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Student Involvement in
Quality Assessments of Higher
Education in the Nordic Countries

NORDIC QUALITY ASSURANCE NETWORK
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Layout: Pikseri Julkaisupalvelut

Helsinki 2004

Preface

The five Nordic countries – Iceland, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden – have long traditions of cooperation in the field of higher education. In the 1990s, these active contacts expanded into the field of evaluation of higher education. So far, this cooperation has been realised through annual meetings where the recent development of quality assurance activities in each country has been discussed. Far more important, the cooperation has resulted in four joint projects. These projects have dealt with evaluation procedures, accreditation-like practices and mutual recognition of quality assurance agencies, and, most recently, student involvement in the national quality assessment of higher education. As a sign of the continuity and usefulness of these joint projects, there are already plans concerning the next one.

The starting point of this project was to share information and experiences on student involvement in quality assessment of higher education in the Nordic countries in order to identify good practices and potential critical points.

The prerequisites for student involvement consist of evaluation practices applied by the evaluation agencies, the legal status of students in the decision-making of higher education institutions and the existence of student organisations. These are described for the reader as background information. Then, the report follows the four-stage evaluation model and describes the practices and experiences regarding student involvement during the four evaluation stages.

The results obtained showed that the most typical ways of student involvement in the quality assessments of the Nordic higher education institutions are their participation in the self-evaluation processes and site visits as a group to be interviewed. Furthermore, some countries have involved students in the planning of evaluations or have invited them to be members on the external evaluation panels or have integrated students in the follow-ups of the evaluations.

Despite the differences in approaches, the Nordic experiences of involving students in quality assurance practices have generally speaking been very positive. Student participation seems to add to the relevance and legitimacy of the evaluations and it may strengthen their role as an equal member in the academic community. On the other hand, the challenges of student participation cover questions about their representativeness, the constant need to train new students for evaluation tasks and their motivation to participate in the self-evaluations. It is a shared impression of the Nordic quality assurance agencies that student participation serves better certain types of evaluations than others.

As a whole, the theme on student participation in evaluations is extremely timely because the European Ministers of Education have included it on the list

of the objectives to be reached by 2005. In more detail, this particular objective stated in the Berlin Communiqué of 2003 indicates that “by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, *participation of students* and the publication of results.”

With this report, the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education wishes to make an input into the European discussion about student participation. I hope that this report succeeds in making visible the Nordic practices of student involvement not only for staff and students in our own higher education institutions, but also for our colleagues all over Europe.

On behalf of the Nordic Network I would like to express my warmest thanks to the working group responsible for realising this project.

Tove Blytt Holmen

Deputy Director General, NOKUT

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Introduction

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of cooperation and joint development work. This is also the case in the field of higher education and between evaluation agencies¹. At the annual meeting of the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education in 2002 it was decided to start a joint project on student involvement in quality assessment of higher education. A working group with representatives from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland was established to conduct the project, the result of which is recorded in this report. This is the fourth project the Nordic Network² has conducted. The intention of the previous projects was to compare methods and learn from each other. This is also the case for the project on student involvement in quality assessment.

Students have a relatively strong position in the governance of higher education institutions in the Nordic countries. Students are seen as co-actors and stakeholders. As such, they also have a vested interest in the evaluation of higher education. For these reasons students have considerable influence over the governance of the evaluation agencies.

In general, all the Nordic evaluation agencies have involved students in their evaluation practices. However, the extent of involvement and the specific procedures vary from one country to another. In this project the involvement of students at different stages of the evaluation process will be described and discussed.

The report builds on our common opinion that student involvement in most cases benefits the results of an evaluation – in one way or another. How and why students should be involved will be treated in the report, which contains many positive examples of student involvement in evaluations. However, attempts to involve students are not always successful. The report also describes problems that have been encountered and the efforts evaluation agencies have made to make student participation in evaluations successful. After some ini-

¹ Evaluation agencies refers to the national evaluation bodies in the Nordic countries recognised by the relevant Ministries. There are quality assurance agencies in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In Iceland quality assurance of higher education is the responsibility of the Ministry and in Finland (and Norway until 2003) there is a council. The term “agency” will be used in this report regardless of the agency’s legal status.

² The former projects are: Evaluation of Higher Education in the Nordic Countries (Nord 1996:6), Quality Assurance in Nordic Higher Education – accreditation-like practices, ENQA Occasional papers 2 (2001) and A Method for Mutual Recognition – Experiences with a method for mutual recognition of quality assurance agencies, ENQA Occasional papers 4 (2002).

tial, descriptive background information in Chapters 1 and 3, some overall principles for including students in evaluations are given in Chapter 4. The rest of the report follows the usual stages of an evaluation project.

Important findings

The Nordic evaluation agencies always advocate a high degree of student involvement in the self-evaluation process. However, there is also a strong tradition of institutional autonomy, and the realisation of the self-evaluation is similarly the institutions' own responsibility. Therefore, students often participate in the self-evaluation groups, although this is not always the case. Institutions that have involved students in the self-evaluation process emphasise the importance of their participation. Students are participants in the education process and the matters they emphasise or their experiences may differ from those of any other group involved. Student involvement in the self-evaluation process can also lead to student involvement in local development after the evaluation.

The Nordic countries vary concerning the use of students on external panels. Students who participate on external panels are seen as ordinary panel members and are expected to take part in every aspect of the evaluation. The overall experience with students on external panels is very positive, but it is necessary to select students with relevant experience. When students participate on external panels, the student perspective of the evaluation is more likely to be focused upon. Student representation on the panel can also add legitimacy to the evaluation.

1.1 Aim of the project

The aim of the project is to share information and experiences on student involvement in the quality assessment of higher education in the Nordic countries in order to identify good practices and potential problems, so that the quality assurance agencies will be better equipped to develop their methods optimally. The aim is not to define a uniform model. The project is limited to evaluations implemented by the quality assurance agencies.

1.2 Method

This report is based on national ones produced by the agencies in the five Nordic countries. The report presents, compares and discusses the methods and practices in the Nordic countries in order to find crucial aspects and examples of good practices. However, the legal framework, as well as the tradition for evaluation, varies between the Nordic countries. Hence, good practice in one country may not necessarily apply in another country. As a result the examples of good practice given in the report must be understood in the given national context.

A working group with representatives from each country designed the structure of the national reports. The working group was composed of the following representatives:

- Wenche Froestad (chair), The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
- Pål Bakken (secretary), The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
- Inge Enroth, The Danish Evaluation Institute
- Ásgerdur Kjartansdóttir, The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland
- Sirpa Moitus, The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (Substituted by Hannele Seppälä in the summer 2003)
- Aija Sadurskis, The National Agency for Higher Education in Sweden
- Ragnhild Nitzler (from June 2003), The National Agency for Higher Education in Sweden

The national reports consist of the following themes: the formal framework governing students' rights to participate in the evaluation of higher education, student involvement in the planning of evaluations, student involvement in higher education institutions' self-evaluations, student participation on external evaluation panels, student involvement in site visits and student involvement in the evaluation follow-ups. In preparing the national report, the evaluation agencies were free to collect additional information, for example, by interviewing students, in addition to relying on existing documents.

- The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) collected information from several groups involved in evaluations and received forty-four replies from FINHEEC Council members, members of planning teams and external panels in selected projects, and contacts at the higher education institutions. Seven evaluation officers at the FINHEEC secretariat were interviewed. The two student umbrella organisations participated in the data collection by sending questionnaires to their member-organisations, nineteen of which replied.
- At the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), all evaluation officers, as well as the leader of the evaluation unit, were interviewed. Also, an e-mail questionnaire was sent to former student members of external panels, student members of self-evaluation groups and to contacts at the institutions/units that have been evaluated. The questions referred to experiences and views concerning student involvement in evaluations. Twelve students and eighteen contacts received the e-mail, and eight students and ten contacts replied.
- The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) decided to make use of internal information only. Evaluation officers from previous evaluations and management were interviewed and their experiences formed the basis for the Danish report together with existing documents, reports and current proce-

dures. It was judged to be outside the limits of the project to seek external information from students and institutions, as this would imply comprehensive studies.

- Iceland decided to make use of internal information by going through files and data and by conducting informal interviews with people within the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture who were familiar with the previous evaluation projects and procedures.
- The National Agency for Higher Education in Sweden (HSV) held a half-day seminar for students who had served on expert panels. The Agency also sent a questionnaire to all evaluation officers who had taken part in the evaluations of 2001 and 2002.

The working group would like to thank everybody who has contributed to the reports. For more information about the national reports, please contact the agencies:

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The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, +358 9 1607 6913, finheec@minedu.fi

Ministry of Education, Science & Culture in Iceland, Division of Evaluation and Supervision, +354 545 9500, postur@mrn.stjr.is

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, + 47 21 02 18 00, postmottak@nokut.no

National Agency for Higher Education in Sweden, + 46 8 563 085 00, hsv@hsv.se

I.3 Terminology

<i>Accreditation</i>	assesses whether a given subject, programme or institution has met predefined standards. Evaluation with the purpose of accreditation always leads to a verdict of either “yes” or “no”.
<i>Audit</i>	is an external review of an institution’s internal quality assurance system and quality assurance practice.
<i>Course assessment</i>	is the feedback given by students to the higher education institution on specific courses. The higher education institutions often make use of these assessments in their internal quality work.
<i>Evaluation</i>	is a process that systematically examines the quality of the evaluation object, for example, a subject, programme or institution. The purpose may be either enhancement or control, or a combination of the two.
<i>External evaluation</i>	Evaluation initiated by an evaluation agency.

