

Nordic Success

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Kato: Next, we turn to examine successful cases in Nordic countries, looking at how university evaluation has been applied to improve quality in higher education. Representatives from the Nordic countries will talk about their experiences of success.

Finland

Ossi Tuomi (Secretary General, FINHEEC, Finland)

The first speaker is Dr. Ossi Tuomi, Secretary General of FINHEEC. Dr. Tuomi completed his doctoral studies at the University of Oulu in Finland, specializing in geography. He has also served as Director of the famous Chydenius Research Institute.

Dr. Tuomi, please.

(Slide1)

Ossi Tuomi: Ladies and gentlemen, it's a great pleasure to be invited to the Japan-Nordic Symposium and it's an honor to be here in the United Nations University and talk to an audience, an eminent audience like this, I think we are opening new doors and roads with this cooperation.

(Slide2)

The FINHEEC evaluations can be classified like this. Our main focus now is on quality audits and I will come back to that later. We don't run program evaluations by now on the regular basis.

We carry out program evaluations only in cases where some problems in education have arisen or in some extensive fields, but not regularly. Nowadays we hope that higher education institutions take more responsibility of evaluating their own programs.

We have a lot of experience in evaluations focusing on centers for excellence and behind this there is additional funding for higher education institutions for those who do well and I feel that this has been quite a success because institutions are very interested in these evaluations, for example for the status of a quality unit or a center of excellence, but also for the extra funding.

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FINHEEC is very much for the enhancement-led evaluation. We can call it "enhancement-led" or development-oriented or improvement-oriented as Christian Thune just said. This does not differ much, this paradigm, from the paradigms other Nordic agencies use, but perhaps we have made more noise with this compared to the

colleague organizations.

From FINHEEC's point of view, the enhancement-led paradigm or premise means that the purpose is to support higher education institutions. I would say that the interest is in support and not so much in control, and this is my main point in this respect, and it seems that this paradigm has suited very well to Finnish higher education tradition. We are not evaluating towards a certain minimum standard or we don't do any ranking lists of higher education institutions. Reports are public and all of them include proposals for further development.

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There are many fora in which there is discussion of evaluation policy and modes of implementation between FINHEEC and higher education institutions. We have planning groups, external extensive seminars, et cetera, arranged by FINHEEC to have discussions with institutions, and the aim of this is to secure the trust of higher education institutions in evaluation, and I have the feeling that we have been quite successful in this respect, because the way of thinking, the way of doing things, respects the autonomy of the higher education institutions.

Here I would shortly point out the importance of student involvement. In all Nordic countries we have students on our boards and we have students in planning groups, in evaluation panels and we have, I think my colleagues agree with me, that we have very good experiences in this, and although we have been very much for this student involvement, I feel that we still need new methods and new ways of doing it to involve students more and more in evaluations.

(Slide5)

We have introduced the audit model two years ago to the Finnish higher education area and it's in order to show the international community that we have a valid quality assurance system. Quality audits fit quite well with the enhancement-led principle, but of course here control comes into the picture as well because higher education institutions either pass or, we don't use the concept "fail"; we say that institutions either pass or need a reaudit in two years.

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We were asked to point out something about the effects of the evaluations. We all know that this is quite a difficult task to prove that there are effects and what kind of effects we have because there are other factors and interposing variables coming to the game all the time. But I think we have something to show in this respect.

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Centers of excellence in teaching and learning, for example, we can see that they have drawn attention to improving pedagogy in higher education institutions. As the evaluations are repeated, the improvement of pedagogical experience and innovation is clearly seen in processes when repeated. Teachers' pedagogical skills have been improved through systematic training and establishing units for further development of teaching. There also been established tenured posts for pedagogical university lectures, also outside the faculties of education.

In addition to providing teaching and research, the Finnish legislation for higher education prescribes an influence in societal and regional development. It's some kind of third task for higher education institutions. And we have carried evaluation of centers of excellence in regional impact, and it seems that it has served to increase the interest of higher education institutions implementing the third task and the quality of this third task. And in the same way, nominations of quality units, (quality universities in adult education) have served to attract attention to life-long learning. It has been included in university strategies and so on.

We can see evaluation policy effects, when implementing the quality audits because it has made the entire Finnish higher education to build up quality assurance on a systematic basis, and they have also taken on board the European standards and guidelines. I think here we can see the effects of evaluation on development of higher education institutions. I would say that with this kind of process, through evaluation policy, it's possible to steer the entire development of the higher education system.

