



# Quality Assurance Procedures of the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance

CUBRIK round table  
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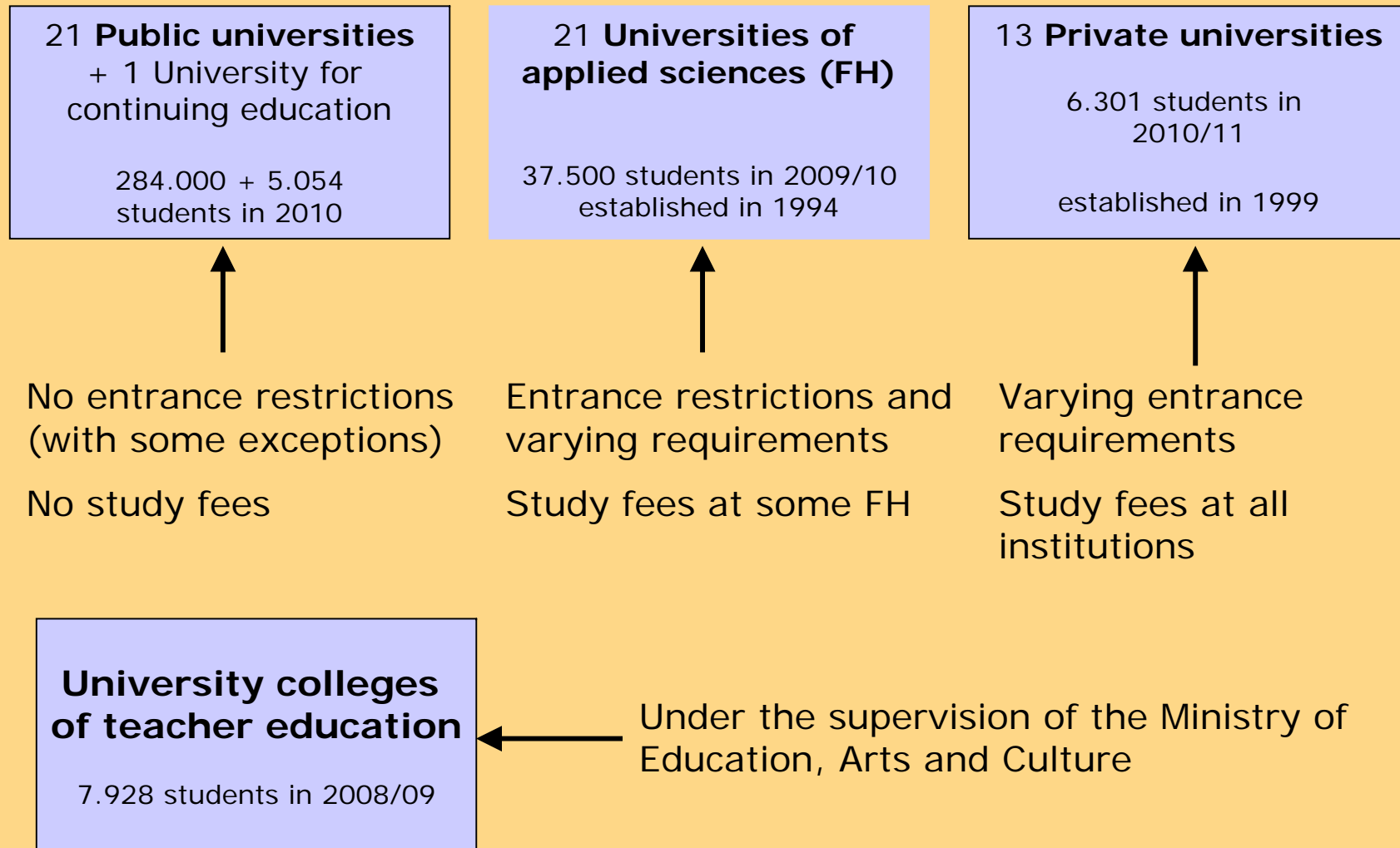
# Presentation outline



- Higher Education in Austria
- Quality Assurance in Austria
- AQA procedures and experiences
  - Quality Audit
  - Programme Accreditation

# Higher Education in Austria

# Higher Education in Austria





# Quality Assurance in Austria

# Quality Assurance in the Postsecondary Sector



**Public universities**  
+ University for  
Continuing Education

No obligatory  
accreditation

External audit by AQA  
or other agency

**Universities of  
applied sciences**

Obligatory accreditation  
by Austrian FH Council

Regular evaluation by  
AQA or FH Council

**Private universities**

Obligatory accreditation  
by Accreditation Council

Regular evaluation by  
AQA or AC

**University colleges  
of teacher education**

No obligatory accreditation  
Voluntary external audit

## Public universities (University Act 2004)

- Autonomy status
- Performance agreements
- Obligation to set up an internal QM system
- Practice of international peer reviews, benchmarking, certification/accreditation

