INTERNAL QUALITY WORK

JOINT SEMINAR of NORDIC AND BALTIC QA AGENCIES
on June 12, 2014, Stockholm

SUMMARY

Internal quality work
What can we learn from each other
A summary from the joint seminar of NOQA
and the Baltic Quality Assurance Agencies

Contents

Background

The Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA) is a forum for information dissemination, exchanging experiences and pursuing projects of mutual interest. The network's main objective is to create a joint understanding of different Nordic viewpoints on issues related to higher education quality assurance.

The network's 13th meeting was held in Stockholm 12-13 June 2014. On the meeting's first day participation had been extended to include approximately five colleagues from each member organization as well as colleagues from the Baltic Quality Assurance Agencies, i.e. around 40 participants all together. The day was introduced by Professor Airi Rovio-Johansson who gave a short presentation on peer review positioning and was then followed by four parallel workshops on topics related to internal quality work. The aim was to exchange experiences on working processes and learn from each other in order to improve our internal quality work. Each of the Nordic agencies; Norway, Finland, Denmark and Sweden had been responsible for preparing one of the four topics:

Peer review and experts – NOKUT, Norway
Project leadership – UKÄ, Sweden
Internal Quality Culture of the QA agencies – Finland
How do we produce system-wide analyses – Denmark

In this paper all four topics are presented as well as a summary from the discussions in each workshop. The main purpose of this paper is to encourage all participants to continue the work on these questions internally. We hope that both the content and the form in which the workshops were conducted should give inspiration and can be useful as a working material. There are no ultimate answers to the topics and dilemmas presented, however, to discuss these matters will result in higher internal quality. One of the main conclusions of the workshops is that despite the fact that all the agencies have different evaluation systems; the challenges when it comes to internal quality work are more or less the same. Therefore we hope that these summaries will be useful for all agencies in their internal quality work as well as to give ideas on how we can continue and develop the cooperation within the NOQA network and learn from each other.

The organization of the network was led by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (UKÄ) but prepared by a working group consisting of:

Anna-Karin Malla, Ulrika Thafvelin, UKÄ
Hannele Seppälä, FINEEC
Luna Lee Solheim, NOKUT
David Metz, the Danish Accreditation Institution

Positioning Peer Review
– Roles, responsibilities and expectations

Introduction by Professor Airi Rovio-Johansson

An introduction was made by Airi Rovio-Johansson, Professor in Educational Sciences and Senoir Research Fellow at Gothenburg Research Institute (GRI), School of Business, Economics and Law at University of Gothenburg. Her main domains are among others; institutional quality management and Quality Assurance methods in higher education, national and international organisations; private and public organisations, as well as; Life-long learning as Sustainable Intercultural and Intergenerational Learning in various national and international organisations. Her presentation was on "Positioning Peer Review – Roles, responsibilities and expectations". Professor Rovio-Johansson pointed out the importance of understanding the social processes in quality assurance contexts. She presented the European University Association/ Institutional Evaluation Programme (EUA/IEP) model of Peer-Review as well as the methodology which has four main questions:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- What proves that it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

Finally Professor Rovio-Johansson talked about the site-visit at the university and the challenges in quality assurance work. The main actors to take into account in the quality assurance context are, according to Rovio-Johansson; the National Agency, the Agency's team and the University. The dominant relation is that between the National Agency and the Universities. She made a point that roles, responsibilities and expectations are quite diverse in these groups and the challenge is to consider and understand all these aspects. In addition, when dealing with multicultural groups, the vocabulary and discourses differ from country to country, with each country having its own terminology. Hence there is a need for a translation process and for an understanding of the social processes in the quality assurance context. Professor Rovio-Johansson encouraged the audience to remember that multiculture is not only about different languages, age groups, positions, etc., it is also a combination of these factors. There is a need for ongoing translation of what the other party is communicating in a multicultural setting in order to obtain an understanding of the task at hand.

Peer review and Experts: The relationship between the mandate, the agency and the experts

Workshop prepared and held by Ine Andersen and Luna Lee Solheim, NOKUT Norway, summarized by Anna-Karin Malla, UKÄ Sweden

Introduction

Quality assurance of higher education is administered by the national quality assurance agencies (QA-agencies) and is performed by academic peers and students - the experts. In this workshop we will discuss the critical issues to consider in the relationship between the expert panels and the QA-agency. What is needed to make the expert panels perform well? The aim of the workshop is to share good practices related to these critical issues, and thereby gather ideas for how to ensure good evaluations processes and reports.

This paper will give a short presentation of the challenges we see related to the topic based on our experiences from the Norwegian system. We hope that this will start some thoughts about your own experiences that you can share in the workshop.

The expert's role in the Norwegian system

In Norway we have four "instruments" for quality assurance; Programme accreditation (initial accreditation), institutional accreditation, evaluation of institutions' internal quality assurance systems (audit) and the revision of accreditation which implies supervision of existing provision. In all measures we use expert panels of 2-5 persons, but the methodology and the procedures differ for accreditation/revision and audits.

Common for all measures is the expert panel's role. The expert panel's judgment, based on written materials and in some cases site visits should lead to a clear conclusion of whether the institution, application or QA-system under evaluation is satisfactory according to the regulations and criteria. It is the Board of NOKUT or the General Director who makes the final decision of approval. As a result of the expert panel's work the institution will gain certain rights or loose an existing right. The expert panels perform the task according to a number of formal regulations (laws, criteria, mandates), and the expectations of the stakeholders such as the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the QA-agency (NOKUT), the Ministry, the media and the society at large. In this paper we will focus on the relationship between the experts, the mandate and NOKUT.

The recruitment and training of experts

NOKUT is responsible for finding and appointing the experts, and informing and training them about the mandate and the criteria. The competence requirements for experts are defined in the NOKUT regulation. The formal requirements are normally possible to meet. However, there are two things we would like to raise as possible critical issues related to the recruitment of experts:

1. The first thing to consider is the expert's reputation, ideological viewpoint and standing in the field. This is normally a bigger challenge in narrow disciplines. How can we understand the narrow disciplines better, so that we know who to ask? What role do we play in creating "professional" experts that reach a position of power in certain disciplines? What are the dangers of reusing experts? The institutions can comment on our suggestion before the experts are appointed, and this may reduce the challenges described here. But, is this enough? Are there other things we can do to make sure we appoint the right experts?
2. In addition to the formal competence requirements, there are other critical factors needed to ensure a good process and report. These are the unspoken and intangible criteria for being a "good expert", and are based on values and personality traits. Examples of critical factors are things like being able to write a good report,

committing to the task, meeting the deadlines, being available, being able to collaborate with the other experts in the panel, and understanding the mandate and the role as expert. How can we increase our knowledge about these factors before appointing the experts?

In order to secure the quality of the evaluation, the training of experts is essential. We conduct different kinds of training for the audits and for initial accreditation and revision. The panels for the audits are composed from a pool of experts who are especially trained for this type of evaluation. Once a year NOKUT host a two-day seminar for the audit experts, where we discuss different topics relevant for the upcoming audits. For initial accreditation and revision we host one-day training in the beginning of the process. The aim of the training is to make sure the experts understand their mandate, the evaluation process and to get a common understanding of the criteria. It is important that the project managers and the experts get to know each other early in the process, as this will foster the cooperation and communication throughout the evaluation process. What are the most important issues to convey to the experts in the training? How can we make the expert panels perform well?

When conflicts emerge
A conflict may occur in all steps of the evaluation process. Conflicts typically occur when:

- The experts are unclear about their mandate and responsibility
- One of the experts do not deliver as expected, leaving all the work to the others in the panel
- The experts are not able to work together (or come to an agreement)
- The experts strongly disagree with the project managers feedback and refuse to make changes in the report

The first two bullet points can be reduced by ensuring that the experts understand the mandate, responsibility and our expectations early in the process. However, we cannot be sure that the experts have understood the task and are willing to meet our expectations until we see the result of the evaluation process (the report). An important issue to consider is when and how can we pick up on any misunderstandings or other serious conflicts? Do we have the necessary tools to pick up on them at an early stage, and to deal with e.g. experts who do not deliver as expected? The experts are sometimes very loyal to each other, which is not always good when there is an imbalance in the responsibility (such as with writing the report).

The most critical point is during the last phases of the evaluation process. When the deadline in approaching and the experts are near to the final conclusion, one gets to a point of no return. At least it will take more effort, in worst case, to end the agreement and withdraw the experts from the evaluation. In some cases we have experienced that some of the judgments in the report are not suitable for publication. When the project manager has addressed this, a conflict has occurred and the experts have not been willing to make the necessary changes. A critical issue to consider here is whether the project manager's role as an editor of the report is clear to the experts. Another question is how can we make sure we pick up on difficulties before we come to a point of no return?

The end result – excellent reports
According to the European Standards and Guidelines "reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership". In some measures, the project managers are secretaries for the expert panel. In other measures the expert panels write the report themselves. There are strengths and weaknesses with both. When the project managers write the report, the reports are more close to the standards laid by the Agency. Also, we control the process and can pick up on difficulties, misunderstanding and conflicts along the way. On the other hand, it is very time consuming, and the experts can feel that the report does

not really belong to them. When the experts write the reports, we can end up in situations described earlier. We also need to have a closer look at the reports to ensure that they are well written and that the conclusions are clear. To ensure consistency is also more critical when the experts write the report themselves. In Norway at least two project managers read the applications and reports, and compare, cross check and discuss the different cases to check if the expert panels use the same level of strictness. After we have gone through the report it is sent back to the experts for correction. The project manager's role as editor of the report can as mentioned before cause conflicts.

