EQA Organization Development: How do EQA organizations train their own staff?

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Disclosures

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- Ad hoc advisor to FIND, Fondation Merieux, WHO

EQA providers help their laboratory and diagnostic customers find the gaps in their testing process, so that they can provide better services to their patients and customers.

Total Laboratory Testing Process and EQA

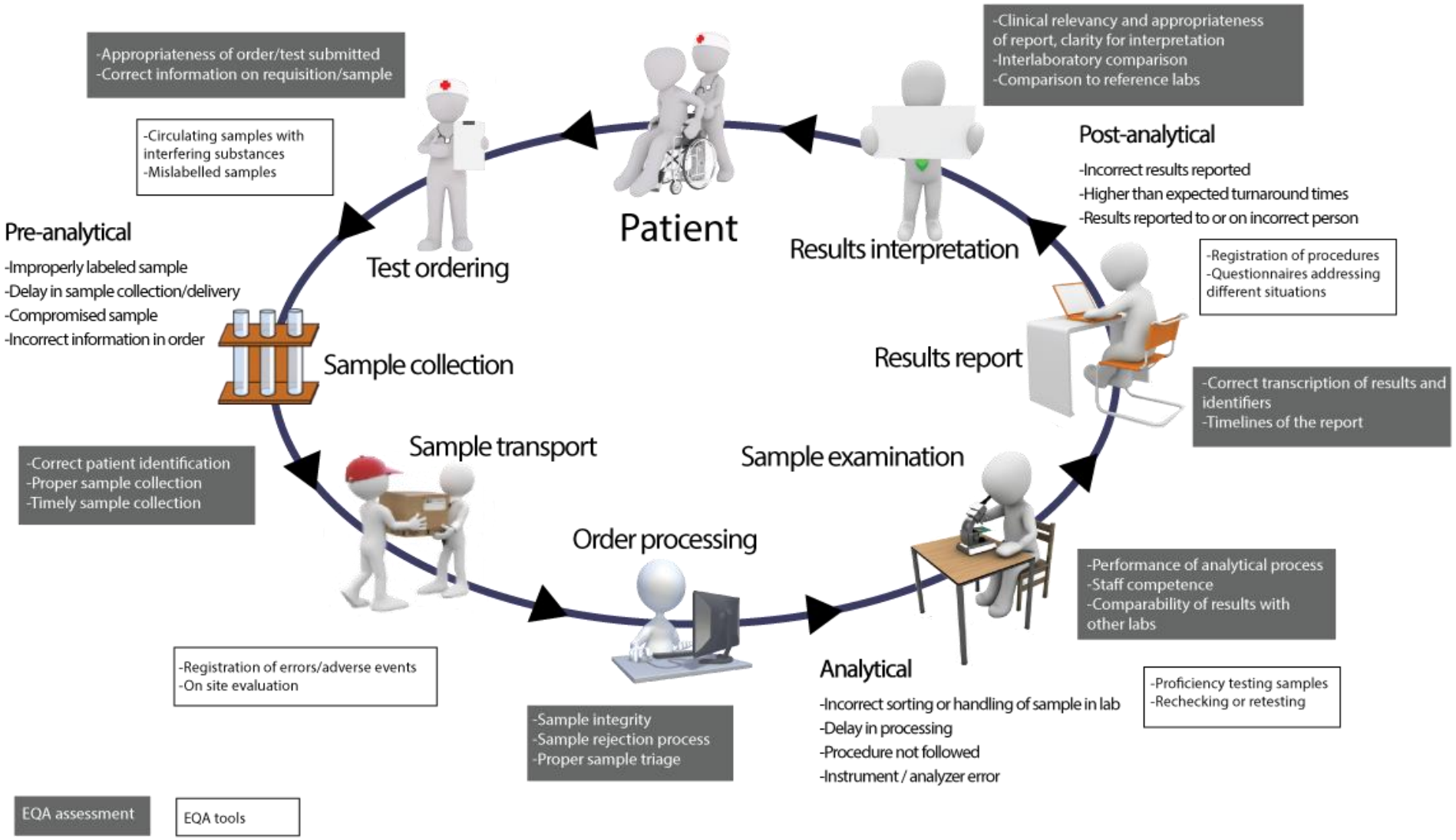


Illustration credit: Veronica Restelli, MSc, CMPT

So many steps to learn!!!