<i>Guidelines</i>	are given by the evaluation agencies to the institution/unit to be evaluated, and explain how to carry out the self-evaluation.
<i>Self-evaluation group</i>	is a project group that is responsible for the execution of the self-evaluation. The group is appointed by the institution or unit to be evaluated.
<i>Steering group</i>	There can be two kinds of steering groups involved in the evaluations. First, a steering group might be set up by the evaluation agency to govern the whole project. Second, the evaluated institution or unit might set up a steering group for the self-evaluation.

2

Summary

The aim of this project has been to share information and experiences concerning student involvement in the quality assessment of higher education in the Nordic countries. It was also an aim to identify good practices and potential problems, so that the quality assurance agencies will be better equipped to develop their methods optimally. However, our aim was not to define a uniform model.

This presentation is based on national reports from each agency. The reports consist of the following themes: the legal framework governing the rights of students to participate in the evaluation of higher education, student involvement in the planning of evaluations, student involvement in the self-evaluations of the institutions, student participation on external panels, student involvement in site visits and student involvement in the evaluation follow-ups.

There is a strong tradition of involving students in the governance of the Nordic higher education institutions. Also, students' rights to participate in quality work at the institutions are stated in laws and regulations. This tradition explains the general positive attitude in the Nordic countries towards involving students in evaluations conducted by the evaluation agencies. However, both the regulations and traditions differ between the countries and the ways students are involved in evaluations vary accordingly. Also, student involvement may vary between different types of evaluation approaches, different types of evaluation projects and between different phases of an evaluation project.

Student involvement in planning

The most common way of involving students in the planning phase is through student representation on the boards or committees of the evaluation agencies. Also, students can be involved through meetings between the agencies and the national student organisations.

When students are involved in planning evaluation projects, the projects will have a clearer student perspective throughout the evaluation and new topics and questions can be added. Students can also suggest evaluation projects to be conducted.

Student involvement in the self-evaluations

The evaluation agencies always advocate a high degree of student involvement in the self-evaluation process. In Iceland, student participation in the self-evaluation groups is stated in the regulations attached to the University Act. Howev-

er, there is a strong tradition of institutional autonomy, and the realisation of the self-evaluation is similarly the institutions' own responsibility. Students often participate in the self-evaluation groups, although this is not always the case. When the self-evaluation group is not autonomously planning and steering the process, student representation in decision-making bodies is important.

In some evaluation projects a large group of students have been heard through questionnaires, seminars, web-site discussions etc.

When students participate as members of the self-evaluation group, they can influence the self-evaluation report. The most common practice is one self-evaluation report from each institution or unit with the students' views integrated. However, there are examples of the students writing their own report.

Institutions that have involved students in the self-evaluation process emphasise the importance of their participation. Students are participants in the education process and their experiences may differ from the experiences brought up or matters emphasised by any other group involved. Student involvement in the self-evaluation process can also lead to student involvement in local development after the evaluation.

Student participation on the external panels

The Nordic countries vary concerning the use of students on external panels. Students who participate on external panels are seen as ordinary panel members and are expected to take part in every aspect of the evaluation.

The overall experience with students on external panels is very positive, but it is necessary to select students with relevant experience. When students participate on external panels, the student perspective of the evaluation is more likely to be focused upon. Student panel members can play an important role when students are interviewed during the site visit. Student representation on the panel can also add legitimacy to the evaluation.

Student involvement during the site visit

It is common practice in the Nordic countries that students are interviewed during the site visit. The student interviews are regarded as a very important way of getting information and involving students in evaluations. The student interview is a way of validating the self-evaluation report. Students can also point out problems or raise new topics not included in the self-evaluation report.

The external panel can only meet a limited group of students during the site visit, and it is important to select students so that a representative group of students is chosen.

Sometimes students are very well prepared for the interview; they have read the self-evaluation report and sometimes they have discussed in advance important topics with their fellow students. However, the opposite has also been

the case; the students have been selected just prior to the interviews and have had no time to prepare at all. Requesting a list of names one or two weeks prior to the site visit can help this problem. Also, it is good practice to provide the students with a list of items prior to the interviews.

When students are interviewed early during the site visit, their answers can provide material for questions given to other groups. Students should be interviewed without the presence of staff.

Student involvement in follow-up

The evaluation agencies sometimes hold public seminars to inform about the evaluation results. When there is a public seminar after the evaluation, students ought to be invited to contribute. At other times there are seminars exclusively for the institutions or units being evaluated, as a source of inspiration for further development at the institutions or units. Sometimes students at the evaluated institutions have been invited. Sometimes the members of the external panel have been invited to individual institutions to present the results to their staff and students. In Finland, student members of the panels have also presented the results to their fellow-students in seminars organised by the student organisations.

If an action plan is demanded, it is easy to see whether the institution intends to follow up the evaluation. FINHEEC encourages the student organisations to play an active role in the follow-up activities at the institutional, departmental and programme level. FINHEEC and the National Agency for Higher Education arrange follow-up evaluations two or three years after the publication of the report. This practise is also the policy in Iceland.

3

Background information

In order to understand how and why the Nordic countries differ in their methods for student involvement in evaluations some background information is important. This chapter describes the purpose and main activity of the evaluation agencies. The position that students may hold on the boards or councils of the evaluation agencies is also described. Further, the formal rights students hold in order to influence education at the higher education institutions is outlined, and finally there is a short description of the student organisations in the Nordic countries.

3.1 Descriptions of the participating evaluation agencies

3.1.1 Denmark

The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) is an independent institution formed under the auspices of the Danish Ministry of Education. EVA's main purpose is to contribute to the quality work and development of teaching and learning in Denmark. EVA conducts evaluations at all levels in the field of education; at primary school level, in youth education, at the higher education institutions and in adult and post-graduate education. EVA has the right to initiate evaluations at all levels of education. EVA is managed by a board, which is responsible for the overall supervision of the institute and draws up the programme for the year's activities on the recommendation of the Executive Director. Evaluations are undertaken in accordance with an annual action plan, which must be approved by EVA's Board and by the Ministry of Education – and for universities, by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation.

In addition to EVA's evaluations, EVA's Centre of Knowledge conducts a number of projects. The purpose of these projects is to produce, collect and disseminate knowledge of national and international experiences concerning the evaluation of teaching and learning. In connection with the evaluations and the Knowledge Centre projects, EVA continuously develops and updates the methods of evaluation.

Between 1992 and 2002, EVA and the preceding Evaluation Centre produced 76 evaluation reports concerning higher education. The Evaluation Centre chiefly conducted rotating programme evaluations of higher education. EVA has broadened the evaluation concept to include other types of evaluation, for example, evaluations of institutions, thematic evaluations, international evalua-

tions with the purpose of benchmarking and audits. The evaluation methods vary and are adapted to the various educational areas and levels. However, EVA's evaluations always include an external panel, self-evaluation by the institutions being evaluated, site visits and publication of a final evaluation report.

EVA's Board has no student representation. EVA has a Committee of Representatives which gives its opinion about EVA's annual plan of action and the annual report, and makes suggestions on the priority of planned activities decided by the Board. The Committee is comprised of 27 members who meet three times a year. Four members are representatives from the students and pupils' organisations.

3.1.2 Finland

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is an independent expert body, which was established in 1996 on the initiative of the Finnish Government. The Decree on the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council regulates FINHEEC's activities at a general level. The main task of FINHEEC is to assist the institutions of higher education and the Ministry of Education in evaluation issues and to support the institutions in developing the quality of their activities. FINHEEC activities are financed by the Government budget via the Ministry of Education. FINHEEC independently sets the targets and decides the methods of evaluation, within the bounds of the resources allocated.

FINHEEC conducts evaluations of Finnish higher education, covering both polytechnic and university education. Since its inauguration, FINHEEC has produced 72 evaluation reports. The types of evaluation cover institutional evaluations, audits of quality work, programme and thematic evaluations, accreditation of professional courses, selection of centres of excellence and quality units and follow-up evaluations of implemented projects. Instead of a rotation principle targeting all programmes in given cycles, the programme evaluations target education programmes that have social or educational importance, are rapidly expanding and developing, or that have caused problems. The basic method for an evaluation includes the following steps: planning the evaluation, a self-evaluation produced by the institution, a site visit conducted by the external panel and a public evaluation report. However, the aim is always to tailor the approach according to the special character of the theme or the institution being evaluated. FINHEEC pays special attention to transparency, and continuous development of its evaluation methods.

The activity at FINHEEC is carried out by a secretariat and managed by the Council, which makes decisions concerning policy, guiding principles and the action plan. In addition, it decides on the Council's proposals to the Ministry of Education. The Council has student representation and members are appointed by the Ministry of Education. The Council also has two permanent subcommittees: the Special Section for the Accreditation of Polytechnics and the Accreditation Board for Professional Courses. Students are represented on both subcommittees.

3.1.3 Iceland

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for regular evaluations of the whole educational system in Iceland, from pre-primary to higher education level. The Division of Evaluation and Supervision was established within the Ministry in 1996 and is the only body at the national level, legally responsible for the planning of external evaluations at all school levels.

The main tasks of the Division of Evaluation and Supervision are:

1. to organise external evaluations at all school levels;
2. to supervise that schooling is in accordance with legislation,
3. to determine regulations and the national curricula;
4. to collect and distribute information on schooling and
5. to serve as the Icelandic EURYDICE Unit.

At the higher education level, programme evaluation has been the main type of external evaluation conducted and the Ministry has evaluated approximately one programme a year. However, in recent months the Ministry has conducted institutional evaluations. Quality audits will also be conducted in the near future. The evaluation methods are reviewed and developed after each evaluation.