What are your experiences with the project manager's role in the process? Whether the project manager is an editor of the report or a secretary for the expert panel, what are the five key components to ensuring a good relationship between the project manager and the experts.

Topic 1: Case study
The recruitment and training of experts
Part 1: NOKUT has suggested Erik Johansen and Julia Larsen as experts to evaluate an application for accreditation of a bachelor program in Nutrition Therapy. The institution does not want Erik Johansen to evaluate the application. Erik Johansen has a high standing in the field of nutrition, but he has an ideological viewpoint that is different from the institution's viewpoint on nutrition, health, and therapy. The institution's viewpoint on nutrition is rather alternative, whereas Erik Johansen stands for the more mainstream view on nutrition and health. According to the institution, Erik Johansen criticized the institution's ideological viewpoint publicly in 2003.

NOKUT has used Erik Johansen as an expert several times before. Actually, he has evaluated all the other study programs in the field of nutrition. We know that he is committed, he writes excellent reports, and he meets deadlines and collaborates well with other experts. He understands the mandate, and has participated in our training of experts before.

The field of nutrition is rather small in Norway, and all of the other experts we asked were either busy or disqualified as they have close connections to the institution. To find another expert to replace Erik Johansen, we will have to search in one of the other Nordic countries. As we had problems finding experts to evaluate this bachelor program, we are already behind schedule.

Questions to consider:
1. What are the pros and cons of appointing Erik Johansen as an expert?
2. Would you use him as an expert for this evaluation or not? State the reasons behind your decision.
Part 2: You decide to appoint Erik Johansen as an expert in spite of the institution's objections. When you receive the first draft of the report, you see that the report is not very well written. The conclusion is that the bachelor program is not approved, but the expert's argumentation for why it is not good enough is weak or even lacking on some of the criteria. You suspect that the experts and especially Erik Johansen is biased, just as the institution was afraid he would be.

Question to consider:
3. What could you have done differently in the training and throughout the evaluation process to ensure a well written report with a fair and valid evaluation of the bachelor program?

Topic 2 Role play
Conflict situation
Luna: Good morning, Professor Andersen. This is Luna from NOKUT.

Expert: Good morning.

Luna: Thank you for the draft of the report. We have reviewed it here in NOKUT and have some comments and suggestions for improvement of the report. Do you have the report in front of you?

Expert: Yes, I do. I hope it is not a lot, as we have already used a lot of time on this evaluation.

Luna: Well, there is one section that we need for you to change. In the report on page 23, criteria 12 you have written: "The institution emphasizes in their application that the faculty are members of ICF- the International Coach Federation. We know that the institution's contact person was excluded from the ICF and from the ICF global committee in 2010. We will not elaborate on this conflict, but in order for us to make a qualified evaluation of the criteria; we need an explanation for how the institution considers this contact person's history with the ICF."

Expert: Yes, what is the problem with this?

Luna: Well, the conflict does not have any direct relevance for this particular criterion, and your background knowledge of specific faculty members should not influence your evaluation of the application.

Expert: What do you mean? They emphasize the membership in the application. If they didn't mention it, we would not have commented on it. Being excluded from the ICF is a pretty serious thing you know.

Luna: Ok. I see your point, but you will at least have to modify it. We suggest that you try to get your point across without mentioning this conflict. Could you do that?

Expert: I don't really know how that should be possible, as what we need is for them to explain how they can let a person who clearly has crossed the line for what is acceptable behavior be the person responsible for the application. I just can't see that this person is suitable as a contact person for an application to NOKUT, and I doubt the whole institutions credibility based on this. Besides, I have spent so much time on this application and report, and I am just so fed up now. You said it would take about 20 hours and I have already used 35 hours or more on this application.

Luna: Well, the time estimate is an average of how many hours our experts usually spend on an application. Since this is your first time, it is natural that you spend a little more.

Expert: A little more. 15 hours more is a lot more, and do you realize how difficult it was to work with the other expert. We disagree on almost all criteria, and he is just so suborn. Ah….

Luna: I am sorry that you had a hard time working together. This is valuable information for us, so that we can try to find a better match next time. However, we value the academic discussions, as this will make the evaluation more valid. And about the time you spent, I will take that into consideration when working with new experts in the future. So thank you for valuable input. But back to the report. Can you please change the paragraph in criteria 12 on page 23?

Expert: You know what. I strongly think we need to get this point across and if you are not happy with what I wrote, you have to change it yourself. You said that the experts role was to give an advice to NOKUT, and that the board can choose to listen to our advice or not. Well, this is my advice, and I can't go against my own conviction in this case. The institution needs to explain their view on this persons conflict with the ICF. Period! As far as I am concerned I am finished with this report. Good bye!

Luna: But….

Summary of workshop

The Norwegian setting was briefly outlined as a background to the cases to be discussed later. The setting is a peer review group of 2-5 experts, who will produce a report with their findings. Over the years the task has varied e.g. regarding to what degree the universities can influence the recruitment of peers and the level of editing by the staff of the report written by the experts.

Issues relating to recruitment

- What formal criteria that needs to be met when recruiting experts is usually not hard to define, but in addition to the formal criteria there are also other competencies. It is not only the academic background that is important, but also other criteria that are hard to ensure in advance, such as the reputation, ideological viewpoint or standing in the field of the expert, the level of understanding the mandate of being an expert, getting the right work together, values, personality traits, committing to the task etc.
- As quality assurance agencies we may "create" professional experts that obtain a fairly large power in a certain discipline. This may be a risk to be aware of, especially in narrow fields. How do we tackle this and what is the challenge of using professional experts?
- How do we train the experts and what issues are the most important ones to convey to the experts? How do we make the experts understand the mandate and the responsibility that comes with the task. Furthermore, these issues are not only related to the individual, but also to the group, and the challenge is to form a good and credible team with competencies that complement each other.

Topic 1: Case study
Summary of discussions on case 1

The following pros of appointing the expert in case 1 was suggested: the expert is experienced, has legitimacy in the sector, has the core competency as an expert since he/she is collaborating well, keeping deadlines, understanding the mandate, writing excellent reports. By recruiting the proposed expert the project will not lose any further time on recruiting. Both formal criteria and unspoken criteria are being met.

The following cons of appointing the expert in case 1 was suggested: the expert has been critical towards the university to be evaluated on previous occasions; since the expert has been involved in all evaluations carried out in this particular field, there is a fear of power concentration and therefore the outcome could be questioned.

The following was listed as possible solutions and ideas on what could have been done differently in the training and throughout the evaluation process to avoid the problems:

- The content of the training of the experts is important, an opportunity where possible challenges can be discussed in a general way.
- Include a third expert in the peer review group in order to balance the views. It could also help to appoint one of the other experts as the chairperson of the group.
- Be strict and formal on the criteria to be applied.
- The project manager could act as secretary in writing the report.
- To have a mechanism in place for disagreeing, so that it is possible for an expert to disagree in the report when opinions differ.
- To have a pre-report, (0-version of the report) and force the peers to write at an early stage. Ask for an early draft of the report.
- To ask each expert to hand in a SWOT analysis to the project manager.
- Make sure the expert attends the training. Talk with the expert regarding the problem, and give an open option for the expert to leave the expert group or carry on.

Topic 2: Role play on conflict situation
Summary of discussions on role play

Yes, we do need peer review experts, but we need to closely consider in what area they are experts and how we use them. Are there certain parts in the writing of the report where the project manager can write or make a draft instead of the expert, e.g. administrative and legal conditions or parts where the project manager will have more information on hand than the expert.

The following was discussed as how to avoid or deal with the conflict in the role play:

- It is hard to deal with delicate issues over the phone. It may be easier, and less of a confrontation for the expert to respond to something written. Ask questions or rewrite a draft of the part as a suggestion, rather than give direct orders or define what is wrong. Convey to experts that all information given is based on trust.
- It may be a matter of personal dignity. Am I the only expert who has received comments? It is better if it is known that the project manager has given comments to several experts. It could be communicated from the beginning that written comments will be given to all team members at a slotted time in the process.
- A clear mandate/role of the project manager is needed and this needs to be communicated early on, preferably during the training. A clear understanding of the chairperson's role versus the project manager is needed. It should be known by everyone who has the editing power. In Denmark, it is the agency that has the responsibility to write after having received input from the experts.
- Discuss report ethics, i.e. what information to be given in reports, transparent writing, not insinuating.

Final discussion

Key components for ensuring good relationships between the project manager and the experts:

- Communication
- Clear mandate to the experts
- Clear understanding of the roles and division of tasks and responsibilities

Key factors for well written reports:
- Agree on deadlines early on in the process
- Discuss the expectations on what the agency or project managers expect of the experts, and similarly what the experts expect
- Common understanding of the assignment and the different roles of experts and project manager in the report writing process
- Training where possible challenges are discussed (criteria, process and impartiality)
- Report ethics (transparent writing, based on facts, formal and non-provocative language)
- The experts send a SWOT analysis to the project manager early in the process. This will give the project manager a better chance to make sure the report reflects the experts' opinion of the application/audit or revision

Project leadership: "Shrewd as serpents, innocent as doves"- Facilitator or manipulator?

