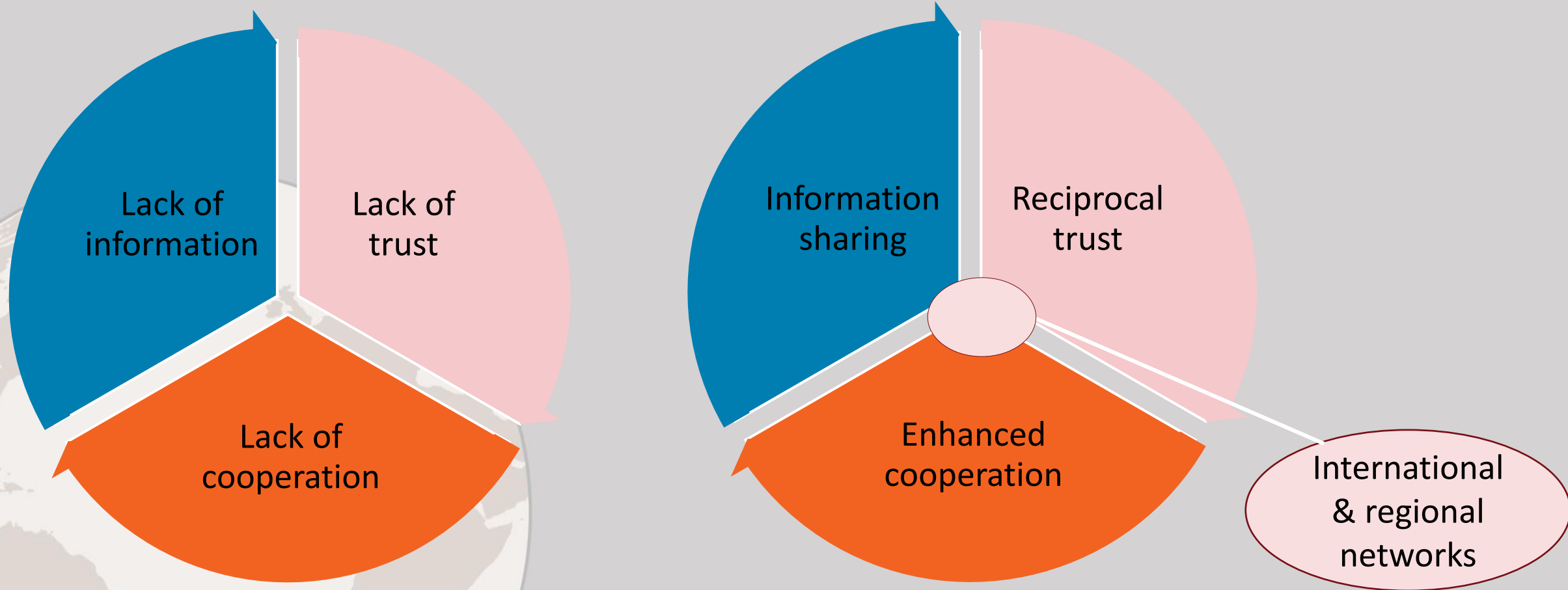
(3) *Networks of agencies*

QACHE recommendations

QAAs should share information about their respective QA systems and about cross-border providers, *with a view to facilitating mutual understanding and building mutual trust*

QAAs should seek to coordinate and cooperate in their review activity of cross-border higher education, *with a view to avoiding regulatory gaps and duplication of efforts, and to lessening the regulatory burdens on providers*.

Networks of quality assurance agencies should facilitate inter-agency cooperation and the implementation of the QACHE Toolkit

Cross-border cooperation in the QA of TNE

Lack of information

Lack of trust

Lack of cooperation

Information sharing

Reciprocal trust

Enhanced cooperation

International & regional networks

Cross-border cooperation in QA of TNE

To what extent do you / can you cooperate with international quality assurance bodies with regard to TNE?

Can/Do you recongise their QA decisions? Can/Do you undertake joint reviews?

Micro-credentials (UNESCO definition)

- Is a record of focused learning achievement verifying what the learner knows, understands or can do.

- Includes assessment based on clearly defined standards and is awarded by a trusted provider.

- Has standalone value and may also contribute to or complement other micro-credentials or macro-credentials, including through recognition of prior learning.

- Meets the standards required by relevant quality assurance.

(*Towards a common definition of micro-credentials*, UNESCO 2022)

Micro-credentials (Council of Europe definition)

- The record of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These Los will have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria.

- Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competences that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs.

- Micro-credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials.

- They are underpinned by QA following agreed standards in the relevant sector.

(*A European Approach to Micro-credentials*, Council of Europe 2022)

Quality assurance of micro-credentials

To what an extent should quality assurance processes be adapted because of the size and nature of the education programme?

MICROBOL:

To be fit for purpose and to avoid overburdening HEIs, the focus of external the quality assurance should be on the institutional approach to micro-credentials and their explicit inclusion in internal QA processes

External quality assurance should ensure that HEIs offering micro-credentials have a reliable and well-built system to monitor their quality internally (the primary responsibility for quality lies with HEIs)

Quality assurance of micro-credentials

Do you have specific processes to quality assure micro-credentials?