And my conclusion here is that a positive, rewarding mode of guidance has been proved to work. Thank you very much.

Kato: Dr. Tuomi, thank you very much.

Iceland

Sólrún Jensdóttir (Director, Department of Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland)

Kato: The next presenter is Ms. Sólrún Jensdóttir, the Director of Department of

Education in Iceland's Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Ms. Jensdóttir completed a master's degree at the London School of Economics and Political Science and her specialty is modern European history. After serving as a staff writer for the Morgunbladid newspaper, she taught at universities in Iceland and the United Kingdom before entering the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture as a special assistant to the minister. She has since held various important positions in education and international relations within the Ministry.

Ms. Jensdóttir, please go ahead.

(Slide1)

Sólrún Jensdóttir: Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, it's a very great honor to have been invited to address this distinguished audience and I hope that we will be able to continue this interesting and fruitful cooperation with Japan in the field of higher education.

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This is the list of the content of my talk and I'll go through it quickly. First I'm going to tell you a few facts about Iceland, then the higher education system, development of quality assurance, Icelandic relation to the Bologna Process, OECD thematic review of higher education, new law on higher education. Then I will explain the way in which we will carry out the certification, qualification framework and quality assurance, and then lastly explains how we see the way forward in Iceland.

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Before giving you an overview of the quality assurance and evaluation in the higher education sector in Iceland, I would like to start by mentioning a few facts about the country to try to put the higher education system in the right context.

Iceland is one of the islands in the North Atlantic close to the Arctic Circle. Like Japan, it's a volcanic island with hot springs, where earthquakes happen frequently. The official language is Icelandic, related to the Scandinavian languages and German and spoken by all Icelanders. Iceland is a republic with a parliament of 63 members. The life expectancy in Iceland is one of the highest in the world, along with that of Japan: 79 years for men and almost 83 years for women. And infant mortality is among the lowest in the world.

Iceland is an affluent country. In 2004, the GDP per capita was the seventh highest in the world and surpassed the OECD average by around one fifth. This prosperity can be

attributed to Iceland's ability to utilize its comparative advantages by exploiting its abundant natural resources, both marine and land based, as well as human capital. Through the latter part of the 20th century the workforce moved from farming to industrial production and from industrial production to the service sector, and in 2004 the service sector employed 71.2 percent of the labor force, industry 22.4 percent, the highest agricultural sector 3.4 percent and fishing sector 3 percent. There is a considerable shortage of labor and unemployment is negligible.

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The modern Icelandic system of higher education dates back to the foundation of the University of Iceland in 1911, still by far the largest education institution at the highest in the country with several faculties and the only one to offer doctoral studies.

There are now a total of seven higher education institutions in Iceland, four public and three government-dependent private institutions. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture administers two public and three private institutions. The two agricultural institutions are administered by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The student population has grown dramatically in recent years and almost doubled from 1996 when the total was 9,564 until 2004 when the total had reached 16,068 putting considerable financial pressure on the government, as seems to be the case in most countries today. I think it is interesting for you in Japan to see these very small figures compared to what you have got in your country.

The first legal framework for the higher education system was passed by the Icelandic parliament in 1997. Up to that time, each institution had operated in accordance with special legislation. The main aim of the framework legislation was to increase autonomy of the higher education institutions and to secure a legal basis for the private institutions.

As the law increased the autonomy of the higher education institutions, the role of the national authority shifted from exercising oversight and control of input to monitoring output.

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Systematic quality assurance in higher education does not have a long history in Iceland. Until the legislation in 1997, there were no provisions for quality assurance in Icelandic law. Quality assurance had however been under discussion for several years,

and Iceland already participated in international cooperation in this field, both in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, ENQA, and the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education, NOQA. This cooperation played an important role in the development of quality assurance in higher education in Iceland.

In accordance with the law 1997, it is stipulated that the supervision of quality in higher education is exercised by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Based on the law, the ministry issued rules, on both an internal and external evaluation explaining the objectives of quality assurance, that is, to maintain and raise the quality of teaching, to improve organization, to promote greater responsibility of the institutions and to ensure their competitiveness on the international arena.

According to the rules, the higher education institutions were obliged to set up formal quality assurance systems and describe the systems publicly.