3.1.4 Norway

The Network Norway Council was appointed by the Norwegian Parliament in 1997 and concluded its work 31 December 2001. The council had thirteen members, two of whom were students. The Network Norway Council was an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs in matters relating to the long-term development of higher education in Norway. The Council planned and carried out national evaluations, evolved systems and methods of evaluation, and summarised the findings of the evaluations so that they could contribute to the assurance and enhancement of the quality of higher education. The Council decided on evaluation strategies and the annual evaluation plans, as well as the project plans. Up to the end of 2001, the Council had carried out ten evaluations of various types and developed a proposal for an institutional quality assurance system.

In connection with the annual budget process, the Network Norway Council made a draft plan for the evaluation activities for the coming year and the following two years. The evaluation plan was based on commissions from the Ministry of Education and Research and the Network Norway Council's own suggestions. The Council decided upon the evaluation plan, and the students could influence the plan through their representatives. Students also had one representative on the committee that assessed the applicants for The National Education Quality Award. The evaluation strategy of the Network Norway Council, approved in December 2000, included student participation on the external evaluation committees.

From 1 January 2003, NOKUT has been responsible for assessing courses and institutions within higher education in Norway. Students hold one of the five seats on the Board of NOKUT. In addition, the student deputy has the right to meet and contribute, but not to vote. NOKUT's regulations state that students have the right to representation on external panels concerning institutional accreditations and audits.

NOKUT's main activity is the evaluation of quality assurance systems, accreditation, evaluation and recognition of institutions and course provisions. NOKUT is also responsible for the general recognition of foreign qualifications. An internal network is responsible for methods and competence development for the organisation. NOKUT has one annual conference on quality work for the sector of higher education.

3.1.5 Sweden

The National Agency for Higher Education was set up in 1995 as a central agency responsible for quality assessments, supervision, reviews, development of higher education, research and analysis, evaluation of foreign education and the provision of study information. Institutions of higher education are directly accountable to the Government. The Agency's role is to provide guidance information for decision-making bodies, both at the national level (in this case Government and Parliament) and at the higher education level (the higher education institutions).

The Agency evaluates the quality of institutions of higher education in various ways:

- In a comprehensive system for assessing the quality of higher education, started in 2001, all general and professional degree courses, including post-graduate education, are evaluated during the course of a six-year cycle. In the first two years, sixty-five subjects or programmes were evaluated in fourteen projects. A subject may be found in only one higher education institution, or in several or all higher education institutions.
- The Agency assesses whether or not an institution should be entitled to award degrees, to have the right to establish areas of research or to have university status. Approximately 600 individual applications to have the right to award a degree have been assessed.
- The Agency audits quality management at institutions of higher education. All higher education institutions have been audited once, and almost all have been audited a second time.
- The Agency evaluates certain key factors to ensure quality within the higher education sector, including issues such as gender equality, student participation and social and ethnic diversity.

In all these cases, except the right to establish areas of research or to have university status, the Agency's decisions are independent of the Government.

The National Agency does not have a formal brief to disseminate information on methodological development on evaluation, but its continual internal quality assurance and enhancement processes include consideration of national and international developments.

The Agency Board has two student representatives appointed by the Government. The Agency Board is not involved in planning or carrying out the Agency's evaluations. However, the Agency also has a reference group of students, appointed by central students' unions, who meet with the Agency leadership from time to time. At these meetings both groups are free to initiate topics for discussion.

3.2 Students' formal rights to influence evaluation and education at higher education institutions

3.2.1 Denmark

Students are represented in all governing bodies of the higher education institutions. The number of student representatives, and accordingly the possibility of the students to influence, is larger at the programme level than at the level of the university board or faculty level.

In the existing University Act, the only mention of evaluation by students is that the responsibility for dealing with all kinds of evaluations is placed within the staff–student committee.³

EVA's regulations mention self-evaluation as a mandatory part of an evaluation project. Student participation in self-evaluation is not mentioned in EVA's regulations and accordingly is not mandatory. However, EVA asks for student participation in self-evaluation and students are almost always involved.

3.2.2 Finland

The acts relating to the universities and polytechnics state that the boards of the universities and polytechnics should include students.

The Universities Act states that the universities should evaluate their education, research or performing and fine arts and their impact. The Act includes a tripartite principle which specifies that the board should consist of (1) university professors, (2) teachers, researchers and other staff and (3) students. This principle has a crucial impact on the way universities organise their internal evaluations. The Polytechnics Act states that polytechnics are responsible for the quality of education and the continuous enhancement and they must participate at regular intervals in external evaluations. The Act including new regulations on the legal status of polytechnic student organisations is currently under Parliament review.

³ The University Act, section 8, subsection 4.

The Decree governing the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council contains no specific regulations on how to organise the evaluations. However, from the beginning of its activities, FINHEEC has chosen to integrate students in every phase of the evaluation whenever possible. It is also in accordance with the FINHEEC principles of diversity, transparency and impact that students have visible roles in all the different phases of the FINHEEC evaluations.

3.2.3 Iceland

The Board of each institution of higher education (the Senate) is comprised of up to ten representatives, two of whom are students elected by proportional voting for two-year terms.

The legislation on higher education institutions enacted in 1997 establishes the general framework for the activities of these institutions. Provisions for quality evaluation of higher education were laid down in this Act. The provisions are general and do not mention student involvement. In the regulation concerning quality control of university instruction that was set in line with the Universities Act in 1999 the evaluation procedures of internal evaluations are described in more detail.

The provisions concerning internal quality assurance of the institutions mention students only in connection with course assessment. The provisions concerning internal quality work of the institutions are general and the institutions can choose their own methods to develop an internal quality system. Even though the provisions do not ask for or demand student involvement, the information available to the Ministry at this point suggests that students are active participants in the development of internal quality systems in higher education institutions.

The provisions concerning external evaluation carried out by the Ministry are more explicit than the provisions on internal evaluation; they state that students are to be members of the institution's self-evaluation group.

3.2.4 Norway

Two members of the Board of the institutions must be elected by and from the students. External board members and students are entitled to reasonable remuneration for functioning as such, according to rules laid down by the Board. Students should hold a minimum of 20 per cent of the seats on the board and have at least two representatives on the governing bodies of departments and basic units. Students shall have at least 20 per cent of membership and always at least 2 representatives on all collegiate bodies that are given decision-making powers, unless the delegating body unanimously decides otherwise. Furthermore, the Act states that students are to be represented on boards appointing teaching and research staff, as well as leaders, unless the Board unanimously decides against it.

In Norway the broad and vertical student representation in the governing of the institutions, as described in this chapter, will normally give them information about and influence over evaluations. The decision-making bodies at the relevant institutional level will normally confirm the organisation and the process-plan of the self-evaluation, as well as confirm the final report. Hence the formal positions students have at the institutional level will in most cases allow them to influence the self-evaluations. However, this has not been the procedure in every evaluation project. The theme can be considered less relevant to students, or the time schedule can be too tight to make this procedure practical. In such cases the self-evaluation report might be the responsibility of a smaller group. See Chapter 4 for a fuller discussion.

The institutions are to have a quality assurance system, and course assessment conducted by students is to be part of that system.

3.2.5 Sweden

Students are granted the right to participate in the shaping of higher education in the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance. The Act states that improving the quality of higher education is the responsibility of staff and students alike and that the institutions shall work towards students taking an active part in the work on the further development of education.

Participatory rights mean that students can appoint a representative in all forums where decisions are made, as well as in groups preparing decisions. The Act states that the students at the institution shall be entitled to representation on the faculty boards, as well as on the governing body of the institution. While the student unions of the institution appoint the centrally placed student representatives, the students of a department typically appoint their representative to the department board.

Higher education institutions are required to give students an opportunity to present their experiences of and views on the course through a course evaluation. The institutions shall collate the course evaluations and release information about the results and any action occasioned by the course evaluations. The results shall be made available to the students.

3.3 Student organisations in the Nordic countries

3.3.1 Denmark

The National Union of Danish Students (Danske Studerendes Fællesråd, DSF) is the largest national organisation of students undertaking higher education. The members of DSF are the local student organisations at the education institutions. At present, DSF has 16 members and claims to represent through these approximately 97,000 students.

The purpose of DSF is to further student interests in general. DSF is engaged in the work of educational policy and the conditions of life for students, nationally and internationally. The organisation coordinates the membership organisations' collaboration on student policy.

3.3.2 Finland

The National Union of Finnish Students (SYL) has 24 member organisations, which are the student unions of universities. University student union membership is compulsory in Finland, thus SYL represents all the 126,000 basic degree university students in the country. SYL works on issues important for students like education policies, social policies and international affairs. SYL has an established role in the national educational decision-making and, for example, participates in the preparatory work of government working groups. SYL works with student unions to enable them to have an influence on a local level on the universities and other significant bodies.

The National Union of Finnish Polytechnic Students⁴ (SAMOK) is an interest and service organisation for non-university higher education students in Finland. SAMOK does not have individual members and consists of 29 local student unions with over 60,000 students. So far membership in the polytechnic student union has been voluntary, but the situation will change if the new Polytechnics Act comes into force in the suggested form. The aims and objectives of SAMOK are to promote the interests and rights of polytechnic students. Through SAMOK, students and local student unions are represented in various national bodies dealing with matters pertaining to student welfare, housing, curricula and legislation. SAMOK also works with local student unions organising seminars, publishing diverse manuals etc. and providing students with knowledge of national and international matters.

⁴ The unofficial English translation of Suomen Ammattikorkeakouluopiskelijayhdisten Liitto – SAMOK ry.