Do you quality assure providers of micro-credentials or each micro-credential?

Other MICROBOL Recommendations

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF): micro-credentials should be included in the NQFs, whenever possible, the decision to include them needs to be made at a national level. Clear criteria need to be set out (e.g. size, naming QA). A learning outcomes approach for inclusion is recommended.

Does your NQF include micro-credentials? What approach is / or should be adopted to include micro-credentials in NQFs?

Other MICROBOL Recommendations

National register: countries should develop official registers of micro-credential providers at national or regional levels, or incorporate them into existing registers, to support acceptance and recognition of micro-credentials

Do you have a national register of micro-credentials? Can it include alternative providers that offer only micro-credentials?

Would you find a quality label for micro-credentials useful? [Should there be specific quality labels for each credential or institutional level is sufficient?]

International Standards and Guidelines

Focused modular sections on:

- **Cross-border higher education**
- Cross-border quality assurance
- Online learning
- **Micro-credentials**

UNESCO Global Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning Higher Education

The Global Convention (GRC) is the first legally binding UN instrument on HE.

- Adopted on 25 November 2019, it entered into force on 5 March 2023 with the 20th ratification
- Currently 28 States are parties to the Convention.

Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Cabo Verde, Cote D'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Estonia, Finland, France, Guinea, Holy See. Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Lithuania, Nicaragua, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Senegal, Slovakia, State of Palestine, Sweden, Tunisia, UK, Uruguay, Yemen

Global Convention on the Recognition of
Qualifications concerning Higher Education
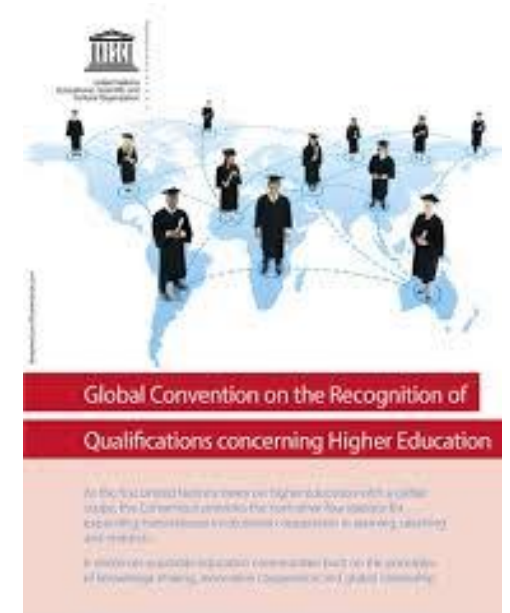
UNESCO's convention aims to make qualification recognition more transparent, equitable and efficient for greater mobility.

Global Convention key features

Scope
Covering all levels of higher education qualifications, including degrees, diplomas, and certificates.

Global Framework for Recognition
Providing an inclusive global framework for the fair, transparent, consistent, coherent, timely, and reliable recognition of qualifications concerning HE

Promote international cooperation
Supporting interregional initiatives, policies and innovations for international cooperation in HE

Facilitate Global Mobility
Promoting student and academic mobility for the mutual benefit of qualification holders, HEI, employers, and any other stakeholders

Emphasizes the centrality of QA
As the foundation upon which trust can be built and from which recognition is possible

Support flexible learning pathways
Emphasizing non-traditional modes of learning, and supporting lifelong learning opportunities for all, including refugees and displaced persons

UNESCO Education 2030 Agenda

A vision for the future of education captured by SDG 4

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

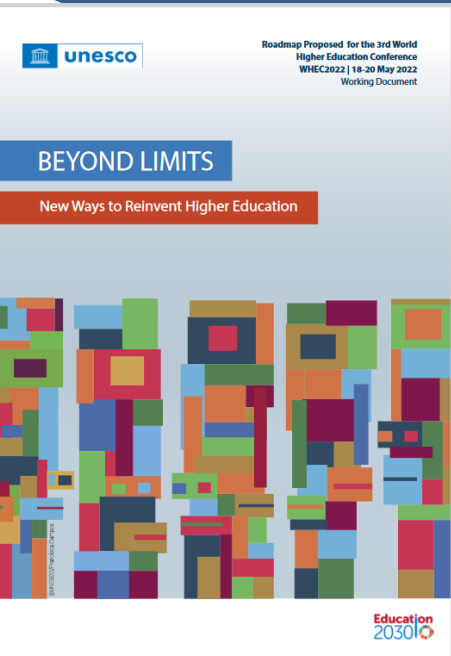UNESCO Roadmap to 2030, a shift in mindsets to

privilege cooperation over competition; diversity over uniformity; flexible learning pathways over traditionally structured ones; openness over more elitist viewpoints

Roadmap Proposed for the 3rd World
Higher Education Conference
WHEC2022 | 18-20 May 2022
Working Document

BEYOND LIMITS
New Ways to Reinvent Higher Education

Education 2030

Education 2030

Incheon Declaration
and
Framework for Action
for the implementation of
Sustainable Development Goal 4

Ensure inclusive and equitable
quality education and promote lifelong
learning opportunities for all

thank you