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# **QAQE: spitting in the wind?**

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**Colin Raban**

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# Yogis and Commissars

The L+T community has an 'enquiring culture' which espouses such values as originality, individual and group reflection, shared activity with peers (and) action research....

The QA community has created a 'compliance culture' that is unremittingly bureaucratic, led by codes of practice written in legalistic language by administrators and policed internally by quality offices, and externally by the QAA.

Derrik Ferney (2007)

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## Locus of power...

At the AUA annual conference, Peter Scott 'regretted the erosion of the power of the senate, and suggested that the influence wielded by senior academics was more "executive and managerial" than "academic and collegial". "As for the donnish dominion...I'm not sure there's much of that left outside Oxford and Cambridge".

THES, 9 April 2009

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# **Enhancement and Assurance: uneasy bedfellows?**

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# Five propositions

- The quality of the relationship between assurance and enhancement depends on what we mean by enhancement and how we do assurance.
  - ‘Conventional’ approaches to assurance place enhancement in a limited and subservient role.
  - If enhancement is to realise its full potential we must radically rethink our approach to assurance.
  - But to do this we shall have to change the culture, and not just the systems, of our institutions.
  - And our ability to do so will depend on the force and direction of the Sector’s ‘prevailing winds’.
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# Assurance versus Enhancement

- Managerialism
  - Conservation and risk-aversion
  - Compliance
  - Top-down
  - Collegiality
  - Creativity and risk-taking
  - Self-determination
  - Bottom-up
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# Academic Practice

(Some) respondents to the consultation favoured enhancement as a process focused at the staff/student interface, suggesting that audit teams should engage in review of good practice, and improvement of practice, in teaching and learning.

*QAA Handbook for Institutional Audit, 2006*

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# Setting conditions

Enhancement is ‘a “systems” concept requiring systems thinking...It involves all the people who teach, assess, support and administer students’ learning and the resources that support learning, the regulatory and support infrastructures used to ensure that teaching and learning is of an appropriate standard and quality... It involves structures, processes, procedures, incentives and cultures’.

LTSN-ILTHE-HESDA (2003) *Imagining a different future – Working Paper 2: Understanding Quality Enhancement*. [www.heacademy.ac.uk/896.htm](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/896.htm)

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# ‘Quality Feasibility’

‘... the removal of factors in the institutional climate or structures that are deleterious to learning and good teaching’

John Biggs, *The Reflective Institution*

‘(There is a need for) a more holistic view of how a university’s administration and procedures affect a department’s teaching’.

Sue Wright, *Enhancing the Quality of Teaching in Universities*

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# Audit culture

I do not know of any other country, except perhaps Australia, which has shown the same pattern of management of higher education as in the UK: growth, the reduction of formal institutional diversity, and tighter administrative controls by an agency of central government.

Martin Trow (1996)

*Trust, Markets and Accountability in Higher Education.*

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# Unintelligent accountability

‘(Accountability can be) the enemy of effective governance, and also of plain truth-telling. ... The more severe and detailed are accountability obligations, the less can they reveal the underlying realities for which the universities are being held accountable’.

Martin Trow

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# Unintelligent accountability

‘...the habits of truth-telling erode, and reports flowing up from the field come to have less and less relation to the facts on the ground that they purportedly represent....(These reports) become less and less exercises in discovery or truth telling, and more and more public relations documents which are, shall we say, parsimonious with the truth’.

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# Assurance vs Enhancement-led QM

- Inhibits frank ('bottom-up') reporting
  - Promotes incremental improvement of academic practice ('closing the loops')
  - Discourages risk taking (low risk appetite)
  - Encourages and requires frank reporting
  - Facilitates transformational change to surface & deep conditions for learning
  - Supports and manages risk taking
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# Towards 'enhancement-led' assurance...

- Retrospective
  - Provision-focused
  - Separated
  - Universal
  - Upward accountability
  - Predictive
  - Context-focused
  - Integrated
  - Selective
  - 'Dialogic' accountability
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# Unintelligent accountability

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# Institutional Culture

‘Openness to challenge is a critical cultural necessity for good risk management and compliance – it is in fact more important than any framework or set of processes’.

Paul Moore, *Evidence to Treasury Select Committee* (February 2009)

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# Three propositions...

- The quality of the relationship between assurance and enhancement depends on what we mean by enhancement and how we do assurance.
  - ‘Conventional’ approaches to assurance place enhancement in a limited and subservient role.
  - If enhancement is to realise its full potential we must radically rethink our approach to assurance.
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## ... and a fourth

- The quality of the relationship between assurance and enhancement depends on what we mean by enhancement and how we do assurance.
  - ‘Conventional’ approaches to assurance place enhancement in a limited and subservient role.
  - If enhancement is to realise its full potential we must radically rethink our approach to assurance.
  - But to do this we shall have to change the culture, and not just the systems, of our institutions. All parts of the institution must be ‘open to challenge’.
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# Cultural prerequisites

- The 'intelligence' (knowledge and ideas) brought to the institution by its 'front line staff is valued;
  - The production of frank reports is rewarded; anodyne reporting is discouraged;
  - Support is targeted on areas in need; and scrutiny is applied proportionately in accordance with assessments of risk;
  - Staff at all levels adhere to the principle of mutual accountability.
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‘The audit found the University's commitment to enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities evident in the structures and processes of management and embedded in the inclusive, open and reflective culture of the institution’.

(A feature of good practice was) ‘the development of a culture of inclusivity, openness and self-reflection which underpins the successful operation of the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes’.

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# The fourth and fifth propositions

- (If we are to radically rethink our approach to assurance, thereby ensuring that it is genuinely supportive of enhancement) we shall have to change the culture, and not just the systems, of our institutions.
  - Our ability to do so will depend on the force and direction of the Sector's 'prevailing winds'.
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# Turbulence

‘Our external operating environment has been in unremitting flux. We have had to deal with volatile political and social conditions and shifting government policies in regard to higher education and its future.... (We) must take such turbulence into account in the management of our affairs’ (*Self Evaluation Document: 2004*).

