

Contributions of university evaluation to society:

University evaluation in Norway

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My introduction

- “Contributions of university evaluation to society”
- Questions asked by the organisers:
 - “Goal of university evaluation in the Nordic
 - How should the government, universities and quality assurance agency satisfy with the accountability of university evaluation
 - How should universities utilize the result of the evaluation for improvement”



Types of evaluations/assessments carried out by NOKUT

- Quality audit (evaluation of institutional quality assurance systems)
- Initial accreditations:
 - Institutional accreditation
 - Programme/course accreditation
- Revisions of accreditations
- Evaluations of significance to assessment of the quality of higher education



Evaluations and assessment carried out by NOKUT

- All evaluations and assessment are carried out by external committees or expert panels established by NOKUT. Only the secretary of the committee is a NOKUT officer.
- All reports from the committees and expert panels are public
- The reports are comprehensive and present basic information about the institution, a thorough evaluation spelled out in recommendations as well as more formal conclusions
 - The reports are very important tools for the institutions further work with quality aspects
 - The institutions normally express great satisfaction with the reports and often underline their practical usefulness
 - We have the understanding that the institutions pay considerable attention to the recommendations



Quality audit

- Institutions are required by law to have satisfactory internal quality systems
- The system will be assessed by NOKUT in periods of maximum six years
 - Institutional quality audits represent the systematic, comprehensive mechanism for external scrutiny of the quality of higher education
- The institutions themselves carry the responsibility for the quality of their own educational provision
 - To carry out robust *internal* quality assurance is in their own interest
 - The institutions have a good possibility to develop an institutional **quality culture**



Quality audit

- The institutions have the **freedom** to design their own quality assurance system within a given frame of reference
- External quality assessment:
 - Should assess whether the internal quality assurance works effectively and convincingly
 - Should not give detailed instruction as to **how** the internal quality assurance should be done
- The concept of **freedom** for the institution to design their own quality assurance system is supposed to foster a sense of **ownership and broad participation** among the institution's staff and students



Quality audits

- The purpose of the evaluation of the quality assurance system is to audit the quality assessments that the institution itself makes of its educational provision
- Quality audits cannot directly themselves lead to the loss of accreditation.
 - But could reveal indications of poor quality
 - NOKUT may follow up these indications by carry out revision of accreditations
 - The link between institutional quality audits and revisions of accreditations can be considered as a central pillar in the Norwegian system



Quality audits

- The quality assurance system should be used as an tool for the institution to pay continues attention to the improvement of their educational provisions
- The feedback to the students about actions for improvements is crucial.
 - Improve the confidence between the institution and the students
 - The students may pay an even more important role in developing the quality of the education when they see improvements
- The fact that the institutions have established, and are able to operate, a reliable quality system may be crucial for the trust and reliability expressed from the society to the Norwegian institutions for higher education



Initial accreditations: Institutional accreditation

- Accreditation of institutions is an instrument which make it possible to change institutional category
- NOKUT carry out institutional accreditation based on applications to change category
- The aim is to achieve academic expansion
- Through a process from being e.g. a university college with the ambition to getting the status of a university, there is need to increase the institution's competence and quality
 - This may:
 - Create a political will to allocate additional resources at the governmental level
 - Mobilize particular support from the regional or local politicians, society and industry
 - Increase the regional competence platform
 - Create regional innovation and new professional activities in the region



Initial accreditations: Programme/course accreditation

- Accreditation of programmes of study is an instrument to secure the standard of new programmes
- Accreditations are carried out by NOKUT when an institution applies for the accreditation of a new course or programme that the institution's status doesn't allow it to provide automatically
- Unaccredited institutions must undergo accreditation procedures for all new provision at all levels
- University colleges must do it for all new provision beyond the bachelor level
- Universities and special field universities (e.g. a school of veterinary science) possess full rights to award degrees at all levels without specific programme accreditation



Institutional Autonomy

	Universities	Specialised universities	Accredited university colleges	Non-accredited colleges
PhD.				
Master				
Bachelor				



Power to establish any study programme (BA, MA, PhD)



Power is limited. The institution can not offer study programmes in the field without accreditation and a final decision by The Ministry of Education.

