

Subject

NOQA annual meeting 2005

Date

16.06.2005

The meeting was held 24 – 25 May 2005 at Langeliniepavillionen in Copenhagen with 21 participants:

Ref.

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- Ásgerður Kjartansdóttir, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland
- Ragnhild Nitzler, HSV, Sweden
- Eric Lindesjö, HSV, Sweden
- Staffan Wahlén, HSV, Sweden
- Ossi Tuomi, FINHEEC, Finland
- Hannele Salminen, FINHEEC, Finland
- Hannele Seppälä, FINHEEC, Finland
- Pirjo-Liisa Omar, FINHEEC, Finland
- Kimmo Hämäläinen, ENQA
- Emmi Helle, ENQA
- Jon Haakstad, NOKUT, Norway
- Ole Bernt Thorvaldsen, NOKUT, Norway
- Luna Lee Solheim, NOKUT, Norway
- Astrid Børsheim, NOKUT, Norway
- Wenche Froestad, NOKUT, Norway
- Gro Hanne Aas, NOKUT, Norway
- Christian Thune, EVA, Denmark
- Christel Sølvhjem, EVA, Denmark
- Signe Ploug Hansen, EVA, Denmark
- Claus Beck Hansen, EVA, Denmark
- Tue Vinther-Jørgensen, EVA, Denmark.

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Bologna process and Bergen meeting

Christian Thune opened the conference by presenting the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, as drafted by ENQA for the European Ministers that had met in Bergen on 19-20 May. In particular, Christian Thune presented the now agreed idea of a European register of quality assurance bodies (Power Points are available at www.eva.dk. Choose "English" and "International work"!).

During the subsequent discussion the following points were raised:

Who has the authorization to evaluate the quality assurance agencies' compliance with the ENQA-standards, and what happens if an agency does not comply with all the standards? In addition, there did not seem to be clear answers as to whom "peers" refer to and how the criteria will be weighted. On the other hand, a clear procedure for an appeals system will shortly be under development, as the ENQA report clearly had emphasised.

Each country then summed up on national challenges and answers in the Bologna process:

In Iceland the Minister has recently appointed a committee to revise the University Act. The work is to be finished by November 2005. A two-cycle system is already in place for about 80 % of students. Almost all HEIs are already issuing diploma supplements. A dual credit system is in work, but in the future ECTS will probably be the only one. National qualification framework needs to be developed. One crucial question is the independence of the quality assurance agency, which currently does not exist in Iceland. The Division of Evaluation and Supervision within the ministry is responsible for external evaluations at all school levels. Iceland is no longer a member of ENQA as a country. A three-year action plan for external evaluation was published in January 2005.

In Sweden the degree system is a major challenge. A draft proposal for a new two-tier system has been made and will be presented in Parliament soon. The system will include a bachelor and a master level, and the old four-year master (magister) will also be kept. The proposal will include a sort of qualifications framework. The diploma supplement was introduced several years ago, and one ECTS point equals 1½ credit points in the Swedish system. Foreigners cannot be on the board as the agency has no board, but otherwise Sweden fulfils by large the indicators set up in the Bologna stocktaking exercise.

In Finland theoretical considerations had been made so as how to integrate the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council with the Finnish Education Evaluation Council possibly by maintaining two separate councils with a common secretariat. Concerning the ENQA standards, FINHEEC may need to develop its system-wide analyses and summary reports. Two audits have been launched as pilots, but audits have not yet been formally decided upon as the Finnish solution to the European quality assurance developments within the Bologna framework. Quality assurance is still a great challenge at the institutional level. ECTS has been implemented both in universities and polytechnics, and a two-cycle system is in place, though new legislation is still needed in order to formalise the second cycle masters programmes at polytechnics, which are open for app. 10 % of a cohort.

In Norway the credit system and the degree system are already in place. The Bergen Communiqué does not directly lead to new initiatives, though a qualifications framework needs to be developed. There has been a discussion about changing the criteria for internal quality systems in the institutions based on the experiences from a number of audits, but it has been agreed that the criteria will not be revised in the middle of a cycle of audits. One challenge is that the Norwegian criteria focus on the systematic dimension, whereas the ENQA standards and guidelines focus more on what items internal quality assurance should consist of.

In Denmark the ECTS and diploma supplement have been implemented, and a national qualifications framework has been in place since 2003. One major challenge is to find a solution for external evaluation of programmes at university level. Since the new University Act in 2003, the universities have been responsible for initiating evaluations themselves. In the non-university higher education sector, EVA is conducting systematic accreditations and audits. Concerning the ENQA criteria, student involvement and follow-up procedures need further development.

Learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks

The second item on the agenda was the difficulties in integrating a focus on outcomes in evaluations and the challenges for quality assurance in the formulation of national qualifications frameworks and implementing the European qualifications framework. Signe Ploug Hansen and Tue Vinther-Jørgensen made presentations (Power Points are available at www.eva.dk), and the item was discussed both in working groups and at the subsequent plenary session.

The three working groups each considered one of the following questions:

- How can an outcome-oriented approach be integrated in reviews and evaluations?
- How does one develop national qualifications frameworks that fit as frames of reference for evaluation and quality assurance?
- How does one handle the challenges for quality assurance in the self-certification process and further on?

Joint project 2004/2005

The project group for the comparative analysis of systematic quality work of Nordic higher education institutions presented the process and results of this year's joint project. The selection of institutions, the process of assessing their quality work and the subsequent identification of Copenhagen Business School (CBS) as an outstanding example of good practice were highlighted. The project report is available at: www.eva.dk.

The project group was praised for its work and the fact that descriptions of the quality systems of four Nordic institutions are now available.

Joint project 2005/2006

First point on Wednesday's agenda was next year's joint project. Four suggestions had been sent before the meeting, and an additional project was suggested at the meeting. FINHEEC had suggested two projects, one on the independency of the Nordic agencies and one on follow-up procedures. NOKUT had suggested a project dealing with qualifications frameworks, and EVA had a suggestion for a project concerning the agencies' internal quality work. HSV proposed a joint thematic evaluation for 2005/2006, e.g. with internationalisation as theme.

The meeting decided to combine the Finnish suggestions about examining the independence of the Nordic agencies and comparing different follow-up methods with the Danish suggestion about describing and analysing the internal quality work at the Nordic agencies.

It was decided that EVA would formulate a revised project description that integrates the three suggestions. Tue Vinther-Jørgensen will be responsible for the project management on behalf of EVA. Hannele Salminen, FINHEEC, and Ásgerður Kjartansdóttir, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Iceland, will be members of the project group. Norway and Sweden will name their members of the group as soon as possible.

The project group was encouraged to consider a model where independence, follow-up and quality work was discussed and defined as a basis for the description and analyses of national approaches. This would make the project results more valuable and of possible use for the Board of ENQA in its work with the European register for quality assurance agencies. The project group was also asked to consider whether the project only should include follow-up initi-

ated by the agencies, or whether follow-up of a more spontaneous kind also should be included.

The meeting encouraged NOKUT to develop further their project suggestion about qualifications frameworks and present it at next years meeting.

The meeting also encouraged The National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden, to make a call for a Nordic cross boarder thematic evaluation, e.g. of internationalisation

The future of NOQA in a European context

Kimmo Hämäläinen gave a presentation on the current visibility and profile of NOQA in Europe and presented additional suggestions for the future development of the network.

After discussions in working groups, the plenary session agreed on the following conclusions:

- NOQA should continue to be a loosely organised network based on joint projects and an annual meeting for both staff-members and management. Stricter follow-up on decisions is needed as well as detailed planning of the annual meetings at the top administrative level.
- NOQA could engage in more staff development schemes with staff exchanges in order to make a more coherent network.
- The decision taken two years ago that the agency planning next years meeting also chairs the network and speaks for it, was reconfirmed. However, it was not decided how to organise the drafting of joint positions on a short notice if needed, as had been the original intention.
- The administrative leadership of the Nordic agencies should consider discussing the agenda prior to meetings in ENQA in search of common views.
- Visibility could be enhanced by updating and upgrading the NOQA website and by making it more accessible, e.g. with its own domain. An upgraded site could have a structure with three main items: Projects, reports and results of the annual meetings. A website working group with persons from all agencies and among them a project leader will be established from among representatives of the network members. The agencies would all have to contribute financially to the development of the website. FINHEEC will prepare a draft plan for the development of the website and circulate it to other members for comments.
- A development of a NOQA logo in order to identify the NOQA reports as specifically Nordic reports is needed. The website working group will consider the idea further.
- A defined structure for the annual meetings is needed together with more solid preparation from each agency:
 1. Serious follow-ups based on the minutes and decisions from previous meeting
 2. Joint projects – presentation of last year’s project and identification of next year’s project
 3. Seminar topic – focus on the business of the agencies, e.g. in the light of the ENQA action plan, or methodological questions. The discussions aim clearly at formulating joint Nordic positions, approaches or policies.
 4. Issue of the day – new developments concerning higher education and agencies. Reports on national responses and common discussions. The discussions could lead to formulation of joint positions.

Annual meeting 2006

Iceland is chair of the network from May 2005 till May 2006. Ásgerður Kjartansdóttir will act as the Chairperson of NOQA in the year to come.

Next year's annual meeting will take place in Iceland between 29 and 30 May 2006 starting Monday morning and ending Tuesday at lunch.

/Tue Vinther-Jørgensen