‘We glorify ourselves by describing our own age as turbulent’ (H Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, 1994)

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# Steerage

‘The essential thing in a gale is to remain very manoeuvrable (and) to keep moving at a fair speed’

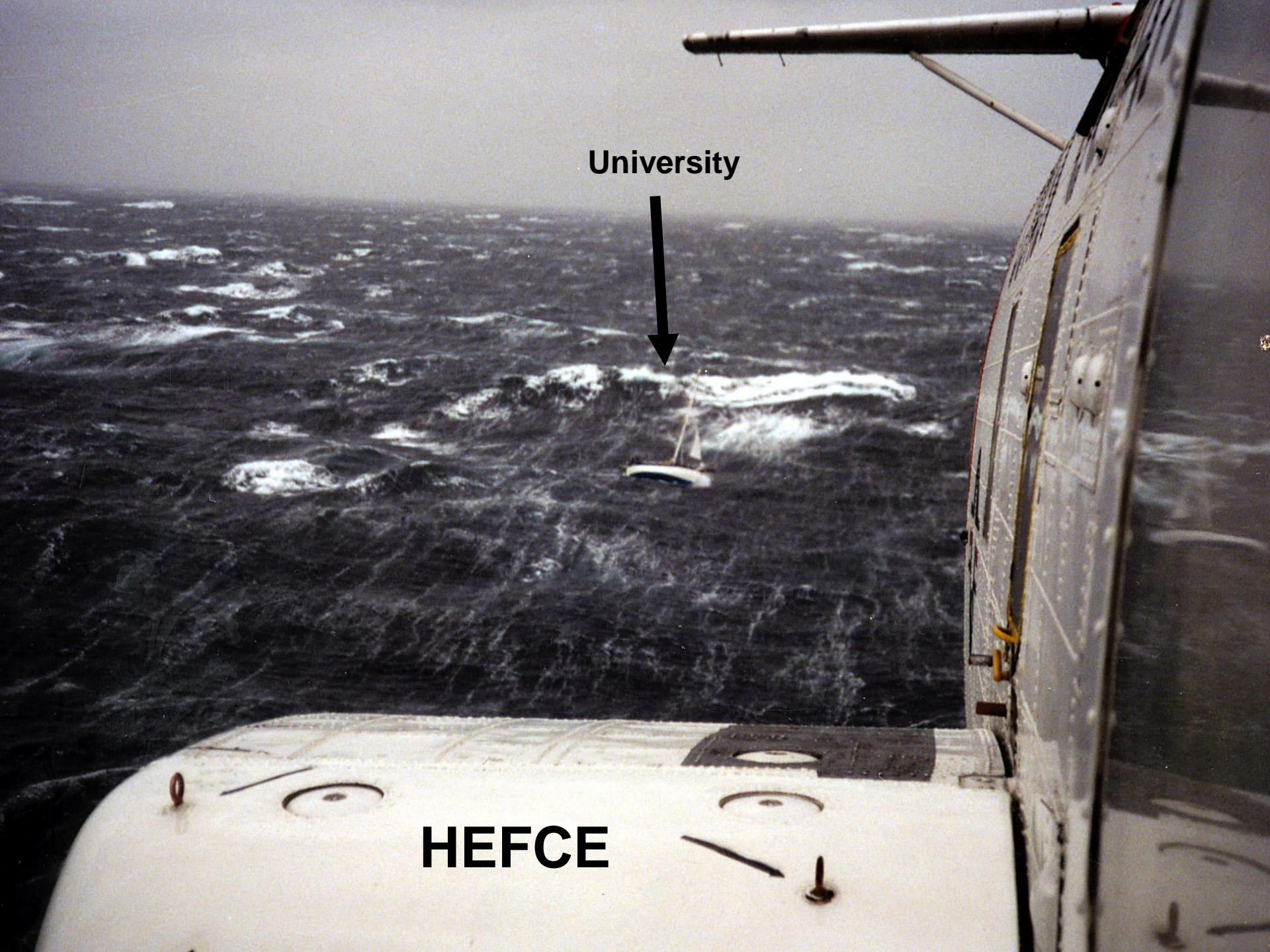
Bernard Moitessier, *Cape Horn: the Logical Route*.

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**University**



**HEFCE**



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**TRUST**

Professional

**MARKET**

Consumer

**REGULATION**

State

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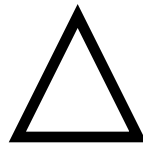
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**TRUST**

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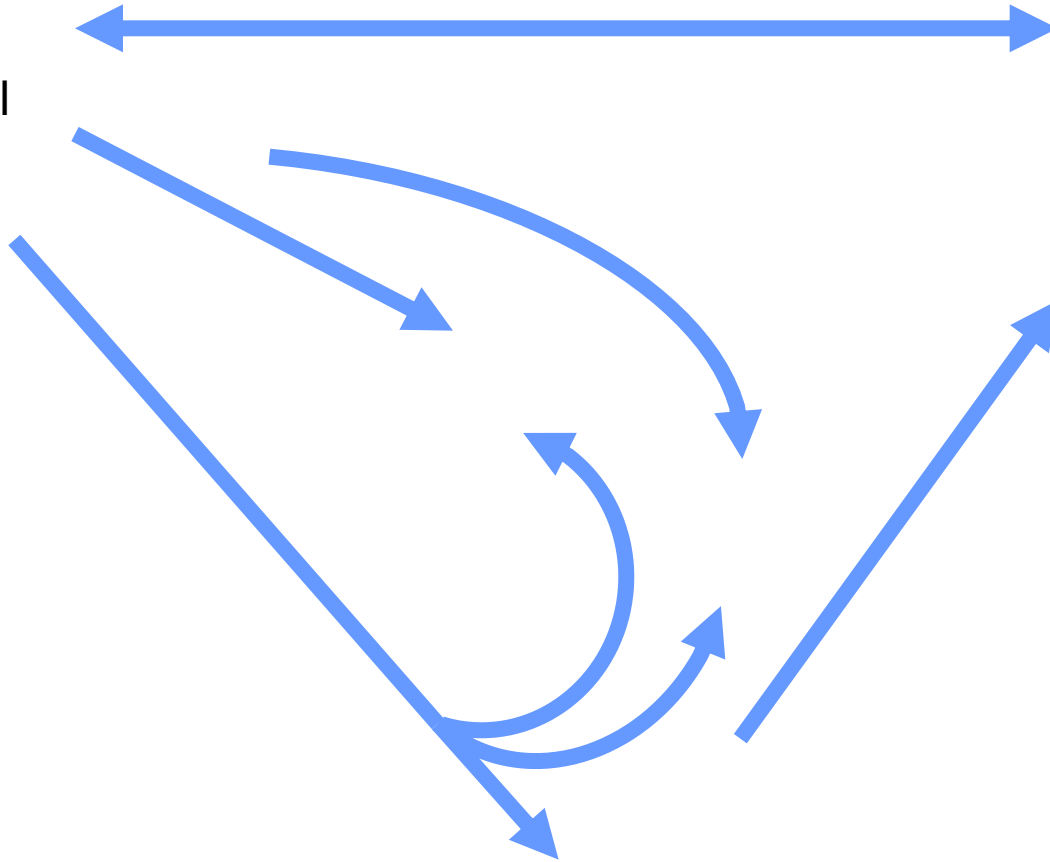
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**REGULATION**  
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# The crisis of higher education

