

# JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMMES – JOINT EVALUATIONS

A Nordic Challenge

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Report prepared for the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA) and the Nordic Council of Ministers by a project group consisting of Staffan Wahlén (Högskoleverket, chair), Søren Poul Nielsen, Kristine Als Velling, Simon Holmen Clemensen (EVA), Gerhard Amundsen (NOKUT), Vibeke Fahlén (ACE Denmark), Kirsi Hiltunen (FINHEEC), Karin Järplid Linde (Högskoleverket) • September 2009

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**Joint Degrees – Joint Evaluations. A Nordic Challenge**

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# Foreword

Joint master's programmes are based on close cooperation between two or more Higher Education Institutions (HEI). This includes cooperation between educational institutions as well as nations. The support of the Nordic Council of Ministers to the joint master's programmes provided by HEIs in the Nordic countries has raised the awareness of the development and quality of such programmes. The HEIs and the Nordic Council of Ministers share an interest in creating a basis for appropriate quality assurance of the provision of joint master programmes, especially taking the national quality assurance agencies and their practices into account.

Financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, a project group appointed by the Nordic Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NOQA) has completed a project on quality assurance of joint master's programmes. The project's main focus was to develop and test methods for evaluating provisions of transnational education. The project offered an opportunity for the participating quality assurance agencies to develop a profound understanding of each other's criteria and methods. NOQA supported the project, endorsing the knowledge sharing, as well as the efforts to shed light on the potentials and difficulties concerning the implementation of transnational quality assurance of joint master's programmes.

In addition, the project includes proposals regarding how to further strengthen the work on assuring the quality of joint master's programmes in a Nordic context. NOQA perceives the proposals as interesting in the light of supporting the Nordic Council of Ministers' promotion of joint Nordic higher education programmes. However, it is vital that the project's proposals are further explored in order to estimate their actual potential, especially regarding the individual national legal frameworks and practices. The importance of developing further the Nordic dimension of higher education must continue.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed to this important project, including the representatives of the two programmes and especially the members of the project group and its chair Staffan Wahlén.

Agi Csonka

Chair of NOQA 2009–2010



# Summary

This report, which has been prepared by a project group consisting of representatives of the Nordic quality assurance agencies, can be divided into two parts. First, it describes the results of broad investigations into current quality assurance practices in the Nordic countries and legislation with regard to quality assurance and joint master's programmes. On the basis of the results of a questionnaire to universities in the Nordic countries it also points out the problems of establishing the current number and types of joint master's programmes. Secondly it suggests three possible alternative processes for joint quality assurance of joint master's programmes provided by higher education institutions in these countries. Only one of these processes was tested in pilot evaluations, so the project group cannot promote any one of them on the basis of empirical findings. The three approaches are meant to invite further discussion on how to conduct joint external quality assurance of joint master's degrees.

The results of the investigations demonstrate that:

- there are major differences between the systems of quality assurance in higher education and the systems seem to be diverging
- it is only in Denmark that joint programmes will be evaluated and accredited and in Norway and Finland systematic programme evaluation does not take place at all.
- so far, there has been no systematic external evaluation of joint programmes in the Nordic countries
- there is scant knowledge of the number and types of joint Nordic master's degrees

It is the opinion of the project group that

- there is a need of joint evaluation and, possibly, accreditation, of joint Nordic master's programmes in order to secure the interest of students in these programmes and it is a feasible objective to implement such evaluations
- these evaluations should concern each programme as a unit and be carried out by *one* expert team and result in *one* report
- no joint evaluation and, in particular, no accreditation can take place without more or less far-reaching agreements between the countries and changes in legislation. It has not been seen as part of the project to propose such changes.

The approaches proposed are

- A. Joint evaluation by one expert team followed by joint accreditation (if necessary) accepted by all through a process of mutual agreement

- B. Joint evaluation for the award of a Nordic quality label
- C. Accreditation, as today, of individual parts of the programme in each country in accordance with national legislation, followed by joint audit of the quality assurance of the programme as a whole.

The project group successfully tested the first of these approaches using specially designed pre-determined criteria.



## Purpose and approach

The main purpose and the mandate given by the Nordic Council of Ministers regarding the project Evaluation of Joint Nordic Master's Programmes was to develop and present a model (or alternative models) for joint evaluation of such programmes on the basis of enquiries into the legal frameworks for joint programmes and joint degrees as well as current practices of external quality assurance in the Nordic countries.

The task was undertaken and the report was prepared by a working group consisting of representatives of the quality assurance agencies in the Nordic countries<sup>1</sup>, and is the result of a project carried out under the auspices of the Nordic Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NOQA) and financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The underlying assumption of the project group was that there are currently a number of programmes developed and implemented in cooperation between higher education institutions in the Nordic countries. However, there are no consistent processes to assure their quality.

We have not based our work on a hypothesis but our approach may rather be described as inductive. Based on the findings of three enquiries<sup>2</sup>, and on earlier investigations into the feasibility of establishing joint evaluation we propose three alternative or complementary approaches and two sets of criteria for assessment. One such approach was also tested through criterion-based pilot evaluations.

The legislation with regard to quality assurance of higher education varies and seems to be diverging rather than converging. This is the reason why we decided to present three different evaluation approaches, which require varying degrees of modification of legislation in the countries. Two of them (joint programme evaluation and accreditation and audit of joint programmes' own quality assurance systems and their effectiveness) assume far-reaching agreements and legislative amendments in above all Denmark and Sweden; at the other extreme, the establishment of a Nordic quality label requires nothing but funding of the evaluation.

The project group chose to write a fairly slim report, not going into detail by e.g. specifying necessary legal changes, which we have not seen as part of the remit.

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1. Iceland was represented in the steering group of the project, but did not participate in the meetings of the project group. Information on Icelandic legislation and quality assurance mechanisms was supplied by Dr. Einar Hreinsson, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland.
  2. An update of information on quality assurance practices in the Nordic countries, an overview of the legislation with regard to joint degrees and an attempt to find out the number of existing Nordic joint programmes.

Besides this final report, the project group has produced two interim reports (August and October 2008) on the development of the six programmes granted support by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2007, conducted two pilot evaluations (the feedback reports to the programmes are published separately on the NOQA website, [www.noqa.net](http://www.noqa.net)) and arranged one follow-up conference (9 June, 2009). The project group has had six meetings (April and September 2008 and January, April, June and August 2009).

We wish to thank the Nordic Council of Ministers for making it possible to carry out a project of great importance to Nordic universities and the quality assurance agencies in the Nordic countries. We are also grateful to the two programmes, Nordic Master's Programme in Gerontology and Nordic Master in Plant Pathology, for their efforts in connection with the pilot evaluations.

# The Bologna Process and evaluation of joint degrees

The development of joint programmes and joint degrees has been an item on the agenda of the Bologna Process, at least since the Prague ministerial meeting in 2001. The success of Erasmus Mundus, initiated in 2003, is an important step towards increased European mobility and cooperation as well as a way of marketing European higher education in non-European countries.

European universities, too, see the advantages of this kind of cooperation, but point to problems of implementation in the light of recognition and funding as well as quality assurance. The European University Association (EUA) initiated a European Commission financed project on internal quality assurance of joint master's programmes (European Master's New Evaluation Methodology), which resulted in a report<sup>3</sup> in 2006. Parallel to this, the European Commission funded a project to develop methods and criteria for external evaluation of joint programmes (TEEP II). A report was published in 2006<sup>4</sup>. It proposes criteria under three headings: Organisation and management, Level and content and Quality assurance, and specifies requirements for the self-evaluation process carried out by the programmes. Further, it outlines three scenarios for evaluation of joint programmes:

- an evaluation of a joint programme as part of a mandatory accreditation/evaluation process required by the legislation of one or several countries.
- an evaluation as part of a voluntary evaluation/accreditation process for the purpose of awarding a quality label
- an evaluation as part of a voluntary process for the purpose of quality enhancement.

Briefly, the first scenario led to the conclusion that “the most natural way of solving the accreditation or evaluation problem is by way of mutual multilateral agreements among agencies” (TEEP II p. 36). Such an agreement would have the advantage of “requiring only one evaluation process for a programme to be recognised in all the countries where a consortium operates” (TEEP II p. 36).

It was taken for granted that the general pattern of the evaluation would follow the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area (ESG) developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). They include self-evaluation, a panel

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3. *Institutional Guidelines for Quality Enhancement of Joint Programmes*, 2006: <http://www.eua.be/eua/en/publications.aspx>.

4. *Methodological report. Transnational European Evaluation Project*, 2006: <http://www.enqa.eu/pubs.lasso>.

of international experts, participation of students, site visits and a report based on pre-defined criteria.

The second and third scenarios would follow a similar pattern, but criteria would have to be adapted for the specific purpose.

The Nordic initiative is well in line with European developments, and many of the points raised in the two above-mentioned projects were useful in the preparation of this report.

# Joint degrees – the legal situation in the Nordic countries

## Denmark

The rules and regulations regarding joint degrees in Denmark differ between the universities, on the one hand, and the university colleges and academies of professional higher education on the other. In 2005 the Danish Parliament passed an amendment to the existing University Act which included the introduction of *fellesuddannelser* (joint programmes). It did not, however, allow for the award of joint degrees. The degree awarded as a result of a joint programme can only be issued, under certain circumstances, by a Danish university under Danish law and will be a Danish degree.

However, the amendment enables Danish universities to enter into agreements with one or more foreign universities according to which they may be responsible for parts (a maximum of two thirds) of a Danish bachelor's, candidatus, or master's programme. Also, it must be ensured that the parts of the programmes completed abroad are research-based and at the same educational level as the Danish part. Further, they must meet the same demands for quality, academic coherence, relevance, and progression as apply to Danish higher education.