## Fachhochschul Act 1993

- Diversification of HE → vocational education on scientific basis

## Private Universities Act 1999

- Diversification of HE
- Supply by private organisations with high autonomy



- AQA is an independent agency for quality assurance, evaluation and certification for the entire HE sector
- AQA was founded by relevant stakeholders of the Austrian HE system in 2003
- Quality, scientific standards and independence are assured by the Scientific Steering Group (Chair: Anke Hanft, University Oldenburg)
- Certification and accreditation decisions are taken by the independent Certification and Accreditation Commission (Chair: Peter Findlay, QAA)
- AQA implements QA-procedures according to national and European standards
- AQA is a member of ENQA and registered in EQAR
- AQA carries out QA-procedures in Austria and European countries

# Procedures and Activities



	Public Universities	Universities of Applied Sciences	Private Universities	Universities outside Austria
<b>Procedures</b>				
Quality Audit	■	■	■	■
Support for the development of QM-processes	■	■	■	■
Evaluation/accreditation of study programmes/ organisational units	■			■
Evaluation/certification of study programmes/ organisational units		■	■	
Benchmarking	■	■	■	■
<b>fields of activity</b>				
Studies and thematic evaluation	■	■	■	■
Public relation/ Dissemination/ Information	■	■	■	

# AQA procedures

## Quality Audit

## Objective

- Certification of the quality management system of a higher education institution

## Organisation

- The quality audit is conducted through a peer-review under guidance of the agency

# Quality Audit: Guiding Principles



- Studies, teaching and further education
- Research and development
- (Human resource management and development)
- (Internationalisation and mobility)
- ▶ Cross-sectional areas

Assessment of the QM on its organisation and effectiveness

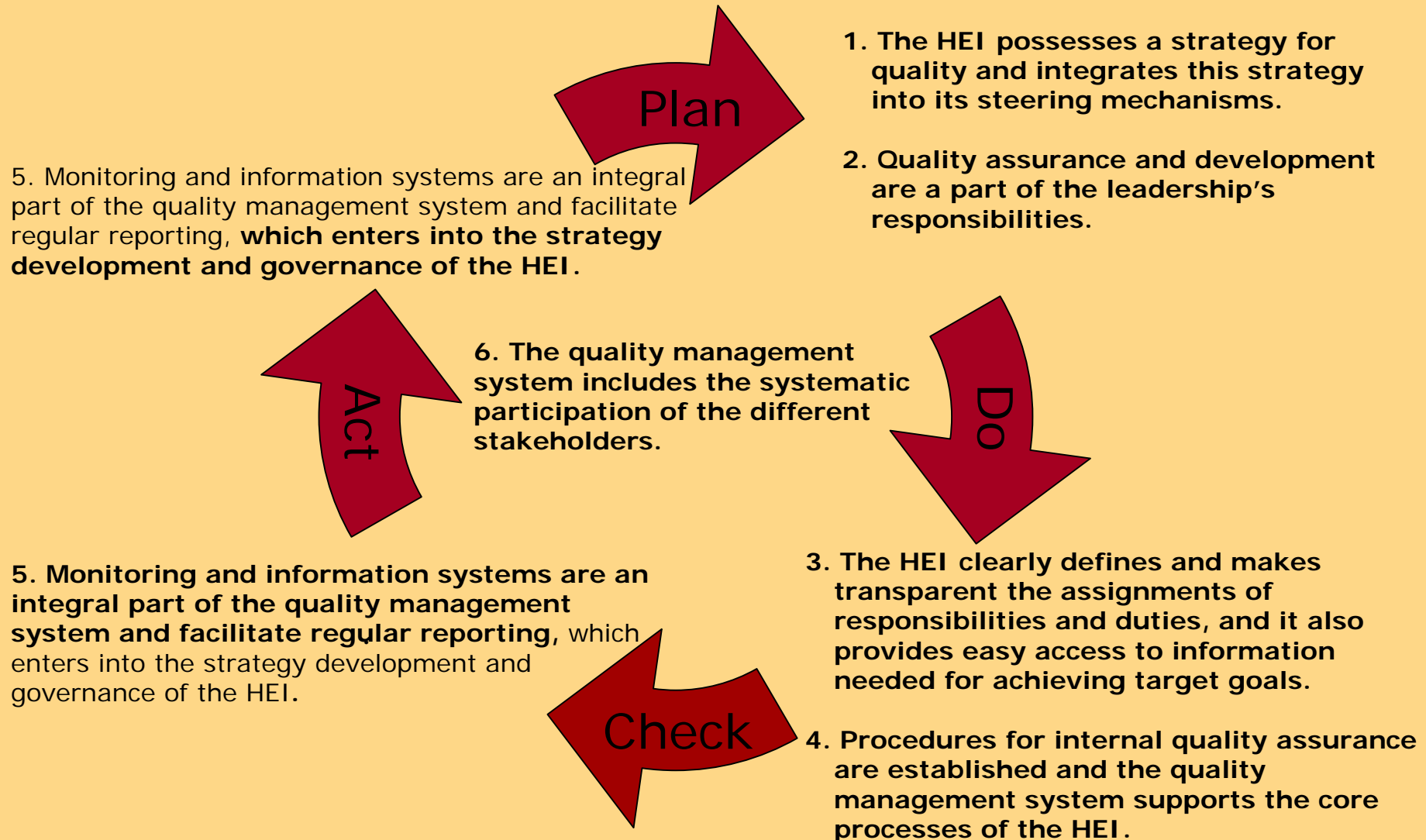
Evaluation of the implementation in one key process per performance area