3.3.3 Iceland

There is no representative body for university students at the national level. However, there is a representative body for university students studying abroad and a representative body for students studying in specialised schools. In addition, each higher education institution has their student body, for example, the Student Council of the University of Iceland, which is by far the largest university in Iceland. The Student Council operates both on a university and a national level. The aim of the Student Council is, in short, to guard the educational and cultural interests of students as well as their general welfare. In addition, various services are offered to students. The Student Council defends student interests, both with regard to the University and the government. The Student Council demands equal opportunity for education and adequate educational and social conditions for students.

3.3.4 Norway

Norway has two major student organisations covering universities and colleges respectively.

The National Union of Students (NSU) in Norway is an organisation for students in the universities and scientific colleges in Norway. NSU represents approximately 85,000 students and has a local organisation in every member institution. NSU works towards the students in Norway getting the best possible education and having all their primary needs fulfilled. NSU works for students' rights and works actively with politicians, bureaucracy, media and the leadership at the institutions.

The Norwegian Association of Students (StL) is an independent, non-governmental, democratic student organisation which represents and defends the rights and interests of about 75,000 students in 29 colleges in Norway. The political aims of StL are to improve and provide student finance, social welfare, democratic rights, and to put international and educational issues on the political agenda.

3.3.5 Sweden

The Swedish National Union of Students, SFS, is an association of about 100 student unions at the universities and university colleges in Sweden. These student unions represent approximately 240,000 students. Students are required by law to be members of the local student union of their university. However, it is optional for the local union to be a member of SFS. SFS protects the Swedish students' interests in social welfare and educational issues and represents Swedish students on a national and international level. SFS aims to look after the common concerns among students and represent Swedish students in relation to the government and authorities in educational, social, labour market and international affairs.

4

Some overall principles for including students in evaluations

As higher education changes so does the view on students. In higher education, a student may be viewed in many different ways: as receiver (of knowledge), participant, co-actor and/or stakeholder. Changing higher education also leads to changing quality assurance.

In a discussion of student inclusion in quality assurance, several processes can be identified.

- The conception of education has changed considerably over the past few decades. Research on knowledge distribution and acquisition has led to the traditional model of students as receivers of knowledge being seriously questioned. Instead, learning as an active, intra-individual process of constructing knowledge now dominates education theory. Learning has replaced teaching as the preferred education paradigm. It is not possible to alter the education paradigm without altering the way that the student is viewed. When the student is perceived as the creator of knowledge, he or she will be a co-actor rather than a mere participant, and much less a recipient. With new forms of learning, such as Problem-based Learning, the responsibility of learning, including evaluating his or her learning process, is transferred to the student.
- The role of higher education is generally thought to be more than the acquisition of knowledge and skills, preparing the student for a future career. In the tradition of liberal education, education also aims at his or her personal development. A sense of inclusion and participation, as well as an ability to critically assess oneself, are necessary prerequisites for the achievement of transferable skills and personal development.
- It may also be argued that a role of higher education is to contribute to the development of a democratic society. It is impossible to imagine higher education fulfilling this role if it is not itself a democratic institution. Hence, the evaluation of higher education includes evaluating to what extent it is democratic. A criterion of a democratic institution is that input is sought from everyone involved.

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- Institutions of higher education are, and will be even more in the future, affected by the change to the knowledge society. Since a feature of such a society is said to be an increase in jobs requiring decision-making, higher education is affected by the demand for a workforce that is trained to actively make decisions. Another feature of a knowledge society is the need for life-long learning. Future higher education has been described as recurring, situational and initiated by students, challenging institutional control of education and affecting the evaluation of education.

5

Student involvement in the agencies' planning of evaluations

This chapter discusses student involvement in different phases of the planning of evaluations. First, students' influence on the long-term planning of the evaluation agencies is described. Are students given the opportunity to suggest evaluation projects or comment on suggestions for annual plans? Second, student involvement in the initial planning of individual evaluation projects is presented. "Initial planning" refers to the design of an evaluation project, from deciding on the project and its aim, and setting up focus areas, to the formulation of guidelines.

Overview of central aspects concerning student involvement in planning evaluations:

Added value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may suggest other kinds of evaluation projects if they have a say in long-term planning. • Student involvement can promote student perspective and relevance throughout the individual evaluation projects. • Students may add topics to the projects. • Students may alter the self-evaluation guidelines. • Student influence on planning may add legitimacy to the projects among other students.
Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws or formal regulations may restrict student representation on relevant Boards or Committees. • Methods of involving students in planning may be inadequate or lacking. • There is often a tradition that planning should be carried out solely by the evaluation agencies themselves.
Examples of good practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have the possibility to suggest projects and influence long-term planning through representatives on Boards or Committees. • Students influence through conferences and through formal and informal meetings between national student organisations and evaluation agencies. • Individual projects can be decided by the agencies' Boards or Committees or by steering groups with student representatives. • Students influence individual evaluation projects through preliminary studies that include a dialogue.

5.1 Annual and long-term planning in the agencies

When FINHEEC started its activities in 1996, all universities in Finland were visited and interviews were conducted with students and staff to gather opinions about the future role and tasks of FINHEEC.

The FINHEEC Council draws up a four-year action plan, which outlines aims, evaluation projects and other activities. Annual plans, that define more exactly the projects and focal areas for each year, are also drawn up. The two student members on the FINHEEC Council participate as equal members in planning FINHEEC's activities and in its decision-making processes. FINHEEC's secretariat also has well-established official and unofficial cooperation with the two national student organisations. As an example of student influence on planning future projects, the project evaluating student guidance and counselling services at higher education institutions was launched on the initiative of the National Union of Finnish Polytechnic Students.

Similarly, the National Agency for Higher Education in Sweden discussed its coming six-year evaluation programme in conferences where students from the student unions at several institutions of higher education participated. Concerning annual plans, on the other hand, the Board of the National Agency for Higher Education is not normally involved in the plan for the coming year.

In Iceland, evaluation of higher education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, and so far student representatives have not had the opportunity to influence the annual plans.

In Denmark, EVA's Board decides on the annual planning but has no student representatives. However, students may suggest evaluation projects through their representation on EVA's Committee of Representatives. The Danish Committee of Representatives, including its student members, may comment on EVA's annual plan of action, but it has no decision-making powers. The possibility of influencing the work and the statements of the committee is real, but also very dependent on the ability of the single representative, as the method presupposes independent and active participation from the representatives. The contributions from the student representatives have therefore varied over time. However, the present committee has found a productive way of gathering members' views thematically. This seems to accentuate the members' common interests and generate views and ideas, which EVA can integrate in the work of the institute.

In Norway, the former Network Norway Council made a draft plan for evaluation activities for the coming year and the following two years. The students could influence the plan through their representatives on the Council. Now, under NOKUT students influence the activity through their representation on the Board. The Board decides all regulations and strategies, and the selection criteria for the external panels, as well as the general principles for mandates given to the panels.

5.2 Planning of individual evaluation projects

EVA conducts a preliminary study prior to every evaluation, holding a dialogue with the main parties involved, including students. In Denmark the external evaluation panel is appointed soon after the board has approved the terms of reference. The external evaluation panel takes part in the early planning of the individual evaluation. If a student is a member of the external evaluation panel, the student can influence the planning.

In Norway, all evaluation projects were discussed by the former Network Norway Council, and the student representatives on the council could therefore influence the planning. The discussions would normally cover the overall design and the main topics of the evaluation. However, these discussions would rarely go into detail about the execution of the evaluation project. The NOKUT Board's Chair decides the compositions of the external panels. The detailed planning of each evaluation or accreditation project will normally not be discussed at the NOKUT Board meetings.

The FINHEEC Council nominates external evaluation panels for individual evaluation projects. The individual evaluation projects may be planned by reference or steering groups. Such groups may design the aims, methods and schedule for the evaluation projects. In programme and thematic evaluations, FINHEEC routinely sets up such planning and steering groups and the national student organisations nominate a student member for each group. Usually, those nominated have taken part in the administration of their own higher education institutions and/or in the national or local student organisations. In the Finnish institutional evaluations, the institutions to be evaluated set up internal steering groups that usually have student members or, at least, invite students to comment on the project plan. The commitment of student members in such steering groups is exemplary. In some cases, student members have chaired the steering groups.⁵ It is FINHEEC's experience that the more responsibility the students are given in these groups, the more commitment they tend to show. In planning an evaluation initiated by students,⁶ student activity was especially strong and vital. In other evaluations, students have contributed especially to the drafting of self-evaluation questions. These experiences indicate that the evaluation agencies should give a high priority to developing ways for students to influence concrete issues.

As with annual plans, students in Iceland and Sweden have little influence over the planning of individual evaluation projects.

It is usual to show the self-evaluation guidelines to the institutions or units to be evaluated, so they can comment on the guidelines before they are finally

⁵The steering group of the evaluation of student guidance and counselling and the planning group which designed the method for selection of centres of excellence in university education.

⁶The evaluation of student guidance and counselling in higher education institutions.

adopted. The communication is between the agency and the leadership at the institution, and there is no knowledge of any student participation in the comments.

There have been few examples of complaints about students being left out of the planning process. However, in one of the Norwegian evaluation projects, students at one of the colleges involved criticised the self-evaluation guidelines for lacking some central topics relevant to students. In this particular case students had been participating, together with deans, at a meeting where the draft plan for the self-evaluation and the guidelines were presented. Evidently, this had not been sufficient to safeguard the interests of the students involved in the evaluation. A draft plan sent to student bodies at the institutions involved, seminars with broad student representation etc might be equally or more effective methods of involving students in the planning phase.