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The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the external quality assurance. There has not been established a special agency in Iceland, but in the wake of the law, in 1997 a special division of evaluation and supervision was established within the ministry to administer and coordinate the external evaluations. This division has now been replaced by the Office of Evaluation and Analysis. According to the rules on external quality assurance, the external evaluation are to be undertaken by a group of three to six independent experts meeting some of the following criteria: qualifications in the relevant field of scholarship; extensive experience of work in higher education, and; experience in employing graduates. And for this last part we look towards firms and also research institutions.

At least one of the group shall be employed outside Iceland. The institution to be evaluated produces a self evaluation report. The report of the review group is published in its entirety, and within three months the higher education institution publishes its response, and within two years the ministry shall ascertain whether and how the institution has responded to the findings of the external review. The review may cover a whole institution, specific discipline or faculty, and can also extend to several institutions or units simultaneously.

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Icelandic authorities decided in 1999 to become one of the 29 signatory countries to the

Bologna Declaration on cooperation in the European higher education area. The introduction of the Bologna Process into the Icelandic higher education system has been relatively unproblematic. The two cycle degree structure stipulated by the declaration was already in place in most faculties. Other elements of the Bologna Declaration and the process that followed are mostly in place in Iceland in accordance with the decisions of the European education ministers at their biannual meetings. The emphasis on quality assurance is at the forefront of the Bologna process, and at their meeting in Bergen, as you have heard earlier, the Ministers adopted the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area as proposed by ENQA. Most of the standards regarding external evaluation were in line with the rules already used in Iceland.

Another element in the Bologna Process that will strengthen quality assurance is the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. Iceland has already adopted a National Qualifications Framework for higher education based on the European Framework.

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During 2004 and 2005, Iceland participated in OECD's Thematic Review of Tertiary at Education, along with 24 countries, one of which is Japan. The review is organized in two strands, and Japan and Iceland are among 13 countries that take part in the second strand and are therefore visited by a team of experts from the OECD. The visit to Iceland took place in the autumn of 2005 and the experts' report was published on the OECD website on the 22nd August of this year.

Among the things scrutinized by the review team was quality assurance. The experts were of the opinion that emphasis should be kept on internal quality assurance mechanisms and the culture of evaluation already present in the system should be preserved drawing on the institutional experience. The currently existing framework for external evaluations should be maintained. The review team stressed that a comprehensive system of quality assurance should aim at improvement and accountability and warned that such a system could degenerate into culture of compliance and imposition. The team stressed the necessity of finding more effective procedures for the validation, approval and accreditation of educational programs. The lack of quality assurance in research was also discussed, but it was noted that quality assurance mechanisms were under development, and in practice much reliance was placed upon the well established incentive and bonus system based on the individual

research output of the academic staff, ensuring individual accountability for the quality of the research.

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The University Act 1997 served the purpose to strengthen the base of private institutions, establish quality assurance and encourage diversity and competition. But at the end of 2005, it was decided to revise the act. A new Higher Education Institution Act came into force on the 1st July this year. The main reason for the revision was the development and changes in higher education that had taken place since the law was passed in 1997. The main aim of the new law is to strengthen the Icelandic higher education system and improve quality so that Icelandic higher education can successfully compete internationally.

The act in 1997 did not have provisions for accreditation; the lack of which has been problematic as pointed out by the OECD and therefore it was decided during the revision of the law to introduce such a process. According to the act, the Minister of Education, Science and Culture grants accreditation to higher education institutions. This applies both to public and private institutions, including those already existing.

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This slide shows the criteria the institutions need to fulfill to be accredited. They have to define their role and policy, and their administration an organization, how they organize teaching and research, personnel qualification requirements, administrative requirements and students' rights and duties, working conditions for teachers and students and services provided, internal quality system, learning outcomes in accordance with the National Qualification Framework, and finances.

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The higher education institution shall apply for accreditation to the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. The accreditation is limited to specific fields of study in accordance with the definition by OECD's Frascati manual, and these are; the natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical sciences, agricultural sciences, social sciences and humanities. When an institution has applied to the Minister, there is appointed a committee of three independent experts to evaluate the applications. The Minister grants the accreditation if recommended by the experts. The accreditation of a field of study confirms that activities of the institution are consistent with the provisions of the act.