The pitfalls and challenges of the role as project manager

Workshop prepared, performed and summerized by Magnus Johansson, Johanna Köhlmark, UKÄ, Sweden

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to serve as a starting point to a discussion about the challenges that the autonomy of the expert group implies for the project manager. We propose to discuss: What challenges do we meet as project managers in dealing with the autonomy of the expert group, regardless of the differences in our national systems? In the workshop, we'll discuss and identify possible challenges and discuss them briefly during the first part of the workshop. During the second part of the workshop, we'll choose and discuss one or two of these challenges further. The aim of the workshop is to learn from each other and to start a discussion that can be continued in our respective organisations – what challenges do we meet and how can we prepare for them? To start off the discussion a few challenges, based on experiences from the Swedish system, are outlined below:

The balancing act of the project manager

The roles of the project manager can briefly be summarized as planning, facilitating and (together with the chairman of the panel) leading the project. The project manager is responsible for ensuring that the panel follows the required method and stays within its authorization. The project manager is also responsible for the quality assurance of the end result, yet not supposed to influence the evaluations of the expert panel. The latter can involve an act of balance.

In regard to the fact that project managers have to balance their roles we would like to discuss:

- What are the risks of "facilitator turning manipulator", i.e. what risks are there that the helping hand of the project manager develops into an influence on the expert evaluations? What are the ramifications for the organization, the panel of experts, and the HEIs?
- What are the means of the project manager to prevent the influence of expert's private agendas?

The balancing act of project equivalence and expert's autonomy

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (SHEA) has taken steps to assure the quality of the evaluation process by developing explicit principles and routines for the panels. The experts are provided with information and an introduc¬tion to the evaluation process to ensure project equivalence and transparency. In accordance to guidelines provided, the assessors then draw up a proposal for the intended lear¬ning outcomes to be evaluated as well as evaluation-specific criteria based on a fixed number of lear-ning outcomes.

However, while the scope and milestones for the projects are clearly defined, there are in fact several points where the project managers can do, and in fact do, things differently. How the project manager presents the scope and the frames for the project and how active the project manager is in, for example formulating criteria and writing reports, vary based on the project manager's earlier experience, input from colleagues, personal preferences etc. There have been internal discussions and efforts to achieve a more uniform approach to these questions. At the same time, a too rigid framework for project management is felt not to be feasible, considering that groups and projects (and of course project managers) are different.

- What challenges does the autonomy of the project manager imply?
- What challenges does the autonomy of the expert group imply?

Conflicts

Generally, conflicts between the project managers and the panel of experts are few and far between, as well as between the members of the panel. In most cases, points of disagreements can be settled though a discussion. When a disagreement does arise between the project manager and members of the panel, it mainly concerns either how the system is described in the report or how an assessment is worded. Based on your experience:

- Where is a conflict most likely to appear in the chain (panel – project leader – internal reviewers – management – council)?
- What is the role of the project manager when this happens?

Summary of workshop

A general trend towards clearer and stricter framework for quality agendas (at least in the Nordic countries), where the agencies set the agenda and exert more control in how the assessments are carried out, was noted in the discussion. This development has implications for the role as a project leader, and it can be argued that it leads to an increased professionalisation of the role as project manager. The development has furthermore implications for the role of experts. Experts are generally experts in their fields, and not experts on quality and evaluation. They might not be used to interpreting the type of data and facts provided to them through the system. The question was raised if we demand too much of our experts? A more rigid framework for quality assessment can also to some extent affect the panels' autonomy. Whereas unclear instructions and vague guidelines can lead to arbitrary verdicts and criticism from the higher educational institutes, too detailed instructions can leave the experts with little room for manoeuvre, which in turn can lead to experts giving up.

It was recognised in the discussions that, however careful a project manager is, a project can still go wrong and a conflict can arise. The project manager has to be aware of the fact that the panel can have openly stated as well as hidden or private agendas. Different systems and different panels also mean that different problems and questions can arise and they require different solutions.

However, some factors that are important and can facilitate the planning and the implementation of a project were identified. The importance of the agency and the project manager "setting the stage" and laying the foundations for a well organised project by careful preparations was stressed. The factors identified are summarised below.

Factors related to the agency as an organisation
- Make sure the project manager has the right training, a clear understanding of what the role contains and the resources to train the panel properly.
- The importance of the project leaders receiving internal backing in form of guidelines, support, and adequate resources was stressed. As a representative of an agency, it is important that the project manager can carry out the project as intended.

Factors related to the process of planning a project and recruiting and training experts
- Consider what sort of expertise that is necessary for the project. What are they experts on? Use their expertise only on matters where their expertise is relevant. The role of the chair is especially important. She or he should preferably combine expertise with an in-depth knowledge of the higher educational system.
- Underline the importance of impartial experts when recruiting. Make sure the members of the panel understand and accept their roles and their task. Agree on a "Code of conduct" for project managers and experts

- Make sure that the experts get an appropriate introduction and training for their task.
- Provide the panel with a manual about what to evaluate, i.e. what to focus on in the evaluation and a frame of reference regarding the judgements, levels etc.

Factors related to the implementation and conclusion of the project
- A warning was raised against putting too much emphasis on training experts – the project manager has to be constantly prepared to tackle problems and conflicts as they arise and to remind the experts of their task.
- Meet the demand from the universities regarding consistency. Norway gave an example how they structured their reports in chapters that can be calibrated and compared between different evaluations and different universities.

Internal Quality Culture of the Quality Assurance Agencies

Workshop prepared and performed by Hannele Seppälä & Matti Kajaste, Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, FINEEC Finland, summarised by Ulrika Thafvelin, UKÄ, Sweden

Introduction

What is quality culture? What is the significance of it? How does the quality culture change and how can we encourage its development? What are the roles of individuals and working community in developing the quality culture?

Quality Culture is a topic, which has been on top of the agenda for Quality Assurance (QA) agencies for some time now. It relates to departure from simple mechanistic and sometimes ritual quality assurance operations that QA agencies have themselves occasionally limited to. However, quality culture could be seen also as a broader concept. FINEEC has defined it as follows: "… quality culture describes the environment and atmosphere in which the operations are developed, as well as the individual and collective commitment to the quality work..." (FINHEEC's Audit manual for the quality systems of HEIs 2011-2017, 2nd edition). In other words, the scope of the quality culture should cover not only formal quality assurance processes but also individual and collective cultural elements as well as commitment to quality.

Quality Culture is prevalent in numerous day-to-day instances in the work of a QA agency. It is not only commitment to quality work but also and perhaps more importantly, intrinsic commitment to working in a high-quality way. For example, it is gathering feedback from seminars, events and such and actually utilizing this information next year, when similar event is planned. It is genuine attempt to plan an evaluation process in such a way that the result is better than the previous thematic evaluation three years ago. It is willingness of personnel to take the time and continuously develop operations outside the formal quality system to improve the output of the agency. It is very difficult to force or coerce or even incentivize personnel to act in this way. Instead Quality Culture develops best through positive example and encouragement to go the 'extra mile' even when it is not demanded by an authority or a stakeholder.

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Quality culture is expressed also by the interaction within the working community. Culture determines how the organization responds to different things – positive challenges as well as conflicts, mistakes and errors. Opportunities to learning and personal development usually motivate people and create future oriented atmosphere. In addition, creativity requires the right amount of freedom and balance between guidelines and individual ways of working.

One of the most essential features of the quality culture is the consistency. The use of formal quality assurance processes helps to assure the quality of operations. The quality assurance systems are typically based on the strategic aims and operating principles. The QA system of higher education evaluations in FINEEC comprises four parts under which most of FINEEC's quality procedures fall: planning (plan of action), executing (e.g., feedback surveys, indicators of activities and self-evaluation by secretariat and Council), utilisation (e.g., development seminar for the Council and the secretariat) and implementation of changes (e.g., changes in documents and activities, updating of processes). The elements of the FINEEC's quality system related to higher education evaluations are described in the quality manual. The most important processes, like the evaluation process and stakeholder process, are also described in the quality manual. In addition the orientation material for new employees includes evaluation process descriptions for the project managers. Further, one of the most important operations of FINEEC, the Audit Model, is fairly strictly dictated by the Audit Manual. Model's development is conducted periodically and through the systematic collection and utilization of feedback from HEIs and audit team members.

The aim of the workshop

This workshop concentrates on different ways the participating agencies and organizations are currently promoting Quality Culture and devising new ways to encourage its development.

Interactive working methods are applied in order to find out different perspectives and experiences of the participants. Discussion topics will include

- How to recognize quality in our daily work?
- What is the importance of consistency in processes and methodology?
- How to define quality culture in working community?
- What are the roles of individuals and working community in developing the quality culture?

Summary of the workshop

The workshop concerning internal quality culture was divided into three parts: a short introduction to the topic, a discussion on what an ideal quality assurance agency should look like and finally concrete activities necessary to create such agency. Quality culture can be defined as the environment and the atmosphere in which the operations are developed as well as the individual and collective commitment to the quality work The purpose of a formal quality system built upon procedures is to assure and enhance the quality of activities and in that way to support the quality culture.