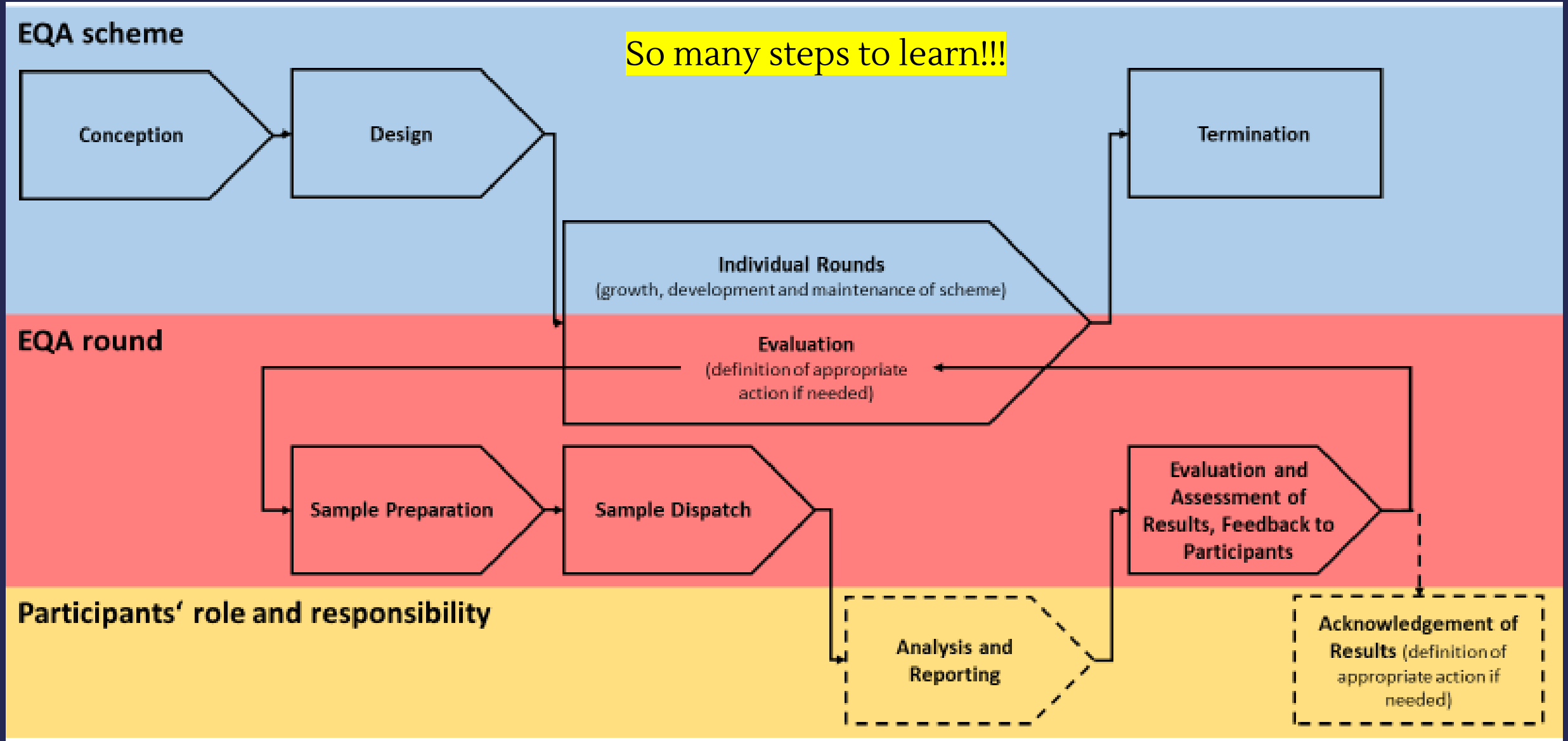


Illustration credit: Christoph Buchta

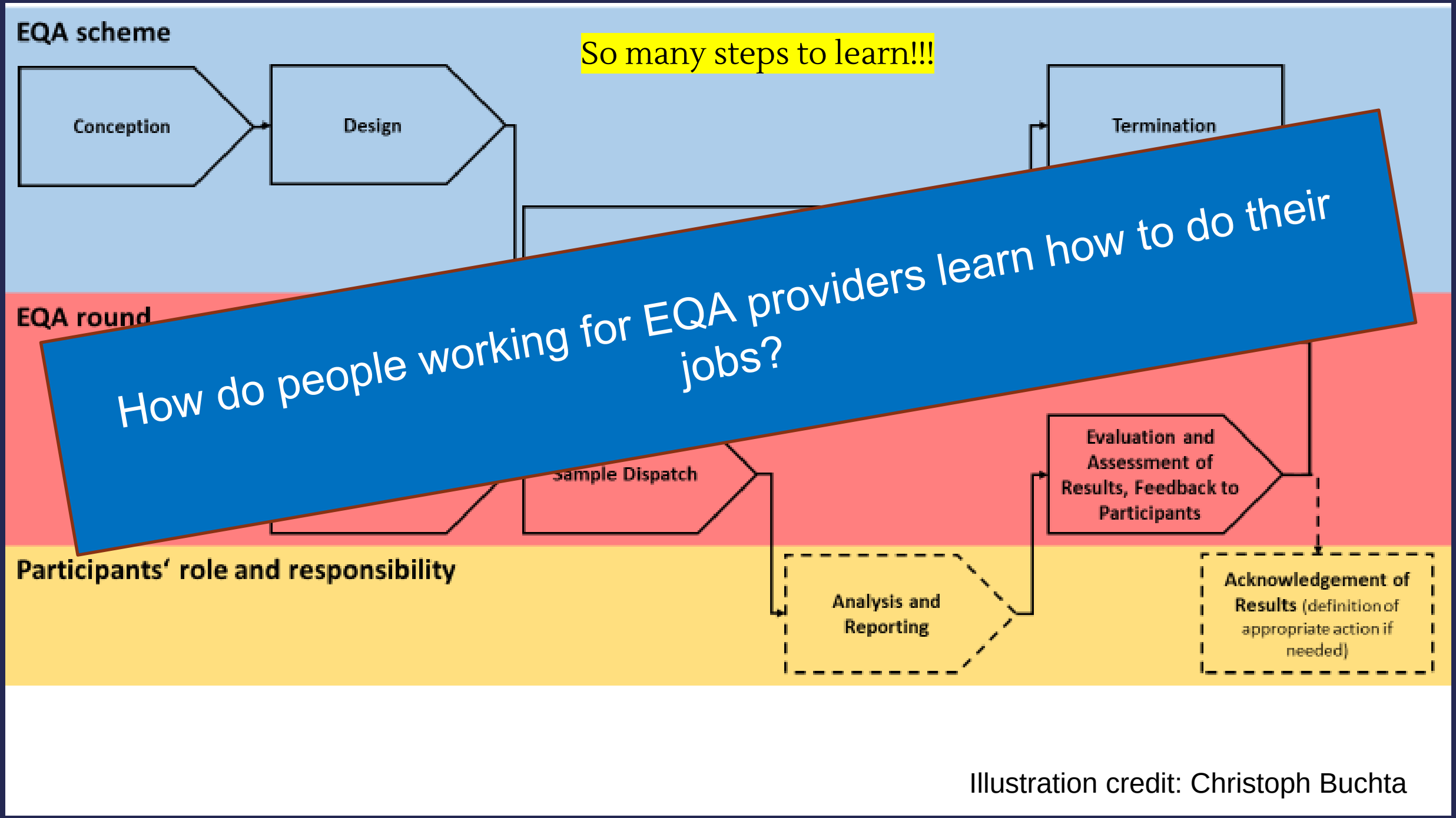


Illustration credit: Christoph Buchta

But HOW do EQA providers actually do this?

- Standards such as ISO 17043:2023 require staff training and competency assessment but don't us how.
- It is commonly accepted that laboratory professionals who enter a career in quality assurance must build their knowledge and competence in this specialty through continuing education and experiential learning.
- However historically and currently, there are no university based or accredited training programs with a structured curriculum for laboratory professionals to learn how to operate, design, develop and implement an EQA program including proficiency testing (PT) programs.
- This professional learning has typically been organized at the direction of the EQA employer.

Study questions

- Our aim was to assess the current status of employee training and skills management programs by EQA providers.
  - What is the extent of the similarity and differences in onboarding and training between EQA providers?
  - Identify best practices and share them
  - Identify “not to do” practices and pitfalls to avoid