If a higher education institution either fails to meet the provision of the act, adhere to

the rules and regulations based thereon, or fails to meet the demands for teaching and research, the Minister can revoke their accreditation.

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The new act also stipulates that the Minister of Education, Science and Culture shall issue a National Qualifications Framework in accordance with the decision by the Education Ministers in the Bologna Process in Bergen in 2005. The National Qualification Framework has already been issued in Iceland based on the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

The National Qualification Framework is a systematic description of degrees and diplomas with emphasis on learning outcomes and the competencies the students should have attained at each level of study.

Higher education institutions are required to issue descriptions of learning outcomes for every study program.

The National Qualifications Framework shall be issued both in Icelandic and English to make the Icelandic higher education system more transparent internationally and to facilitate student mobility.

(Slide13)

The procedure introduced by the law for quality assurance of teaching is based on ENQA's Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. A special process will be put in place for research in accordance with international criteria. The main objectives of quality assurance of teaching and research are; to ensure that the requirements for accreditation are met, to ensure that the Qualification Framework for higher education is respected, to improve the quality of teaching and research in an efficient way, to increase responsibility of the institutions for their own activities, and to ensure competitiveness at the international level.

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The evaluation of quality shall be both internal and external according to rules laid down by the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. Each higher education institution is responsible for internal evaluation to be carried out regularly and to include policy and objectives, study content, teaching and teaching methods, assessment, research, research effectiveness, working conditions, administration and external relationships. Active participation of staff and students shall be ensured.

The Minister of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the external evaluation and proposes a three-year plan. The Minister can also decide to instigate a special evaluation of an institution in addition to the plan if required. The Minister can delegate the administration of an external evaluation of teaching and research to a committee, an institution, a company or other relevant agent, national or international. But at least for the time being, the Ministry's Office of Evaluation and Analysis will be responsible for the administration. The implementation will be assigned to an independent agent and the evaluation process involves both domestic and foreign experts as well as student representatives.

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The aim is to have the accreditation for all institutions in place by mid-2008 or two years after the coming-into-force of the legislation on higher education institutions. The rules for external evaluation, both for teaching and research, on the basis of the new law are being prepared and will be adopted before the end of the year. The drafts have been sent to the higher education institutions for comments.

During the last decade the Icelandic higher education system has adjusted reasonably well to a rapidly-changing environment both inside the country and in the outside world. There is always scope for improvement, and that is our aim, by increasing the effort to assure the quality and efficiency of our higher education institutions and to put human capital and financial resources to even better use.

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The Ministry is certain that the full implementation of the new law by all institutions will strengthen the position of Icelandic higher education in an increasingly competitive world where mutual trust is a prerequisite for cooperation and interaction in the international arena.

Kato: Thank you very much, Dr. Jensdóttir.

Norway

Tove Blytt Holmen (Deputy Director General, NOKUT, Norway)

Kato: The next speaker is Ms. Tove Blytt Holmen, Deputy Director General of NOKUT. Ms. Holmen completed her Master's degree at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, specializing in engineering. She has served as a Head of Division in the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Director of Studies and of Continuing Education

at the Agricultural University of Norway. Her current position is that of Deputy Director General and Head of the Accreditation Unit at NOKUT.

Ms. Holmen, please come forward.

(Slide1)

Tove Blytt Holmen: Dear hosts and dear participants of this symposium, may also I express my gratitude to be here today. I think it's very interesting. I represent NOKUT, which is the Norwegian agency for quality assurance, and this agency has a monopoly situation in Norway assessing the quality of higher education. That monopoly situation is regulated by law.

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In Norway we have 42 state-owned institutions giving higher education today. Seventy percent of the total student population will attend those state-owned universities, so it's quite an opposite of your situation. Those state-owned universities are fully financed and they are not allowed to take fees from the students. Studies are free for them; living is not, but studying is.

Another category of higher education institutions are the private ones. We have about 20 private institutions having partly and variably financing from the state also. Thirty percent of the student population will attend those private schools, and they are allowed to take tuition fees. So that's different.

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In the past years, higher education in Norway has undergone an extensive quality reform parallel and because of the Bologna Process that Christian Thune also introduced to you earlier today. The quality reform has embedded a change in governance at the institutional level. It also has increased institutional autonomy, it has led to new funding formulations for the institutions, and a part of that reform is NOKUT, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education.