Below is a picture of the typical elements including to the quality system.
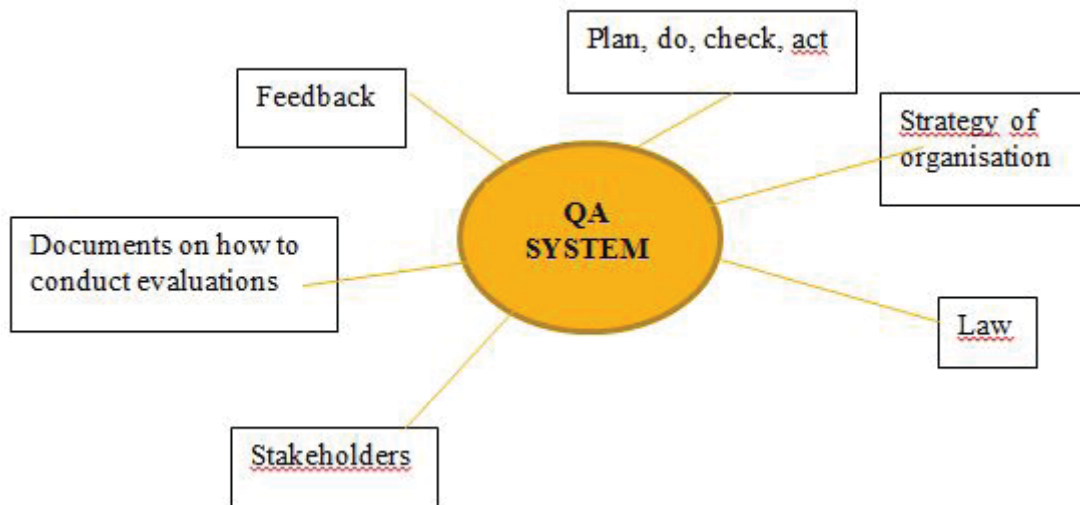
However, a formal quality system is not in itself a guarantee that high quality will be obtained. It can also be described as "a state of mind" one cannot force people to create a quality culture. It is associated with to staff development and attitudes of a workplace, and demands a strong commitment by people involved.

An ideal quality assurance agency
The participants of the workshop were asked to reflect on which aspects they consider are the most important in order to build an ideal quality assurance agency. Questions such as; "How to recognize quality in our daily work?; What is the importance of consistency in processes and methodology?; How to define quality culture in a working community?" were to be answered. Many aspects were discussed. It was evident, however, that the participants from the different agencies had similar ideas. The discussed aspects have been categorized into the four areas listed below:

Leadership and management
An ideal quality assurance agency requires good leadership and a management who recognize the importance of building a quality culture. The management needs to have a good understanding of the HEIs and the political arena, of the ability to make strategic decisions, as well as strong leadership skills, needed internally in any organization. Also, a specific budget for working with the internal quality culture is needed.

Learning organization
Furthermore, an ideal quality assurance agency is a learning organization. As such, routines for self-evaluation and reflection should be applied, and strategies on how to learn from experiences, successes and failures, should be in place. A learning organization is not only reflective - it is also flexible and open for changes. It should facilitate the learning of employees and continuously transform itself. This can be a way to make employees feel more committed to their work.

Values and attitudes
A quality culture is not created only by routines and organizational aspects, but also by supportive values and attitudes. Such values can be to continuously support and motivate employees and colleagues, to arrange for teamwork and to encourage collective accountability for a result, to keep an open-minded atmosphere, with time for discussions. Values and attitudes should encourage and support employees to be innovative, and allow employees to make mistakes.

External relations

Finally the importance of the external relations was stressed in the discussions. External relations are a source for input in order to develop and improve the internal work. It is also important for the agency to be visible and transparent in order to serve society. By external relations the following were mentioned: HEI, political actors, the society and international actors. It is crucial to build a relationship of trust with HEI, not forgetting the student participation at all levels. In addition, to have a good understanding and dialog with the political arena and consider a societal responsibility is important. Furthermore the international relations are important in order to learn from others.

The different categories are interlinked and affected by each other. The leadership is crucial in order to make the organization function as a learning organization. And the external relationships depend on organizational strategies set by the leadership, which works well if right values and attitudes are in place.

What activities are needed?

During the second part of the workshop, the participants were asked to reflect on which concrete activities or actions could be taken in order to create this ideal agency. Questions such as "how can we encourage the development of a quality culture", were to be answered. Many ideas were discussed and most of them are listed below.

Organizational practices
- Organize open discussion every Friday
- Visualize the results of the meeting
- Appoint someone responsible for following up activities
- Regular coffee breaks, where staff can meet in an informal way
- Create a box in which you put mistakes or successes that can be shared

Values and attitudes
- Develop routines on how to motivate staff
- Involve staff in the strategic planning
- Identify and develop values and attitudes which support quality
- Encourage to work in teams

External relationship with HEI
- Establish policies for transparency
- Develop strategies for cooperation
- Develop routines that support a continuous dialog
- Find ways to participate in the public debate
- Develop routines on how to develop tasks based on input from stakeholders
-
Societal responsibility
- Make research-based development of external quality assurance
- Communicate objectives, achievements, values of external quality assurance
- Study the impact of the agency's activities

How do we produce (effective) system-wide analyses?

Workshop prepared and performed by David Metz, (the Danish Accreditation Institution, AI), Frederik Sigurd and Tue Vinther-Jørgensen (the Danish Evaluation Institute, EVA) Denmark, summarized by Loulou von Ravensberg.

Introduction

The European Standards and Guidelines put great emphasis on the need for quality assurance agencies to produce system wide analyses. The agencies are not only expected to conduct quality assurance processes of institutions and/or programs. They must also take a broader view on the Higher Education landscape and address quality issues and general challenges across institutions and programs. In the current version of the ESG's this request for system-wide analyses is formulated in standard 2.8:

> ### 2.8: System-wide analyses
> **Standard:**
> Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.
>
> **Guidelines:**
> All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

This request is maintained as standard 3.4 in the proposal for a revised set of ESG's under the heading "Thematic analysis" with more or less the same content as above.

The purpose and scope of system-wide analyses

Some quality assurance agencies have a long tradition of producing different kind of system-wide analyses ranging from summary reports to thematic evaluations. A common feature of these analyses and evaluations is that they do not aim to assess the quality of provision at a single institution or of a single program. The aim is rather to give an overall picture of the quality standards, patterns in observed practices, incentives and dynamics as well as shared challenges across the whole higher education sector or in specific parts of the sector, for instance a group of programs. They might very well be conducted with a critical approach pointing at both strengths and weaknesses, but the conclusions and recommendations address the sector as such – including the Higher Education authorities – and therefor the responsibility for following up is often less evident than in an audit or an accreditation.

Nordic experiences with system-wide analyses

The tradition of conducting system-wide analyses is also well known in a Nordic context. In Norway, NOKUT established a Department for analysis and development in 2006, and NOKUT has produced a large number of analytical reports, i.e. on students' and academics' different perceptions of quality, the concept of R&D-based higher education, doctoral education etc. FINHEEC frequently produces thematic evaluation reports, i.e. about international degree programmes in Finland and about research, development and innovation activities of Finnish universities of applied sciences. The Swedish Higher Education Authority (SHEA) carries out a large number of analyses of

different themes in higher education and has identified a shortlist of different proposals for new analyses in 2014, e.g. including national analyses of multi-discipline programmes and gender perspective in the programme evaluations. In Denmark, the Accreditation Institution makes summary reports about critical quality issues based on the knowledge gathered through the accreditation processes, i.e. multidisciplinary study programmes, and EVA's work in the field of Higher Education is now solely oriented towards thematic evaluations of key questions relevant for a broad range of programmes and institutions, i.e. the use of ECTS in the planning of programmes and teaching.

A different approach to quality assurance and development
The system-wide analyses seem to be attached to a different kind of development theory than other more traditional types of quality assurance activities such as audits, accreditations and program evaluations. The driver for development and enhancement is not the assessment of the specific programme or institution and related follow-up obligations. The idea is rather, that new knowledge and higher levels of transparency delivered in the analysis reports will kick start reflection processes and eventually have a positive impact on the practices of institutions and programmes – and maybe even induce new and better regulation in the field. If this aim is to be achieved, the quality assurance agency must put a significant effort in the framing and reporting of the analyses in order to assure that the analysis results will be received in the intended way by the institutions, and that results are not hijacked in the public debate by specific interest groups pursuing their own political agenda.

The workshop
The workshop will focus on the development theory (or theories) in system-wide analyses. We will discuss the different steps in the process and production of system-wide analyses and explore what are the prerequisites for an effective implementation of the applied development theory? The point of departure will be the experiences and plans of the participant agencies.

Some of the questions that could be discussed in the workshop are listed below:

▪ What are the aims and purposes of the system-wide analyses?
▪ How are topics and themes for system-wide analyses identified and decided?
▪ What are the materials and methodology used in system-wide analyses, and how does the staff of the agencies acquire the necessary skills and competencies?
▪ How are conclusions and recommendations quality assured by the agencies and to what extend do considerations of political agendas play a role in this proces?
▪ How are the results presented and published to the Higher Education sector and the wider public, and do the agencies have strategies for dissemination through the press?

Summary of workshop
According to ESG, European Standards and Guidelines, QA agencies are not only expected to conducts QA processes, they should also take a broader view on the HE landscape. This idea is expressed in para 2.8; *QA agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analyzing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.*

Guidelines:
All external QA agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trend, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy develop-ment and quality enhance-ment. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

The purpose of workshop 4 was to share experiences of system-wide analyses (SWA) among the Nordic and the Baltic states.

Objectives of System-Wide analyses
System-wide analyses are
a)   based on (previously published) Quality Assurance reports, or
b)   new reports of a more thematic nature

The majority of SWA seems to be associated with the first group.