Interpreting and applying ISO 17043:2023

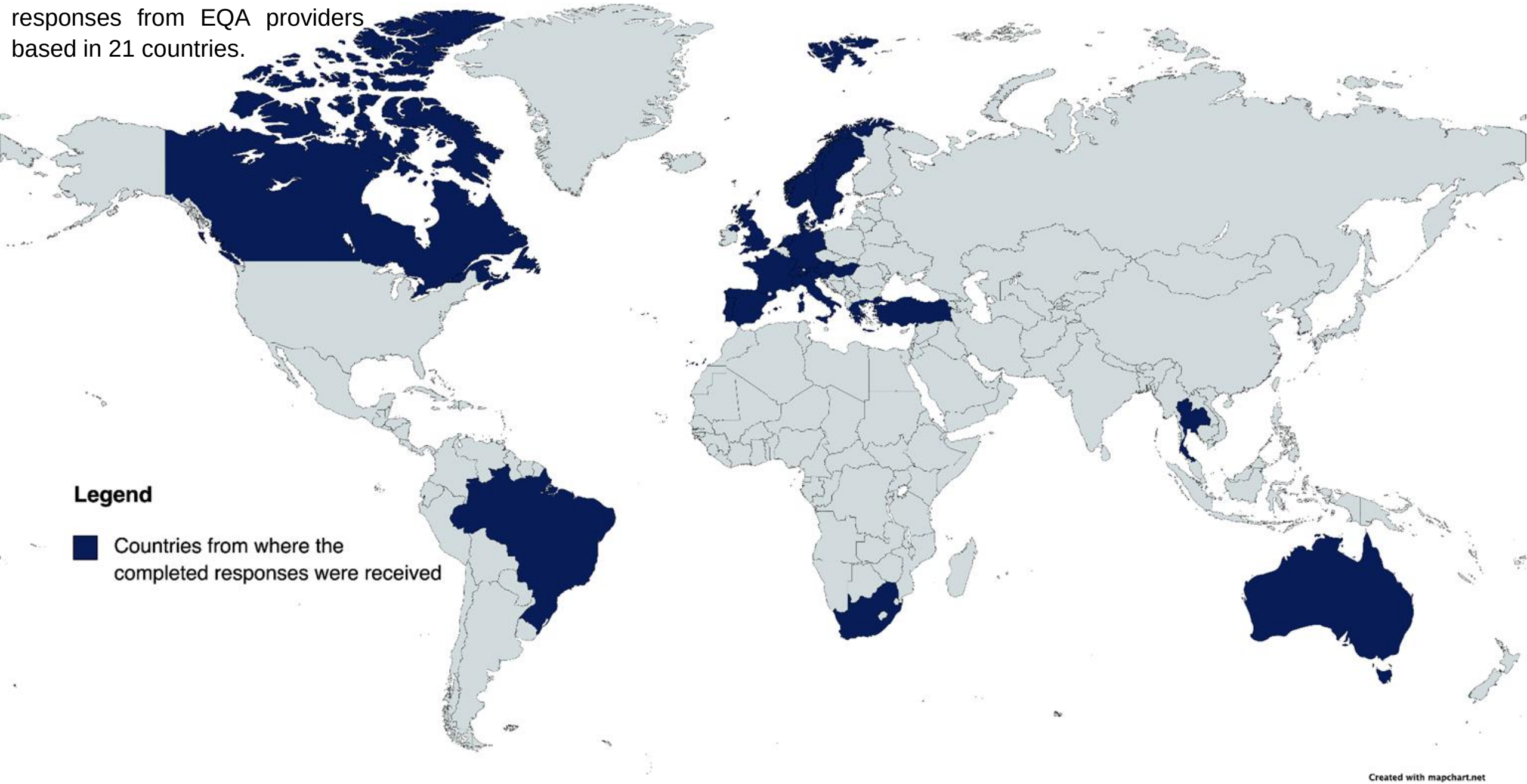
- How do you teach your staff the requirements?
- How do you evaluate their learning and knowledge?
- How do you evaluate their competence?

