

THE QUALITY CONVERGENCE STUDY PROJECT

SELF ANALYSIS DOCUMENT FROM THE NORWEGIAN AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EDUCATION (NOKUT)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. The Norwegian system of quality assurance

1. The responsibility for educational quality rests with the individual institution.
2. The structure of the Norwegian quality assurance system is dualistic

A
Evaluation/accreditation of
the quality assurance system
of individual HEIs.

B
Evaluation/accreditation of
institutions and programmes.

3. Accreditation and evaluation procedures shall be so designed that the institutions can benefit from them in their quality assurance and development work. This underpins the "good will" of NOKUT to contribute to quality development.
4. Course and programme assessment conducted by students is mandatory and part of the quality assurance system.
5. NOKUT is an independent state body with its own Board. Political and administrative control is exercised by the Ministry of Education and Research.

B. Institutional autonomy

1. The universities and specialised universities in Norway have a long tradition of institutional autonomy in research and teaching, while the university colleges have a shorter previous history. For the latter, institutional autonomy has increased gradually over the last couple of decades as the colleges have been given more responsibility and influence on how to allocate resources, decide study programmes, appoint academic staff, etc.
2. Higher education providers can be of two types: State (public) and non-state (private). Only a smaller percentage (in 2003: approx. 11 % /20.000) of the students attended private institutions.

C. Students

1. Students hold one (+ one deputy) of the seven seats on the Board of NOKUT.
2. Audit procedures and procedures for institutional accreditation imply site visits with mandatory student participation
3. Students hold a minimum of 20 percent of the seats on the board of HEIs.

4. Students have at least two representatives on the governing bodies of departments and basic units in the HEIs.

D. Teaching staff

1. Up to the late 1970s, academic staff in public sector was appointed by the Ministry. Full professors were appointed by the Government (the King) as civil servants. During the 1980s the authority to appoint academic staff was gradually decentralised and transferred to the Board of HE institutions. Before these changes were introduced, there used to be a fixed number of professorships. One consequence of this new regime has been an immense increase in the number of full professors at Norwegian HE institutions over the last couple of decades.
2. Academic staff is in principle appointed for lifetime. New proposals as to organising institutions of HE might threaten this tradition. One scenario is that we will see more differentiation between members of the academic staff, some spending relatively more time on teaching, while others do relatively more research, which contributes to more flexibility.

E. Programmes

1. As part of The Quality Reform in HE in Norway, the HEIs have made an immense effort in restructuring their programmes from the old degree structure (4 + 1 ½ - 2 +3) into the new one (3+2+3) adopted from the Bologna Process. The new degree structure was fully implemented in 2003. Still various professional qualifications are of 4-6 years duration.
2. All universities and specialised universities owned by the state have "self-accrediting" powers for all their programmes, while university colleges have the general powers to accredit programmes on bachelor degree level only.
3. Non-accredited institutions have to apply NOKUT for accreditation of any new programme or course.
4. The implementation of Diploma Supplement has improved the information about the programmes and the individual students' background and competence.
5. It is assumed that the system of cyclical audits will disclose weak points of the internal quality system and procedures, as well as in academic programmes.

1. Background

1.1 The size and scope of the Norwegian higher education system

Higher education in Norway consists of all accredited education (courses and programmes) offered at state- and privately owned HEIs¹, respectively regulated by the Universities and Colleges Act and the Act of 11 June 1986 relating to the recognition of study programmes at private colleges, with amendments in 2002. Entrance to such institutions is normally gained on the basis of upper secondary education. With the exception of some private university colleges, all are state-run, but have considerable academic and administrative autonomy. Public higher education institutions include four universities, six specialised university institutions, 26 state university colleges and two national university colleges of the arts. These institutions carry out research and offer courses leading to academic degrees. The degrees, professional qualifications, regulated titles awarded by the institutions and specifications of the length of each degree course are all laid down in a Royal Decree of 11 October 2002.

The aim of the state university colleges is to make higher education more widely available while increasing the amount of academic expertise available to the different regions of Norway. The 26 university colleges primarily offer shorter courses of a more vocational and professional orientation than those offered by the universities. Degree programmes normally run for three to four years. In addition to bachelor's degrees in teacher education, engineering, health and social work, the university colleges also offer undergraduate courses in different subjects and areas of higher education. The colleges make an important contribution to the decentralisation of higher education. Many students combine courses at the colleges with courses at universities. A lot of university colleges now offer Master's degrees. Some of them have been given the right to grant doctorates. The university colleges are also engaged in research and development work including development work within the arts.

There are 26 private higher education institutions with one or more recognised study programmes. 90% of these have only few students.

From 1986 to 2001 the number of students increased by 100 per cent, and for the time being altogether approximately 180000 students attend higher education institutions in Norway. 20000 (11%) of these study at private university colleges, while approximately 75000 students attend universities and university colleges respectively. Students at specialised universities number up to 8500, while the two art colleges count about 750. In addition to this, approximately 15000 Norwegians study abroad with the support of the State Educational Loan Fund, and about 9000 foreign nationals study in Norway with the support from the same financial source.

1.2 The Norwegian system of quality assurance

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, NOKUT, was established by the Storting in 2002 and commenced its activities on 1 January 2003². NOKUT is an independent government body. Through evaluation, accreditation and recognition of quality systems,

¹ This web address: <http://www.study-norway.net/> will furnish you with more information on HE in Norway.

² More specific information about the internal organisation of NOKUT, its board and sections can be picked up at these web addresses respectively:

<http://www.nokut.no/sw452.asp>

<http://www.nokut.no/sw454.asp>

institutions and course provisions, the purpose of NOKUT is to supervise and help to develop the quality of higher education in Norway. In addition, NOKUT considers individual applications for general recognition of foreign qualifications. As the Norwegian ENIC-NARIC center NOKUT is also responsible for providing foreign institutions and partners with information on the Norwegian educational system and the system for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.