The aim of SWA is to give an overall picture of the sector, or of certain aspects of the sector. The driver for development and quality enhancement is not the assessment of a specific programme but rather higher levels of transparency and new knowledge in the form of for example better dialogue with the sector. Other reasons for carrying out SWA are to improve and support quality assurance operations for example methodological improvements. One organization mentioned that they have started a concrete project the aim of which is to look into whether results emanating from SWA can be integrated into more traditional quality assurance. Another reason is to provide public information to for example students and policy makers. Sometimes these studies are carried out at the request of the government or the parliament. One reason for an agency to involve in SWA can be to try to influence the political agenda. Doubts about the effectiveness of SWA with this purpose were expressed during the workshop. One of the agencies, however, referred to an example where they thought they had exercised a certain influence in the area of teacher training education.

Some of the findings
The extent to which agencies can involve in SWA depend very much on the size of the agency, on the number of years it has been in operation, the mandate given to the agency and on resources available to carry out such studies. Some agencies for example NOKUT in Norway, Swedish Higher Education Authority, UKÄ, in Sweden, EVA in Denmark and FINEEC in Finland have relatively long traditions of producing SWA. In addition to institutional audits of HEIs quality assurance systems FINEEC also conducts subject evaluations and thematic evaluations. Since 2010, NOKUT publishes sector wide studies that now account for the largest part of NOKUT's development-oriented activities. In Denmark, the Danish Evaluation Institute, EVA, is solely focused on thematic evaluations across the higher education sector whereas the Danish Accreditation Institution produces summary reports about critical quality issues based on knowledge acquired from the accreditation processes. UKÄ in Sweden is also responsible for statistics pertaining to the higher education sector, for monitoring efficiency and for monitoring international developments in the sector. Within this legal framework UKÄ produces publications for a number of stake holders and produces official reports at the request of the government. In addition to these mandatory tasks the department of Higher Education Analysis has a relatively far reaching mandate to initiate SWAs. Estonia will publish four SWAs in 2014 the majority of which will be based on previous quality assurance reports. One study, however, will be a separate report dealing with the attitudes of academic, administrative and support staff of universities towards external assessments. Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education in Lithuania, SKVC, provided the workshop with a communication plan for reports including SWA to be published in 2014.

Publication strategy was discussed at some length during the two workshops. Publication strategy deserves a great deal of attention in general from evaluating agencies. It may be even more important to pay attention to publication strategy in connection with publication of SWA since these reports may not part of an agency's "regular" supply of reports. There are ample opportunities for misunderstanding. Extra attention may have to be paid to the purpose and the conclusions of the report. The communication with the press/journalists, a press releases etc is essential. Some good advice from one of the agencies was to think very clearly about the message that the agency wants to

share, to be informed of the date when the newspaper(s) intend to publish the report and to see to it that someone at the agency will be present to answer questions.

External experts participate to a lesser extent in writing SWA. In contrast to evaluation reports, SWA are mostly carried out by in-house staff. The methodology is similar to that applied in evaluations; interviews, site-visits, surveys etc, but may also comprise data from national registers and other kinds of qualitative or quantitative data. One purpose of the workshop was to identify areas for co-operation. Tangible proposals were scarce but one concrete idea to facilitate cooperation was to publish more reports in English.

So, to what extent can SWA actually fulfil the multifold purposes earlier mentioned and what impact do they have when it comes to enhancing education quality? There was a consensus among the delegates of the workshop that SWA spread information about the sector not only to the sector, but also to the general public and to policy makers including evaluation agencies. The second part of the question, to what extent SWA can improve education quality, is more difficult. There are no easy or obvious answers, but then again, quality is a very complex concept.

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Country presentations

Denmark
Higher education area in Denmark
Overall responsibility for higher education
The overall responsible is mainly the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, but a few "artistic" programmes reside under the Ministry of Culture, and there are also some higher education programmes that are offered by the police force and the Danish Defence, and finally, there are a few private providers of programmes. The following description only covers the institutions and programmes regulated by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

Number of HEIs
Under the Ministry of Higher Education and Science are 8 universities, 9 academies of professional higher education, 7 university colleges, 9 maritime education institutions and 3 artistic education institutions. Additionally there are 7 institutions under The Ministry of Culture that offer further artistic educational programmes (both second and third cycle).

Regulations that govern the HEIs
There's a large number of acts and orders regulating the different types of HEI.

System of accreditation or degree-awarding powers
Generally, every HEI has degree awarding powers for all programmes it has been approved of giving. Since 2007 every HE programme should be accredited, both new and existing programmes, according to plan approximately every six years for existing programmes. In 2013 the accreditation system was changed and is now in a transition period. All HEI must be accredited. Untill an HEI applies for accreditation, its existing and new programmes must be accredited. After obtaining accreditation, the system of programme accreditation is abolished for that institution. However all HEI need to apply for pre-qualification of a new programme, regardless of the accreditation status of the HEI. The pre-qualification evaluates relevance of the programme as well as coherence with and desirability in the national educational system as a whole, as seen from a political perspective.

Quality assurance system in the higher education area in Denmark
Organisation responsible for QA
The pre-qualification is awarded by the Minister for Higher Education and Science after recommendation from The Council on Evaluation of Provision of Higher Education on the basis of a report from a secretariat in the ministry after application from an HEI. Accreditation is awarded by The Accreditation Council on the basis of a report from The Danish Accreditation Institution. The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) is responsible for conducting cross-sectoral evaluations of the higher education system.

Controlled by whom
The Accreditation council is appointed by the Minister, with two members nominated by student organisations. Both the Accreditation Institution and EVA are independent institutions, but their tasks are outlined in acts and a ministerial orders. Their individual budgets are laid down each year in the national budget.

Area of responsibility for the organisation
The council and the instititution together do external QA of programmes in the transition period and of the internal QA-systems of HEI. EVA's task is to conduct cross-sectoral evaluations of the higher education system.

Quality assurance system in place
1. In programme accreditation a programme is evaluated for knowledge base, structure, learning outcome, and ongoing quality and relevance assurance.

2. In institutional accreditation an institution's policies and procedures for internal QA of its kvowledge base, programme level and content and relevance of programmes are evaluated.
3. Cross-sectoral evaluations focus on a specific theme, challenge, or groups of programmes with common features and aim at identifying good practices and needs for improvement. It covers areas such as enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning, related student services as well as the institutional management and societal regulation of Higher Education.

Method of the QA system
The accreditation scheme is basicly a peer review system, where the assesment is made by panels of external experts: subject experts (including in didactics), students and represen-tatives of the labour market (not for accreditation of new programmes, since labour market relevance is covered in pre-qualification). The panel evaluates the institution/programme according to the criteria given by ministerial order, and The Accreditation Institution has to propose a recommendation for the Councils decision. The Council can decide for a pro-gramme/an institution to be positive accredited, conditionally accredited (not possible for a new programme) or denied accreditation. In all cases a conditional accreditation will be followed-up after 1-2 years, when a panel of experts assess whether the actions taken by the HEIs are sufficient or not. A denial of accreditation for a programme means it will be shut down. Denial of accreditation for an HEI means it will not be able to start any new program-mes, and its existing programmes have to enter back into the system of programme accre-ditation untill a renewed institutional accreditation process is commenced. Cross-sectoral evaluations do not follow a standardized concept or procedure. The methodological approach in each project will be designed according to the nature of the theme under investigation and the specific purpose of the evaluation. These projects typically involve both quantitative and qualitative data, e.g. data from site visits, interviews, surveys, statistical registers etc.

Input or material for the evaluation
Self evaluation report written by the HEI, key figures (either self reported or from national databases dependent on availability), site visits with interviews of main stakeholders. For institutional accreditation also supplementary documentation from the HEI requested by the panel of experts before a second site visit focussing on "audit trails" (more in depth investi-gations of themes selected by the panel). For cross-sectoral evaluations a variety of data can serve as input as well as relevant research knowledge.

Current activities
In process of accrediting the first 8 HEI and a for the first time using a revised set of criteria for programme accreditation, now with the same set of criteria covering all types of pro-grammes. Cross-sectoral evaluations currently include studies of new teaching and learning methods, innovation as an integrated element in subjects, the entrance system into higher education and internships as a distingt pedagogical learning arena.

Main elements of internal QA of the agency
Internal written guidelines, plenary meetings, project leader-meetings, internal review-system covering all written reports. Education plan for panel members comprising a two day seminar (institutional accreditation) and written guidelines. All reports are sent in a written hearing to the HEI in question before submission to the council. EVA's internal methodical unit gives guidance to the outline of each evaluation project and quality assures all written reports. Reports are sent in a written hearing before publishing.

Estonia
Higher education area in Estonia
Overall responsibility for higher education
The overall responsibility for higher education relays on Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament) and the Government. Also on Ministry of Education and Research. Riigikogu approves the Universities Act, government approves the standard for HE and educational strategies, MoER decides the allocation of resources.

Number of HEIs
There are 6 public and one private university in Estonia. Also, 9 state and 8 private professional higher education institutions. Two vocational education institutions have got the right to provide programmes at professional higher education level.
For more information: *http://www2.archimedes.ee/enic/index.php?leht=4*

Regulations that govern the HEIs
General legislation for higher education in Estonia is detailed in the following legal acts: Republic of Estonia Education Act, Universities Act, Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act, Private Schools Act, Vocational Educational Institutions Act, and Standard of Higher Education. The Standard of HE contains regulations for diferents circles. Annexis of the Standard contain also general
descritors all circles of HE and the full list of licences given to the HEIs in Estonia to provide HE in different study programme groups and levels.
Look for more information at EKKAs website *http://www.ekka.archimedes.ee/documents*

System of accreditation or degree-awarding powers
Initial assessment gives the right to HEI to conduct studies in the certain study programme group ant level (BA, MA, PhD). In 2009-2011, all higher education institutions had to go through the so called transitional evaluation in result of which the open ended education licenses or fixed-term education licences were granted to HEis by the Government. EKKA is conducting assessment, but not making final decisions in that case.