Initial accreditations: Programme/course accreditation

- In order to achieve governmental supported students loan, a study programme has to be accredited
- Accreditation of new programmes are an important prerequisite in the Bologna-process signed by the Norwegian government
- Accreditation may be considered as an important tool to achieve the national political and institutional goal to secure that the quality of higher Norwegian education is at a high international level
- It is considered important for the students to know that their study programme has been accredited
- Accreditation of new programmes establish an increased confidence to the institutions from the society



Revisions of accreditations

- Revision of accreditation of programmes of study
- Revision of accreditation of institutions
- Based on different indications, NOKUT may conduct an evaluation of an institution or a programme of study with a view to do revision of a previously granted accreditation. Such revision may result in withdrawal of the accreditation. The Ministry shall then withdraw the rights entailed by accreditation.
- Revision may be triggered by indications from the institutional audit of the quality assurance system or by other indications of inferior quality.
- Revisions may be carried out as random tests



Revisions of accreditations

- Accreditation is not a monitoring instrument only
- The reports from the expert panels contains recommendations on how the institutions could develop the quality beyond the minimum level
- The experience shows that the institutions follow up the expert's recommendations
- Accreditation is a strong instrument for obtaining the goal of continuous improvement of higher education
- The decision to revoke the accreditation of a programme or institution will obviously create a considerable set of activities in order to retain the quality necessary for accreditation



Evaluations of significance to assessment of the quality of higher education

- NOKUT may decide to conduct other types of evaluations that are considered useful from the perspective of increasing knowledge about quality in Norwegian higher education.
- Also the Ministry may instruct NOKUT to carry out such evaluations
- In these evaluations NOKUT will no longer have quality control as an objective. The relation to the evaluated institutions changes correspondingly.
- When the object is exclusively “to learn more”, participating institutions become NOKUTs project partners



Evaluations of significance to assessment of the quality of higher education

- Important source of information for the Ministry and for the institutions in their decision making and allocation of recourses for improvement of higher education.
- May indicate to NOKUT if a revision of accreditation of a program or institution is necessary or relevant.



Challenges and further development of the system of quality assurance in higher education

- Based on the information given concerning the links between the various elements in the Norwegian system for quality assurance of higher education it can be concluded that it is **an integrated system**
- One of the strengths of the Norwegian system for quality assurance in higher education is the balance between internal and external quality assurance with focus on the institutions' responsibility for the quality on their provisions.
- This balance, combined with confidence in the institutions, also make the system resource effective



Challenges and further development of the system of quality assurance in higher education

- Besides getting more out of the existing system by improving processes and procedures and following up other challenging issues, the following steps could be taken:
 - Systematize the accreditation instruments more; criteria and procedures
 - Reserve evaluations of significance for assessment of quality of higher education, primary to thematic evaluations, covering specific aspects across the institutional spectrum
 - Give higher priority to work with the examination of the effects of the different instruments on the aims and objectives
 - Achieve more knowledge on the effectiveness of the different methods used and how to reduce the cost in quality work without reducing the quality

Some general conclusions

- The various types of evaluations of the quality assurance system in higher education creates an increased focus on quality development in higher education
 - Important for the country as such
 - Important for the students
 - Important for the institutions
- A comprehensive quality assurance system and the evaluation tools used creates:
 - Increased confidence between the society and the institutions
 - Better contact between the society and the institutions
 - Better contact between the industry and the institutions
 - A better platform for decision making for allocation of resources both at the institutional and governmental level
 - A better platform for other political decisions
 - An increased possibility for internationalisation within higher education
- The lack of an appropriate national quality assurance system in higher education will result in a loss of confidence in the modern society, among students and among politicians