Students must, finally, be ensured the same conditions as would have been the case if the programme had been completed in Denmark only. Thus, no tuition fees can be levied (save for non-EU students) and they must have the same public security and rights granted as at Danish universities.

*Fellesuddannelser* are allowed under special circumstances only and like all other programmes they have to be approved by the recently established accreditation institution, the Accreditation Council. Over and above general quality criteria, the following criteria (which are laid down in separate executive order on joint programmes must then be taken into account:

- the academic benefits of offering the programme as a *fellesuddannelse* (compared to ordinary provision);
- society's needs of Danish provision of the programme in question;
- the securing of the legal rights of the students in relation to parts of the programme to be completed abroad;
- the potential additional expenses incurred by the students for completing the programme abroad;
- the economic benefits of completing the programme as a *fellesuddannelse*;
- the university's budget for the programme.

The same rules apply with regard to programmes offered by university colleges and academies of professional higher education (short and first cycle degrees)

except that the Act on Academy Programme degrees and professional bachelor degrees of 2008 allows for the provision of joint degree programmes and that there is no upper limit to the parts of a joint programme that may be provided by a non-Danish institution. No programme has so far been submitted for accreditation under these regulations, so only one *fællesuddannelse* has been accredited in Denmark: The Religious Roots of Europe, with the University of Aarhus as coordinator. The programme started in August, 2009.

### **Finland**

The current Finnish legislation mentions nothing about joint degrees, either on a national or international basis. In the decree on university degrees it is merely stated that the “education leading to a higher education degree may also be arranged in international cooperation”. Attached to the decree there is a list defining the fields of education, names of degrees and universities awarding the degrees.

In 2004, the Ministry of Education published a recommendation for the development of international joint degrees and double degrees. In this memorandum, the Ministry defined *joint degree* as a “joint programme, developed and organised by two or more higher education institutions, that leads to one or several degree certificates”. Thus, the definition did not make a distinction between a joint degree and a double degree. The Ministry saw the development of joint degrees as an important part of the internationalisation of higher education institutions. However, the status of joint degrees, which do not belong to any one country’s official education system, was still seen as ambiguous and non-established. Consequently, the Ministry recommended that, in order to safeguard the students’ legal protection, a joint programme should be arranged so that the degree obtained by the student belongs to at least one country’s official degree system.

Commissioned by the Ministry of Education, The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is now coordinating a project in which quality recommendations for transnational higher education will be formulated by the end of 2009.

### **Iceland**

The Icelandic Act on Higher Education Institutions no. 63 from 2006 permits all higher education institutions that have undergone accreditation to award degrees in cooperation with other higher education institutions on all levels. The Act does not make any distinction between national or foreign partner institutions. Regulations concerning the accreditation of higher education institutions, also from 2006, mention the level of international and national cooperation, with other research and educational institutions, as a criterion that can affect the result of the accreditation. This means that all higher education institutions are expected to have some form of cooperation with institutions abroad and that the level of this cooperation, i.e joint degrees or

joint programmes, will be taken into consideration by the expert committee. In other words, the higher education institutions are encouraged by the state to establish cooperation channels with institutions abroad. Joint degrees and programmes in which Icelandic higher education institutions are involved, are obliged to offer Diploma Supplements and to have described learning outcomes for all courses, as is obligatory for all programmes in Iceland.

## **Norway**

The Norwegian Act on Universities and University Colleges of 1 April 2005 introduced the possibility for the higher education institutions to establish and award degrees in cooperation with other higher education institutions on all levels. The partners could be national or international. This act is supplemented with more detailed requirements in Chapter 4 in the Ministry's regulations of 8 September 2005 concerning accreditation, evaluation and recognition pursuant to the Act relating to Universities and University Colleges. This chapter deals with the responsibility of each institution in relation to joint degrees and requires that the institutions ascertain

- that there should be a contract which regulates the responsibilities between partner institutions,
- that all partners are accredited or publicly authorised to award higher education qualifications,
- that students admitted to an international joint degree should be ensured a period of study of a certain duration at partner institutions,
- that if a partnership of a joint degree ceases, the institution shall conclude an agreement with another institution academically responsible for ensuring that the students are able to complete their studies,
- that universities and university colleges shall notify NOKUT concerning which joint degrees it awards.

The diploma and the Diploma Supplement of the joint degrees must include information on all the partners in the programme.

The higher education institutions can establish degrees (and of course also joint degrees) according to their accreditation powers. A university can establish and award all degrees at all levels, specialised universities can establish and award degrees at all levels in their special field, university colleges can establish bachelor's degrees but must apply to NOKUT for accreditation of (joint) degrees at master's and PhD level. The rest of the providers of higher education in Norway must apply to NOKUT for accreditation of all studies at all levels. NOKUT has issued criteria for accreditation of joint degrees at all levels.

Foreign joint degrees are recognised according to the Lisbon convention on recognition. The main requirement is that all partners in the consortium are recognised as higher education institutions in their respective country.

## **Sweden**

The awarding of joint degrees in the sense of the issuing of one document provided by the participating institutions which is not accompanied by any national diploma has so far been ruled out by current legislation, and even by constitutional law. The reason is that as public authorities they have the right to make binding decisions with regard to their own activities only, and that no other authorities, national or foreign, can make decisions on their behalf.

In a survey last year among Swedish institutions participating in Erasmus Mundus programmes, the current legislation ruling out joint degrees in Sweden was seen as one of the most urgent questions to be resolved in the context of joint provision of higher education. Against this background and in the light of Swedish higher institutions increasingly taking part in joint programmes on a Nordic and European basis, the Swedish government saw it as important to review the situation. As a result new legislation will come into force as from January 1, 2010, which allows higher education institutions to award a joint degree together with other Swedish or foreign institutions.



## Existing or planned Nordic joint master's programmes

The initiative taken by the Nordic Council of Ministers to support the development of joint master's degrees demonstrated that there is a comparatively great interest in close Nordic cooperation in this field. It may be regarded as a disappointment this year that only 10 programmes as compared to 41 in 2007 applied for support when funding was offered by the Council. The reason for this decline is difficult to explain. One consolation may be that a much greater number of programmes expressed an interest, but did not submit a formal application, which indicates that the interest in establishing new joint programmes is widespread, but that there may be practical obstacles that will have to be overcome.

The number of Nordic joint master's programmes currently in place or under development is difficult to estimate. The only Nordic country with any kind of official registration of joint provision is Norway. Norwegian legislation requires programmes awarding a joint degree to notify NOKUT. At the moment of writing some 40 programmes have done so. Furthermore, seven joint degree programmes have been accredited by NOKUT. Danish programmes cooperating formally with foreign universities or other higher education institutions in *fællesuddannelser* (see p. 12) are registered and must be accredited by the Accreditation Council.

The project group made an attempt to find out the number of joint Nordic master's programmes through a questionnaire sent to all universities in the Nordic countries except Iceland. The answers demonstrated that there is scant knowledge of the situation at the institutional level. Thus, in the absence of reliable national and institutional statistics regarding joint programmes (with the exception of those listed at NOKUT, the Erasmus Mundus programmes and those supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers) it has proved not worth the effort to proceed.



## External Quality Assurance processes in the Nordic countries – an overview<sup>5</sup>

It is not surprising that the general methodology applied by the quality assurance agencies in the five countries resemble each other. They all follow the principles of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA), the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC), the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (HsV) are full members of ENQA. Furthermore, EVA, NOKUT and HsV have been successfully reviewed and had their full membership of ENQA re-confirmed. ACE Denmark is an associate member as well as the Office of Evaluation and Analysis at the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland, which is responsible for all external evaluations in the country.

Consequently, all five countries use similar methodologies, which include self-evaluation, expert panels, and public reports. Reviews are in the form of programme and subject evaluations, thematic evaluations, quality audits, accreditation-like practices and awards for excellence in higher education. However, the primary objects of evaluation and the strict application of accreditation *ex ante* and *ex post* differ between Denmark, Iceland and Sweden, on the one hand, and Finland and Norway, on the other. Developments have taken place in the latter two countries which do not support the assumption made by Björn Stensaker and Trine Danø (Stensaker – Danø<sup>6</sup>, 2006) in a report prepared for the Nordic Council of Ministers that convergence of the Nordic quality assurance systems was to be expected.

In **Denmark** today the emphasis is on programme or subject accreditation. In May 2007, the Danish Accreditation Council was set up to accredit all existing higher education programmes at six-year intervals. Likewise, the Accreditation Council pre-accredits all new programmes, and a positive accreditation is necessary to obtain public funding. When accrediting existing programmes the Accreditation Council either awards the programme a positive accreditation, a conditional positive accreditation (the programme must have fulfilled special conditions within a year), or a refusal (the programme can no longer receive public funding). There are two accreditation operators: *ACE Denmark* for the university sector and the Danish Evaluation Institute (*EVA*) for the non-university sector.

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5. See Appendix A for a full account.

6. Stensaker, Bjørn og Danø, Trine (2006) Nordisk kvalitetssikring av høyere utdanning. Arbeidsnotat 16/2006 NIFU STEP.

Danish legislation also includes special provisions for allowing operators other than *ACE Denmark* and *EVA* to conduct evaluations of higher education. However, institutions that choose this option will have to bear the full costs and the criteria applied must be those established by the Ministries. Also, decisions with regard to accreditation can only be made by the Accreditation Council. Similar provisions are not found in the other countries.