Quality assurance system in the higher education area in Estonia
Organisation responsible for QA
Eesti Kõrghariduse Kvaliteediagentuur/ Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency is responsible for providing institutional accreditation of higher education institutions and quality assessment of their study programme groups; providing accreditation of study programme groups in vocational education and training as well as providing initial assessment of study programme groups.

Controlled by whom
Supervised by the Supervisory Board of the Foundation Archimedes (EKKA is a subunit of) and periodically reviewed by ENQA.

Area of responsibility for the organisation
The main functions of the Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency are: to develop and establish the pinciples and procedures for quality assessment in Estonian HE; to provide institutional accreditation of higher education institutions and assessment of the quality of their study programme groups; to provide
accreditation of study programme groups of institutions of vocational education and training; to carry out the expert analysis to evaluate the right of higher education institutions to conduct studies.

Quality assurance system in place
Quality assessment of a study programme group and institutional accreditation at least once every 7 years.

Method of the QA system
A peer review system consisting of self-evaluation report of HEIs and assessment report by the international (or mixed) panel (academic experts, student representatives and labor market representatives). Quality Assessment Council make the decision based on the reports. The Council's decisions are final concerning institutional accreditation and the assessment of study programme groups. In the case on institutional accreditation th Council may decide wheather the next accreditaion will take place in 7 or 3 years (in case there are significant shortcomings). The Council may also decide not to accredit the institution. Quality as-

sessment of study programme group is an enhancement led process with no accreditation decision (just recommendations and commedations).

Input or material for the evaluation
Self-evaluation report of the institution (with a number of fixed annexis); interviews by representatives of the institutions, students, employers and other stakeholders during the assessment visit.

Current activities
First round of institutional accreditation of HEIs (2011-2016), quality assessment of study programme groups (2013 -2019), accreditation of study programme groups in VET (2011-2014) and re-evaluation of study programme groups.

Main elements of internal QA of the agency
EKKA builds its internal quality assurance system and external evaluation processes on the Continuous Quality Improvement approach. In its everyday work, EKKA follows the regulations of the Archimedes Foundation for the ISO 9001:2008 quality management system. To assure the quality of its core process — the external evaluation of HE and VET —, EKKA has developed regulations for each type of evaluation separately. The principles and procedures for quality assurance of the core process are described in detail in the EKKA Quality Manual. Internal Quality Assurance of the agency are set in the EKKA Quality Manual. Manual is coordinated by the Quality Assessment Council.
See more at: *http://www.ekka.archimedes.ee/files/Quality%20Manual.pdf*
The yearly action plans follow the startegic lines set in the Development Plan 2012-2016 *http://www.ekka.archimedes.ee/files/EKKA_arengukava_28.06.2012_ENG.pdf*

Finland
Higher education area in Finland
Overall responsibility for higher education
The goverment of Finland decides on the regulations and on the allocation of resources for the higher education area. The tasks and educational missions are stated in the Universities act and in the Polytechnics act. The Ministry of Education and Culture prepares HEI matters within the government remit and ensures appropriate administration and steering of HEI administration.

Number of HEIs
15 universities and 26 universities of applied sciences.

Regulations that govern the HEIs
Higher education institutions are subject to the higher education acts and the government decrees set the general aims for university and UAS degrees. In Finland all universities are either independent corporations under public law or foundations under the Foundations Act. Polytechnics are municipal or private institutions, which are authorised by the government.

The Government adopts a development plan for education and for academic research and R&D every four years. The development plan outlines education and research policy for the next few years. Apart from the government programme, the development plan and legislation, HEIs are governed by performance agreements concluded with the Ministry of Education and Culture.

System of accreditation or degree-awarding powers
There is no system of accreditation in Finland. The Ministry of Education and Culture has the entitlement to award degrees and operational licences of the universities of applied sciences. Higher education legislation requires HEIs to regularly perform external evaluations of quality systems and to publish the results of such evaluations.

Quality assurance system in the higher education area in Finland

Organisation responsible for QA

The national quality assurance framework of higher education in Finland encompasses the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC 1.5.2014 – >) and the higher education institutions (HEIs).

FINEEC is an independent expert body, the task of which include to assist higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Culture in matters relating to the evaluation of higher education. The aim of the FINEEC is to strengthen education evaluation activities, to increase cross-sectoral evaluations and to support methodological development. In addition to higher education, FINEEC's evaluation mandate covers all other parts of the education system. FINEEC takes part in international evaluation activities and cooperation, and it regularly participates in external evaluations of its own operation. FINEEC is full member of ENQA and listed in EQAR 2010.

Controlled by whom

The areas of responsibilty and tasks of FINEEC are governed by the Decree.

The Ministry of Education and Culture appoints the members of Evaluation Council. The task of the Council is to take part in the FINEEC's strategic planning and to prepare the Education Evaluation Plan to be approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Area of responsibility for the organisation

Duties of FINEEC in the higher education sector:
 1. Conduct evaluations of higher education following the Education Evaluation Plan,
 2. organise evaluations on the operations of HEIs and on their QA systems,
 3. support HEIs in evaluation and QA issues, 4) develop the evaluation of education.

Quality assurance system in place

Under the Universities Act and the Polytechnics Act, HEIs are required to participate in external evaluation of their operations and quality assurance systems on a regular basis and to publish the findings of these evaluations. HEIs is free to build a quality system that suits their needs. FINEEC (FINHEEC 1996-2014) has conducted audits of the quality systems of higher education institutions since 2005. All Finnish higher education institutions have been audited once and the second audit round began in 2011.

In addition to audit of HEIs QA systems FINEEC also conducts subject evaluations, thematic evaluations, selections of centres of excellence and accreditation type evaluations (e.g., EUR-ACE accreditation).

Method of the QA system

Audits of quality systems encompass quality management of all basic duties of higher education institutions. The aim is to enhance the quality culture of institutions by reviewing e.g., institutions' strategic and operations management, degree education and functions central to their strategy or profile.

The higher education institution may decide if the audit is conducted by a national or an international team. Based on the appraisal of the audit team, the Board for Evaluation of Higher Education in FINEEC makes the decision whether the institution passes the audit or must be subject to a re-audit. Higher education institutions that pass the audit receive a quality label, which is valid for six years. The audit process is described in detail in FINEEC's audit manual.

Input or material for the evaluation

Evaluations are based on enhancement-led peer review.

Audits and most of the evaluations involve the following stages: the higher education institution first carrying out a self-evaluation and preparing the material, a team of experts then visiting the institution and the result finally being published in a report.

Current activities
Second round of audits of the HEIs' QA systems (2011-2017), evaluation of study paths from secondary vocational education to higher education, evaluation of adult lerning, pilots of EUR-ACE accreditations.

Main elements of internal QA of the agency
The quality assurance system of higher education evaluations in FINEEC is based on the strategic aims and operating principles and comprises four parts under which most of quality procedures fall: planning (plan of action), executing (e.g., feedback surveys, indicators of activities and self-evaluation by secretariat and Board for Evaluation of Higher Education) and implementation of changes (e.g., changes in activities and documents, updating of processes).The elements of QS are described in the quality manual.

Iceland
Higher education area in Iceland
Overall responsibility for higher education
The overall responsibility for higher education and research rests with the Althing (Icelandic Parliament) and the Minister of Education, Science and Culture. The Althing has the legislative power, the Minister of Education decides on regulations and determines objectives and guidelines, allocation of funding etc.

Number of HEIs
There are seven Higher Education Institutions in Iceland, four are public and three are privatly owned, government dependant. Three of these have been accredited to award third cycle degrees, four only award first and second cycle degrees.

Regulations that govern the HEIs
All HEIs in Iceland come under the ordinance of the Higher Education Act, no. 63/2006. The Public Higher education Act, no. 85/2008 does also apply to the public HEIs. Regulation no. 1067/2007 concerns accreditations of HEIs and regulations no. 321/2009 coverns Quality assurances of teaching and research.

System of accreditation or degree-awarding powers
The Minister of Education, Science and Culture awards accreditation based on application for fields of study, based on the Frascadi manual of OECD. Applications are evaluated by a group of foreign experts, assigned by the Quality Board for Higher Education in Iceland.

Quality assurance system in the higher education area in Iceland
Organisation responsible for QA
The Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education has the task of organising and carrying out of all quality assurance in Icelandic higher education. The QB consists of six foreign experts and is assisted by a Quality council and a secretariat, based in Iceland.

Controlled by whom
The Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education is a totally independent unit, controlled only by annual reports to the Ministry of Education.

Area of responsibility for the organisation
The QB is responsible for organisation and management of Quality Assurance of Higher

Education in Iceland, evaluation of quality systems of the HEIs as well as subject level reviews, follow up activities, quality enhancement activities (with the Quality council), accreditation on demand and to councel the government on HEI-issues.

Quality assurance system in place
A five year program of quality audit of all HEIs in Iceland, carried out by expert groups assigned by the QB as well as a subject review program carried out by the HEIs and foreing experts, assigned by the QB.