‘I believe that a fundamental weakness of British higher education is that it is producer-dominated. (It needs to be) responsive to the needs of society.

There are two ways of encouraging producer-dominated establishments to be more adaptable. One would involve external regulation of institutions, the other would expose them to the opportunities and rigours of the market’.

Gareth Williams, *The Leverhulme Project: future prospects* (1983)

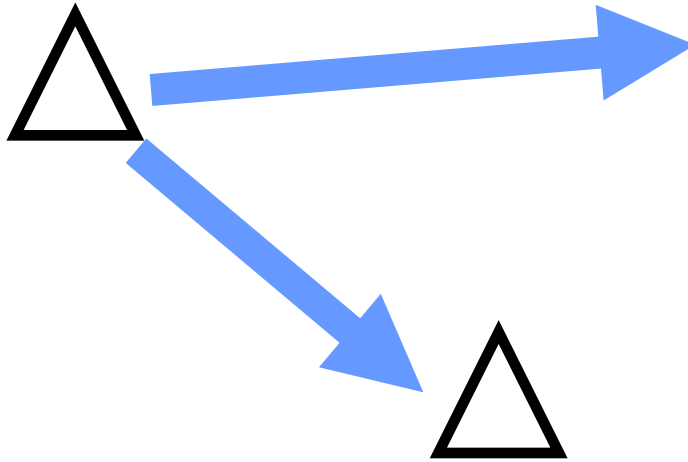
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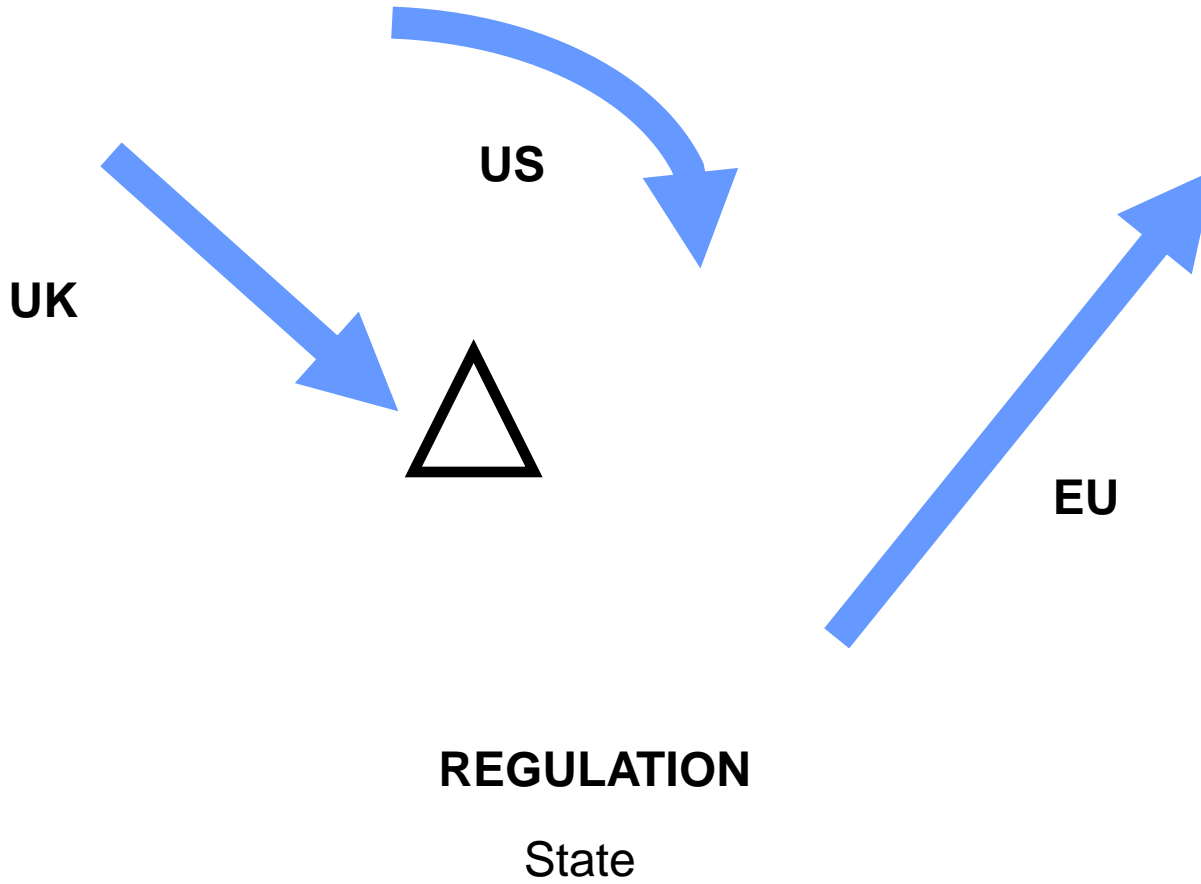