**Finland** through *FINHEEC* systematically audits the quality assurance systems in all higher education institutions. If the established criteria are not met, a re-audit will take place about two years after the first review. Subject, programme and thematic evaluations are also carried out intermittently, and systems to assess institutions or units applying for awards on the basis of excellence in education are in place.

External quality assurance of higher education in **Iceland** is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and a special unit within the Ministry organises evaluations of institutions and programmes, but the actual evaluations are conducted by an independent panel of international experts, assisted by a secretary from the Icelandic centre for research.

Since 2006 Iceland has followed a similar path as in Denmark concerning accreditations, although accreditations in Iceland are conducted on the level of fields of studies, in accordance with the Frascadi manual of OECD. When higher education institutions have been through the accreditation, the minister of Education either awards the higher education institution a positive accreditation, a conditional positive accreditation (the programme must have fulfilled special conditions within a year), or a refusal (the programme can no longer receive public funding).

A three-year plan for external evaluation has recently been put into practice. It consists of institutional audits as well as programme and subject evaluations. The programme evaluations will be done in all higher education institutions at the same time, i.e. all departments of for example law in the country will be the subject to external evaluation at the same time and the external evaluation of the departments will be undertaken by the same expert panel, and the result will be made public on the same day.

In **Norway** like in Finland the emphasis is on audit of the higher education institutions' own quality assurance procedures. Institutions that do not meet predefined criteria are re-audited after one year and if deficiencies are not remedied they will lose their right to launch new programmes.

*NOKUT* also conducts programme evaluation and accreditation of higher education provision and accredits institutions wishing to upgrade their status (e.g. university colleges aspiring to get full university status), and programmes and subjects at those institutions which do not have full degree-awarding powers.

At the moment of writing, *Högskoleverket (HsV)* in **Sweden** is changing its quality assurance system after a period of turbulence. A new model of pro-

gramme and subject assessment will be introduced, which will be outcomes-oriented, and the results of the reviews will be graded and linked to funding.

Audits of higher education institutions will be gradually phased out during 2010. Under the current system the results of audits are graded (confidence/limited confidence/no confidence in the quality assurance system). In case of a no confidence decision, the institution will be given one year in which to remedy shortcomings.

All professional programmes (law, engineering etc.) must undergo ex ante accreditation (assessment for the entitlement to award degrees), as must 120 ECTS master's programmes and PhD programmes at institutions that do not have full degree-awarding powers.

## Conclusions

The different forms of reviews are summarised in the following tables:

**Table 1. Types of external review currently conducted in the Nordic Countries**

TYPE	Audit	Subject	Programme	Accreditation	Theme	Excellence
Country						
DK		X	X	X <sup>7</sup>	X	
FIN	X	X	X		X	X
ICE	X	X	X	X	X	
N	X		X	X <sup>8</sup>		
S	X	X	X	X <sup>9</sup>		X

**Table 2. Main types of external review in the Nordic Countries**

TYPE	Institutional audit	Subject/Programme evaluation	Accreditation
Country			
DK			X
FIN	X		
ICE	X	X	X
N	X		X <sup>10</sup>
S		X	X <sup>11</sup>

To sum up, there are major similarities in evaluation processes in the Nordic countries as regards methodologies. This is due partly to a tradition of cooperation and information-sharing among the agencies responsible for national quality assurance of higher education. Naturally, the European Standards and Guidelines and criteria for membership of ENQA have also been instrumental in this respect.

7. Of all subjects and programmes.

8. Of subjects at institutions that do not have full degree-awarding powers.

9. *Ex ante* of programmes at institutions that do not have full degree-awarding powers (typically at master's level) and of professional programmes at all institutions.

10. *Ex ante* of programmes at institutions that do not have full degree-awarding powers.

11. See footnote 9.

But it is highly doubtful whether the same observation can be made today as was made by Stensaker-Danø (2006) three years ago, namely that the systems are converging. On the contrary, the systems seem to be moving in two different directions and in this process, very little consideration appears to be taken of the development in the other countries. The different emphases and national requirements create problems as regards the recognition of joint programmes in the different countries as well as in finding common denominators for joint evaluation/accreditation. In particular, the substantial revision of the national quality assurance systems in Sweden and Denmark are complicating factors.

# Pilot evaluations and experiences of the use of joint criteria<sup>12</sup>

## Description

### The two programmes evaluated

The Nordic Master's Degree Programme in Gerontology (NordMaG) and The Nordic Master's Degree Programme in Plant Pathology (NorPath) were two of the six joint master's programmes granted development support by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2007. As they were the only ones that admitted their first students in 2008 and started teaching in the autumn of the same year, they were invited to participate in the pilot evaluation.

### NordMaG

NordMaG is the result of a collaboration of three universities – the University of Jyväskylä (coordinating institution), Lund University and the University of Iceland. It describes itself as a “multidisciplinary and jointly implemented degree programme ... (which) qualifies graduates for employment e.g. in the fields of administration, development, education and research” ([www.jyu.fi/sport/laitokset/terveys/en/Nordplus/nordmag](http://www.jyu.fi/sport/laitokset/terveys/en/Nordplus/nordmag)). The three universities offer different specialisations reflecting the research and teaching of the departments involved, and students are admitted and enrolled at one of them, which also awards the degree. The specialisations and degrees are as follows:

#### *University of Jyväskylä:*

Area of expertise: health gerontology and epidemiology

Degree awarded: Master of Health Sciences

#### *University of Iceland:*

Area of expertise: gerontological social work and social gerontology

Degree awarded: Master in Gerontology

#### *Lund University:*

Area of expertise: environmental and health gerontology

Degree awarded: Master of Medical Sciences, major in midwifery, nursing, physiotherapy or occupational therapy in gerontology.

The whole programme covers 120 ECTS and is a two-year programme, except in Lund where it extends over four years half-time. However, arrangements can be made for Lund students to complete the programme in two years.

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12. The evaluation reports are available in a separate appendix to be found on [www.NOQA.net](http://www.NOQA.net).

The plan for the first cohort was to admit a total of 15 students, five at each university. However, although the programme initially attracted a larger number of applicants, the final figure was 13, of whom three were admitted at Jyväskylä University, four at Lund University and six at the University of Iceland.

More information on NordMaG can be found on the programme website: <http://www.jyu.fi/sport/laitokset/terveys/en/Nordplus/nordmag>.

### **NorPath**

NorPath is the result of a partnership between four Nordic universities: the University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Life Sciences (KU-LIFE), the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB), the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and the University of Helsinki, Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry (HU-AF). The LBHI Agricultural University of Iceland has also been associated to the programme but the role of the university is not quite settled.

From 2008, students have been enrolled at the programme at KU-LIFE and UMB and according to the long-term plan students at SLU and HU-AF may also apply from 2009. 7–9 students joined the programme in 2008 and it is hoped that about 25 students will sign up for the programme in 2009.

The universities involved in the programme offer different specialisations reflecting the research and teaching at the departments involved in the programme. Students are admitted and enrolled at a home university which awards the degree. The specialisations and degrees are as follows:

#### ***KU- LIFE:***

Area of expertise: molecular plant pathology

At KU-LIFE the NorPath programme has been structured as a specialisation under the existing MSc programme, 'Plants and Environment'.

Degree awarded: MSc in Agriculture.

#### ***UMB:***

Area of expertise: ecology and epidemiology of plant diseases

At UMB the NorPath programme has been structured as a specialisation under the existing MSc programme Plant Science.

Degree awarded: MSc in Plant Science.

#### ***SLU:***

Area of expertise: ecology and epidemiology of plant diseases

Degree awarded: MSc in Plant Biology, with specialisation in Plant Pathology.

#### ***HU-AF:***

Area of expertise: molecular plant pathology

Degree awarded: MSc in Plant Production Science.



The NorPath Programme is a two-year programme equivalent to 120 ECTS. Mandatory courses, core courses and the final research-based thesis in plant pathology constitute the common core of the programme and are equivalent to a minimum of 90 ECTS.

More information on Norpath can be found on the programme website: <http://www.nova-university.org/NorPATH/index.htm>.

### **Purposes and general methodology of pilot evaluations**

The main purposes of the evaluations of the two programmes were to serve as a tool in the development of methods for joint evaluation of joint master's programmes in the Nordic countries and to provide feedback to the two programmes with regard to the further development of the quality of their educational and quality assurance activities.

The first of these aims involved the development and testing of a method and criteria for evaluation. The second included a critical examination of the quality of the programmes with reference to organisation, content and quality assurance. The outcome was thus twofold: a report to the Nordic Council of Ministers on evaluation methodology with respect to joint master's degrees and reports to the two programmes. See *Report on Pilot Evaluations*, [www.noqa.net](http://www.noqa.net).

The pilot evaluations followed the general principles of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. This meant, among other things, that criteria for evaluation (see Appendix B) were published and applied consistently, that experts and students participated, that the approach included the use of self-evaluation, site visits and reports and that it ensured that the procedures used provided adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached.

Since a joint programme should be evaluated as one programme, by one group of experts and one set of criteria, the project group developed a common methodology and set of criteria. This presented challenges due to the variation of evaluation practices as well as legal differences in the countries involved. The result was, therefore, an attempt to amalgamate principles and criteria, mainly using a criterion based (*ex ante* and *ex post*) approach.

Rather than prepare a full self-evaluation, the programmes were asked to comment on their fulfilment of the criteria developed by the project group. These comments as well as study plans, relevant course plans and a list of teaching staff involved in the programme formed the background of the assessments.

### **Site visits and follow-up**

One-day site visits to each of the partners took place in February – first half of March 2009 for interviews with those responsible for programmes, teachers, students and faculty leadership. The evaluation of NordMaG involved three

site visits and the evaluation of the NorPath programme involved two site visits.