Method of the QA system
A peer review system, where Quality audits of the HEIs are carried out by a group of experts (two members of the QB, two foreign experts and a student representative) based on a reflective analysis of each HEI, based on the quality handbook of the QB, with a site visit to the HEI. The expert group produces a report with a judgement, using a four-level scale: full confidence, confidence, limited confidence and no confidence. HEIs that receive limited confidence need to hand in an action plan and are revisited a year later for evaluation by members of the QB, for re-evaluation of the judgement. Subject review reports from the HEIs and the foreign experts are handed in to the QB for evaluation by the QB. All activities are conduced in English. All reports are written in English and published in English.

Input or material for the evaluation
The evaluation of each HEI is based on a self-evaluation report (Reflective analysis), written in accordance with the QEF manual of the QB. HEIs are allowed to attach material to the report. The Reflective Analysis is supposed to be partly based on the subject review reports mentioned here above. The expert group that is assigned to each Quality audit can aske for extra material if deemed needed.

Current activities
Finalizing the first round (2011-2015)of evaluation of the HEIs, three HEIs have already been evaluated, one is under evaluation, one will be evaluated during autumn 2014 and two during the spring-term of 2015. A review of the system and preparation for the second round will begin in a year.

Main elements of internal QA of the agency
The Quality Board for Icelandic Higher Education includes six foreign members, whom none is based in Iceland. It is served by a secretary with personal staff of 1,5 persons. It only uses foreign experts and all reports are written by the experts themselves, not the personal of the QB. The secretariat is a part of the Icelandic Centre for Research and is subject to the internal QA system of the Centre. The whole system of Quality assurance for Icelandic Higher Education will be subject for evaluation during the year 2015 – 2016.

Latvia
Higher education area in Latvia
Overall responsibility for higher education
The overall responsobility for higher education rests with the Ministry of Education and Science, Cabinet of Ministers and Parliament (Saeima), which decide on the regulations in higher education area, Law on Institutions of Higher Education, as well as Council of Higher Education, which has responsibility to formulate long-term m plans and proposals for the development of education and science in the system of higher education.   The Ministry of Education and Science supervises compliance with legislation in institutions of higher education and colleges, as well as shall be responsible for State policy in the field of higher education. The Minister for Education and Science represents the interests of institutions of higher education and colleges in the Saeima and the Cabinet.

Number of HEIs
17 public-sector higher education institutions, incl. 6 universities, 17 public-sector colleges (short cycle study programmes). 16 private-sector higher education institutions and 8 private-sector colleges.

Regulations that govern the HEIs
Law on Institutions Higher Education and respective Cabinet regulations.
Institutions of higher education are autonomous institutions of education and science with the right to self-governance. The autonomy of an institution of higher education is expressed in the right to select the ways and forms for the implementation of the tasks set forth by the founders of the institution of higher education and corresponding to this Law, as well as in responsibility for the quality of education acquired in an institution of higher education, appropriate and efficient utilisation of financial and material resources, and compliance with the principle of democracy and with the laws regulating the operation of institutions of higher education and other regulatory enactments.

System of accreditation or degree-awarding powers
Accreditation of institutions of higher education and study directions. Accredited institutions of higher education have the status of a State-recognised institution of higher education or college. Degree shall be awarded after the completion of study proramme if relevant study direction in accredited institution of higher education is accredited.

Quality assurance system in the higher education area in Latvia
Organisation responsible for QA
Currently, Ministry of Education and Science has the task to organise accreditation and licencing process.

Controlled by whom
Controlled by the government through regulations and instructions, which define the areas of responsibility and the tasks to be undertaken.

Area of responsibility for the organisation
Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for higher education policy development and implementation.

Quality assurance system in place
Accreditation of an institution of higher education – assessment of the work organisation and quality of resources of an institution of higher education or college as a result of which it is granted the status of a State-recognised institution of higher education or college.

Accreditation of the study direction – an inspection with the purpose of determining the quality of the resources of an institution of higher education or college and the ability to implement a study programme corresponding to a specific study direction in accordance with regulatory enactments. The accreditation of the study direction of an institution of higher education or college gives the institution of higher education or college the right to issue a State-recognised diploma of higher education for successful acquisition of a study programme corresponding to the relevant study direction.

Method of the QA system
Decision on the accreditation of a higher education institution is taken by the Council of Higher Education (non-term accreditation). Decision on the accreditation of study direction is taken by Study accreditation commission (for period of 6 years or 2 years).

Decisions are made on the basis of: 1) documents submitted bu the institution of higher education (self-evaluation report); 2) joint report prepared by the Assessment Committee (subject experts, students and representatives of the labour market) and the individual opinions of the Assessment Committee experts; and 3) if necessary, the real conditions in the institution of higher education.

Input or material for the evaluation

Self-evaluation reports by institutions of higher education, joint and individual reports of the Assessment Committee experts.

Current activities

Improvement the system of quality assurance and development national institution for higher education quality assurance.

Main elements of internal QA of the agency

QA agency does not exist. Currently, the issue on an establishment of national accreditation agency is under discussion.

Lithuania
Higher education area in Lithuania
Overall responsibility for higher education

The overall responsibility for setting policy in higher education and research rests with the Seimas (Lithuanian Parliament) and the Government. They decide on the regulations that apply to the higher-education area, the Law on Higher Education and Research and other legal acts pertaining to establishment and review of higher education institutions. They also determine objectives, guidelines and the allocation of resources for the area. HEI are primarily in charge of quality of education provision.

Number of HEIs

24 colleges of higher education (entitled to award only professional bachelor degrees within the 1st cycle) and 23 universities (entitled to award bachelor, master, doctor degrees). Of these total 47 insitutions, 27 are public institutions (a public university is established by the Parliament, a public college of higher education is established by the Government), the rest 20 are privately owned. There is 1 branch of foreign university in Lithuania.

Regulations that govern the HEIs

All higher education providers need to have a licence to engage in provision of studies and/ or a licence to engage in activities related to studies. The main document regulating HE in Lithuania is Law on Research and higher Education. It describes the system of HE, establishement and governing of HEIs, financing, QA principles etc. Government's decree regulates Institutional Review and accreditation procedures. Requirements for higher education study programmes, external QE and accreditation of study programmes are set in ministerial orders.

System of accreditation or degree-awarding powers

There is accreditation of HEIs in Lithuania (starting from 2011), as well as mandatory accreditation of all study programmes (since 2002). If HEIs intend to award not only academic qualifications, but also professional ones, they need to have special permission to award these from relevant competent authorities, responsible for that profession. All institutions and study programmes must be evaluated at least once every 6 years. The result of external evaluation could be accreditation for 6 years, for 3 years or non-accreditation.

Quality assurance system in the higher education area in Lithuania
Organisation responsible for QA

Studiju kokybes vertinimo centras - SKVC (Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education) has the task of external quality assurance of HE via evaluation of all study programmes (ex-ante assessment of applications to open a new study programme, ex-post assessment of running study programmes), as well as holistic review of HEI activities (encompassing strategic management, studies, research, service to society). SKVC is also acting as Lithuanian ENIC/NARIC centre, issuing binding academic recognition decisions in respect to foreign

qualifications giving access to higher education and higher education 1st and 2nd cycle qualifications.

Controlled by whom
Established in 1995 by the Ministry of Education and Science. Subject to all regulations applicable to public administration institutions in Lithuania. SKVC is de jure and de facto an independent organization, with its state example seal, separate bank accounts, distinct organizational and management structure, premises and infrastructure apart from the Ministry or any other organization.

Area of responsibility for the organisation
Assuring threshold quality in higher educationa and support towards development of quality culture within higher education institutions via a selection of instruments:
1. Evaluation and accreditation of new study programmes (ex-ante procedure);
2. evaluation and accreditation of existing study programmes (ex-post procedure), follow-up;
3. evaluation of applications to establish new HEI or branches of foreign HEIs;
4. Institutional review and follow-up;
5. methodological support and consulting;
6. public reporting and awareness raising on quality, mobility and internationalisation related issues. SKVC is also contributing towards implementation of the national qualifications framework. Quality of research, including of doctoral studies, as well as research funding is in the hands of Lithuanian Science Council.

Quality assurance system in place
Lithuanian quality assurance in HE system is compatible with ESG. In 2012, SKVC was for the first time externally reviewed by ENQA panel, and found in substantial compliance of ENQA membership criteria, thus ESG implementation as well. This also allowed SKVC to become listed on EQAR. The Law on Higher Education and Research oblidges HEIs to establish their own internal QA systems, also in line with ESG. All study first cycle (profesional bachelor, academic bachelor) and second cycle (master) study programmes as well as teacher training (non-degree) programme are assessed and accredited. HEIs can apply for evaluation of their programmes to other Agencies listed in EQAR; subsequent accreditation decisions are always issued by SKVC. Institutional review is solely in hands of SKVC.

Method of the QA system
Assessment of study programmes. A peer review system, where the evaluation is made by panels of external experts (subject experts, students and representatives of the labour market). The panel has to propose an evaluation of each programme using a four-level scale: "very good", "good", "satisfactory", "unsatisfactory" under each of 6 evaluation areas:
1. Programme aims and learning outcomes,
2. Curriculum design,
3. Teaching staff,
4. Facilities and learning resources (facilities, equipment, learning materials),
5. Study process and students' performance assessment (student selection, performance assessment, support),
6. Programme management (administration of the programme, internal quality assurance).
The panel will provide the grounds for each evalutation in a report, which is then discussed in the Study Programme Assessment Commission, SKVC advisory body. Based on the expert report and the opinion from the advisory body, Director of SKVC makes a decision, which then could be appealed. Programmes that receive the assessment in at least one area as of unsatisfactory quality, will be required to issue an urgent action plan for amelioration of the quality so that students are able to finish the program, and subsequently are closed.