From 1 January 2003 accreditation is mandatory for all higher education that may qualify for – or contribute towards – national titles and degrees. In this sense accreditation now fulfils the function that was formerly served by the Ministry, taking academic recognition out of the sphere of government and transferring it to NOKUT. This new way of organising QA in HEIs is based on the notion that academics know best what academic quality is and should be, while the Ministry decides the funding formula based on political and societal needs for HE. As a consequence, when for instance funding is scarce and at the same time global, the priority work has to be done within each institution of higher education, and partly based on the principle of supply and demand. Hopefully, this will make institutions of HE more efficient and dynamic in their teaching, research and developmental work. It could also be argued that the new way of organising QA-work in Norway, with NOKUT as a supervisor, complies fairly well with the principle of subsidiarity.

All state institutions of higher education and all higher education courses and programmes that were recognised by the end of 2002 automatically received status as 'accredited' from the beginning of 2003. The Universities and Colleges Act defines accreditation like this:

Accreditation means a professional assessment as to whether an institution of higher education - or education that the institution provides - fulfils a given set of standards. Accreditation shall be based on an evaluation that is undertaken by external experts appointed by the agency (NOKUT). Accreditation is a prerequisite for offering educational programmes within the authority of the present Act.

1.3 Terminology

What is evaluation? There is no widely agreed-upon definition of evaluation. Some authors equate evaluation with measurement. Others define evaluation as the assessment of the extent to which program objectives have been attained. For some, evaluation is synonymous to professional value judgment. While others argue that it is essentially a political activity.

In Norway evaluation in HE is a broader, more general term than accreditation. The latter has a specific aim, which is to assess whether a defined quality standard is met. For this purpose an evaluation is always carried out, but not necessarily an evaluation in the 'classical' sense, i.e. including a site visit. Accreditation processes must always rely on a set of defined standards and external judgement. Most other types of evaluations have other and broader (usually more 'developmental') aims. On the other hand, their findings and recommendations may be less authoritative and binding for the institution. The institution itself decides what consequences they will have. In practice, however, 'evaluations' and accreditation processes are quite similar, using similar techniques. And there is no reason why accreditation processes may not also have 'developmental' features and objectives. Thus evaluation in some form will always be a part of accreditation processes in the present system of quality assurance in Norway. In section 12 of The Universities and Colleges Act NOKUT's purpose and definition is put like this:

- 1. The Body shall be an independent state body that by means of accreditation and evaluation shall control the quality of Norwegian institutions that provide higher education, and approve qualifications awarded by institutions that do not fall within the scope of the present Act. Accreditation and evaluation procedures shall be so*

designed that the institutions can benefit from them in their quality assurance and development work.

2. *For the purposes of this Act, accreditation shall be understood to mean a professional assessment as to whether a higher education institution and the courses provided by this institution fulfil a given set of standards. The accreditation shall be based on evaluation conducted by external experts appointed by the Body. Accreditation is a precondition for provision by the institution of courses established pursuant to sections 45 and 46.*

Summary

- NOKUT is an independent state body.
- In the Norwegian scene evaluation and accreditation is considered to be two sides of the same coin.
- Accreditation shall be based on evaluation conducted by external experts, who are supposed to be neutral and objective in their assessments.
- Accreditation and evaluation procedures shall be so designed that the institutions can benefit from them in their quality assurance and development work. This underpins the “good will” of NOKUT to contribute to quality development.

1.4 Structure

The Norwegian system for evaluation, quality assurance and accreditation is dualistic in its structure. On the one hand there are audit procedures linked up to cyclic examinations of the quality assurance system in every individual accredited institution of HE. However, the responsibility for all aspects of educational quality rests with the individual institution, i.e. the institutions must themselves both internally and externally be ready to document whatever quality aspect, for instance how teaching and learning resources are allocated and how teaching and learning processes are evaluated, in a transparent way. There are no specific recommendations or guidelines from NOKUT to HEIs outside what is laid down in the set of criteria for evaluation of quality assurance systems. The “application” and thereafter the annual/cyclical reports serve as institutional self-evaluation documents and are prerequisites for every audit. The audit process is intended first and foremost to lead to and stimulate enhancement. At the same time a successful audit process shall throw light on circumstances that need to be gone deeper into, and thus be the basis and state the reason for implementing projects of particular evaluations or revision of accreditation, for instance in cases where student outcomes show decreasing quality. This may be seen as the control function of audit.

On the other hand there is a system for evaluations, accreditation and reaccreditations of institutions and programmes. To attain institutional accreditation either as a university college, specialised university or as a university, it is a prerequisite that the quality system is examined and accepted according to NOKUT’s standards.

It is also possible to apply for accreditation of academic programmes/degrees without having obtained institutional accreditation. If you don’t have status as an accredited institution in one of the three categories, any new provision has to be accredited by NOKUT as illustrated in figure 1.

"Self-accrediting" powers	Universities (state (4) / private (0))	Specialised universities (state (6)/ private (0))	Accredited university colleges (state (26)/ private (0))	Non-accredited private colleges (26)
"Bachelor level"				
Bachelor's Degree				
Master's Degree				
Ph. D.				

Figure 1

WHITE: Institution may establish new provision without programme accreditation.

GREY: Institution cannot establish new provision without initial accreditation.

Self-accrediting powers rest on status as accredited institution. The self-accrediting powers do not guarantee that the Ministry will allow provision to be established – or provide funding for it.