6

Student involvement in self-evaluations

It was beyond the limits of this project to make a full study of student involvement in the self-evaluation process in every evaluation project initiated by the Nordic evaluation agencies. However, the experiences of the Nordic evaluation agencies will be presented, as well as experiences from students and staff at the higher education institutions. The chapter starts with a description of the evaluation agencies' roles at this stage. Then the following are focused upon: the students' possibilities to participate in steering the process, student involvement in the self-evaluation groups, how students can influence the report and methods of including a large group of students.

Overview of central aspects concerning student involvement in self-evaluations:

Added value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student involvement in the self-evaluation process will provide the student focus in the self-evaluation. • Students often promote change and can provide new solutions. • Student involvement in the self-evaluation can enhance student involvement in quality work in general. • Student involvement can add legitimacy to the self-evaluation process at the institutional or unit level. Student involvement will increase the legitimacy of the self-evaluation report in the eyes of the external evaluation panel.
Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It can be difficult to motivate students to participate. • Involvement of many students is not always possible, and a few student representatives must often speak for a very large group. • Student participation demands sufficient time and a suitable schedule.
Examples of good practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students participate in steering the local process. • Students are represented in the self-evaluation group. • Students participate in the self-evaluation group. • Broad student involvement through questionnaires, interviews, web-discussions, seminars etc. • Students can influence the self-evaluation report, or they may write their own separate report. • A seminar for students and staff prior to the self-evaluation has been beneficial.

6.1 Role of the evaluation agencies

The evaluation agencies normally give guidelines to the institutions or units being evaluated. These may be standardised or altered according to the needs of each evaluation. Possible student influence on guidelines or manuals has been discussed in the section on student involvement in the planning of evaluations. The guidelines or manuals always ask the units to involve students in self-evaluations, and may ask them to collect the students' views on specified questions, but cannot demand specific forms of involvement.

There is a strong tradition of institutional autonomy, of quality assurance being the responsibility of the institutions themselves. Similarly, the organisation and realisation of self-evaluations are the institutions' responsibility. Institutional ownership is considered important for the self-evaluation to contribute to the institution's development. If the agencies direct the work, by deciding who takes part and in what manner, the outcome of the evaluation may well be improved and student participation may be safeguarded. However, it could be considered an infringement of institutional autonomy. When setting up self-evaluation procedures, this possible conflict needs to be considered.

6.2 Student involvement in the steering of the local self-evaluation process

As described above, the institutions or units evaluated have the responsibility to carry out the self-evaluation. Main topics and questions are often given in the guidelines, but details about how the process should be carried out are mainly decided by the institutions themselves. There are different ways in which students can influence the steering and organisation of the local self-evaluation process. Firstly, the process can be decided by a decision-making body with student representation. This is often the case in Norway and Sweden. Secondly, a local steering group can be given the responsibility for the process. This has often been the case in the institutional evaluations in Norway. In Denmark and Iceland, the self-evaluation groups are responsible for planning and organising the self-evaluation process. As students normally are represented in these groups, their possibility of influencing the process is ensured.

In Finland, the programme and thematic evaluations usually start with a discussion arranged for the local evaluation contacts nominated by the participant institutions or programmes being evaluated. The students usually do not take part in this initial seminar. It is the task of the evaluation contact to inform the students and the rest of the staff about the evaluation. However, to ensure the quick flow of information, the local student organisation is also usually informed about the evaluation via the central student organisation.

The strong position granted to students by the respective Nordic university legislations ensure that student representatives know of evaluation projects, which is an important precondition for student involvement. Local student organisations can play a big part in supporting the students' participation in self-evaluations.

6.3 Student participation in the self-evaluation groups

While the evaluation agencies in the other Nordic countries *recommend* that a self-evaluation group be formed, the regulations to the University Act of Iceland *require* that the institution or unit under evaluation should set up a self-evaluation group. The group must consist of representatives from the academic staff, students and administrative staff. In Denmark Finland, Norway and Sweden the evaluation agencies advocate student participation in the self-evaluation group through guidelines for the self-evaluation. In the absence of mandatory self-evaluation groups, the local student organisations and/or individual student representatives on decision-making bodies may exert pressure on the unit being evaluated to increase student participation. In all the Nordic countries, the units are asked to describe the self-evaluation process in their reports. The site visit is also used to ascertain to what extent students have been involved in the self-evaluation.

The importance of student involvement is emphasised in all the Nordic countries. That students should be involved is uncontroversial, and normally students contribute in different ways and to a high degree in all phases of the self-evaluation process in all the Nordic countries. Where self-evaluation groups are mandatory, student involvement in self-evaluation is, of course, more consistent. However, we also have examples of the self-evaluation being conducted with little or no student involvement. This is not necessarily the institution's fault. Many institutions make a considerable effort to involve students. However, sometimes it is difficult to find student representatives. Committed involvement in quality assessment takes time, and students may have a busy schedule. The student's benefit from evaluations may be perceived as limited. Often, it is future students that fully benefit from the evaluation and the follow-up work at the institution. Nevertheless, many students are willing to be involved in the process.

The ENQA report *Quality Procedures in European Higher Education*⁷ gives the following description of student involvement in self-evaluation groups: "*The overall picture is that management and teaching staff are usually part of the self-evaluation group, whereas graduates rarely participate. The participation of administrative staff and students varies considerably, and for the latter there seems to be a*

⁷ ENQA Occasional Papers 5, 2003, p. 28

connection to the method used: students are usually represented in evaluations, but rarely in accreditation procedures.”

Accreditation practices can be found in Finland, Sweden and Norway (from 2003). Accreditation processes can differ considerably from the traditional self-evaluation processes regarding who is involved. The institutions apply for accreditation according to predefined standards. A self-evaluation group is not always formed, and students are normally not involved in formulating the application. However, several criteria may have high student relevance.

6.4 How students can influence the self-evaluation report

When students participate in the self-evaluation groups, they can always influence the report.

Sometimes when students are not represented in the group, the local student organisation receives a draft report to comment upon. This also gives the students some influence, but certainly not as strong as participation in the group itself. A self-evaluation is normally considered to be a collective process where different views are discussed. The self-evaluation report ideally describes the views of all groups involved in the activity being evaluated, and includes information on whether all groups have taken an active part in the work. There appear to be three ways in which students participate in writing the self-evaluation report:

- Student opinions are integrated into the self-evaluation report; either students are members of the self-evaluation group, or students are given an opportunity to comment on the self-evaluation report and add their own conclusions.
- Students write a separate self-evaluation report or student opinion is attached to the self-evaluation report as a separate statement.
- Students and staff both write their own report, which can be followed by a joint seminar where the findings are discussed.

To integrate students' opinions into the report is by far the most common practice. There are several arguments for this practice: the institution gathers its views in one 'official' report, which can be said to represent the institution, and a self-evaluation group with student participation is the best basis for the development of the institution. Also, such mixed groups reflect a democratic decision process at the universities, where teachers, students and technical-administrative staff make the decisions together. One disadvantage of a mixed group writing the report is the risk of hiding differences of opinion when wishing to reach consensus. Although the self-evaluation manual may encourage the expression of different opinions, these may not come to light. There are also examples of one person dominating the self-evaluation process and in reality writing the report single-handed.

When students write their own separate report, or their opinions are attached to the report as a separate statement, the students can make their views clearly and without influence. On the other hand, the external panel will not see how the institution plans to react to the students' opinions. However, there may be cases when this way of organising the report is beneficial. In Finland, a separate student statement is normally attached to the self-evaluation report in the evaluations of operating licences of the polytechnics and in the selection of the centres of excellence. Separate student reports were also used by EVA in a case where the preliminary study had shown that there was no common understanding of the academic discipline. The discipline was in fact understood and practised in a variety of different ways. The external panel and EVA's project team, therefore, needed to ascertain what the discipline meant to the parties involved. This was partly achieved by forming separate groups of students and teachers. This method worked out well. As was hoped, the students contributed with their perspectives of the discipline without being directly influenced by their teachers. In combination with the teachers' self-evaluation reports, a complex and realistic picture of the discipline took form. EVA's project team believed that mixed self-evaluation groups would not have produced such useful results as in this case.

FINHEEC has tried the method of separate self-evaluation processes and reports from students and staff combined with a joint seminar. The case concerns the evaluation of student guidance and counselling in higher education institutions. As the theme is very important to students, a new method that emphasised the dialogue between staff and students was developed for the evaluation. The method consisted of four phases: (1) the staff and students produced their respective 15-page self-evaluation reports, (2) staff and students exchanged reports and produced statements on each other's reports, (3) the external panel visited the selected institutions and organised a joint discussion forum for staff and students, and (4) the external panel wrote an evaluation report on the basis of the evaluation material. The project included a pilot phase to test the method.

Before starting the project, FINHEEC arranged joint training for the higher education institutions and student-nominated contact persons. In addition, the two student organisations arranged a complementary training seminar for student contacts. This seminar gave them an opportunity to discuss the evaluation from the student point of view. The students that had participated in the pilot phase shared their experiences regarding different ways of organising the self-evaluation process.

The local student organisations played a crucial role in organising the self-evaluation processes in individual higher education institutions. In general, a group of two to three members from the student organisation organised the self-evaluation process and compiled the report. The student organisations collected student opinions in a variety of ways: through questionnaires, by arranging group meetings for students from different course levels or by interviewing samples of students from different fields and courses.

The self-evaluation produced a great deal of information concerning the deficiencies and strengths of guidance and counselling, as seen from the staff and student perspectives. According to a FINHEEC follow-up, surveying institutional opinions one year later, the evaluation proved very useful. It led to a better understanding of the whole student guidance process, revealed some deficiencies, identified good practice, and inspired new developmental activities. The participants emphasised that the method contributed to cooperation between staff and students. The evaluation increased the staff's will to co-operate with students and the use of student unions as partners in coming projects.