The evaluation procedure consists of preparation of self-evaluations report (SER) by HEI; analysis of SER by expert panel; site-visit to HEI; evaluation report writing; disscussion of the report at Study Programme Assessment Commission; publication of the evaluation report.

Institutional reviews. A peer review system, where the review is made by panels of external experts (academic experts, students and representatives of the labour market). Each of the group is composed of the Chair of the pannel, secretary and experts. The panel has to propose an evaluation of each evaluation area:

1. strategic management;
2. academic studies and life-long learning;
3. research and/or artistic activities;
4. impact on regional and national development. Each of the areas gets an evaluation: "positive" or "negative". If at least one of the areas gets "negative" assessment, the overall assessment of the institution is "negative" that for the first time leads to decission on accreditation for 3 years. If institution would be evaluated negatively for the second time the Ministry of Science and Education has a right to cancel the licence for studies. The panel will provide the grounds for each evalutation in a report, which is then discussed in the Higher Education Institutions Assessment Commission, SKVC advisory body. Based on the expert report and the opinion from the advisory body, Director of SKVC makes a decision, which then could be appealed. Appeal Commission is operating at the Ministry of Science and Education.

Input or material for the evaluation
The decision is made based on variety of sources, that can be classified as both input and output oriented. Necessary elements include institutional Self-evaluation report, and a site-visit to HEI and meeting with those involved in study programme/institution. Assessment of learning outcomes includes review of student final papers, projects and other results.

Current activities
Finalizing the first round of institutional reviews of all HEI (2011-2014), conducting regular study programm reviews (activities started in 1998), participation in drafting the new Law on Higher Education and Research (expected to be approved by end of 2014).

Main elements of internal QA of the agency
The Quality Policy of SKVC is published on its website and describes the resposibilities of the management in ensuring continuous improvement of the quality of the Centre's services. SKVC has developed Quality manual which consist of three elements: the needs and expectations of the stakeholders; requirements of Lithuanian and international legal acts and other requirements; the SKVC processes and their requirements. The Centre's quality management model reflects the following four groups of processes, those of:

• the management (planning of activities (at the strategic level) and the budget; organising self-evaluation, reporting);
• core activities (external review of HEIs, external evaluation of study programmes, follow-up, evaluation of foreign qualifications relating to HE, performance of the activities of an ENIC/NARIC authorised member);
• supporting activities (management of documents, entries, personnel, infrastructure, safety, supplies, cooperation, public relations, projects);
• improvement activities (feedback management, internal quality audit, management of corrective and preventive actions).

Norway
Higher education area in Norway
Overall responsibility for higher education
The Norwegian legislative and executive system is based on the principle of division of power. Legislative authority lies with the national assembly (Storting), while the main executive power lies with the Ministry of Education and research.

The Storting also determines and specifies the HEIs funding.

Number of HEIs
There are 8 universities, 8 specialised universities, 35 university colleges. In addition there

are 19 non-accredited institutions . These institutions do not have self-accrediting powers, but provide one or more accredited programmes. Norway has a relatively high number of HEIs, and many very small institutions. Private institutions account for 13 per cent (Til-standsrapport 2013) of the student population.

Regulations that govern the HEIs
The Higher Education Act regulates all higher education, both public and private. There are in addition several regulations such as admission and admission requirements to higher education, regulation concerning degrees and Quality Assurance. NOKUT is subject to regulation by the Ministry.

System of accreditation or degree-awarding powers
Here are following tasks and system related to accreditation and degree-awarding powers: Accreditation of institutions (University, Specialised University and University College) and new study programmes (initial accreditation of shorter cycle programmes, bachelor's, master's and PhDprogrammes), Revision of accreditation (evaluation process to assess whether the higher education programme or institution complies with national accreditation standards).

Quality assurance system in the higher education area in Norway
Organisation responsible for QA
NOKUT was established in 2003 with the main task related to control and to help develop the quality Norwegian higher education.

Controlled by whom
NOKUTs main tasks and activities is regulated by the University and College Act. NOKUTs decisions are made inpedently and cannot be overruled by political authorities.

Area of responsibility for the organisation
Here are the following area of responsibility for NOKUT: Accreditation of institutions (University, Specialised University, University College) and new study programmes (initial accreditation of shorter cycle programmes, bachelor's, master's and PhDprogrammes), Evaluation of the institution's internal quality assurance system (audit), Revision of accreditation (evaluation process to assess whether the higher education programme or institution complies with national accreditation standards and criterias), evaluation with purely diagnostic and enhancement objectives and more system-wide analysis.

Quality assurance system in place
Cyclic audit. All institutions that provide higher education must have satisfactory internal QA system. Evelution of the institutions' quality assurance system takes place and must be recognised by NOKUT at least every six years.

Method of the QA system
Peer review system with expert panels of national and international academic peers, students, experts in quality assurance of higher education. The experts assessment is on written documents from the institutions and site visits, provide a written report which the institutions can give their comments to before the formal decision is given by NOKUT (the Board and some are delegated to the director).

Input or material for the evaluation
Self-evaluation reports application by the HEIs, other written documents (these are mostly defined for the different activities, ex. Studentevaluations, contacts), sites visits.

Current activities
There is an ongoing process with a new model for our quality assurance activities. This involves internal processes within NOKUT, but also external processes (Ministry) because the regulation and the mandate given to NOKUT probably needs to be changed.

Main elements of internal QA of the agency
External feedback on our processes (survey of the institution and the experts), review and develop internal procedures and guides for institutions and experts regularly, systematic assessments of the competences and development of NOKUTs project managers and employees.

Sweden
Higher education area in Sweden
Overall responsibility for higher education
The overall responsibility for higher education and research rests with the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) and the Government. They decide on the regulations that apply to the higher-education area, the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance. They also determine objectives, guidelines and the allocation of resources for the area.

Number of HEIs
14 public-sector universities and 20 public-sector university colleges. There are also 3 independent HEIs entitled to award third-cycle qualifications and another 14 independent education providers entitled to award first- and second-cycle degrees or qualifications in psychotherapy.

Regulations that govern the HEIs
The public-sector HEIs are agencies in their own right and report directly to the Government. The HEIs are subject to the Higher Education Ordinance and the Higher Education Act. The Higher Education Act contains regulations about courses and programs in the different cycles and stipulates freedom of research. Annex 2 of the Higher Education Ordinance contains the descriptors for all qualifications. As Government agencies, the HEIs are also subject to administrative and labour-market legislation and the provisions of the Instrument of Government.

System of accreditation or degree-awarding powers
There is no accreditation of HEIs in Sweden, but the HEIs need to have degree-awarding powers i.e. special permission to award the particular qualification.

Quality assurance system in the higher education area in Sweden
Organisation responsible for QA
Universitetskanslersämbetet, UKÄ (Swedish Higher Education Authority) has the task of evaluating all higher education, including reviewing the degree-awarding powers of HEIs by appraising applications for the entitlement to award qualifications and revoke them if there are shortcomings.

Controlled by whom
Controlled by the government through instructions. The instructions define the areas of responsibility and the tasks to be undertaken.

Area of responsibility for the organisation
1) Quality assurance of higher education and appraisal of the degree-awarding powers of public-sector higher education institutions.
2)Legal supervision of higher education.
3)Monitoring efficiency, follow-up and horizon scanning as well as responsibility for statistics in the higher education sector.

Quality assurance system in place
All programmes and courses that lead to the award of a general or professional qualification are assessed, i.e. "programme evaluation". Since the HEIs are autonomous, they take full responsibility for the development and quality assurance of their activities. The focus of the

national QA system is therefore to assess whether the students achieve the intended learning outcomes specified in the Higher Education Ordinance.

Method of the QA system

A peer review system, where the evaluation is made by panels of external experts (subject experts, students and representatives of the labour market). The panel has to propose an evaluation of each programme using a three-level scale: Very high quality, High quality, Inadequate quality. The panel will provide the grounds for each evalutation in a report, upon which the UKÄ makes a decision. Programmes that receive the assessment "Inadequate quality" will be followed-up after one year, when a panel of experts assess whether the actions taken by the HEIs are sufficient or not. After which the UKÄ decides whether or not to revoke the entitlement of the HEI to award a qualification. HEI that has obtained "Very high quality" will receive extra funding from the Government.

Input or material for the evaluation

Three materials are used in the assessment, focussing on the learning outcomes of the students rather than the prerequisites and processes for quality assurance. i.e. the students' independent projects, self-evaluation reports by the HEIs and the experience of current students through a group interview.

Current activities

Finalizing the first round of evaluations of the QA system (2011 – 2014) and reviewing the system in preparation for the second round which will begin in January 2015.

Main elements of internal QA of the agency

In the Policy for Internal Quality Assurance the elements for IQA are listed together with an action plan covering areas of improvement for the two years to come. The policy describes both internal (regular meetings with project managers) and external feedback mechanisms (surveys of the external experts). Other elements are e.g. the Project Managers' Manual which contains descriptions of various elements in the evaluation process, for example recruitment of external experts, division of labour and responsibility and administrative routines. There is also a manual for the external experts describing the task in order to guarantee that the experts understand the approach of the evaluation process. Another feature to enhance equivalence within and between evaluation projects is a reading group that reads and offers feedback on the report of the external experts before it is submitted for decision.