The representatives from the quality assurance agencies in the project group functioned both as quality assurance experts and as secretaries at the site visits. In the latter function they took notes and wrote the report drafts. These drafts were then circulated to the group and a version on which the group agreed was sent to the programme for verification of facts and for comments. The final version was then sent to the programmes in April 2009.

As a follow-up of the pilot evaluations, a final conference was organised on 9 June for representatives of the programmes (all six programmes granted development funding in 2007), experts of the evaluation team, quality assurance agencies and the Nordic Council of Ministers in order to discuss the outcomes of the pilot evaluations, further developments of Nordic Joint Master's Programmes and joint evaluation methodology.

### **Fulfilment of purposes**

With regard to the two main purposes of these pilot evaluations, it is the impression of the project group that the aims set up were met. This means that in terms of testing a method and criteria for evaluation of Nordic joint master's programmes, the pilot evaluations functioned quite well. Adjustments will have to be made regarding certain criteria, to arrive at a final approach to evaluating joint Nordic programmes. But as a tool in the development of such an approach, the pilot evaluations were an essential part of the process, as a framework has now been developed. The second purpose of the pilot evaluations was to provide feedback to the programmes regarding the further development of their educational and quality assurance activities. In this case, too, aims were met. The higher education institutions' attitude towards the pilot evaluations was positive. The project groups found that the evaluation teams were welcomed at the site visits where fruitful discussions took place. The pilot evaluations were seen as an opportunity for improvement, which contributed to providing relevant feedback to the programmes.

In a larger perspective, these two pilot evaluations were part of a project which aims at developing an approach to joint quality assurance of Nordic joint master's programmes. Even though the pilot evaluations may have been successful, several difficulties related to the legal situations, administrative issues and quality assurance processes remain to be solved.

### **Experiences of the use of the criteria**

The application of the criteria to the two pilot evaluations provided a full picture of the programmes. The criteria proved adequate in terms of focusing on programme content, current up-to-date research and administration as well as on general challenges of running joint programmes. Regarding the use of the criteria on content, research and administration, the results correspond with

those from national evaluations, and this chapter thus focuses specifically on the use of criteria referring to the jointness of programmes. Not all of the criteria for jointness are treated in this chapter, but only those which proved to be *particularly* significant in the pilot evaluations.

The pilot evaluations and the use of the criteria unveiled a range of different challenges as well as strengths in the joint programmes which are new in the context of evaluation, and which future providers of joint programmes should focus on. Therefore, the discussion on the pilot evaluations emphasises this aspect. The programmes have remarkable strengths, but this chapter is concerned mainly with their challenges in order to provide inspiration for possible ways of overcoming them.

These different types of challenges will be discussed in the following with reference to the recommendations given by the expert panel. The order in which they are presented follows the progression from establishing a formal agreement, via challenges experienced during the programme, to follow-up of the alumni.

### **Formal agreement**

A formal agreement signed by the participating universities is a solid foundation as a central document and guarantee of its continuity. As the joint learning outcomes compose the core of the jointness of programmes, it is crucial to define them in the establishment of a joint programme. The pilot evaluations have to a great extent shown the need for clearly stated aims and learning outcomes, including a joint syllabus, as well as an account of the intended added value of the programme. Also, it is recommendable for the universities to formally agree on common criteria for admission to underpin jointness.

As an example, the Vice-Chancellors of the respective universities participating in the **NordMaG** programme have signed a formal agreement that specifies the conditions of the programme. The agreement contains overall guidelines and among these a common funding strategy.

### **A common funding strategy**

The universities can benefit from formally specifying a funding strategy as part of the formal agreement. E.g. the planning and coordination of the programme are an extensive task that requires extra resources, and both programmes refer to the need of extra resources, which may be difficult to find within the framework of ordinary funding principles. Resources for mobility also represent a noticeable challenge characteristic of joint programmes since the mobility of students, teachers and management requires extra resources.

### **Mobility**

The opportunity for the students to spend time at another university in another country represents one of the obvious strengths of the joint program-

mes. However, assuring mobility can be a problem for several reasons, and among these are:

- differences in semester structures
- language policies
- students who have problems staying away for an extended period of time.

Differences in semester structures narrow down the possibilities of a stay abroad. The courses across the universities are staggered in time, which makes mobility difficult. The different semester structures are a serious constraint to the programme as mentioned by management, teachers, and students in **Nor-Path**. It should also be mentioned that it may be unclear to students when courses overlap at the same level or whether one is more basic than the other if courses are not classified, which may be an obstacle to both progression in the programme and the attainment of the intended student learning outcomes.

For non-Nordic students the programme's language policy is an obvious obstacle to mobility if teaching is in a Nordic language. If the universities want to attract non-Nordic students, the courses must be taught in English. But also for the students from the Nordic countries, the language policy may be a hindrance to mobility, and universities should thus consider how to solve this problem.

Furthermore, mobility may be especially difficult e.g. for mature students who are often less mobile. Many of the **NordMaG** students are mature students with jobs and families and are unable to stay away for extended periods of time. Thus, programmes aiming to attract mature students must give special consideration to the challenge of encouraging mobility and experiences of working together with students from other countries.

The question of mobility may be dealt with in different ways that suit the individual programmes. It can be secured by making it mandatory for students to visit another university, and where different semester structures are a hindrance, developing short joint courses or e-learning courses may be part of a strategy to underpin mobility. Short courses might also be suitable to facilitate mobility for mature students and others who are less able to go abroad for extended periods of time. It should be considered though that short intensive courses imply a limitation of the actual time spent at another university during the programme and could thus well be supplemented by the establishment of a virtual learning community.

Some of the challenges with regard to mobility may be met by a tutor system. A tutor can help the students with mobility and facilitate the process of selecting courses and creating an individual study plan for the students. If the tutor system is developed and the role of the tutor is clear, the student's need of support following from the differences between the administrative systems of the universities may be satisfied.

### **Practical preparation**

When the students arrive at one of the partner institutions, it is essential that everything is prepared for them since courses often have a duration of only one or two weeks. It is important that details such as computer logins and other practical things are prepared when students arrive in order to smoothen the process. Also, the individual study plans should be developed as soon as possible in order to be able to monitor student progress systematically.

### **Sharing of information between students**

The social aspect and information-sharing between the students demand special attention in a joint programme. The students live far apart and meet only for relatively few joint courses, which involves a potential challenge for communication between them. In both programmes, a joint introductory course proved to be beneficial in terms of making the students become a group, and some students have stated that communicating on the web has become much easier after this course. Information sharing and interaction among the students can be encouraged e.g. through a discussion area on the web.

### **Employability**

Both programmes are young, and have no graduates yet. Thus, it is not possible to fully answer the question of employability and labour market demand at this point. It is important to define the distinct quality of graduates from joint programmes, and the project group recommends that the diploma issued to the graduates accentuates the special skills and competences they have developed through the joint provision. Also, we propose that the universities develop a system for keeping track of alumni in order to be able to get an overview of their careers and thus of the labour market available for graduates.

Due to the fact that the programmes are newly developed, it might not be clear to the students what their future job possibilities are. Some students have thus expressed a wish for more information on future job possibilities during the programme. One way of providing information and clarifying the job situation outside academia might be for universities to regularly invite employer representatives as lecturers or informants on labour market conditions and demands.

### **Quality assurance**

The criteria regarding quality assurance assume that the joint programme has a system which assures the quality of the joint provision and guarantees that the aims of the programme are met. On the basis of the current evaluations the project group recommends that institutions or programmes develop a joint quality assurance programme that takes the criteria presented in Appendix A as its point of departure, and includes, e.g. shared information on students from application to admission, joint procedures for monitoring students' progression through the programme through the use of individual study plans,

midterm evaluations, and a plan for teacher exchanges within the programme. In the future, the quality assurance system should also include evaluation of the programme as a whole and follow-up of alumni and contacts with employers. With a joint programme it may be particularly important to make it clear who has the responsibility for the overall quality assurance.

### **Conclusions**

There is little doubt that a great amount of work has been done on developing the joint programmes under review in this project. Each of them has distinct strengths e.g. by providing opportunities for development for both the universities involved and for the students enrolled in the programmes. The challenges discussed in this chapter must be considered in relation to the fact that the programmes are new and based on cooperation across borders and between institutions with different administrative processes and underlying legislative frameworks and traditions. It is not surprising, therefore, that they did not satisfy all the criteria.

The use of the criteria, especially those for jointness, has demonstrated that joint programmes may encounter challenges both with regard to explaining clearly why they provide added value compared to traditional programmes and concerning the particularities of cooperation between the participating institutions. The establishment of formal agreements between institutions is a necessary platform for the efficient management of a joint programme, as are language policies and considerations of how to handle different semester periods. Efficient study counselling and mobility plans, which take into account the needs of different kinds of students are also indispensable elements that will have to be considered when assessing the quality of joint programmes.

The criteria relating to academic performance and to the programmes' own quality assurance could not all be addressed. Most of those used by the project group are included among the criteria applied by all the quality assurance agencies in the Nordic countries and belong to those that must be met in order for programmes to be accredited. However, criteria will have to be reconsidered in possible negotiations between the Nordic countries in order to arrive a common strategy for evaluating and accrediting joint programmes.