The new regime of quality assurance in Norway was introduced 1 January 2003. All institutions of higher education are obliged to develop and implement a quality assurance system within 1 January 2004. Among other variables assessment conducted by students is mandatory and a part of that system. The standards and criteria for evaluation of quality systems and accreditation of institutions and programmes were approved by NOKUT 5 May 2003³. The standards and further criteria for evaluation and accreditation have been developed by hearing the opinion of the sector. NOKUT's experience from auditing and accreditation of institutions is so far very scarce. We are now in the midst of an institutional accreditation; the first one in NOKUT. A private college applying for accreditation as a specialised university got acceptance for its quality system when NOKUT's board met 6 November. Three more private colleges and a couple of state university colleges are or will soon be in process with evaluating their quality assurance systems. If and when these are accepted by the Board, the second phase of the accreditation process will follow.

Summary

- The structure of the Norwegian quality assurance system is dualistic

A	B
Evaluation/accreditation of the quality assurance system of the individual HEI.	Evaluation/accreditation of institutions and programmes.

³ More specific information on standards and criteria can be picked up at this web address:
<http://www.nokut.no/sw479.asp>

- To attain institutional accreditation in a different institutional category, it is a prerequisite that the quality system is examined and accepted according to NOKUT's standards.
- A successful audit process shall throw light on circumstances that need to be gone deeper into, and thus be the basis and state the reason for implementing projects of particular evaluations or revision of accreditation.
- For HEIs not having obtained institutional accreditation, it is still possible to apply for and receive accreditation. This applies to the right to establish individual academic courses, programmes and degrees, in principle on whatever level.
- The responsibility for all aspects of educational quality rests with the individual institution. That means there is no "one system" which is "the correct one".
- Assessment conducted by students is a mandatory part of the quality assurance system.

1.5 Procedures

All evaluations and accreditation projects are conducted by NOKUT but carried out by specialist committees consisting variably of peers, students and other stakeholders. Committees that are evaluating applications for accreditation of single courses from ½ year to 2 years, Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. degrees consist of 2-4 peers, all with a relevant academic background. In addition the group as a whole needs to be experienced/have competence in evaluation and quality assurance. When accrediting Ph.D. degrees, the members must all be full professors, when accrediting Master's degrees, they must all be at the least Associate professors, while when accrediting Bachelor's degrees, or courses on that level, the requirements are that the members at least have qualifications as Assistant professors. Except for peers evaluating first degree courses, at least one of them shall be an academic from abroad.

As mentioned above, the applications for institutional accreditation are reviewed in two phases. In the first (audit) phase the committee consists of at least four representatives drawn from a pool of experts. At least one shall be a full professor, one must be experienced in leading an academic institution, one member from another country, at least one must be competent in quality work and quality assurance systems, and last but not least, one student with experience from working on an institutional board or other important honorary posts. In the second phase the committee consists of 4 to 5 members. Two academics in relevant subject fields, at least one from abroad, and one must be experienced in leading an academic institution, one student with experience from working on an institutional board or other important honorary posts, and one representative from the society outside academia. When accrediting a university or a specialised university, the academics must be full professors. When the application concerns accreditation as a university college, the academics must be at least Associate professors.

Summary

- All evaluations /accreditations are conducted by NOKUT but carried out by expert committees consisting variably of peers (2-3), students (1) and other stakeholders (1) (e.g. employers, public authorities, employees organisations).
- In most cases there is international representation among the peers
- The expert committees as a group must have competence in the respective subject field(s), quality assurance and evaluation.

1.6 External control

Political and administrative control is exercised by the Ministry of Education and Research. No authority exercises professional supervision. However, the agency's (NOKUT's) decisions can be appealed to an appeal board, appointed by the Ministry. This possibility applies to procedures only, not to the judgements from the expert panel.

Every year - in early spring - the Ministry meets each institution in public sector to discuss the present situation of the institution and its strategies for the future. Similar meetings are planned for the private sector too. Up till now their feedback to the Ministry has annually been submitted in a written report. Also NOKUT will meet with the Ministry annually to talk over the situation on quality assurance in the higher education sector, inform about results from its evaluations and accreditation projects, and discuss plans for the future.

Summary

- Political and administrative control is exercised by the Ministry of Education and Research.
- NOKUT's decisions can be appealed to an appeal board. Appeals can be applied to procedures only, not to the judgements from the expert panel.
- Once a year the Ministry meets each institution in public sector to discuss the present situation of the institution and its strategies for the future.

2. Institutional autonomy

The principle of institutional autonomy can be defined as the necessary degree of independence from external interference that the institutions of higher education requires in respect of its internal organisation and governance, the internal distribution of financial resources, the generation of income from non public sources, the recruitment of its staff, the setting of the conditions of study and, finally, the freedom to conduct teaching and research. The principle of freedom can be defined as the academic freedom for members of the academic community - that is scholars, teachers and students - to follow their scholarly activities within a framework determined by that community in respect of ethical rules and international standards, and without outside pressure. Still in Norway national curricula for the education of teachers, nurses, engineers and social workers are laid down by the Ministry of Education and Research.

The universities and specialised universities in Norway have a long tradition of institutional autonomy in research and teaching, while the university colleges have a shorter previous history. Most of the university colleges, except for the teacher training institutions, came into being from the late 1960's and forward.

Institutional autonomy has increased gradually over the last couple of decades. The HEIs have been given more responsibility and influence on how to allocate resources at disposal, decide study programmes, and appoint academic staff.

In a way the latest developments can be seen as a kind of 'redistribution' of institutional autonomy. As a consequence of the Quality Reform the universities and specialised universities have to take more responsibility for a more intense relationship with the students, and put more resources and effort into the teaching-learning process, and be more aware of the needs in the market, while the university colleges in a way is in the process of gaining more autonomy as they are now given the opportunity to apply for a different ("higher") institutional status. The culture and system of teaching and learning in the university

colleges, and awareness of the market needs and the needs in the professions, have in a way made them more relevant to what is now being introduced through the Quality Reform and the new degree system.