If we proceed, we changed at the time, 2003, at the same time as NOKUT was established, we changed from a rather specific Norwegian academic degree structure to a more European one, the bachelor, master's and PhD degrees, three-year bachelor, two-year master and three years' PhD. That's our academic degree structure in Norway right now.

We also got a new form for student guidance, evaluation and assessment, and that

means a closer follow-up of each student is required. New financial support for students; the students, they got even better financial support when, and the new act regulating universities and colleges and into, well, when that was decided upon in 2002. And at last, the ambitions of internationalization became much clearer and they were much more ambitious now than they were before.

All these elements are now regulated in the new act for universities and colleges, and this one act regulates all institutions, also the private ones. Universities, colleges, state-owned and private, are regulated by the same university act in Norway.

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When it comes to governance at the institutional level, several things have happened, but I would like to show you one thing that has been pointed out earlier also: student involvement is very important to us in the Nordic countries. The board of a state-owned institution will consist of several different representatives, but also, the most important thing, two student members on each university board.

Also, student representatives should have at least 20 percent of the seats, two seats at the minimum, to see that they are not alone on a board, in all executive bodies of an institution. For the private institutions the law is a little bit different, but it says that the board for a private institution also should have a student representative. And that is also because we regard the students as very important in governing higher education in Norway today.

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About institutional autonomy, this is rather hard to explain to you but I'll try as best as I can. We have different categories of institutions, higher education institutions. If you look to this column, the universities, the university is within a category that has the full power to establish bachelor, master and PhD within the whole classical breadth of university, the full scope of university. They have the power to establish whatever degree they want to. For a specialized university they have the same power concerning depth of the studies but not the breadth. The specialized university may be like a school of economics. We have a specialized university in physics, music, veterinarian medicine and so on. They have the full depth of establishing their degrees but not go beyond their limits.

Then we have the certified university colleges, which is a category that is only allowed to give a bachelor degree by themselves, but they really can offer any bachelor degree

they want to. They are quite ambitious, the certified colleges in Norway. They want also to give master's and doctorate degrees, but if they do they have to apply to NOKUT, I will show you later on, to get those certified. That's what accreditation of programs is all about.

The non-certified institutions, they are the private ones. In the beginning, in 2003, the private institutions were not allowed to offer any study program unless they applied earlier to the ministry, nowadays to NOKUT, to get these programs certified. But of course building up competency, running degrees, made them a little bit impatient. They also wanted the same institutional freedom as the others because they felt as good as, and now after they have run bachelor degrees for some years, examined candidates for at least two years, they may apply to NOKUT to get accredited as a university college, then they will have increased freedom to give whatever they want to a bachelor degree. When you are in this category, they get impatient to become a university of one kind, so they will apply to NOKUT to become accredited as a university, a specialized university, having more freedom. I hope this will explain a little bit of the certification system and the freedom also with having different kinds of powers to give degrees.

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About the NOKUT mandate, I don't think I shall go into that too much, but I can say that our main tasks: it is to monitor quality and quality systems in the university institutions; it is to control that the quality is sufficient that it satisfies our criteria, standards and criteria for educational quality. And also, we have evaluations for enhancement purposes, but that is a smaller field. I do believe, however, you might say what you want about accreditation, it is an assessment for control, but I also think it has quite a deal of enhancement drive within it.

We do something else: approval of shorter vocational education and recognition of foreign education.

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The Norwegian model of quality assurance, the basis for that is of course the higher education institutions and their portfolios. This new act that regulates universities and colleges says that every institution, certified or not, that is given higher education has to have sufficient quality assurance systems in place. NOKUT is established then to perform the audits. Every sixth year we will return to an institution and see to it that it has sufficient quality assurance systems.

Through this, we have experienced through these three years we have existed then, three or four years, that the institutions organize their quality work better than before. This auditing we believe has an effect not only on the quality systems themselves, but also in the way they organize and develop their programs.

It might occur, though, that we get suspicion of lacking quality while we are visiting the institution, auditing, and then we are able to initiate a revision of certification or re-certification of the program or the point where we got the suspicion of lacking quality. So we are not only working at the systems, but that is the basis; we also go into their portfolio, their actual program.

If you look back to the table I showed you about institutional autonomy, the institutions, whenever they want to give a program outside their power, they may apply to NOKUT for a certification such programs, and we have set standards for what is expected as good educational quality. We have set, NOKUT has set the standards and the criteria for that quality picture.