## Alternative approaches to external quality assurance of Nordic Joint Master's programmes

In previous chapters we have demonstrated the differences between the Nordic countries when it comes to methods of external quality assurance of joint programmes and legislation with regard to joint degrees. We have touched on differences in legislation with regard to the right of organisations other than the national quality assurance agencies to conduct evaluations. We have pointed out that with certain exceptions national authorities and even the central administrations at higher education institutions have little awareness of the extent of international or Nordic collaboration in the form of joint provision of master's programmes. Thus, most of these programmes are not subject to external evaluation on a national level. It is true that much of this collaborative provision is informal, but not even established Erasmus Mundus programmes are systematically evaluated through national or transnational arrangements<sup>13</sup>. In fact, so far only one programme, *Religious Roots of Europe* and seven programmes involving Norwegian university colleges (see pp. 13 and 14) have been evaluated for accreditation *ex ante* by the respective national quality assurance agencies. These evaluations have focused on the national provision but have also touched upon the special conditions of jointness and the provision of the partner institutions.

What has been said so far, might lead to the assumption that there is no need for external evaluation of joint programmes. We find this to be an erroneous assumption, and are convinced that there is still much to be done in the field of quality assurance of transnational programmes. Most joint programmes are hardly evaluated externally today, and in two of the Nordic countries, programmes are not evaluated systematically at all. As far as those programmes are concerned which have been selected for support by the Nordic Council of Ministers internal quality assurance was a requirement. This is an important step in the right direction, but it is hardly enough. We strongly maintain that the student perspective makes it particularly important to monitor and assess the quality of this kind of provision. Students pursuing or planning to pursue studies in a transnational programme face a more complex situation than students studying in a national context. They must adapt to different environments and different learning situations. They certainly have a responsibility to seek information themselves, but the quality assurance agencies of

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13. Within the context of Erasmus Mundus a Self-assessment tool and a Quality handbook have recently been developed, following pilot assessments exercises involving six Erasmus Mundus Master's courses. See [http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-mundus/doc1274\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus-mundus/doc1274_en.htm).

the countries in which these programmes operate must also, in our opinion, convince themselves that the programmes meet sufficient standards through external evaluation procedures.

The main aim of this report is to propose alternative approaches to evaluation of joint Nordic Master's degrees. The aim is to go beyond the situation described earlier in which the above mentioned differences regarding emphasis and national requirements for external quality assurance in the Nordic countries create problems as regards finding common denominators for joint evaluation and accreditation. There are several examples of agreements among countries in the world with regard to evaluation and accreditation. The best-known is the Washington Accord<sup>14</sup>, an agreement with regard to engineering programmes among agencies in a wide range of mainly English-speaking countries. A similar agreement has been, and is still being, developed in Europe, the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAAEE<sup>15</sup>). These two organisations have faced the problem of accepting the decisions by quality assurance agencies in different countries by a QA agency in another country. They have solved it by all the countries involved accepting an accreditation of a programme made by a quality assurance organisation in any of the signatory countries as their own. The Higher Education and Training Awards Council of Ireland (HETAC) has established a policy for evaluation of collaborative programmes, transnational programmes and joint awards – *Accreditation, Quality Assurance and Delegation of Authority*<sup>16</sup> – with similar intentions.

An interesting collaboration today takes place within the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education ([www.ecaconsortium.net](http://www.ecaconsortium.net)). This is an organisation of currently 15 accreditation agencies from 9 European countries, including Denmark (EVA) and Norway (NOKUT). The ambition of ECA is to develop a system of joint accreditation among member states involving a process in which joint programmes apply for one single accreditation procedure replacing the different national procedures in the countries concerned, taking into account the totality of the joint programme. This project is now under way, and the final methodological report, which is expected in March 2010, may well provide valuable inspiration for the further development of the approaches proposed in this report.

Any method of quality assurance of joint Nordic Master's programmes will have to take into account the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. It is also necessary to consider the different methodologies and criteria of the individual countries as well as the internal quality assurance processes of institutions. As we have seen, the most important differences with regard to approach concern the object of evaluation, namely the focus on programme (Denmark, Sweden

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14. [www.washingtonaccord.org](http://www.washingtonaccord.org)

15. [www.enaee.eu/](http://www.enaee.eu/)

16. [www.hetac.ie/docs/policy](http://www.hetac.ie/docs/policy)



and, to some extent, Iceland) versus audit of institutional quality assurance systems and the strict legislation on accreditation in Denmark and, partly, Sweden versus the principle of full self-accreditation for universities in Finland, Norway and, partly<sup>17</sup>, Sweden.

The differences in methodology between the five countries involved call for special arrangements and negotiations at different levels – ministries, quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions. Based on the information we have collected and on the experiences gained through the pilot evaluations we here propose three alternative approaches for the quality assurance of joint Nordic master's programmes. We are fully aware that adjusting principles of evaluation, and especially changing legislation pertaining to accreditation of what today concerns relatively few programmes and students is not a priority in those countries where evaluation of higher education is more centralised. However, if, as has been argued above, assuring high quality learning outcomes and positive student experiences is seen as important, such a process should, in our view, be considered.

As described above, the working group has tested one of the alternatives and found both the methodology and the criteria satisfactory. We have, however, no evidence for giving preference to any one of the three alternative approaches presented here, but we do state pros and cons of each proposal.

### **Alternative A: A Joint methodology for evaluation and accreditation of joint master's programmes**

#### **Approach**

The most far-reaching alternative is a common methodology for evaluation with a common set of criteria for accreditation and participation of all the countries involved in the programme, followed by mutual recognition by the competent bodies in the countries involved, if applicable. In principle, it has the following ingredients:

The quality assurance agency in the country of the coordinating institution assumes the responsibility for, and leads the evaluation.

The programme conducts a self-evaluation and submits a report.

The quality assurance agency appoints a project manager who recruits subject experts from (one or two of) the countries involved in the programme, one student and one stakeholder (employer) representative. The panel should be composed so that at least two participating countries are represented. At least one project officer from one of the other Nordic quality assurance agencies should be included in the expert group in the capacity of secretary.

The expert group visits all the partner institutions, except in the case of *ex ante* accreditation, and prepares a report with recommendations

The competent body in the country that leads the evaluation considers

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17. In Sweden, as has been mentioned, universities whose programmes do not meet predefined criteria may lose the right to offer those programmes.

the report and makes an accreditation decision which is recognised by the corresponding bodies in the other countries (if needed) on the basis of an agreement of mutual recognition.

### Consequences

The main advantage of this approach is that it would require only one process and one decision for the evaluation and accreditation of one programme. It would promote transparency in that stakeholders, including students, institutions and future employers would get an overall view of the quality of the programme as a whole. It would also increase mutual awareness of the quality assurance systems in the Nordic countries.

We are aware that it would require substantial revision in the legislation with regard to joint programmes in at least Denmark and Sweden. First of all, agreements will have to be made by the relevant and competent authorities with regard to both methodology and criteria. The criteria in Appendix B are, on the whole, based on fundamental criteria already applied in the Nordic countries, but criteria for jointness have been further developed by the project group. Such agreements are particularly important if accreditation decisions are to be made on the basis of the evaluation as in Denmark or, partly, in Sweden. Also, regulations concerning the assurance of the quality of the evaluation process itself (proper briefing of experts, regular monitoring and follow-up of the process) will have to be established as well as the status of an evaluation group external to the country where the evaluation is carried out. The administrative level at which such agreements can be made varies. It may be at ministerial or national agency level. Higher education institutions, too, should be involved in these discussions.

Furthermore, the joint evaluation procedure requires a common transnational procedure for initiating the process and a system for information-sharing among the Nordic quality assurance agencies especially with regard to the decision-making processes.

It should be considered whether accreditation of joint programmes should be made mandatory in all the Nordic countries. Compulsory accreditation of all programmes exists in Denmark and, to all intents and purposes, in Sweden.

A crucial question is the financing of the evaluations. Normally, the services of a national quality assurance agency are free of charge, i.e. higher education institutions do not pay (except through their own preparations and the time and efforts required by the self-evaluation and the site visits). So far, Iceland and Denmark are the only Nordic countries that explicitly in their legislation allow agencies other than the national ones to conduct evaluation of university or university college programmes. However, in Denmark those institutions which opt for this solution will have to pay for the services and any accreditation. This contingency will also have to be resolved through negotiations.

## **Alternative B: A Nordic Quality Label**

### **Approach**

Current national evaluation and accreditation procedures remain unchanged but evaluation for excellence (a Nordic quality label) is introduced. This would give the programmes awarded a label a certain status, which may attract students from both the Nordic countries and other countries. This is done on a voluntary basis. Programmes apply for the label and are evaluated using the standard methodology (ESG) but with emphasis on jointness. We again suggest that the quality assurance agency in the country of the coordinating institution organises the evaluation, inviting experts, setting up site visits and writing the report. Alternatively any other full members of ENQA might be invited to carry out the process. The criteria may remain the same or be similar to those used in the other alternatives (see Appendix B). Appendix B also contains a proposal for possible criteria for a Nordic quality label.

### **Consequences**

This is the option requiring the fewest changes in the current structures of Nordic evaluation and appears to be the stance taken by the European Commission in relation to Erasmus Mundus (see footnote 13). It was also one of the proposals put forward by the TEEP II project.

Evaluation for a Nordic quality label would take place on the basis of the initiative of the programme in question and would not be part of the ordinary evaluation cycles. It may either take place at any time, following an application, or specific application dates may be announced by the authority issuing the label. We propose the latter solution in order for assessments to be coordinated and comparable.

The question of what authority should issue the label will have to be solved. In the view of the project group it is natural that it should be the Nordic Council of Ministers. It could then either replace the projects aiming at the development of Nordic Master's programmes, or be added as a further incentive. If the Council of Ministers should decide to develop the label, it would also be natural for that organisation to fund both the evaluations needed for decisions regarding the award. The evaluations themselves would, however preferably be carried out as a cooperative project by the Nordic quality assurance agencies under the auspices of NOQA.

