European Quality Assurance
Register for Higher Education

eqar

Establishment and Functioning of EQAR

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Outline

1. Mission and Objectives
2. Ownership and Legal Form
3. Governing Structure
4. Funding
5. Registration Process
6. Conclusion

0. Pre-conditions

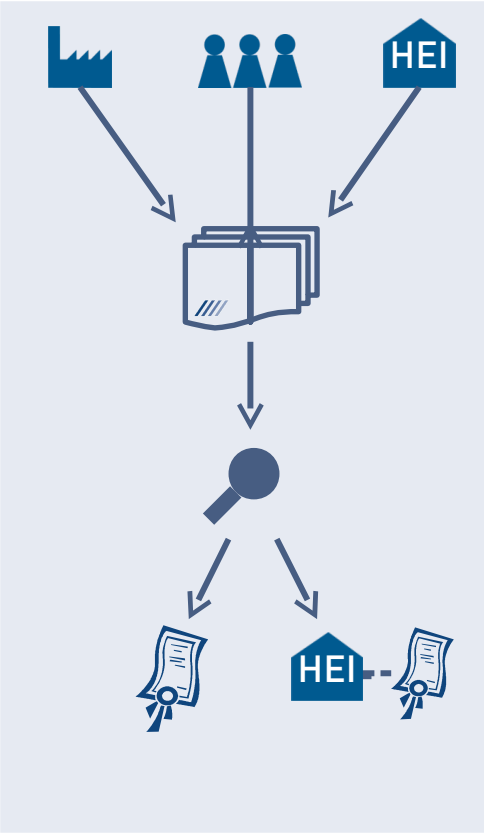
- Bologna Process
  - European governments cooperating and coordinating policies in higher education since 1999
  - Not a formal treaty, but an institutional framework
  - European HE Area covering 47 countries
- Stakeholder cooperation
  - Well-established stakeholder umbrella organisations, with geographical scope broadly equivalent to Bologna countries
  - E4 (agencies, institutions, students) cooperating since 2003
- Council of Europe
  - Intergovernmental organisation, dealing with education issues inter alia, covering same area as Bologna

0. Milestones

2005	European HE ministers „**welcome the principle** of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review“
2007	Ministers „**welcome the establishment of a register** by the E4 group, working in partnership, based on their proposed operational model“
2008	EQAR **founded** by the E4 Group
2011	**External evaluation** of EQAR
2012	Ministers agree to „ allow E**QAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA**, while complying with national requirements“
2013	**Strategic Plan** 2013-2017

1. Mission & Objectives

"coherent quality assurance framework for the EHEA in which HEIs have the freedom to turn to any EQAR-registered agency [...], and in which qualifications are thus universally recognised"



Transparency and Information

- Information on bona fide agencies
- Prevent „accreditation mills" from gaining credibility

Trust and Recognition

- Enhance trust in and recognition of QA results
- Support recognition of qualifications/periods of study
- Allow registered QA agencies to operate across the entire EHEA, HE institution to choose agency

Manage a register of quality assurance **agencies that comply substantially with the European Standards and Guidelines** (ESG)

Perspective of QAA's

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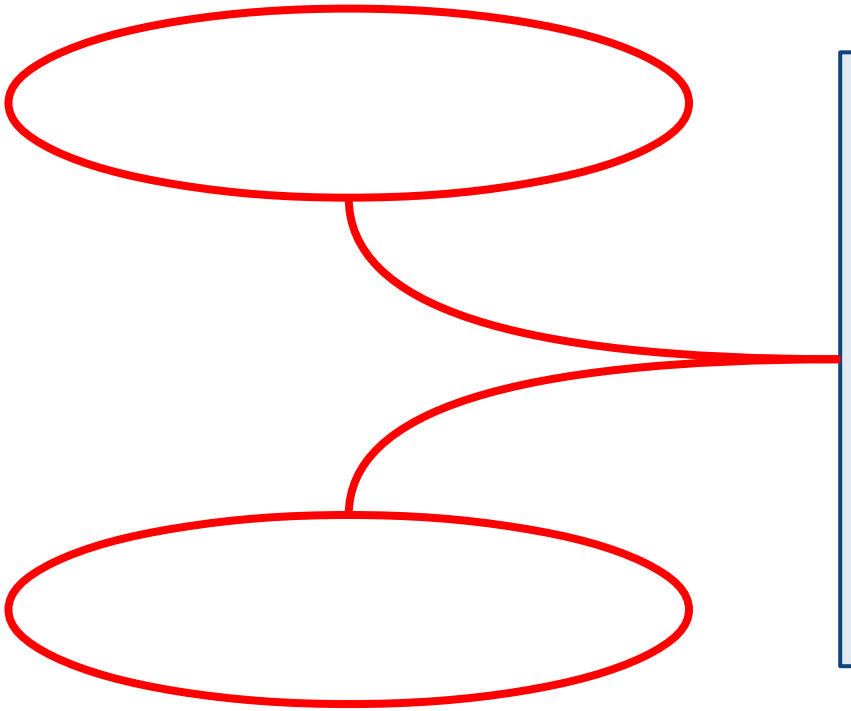