6.5 Methods of involving a large group of students

In some evaluation projects it can be relevant to collect views on central topics from a large group of students. In all countries there are examples of the evaluation agencies or the higher education institutions collecting such information through questionnaires, etc. These studies often cover topics such as teaching, the organising of a course or programme, learning facilities, the total learning environment, etc. Sometimes this material is a basis for the self-evaluation and other times it is a basis for the external panel.

In Denmark, user surveys are normally conducted among students, graduates or employers in each evaluation⁸. Consultancy firms carry out the user surveys. The user surveys may be qualitative or quantitative depending on the object of the evaluation and the size of the relevant population. The type of user survey is specified in the terms of reference. EVA decides on the focus of the user survey in conjunction with the external panel. Qualitative surveys consist of interviews with individuals or groups, whereas quantitative surveys consist of postal questionnaires, telephone interviews and questionnaires on the Internet.

On the basis of the collected data (statistics or interview minutes) the consultancy firms produce descriptive and analytical reports. The reports form part of EVA's documentation material and are published together with the evaluation report.

User surveys are an important element in the evaluations because they constitute documentation that is produced completely externally in relation to the institutions or programmes under review. Such material thus provides an external perspective for assessing the information provided by the institution in the self-evaluation and during the site visit.

In Norway, the institutions have sometimes taken upon themselves to collect views from a large group of students, as part of the self-evaluation process. This was especially evident in the institutional evaluations of the universities, which showed that many institutions make a considerable effort to involve the students. They solicit student opinions using methods such as interviews, questionnaires, mail boxes, web sites etc. The self-evaluation groups made use of

information from these sources, in addition to course assessments by students and various statistical data. These methods ensure that a large and diverse group of students can make their voices heard on matters that concern them. Such arrangements are reported to be fruitful for the institutions themselves. Some institutions also used the self-evaluation as an opportunity to bring staff, students and leadership together to discuss further development, in meetings or seminars on different topics. The seminars provided extra input to the institutional evaluation follow-ups. According to the institutional action plans received by the former Network Norway Council, several institutions intend to involve students in the institutional evaluation follow-ups.

However, involving a large group of students in the self-evaluation process is not always found to be useful. The institutions or units sometimes found that existing information collected through students' course assessments or various statistical data, already ensured that students' views influenced the self-evaluation in a sufficient way. Gathering and analysing new information from a large group of students also takes considerable time, and the time schedule for the self-evaluations does not always allow for the use of these methods. In some cases, it was difficult to motivate students to participate.

6.6 Institutional experiences

Institutions that have involved students in the self-evaluation process strongly emphasise the importance of their participation. Students may ask questions, raise issues and make suggestions that otherwise would have been left out. Students are part of the teaching process, and normally genuinely interested in the development of their education. Also, the institutions often get concrete issues to follow up. Further, student involvement strengthens the communication and general trust between students, staff and leadership and makes students partners in further development.

The institutional representatives interviewed for this report emphasised the following aspects of student involvement in the self-evaluation:

- If the evaluation includes education, it is impossible to evaluate an institution of higher education without involving the students. Their experiences and views are unique, and cannot be replaced by any other groups.
- Students' self-evaluation is a functional way for a programme to get open and constructive criticism and acknowledgement from students to be used in future development.
- Student involvement in the self-evaluation process motivates students to take part in the follow-up after the evaluation and the normal quality work.
- The organisation of the self-evaluation should be considered case by case. In some evaluations, it is better for the students to produce their own report, while in other evaluations it may support future development if the report is produced in close co-operation between staff and students.

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- There is a risk that only the most active students take part in the self-evaluation which may lead to a bias. The commitment and motivation may also be a problem, as students are seldom rewarded for participating in the self-evaluation.
 - If students are to be involved properly in the self-evaluation process, the schedule given to the institutions must leave sufficient time to organise this.

A quote from a contact from the Agricultural University of Norway can sum up the general attitude to student involvement in quality work expressed in these interviews: *“One might involve students because it is a tradition, because it is politically correct or because the law states their participation is required. However, we involve the students mainly because it is inspiring and we see good, solid results from their involvement. Students are partners and a great resource in this work.”*

7

Student participation on the external panels

This chapter first starts with a discussion on student participation on the external panels. Secondly the practices and experiences in the Nordic countries are given. Then the report turns to some details about the selection of students to the panels, and finally, seminars or training for the panel members are discussed.

Overview of central aspects concerning student participation on the external panels:

Added value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student participation helps to promote that the student's view on quality will be focused on in the panels' work. • Students can assess the self-evaluation report from a student perspective. • Students are experts on students' situation and participants in the educational process; and student views cannot be replaced by any other expertise. • Students on the panel can enhance the interviews with students during the site visit. • Student participation adds legitimacy to the conclusions of the panel for the students at the evaluated institutions.
Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may be hard to find and select students fit for the task. • Regulations may restrict student participation. • Evaluation traditions may restrict student participation.
Examples of good practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection criteria are used to ensure that student panel members have the required expertise. • The national student organisations are involved in nominating students. • A start-up meeting or seminar is held with the panel in which evaluation methods and experiences in general, as well the forthcoming project, are discussed. • The evaluation officer will consult the panel throughout the project, and may especially focus on the student member if necessary. • Evaluation training programmes open to staff and students.

7.1 Reasons for including students or not on the external panels

While student participation in self-evaluation groups or as informants during site visits will arouse no comments, student involvement on the external panels is rarer, and hence probably more controversial. Traditionally, external panels have consisted of experts who are the most highly qualified in the academic world, that is, professors. A consideration when including students on the panels, therefore, is whether they should be considered experts like the other panel members, or have another, special status, for example, as stakeholder representatives. A stakeholder has rights as a concerned party. Depending on the theme of the evaluation, stakeholders may include teachers, employers, regional authorities, politicians and students. The external panel is sometimes referred to as a peer-review group. If students are viewed as co-actors in the education process, they will, in a peer-review model, have a right to be evaluated by their peers.

Up until now, students have not been included on the Danish or Icelandic external panels, while in Finland, Norway and Sweden students are sometimes included. In most countries, external panels consist of experts in a narrow sense. Choosing experts who have well-acknowledged competencies and special expertise within the field to be evaluated has been considered important for the legitimacy of the panel's work. When included on the panels, students have been viewed as stakeholders and as participants. Within higher education they have (at least) one area of expertise: as participants in the educational process. Student views cannot be replaced by any other expertise.

The issue of student participation on external panels has recently been the subject of discussion at EVA and in EVA's Board for its practical consequences, as well as for its fundamental implications. The advantages, in the form of adding student perspectives and increasing legitimacy have been pointed out, as have potential problems. There is a formal obstacle, however: according to the Act of the Danish Evaluation Institute, members of the external panels must have special professional expertise within the field to be evaluated. Also, all members must be independent of the programmes/institutions evaluated. A student member can hardly fulfil these legal requirements, and the student's possible role must, therefore, necessarily be defined otherwise.

EVA's arguments for student participation on external panels are:

- Students on external panels can contribute with first hand knowledge of student perspectives of the education/institution; this is useful for planning the evaluation, and helps to ensure that the student perspective is kept in mind throughout the process.
- At the site visits, students on external panels can give the other students a feeling of being heard and of their views being seriously considered; they

can put questions directed at the students' real situation concerning the setting/atmosphere and the quality of the education or programme.

- Students on external panels offer them the opportunity for direct contact with "what's going on" in the evaluation project.
- Student influence on the report may improve the chance of it being used as a tool for educational development.
- Students on external panels can help to further ensure the general legitimacy of the evaluation process and of the results for the students of the evaluated education or institution.

However, EVA has also raised some questions: Can students assert themselves within a group of professional experts – or will they be 'hostages' of the other members' views? EVA appoints members for the evaluation groups who have strong professional qualifications and who are not representatives of organisations. EVA must remain impartial and perform the evaluation work independently of the organisations. If students are appointed by students' organisations, how can EVA ensure an independent and impartial evaluation, and how will the other interest groups react?

In a pilot project started in 2002, EVA has included a student in the panel evaluating German studies. So far, the experience is very good.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland bases its evaluation system on the European Pilot Projects for evaluating quality in higher education from 1995. A regulation on the quality control of university instruction was passed in 1999 and the provision on the composition of the external panel did not allow involving students. Currently, the regulations are under revision and this provision will probably be more open and may leave more room for including students on the external panels.

FINHEEC always includes students in subject, programme or thematic evaluations. In those Finnish projects where the evaluation is targeted simultaneously at the university and polytechnic sectors, there may be two student representatives, one from each sector on the external panel. In such cases, the student members alternate in the site visits according to the institution being visited.

The practice of the former Network Norway Council has varied from one evaluation to another according to the focus of each evaluation project. When the former Network Norway Council started its evaluation projects five years ago, evaluation by a traditional expert panel was generally considered to be the model both theoretically and methodologically. However, there has been a shift towards viewing students as stakeholders. Student participation on the external panels was stated as desirable in the Council's strategy decided in 2000. For the future, NOKUT has decided in favour of student participation on the panels of institutional accreditation and on audit panels. In Sweden, students are always included in subject, programme or thematic evaluations as well as in audits.

Even when students are, on principle, included on external panels, they may not be so in all types of evaluation. In Finland students are not included on evaluation panels of institutional evaluations of universities or in accreditation of professional courses. NOKUT will not include students on the expert panels accrediting new programmes, and in Sweden students are frequently not included in accreditations when a university or a university college apply for the right to award a special degree.