Once every year the board of NOKUT will decide for a national revision of certification or a national re-accreditation. Last year the board decided that we should go through and look into all the Norwegian programs, bachelor programs in nursing. This year it will be, this coming year it will be master and doctorate degrees in law, in pharmacy and in dentistry.

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There have of course been some tumble-stones along our way. I won't go deeply into the stories of how we tumbled, but I will tell a little bit about the most important results. The division of labor and responsibility between NOKUT and the ministry is very important. NOKUT conducts what should be reliable independent academic assessments, and the ministry is the owner and political instant. May I be so free to say that they have learned and they are in Norway really the political instance towards our academic assessments.

The ministry may not instruct NOKUT in excess of what is laid down by the law and may not revise certification judgment by turning them from a "no" to "yes." If we say "no," they are not good enough, the ministry may not say "yes."

Through the years, higher education institutions have been heard thoroughly when

designing models for quality assurance, also when designing or setting up the standards and criteria, and we listened to them in our very beginning and we found that very valuable. We all agree upon the standards and criteria even though it was NOKUT that decided upon them.

All evaluations conducted by NOKUT are public and NOKUT shall make efforts to ensure that they are made known to the public. Of course that also relates to the European standards for such work, but it is very hard sometimes to keep up with that. You can have rather tense situations when publishing material.

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When quality fails, we may withdraw the power but the institution will have one or two years to improve before we finally take that decision.

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We also have an appeals board so the institutions may appeal primarily the negative decisions by NOKUT; they have an appeals board to seek to. It doesn't however go to the experts' judgments, the experts' advice, but it goes to the process of NOKUT only. It has to be shown that we had something wrong in our procedures.

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A little bit about the basic fundamentals of our standards and criteria for the program certification. First of all, an important paragraph in the act regulating universities is as follows: "Universities and university colleges shall promote the purpose of the Act by providing higher education on the basis of the foremost within research, academic and artistic development work and empirical knowledge." This basis of the "foremost within" is very important to us. It really is a fundament for putting a high threshold so that institutions should really show active research and that is involved, the results are used for education, and there are also highly academic professional personnel among the teachers.

We look into curriculum, staff, the internationalization strategies and results; we look at infrastructure and the way they do their quality assurance.

These past years, we, I think I might say, that we can register improvement in curriculum, the way that they are better in formulating their aims and ambitions and thinking that in connection with the content and the pedagogical methods. They are really putting aims, content, pedagogical methods, more into a system now than they did three years ago in fact. The institutions also put more interest in the academic

profile on staff and in general they are better documenting their quality than before and that may sit transparent to all of us.

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I won't say that much about criteria. I don't think time will give room for that. You can read it yourself.

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But I will sum up. I started it all by telling you about this quite extensive quality reform that was politically-driven, and there were two main reasons for the reform. The one of course was to achieve improved quality in higher education and research. Another reason was to follow up internationalization, specifically through the Bologna process and Norway's obligations in this respect. I think I can say that our minister at the time wanted to be in the forefront joining the Bologna Process.

Years of cooperation between the parties, the higher education institutions, NOKUT and the ministry, show that we are moving in the right direction, at least for my sake, doing the quality assurance work, I can say that we are getting an improved quality out of this all. Yes, I think that will be it. Thank you for your attention.

Kato: Ms. Holmen, thank you very much.

Sweden

Staffan Wahlén (Senior Advisor, National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden)

Kato: The final presentation on successful cases in Nordic countries comes from Mr. Staffan Wahlén, Senior Advisor to the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. Mr. Wahlén completed a Master's degree in linguistics at the University of Stockholm. He has for many years served as an Education Consultant at the University of Stockholm and Head of the University's Centre for Languages for Specific Purposes.

Mr. Wahlén, please go ahead.

(Slide1)

Staffan Wahlén: I am truly honoured by this kind invitation and by having been given the opportunity to share with you some of the ideas and some of the elements of the Swedish system of quality assurance in higher education.

Speaking last on an occasion like this is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It's an advantage because I can draw upon what has already been said and make reference to that, but it is also a disadvantage in that some of what I'm going to say will necessarily be a repetition of things that have already been told, and I hope you will bear with me for that.