Some examples:

- Automatic recognition of degrees accredited by EQAR-reg. QAA (BE Flemish Community)
- Institutions can choose to be accredited/ evaluated/ audited by foreign EQAR-reg. QAA (AL, AM, AT, KAZ, LI, LT, RO)
- Recognition of accreditation limited to joint degrees and/or TNE (DE, DK, PL)

➔ More tomorrow …

2. Ownership and legal form

- Founded by the "E4 Group":

ENQA EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

esu european students' union

EUA European University Association

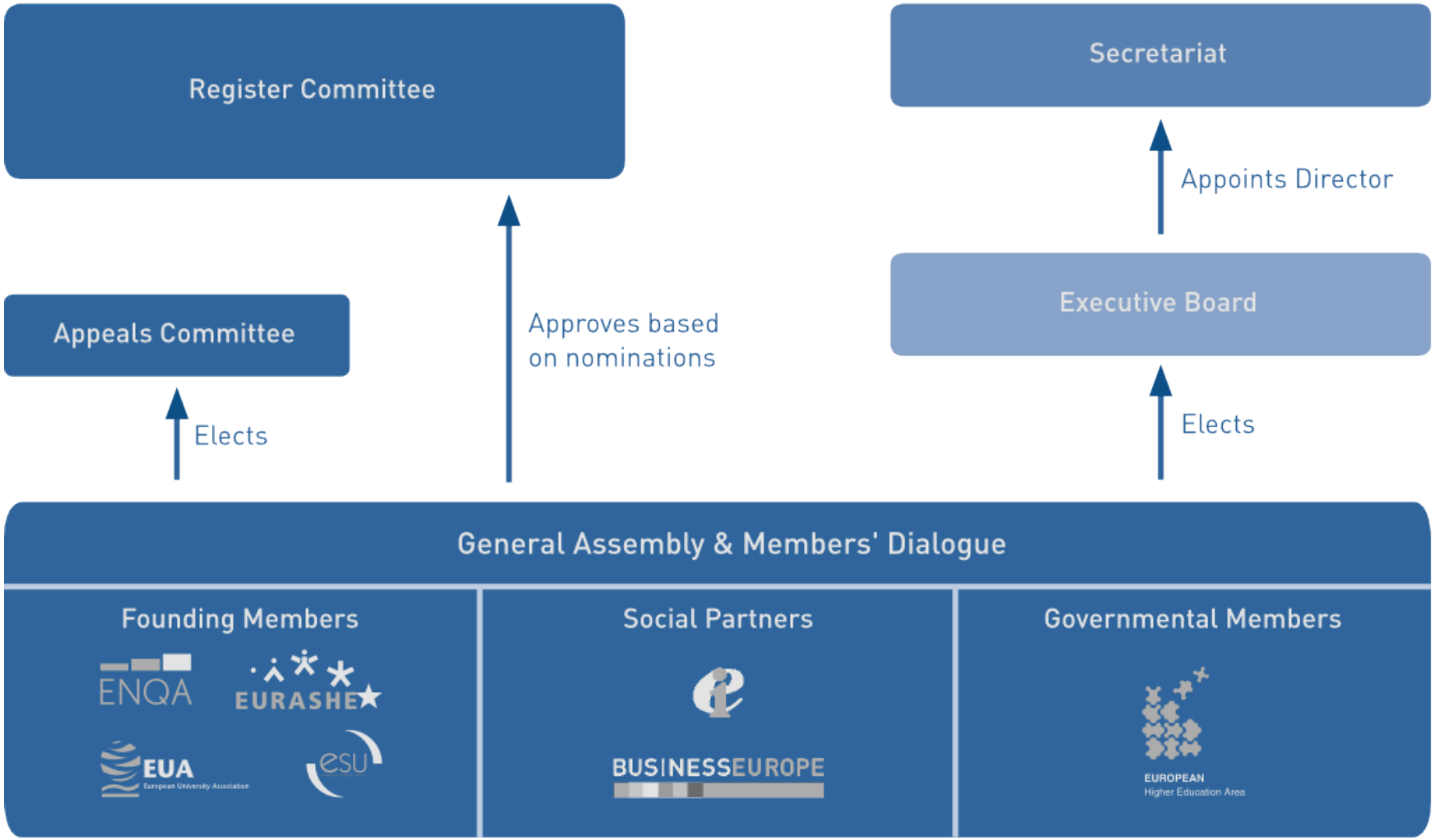
EURASHE

- Non-profit association, registered in Belgium
- Other stakeholder members:
  - BUSINESSEUROPE (employers)
  - Education International (staff in HE)
- 31 (of 47) European governments
  - Represented by ministries of higher education

Alternatives discussed

- Managed by existing organisation
  - Not considered sufficiently independent by stakeholders & gov.
- Legal forms
  - Foundation – problem re. capital
  - Company limited by guarantee – uncommon for activity
  - Special EU legal forms (SE, EEIG) – not 100% suitable, complex
  - International treaty – extremely complex
- Membership
  - Agencies – independence-related considerations
  - Without governments – some gov.s clearly demanded involvement, and support and ownership are crucial