Approach

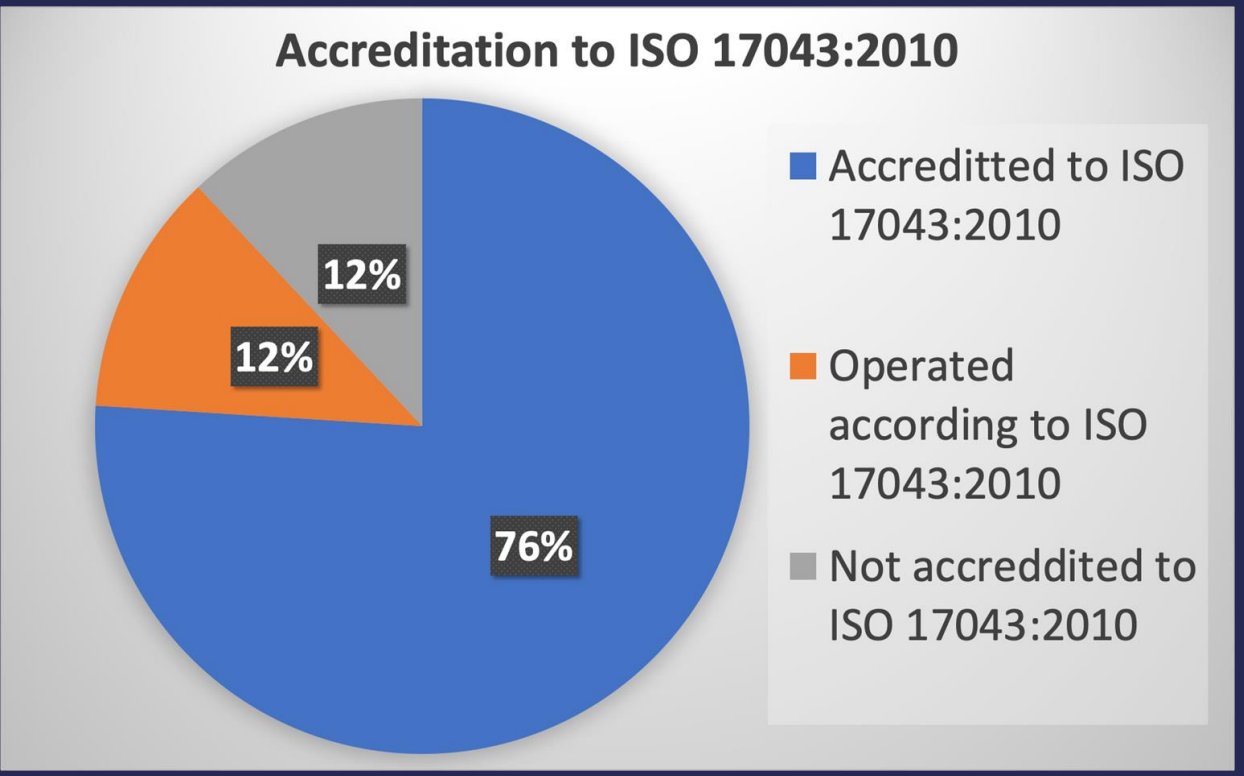
- Identify what we want to learn about the staff onboarding process
- Identify audience of the survey (EQALM members and quality partners)
- Develop a set of questions for a survey (31 qualitative and quantitative questions to assess provider policies and procedures).
- Used Qualtrics, a survey tool
- Implement the survey (April - July 2023).
- Receive and analyze results (August 2023)
- Summarize and report (September-October 2023)

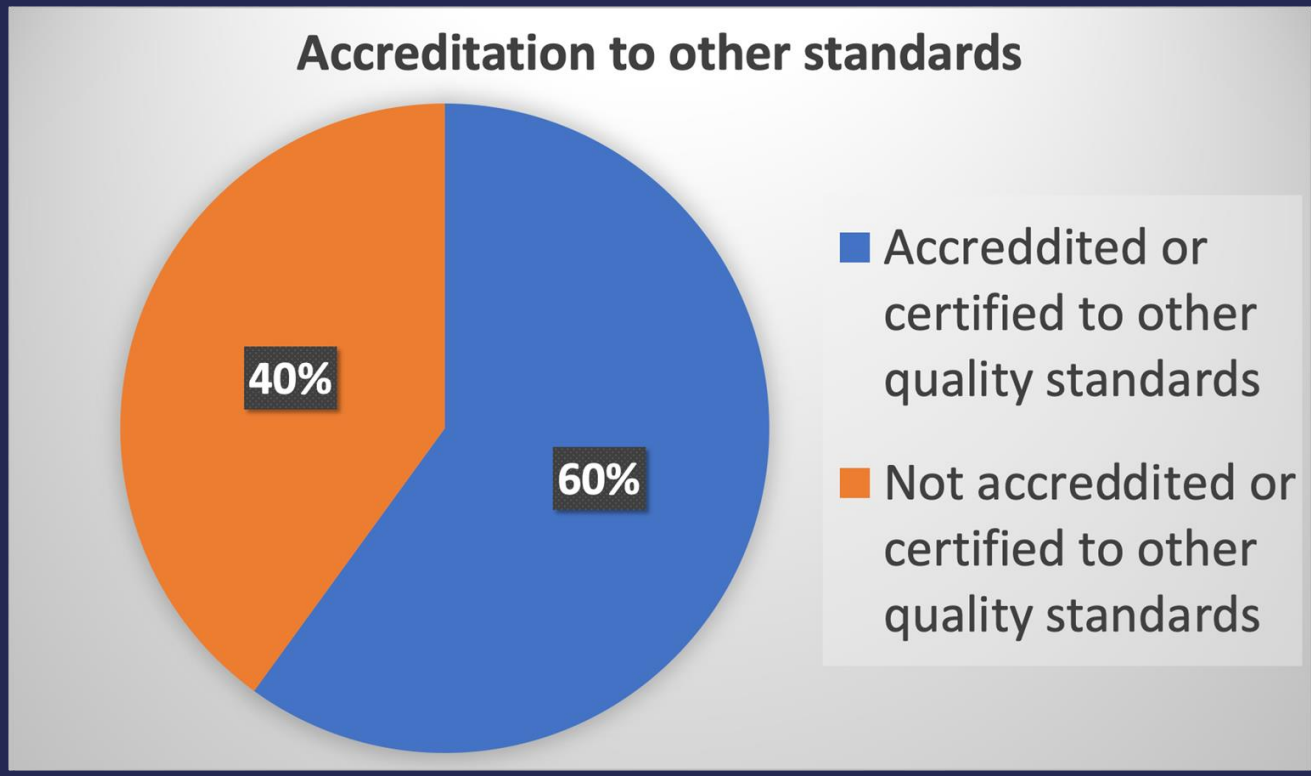
Results

The survey received 25 complete responses from EQA providers based in 21 countries.