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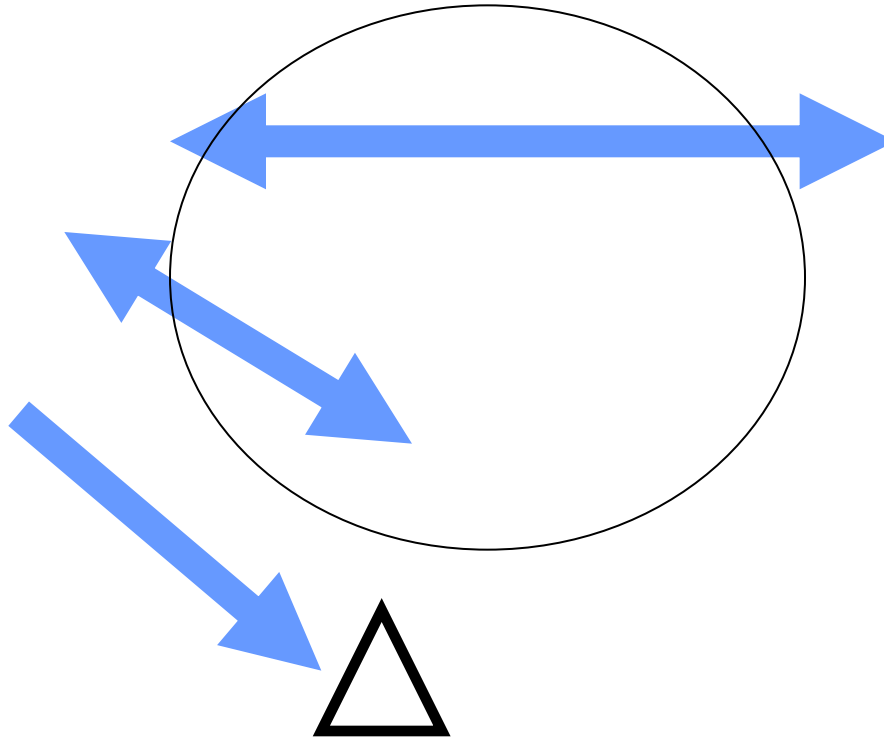
**MARKET**

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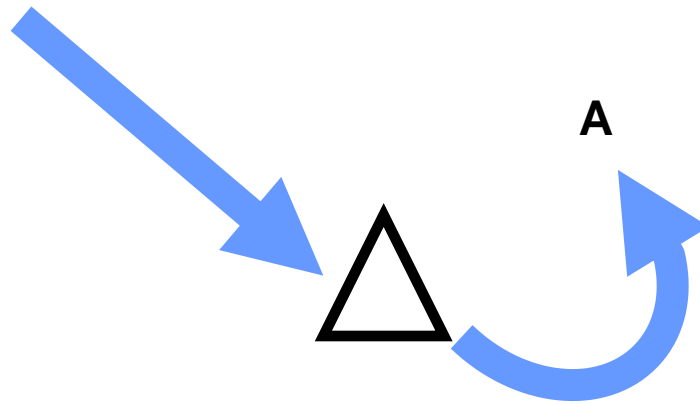
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# Audit culture

...the comfortable days are gone: the new stakeholding public no longer accepts the legitimacy of unaccountable priesthoods.

John Randall: 1998

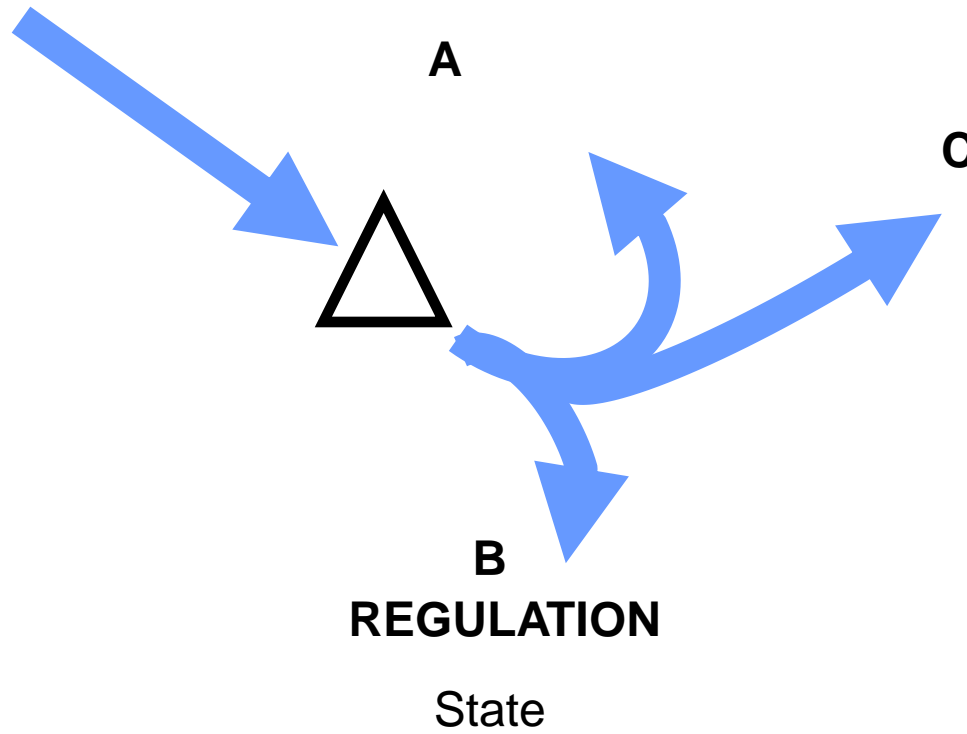
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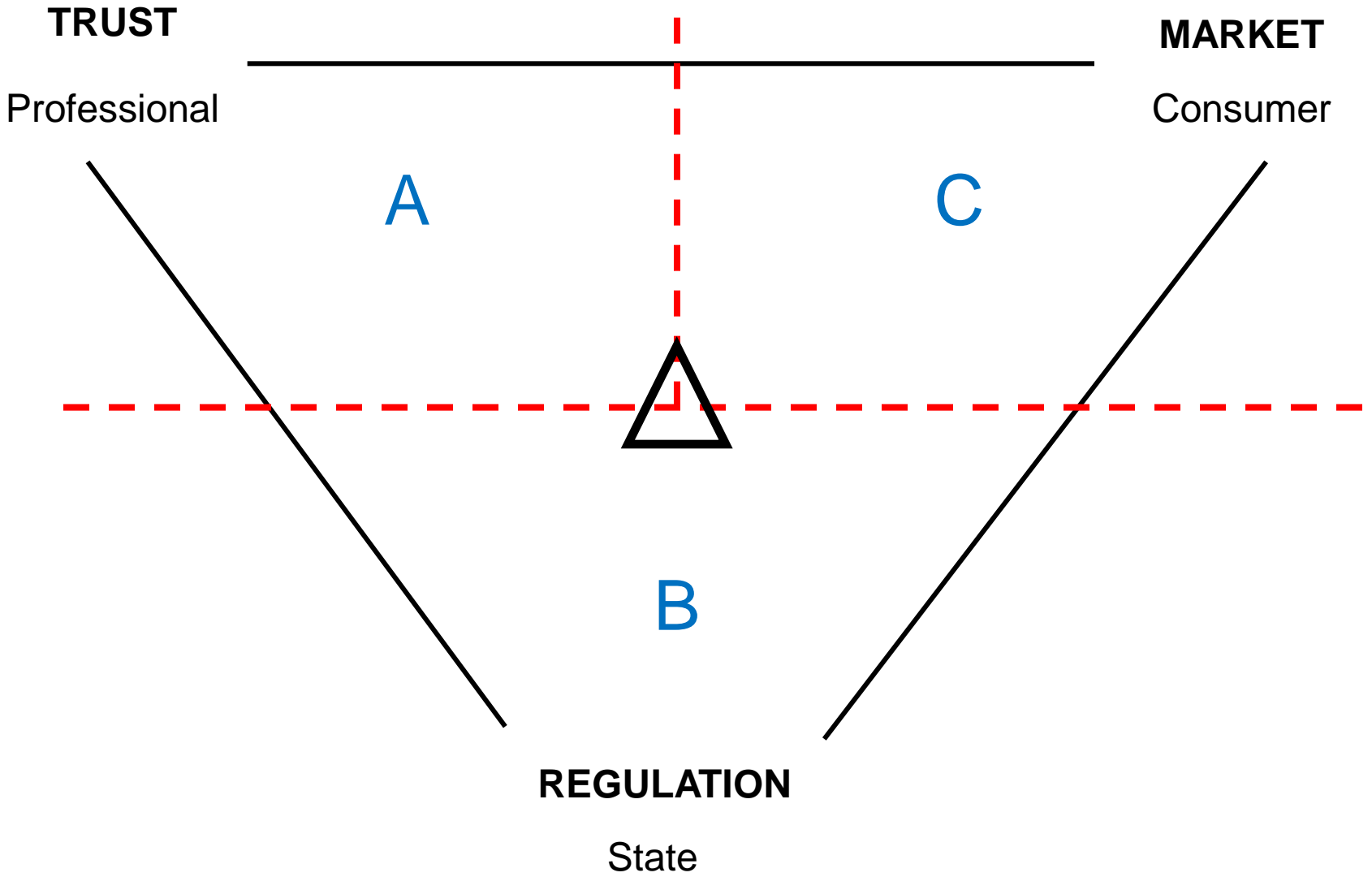
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Consumer





