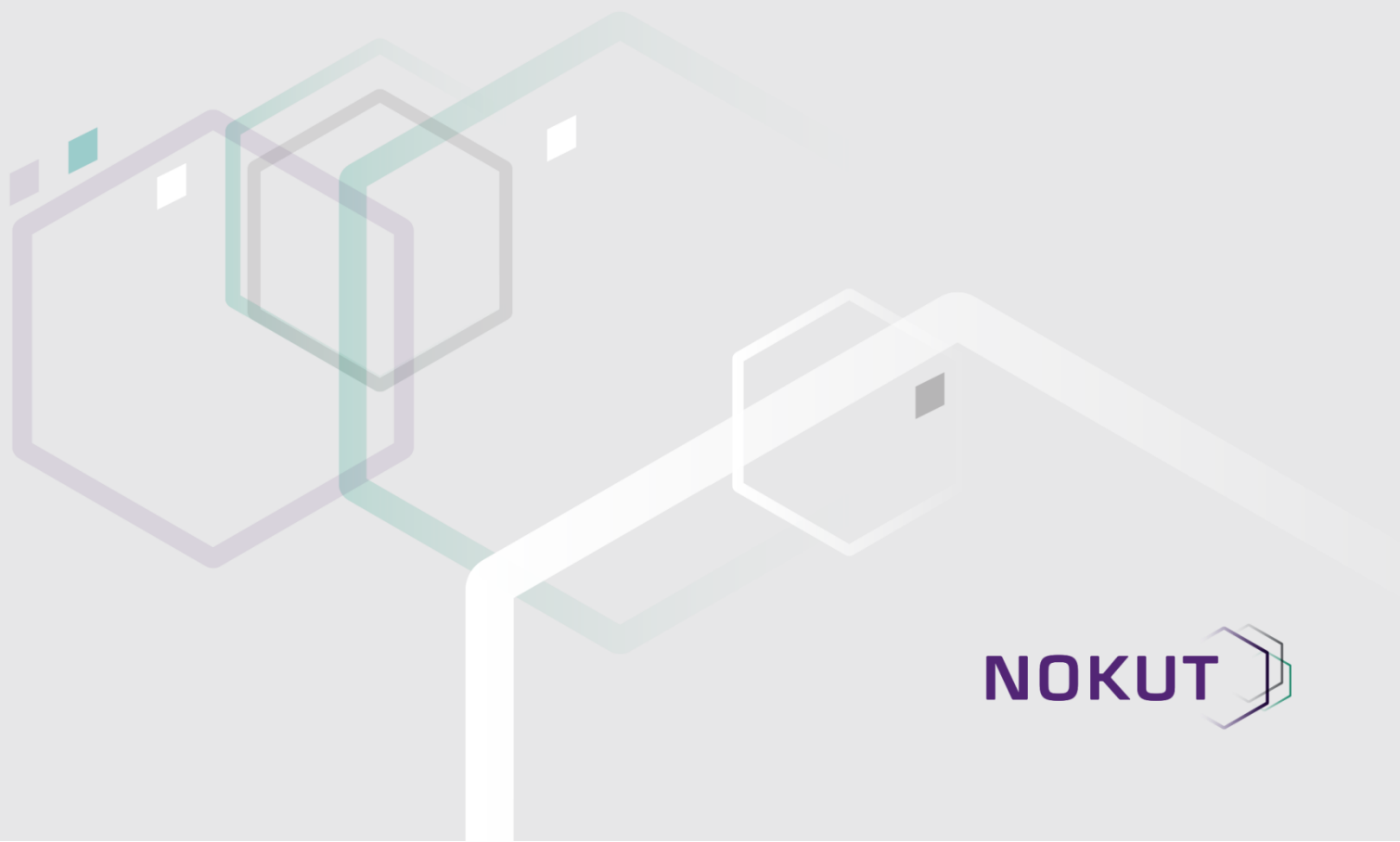


NOKUT's summaries

NOKUT's evaluation of institutions' quality assurance systems for educational provision (audit)

Summary of analysis of the second round of audits (2009–2016)



NOKUT 

This is a summary of NOKUT's analysis of the second round of evaluations of institutions' quality assurance systems for educational provision (institutional quality assurance audit). NOKUT conducted evaluations of quality assurance systems at 62 higher education institutions between 2009–2016. Of these, expert panels recommended that 55 higher education institutions have their quality assurance systems approved by NOKUT. In seven evaluations, expert panels have found significant deficiencies in the institutions' quality assurance systems. NOKUT conducted new evaluations of six of these institutions, and each have resulted in the approval of the institutions' quality assurance systems.