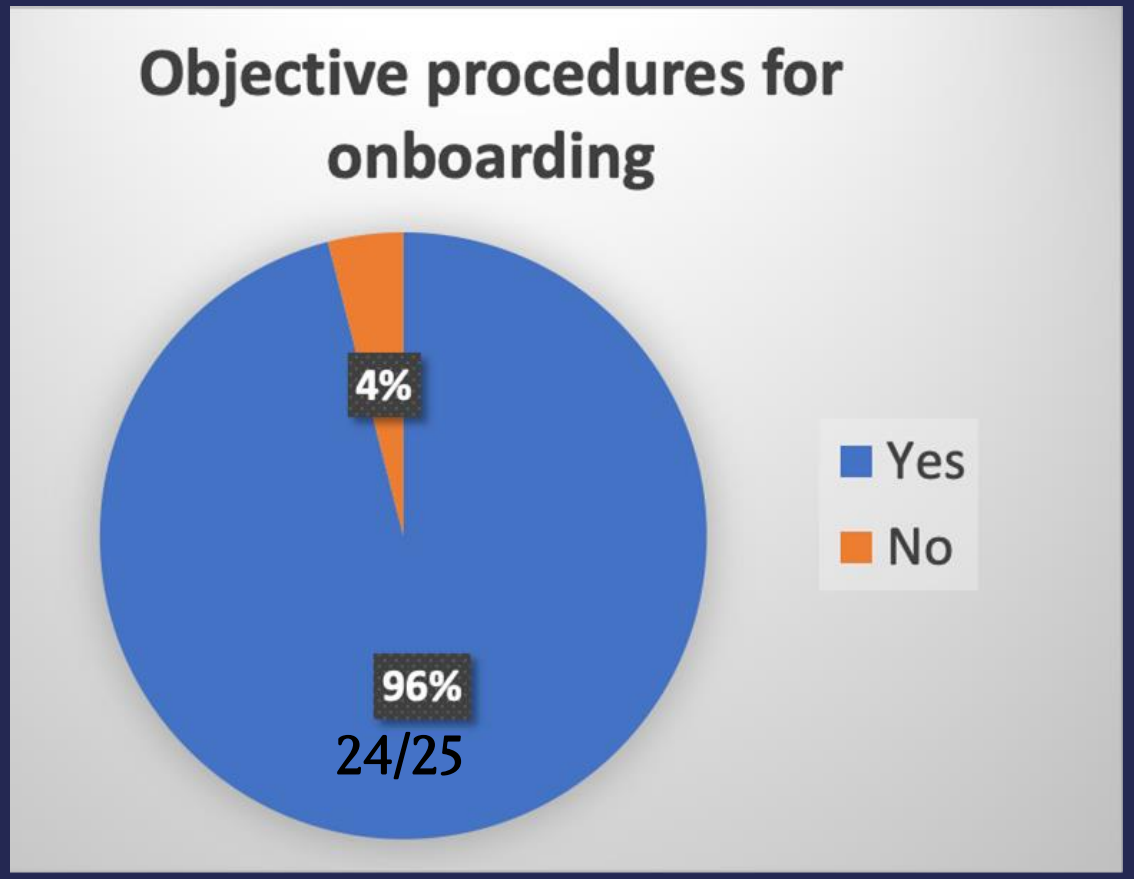
Total number staff employed in these organizations varied between 1 and 90 full time staff.