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- ‘The system in England for safeguarding consistent national standards in higher education institutions is out-of-date, inadequate and in urgent need of replacement.... Given the amount of money that the taxpayer puts into universities (this is not acceptable)’ (Select Committee)
  - A Quality and Standards Agency ‘with the responsibility for maintaining consistent, national standards...’; the accreditation of HEIs; and a national remit and training for external examiners, drawn from a ‘UK-wide pool’ recognised by the QSA (Select Committee).
  - ‘The (sic) QA system needs to assure the threshold standards of awards’ (HEFCE Consultation Paper).
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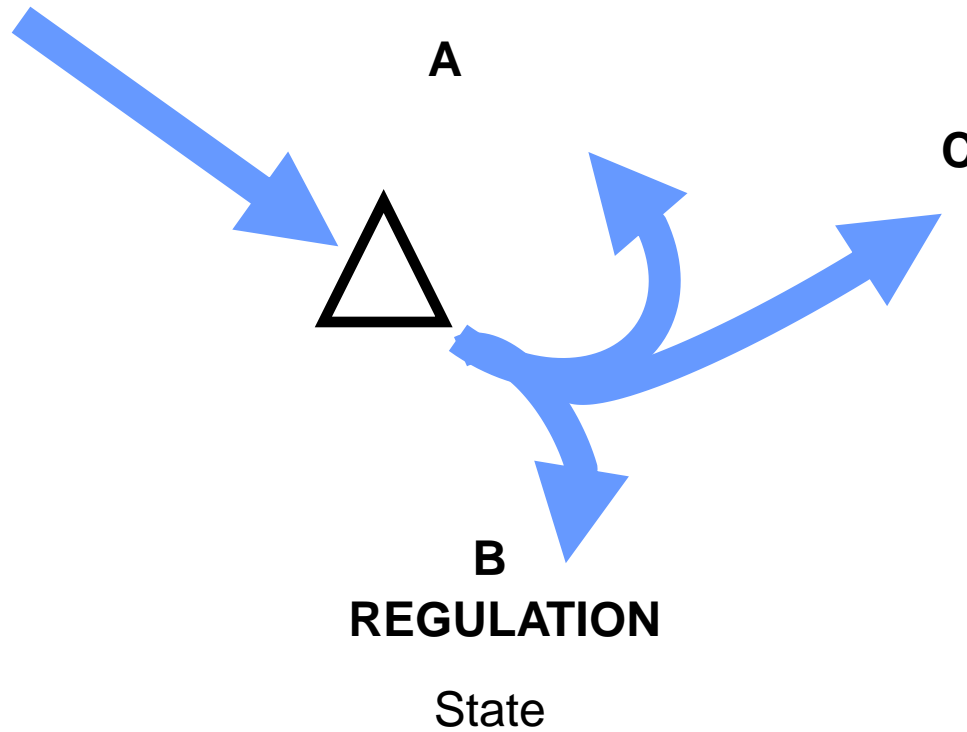