The reasons for not including students in certain situations vary. Evaluation of higher education is multi-faceted and evolving with, historically, different procedures for different types of evaluation. This is the case with the Finnish institutional evaluations of universities which were launched by the predecessor of FINHEEC. These evaluations were planned on an international basis without student representation and FINHEEC followed this tradition.

There may also be practical and/or economic reasons for not including students. That is partly why FINHEEC does not include students on the external panels in the accreditation of professional courses. Also, in these cases the evaluation team is very small, consisting only of one pedagogical expert and one expert on the subject area. The character of the object of evaluation may also determine student participation. As the programmes being accredited are in the planning stage, NOKUT takes the view that they ought to be assessed by a small expert committee.

Overview of student participation on external panels in different types of evaluations:

Country	Student participation on external panels in different types of evaluations
Denmark	Programme/subject evaluation (tested in a pilot study)
Finland	Audits, institutional evaluations of polytechnics, programme/subject evaluations, thematic evaluations, selection of quality units
Iceland	Students have not participated on external panels of any type of evaluation up to now.
Norway	NOKUT appoints students to the panels for accreditation of institutions and to audit panels, but not in subject- or programme accreditations. The Network Norway Council appointed students to the panels in institutional evaluations of universities, sometimes in programme/subject evaluations and sometimes in thematic evaluations.
Sweden	Sometimes in accreditation when a university applies for a degree and in thematic evaluations, always in audits and programme/subject evaluations.

When students are included they take part in the work as equal members of the external panel. The experiences are mainly positive. In most evaluations, the student representative has been active, motivated and has integrated well into the panel, although, in some cases, the student has been a silent member of the group. However, this applies to other panel members as well. Student participation on the panels tends to strengthen the relevance of the evaluation for the students. Students often have the most up-to-date information, for ex-

ample, about matters concerning student financial support, or implementation of the Bologna process, including ECTS, and the other panel members may consult the students on these matters. Indeed, the panels' student members are often given special responsibility for issues that they feel especially strongly about. They may also, with good results, ask most of the questions when students are interviewed during the site visit.

Normally, the rest of the group respects the students' views and accepts them as positive contributions to the panels. The other members of the panel have in most cases been genuinely concerned with the students' views. In most cases only one student has been included in the expert panel. In a survey of attitudes among Norwegian students who had served on panels, they confirmed that they had been accepted by the other panel members but almost unanimously said that there ought to be at least two students to make it easier to make their voices heard. However, this wish can be hard to fulfil, as there is a limited number of members on the panels.

Representation on the external panel ensures student influence on the writing of the external report. There is a tendency, however, for undergraduate students to contribute somewhat less than the others.

7.2 Selecting students to serve on the panels

Like all other panel members, students are selected on the basis of individual ability. In Finland and Norway, the decision is made by the evaluation authorities but the students are suggested by the student organisations.

In Sweden, on the other hand, the institutions may suggest evaluators and this right extends to the suggestion of students, but the Agency decides the composition of the expert panel. Whereas the professionals suggested cannot be from the institution's own staff, institutions may (and usually do) suggest their own students. The institutions are instructed to check the names with the local student organisation, however. Obviously, a student will never take part in the evaluation of his/her own institution. Students are nominated by the national student organisation when they are part of audit panels.

Selection criteria may include good knowledge of the education system, good knowledge of evaluations, and experience from decision-making bodies or student organisations. Student panel members are often expected to have experience of the field or subject, at the same level of study as the one being evaluated. Also, they should have sufficient experience but preferably not be taking final exams because of the workload. Naturally, the criteria vary with the type of evaluation. In audits and institutional evaluations, experience from student organisations and decision-making bodies at the institutional level is essential. Frequently, the students chosen have considerable experience from boards, other decision-making bodies and student organisations and find that these experiences are a great advantage for their work on the panel.

7.3 Training or seminars arranged for the panels include the students

All the Nordic countries arrange an introduction meeting or seminar for the panels at the start of an evaluation. The seminar/meeting is used to discuss the theory, methods and practice of evaluation, plan the individual project and give other relevant information. This meeting is also used to ensure that there is a common understanding about the mandate and the role of the panel. In those Nordic countries having student representation, students are introduced to the work alongside the rest of the panel.

In addition, FINHEEC and the National Union of Finnish Polytechnic Students on one occasion organised a seminar, targeted at potential participants. Also, FINHEEC has organised an evaluation course, intended for QA personnel but open to students.

Feedback to the panel given by the evaluation officer throughout the evaluation is also important in this context. The beginning and end of each site visit are important, providing an opportunity to discuss the contribution of each panel member. Another opportunity for feedback is during the writing of the evaluation report. According to the response from the students, the information and training offered are considered sufficient by some but inadequate by others, especially when training meetings are held the day before a site visit.

The need to learn about, for example, the legislation regulating the activities of institutions of higher education will vary between panel members. Students may need additional and/or separate introduction. On the other hand, as was pointed out earlier, students frequently know more about some aspects of education. Perhaps the most important difference between students and other panel members is their respective status in the academic world. This difference is likely to affect the group dynamics of the panels. This problem cannot be fully prevented by the agencies' introductions, and needs to be monitored throughout the evaluation.

Students have expressed the view that a clear mandate, sufficient time to reach consensus and defined individual projects are important features of a successful evaluation project. Rather than separate training programmes for students, there seems to be a need for a seminar discussing evaluation methods and experience. Also, experience from student panel members ought to be brought back to the student organisations. The national student unions should find ways to ensure that the experience of students is passed on to the next student generation. FINHEEC intends to produce an evaluator's handbook that may also serve to pass on experience.

Ultimately, the ability to evaluate requires practice. Therefore, it might be a good idea for students to accompany and observe another project on one of their site visits. Another idea is to establish networks of students who have served on external panels and can share their experience with beginners.

8

Students as informants during the site visits

When the external panels conduct site visits, it is common practice in the Nordic countries to meet students. There are two important purposes of a site visit. One is to subject the contents of the self-evaluation report to critical examination by the use of interviews. The other is to hear if the students have views on and knowledge about problems that have not been identified in the self-evaluation report.

This chapter tries to single out some examples of good practice on how to conduct the student interviews.

Overview of central aspects concerning student involvement during the site visit:

Added value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewing students validates the self-evaluation report. • It is interesting to compare students' answers with the answers from other groups. • Students may have views on and knowledge about problems that have not been identified in the self-evaluation report. • Students can assess the coherence (or lack of coherence) of the study programme from a user perspective.
Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers may be biased by a few very critical or positive views. • Sufficient information and time for the students to prepare for the interviews, as well as motivation to invest that time from the students themselves can be a critical point.
Examples of good practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses of a specified selection process to ensure that representative group/s of students are interviewed. • Inform the students to be interviewed of the evaluation in advance and give them time to prepare for the interviews. • Interview students with no staff present. • Interview student representatives on relevant decision-making bodies. If this is done, they should be interviewed as a separate group. • If first-year students are to be interviewed, this should be done in a separate group. This also applies if post-graduates or PhD-students are to be interviewed. • If there is a student member of the external panel, it is a good idea if he or she plays an active part in the student interviews.

8.1 Reasons for interviewing students

The site visit interviews are generally regarded as one of the most important ways of involving students. In most cases, the students interviewed have been open and committed to the development of their studies and are not afraid to identify problems. Students can often confirm, deny or differentiate the conditions, relations and views expressed in the self-evaluation report. They are usually not limited by strategic considerations of, for example, employment, so it is interesting to compare their answers with the answers from other groups, such as leaders and teaching staff. Students can assess the coherence (or lack of coherence) of the study programme from a user perspective. Furthermore, they may have specific views concerning the workload, the didactic qualifications of the staff, the coherence of a programme, whether the students are familiar with the goals, aims and the organisation of the curricula, the facilities, etc.

Interviewing the students is seen as obvious in the Nordic countries. Students are regarded as stakeholders and participants. Also, involving students in the site visit may bring about student involvement in the local development following the evaluation. Especially, interviews with local student organisations may help future development.⁹

Students who are asked to participate in the planning of an evaluation project, as well as students who participate in the self-evaluation groups or on the external panels, are likely to be chosen from an active “elite” of students. The site visit offers an opportunity to ensure that students who are not active in decision-making bodies are also heard. However, site visit interviews can only involve a limited group of student informants, although there have been cases where the students meeting the panel have collected reports and opinions from their fellow students prior to the interview.

8.2 Interviews

The site visit normally takes one day, except in Norway and Finland where it may last up to three days. The external panel meets and interviews students as one of several groups.

The order in which interviews with different groups are conducted may be worth considering. If students are among the first groups to be interviewed, their answers may provide material for the questions given to other groups. Also, interviewing students early on in the site visit helps focus attention on student concerns. On the other hand, it can also be interesting and useful to interview students after the other groups, and then compare their answers to the information from other groups interviewed.

⁹ This will be dependent on the type of student organisation one finds in the higher education institutions.

Depending on the total number of interviews, the student interview may vary in length from one to two hours. The number of students interviewed varies between countries and from one type of evaluation to another. In Denmark, Iceland and Sweden it is general practice that the external panel meets eight to twelve students during the site visit. In Norway and Finland, the number of students interviewed has varied from six to sixty depending on the type of evaluation. In the institutional evaluations of the universities in both countries a large number of students were interviewed, as the panels wanted to have meetings with students from different faculties. The panels also met the formal student representatives on relevant decision-making bodies and students from the student welfare organisation¹⁰.

