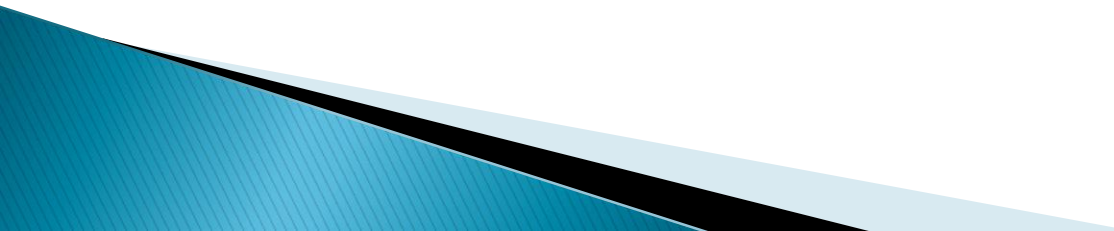# EQAA independence from the global discourse on QA

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Introduction

1. The nature of the knowledge on quality assurance.
2. QA knowledge circulation in a globalised higher education system and (travelling policies)
3. Local EQAAs repurposing QA knowledge according to their contexts (vernacular globalisation).
4. Necessary conditions for the local EQAA to maintain their independence.

1. Concepts

- Globalisation operates at the political, economic and cultural level and it has manifestations at policy level which are expressed in different fields of human activity. This is possible not only because there is faster and closer communication between national actors, but because supranational organisations play a role in the development, dissemination and implementation of specific policies. These constitutes what some authors call *travelling policies* (

- HE policy is a prime example of a globalised blueprint diffused through a variety of mechanisms. Particularly important among them is the work of the OECD, the WB and UNESCO.
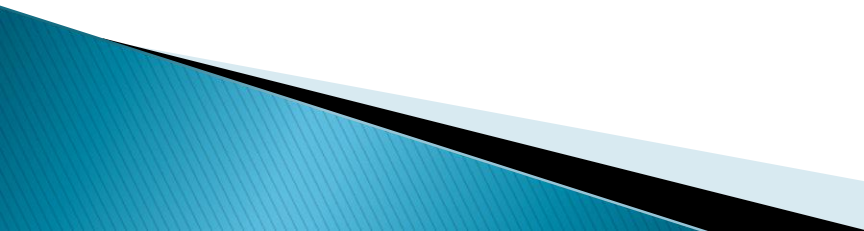
1. Concepts cont.

- The blueprint of HE reform is shaped by the notion of the knowledge economy and that search for greater accountability, effectiveness and responsiveness from HE in order to achieve greater competitiveness for national systems.
- Discursive field: "range of assumptions that are made implicitly in debating a particular topic or issue; ideas that are presumed and notions that are simply ruled out of bounds of possibility. A discourse field is an exercise in power". (F. Rizvi 2007)
- Within the broad discursive field of HE policy reform, QA has emerged as a discursive field on its own (Singh & Lange 2007).
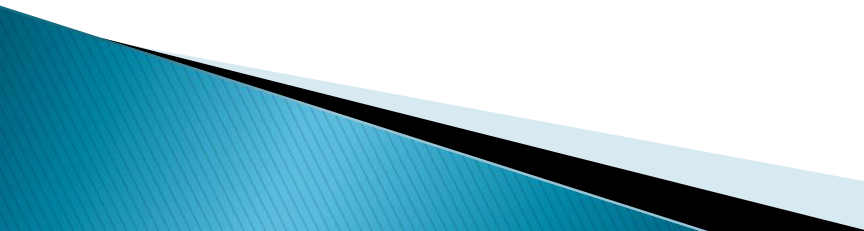
1. Globalising QA discourses

- QA is a globalising phenomenon: from 100 year old system (US) to a 2007 AAU initiative to strengthen QA in Africa.
- QA is shaping and being shaped by HE systems in transition across all continents.
- QA role explicitly articulated in multilateral organisations (OEDC, WB, Unesco)
- QA becoming a professional field of knowledge, activities and competence.
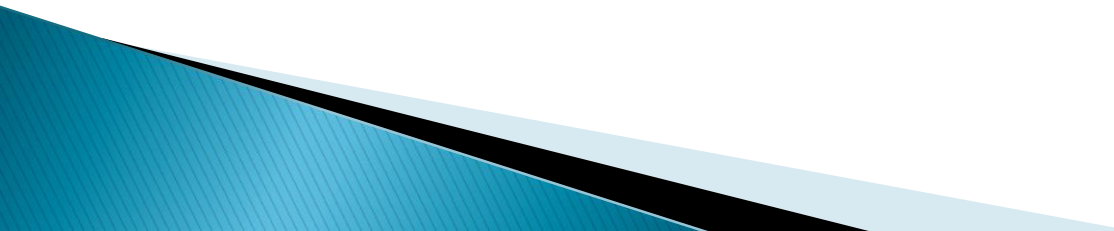- Role of INQAAHE (200 members) and *Quality in Higher Education,* regional networks.