The question regarding who would finance the evaluation would have to be addressed. In the view of the project group, it is not unnatural that the programmes themselves or their universities should bear the costs. The label may be seen as a distinction which would make the programme more attractive to students, and thus generate an income. It could be compared to accreditation granted to e.g. business schools by EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System).

Alternatively, we suggest that NOQA, i.e. the Nordic quality assurance agencies together, might consider developing the label and assume the task of organising the evaluations within its spheres of activities.

### **Alternative C: Audit of the programme's quality assurance procedures**

#### **Approach**

Each country evaluates and accredits the part of the programme provided by its own institution(s) (as and if required by the quality assurance model used in the country). In addition, a joint Nordic team conducts an audit of the programme's quality assurance system to ensure that the programme as a whole has procedures in place to ensure the quality and effectiveness of its provision and secure the jointness of the programme. One of the NOQA organisations is responsible for the audit process, and appoints a team consisting of quality assurance experts from at least two of the Nordic countries plus a student representative and an employer representative. The group visits the institutions where the programme is offered and on the basis of information provided by a self-evaluation and interviews with teachers, students and administrative staff make an assessment of how well the quality assurance system works. The information is fed back to the programme and the various quality assurance agencies, who make decisions according to their regulations.

#### **Consequences**

This approach is more suited to the Norwegian and Finnish quality assurance models, and its role when it comes to accreditation decisions would have to be further explored. It may well be linked to an official approval (accreditation) of the programmes' quality assurance system as is *de facto* the case with Norwegian and Finnish higher education institutions. The advantage is that it would have fewer consequences for the autonomy of the programmes and higher education institutions, and would assure stakeholders that the programme works well as a whole. Audits are well rooted in the Nordic countries (possibly with the exception of Denmark, where they have, however been tried). This alternative also takes account of the individual quality assurance agencies' task in Denmark and, partly, Sweden to accredit all national programmes.

Agreements between the countries (quality assurance agencies) involved would have to be made as to the status and consequences of the audit. The financing of the audit would also have to be subject to negotiations as well as the economic consequences for the institutions with regard to the Danish requirement for institutions to pay for reviews not carried out by ACE Denmark or EVA.

Criteria for audit of the programmes' quality assurance processes and their effectiveness will have to be further developed, relating specifically to the question of how the quality of joint provision is assured.

## A note on terminology<sup>18</sup>

There exists a wealth of terms to cover the concept of “determining the value or quality of something”, e.g. appraise, assess, evaluate, review. We have mostly used the verb *evaluate* and the corresponding noun *evaluation*. *Assess* and *assessment* have sometimes been used in connection with programmes.

Another frequently used term in the report is *accredit* and *accreditation*. It is used in several connections and has two or three slightly different definitions. In higher education we may, e.g. find the following:<sup>19</sup>

“a formal, published statement regarding the quality of an institution or a programme, following a cyclical evaluation based on agreed standards” (CRE)

“a process of external quality review used by higher education to scrutinise colleges, universities and higher education programmes for quality assurance and quality improvement” (CHEA)

“the award of a status. Accreditation is a process generally based on the application of predefined standards. It is primarily an outcome of evaluation.” (The European Training Foundation).

For our purposes we have understood the term as follows:

Accreditation involves a decision, based on an evaluation, as to whether a programme or an institution meets certain pre-defined criteria, either at minimum level or a level of excellence. The decision is based on academic and/or professional criteria of quality and not on political considerations.

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18. See Högskoleverket 2003, *Ackreditering, en öppen fråga*. Högskoleverkets rapportserie 2003:4 R.

19. See Hämläinen et al. 2001, *Quality Assurance in Nordic Higher Education – accreditation-like practices*. ENQA Occasional Papers.



# Appendix A.

## External quality assurance in the Nordic countries – an overview of changes since 2005

### Higher Education Systems

Over the last ten years the Bologna process has meant a fundamental restructuring of higher education in all the Nordic countries with regard to the degree systems (Bachelor-Master-PhD), transparency of degrees (through the Diploma Supplement and the introduction of learning outcomes); the credit system (introduction of ECTS), and quality assurance (the European Standards and Guidelines), to name the most important elements. These developments may now be said to have been completed in all five countries.

Many of these elements had been introduced in the various countries at the time of the Stensaker-Danø report, but the full implementation in all countries was not completed until 2008.

All Nordic countries are in the process of completing, or have just completed changes in their institutional structures. In Norway, for example, several institutions have been “upgraded” through NOKUT’s accreditation processes, bringing the total number up to 49.

In Denmark the number of higher education institutions has decreased due to mergers. The number of universities has been reduced from 12 to 8 and the number of university colleges from 23 to 8 (plus two engineering colleges). In Finland, the number of higher education institutions is decreasing due to structural development of the higher education sector.

In Iceland, attempts are also being made to reduce the number of higher education institutions. The Iceland University of Education was recently merged with the University of Iceland and in the near future, the Agricultural University of Iceland will probably merge with the University of Iceland as well, bringing the number of higher education institutions down to six.

Some Swedish institutions are now establishing close contacts with a view to merging, and two existing institutions will soon merge into one. Others may follow. The Swedish government has recently announced that no university colleges will be upgraded to university status within the foreseeable future, but that university colleges will be able to apply for permission to develop and offer Ph.D programmes.

## Quality Assurance

### Compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines

The procedures in all five countries comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality assurance in Higher Education (ESG). NOKUT in Norway, EVA in Denmark and Högskoleverket in Sweden have had this re-confirmed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) following external review of the organisations. FINHEEC as a full member of ENQA naturally also complies with ESG, but has not been reviewed yet. ACE Denmark is an associate member as well as the Office of Evaluation and Analysis at the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland.

This means, among other things, that quality assurance agencies require self-evaluations (or similar documents) from the evaluatees, that they employ external experts (also international), and that a publicly available report is the outcome of the review. But whether evaluations target the whole institution and its quality assurance system, or a program or subject, or whether they have the function of accreditation of a programme or an institution is a matter of choice or of national policy.

### Major changes

The most notable changes since 2005 in the external quality assurance systems have taken place in Denmark and Sweden. These changes have taken different directions. Denmark has introduced a thorough-going accreditation system, involving accreditation of all higher education programmes, new as well as already existing, to be carried out under the auspices of the Accreditation Council. The accreditation process is operated by ACE Denmark concerning the assessment of long cycle (university) programmes, and EVA with regard to assessment of short and medium cycle programmes. Over and above these obligations, EVA conducts evaluations within the field of higher education and is free to undertake revenue-generating activities in the field of higher education.

Sweden is now developing a system of result-oriented assessments of programmes and subjects, linked to funding. At the moment of writing, audits of quality assurance systems are also carried out, but their future is uncertain. The audit results are graded, and an institution whose quality assurance system is regarded as deficient will be re-audited within a period of one year.

For certain (professional) programmes Sweden requires *ex ante* accreditation. This also applies to university colleges wishing to provide master's programmes.

Finland and Norway both rely on quality audit as the main method of quality assurance of higher education. In both cases institutions undergoing review must demonstrate that they have acceptable quality assurance systems, a sort of *ex post* accreditation, but at least in Finland, without major sanctions.



If these differences are seen as an indication of trust placed in the higher education institution by central national authorities, it may tentatively be argued that there is a scale in which Denmark and Iceland are at one end, followed closely by Sweden and with Norway and Finland at the other end.

The circumstances with regard to evaluating joint programmes and joint masters' degrees are thus fairly complicated. Danish legislation requires that all programmes, including joint programmes be reviewed and accredited. Sweden and Norway require *ex ante* accreditation of master's degrees for university colleges. This situation may indicate that any joint evaluation of joint programmes should take into account the criteria applied for evaluation of masters' degrees in these three countries. In a recommendation published by the Finnish Ministry of Education in 2004 for the development of international joint degrees and double degrees, it was stated that, in order to safeguard the students' legal protection, a joint programme should be arranged so that the degree obtained by the student belongs to at least one country's official degree system.

### **Assessing excellence in higher education**

As is pointed out in Stensaker – Danø (2006), the trend in the Nordic countries towards assuring the quality of all higher education provision has the disadvantage of focusing on a threshold level. In order also to encourage the development of best practice, some of the countries have introduced awards for excellence. This is common practice in research, where a number of prizes are awarded for particularly outstanding performance in various fields.

Finland, and so far, Sweden give special awards to institutions or units for excellence in higher education. In Norway NOKUT is responsible for annually assessing applications for distinction for quality in higher education to one or several units. Whether Sweden will continue these awards is an open question.

Finland distinguishes centres of excellence in universities on the basis of evaluations by international peers in two steps. A similar procedure is part of the Swedish evaluation repertoire. In both cases, few applicants are successful, and the criteria are tough and applied stringently. A process to develop criteria for best practice will have to take these criteria into account.

## **Denmark**

### **Towards an overarching accreditation system**

In 2007 an Act of Parliament introduced systematic accreditation of all higher education in Denmark (*ex ante* and *ex post*) as mandatory external quality assurance and a pre-condition for obtaining public funding for higher education programmes. To carry out the executive power of awarding (or denying) accreditations the act established the Accreditation Council consisting of 8 members (including a chairman) appointed by the relevant ministries and one

member representing student groups. Prior to the Accreditation Act, approval of new programmes was granted by the relevant ministry.

Along with the introduction of the accreditation system the act established a new accreditation agency specifically designed to accredit long cycle programmes, namely ACE Denmark, while EVA became responsible for accrediting short and medium cycle programmes. The Accreditation Council thus draws on two agencies each carrying a specific portfolio of educational programmes.