3. Governing structure



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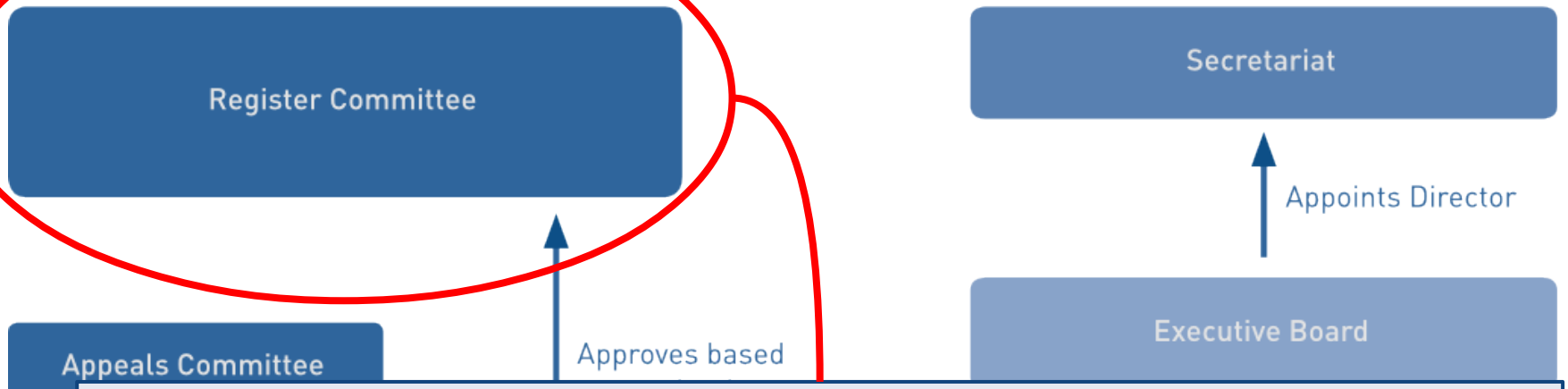


Composition:

- Independent QA experts nominated by E4, BE, EI (not representatives, but individuals)
- Chair appointed by the Committee itself (as additional member)

Principal responsibilities:

- Decide on applications for inclusion on the Register (and renewal)
- Consider Substantive Changes Reports, Complaints and decide on extraordinary reviews
- Adopt Procedures for Applications (official rules for handling applications)
- Any other matters related to the management of the Register as such

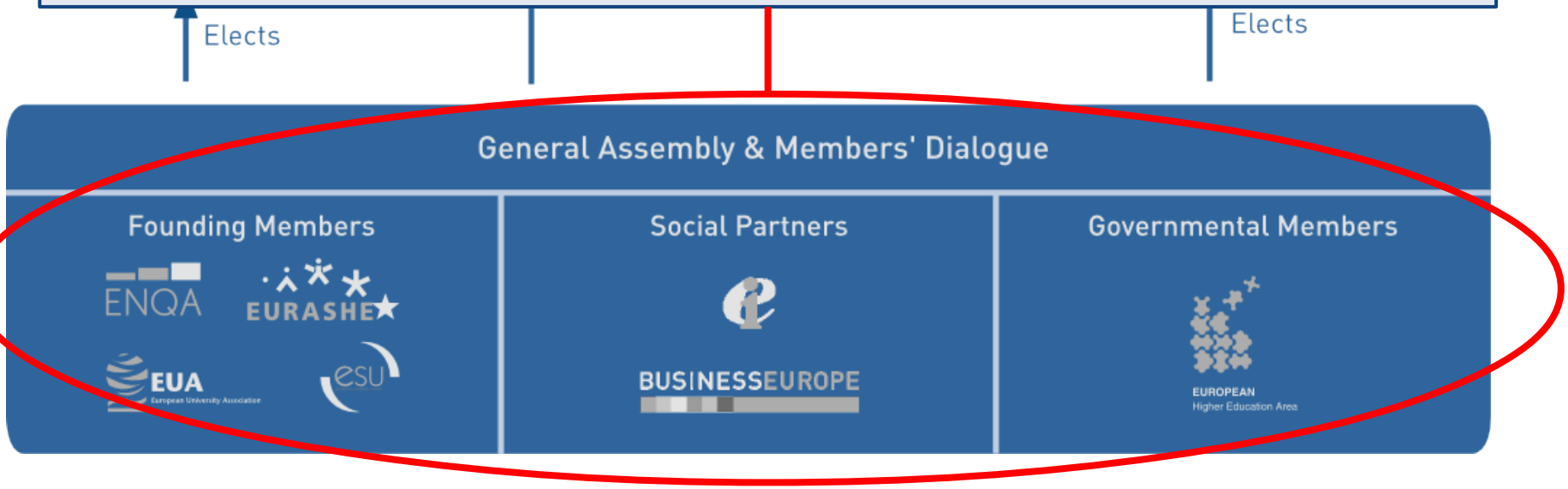
3. Governing structure

Composition:

- All members (governments and stakeholders)
- Observers: European Commission, Council of Europe, UNESCO, Bologna Secretariat

Principal responsibilities:

- Strategic planning and work plan
- Elect/approve all statutory bodies
- Budget and accounts
- Consulted on Procedures for Applications



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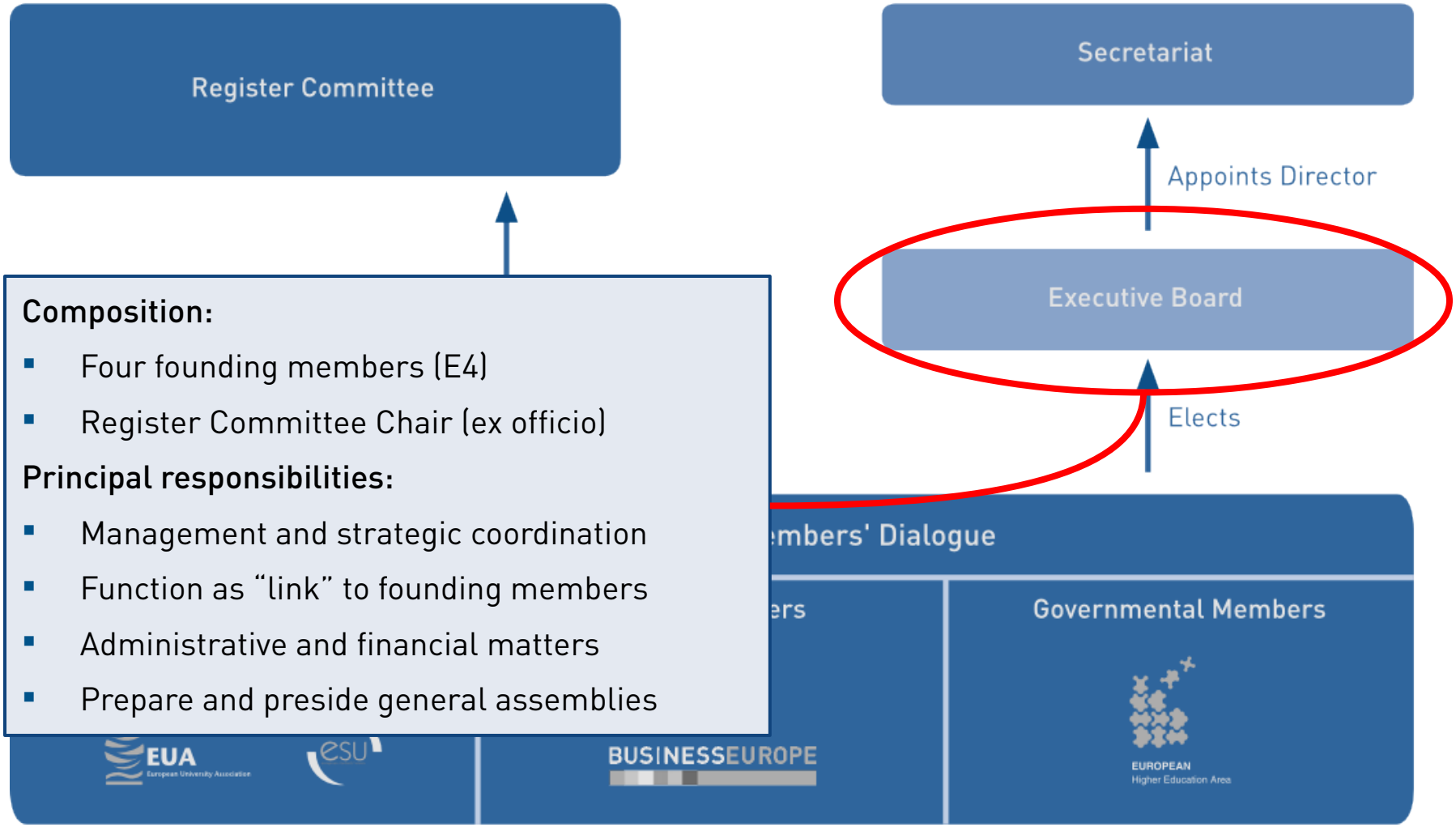