As a consequence of the developments over the last couple of decades, the relation between the Ministry of education and the institutions of HE has become less commanding on the part of the ministry, but more demanding for the institutions. The state Authorities put more stress on results, and less on how to produce them, while in the past it used to be more the other way round. Autonomy has increased through legislation, still quite detailed, however less so than it used to be. In the new system it is possible for institutions to apply for accreditation in a different institutional category, from non-accredited institution to accredited university college, specialised university or a full university, and. This has stimulated academic drift⁴, a phenomenon that has been increasing over the last two decades. The university colleges in particular have increased their institutional autonomy in terms of their power to introduce and repeal courses and study programmes. The universities and specialised universities have always had full "self accrediting powers".

Summary

- The universities and specialised universities in Norway have a long tradition of institutional autonomy in research and teaching, while the university colleges have a shorter previous history.
- Institutional autonomy has increased gradually over the last couple of decades, the HEIs have been given more responsibility and influence on how to allocate resources at disposal, decide study programmes, and appoint academic staff.
- With the implementation of the quality reform the HEIs have to take more responsibility for a more intense relationship with the students. In particular this is a challenge to liberal studies at the universities.
- More resources and effort have to be put into the teaching-learning process.
- The university colleges have in a way gained more autonomy as they are now given the opportunity to apply for a different/"higher" institutional status.
- State authorities put more stress on results (output), and less on how to produce them (process).
- The latest developments have – for the good and the bad – given a push to academic drift.

2.1 Debate in progress

Until recently Rectors and Deans used to be recruited from the academic community through elections exclusively. Votes were laid down by faculty, students and administrative/technical staff. Last year an alternative way of recruiting candidates to these positions was introduced. It is now possible to announce these tasks as time restricted posts and ask for applications, in principle also from persons that are not fellows. Those in the academic community who oppose this alternative, argue that this procedure will weaken the institutional and academic democracy, lead to democratic deficit, and transfer influence and power from the academic community to a steering system more typical for management in industry and bureaucracy. Those who support the changes argue that it is necessary to run HE institutions more efficient (get more out of the talent of the population), keep the budgets (the investment must yield a good return), and based on the resource situation – financial and human – be able to

⁴ The ambition and strategy of HEIs to climb the stairs to the top of the hierarchy by adapting to the standards, rules and procedures that give academic merit.

allocate resources to what should be given priority. It might be considered a paradox though that management ideology seems to be in fashion and an increasing phenomenon in steering institutions of higher education, while at the same time modern knowledge-based industry seems to quit the management tradition and look to universities and research institutes to learn how knowledge-based organisations should be run.

The development from serving the few, in a kind of elite institution, to the present situation of mass education for the majority, has made it a necessity to put more effort and resources into teaching and counselling. Along with mass education and increasing numbers of students and a more heterogeneous student population, the Bologna process has been a catalyst for introduction of a simpler and less time-consuming degree structure. The new structure with Bachelor's Degree (3 years) + Master's Degree (2 years) + Ph.D. (3 years) is implemented from August 2003. To be successful the implementation needs an increase in teaching and mentor resources, which in turn will have an essential impact on how the academic staff will be able to reserve/allocate resources to research and development activities.

Along with this development the market for higher education is opening up, which promotes new institutions and competition. Some months ago the Ryssdal commission published a report on a joint law and regulations for public and private sector. The majority (7 out of 10) wants to increase institutional autonomy in the sense that they will give more power to the board in matters of creating a sound financial base, funding and resource allocation, e.g. by transferring from the Ministry to the board the right to sign for loans. Another proposal from the commission is that the board shall have a majority of external members. This is a radical change from the tradition where the board consisted of academics, other university employees, students, and, during the later years, external board members, with no one group being able to form a majority alone.

For academics and other staff the central issue seems to be how to find a good balance between keeping and even increasing institutional autonomy and still keep the rights and privileges gained in a centralised and detailed oriented system of yesterday. For the Ministry it is a said objective, and of great importance, to grant the institutions more autonomy. One reason is the follow-up of the Bologna process, that states the necessity and need for internationalisation and cooperation between institutions of HE in the European educational room. To obtain these objectives, more flexibility and power to the individual HE institution is needed. The expectation from the Ministry is that the more the decisions are made at the base of research and education the more they will lead to efficient and effective use of resources. This complies very well with the principle of subsidiarity in the European Union. However, increased institutional autonomy has its costs, costs that have to be met by implementing a system of increased accountability. This is where NOKUT comes in.

In Norway access to HE in public sector has always been free of charge. Even if it is stated explicitly in the Ryssdal report – and in the law – and underpinned by all the political parties, that the Ministry has the obligation to fund the institutions of HE with necessary financial resources to fulfil their mission and objectives, the minority fears that this kind of guarantee is not strong enough in the long run, and hence fear that the principle of non-tuition is at stake.

In parts of the private sector of HE, in subject areas like business, marketing, ICT and the like, with a greater potential for higher salaries than in medieval history, literature or anthropology, it has been possible to charge student fees to cover the costs. If external financial support disappears, for instance by reduced demand from students, staff has to be reduced. For the time being The Norwegian School of Management (BI), which is a private institution partly financed through student tuition, has problems with recruiting a sufficient number of students to some of their programmes. The consequence is that highly qualified academics and other staff face the threat of getting dismissed. If the proposals of the majority

in the Ryssdal commission are to be implemented, this is a scenario which is feared by a lot of academics in public sector, and even more so because the implementation of the Quality Reform has changed the funding structure in the public sector of HE so that the number of completed student credits (output) will have a 25% impact on the budget for the following years. Previously the funding was based on the number of students that started in higher education (input). Accreditation is a prerequisite for financial support, but at the same time it is up to the Ministry to decide whether such financial support should be given or not. Usually the HEIs have to cover new provision within their fixed budget frames, which means that some old programme must be put down.