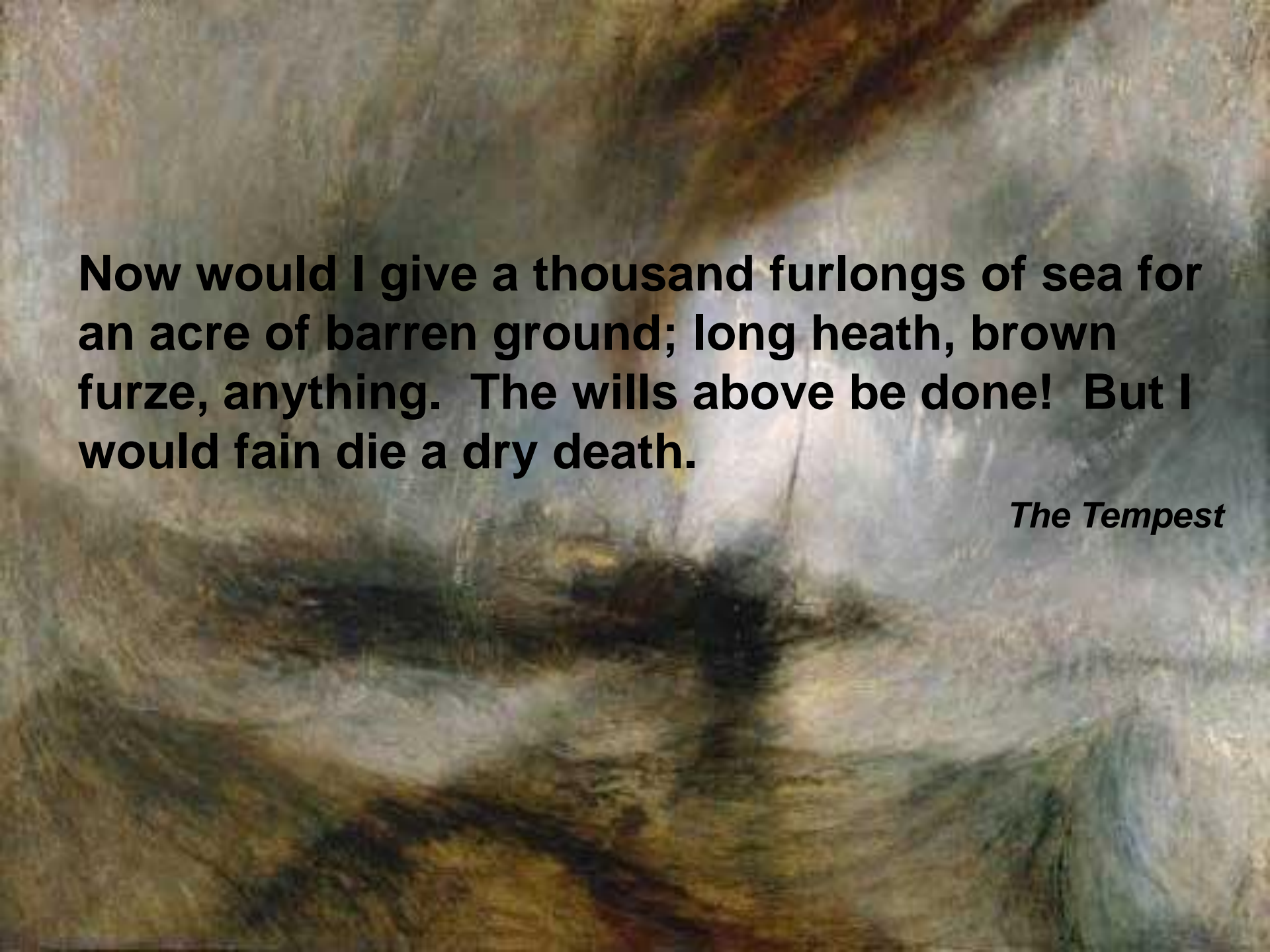
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**Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for  
an acre of barren ground; long heath, brown  
furze, anything. The wills above be done! But I  
would fain die a dry death.**