The above mentioned Accreditation of Higher Education Act states that all programmes must be accredited according to criteria based on quality and relevance. Furthermore, it introduces two types of accreditation:

- accreditation of new programmes (*ex ante*), and
- accreditation of existing programmes (*ex post*).

The accreditation criteria are further developed and institutionalised in the executive orders following the Accreditation Act and all programmes must be accredited within a six-year cycle.

The Accreditation Council makes its decisions based upon an accreditation report written by either EVA or the academic secretariat in ACE Denmark. When accrediting existing programmes the Accreditation Council either awards the programme a full positive accreditation, a conditional positive accreditation (the programme must fulfil the specified conditions within a year at which point it is re-accredited) or a refusal of accreditation (the programme can no longer receive public funding).

### **Criteria, method and process – existing programmes**

The accreditation process begins with the formal decision to accredit a particular set of existing programmes. Programme representatives are then invited to an information meeting where they are given in-depth information about the application of criteria and the procedure of the assessment. While the university/college is preparing its documentation of the criteria the relevant accreditation agency (EVA or ACE Denmark) appoints an accreditation panel consisting of subject experts, a student and a representative of future employers of the programmes graduates. The panel as a group should include the following knowledge profiles: subject specific knowledge related to the programme; employer perspective on the programme, and pedagogics.

The panel plays an important role in terms of ensuring a responsible and qualified assessment of the various programmes, and EVA/ACE functions as a secretariat to the panel. The accreditation agencies are thus responsible for the methodological, procedural and practical aspects of the accreditation, whereas the panel is responsible for delivering a professional and specialised assessment of the programme to be accredited including the institution's QA procedures and processes.

## **Documentation**

Each programme prepares a documentation report, structured according to the criteria for programme accreditation. ACE or EVA ensures that the programmes receive guidance on the specific meanings and applications of the different criteria to ensure a consistent approach. The documentation is then read and assessed by the accreditation panel.

## **Site visit**

The panel and representatives from the accreditation agency conduct a site visit to each existing programme under accreditation. The purpose of the site visit is to clarify and validate the information provided in the documentation report. The visit also provides an opportunity for the programme to further elaborate on the report and for the accreditation panel to ask questions concerning the documentation.

## **Draft report and factual verification**

Following the site visit, ACE/ EVA will prepare a draft report on each programme based on the accreditation criteria. Each programme under accreditation will have the possibility to take part in a hearing process, to explain incorrect or missing information before the report is finalised and sent to the Accreditation Council.

## **Decision**

Thereafter, the Accreditation Council decides whether it will grant each programme a positive accreditation, a conditional accreditation or reject accreditation.

Following the decision of the Accreditation Council, the relevant ministry will provide the final approval of the legal matters concerning the programme.

## **Criteria, method and process – new programmes**

The accreditation of new programmes begins when an application is submitted to either EVA or ACE Denmark. Concerning short or medium cycle programmes the application process is followed by a screening process carried out by the relevant ministry. University programmes do not undergo this screening process.

Short and medium cycle programmes subsequently undergo a process similar to that of existing programmes. Only no site visits are conducted, but an accreditation panel is appointed to assess whether the programmes live up to the accreditation criteria. New university programmes are not assessed by an external panel but are assessed by the academic secretariat in ACE Denmark.

Much like the process concerning existing programmes an accreditation report is drafted upon the assessment of the accreditation panel/ the academic secretariat. The applicant institution has the opportunity to comment on this

report in the following hearing process prior to the finalisation of the accreditation report, which is sent to the Accreditation Council.

New programmes can only receive a positive accreditation or a rejection. Following the decision of the Accreditation Council, the relevant ministry will provide the final approval of the legal matters concerning the programme.

## **Finland**

### **The national quality assurance system**

The national quality assurance of higher education has three components: national higher education policy, the higher education institutions' own quality assurance and national auditing. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the national higher education policy. In practice, the national steering by the Ministry materialises in the triennial agreements on objectives and performance negotiated between the Ministry and each higher education institution.

In accordance with the legislation (Decrees 1320/1995 and 465/1998), the task of FINHEEC is to assist institutions of higher education and the Ministry of Education in issues relating to evaluation and to organise the higher education evaluations. The evaluations conducted by FINHEEC can be classified as follows<sup>20</sup>:

1) audits of quality assurance systems of higher education institutions, 2) subject evaluations, 3) education policy and other thematic evaluations, 4) evaluations of centres of excellence in university and polytechnic education, and 5) evaluation assignments implemented at the request of universities/polytechnics and the Ministry of Education as a separate commercial service.

In line with the principle of the autonomy of higher education institutions, the Finnish system starts with the premise that the higher education institutions are ultimately responsible for the quality of their own education and other operations. Each higher education institution can set up a QA system that best suits its own needs. The audit operations have been developed not only to support the quality work at the higher education institutions but also to demonstrate that Finland has competent and coherent national quality assurance in place at the level of higher education institutions. Built to correspond to the European QA guidelines, the audit model also promotes the adoption and application of the European principles in quality assurance of Finnish higher education institutions.

### **Audits**

Audits of the quality assurance systems of higher education institutions take place in six-year cycles. The institutions and FINHEEC have agreed on an overall timetable, and each university and polytechnic will have undergone an

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20. The Board of Professional Courses was disbanded on 31 December 2007. Therefore, FINHEEC is no longer responsible for evaluating professional courses and accrediting them for inclusion in the register.

audit by the end of 2011. Thus, audits will be the central tasks of FINHEEC until 2011.

The audits focus on the procedures and processes which the higher education institution uses to steer and develop the quality of its education and other activities. The aims, operative contents or performance of the higher education institution are not, *per se*, touched upon in the audits. Result assessment is the domain of the higher education institutions themselves and is also performed by the Ministry of Education in the framework of its management by objectives and performance. If a re-audit is required it will take place in about two years from the audit proper, and it will focus especially on the improvement proposals made; there are no other consequences or sanctions following a re-audit decision. FINHEEC maintains a register of higher education institutions that have undergone an audit on its website.

In November 2007, FINHEEC published a revised edition of the Audit Manual first released in 2005. The new manual follows the general principles and procedures of the earlier version, but includes certain technical corrections. The practical principles of re-audit are also included in the revised manual.

### **Subject and thematic evaluations**

In choosing the targets of subject and thematic evaluations, FINHEEC still applies the following main criteria: the subject or theme is significant with regard to education and social politics, and/or is a rapidly growing, developing or problematic area in the field of higher education. Additionally, higher education institutions and student unions can propose suitable evaluation themes to FINHEEC.

### **Centres of excellence in university and polytechnic education**

Evaluations focusing on centres of excellence in university and polytechnic education continue and are being developed. As before, the Finnish Ministry of Education requests FINHEEC to submit its decision/proposal for centres of excellence in university and polytechnic education as a basis for the allocation of performance-based funding for a given performance agreement period. In 2008, the selection method for centres of excellence in university education was reformed substantially. The fifth selection round for the period 2010 – 2012 was upgraded to an international level and was implemented in two stages with site visits.

### **Iceland**

External quality assurance of higher education in Iceland is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Office of Evaluation and Analysis. A special unit within the Ministry organises evaluations of institutions and programmes, in accordance with a three-year plan. In prac-

tice the actual evaluations are conducted by an independent panel of international experts, assisted by a secretary from the Icelandic centre for research. This means that although the ministry is officially responsible for all external evaluations, the evaluations are done by independent committees that have no contact with the ministry, once it has been hired for the project and until the committee has handed in its report.

Since 2006 Iceland has followed a similar path as in Denmark concerning accreditation, although accreditations in Iceland are done on the level of fields of studies, according to the Frascati manual of OECD. When higher education institutions have been through the accreditation, the Minister of education either awards the higher education institution a positive accreditation in that particular field of study, a conditional positive accreditation (the field of study must have fulfilled special conditions within a year or two), or a refusal (the field of study can no longer receive public funding).

A three-year plan for external evaluation has recently been put into practice. It consists of institutional audits as well as programme and subject evaluations. The programme evaluations will be done in all higher education institutions at the same time, i.e. all departments of law in the country will be the subject of external evaluation at the same time and the external evaluation of the departments will be undertaken by the same expert panel, and the result will be made public at the same time. In practice this means that the external evaluations have an element of benchmarking on subject and programme level.

All external evaluations in Iceland are done in English and the higher education institutions are obligated to hand in all their documents in English as well as publish relevant documents on its homepage in English. A new regulation, no. 321 from 2009, also states that at least one member of each evaluation panel must be from outside Iceland, at least one must be Icelandic and one must be a student representative. The same regulations also declare that the Ministry of Education must publish a handbook on internal and external evaluations of higher education institutions. Since spring 2009 a committee of stakeholders from the ministry and the higher education institutions has been working on the handbook, which is expected to be published in December 2009. It is worth mentioning that the quality assurance system in Iceland deals with both teaching and learning and research and development.

A new committee on the future of Icelandic higher education recently submitted its proposals concerning quality assurance in higher education. Some of these ideas include the suggestion that Iceland should establish its own quality assurance agency, as is the case in the other Nordic Countries.

## **Norway**

In comparison with the situation described in the Stensaker-Danø report (2006), there are not many changes or updates.

The higher education system remains unchanged but some internal dynamics of the system can be reported. Several institutions have been accredited for a new institutional status by NOKUT.

One university college has been upgraded to university status, making the total number of universities seven.

Two specialized universities have been established bringing the total number of specialised universities up to eight.