Summary

- More varied recruitment procedures for Rectors and Deans from elections to opening for applications on time restricted posts have been introduced. Pros and cons.
- The development from a kind of elite institutions serving the few to mass education for the many demands more resources for structuring study programmes, teaching and counselling.
- The internationalisation and market orientation of higher education has made it necessary to furnish the HEI-board with more power.
- Proposal to give the board a majority of external members, which is quite a new and radical change in the governance of HEIs in the public sector.
- Increased institutional autonomy is gained through a system of increased accountability through NOKUT's activities in evaluation and accreditation.
- The apprehension that the principle of non-tuition is at stake through the efforts of internationalisation and market orientation of higher education.
- Up till now the funding has been based on the number of students that started in higher education (input).
- In the future the number of completed student credits (output) will have a 25% impact on the budget for the following years.
- New provisions usually have to be met within the fixed budget of the HEI.

3. The place of students in the institution⁵.

Since 1 January 2003, NOKUT has been responsible for assessing courses, programmes and institutions within higher education in Norway. Students hold one of seven seats on the Board of NOKUT. In addition, the student deputy has the right to meet and take part in the debates, but not a right to vote. NOKUT's regulations state that students shall have their own representatives on external panels for institutional accreditations and audits.

Two members of the Board of the HEIs are elected by and among 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 they have at least two representatives on the governing bodies of departments and basic units. The rule also applies to all collegiate bodies that are given decision-making powers, unless the delegating body unanimously decides otherwise. In addition it is stated in the Act that students are to be represented on bodies appointing

⁵. Student involvement in quality assessments of higher education in the Nordic countries. Report from a co-project within the frames of the Nordic Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (NOQA), October 2003.

teaching- and research staff as well as leading administrative staff, unless the Board unanimously decides against it.

In Norway the broad and vertical student representation in the governing bodies of the institutions will normally give students information about and influence on evaluations. The decision-making bodies at the relevant institutional level will normally approve the project-plan for the internal evaluation, as well as the final report. Hence the formal positions students have at the institutional level will in most cases give them fairly good influence on the internal evaluation process. However, this won't necessarily be the procedure in all evaluation projects. The focus of the evaluation can be considered less relevant to students, or the time schedule can be too tight to make this procedure feasible. In such cases the report from the internal evaluation may be the responsibility of a smaller group.

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

Summary

- Students hold one of seven seats on the Board of NOKUT.
- Students shall have their own representatives on external panels for institutional accreditations and audits.
- Students hold a minimum of 20 percent of the seats on the board of HEIs.
- Students have at least two representatives on the governing bodies of departments and basic units in the HEIs.
- Students are to be represented on bodies appointing teaching- and research staff as well as leading administrative staff.
- Course and programme assessment conducted by students is mandatory and part of the quality assurance system.
- There are no way students points of view can be overseen or not taken into consideration.

3.1 Debate in progress

Among students and others the Quality Reform has been nicknamed the student reform. Considering that the focus of the current reform is on new degree structure, student instruction (supervision), new systems for student assessment and marking, changed financial support of students (loan and grants), and more effort to internationalisation, the nickname seems to be fairly relevant and adequate.

As a part of the Quality Reform, an improved system of financial support to students has been introduced, whereby the cost-of-living allowance (basic support) is increased to NOK 8 000 (approx. EUR 1 100) per month. The allowance consists of a combination of loans and grants. Students will be eligible for a grant equivalent to 40% of the maximum cost-of-living allowance. 25% are payable upon commencement of studies. The remaining 15% are conditional upon timely completion of courses, and will be converted from the loan already paid out (the Loan-to-Grant Conversion Scheme).

There is no debate or controversy in the academic community whether students should play a role in evaluation projects and procedures. As mentioned above, it is fixed by law that students are to be represented in committees and boards that plan, decide, implement and evaluate efforts of academic or managerial relevance to institutions of HE. On the other hand it can be observed that the greater part of the student population is not very enthusiastic when it comes to being active and take responsibility for the democratic processes within the HEIs. The trend over the later years seems to be that the few do most of the work for the many.

In higher education, a student may be viewed in many different ways: as a receiver (of knowledge), consumer/participant, co-actor and/or stakeholder. In a debate on student involvement in quality assurance, several processes can be identified.

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 educational theory. Learning has replaced teaching as the preferred educational paradigm. With new teaching/learning strategies, such as Problem-based Learning (PBL), the responsibility for learning, including evaluating his or her learning process, to a much greater extent rests on the shoulders of the student.

In NOKUT students influence the activity through their representatives 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.

Accreditation practices are found in Norway from 2003. Applications for accreditation of programmes and institutions are submitted according to a set of fairly general predefined standards⁶. Based on NOKUT's experience up till now, students are normally not involved in working out the applications. The compilation of the applications tends to be more focused on documentation in relation to standards and criteria and less on processes. Anyway, student evaluations and students needs, as well as other stakeholders', relevant to the application in question, should be important elements in working out and documenting such applications for accreditation. To assure student involvement in the internal processes from the beginning, it is necessary for the HEIs and the students to discuss how this could be obtained in the future. This is expected to be an issue in the development of the quality assurance systems of all HEIs. As the audit procedures imply site visits, student participation and influence will be revealed through NOKUT's audits. This is also valid for accreditation of institutions and Ph.D.-programmes, while the accreditation procedures concerning Bachelor's and Master's degrees do not have site visit as a part of it, and do not include student participation on the panel of experts. Accreditation of Master's and Bachelor's degrees is based on written material only. Evaluations and reaccreditation of programmes will most certainly include site visits and thus secure student participation and the student perspective in the panel of external specialists.