The analysis emphasises the use of documentation and how the evaluations have been conducted. NOKUT's reports from the quality assurance audits have not been compiled with the purpose of comparing the systems or quality work of the institutions. Therefore, this report does not provide a basis for this type of analysis.

In addition to information about the evaluations, the report consists of information from three types of text sources:

- A statement from institutions' management about the status, challenges and successes of the quality assurance activities
- The expert panel reports
- Institutions' statements to the reports

Based on the information, institutions have faced a number of common issues with their quality assurance activities, which were uncovered in the second round of audits. This has included problems with documentation, reporting and analysis, student evaluations, academic development and quality assurance of programmes and courses and strengthening students' participation in quality assurance and enhancement activities.

In general, the evaluation of educational quality assurance systems serves as a control as to whether institutions' own control with educational quality functions satisfactorily. Expert panels have considered whether institutions are aware of the quality of their educational provision and how the knowledge they gather through their quality assurance practices is used to improve their education. Expert panels have also provided recommendations for the further development of institutions' quality assurance activities, but the core issue has been whether institutions' own quality assurance satisfies the Ministry of Education's requirements and NOKUT's evaluation criteria.

NOKUT has also emphasised that quality assurance systems are the property of each institution, and it is the institution itself, based on its size, professional profile and other local needs, which must determine how to design their quality assurance systems. In order to be able to make satisfactory assessments, experts have had to take into account institutions' unique profiles and logic, and in their assessments, they have worked to balance both the authorities' requirements and institutions' needs.

Based on this element in the evaluations, conducting two site visits has been a strength in the methodology of these assessments. Two site visits have provided for a longer timeframe of contact with the institution and time for experts to process the information gathered. Prior to and during the initial visit, expert panels have been able to concentrate on the documented work with quality assurance for the institution as a whole. Following the initial visit, and during the main visit, expert panels generally assessed the quality assurance

with individual study programmes. Inspection on the programme level has been important in gaining a picture of quality assurance in practice, and in many cases, it has also been able to demonstrate the variation in quality assurance practices across the institution. The impression is that a more defined scope, first examining the overall picture, then different parts, has been an advantage for the experts, which are tasked with recommending whether the institutions' quality assurance systems should be approved or not.

It is always difficult to measure the effect and benefit of this type of evaluation. In the analysis, only the institutions' statements to the expert panels' reports are summarised. NOKUT has observed that most institutions are positive to the evaluations and express that they will follow up the recommendations in the reports. However, as a measure of the overall value of the evaluations, these statements have clear limitations. The statements are written as a document that accompanies the expert panels' reports for decision-making in NOKUT's board, and it is common that panels' recommendations for approval (or not) and the advice of the experts influence institutions' comments.

As part of NOKUT's internal quality assurance, we have used two additional sources of information about institutions' perceptions of the evaluations: answers to questions about the evaluation process obtained shortly after the main visit and before the draft report is sent to the institution, and comments from the institutions obtained when the preliminary report is sent to the institution to correct any factual errors or misunderstandings. The caseworkers have to some extent followed along with what is published about the evaluation on institutions' websites, and they have received oral and written comments about the evaluations after NOKUT has reached a decision on the report.

The evaluations have also been highlighted as sufficiently calibrated, as they are limited in time and scope. The process has also been perceived as predictable. The impression is that many view the "external approach" which the evaluations have provided as very useful for the institutions. The discussions with expert panels have consistently received positive feedback. NOKUT's visits give rise to a more thorough self-examination than institutions' standard and critical review of their own quality work.