As a rule, students are never interviewed in the presence of staff¹¹. Sometimes, members of staff have asked permission to stay as observers, but this is usually not allowed. When a panel has meetings with students, the leadership and faculty staff at the same time, the arrangement tends to restrain the students. They are less creative and less critical than normally is the case. If first-year students are to be interviewed, this should be done in a separate group. This group has the highest dropout rates, and is, for that reason alone, important. They may also be reluctant to speak if interviewed alongside more experienced students. Similarly, if post-graduates or PhD students are to be interviewed, they also ought to be interviewed as a separate group.

There are examples of the students arranging meetings to discuss their collective views on the quality of the education before meeting the external panel. However, one cannot expect these discussions to take place, and normally each student represents only his or her own views. Sometimes the students are well informed about the evaluation project and have had the necessary time to prepare for the meeting with the panel. At other times, however, the students have been told of the meeting the same day, even though the institution is asked to hand out the self-evaluation report prior to the site visit. In order to ensure that the students can prepare for the interviews, the evaluation agencies sometimes ask for the names of the students one or two weeks prior to the interviews and also send out a list of items in advance. Nevertheless, there have also been instances when unprepared students have contributed considerably during the interviews.

In Finland, the student member of the external panel plays a big part in the student interviews. Frequently, he or she is the one who asks most of the questions. In one Finnish project, the student member chaired this interview session. This melted the ice, as the students being interviewed recognised the appreciation and role given to their peer on the panel.

¹⁰ These organisations are mainly concerned with student health, living accommodation, etc.

¹¹ The rule does not apply to the interview with the self-evaluation group which most often consists of both staff and students.

8.3 Selection of students to be interviewed

All the Nordic evaluation agencies normally send guidelines to the institutions suggesting criteria for student selection. As meeting a representative group of students is important for the result of the evaluation, the selection of the students is described in some detail:

- EVA forwards selection criteria to the institution under evaluation. The criteria depend on the focus of the evaluation, which can necessitate meeting with representatives from all parts of the student body, from first-year students to graduates. EVA emphasises obtaining a representative student group, and normally chooses them by random selection. Selection criteria are established within the framework of the individual evaluation. Student members of the self-evaluation groups cannot participate in any of the other groups that are interviewed. EVA's experiences with this method are good.
- According to the instructions given by FINHEEC, students are to be selected by the local student organisations. The idea is to avoid the selection of only students that are positive towards the study programme or are academically successful. However, Finland has experienced that when there are many evaluations simultaneously taking place at the same institution or programme, the task of recruiting student representatives may be very demanding for a small student organisation. It has proved to be especially difficult to recruit post-graduate students for the interviews since they have no umbrella organisations and many of them conduct their research studies outside of the higher education institutions. Both sexes and different age groups are to be selected, as well as students from different subspecialties and course levels. They should be interested in contributing to the development of education, but do not necessarily have to be active in the students' organisations. Ideally, the group should be a mixture of students with knowledge of the study or programme under evaluation and activists representing broader views.
- In Iceland, the importance of the student group being as representative as possible of the whole student body in the field being evaluated is stressed. There are normally approximately three student representatives from each cohort (BA/BSc level – MA/MSc level -graduates). The Ministry has selected students either by having the higher education institution nominate them, or by having the students themselves nominate their representatives. The latter has proved to work better and has been the method used in recent evaluations: the Ministry contacts the student organisations and asks the students to nominate students to be interviewed.
- The former Network Norway Council normally sent a letter to the institution defining the different groups the panel wanted to meet and the selection criteria for the groups. Sometimes the institutions were asked to select the student representatives. On other occasions the institutions were asked

to see that the student organisations themselves selected students for the interviews. As in Finland, the idea was to avoid having only students positive towards the study programme or academically successful selected. Sex and length of completed study were normal criteria, but the selection criteria and the way the interviews were carried out varied with the type of evaluation.

- The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education informs the institution that it wishes to speak to a group of students, representing different levels and subspecialties. The selection procedures vary greatly: students may be hand-picked, those who happen to be there the day of the site visit may be asked, a request for volunteers may be sent by e-mail or posted on a bulletin board, teachers may set aside time to allow student groups to choose their representatives, the request may be handled by the student union etc.

Regardless of the selection method, the external panel normally checks how the students have been selected and what they know about the evaluation process by making these among the first questions of the interview.

9

Follow-up of evaluations

In this chapter attention is drawn to the extent in which students are involved in the evaluation follow-up conducted by the evaluation agencies.

Overview of central aspects concerning student involvement in follow-up of evaluations:

Added value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student involvement in the agencies' follow-up may bring about student involvement in the local development at the institutions or units evaluated. • Student involvement may add importance to student relevant topics in the follow-up at the institutional or unit level.
Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods of involving students at this stage may not be developed.
Examples of good practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A public seminar to spread the results of the evaluation can be a good way of starting relevant debates. Students should be invited. • Invitation of students to meetings or seminars at the evaluated institutions or units. • Action plans at an institutional or unit level makes it possible to check student relevance and planned student involvement. • The evaluation agencies can encourage student organisations to play an active role in follow-up activities at the institutional or unit level.¹² • A follow-up evaluation project some time after the first evaluation is a good way to find out what actually happened at the institutional or unit level.

9.1 Immediate or short-term follow-up

In Denmark, Finland and Norway, a hearing or seminar is held at the time of publication of the report by the external panel¹³. Typically, the seminar is open to all interested parties. The main objective is to provide an opportunity for a discussion between the panel and the representatives of the units that have been evaluated. The seminars are meant to be a source of inspiration for further development at the evaluated units and other similar institutions. Sometimes there is a public seminar in order to inform about the evaluation results and start a general debate of the evaluated programme. After the seminar, the evaluation officer or the panel members have sometimes been invited to indi-

¹² This is dependent on the existence of a representative student organisation at the higher education institutions.

¹³ In Norway and Finland the seminar is held shortly after publication. In Denmark, there is a written hearing before publication; a seminar may be held after publication.

vidual institutions to present the results of the evaluation to their staff and students.

In Finland, in addition to the normal public seminar, student members of the external panels have presented the evaluation results to their fellow-students in seminars organised by the student organisations.

In Iceland, a follow-up takes place within three months of the evaluation, where the evaluated higher education institution has to report to the Ministry on how it intends to make use of the evaluation results to improve its work. It is up to the institution to determine to what extent they include students in this process.

The former Network Norway Council also used to collect action plans from the institutions. The plans were sent to the Ministry, who would use them in its annual meetings with the institutions.

In Sweden, a seminar is held somewhat later, 3–6 months after the publication of the report. Only representatives of the evaluated units are invited. The institution is free to send someone else, but it is usual to send the evaluation contact. The panel is also invited to participate, including the student members. In a few instances, students from evaluated units have participated in the seminars.

9.2 Long-term follow-up

The evaluation agencies vary in how they check that the institutions follow-up. In Denmark, Iceland and Norway, the responsibility lies with the relevant ministry.

FINHEEC and the National Agency for Higher Education arrange follow-up evaluations two or three years after the publication of the report. The follow-up evaluations, solicited by the Ministry or the evaluation authority, may be based on a plan from the institutions, describing how they intend to use the evaluation results to improve their work. In Sweden the institutions of higher education are asked how they have dealt with problems identified in the report. The follow-up is not specifically directed at students since they are not (legally) responsible for solving the problems.

So far, Finnish follow-up evaluations have covered institutional evaluations of universities and programme evaluations. In the former, students have been represented in every part of the follow-up evaluation procedure except the external panel. In the programme evaluations, a unified method for follow-up is still being planned, but in the ones conducted so far, students' opinions have only been collected in some instances. As a general principle, FINHEEC encourages student organisations to play an active role in the follow-up activities at the institutional, departmental and programme level.

In Iceland, there is also a follow-up that takes place two years after each evaluation. This follow-up procedure has not been put into practice yet, but the Ministry will encourage the involvement of students in this process.

APPENDIX: Overview of student involvement

	Student involvement in				
	Norway	Finland	Iceland	Sweden	Denmark
Formal positions	NNC: 2 students out of 13 council members. NOKUT: 1 student out of 5 board members	2 students out of 12 council members. Student members on two subcommittees	No Board or Council and therefore no students	2 students on the board. Reference group of students	4 students out of 27 members in Committee of Representatives
Planning of evaluations	Through council or board membership	Through council membership and students in steering groups	Not so far	Some influence on long-term plans, but not on annual plans	Sometimes through preliminary dialogue with self-evaluation group
Self-evaluation	Encourages institutions to involve students. Institutions' responsibility how to achieve this	Encourages institutions to involve students. Institutions' responsibility how to achieve this	Students are to be involved. Institutions' responsibility how to achieve this	Encourages institutions to involve students. Institutions' responsibility how to achieve this	Encourages institutions to involve students. Institutions' responsibility how to achieve this
External panels	NNR: students in 4 out of 9 evaluations	Yes, except institutional evaluation of universities	Not so far	Always	Not so far. Ongoing pilot project
Writing of the report	Through panel membership	Through panel membership	Responsibility of the external panel. Students have not been involved until now	Through panel membership	Responsibility of the external panel. Written by EVA staff
Site visit	Student participation required. Students are normally selected by student organisations. Selection criteria from evaluation agency.	Are selected by local student organisations. Selection criteria from evaluation agency	Student participation required. Most often selected by student organisations. Students from each cohort.	Are selected in different ways, decided by the institutions. Selection criteria from evaluation agency	Student participation required. Selection criteria from evaluation agency. Random selection.
Follow-up	Students are invited to publication seminars and sometimes take part in the institutions' follow-up.	The follow-up evaluations involve students (as above)	Possible student involvement through the self-evaluation group	Panel members invited to meeting with the institutions	Possible student involvement through the self-evaluation group