

NOQA 2021: Brief summary of the themes covered in the meeting

1. More agencies are using "enhancement" in their vocabulary around reviews than before.
2. Agencies struggle to promote institutional ownership of QA and wonder what is the proper starting point to support that ownership.
3. Research is a review target for some of the agencies (Sweden and Iceland are already doing it and Norway is preparing for it).
4. For risk-based evaluations, the agencies are wondering on what basis these should be done (what criteria), and to what end (that is, they should help the institutions, not punish them).
5. Internationalisation remains a big topic, but the scope of issues under that umbrella is quite large. For example, agencies are wondering what the European University initiative means for them as QA agencies, including how this initiative rhymes with the legal framework in their respective countries.
6. On a related note, Norway has done a lot of internal work to ensure that their approach to reviews (most importantly their criteria) is in line with relevant legal frameworks. The Icelandic legal framework on higher education is in need of revision.
7. Agencies are looking for ways to reduce the burden on the institutions by reducing the requirements on required materials for self-assessment. Two methods were discussed: less voluminous self-assessment reports and access to intranets. Requiring less material has been challenging for Denmark because both the agency and the institutions find that information is sometimes lacking, which hampers proper discussions. Access to databases raises GDPR concerns.
8. Finland and Denmark were preparing for more distance work even before COVID, and now all agencies have more distance work. This has presented challenges for onboarding new staff and building and maintaining team spirit.

Sigurður Óli Sigurðsson

Manager of the Quality Board for Higher Education in Iceland

Tel: (+354) 897-8935