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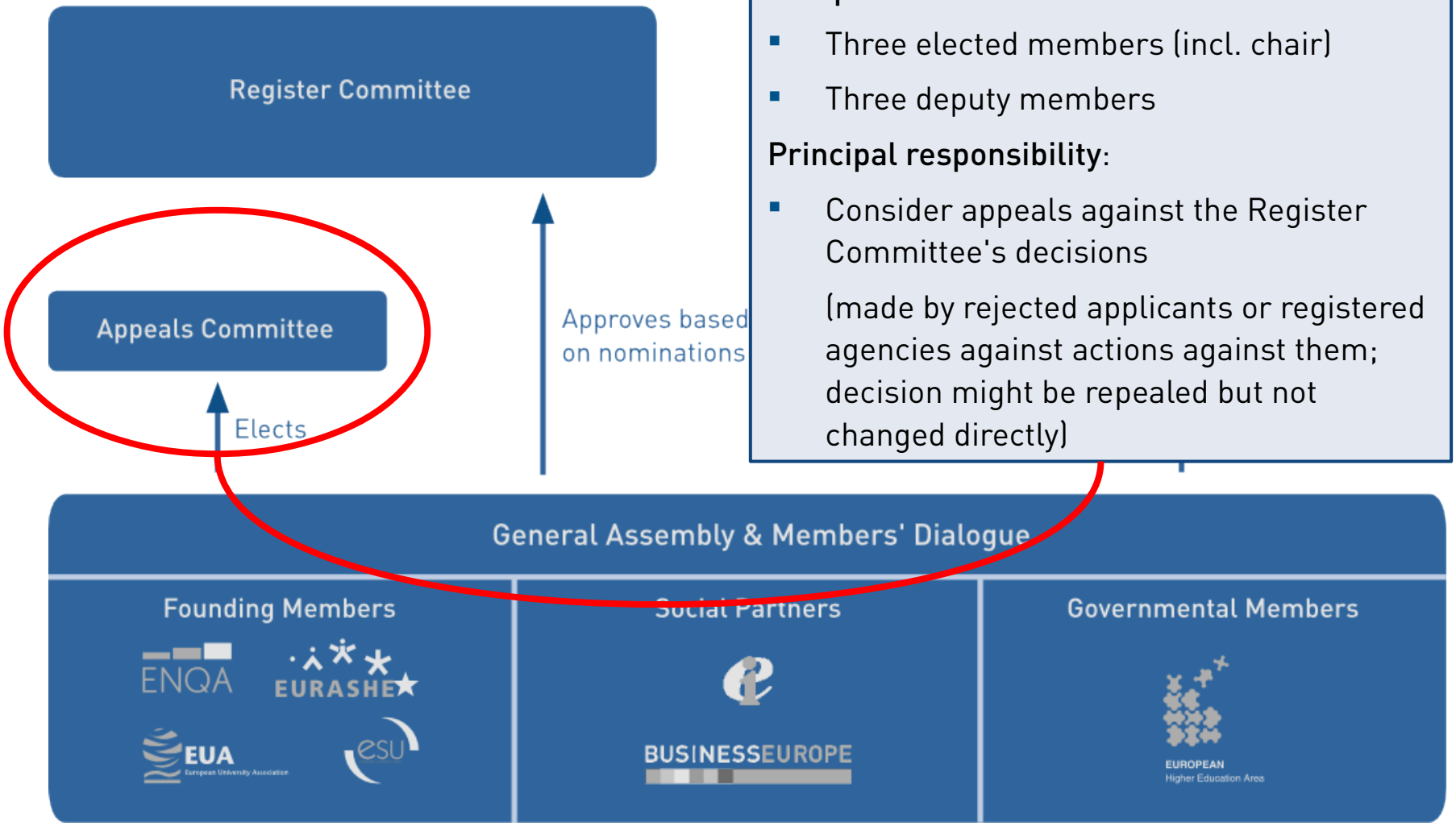