Summary

- An improved system of financial support to students has been introduced. The allowance consists of a combination of loans and grants. Students will be eligible for a grant equivalent to 40% of the maximum cost-of-living allowance.
- There is no debate or controversy in the academic community whether students should play a role in evaluation projects and procedures. Active participation from the majority of the student core is less than wanted.
- Student learning is defined as an active, intra-individual process of constructing knowledge.
- The responsibility for learning, including evaluating his or her learning process, now to a much greater extent rests with the students themselves.
- Students are normally not a part of working out applications for evaluations or accreditation, anyway student evaluations and students needs will always be important elements in working out and documenting such applications.

⁶ More specific information on standards and criteria can be picked up at this web address:

<http://www.nokut.no/sw482.asp>

- Audit procedures imply site visits with mandatory student participation.

4. Teaching staff

The Norwegian way of appointing academic staff is closely linked to the tradition and development of institutional autonomy.

Up to the late 1970s academic staff in public sector were appointed by the Ministry, full professors even as civil servants appointed by the Government (the King). This procedure was abandoned during the 1980s, and the authority to appoint academic staff was gradually decentralised and transferred to the Board of HE institutions.

Due to changes in provision concerning appointment of academic staff, there has been an immense increase in the number of full professors at Norwegian HE institutions over the last couple of decades. Before these changes were introduced, there used to be a fixed number of professorships. Unless there was a vacancy, there were no possibilities for aspiring associate professors to become full professors even if they were well qualified. The regulations were changed in the late 1980s, and they stated that associate professors could attain status as a full professor independent of a vacant position as long as they fulfilled the academic requirements. Such applications are considered and evaluated by a committee of peers from relevant subject fields. There are similar procedures for assistant professors who want to attain status as an associate professor. It is a prerequisite that appointees for fixed posts have a Ph. D. or equivalent.

Courses in education (theory and practice) are a prerequisite and mandatory for university teachers whose intention is to be appointed to an academic post. These courses are offered by the universities' school of education. All appointees have to document teaching qualifications before or within two years after their appointment. The minimum qualification is a course that lasts for approximately 3 weeks (100 hours) full time study. Usually these courses are organised as part time study within one academic year.

Summary

- Up to the late 1970s academic staff in public sector were appointed by the ministry, full professors even as civil servants appointed by the Government (the King).
- During the 1980s the authority to appoint academic staff was gradually decentralised and transferred to the Board of HE institutions. Before these changes were introduced, there used to be a fixed number of professorships.
- One consequence has been an immense increase in the number of full professors at Norwegian HE institutions over the last couple of decades. For the time being, full professors constitute 47 per cent of the academic staff at the universities.
- Applications are considered and evaluated by a committee of peers – also with international representation – from relevant subject fields. All applicants have to document teaching qualifications.

4.1 Debate in progress

Another proposal from the above mentioned Ryssdal commission, which is intensely debated for the time being, is about the laws and regulations for recruitment and appointment of academic staff.

Academic staff has up till now been appointed in principle for lifetime, except for so-called "20% professorships" which means that a specialist from industry, other parts of society or a professor from another university holds a 20% post for a restricted period of time. This also applies to academic staff/artists appointed for posts at National Colleges of the Arts, posts that mostly are part-time and time restricted. If the majority proposal from the Ryssdal commission on a different way of organising institutions of HE will be put into practice, one of the consequences could be that appointment of staff for lifetime will be weakened, which by a lot of academics will be considered as an attack on the principle of academic freedom.

There is a Norwegian saying going something like this: It is difficult to predict and in particular about the future. However, looking back over the post-war period one scenario as it comes to appointment procedures and recruitment of academic staff, is the introduction of a more flexible system for employers to recruit and appoint teaching and research staff. This will be opposed by the employees' organisations and considered a threat to the principle of academic freedom. Another element of this scenario might be development of more differentiation between members of the academic staff, e.g. one group spending relatively more time on research, another more time on teaching, while, a third might be changing between research, teaching, industry, media, politics, bureaucracy etc. In sum: more flexibility because of fewer life-long appointments. Today all teachers in HE have the obligation and the right to do research, per cent between 25 and 50 of a full time post. Percentage varies between types of institutions. Funding of research projects - beyond the individual academic staff resource - is a separate issue that has to be solved through other internal and/or external funding instruments.

Student evaluation of teaching and assessment of the learning environment has been mandatory in higher education in Norway over the last couple of decades. For the same period of time teachers have had the obligation to sum up and evaluate their teaching experience every term. Consequences of these evaluations have varied quite a lot both within and between institutions. In some they have been taken seriously and used in a systematic way to improve teaching, while others have produced results for the shelf only. After the introduction of the new quality assurance regime from 1 January 2003, student evaluation of the learning environment, teaching included, is decided to be one of the variables that will be reported in NOKUT's audit system. This will probably put an end to producing reports for the shelf. Hopefully the quality assurance system will be more focused on the quality of the individual teacher and the organisation and adaptation of teaching resources as a whole to courses and programmes. This will make a clearer basis for implementing provisions that work within each individual institution.

Summary

- Academic staff is in principle appointed for lifetime. New proposals as to organising institutions of HE will threaten this tradition.
- One element in a scenario is that we will see more differentiation between members of the academic staff, some spending relatively more time on teaching while others do relatively more research): more flexibility.
- Student evaluation of teaching and assessment of the learning environment has been mandatory in higher education in Norway over the last couple of decades. This issue will probably be of increased importance in the future as it is also one of the variables reported in NOKUT's quality assurance system.

