

How University Evaluations are being innovated in Europe

Japan-Nordic Symposium: On the Frontier of University
Evaluation – Making the most of Nordic Successes

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Structure of presentation

- European cooperation in quality assurance of higher education (ENQA)
- Cooperation between the Nordic agencies (NOQA)
- Quality assurance of higher education in Denmark (EVA).

1992 prospects for a European success (1)

The positive:

- As a rule government initiated and owned agencies
- Independency of agencies in choice of methods and processes
- Four stage model universally applied (independent agency, self-evaluations, site visit by experts, public report)
- Cyclical activities in most national systems
- Very positive attitude towards agency networking
- Strong back up from the EU Commission
- 1994-95 The European Pilot Projects.

1992 prospects for a European success (2)

The negative:

- Fragmented national approaches (goals and methods)
 - Western Europe: improvement oriented evaluations
 - Central/Eastern Europe: accountability oriented accreditations
- Considerable variance in professional capacity building
- Language and terminology problems
- General scepticism and mistrust from universities.

European quality assurance strategies by 2002

National agency in place in almost every European country

EVA survey for ENQA identifies five top approaches:

- Accreditation of programmes
- Evaluation of programmes
- Audit of institutions
- Evaluation of institutions
- Accreditation of institutions.

The Bologna Proces – challenge and catalyst

Bologna 1999 – Prague 2001 – Berlin 2003 – Bergen 2005 – London 2007

- Important themes: the transparency, compatibility, comparability and flexibility of European higher education
- Increasing focus on quality assurance of higher education
- Key stakeholders: universities, students, teachers, employers and society.

ENQA

- acronym of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- established in 1999
- today more than 42 member agencies
- first objective: to share and disseminate knowledge and best practice
- second (and increasingly important) objective: to fulfil a political role.

ENQA report on European standards

“Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”

- submitted to the European Ministers of Education in Bergen in May 2005
- fully endorsed by ENQA members and partners
- standards and guidelines adopted by the European Ministers.

Results and recommendations

- Agreed European standards for internal and external quality assurance and for external QA agencies.
- The standards will be common reference points for HEIs and QA agencies.
- Obligatory cyclical review within five years for European QA agencies
- A European register of QA agencies will be developed.

Standards for higher education

Scope: The standards cover internal as well as external quality assurance of HEIs.

Target group: The standards are applicable to all HEIs in the Bologna signatory states

Purpose:

- to improve the higher education available to students in the EHEA
- to assist HEIs in managing and enhancing their own quality
- to form a background for QA agencies in their work.

Standards for internal quality assurance

- Policy and procedures for quality assurance
- Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
- Assessment of students
- Quality assurance of teaching staff
- Learning resources and student support
- Information systems
- Public information.

Standards for external quality assurance

- Use of internal quality assurance procedures
- Development of external quality assurance processes
- Criteria for decisions
- Processes fit for purpose
- Reporting
- Follow-up procedures
- Periodic reviews
- System-wide analyses.

Standards for external QA agencies

Background: The growing numbers of European external QA agencies and of operators from outside Europe

Target group: External quality assurance agencies operating in one or more Bologna signatory states.

Purpose: To make the professionalism, credibility and integrity of the agencies visible, transparent and comparable

Standards for external QA agencies

- Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education
- Official status
- Activities
- Resources
- Mission statement
- Independence
- External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies
- Accountability procedures.

The European Register of QA agencies

- Bergen mandate
- Purpose
- Users
- Scope
- The European Register Committee
- Time schedule.

Main challenges for success

- The willingness of governments, HEIs and the QA agencies to implement the European standards
- The balance between national subsidiarity as a central principle and overall European constructions
- The different interests and goals between governments, agencies, HEIs, students and other stakeholders
- The risk that the register develops into a political rather than professional instrument.

The Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA)

- Annually meetings since 1992
- Officially established in 2003
- Regional network under ENQA
- Low level of formalisation
- No substantial links to the Nordic political processes.

Indications for Nordic networking

Positive:

- All agencies national and government initiated
- Shared culture and tradition for Nordic cooperation
- Universities generally positive towards quality assurance
- Shared Scandinavian language
- Combinations of accountability and improvement oriented approaches
- Shared methods: Evaluation – Audit – Accreditation.

Negative:

- Still very individual approaches to agency mandates by the Nordic governments.

Nordic agencies' main methods of quality assurance

Evaluation

- Review of the quality of a programme or institution with a focus on input, output and processes.

Audit

- Review of the quality culture and internal quality assurance of a university.

Accreditation

- Review of the extent to which an institution or a programme fulfils predefined standards and resulting in a formal decision 'yes' or 'no' on compliance.

NOQA activities

- Annual conferences
- Annual joint projects 2001-06:
 - “Quality Assurance in the Nordic Higher Education – Accreditation-like practices”
 - “A Method for Mutual Recognition of QA agencies”
 - “Student involvement in Nordic Quality Assessments of Higher Education”
 - “Systematic Quality Work in Nordic HEIs”
 - “European Standards and Guidelines in a Nordic Perspective”
 - “Audit as a concept and method”.

NOQA results

- Staff Exchanges
- Consultation and clearing mechanism for external experts
- Joint ENQA reports
- Strong element in ENQA developments and policies.

Challenges for further NOQA success

- Maintaining a Nordic dimension in the context of the European cooperation.
- Striking a balance between aims of increased Nordic cooperation and convergence on the one hand and recognition of national differences in policies for educational and quality assurance systems on the other.

External quality assurance of Danish higher education

1992-99 The Danish Evaluation Centre: Full cycle of reviews of programmes/subjects in higher education

1999 The Danish Evaluation Institute

- Established by an act of Parliament
- Covers the entire educational system from day care institutions to universities
- Is an independent institution under the Ministry of Education
- Has a Board of directors with the right of initiative
- Has a staff of 75.

EVA's aims and tasks

- Develop and improve evaluation methods.
- Develop and render visible the quality of education and teaching through systematic evaluation.
- Advice and cooperate with public authorities and educational establishments.
- Collect national and international experiences on educational evaluation as a national knowledge centre.

First phase: 2000-2003

- Selected follow-up on the Evaluation Centre's programme reviews of higher education
- Thematic reviews
- Cross-sector reviews
- Cross-national reviews
- International bench markings
- Audits
- Accreditations
- Revenue generating activities.

Second phase: 2004-2006

- Audits at university level (12 institutions)
 - from national/Nordic panels to international panels
 - from open format to European standards.
- Selective, criteria based reviews of university programmes
- Accreditation of medium-cycle higher education
 - programme level (20 programmes at 70 institutions)
 - institutional level (18).

Key challenges for Danish success

- Managing the comprehensive mandate (problem of coverage)
- Balance between improvement and accountability
- Balance between institutional and programme level
- Landing safely in the bureaucratic infighting between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science
- Increase in profit generating activities
- Setting the information strategy towards respectively the media, the authorities and the educational institutions
- Continuing compliance with the European Standards.

Links - further reading

- www.enqa.net
- www.noqa.net
- www.eva.dk