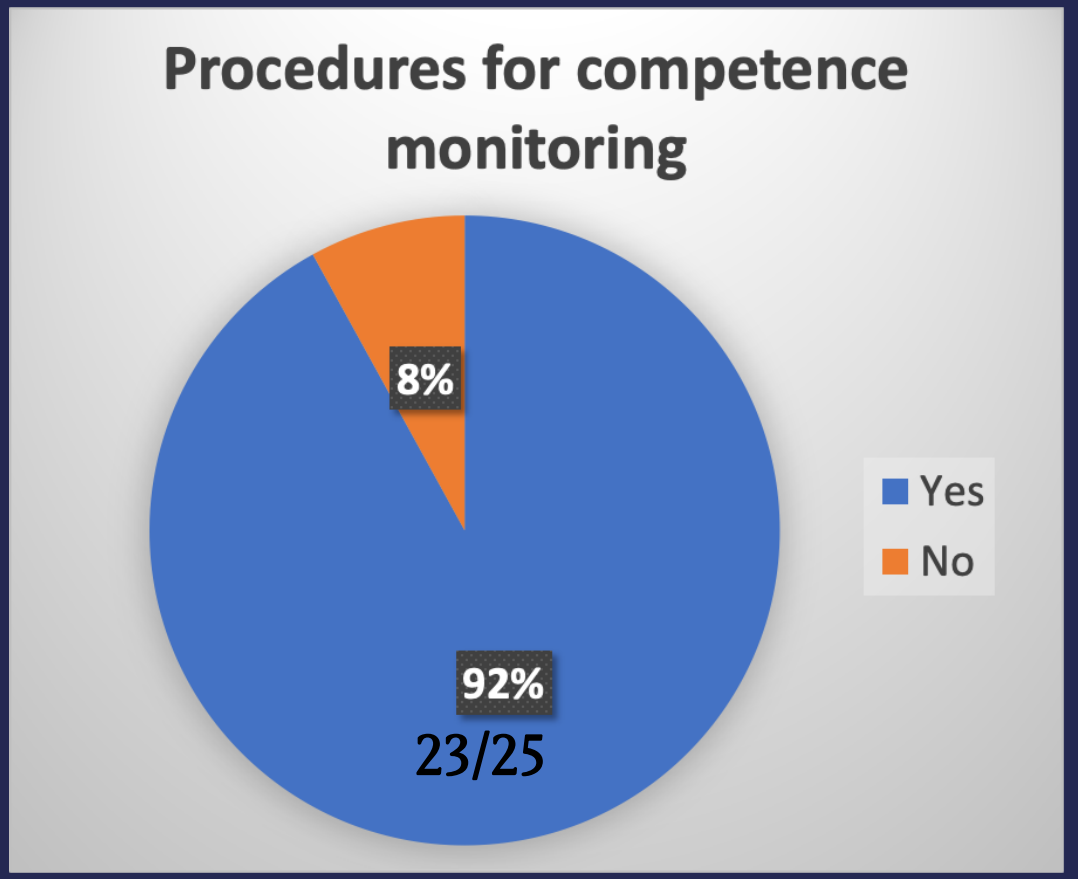




- A total of 22/25 providers stated that they were accredited (19/22) or operated (3/22) their processes according to ISO 17043:2010
- 15/25 were accredited or certified to other quality standards.

Are there established processes for the employees?