5. Programmes

In Norway the term study programmes in HEIs can be explained as consisting either of academic disciplines (e.g. sociology, history, mathematics, etc.), subjects and courses (e.g. in cross-cultural communication, developmental studies, applied psychology, accounting, European studies, etc.) or degrees (B.A's, M.A's and Ph.D's). The latter type of programmes may concentrate on traditional academic subjects exclusively, for instance in theoretical mathematics, linguistics, chemistry, etc., or they may have a different professional and more practical aim towards educating specialists for positions in the society outside HEIs, for instance in accounting, in teaching or in nursing, where content and methods are picked from different academic subject fields to fit the purpose and objectives of the programme. A typical degree programme will consist of a set of courses, some mandatory and some electives. As explained in figure 1 above, all universities and specialised universities owned by the state have "self accrediting" powers for all their programmes, while university colleges have general powers to accredit programmes on bachelor degree level only. Similar powers will be granted private institutions when they have obtained institutional accreditation in the respective categories. Non-accredited institutions have to apply NOKUT for accreditation of any new programme, whether it is a course of a half year's duration or a complete Ph-D. programme. The application must be worked out according to NOKUT's standards and criteria for accreditation of courses and degrees and will be evaluated accordingly by a group of peers. The expert group must reach a clear conclusion whether the programme has a sufficient quality to be accredited. If the conclusion is negative, the evaluators are obliged to point out what has to be changed and further developed to obtain accreditation. Even if the conclusion is positive, the evaluators are asked to (and expected to) present ideas and comment on details that may help the applicant to enhance the quality of the programme further.

As mentioned earlier, the responsibility for internal academic quality in accredited institutions of HE rests with the individual institution. This is also valid for the internal quality assurance of study programmes, with regard to development of new programmes as well as revision of established ones. All courses and programmes are developed by faculty before they are validated through formal procedures. Up till now there have been no systematic or mandatory procedures for external evaluation of study programmes in general in accredited institutions, except for consultations between university colleges in subject fields where the Ministry has laid down national regulations (bachelor degrees in teacher education, education of nurses, social workers and engineers). It is assumed that the system of cyclical audits – now under implementation – will disclose weak points of the internal quality system and procedures. When it is revealed that the system does not assure the quality of the programmes sufficiently, it will release specific external evaluative actions. Since standards and criteria for accreditation of study programmes (courses and degrees) also will be valid in cases of reaccreditations or other evaluative initiatives, NOKUT expects that these will be reflected in the annual audit reports concerning quality assurance of academic programmes.

The implementation of the internationally proposed Diploma Supplement has improved the information about the individual student's background and competence. Compared to information on diplomas under the old system, the Diploma Supplement describes in more detail and in more informative ways what kind of training the individual student has accomplished.

Summary

- Study programmes in HEIs can be explained as consisting either of traditional academic disciplines (e.g. sociology, history, mathematics, etc.), subjects and courses (e.g. in cross-cultural communication, developmental studies, applied psychology, accounting, European studies, etc.) or degrees (B.A's, M.A's and Ph.D's). The latter type of programmes may concentrate on traditional academic

subjects exclusively, for instance in theoretical mathematics, linguistics, chemistry, etc., or they may have a different professional and more practical aim towards educating specialists for positions in the society outside HEIs, for instance in accounting, in teaching or in nursing, where content and methods are picked from different academic subject fields to fit the purpose and objectives of the programme.

- All universities and specialised universities owned by the state have "self accrediting" powers for all their programmes, while university colleges have the general powers to accredit programmes on bachelor degree level only.
- Non-accredited institutions have to apply NOKUT for accreditation of any new programme, whether it is a course of a half year's duration or a complete Ph-D. programme. The programme is assessed according to NOKUT's criteria for accreditation.
- The responsibility for internal academic quality in accredited institutions of HE rests with the individual institution. All courses and programmes are developed by faculty before they are validated through formal procedures. Up till now there have been no systematic or mandatory procedures for external evaluation of study programmes in general in accredited institutions, except for consultations between university colleges in certain subject fields.
- It is assumed that the system of cyclical audits will disclose weak points of the internal quality system and procedures. Since standards and criteria for accreditation of study programmes (courses and degrees) also will be valid in cases of reaccreditation or other evaluative initiatives, NOKUT expects that these will be reflected in the annual audit reports concerning quality assurance of academic programmes.
- The implementation of the internationally proposed Diploma Supplement has improved the information about the individual student's background and competence.

5.1 Debate in progress

Over the last one and a half years the HEIs in Norway have made an immense effort in restructuring the old degree structure into the new one adopted from the Bologna Process. The new degree structure (3+2+3) has – with a few exceptions – replaced approx 90 former degrees and vocational qualifications. The old general degree structure (4 + 1 ½ -2 +3) have been changed, and in particular the lower degree, which has got less time at disposal. Still various professional qualifications are of 4-6 years duration (i.e. class teacher education for primary and lower secondary school (4 years), candidates in psychology, medicine and theology (6 years)). The organisation of the courses and programmes in particular at the university colleges in the old system, was in a way closer to the structure of the new degree system; a lot of them were professional degrees of 3 years duration or less. So for the majority the main task has been to adapt and organise their old programmes and courses into the new structure, and in most cases within identical or expanded limits. Given these conditions the universities in particular have done an immense job to implement the new structure. The challenge was twofold. On the one hand they should reduce time spent on the lower degree (cand. mag.) from ½ (natural sciences) - 1 year, and at the same time keep up with and even improve quality in their first degree. On the other hand they had to restructure content, construct new courses and modules and create a lot of new programmes to lay the basis for student and teacher mobility, internationalisation and fulfil the demands for qualifications needed in the labour market.

There has been – and still is – a debate whether the current reform is a quality reform or an efficiency reform. Teaching staff at the universities in particular have argued that it will be difficult to keep up with and, not to mention, enhance academic quality side by side with reducing the first degree with 1 year. It is also considered a quality issue when the student workload put into writing the master's thesis is reduced from 60 to 30 credits.