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The background that I would like to sketch summarily is first the size of higher education in Sweden. We have today something like 340,000 undergraduate students. The number has doubled over the past ten to 15 years, so there is a substantial increase, which is part of the government's policy. We also have a similar increase in the number of post-graduate students.

In our higher education system, we have 14 state universities and three semi-private institutions, one of which is a major university of technology. There are 22 small institutions, what we call university colleges, including seven colleges of visual and performing arts.

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The degree system involved a three-year bachelor's degree, and on top of that a one-year master's degree and then a four year PhD programme. We are now, however, somewhat late in comparison with several European countries, including our Nordic neighbours, in introducing the Bologna system with a three-year bachelor, two-year master and a three-year PhD. At the same time we will retain the former degrees for the time being, so, in fact, over the next six or seven years there will be a substantial, and somewhat confusing, number of university programmes.

In this context, The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education operates as the only quality assurance organization. We're a bit different from our Nordic sister organisations in that we deal not only with evaluation and similar activities, but we also have a largish statistics department, responsible for higher education statistics, whose work we can draw on in our evaluation activities. We also have a substantial information department, a department of legal supervision and, like in Norway, a department dealing with recognition of foreign degrees.

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In Sweden, as in most countries, the objectives of evaluation are three-fold. One is assurance, or control. The reason for this is primarily to make sure that Swedish higher education meets the goals set up in the Higher Education Act. This has become more

important in the light of the government's goal of a 50 per cent participation rate. The second goal is improvement or enhancement, of the provision of higher education. Finally, there is also the need to provide information on the quality of higher education to the public, to taxpayers, to the government, employers and other stakeholders. This information is not disseminated in the form of league tables or ranking.

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Our evaluation activities include four basic ingredients. One, which has now been put temporarily on hold, is institutional quality audit. It will be re-introduced in 2006. The second is *accreditation*, i.e. an evaluation for a formal decision, "yes" or "no" for the introduction, re-introduction or continuation of a program. Thirdly, since 2001, we have been conducting subject and program evaluations, covering all provision leading to a degree offered at Swedish universities and colleges across the country. And for each evaluation, and I'll be coming back to that in a while, we have made accreditation decisions as to whether these programmes should be allowed to continue or not. Fourthly, and finally, like in Denmark, we conduct thematic evaluations, and I'll come back to that as well.

(Slide6)

Accreditation for new programs involves primarily certification for master's degrees, including the new two-year Bologna master's. These evaluations concern university colleges, since full universities have the right to award all degrees except what we call professional degrees. For these degrees leading to professional qualifications (law, engineering, teaching, medicine, nursing, etcetera) all higher education institutions have to apply and be certified.

Accreditation also includes the possibility, like in Norway, of allowing university colleges to apply for full university status, i.e. conducting their own research and awarding PhD degrees.

(Slide7)

For about seven years two rounds of institutional quality audit were conducted with the primary aim of enhancement, reviewing their institutional quality work, through the familiar processes of self-evaluation, peer review, site visit and public report. What we assessed in, particular, was academic leadership as a tool for development of an academic organization. The ideal was not necessarily strong leadership, but rather incisive and informed leadership as a tool for development of the academic organization.

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We tried to assess the level of cooperation with stakeholders as a means of enhancing

the quality of institutions. The active participation of teaching staff and other staff in quality work and the extent to which quality work was actually integrated in other processes at the university were other elements. We also took for granted that internal evaluation processes and follow-up activities should be part of the quality work of the higher education institutions as well as internationalization. Finally, the question of gender equality in higher education, which has not been mentioned before, was and is included in the quality assurance domain.

(Slide9)

The quality audits were discontinued, for a number of years, when, in 2001, the Agency introduced a subject and program review model, which, was, a still is quite extensive. It involves the evaluation of all subjects and programs across the country leading to a degree. This means that by now we have been conducting about 1,700 reviews, which is an average of about 275 each year. It is a peer review model, which has involved about 900 peers, over the years – experts from Sweden, from the other Nordic countries and also from the rest of Europe and, in a few cases, the United States. Reviews are conducted in Swedish, so international experts will have to have at least a working knowledge of the language.

We also include students as a matter of course in the review panels, and in the cases of professionally oriented programs we also include relevant stakeholders.

The evaluation results in a decision by the agency as to whether the program meets the quality standards required by the Higher Education Ordinance. If it does not, the university is given one year in which to improve, and a re-evaluation then takes place. If the standards are still not met, the agency has the right to close down the program. This has happened on only one occasion so far, mostly because the institutions have adapted or, in some cases closed down the program themselves.