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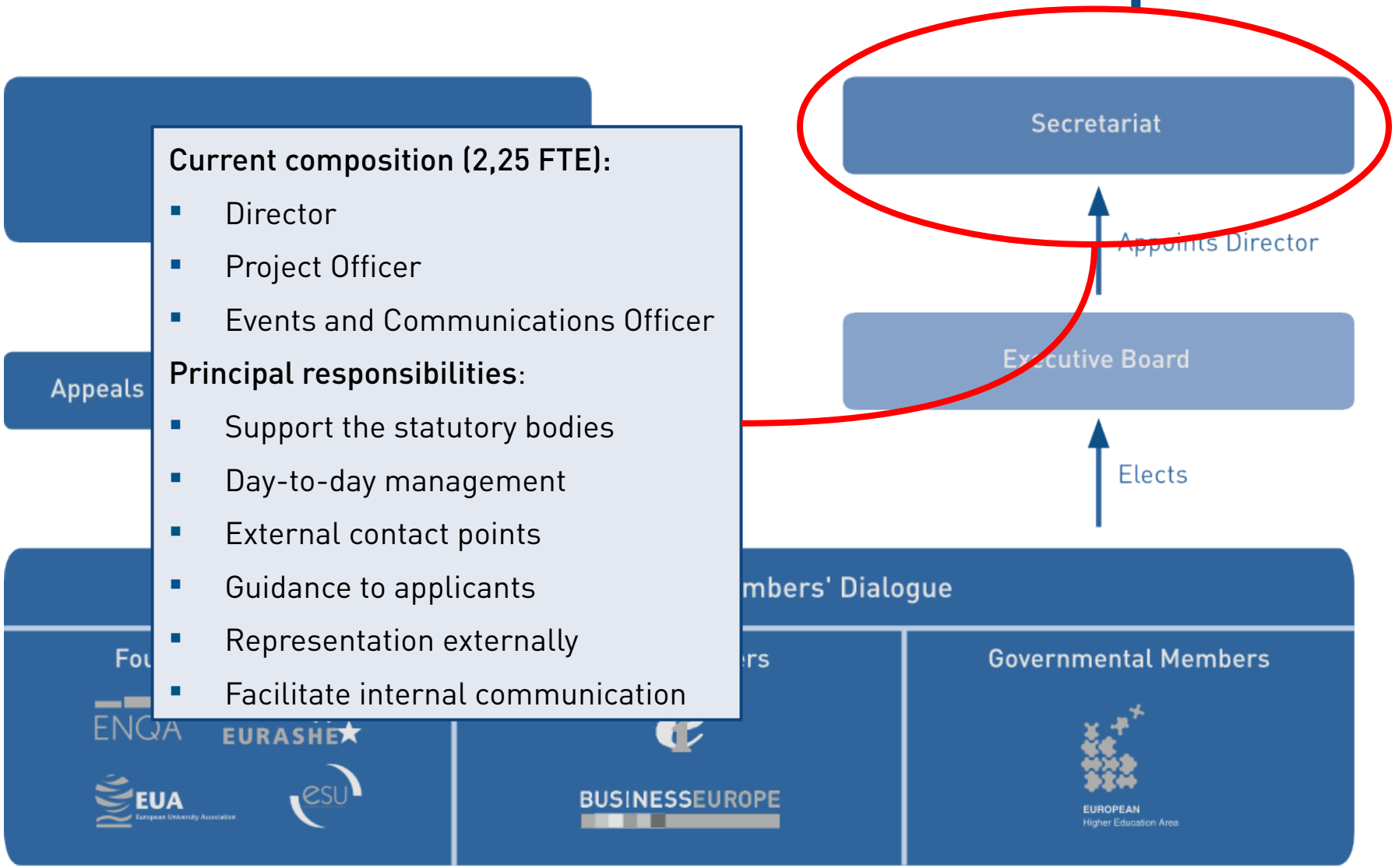


Current composition (2,25 FTE):

- Director
- Project Officer
- Events and Communications Officer

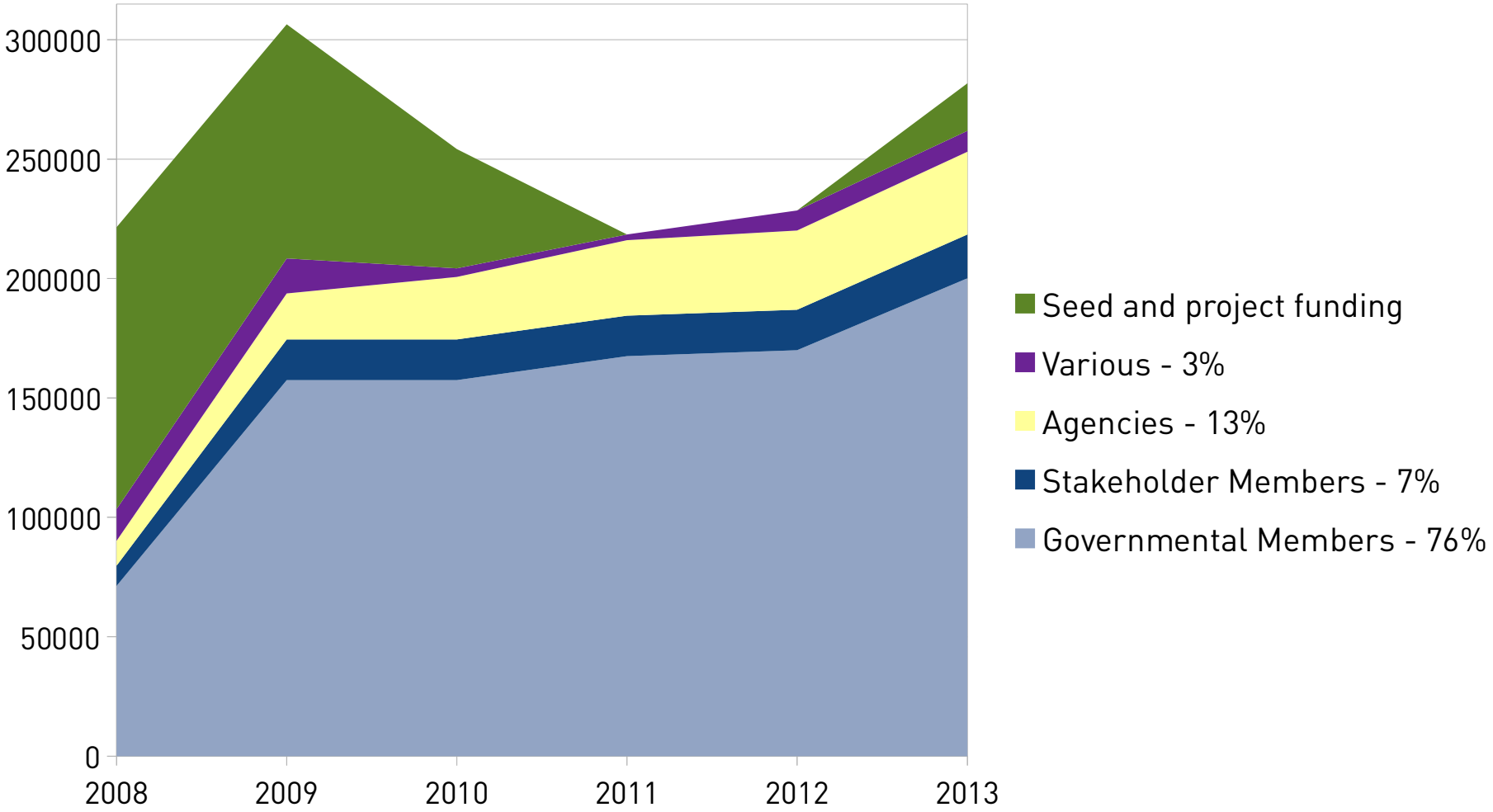
Principal responsibilities:

- Support the statutory bodies
- Day-to-day management
- External contact points
- Guidance to applicants
- Representation externally
- Facilitate internal communication

Rationale and alternatives discussed

- Main rationale: checks and balances
  - Environment for independent Register Committee to operate
  - Ensure that E4 organisations can exercise main responsibility
  - Involve the E4, stakeholders and governments in governance
- Combination of Register Committee & Executive Board
  - Different profiles; problem with role of E4
- Full members from governments on Reg. Committee
  - Independence at risk; governments did not want that either
- Smaller (and more "symbolic") General Assembly
  - i.e. fewer or no governments; problem with ownership, support and communication with governments

4. Funding


300000
250000
200000
150000
100000
50000
0
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
Seed and project funding
Various - 3%
Agencies - 13%
Stakeholder Members - 7%
Governmental Members - 76%

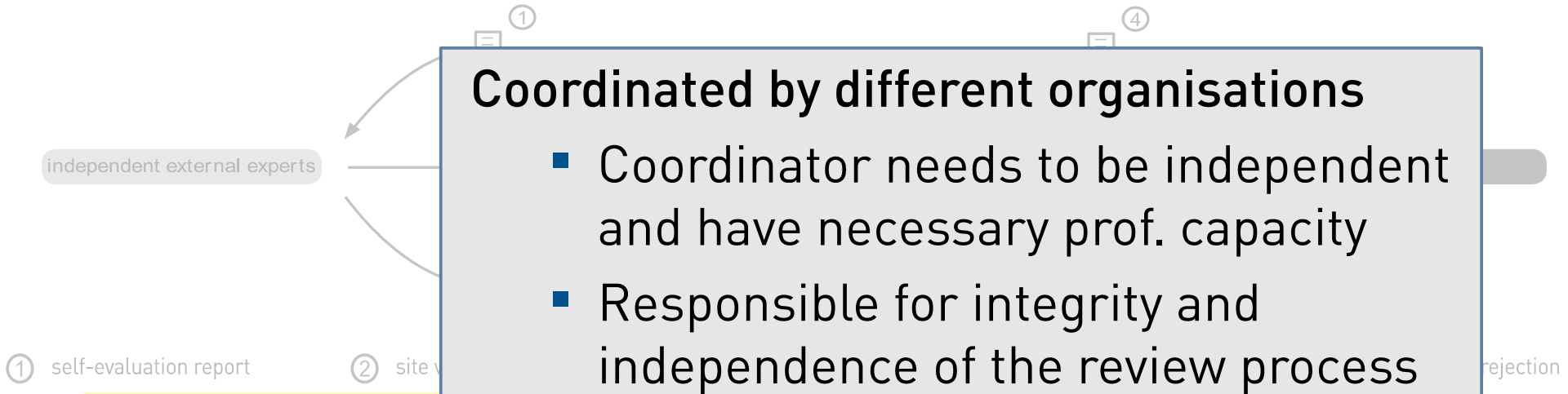
Rationale and alternatives discussed

- Rationale: support independence
  - Fees from agencies are at a rather symbolic level
  - Running of EQAR is a public responsibility, thus funded by gov.
- Funded entirely by …
  - Agency fees – independence risk, financial incentive to accept
  - Stakeholder organisations – not feasible, small budgets
  - International organisations – not feasible, unless part of them
  - Funding via project grants – not sustainable
  - Fees for users – contrary to public objective

5. Registration process

1. **self-evaluation** produced by the QA agency
2. **site visit** by independent review team(QA professionals, students and academics)
3. external **review report** according to ESG parts 2 & 3
4. **application** for inclusion on EQAR
5. **decision** by EQAR Register Committee