Another trait that is of concern among teaching staff and students is the introduction of the new system for student assessment and marking. The students' academic performance will be assessed both through final examinations as well as through various term assignments. A new grading system is introduced, with a descending scale from A to E for passes and F for fail. The old system consisted mainly of numerical marks from 1.0, 1.1, 1.2, etc up to 6.0 (1.0-1.5: *Laudabilis praeceteris*, 1.6-2.5: *Laudabilis*, 2.6-3.2: *Haud illaudabilis*, 3.3-4.0: *Non contemnendus*, (passes), 4.1-6.0: *Contemnendus* (fails)).

Symbol	Description	General, qualitative description of valuation criteria
A	Excellent	An excellent performance, clearly outstanding. Shows a high degree of independence.
B	Very good	A very good performance, above average. Shows a certain degree of independence.
C	Good	An average performance, satisfactory in most areas.
D	Fair	A performance below average, and with some significant shortcomings.
E	Sufficient	A performance that meets the minimum criteria
F	Fail	A performance that does not meet the minimum criteria

Table 1
Description of the different grading levels recommended by the Norwegian Council for Higher Education.

A hot issue for the time being is a debate on how to differentiate students with an A in connection with selecting students to programmes with restricted student intake (e.g. the program for educating and training students for a profession as a psychologist, and certain special courses and programmes within veterinary medicine).

The Faculty of Psychology has decided to solve the problem by drawing lots among the students that have acquired an A. Most students think this is unjust because there is no differentiation between the A's, or for that matter between the B's, C's and so on, as it used to be in the old system with numerical marks.

With the implementation of the Quality Reform the academic courses will now be more structured to a much greater extent than previously, and this will be experienced particularly in liberal studies at the universities. There will be regular guidance and monitoring of each student. An Individual Study Plan containing both the student's and the institution's mutual commitments, will be signed by both parties. This is to secure that the student receives adequate guidance, as well as providing the institution with an overview to ensure proper use of resources. This will be of great importance for the future funding of the HEIs. 25% of the budget will be linked to "production" of course credits and internationalisation, i.e. students

in/out. The remaining 75% consist of a basic component (60%) and a research component (15%). So if students fail to pass their examinations, the institutions will have a cut in their budgets the following year. Teaching staff fear that the new funding formula can lead to inflation in marking and a situation where students are given a pass without really deserving it/having qualified for it. Rectors and deans have guaranteed that this won't happen. Compromising with the standards, criteria and academic level that have to be met to attain a pass will not be tolerated. Hopefully the institutions' quality systems will be sufficient and robust enough to reveal such frauds if they should occur. So far there is no experience on this issue, so what happens in the future, remains to be seen.

Summary

- Over the last one and a half years the HEIs in Norway have made an immense effort in restructuring the old degree structure (4 + 1 ½ - 2 +3) into the new one (3+2+3) adopted from the Bologna Process. Still various professional qualifications are of 4-6 years duration.
- The challenge of restructuring was twofold. On the one hand they should reduce time spent on the lower degree (cand. mag.) from ½ (natural sciences) - 1 year, and at the same time keep up with and even improve quality in their first degree. On the other hand they had to restructure content, construct new courses and modules and create a lot of new programmes to lay the basis for student and teacher mobility, internationalisation and fulfil the demands for qualifications needed in the labour market.
- There has been – and still is – a debate whether the current reform is a quality reform or an efficiency reform, whether the focus is put on quality and innovation or transparency and control.
- Another trait that is of concern among teaching staff and students is the introduction of the new system for student assessment and marking. (How to differentiate students with an A, or for that matter a B, C or D?)
- With the implementation of the Quality Reform the academic courses will now be more structured. There will be regular guidance and monitoring of each student.
- An Individual Study Plan containing both the student's and the institution's mutual commitments, will be signed by both parties.
- 25% of the budget will be linked to "production" of course credits and internationalisation, i.e. students in/out. So if students fail to pass their examinations, the institutions will have a cut in their budgets the following year.
- Teaching staff fear that the new funding formula can lead to inflation in marking and a situation where students are given a pass without really deserving it/having qualified for it.

Conclusion

The Norwegian system of quality assurance and accreditation is at the beginning of its second year after implementation. That explains why we have very little experience as to how the system works, what results it produces, and where we are going. Hopefully, we will have more to share in a couple of years. Until then our main contribution will be to make the Norwegian system of HE more transparent, which in itself might be of informative and strategic value.

Areas of commonality with Lithuania

- Higher education can be of two types: State (public) and non-state (private). Only a smaller percentage of the students attend private institutions.
- The Ministry of Education and Research has the national responsibility for educational policy. The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) has the responsibility for evaluation of quality systems (audit) and accreditation of institutions, while quality assurance on the institutional level is the responsibility of higher education institutions themselves.
- Institutional autonomy is very high, especially for universities and specialised universities, as they have self accrediting powers to choose studies field on all degree levels.
- Evaluation of teachers and the learning environment is part of the internal quality assurance system.
- Age structure of academic staff (teacher-researchers) is a matter of great concern. Teachers' salary is not competitive with what is offered in industry and business.
- Different types of Master's studies; into depth and into width

Areas of commonality with France

- The higher education system is a broadly public funded system. The costs of study are largely covered by the direct funding of the institutions. Student fees are low.
- The infrastructure of higher education – HEIs of all types can be found all over Norway – generates low mobility of students.
- The higher education system is State controlled and centralised, steered by the Ministry of education and research.
- Evaluation methods consist of 2 main stages: an internal evaluation run by the institution itself; an external evaluation by peers and other stakeholders.
- Internal systems of quality assurance in the HEIs are under implementation.
- Internal student evaluations of programmes and teachers are an obligation for all HEIs.