(Slide10)

In our reviews we look at the prerequisites of the program. What are the resources and teacher qualifications, the quality of the library and laboratories etc? To what extent does the program have its own quality assurance? Does the program have a functional organization? And does it lead to good results? We look at processes, such as teaching and examination methods. And, finally, we examine results in terms of the quality of theses and completion rates.

(Slide11)

The fourth element is the thematic quality audits. We conduct special investigation into

various quality aspects across the higher education institutions. One such investigation has dealt with internationalization and how it is used as a tool for quality improvement. Another has concentrated on the cooperation of institutions with society and business. A third has studied the role of student influence in universities. Such studies have also been done in the other Nordic countries, but it is possible that they have been more common in Sweden.

(Slide12)

So what do we see as the specific elements of Swedish evaluation of higher education? Well, like the other Nordic countries, we see student involvement, including that of PhD students, as experts in our panels. This is indeed important and rewarding. Secondly, through our subject and program evaluations, we get a complete national picture of each program, and this is regarded by many as very rewarding, not only by the students and academic staff, but also by the general public. Thirdly, the sanctions imposed in case a program does not meet adequate standards are also a specific element which is seen as important and quality driving. Fourthly, in contrast to many other countries, we include PhD programs and, fifthly, we conduct systematic follow-up activities after a few years, to see what has happened as a result of the evaluation, and we also publish the results of these.

I might also add another aspect, which is perhaps not self-evident: through our program and subject evaluations, which have affected the whole system, including both institutional leadership, administration, staff and students, there has developed an awareness and knowledge of at least one method of evaluation of higher education among all those involved in the process through self-evaluations and discussions with peers during the site visits.

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What then is the impact of all these activities? When it comes to the audits, we have seen improvement of quality work in university leadership and strategic operations, we have also experienced improvement of student influence and how that has helped to enhance teaching processes. Further, cooperation with stakeholders has helped to focus teaching and learning. But in the end, it is difficult to measure the real impact of audits and of internal quality work in universities. That is an important subject for further discussion.

(Slide14)

The impact of program and subject reviews is seen more easily. The threat of closing down programs that do not meet reasonable standards has been effective. Only one

program has actually been closed down by the agency, but action has been taken to avoid such a thing happening, either through significant improvement or by the institutions themselves discontinuing the program that have not been deemed to be viable.

Clear improvement has been identified when it comes to teaching staff qualifications. Additional staff have been hired, with better qualifications. Staff development has become a more prominent feature of university strategies.

The most conspicuous impact was seen in the wake of a particularly tough program evaluation of teacher education. The very critical report resulted in the government introducing immediate changes in the higher education ordinance. Changes in organization and syllabi, course materials and examination processes introduced by the universities themselves were other consequences. We still have not seen the last of these consequences, but this particular review demonstrates that evaluation of higher education can lead to very important impacts.

It might be added that some of the general observations made in a number of evaluations have to do with the need for greater cooperation among higher education institutions, with the need for specialization, in the sense that all institutions should not necessarily provide the same programmes, and with the need for concentration of resources to certain universities. These observations have led to action taken by the government and by a number of higher education institutions, which are now developing strategies along the lines suggested.

(Slide15)

Finally, any quality assurance agency must practice what it teaches. In other words, it must assure the quality of its own activities, as Christian Thune mentioned in connection with the Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. So the Swedish Agency regularly conducts internal monitoring of what we do. We also provide an annual analytical summary of evaluation activities, and collect and make use of feedback from various actors. Our activities are also regularly monitored by an external advisory board, and we submit ourselves to external reviews.

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We are, finally on the brink of establishing a new quality assurance model, which is really a combination of the methods that we've been using so far. The model will

emphasize the higher education institutions' own quality assurance and enhancement systems, and thus, in a sense, we are back where we started 12 years ago, with the audits, but drawing on all the experience of other methods that we have been using throughout this period.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Kato: Thank you very much, Mr. Wahlén.

That concludes the program for this morning.

The afternoon session begins at one o'clock. We request that after taking lunch, you return to your seats by the starting time. Please leave the simultaneous interpretation receivers behind when you leave your seat. We also request that you remember to keep your nametags on as you enter and leave the hall.