*The Tempest*

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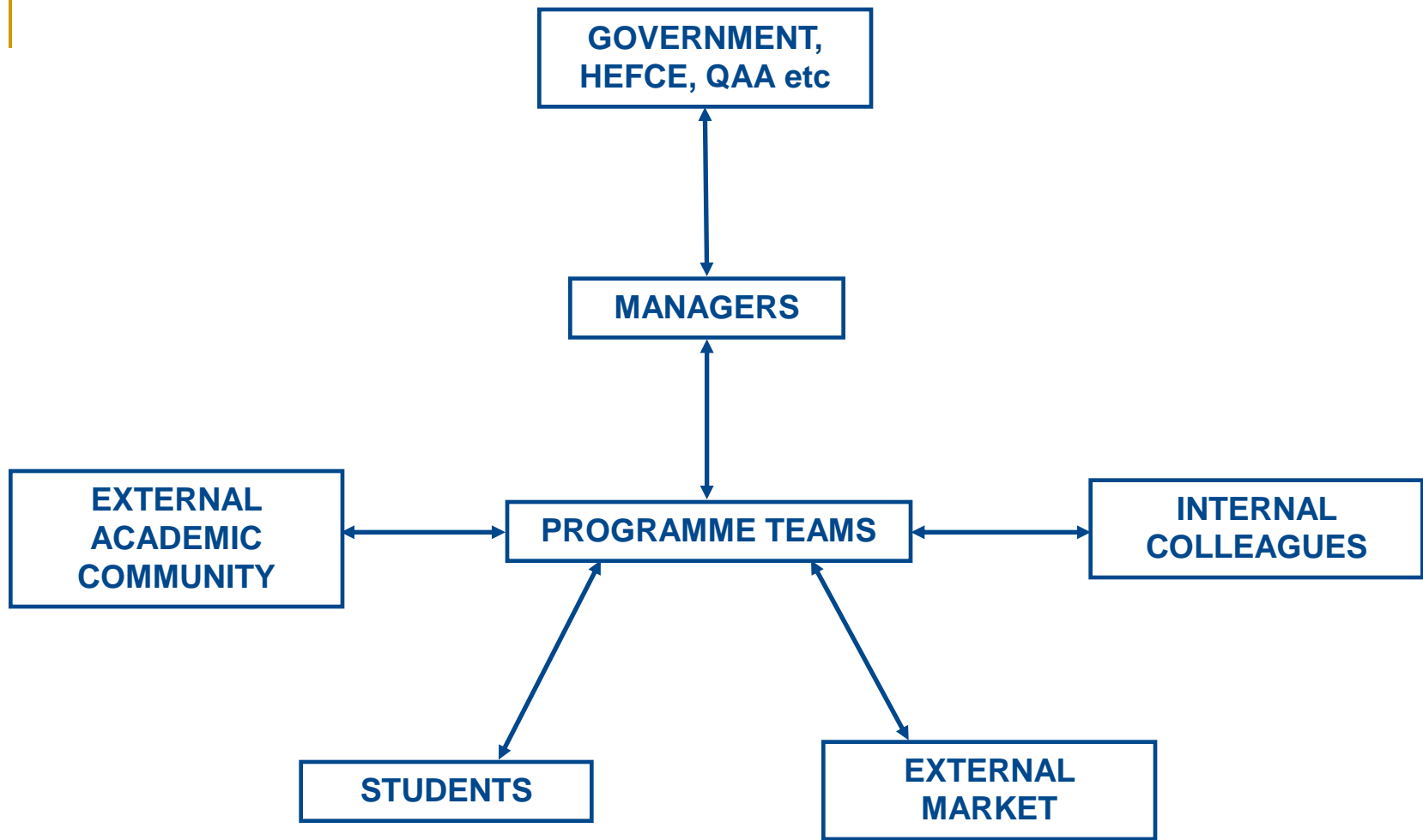
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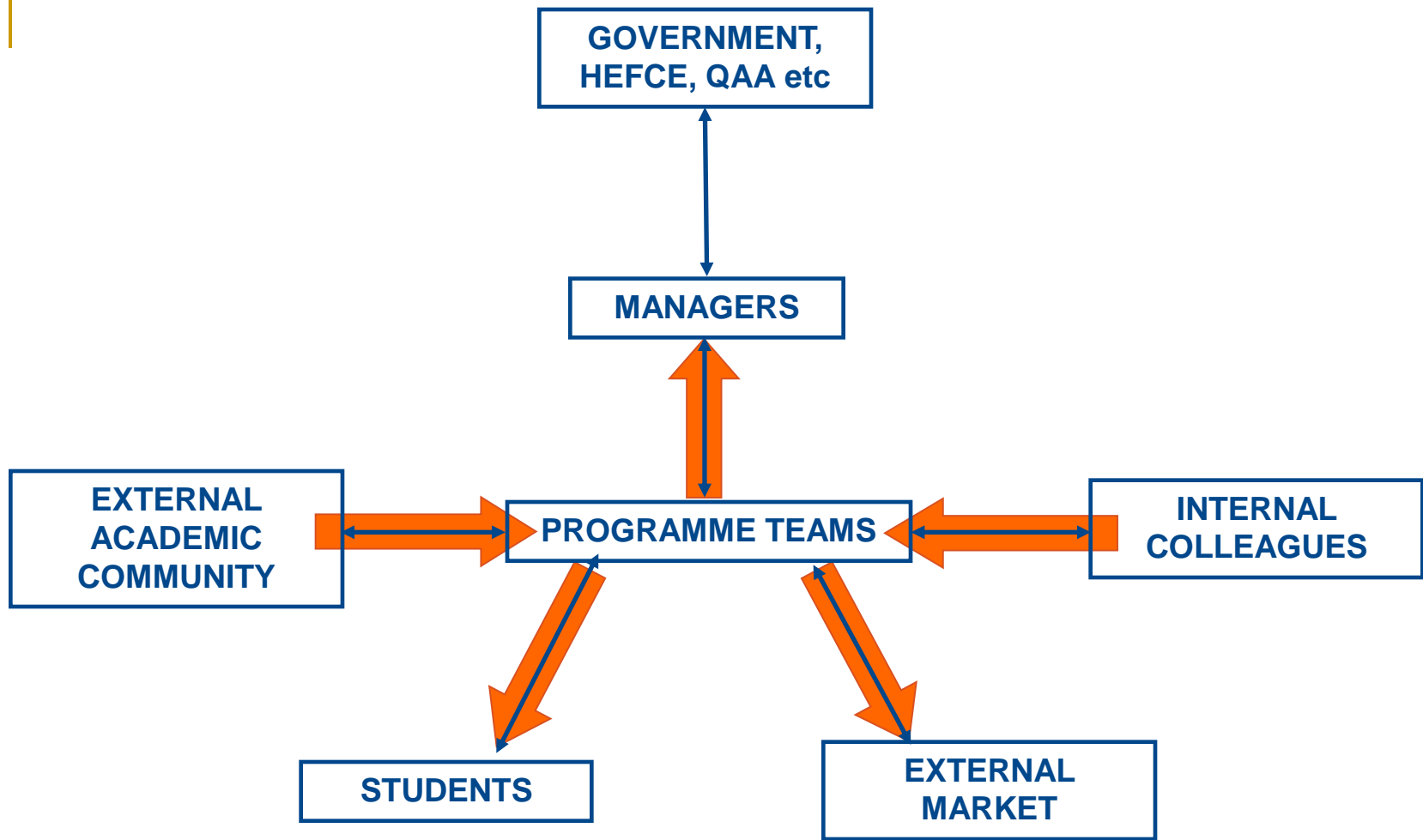
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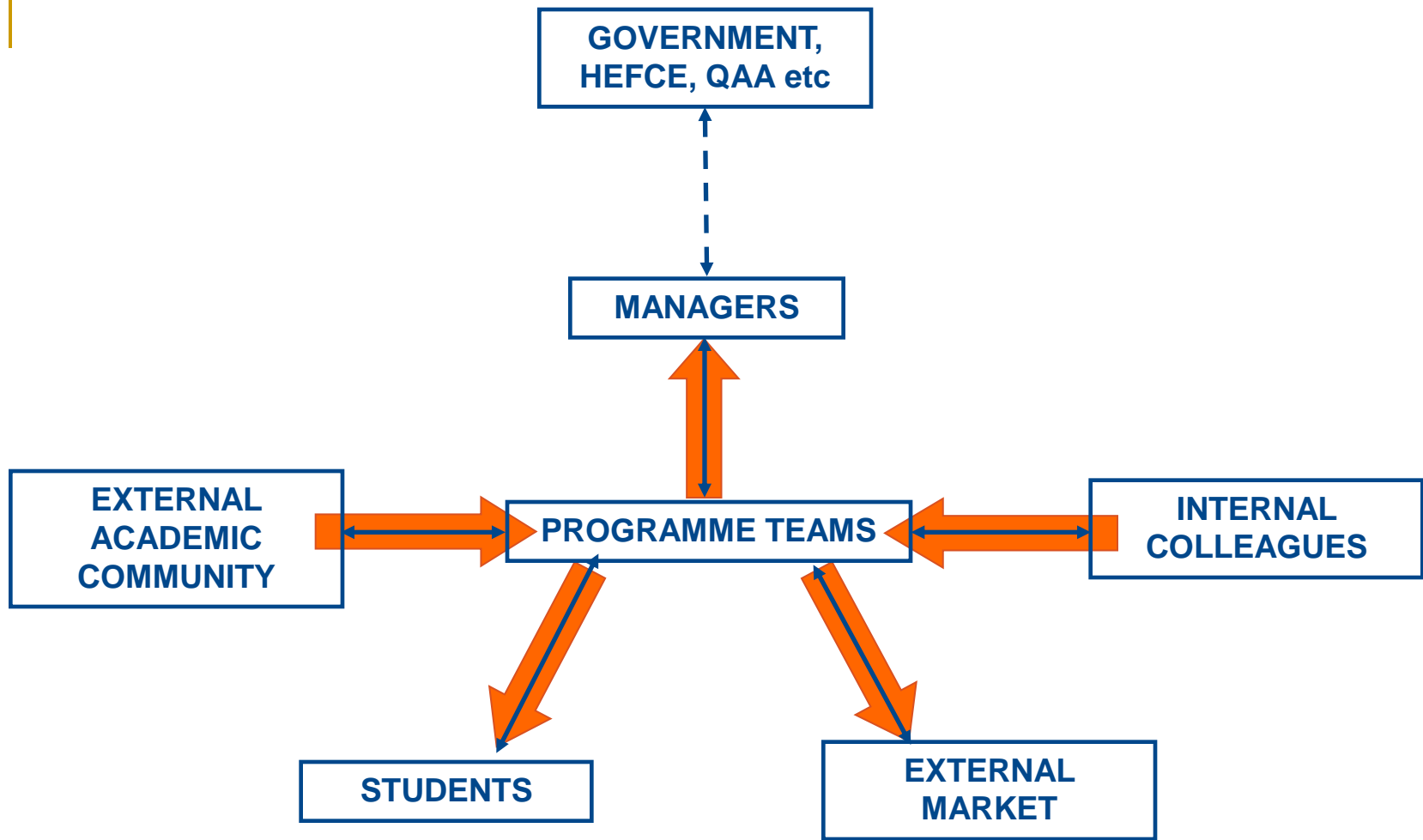
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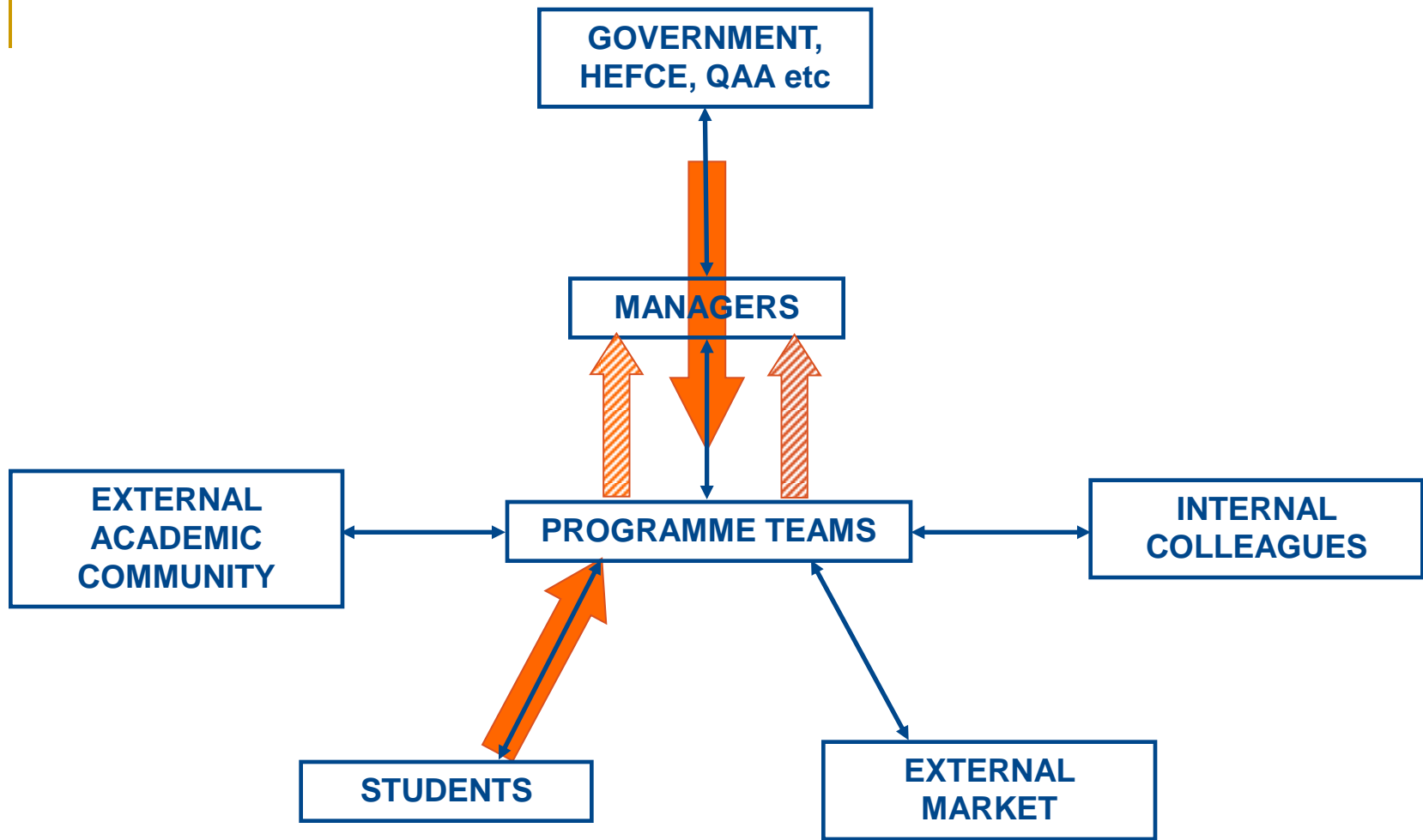
# Innovation

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# Purposes of Quality Management

Ensure responsiveness to student feedback

Ensure staff fulfil their responsibilities

Call managers and central departments to account

Respond to market and employer demands

Align with standards and practice in other HEIs

Ensure compatibility with external QA requirements

Identify and exchange good practice

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