External review of QAA's



Coordinated by different organisations

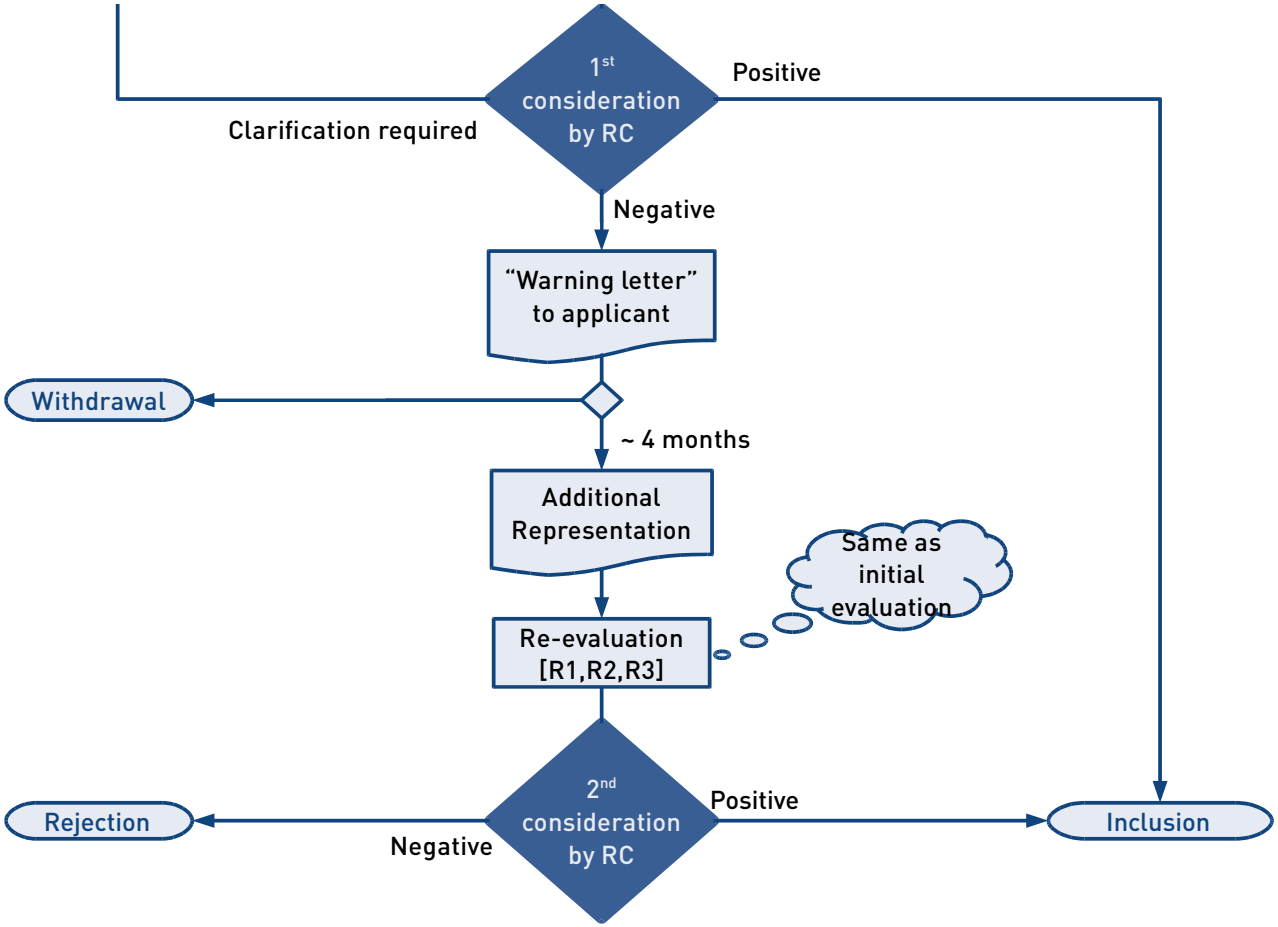
- Coordinator needs to be independent and have necessary prof. capacity
- Responsible for integrity and independence of the review process
- For many QAAs, ENQA coordinates

Requirements for the external review

- Explicitly address ESG
- Panel including QA experts, academic and student
- At least one international

Internal process

Internal process (2)



Since 2013: Publication of full decisions by the Register Committee (positive and negative)

After initial registration

- Periodic **renewal every five years**
  - Complete new review against ESG
- **Extraordinary Review** of registration
  - Initiated by the Register Committee before five years elapsed, following complaints or changes
- Obligation to report **Substantive Changes**
  - Organisational structure of the agency
  - Change in external QA activities & methodologies
  - Specific guidelines and templates available
- **Complaints** Policy
  - Third-party concerns in relation to ESG compliance

6. Conclusions

- Challenging to design an optimal organisational structure
  - Different backgrounds (national and organisational cultures)
  - Different ideas on the role of stakeholders and governments
- The solution might look complex, but works efficiently:

  "In the view of the Review Panel, much has been achieved by EQAR in the first two years of its existence. More than 50% of potential applicants were considered in that period (see paragraph 7.12). This has been achieved with a very small secretariat and relatively modest funding." (Panel that evaluated EQAR in 2011)
- Main challenge seen by panel after first 3 years: lack of strategic role – has been (and is being) addressed since
- Independence was always key and is well recognised:

  "The Committee appears to have successfully established and jealously maintained its independence in the first two years of its operation - a point acknowledged by a number of those whom the Review Panel met - and is to be commended for this."