Nine university colleges have been established, making the total number of university colleges 36

The status as *colleges of the arts* no longer exists. The two former colleges of the arts now have the status as university colleges

Of direct relevance for the introduction of joint degrees in the Norwegian higher education system, is the fact that the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions in 2007 completed a report on joint degrees and *cotutelle* on the PhD level. The conclusions to be drawn from the report are still under discussion among Norwegian higher education institutions. The existing report has identified challenges and proposed solutions.

A second round of audits of the institutions' quality assurance systems has recently been initiated. The evaluation criteria have been only slightly adjusted in this second round. Generally speaking, there is now a stronger focus on ascertaining the impact of the system. Audits may now also include in-depth study of one or more areas.

In 2007 NOKUT was externally evaluated by an international panel. The result of this international evaluation is two reports. The first report is an assessment of whether NOKUT meets the ENQA standards for external quality assurance agencies. The second report is an evaluation of the national role of NOKUT. This second evaluation is based on criteria set by the ministry.

The outcome of this first review is that from June 2008 NOKUT has become reconfirmed as a full member of ENQA, The outcome of the second evaluation is still not clear. But the current system of external quality assurance in Norway will probably be adjusted or modified in the near future. The substance of possible adjustments has not yet been decided.

## **Sweden**

### **Reforms in Higher Education**

In comparison with the situation in 2005 as described by Stensaker-Danø (2006) Swedish higher education has undergone a number of changes, most of them as a consequence of adaptation to the Bologna system. Thus, the Bachelor – Master – Ph.D. structure has been introduced, as well as the ECTS credit point system and, to a certain extent, the ECTS grading system. A new Higher Education Ordinance has been introduced and new degree regulations expressed in terms of learning outcomes have been established as a consequence.

A number of reforms are expected within the next few years. Thus, several government enquiries are currently in place with mandates in the field of governance (the status of higher education institutions), financing and the relationship between quality and funding. The national quality assurance system has been further developed, and a model concentrating on assessment of programmes and subjects which will be linked to funding is being developed and will be introduced as from January 1, 2010. Accreditation of new professional programmes and of master's programmes at university colleges will be retained and conducted as previously. The future of audits is highly uncertain. The distinction to centres of excellent quality will probably cease to exist.

### **The national quality assurance system**

The role of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education remains the same as before. Its tasks include evaluation of higher education and legal supervision. The agency is also responsible for higher education statistics, various studies into higher education and evaluation of higher education qualifications awarded abroad.

### **Audits**

At the moment of writing, audits of institutions' quality assurance measures are still taking place and include evaluation of the structure and implementation of the systems at central level. They also include in-depth study of two to six areas, which may be departments, centres or other units, in order to ascertain the impact of the system. Institutions of similar size and status are audited in the same year.

Audits will in all likelihood be phased out by the end of next year, and thus the cycle that began in 2008 will not be concluded.

### **Programme and subject evaluations**

Programme and subject evaluations are under discussion. The Agency has been instructed by the Government to develop a new system of evaluating programmes and subjects at first, second and third level. Evaluations are to result in graded assessments and results are to be linked to funding.

The focus in these evaluations, which are meant to be carried out in four-year cycles, will be on learning outcomes, both intended and achieved. This will include generic and transferrable skills. Further, they will take into account the student experience and the research basis of teaching.

Programmes will be graded on a scale from 3 (high quality) to 1 (not acceptable). In the latter case the higher education institution may lose its entitlement to award the degrees in question.

The details of the system are now being developed it is expected to become effective as from 1 January, 2010.



### **Distinction of centres of excellent quality in higher education**

Distinction of centres of excellent quality in higher education at national level is new for Sweden, although awards of this kind exist in several other Nordic and European countries, among them Norway, Finland and England. The main reason for such distinctions is to provide incentives for higher education organisations that already maintain high standards to seek further improvement and to stimulate quality enhancement and inspire others by offering examples of good practice.

In Sweden, the educational units that apply for the award have to submit a report that offers a convincing description and analysis of how they operate and how this benefits student learning. They must also provide convincing evidence of their results. Evaluations are then carried out by panels of highly qualified international experts, who visit the unit and submit a report. Only a few units are likely to be considered for the award each year. The continued existence of this model is highly uncertain.



## Appendix B.

# Criteria for Joint Evaluation of Joint Master's Programmes

The following list is indicative of criteria that might be included in a Nordic model. With the exception of the criteria for jointness, it is mainly based on those for evaluation and accreditation of master's degrees applied in the Nordic countries.

### **Aims of the programme**

- The aims of programme are clearly defined in terms of learning outcomes and are in line with the European qualifications framework.

### **Criteria for jointness**

- There is a formal agreement between the participating institutions.
- Mechanisms for cooperation are spelled out in the agreement and understood by all parties. Responsibilities are clearly defined and shared.
- The managements of all participating institutions support the goals and objectives. The programme is fully recognised by all participating institutions.
- The joint programme provides added value in relation to provision by only one institution. It involves benefits for all the institutions taking part in the programme.
- A common sustainable funding strategy is in place.
- A language policy is in place.
- Academic and administrative aspects of the programme are adequately staffed and funded. The infrastructure, e.g. library and other information sources, premises and equipment, in all participating institutions meets the needs of the programme.
- Students are secured a stay at an institution in at least one country other than that of their home institution.
- The rights of students are secured when they attend institutions other than their home institution.
- Arrangements for reaching out to and receiving guest students and scholars are in place.
- Contacts between teachers in the different institutions involved in the programme are secured through joint seminars, exchange arrangements, etc.
- Information about the programme is relevant and easily accessible to students and other stakeholders.

### **Links between programme contents, teaching and current up-to-date research**

- The programme is based on relevant up-to-date research-based knowledge developed by active researchers.
- Teaching is based on theoretical and/or empirical studies and practice, wherever relevant.
- Teaching and examination methods support students' attaining the goals of the programme.
- Teaching and assessment contribute to students' ability, in national and international contexts, to account for and discuss results and conclusions of research as well as the arguments on which they are based.
- Teachers are active researchers, and 50 % of the full time equivalent staff should be senior researchers and at least 25 % of those should be professors and also possess the pedagogical skills needed to stimulate students to acquire the relevant competencies, knowledge and abilities.
- Teachers participate in international research cooperation within the field of the study programme.
- There is an active and keen research environment which also provides PhD programmes. Students should be involved in this environment, and successful completion of the programme should make students eligible for relevant PhD programmes.

### **Relevance for future professional careers**

- There is labour market demand for graduates from the programme.
- Successful completion of the programme makes graduates eligible for employment with high demands for independent work related to research and development or other qualified employments.
- There are regular contacts between the programme and employers.

### **Depth and progression**

- The programme is planned and organized as a unit in which the courses contribute to the whole. It is relevant, up to date and realistic in relation to learning outcomes specified and the length of the programme.
- Learning outcomes cover knowledge and abilities in the main area of study as well as generic skills. There are links between the learning outcomes and the organization of teaching.
- The programme demonstrates progression internally and in relation to relevant bachelor programmes. The programme is based on the students' expected prior knowledge (a first level degree).
- The programme includes a main area of studies amounting to a minimum of 60 ECTS.
- The minimum extent of the thesis is 30 ECTS.

### **Quality assurance**

- The programme has a system which assures the quality of the joint provision, and guarantees that the aims of the programme are met. The programme continuously collects information both for this purpose and for the further development of the programme. This system is recognized by all the institutions represented in the consortium.
- Quality assurance practices involve students, staff and other stakeholders from all participating institutions.
- Quality assurance includes coordination of assessment across the whole programme to ensure that all of its expected competences/learning outcomes are met.
- There is adequate provision for teachers' academic and pedagogical development.
- Reports on results of quality assurance activities are publicly available.

### **Criteria for a Nordic quality label**

The criteria listed under this heading should be applied in relation to joint provision of the programme.

#### **Jointness**

- The joint programme provides added value in relation to provision by only one institution. It involves benefits for all the institutions taking part in the programme.
- Students are secured a stay at an institution in at least one country other than that of their home institution
- The rights of students are secured when they attend institutions other than their home institutions
- Teachers participate in joint activities and exchange programmes with institutions that participate in the programme
- Information on teaching and examination methods in the different institutions is shared and well understood

#### **Organisational structure, quality assurance system and infrastructure**

- There are effective systems for quality assurance of the programme as a whole
- The organisational structure as a whole is optimal
- The educational program/environment is well supported by its context and networks, and vice versa
- There is supporting administration to guarantee continuity

### **Management, administration, and teachers**

- There are systems for recognising and supporting excellent teaching and learning (including academic awards)
- There are well functioning systems for teachers' academic and pedagogical development
- Basic indicators such as student/faculty ratio, number of teachers with PhD degrees and number of professors involved in the education demonstrate high quality
- Teaching is firmly underpinned by an explicit and robust academic or artistic foundation or tried and tested experience.
- There are explicit links between current research/development and student learning in the programme as a whole
- Research and new knowledge are well integrated in the curricula and in teaching
- Students are involved in research projects

### **Methods of teaching and examination**

- Goals are well described and measurable
- Methods of teaching and examination are well described and adapted to contents and goals
- It is explained why or how methods of teaching and examination support reaching these goals
- Students' learning processes
- There are procedures to secure and evaluate feedback from students
- There are indicators that show development of innovative and suitable pedagogical methods
- Degree projects and theses are externally evaluated
- There is a culture of promoting and maintaining high quality
- There are indicators for national and international benchmarking

### **Excellent results.**

- Key performance indicators (number of applicants/available place, throughput) are monitored and used
- There is alumni follow-up with regard to employability, transfer to doctoral programmes etc.
- There are other feedback mechanisms that demonstrate excellence of results

### **Success factors**

- Success factors are identified and well defined
- There is well documented impact on other institutions (local, national or international)
- Prizes or awards