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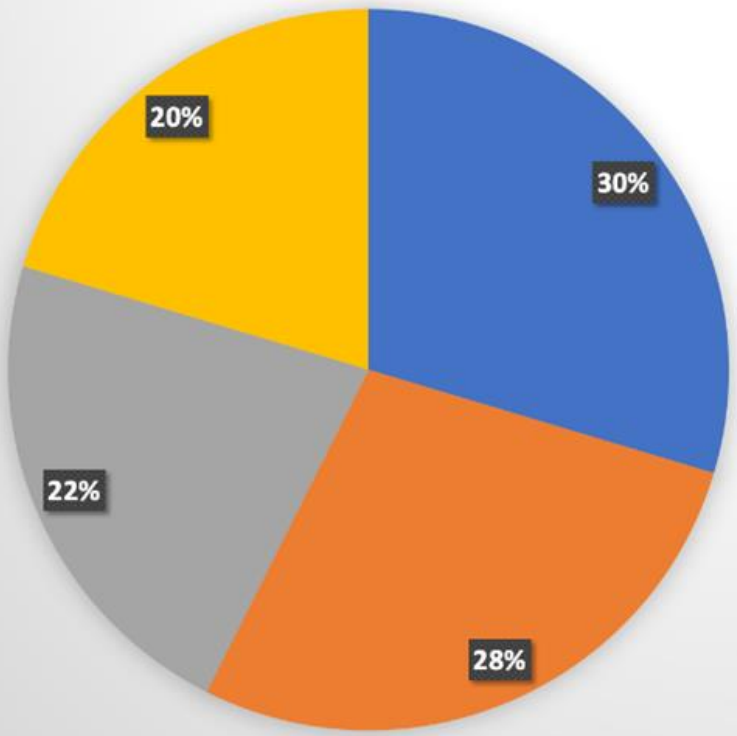
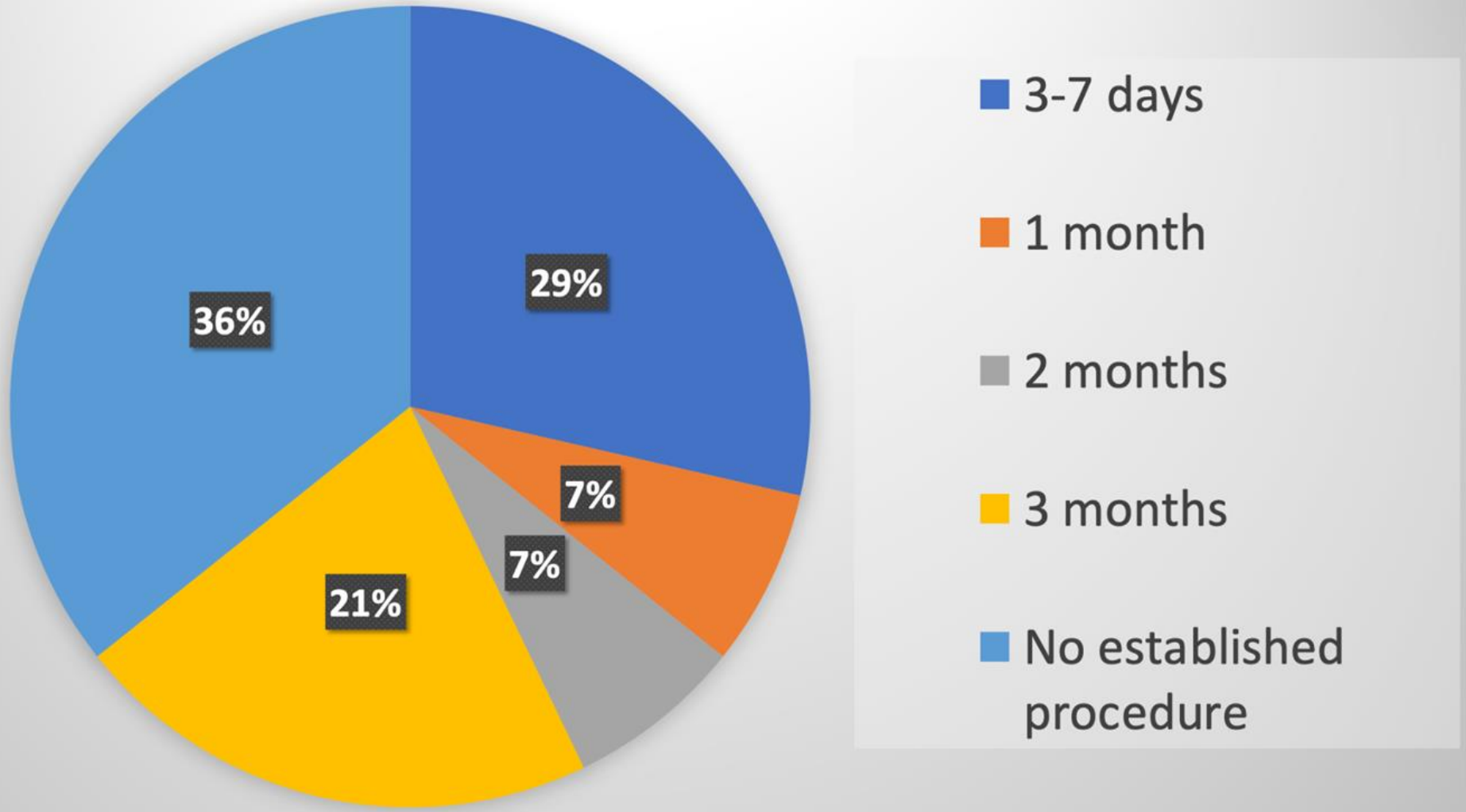
How do EQA organizations assess their employees?



Re-training for an employee that was away for >6 months



Key Takeaways

1. The objectivity of the competency assessment procedures for existing staff does not appear to be consistently given, but is required by ISO 17043:2023.
2. Duration of the enrollment phases and procedures for monitoring staff competences VARIES WIDELY amongst EQA providers.
3. Adaptations of procedures required by coming into force of this revised version of the standard should be taken as an opportunity to harmonize the processes in the competency management system among the EQA providers.
4. Internationally harmonized processes to implement the requirements of the standard can contribute to strengthening individual EQA providers positions towards the responsible accreditation bodies.

Way Forward

1. How we can share best practices
2. Frameworks for training
3. Develop a Training toolkit
4. International training program on EQA
5. Offer trainings to staff from EQALM members around the time of the symposium on various topics

Staff competence as a key performance indicator

- Do you look at staff onboarding and compliance/readiness for work as a KPI?
- Do you monitor how long it takes a staff member to learn a particular area before challenging them with a new area?

Acknowledgements

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- Thank you to survey responders!

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