2. QA as travelling policy

- Greater need for accountability and transparency an ubiquitous theme which have altered the face and practice of HE in developed and developing countries.
- QA between accountability and improvement.
- Tools of the trade: accreditation, audits, capacity development.
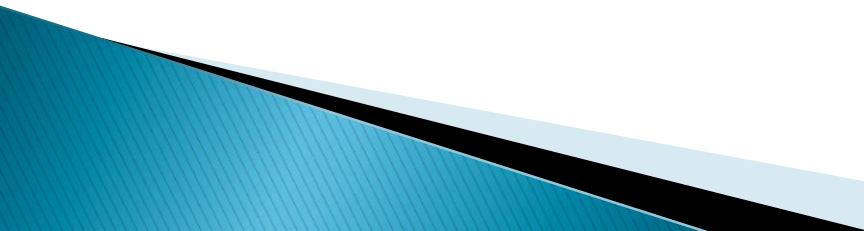- Capacity development: OECD, WB, INQAAHE, consultant networks.

3. Vernacular globalisation

- The role of historic/social context in policy formulation.
- Driving factors and purposes of QA.
- Purpose: attain comparable levels of quality in a stratified system.
- Drivers: need for information, request for transparency.
- If we confuse purpose and drivers we run the risk of underplaying the internal purposes of HE and the reason for quality improvement.

3. Vernacular Globalisation cont.

- What is the local, regional problem to which QA is the answer.
- Regional and local development agenda, HE policy agenda and the role of QA in that context
- Guard against disengagement with international discourse. Avoid insularity.
- Pay attention to the possibility of broader drivers and purposes of QA. Issues of social justice and democratisation in developing countries
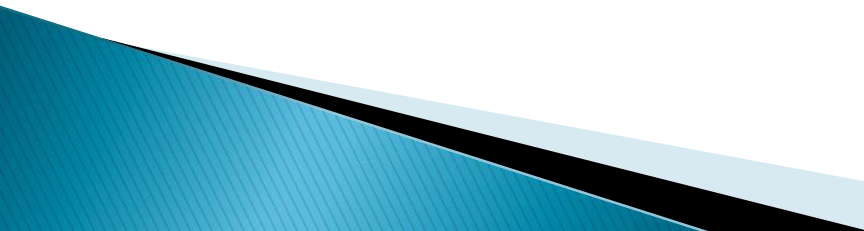
3. Vernacular globalisation

- Context: inside the HE system (power and differentiation) has to have a bearing on the approach and the focus of EQAAs.
- However, if the instruments are more or less fixed, if good practice has been already settled, if there are not many permutations when it comes to implementing specific instruments,
- How to mediate, re-appropriate, repurpose the international discourse?

4. Conditions for independence

- Move from the surface of the practice to the knowledge that underpins it.
- Identify the assumptions that inform the QA as a discursive field.
- QA is about judgement but this is a melange of values and premises and ideological perspectives which are often contradictory and in tension with each other. This is seldom brought to the surface.
- Contestation about the purposes, benefits and costs of QA and the appropriate methodologies to deliver the purposes and benefits.

4. Conditions for independence

- Assumptions about power and power relations among key constituencies in higher education.
- Assumptions about behavioural psychology (what motivates, influences, incentivises, produces resistance)
- Assumptions about organizational change, the relationship between cause and effect, and between knowledge and action.
- Assumptions about knowledge, evidence, and the nature and processes of knowing, teaching and learning.

4. Conditions for independence

- Assumptions about the role of HE, academic freedom, academics and academic work, etc.
- However, there is no necessary connection between more sophisticated hermeneutical grasp of QA and an improvement in its operations or an increase in its efficacy.
- But without a sophisticated grasp of QA as a discursive field agencies (particularly in developing countries) run the risk of buying travelling toolkits that might not answer to their context needs.