# Quality Audit: Standards



1. The HEI possesses a strategy for quality and integrates this strategy into its steering mechanisms.
2. Quality assurance and development are a part of the leadership's responsibilities.
3. The HEI clearly defines and makes transparent the assignments of responsibilities and duties, and it also provides easy access to information needed for achieving target goals.
4. Procedures for internal quality assurance are established and the quality management system supports the core processes of the HEI.
5. Monitoring and information systems are an integral part of the quality management system and facilitate regular reporting.
6. Quality management system includes the systematic participation of the different stakeholders.

# Quality Audit: PDCA-cycle and standards



# Quality Audit: Assessment



Assessment level 1:

Assessment of the organisation and structure of the QM-system



Assessment level 2:

Assessment of evidence regarding the QM-system's effectiveness in executing and accomplishing the goals of the key processes

Set into relation with assessment of six standards

Audit standard	Not visible	In development	Considerable development	Advanced system	Not classified / comments
1					
2					
3...					

# Quality Audit: Procedures



- Preparation of the procedure and selection of experts for the peer review
- Analytical quality documentation of the HEI: organisation of institutional quality management
- 1st site visit at HEI by experts with focus on institutional quality management system
- Self evaluation of selected key processes by the HEI
- 2nd site visit at HEI by experts with focus on quality management of key processes
- Expert report on the evaluation results
- Certification decision by the Certification and Accreditation Commission and follow-up
- Duration of the whole procedure: 12 – 18 months

## Orientation of the audit standards along the QM-cycle

- Insufficient illustration of processes, but mainly detailed descriptions of single instruments or measures
- Incomplete QM-cycle, often planning stage only
- Absence of last part of QM-cycle (ACT) – how does the HEI prove if it works and how are objectives adapted?

## Evidence of implementation of the HEI's QM-system

- Key processes should be relevant for the individual profile of the HEI and not only for micro-projects
- Challenge: quality (culture) is more than a phrase in the mission statement
- Internal and external presentation of the QM-system is essential

## Quality Audit: Experience (process)



- Consensus on the character and the objective of the audit and the terminology
- Analytical character of the self-documentation of HEI
- Key data of the HEI (faculties, staff, budget, students etc.)
- Quality of peer experts, knowledge of the Austrian HE system and understanding of audits
- Design of the site visit(s)
- Role of AQA as supportive (not consulting) agent for HEI and peer experts as well
- Quality of the expert report

# AQA procedures

## Programme Accreditation

## Programme accreditation: Objective



- Programme accreditation of study programmes on Bachelor and Master level as well as joint programmes
- Standards and criteria correspond to programme accreditation at German HEIs
- Accreditation shows:
  - study programme meets national and European quality standards
  - study programme fulfils relevant qualification objectives
  - study programme and its effectiveness are subject to constant assessment



- Independent and no influence by politics
- Fairness of the procedure
- Experience and expertise in quality assurance
- Internationally experienced and interdisciplinary staff
- Orientation towards service and partnerships

## Programme accreditation: 10 criteria



1. Qualification objectives of the study programme concept
2. Conceptual integration of the study programme into the system of studies
3. Study programme concept
4. Academical feasibility of studies
5. Examination system
6. Facilities
7. Transparency and documentation
8. Quality assurance and development
9. Study programmes with a special profile
10. Diversity, gender justice and equal opportunities

## Programme accreditation: Procedure



- ▼ Preparatory discussion between the HEI and AQA
- ▼ Preparation of the self-documentation (application) by the HEI
- ▼ Nomination of the expert group by AQA
- ▼ Briefing of the expert group by AQA
- ▼ On-site visit by the expert group
- ▼ Preparation of the expert report and forwarding (without the recommended decision) to the HEI for ist comments
- ▼ If necessary, revision of the report by the expert group
- ▼ Accreditation decision by the Certification and Accreditation Commission of AQA
- Assessment of the fulfilment of conditions

- Quality of self-report and documents provided by HEI
- Knowledge of the national HE system and in the relevant discipline
- BOLOGNA
- Experience of peer-experts with accreditations
- Quality concept of HEI, agency and experts
- Design of on-site-visit
- Expert report
- Conditions and recommendations for the HEI



Thank you for your attention!

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