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# Institutional Evaluations in Europe

ENQA Workshop Reports 1

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# Preface

The key activities of ENQA (the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) are training and advisory support. The network also disseminates general information, experiences, good practices, and new developments in the fields of quality assessment and quality assurance. An example of such activities was a two-day workshop on institutional evaluations on 22–23 September, 2000 in Paris. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) and Comité National D'évaluation (CNE) were responsible for the workshop's practical arrangements.

The workshop was planned for professionals in quality agencies who have institutional evaluation responsibilities in their own countries. A total of 31 professionals from 12 countries and from the Association of European Universities (CRE) participated. The workshop had three specific objectives:

1. Document and compare the objectives, methodology and implementation strategies applied by the ENQA member states and agencies in institutional evaluation.
2. Discuss and share experiences on theoretical and practical problems of institutional evaluation.
3. Identify opportunities for increased transnational collaboration in the field of institutional evaluation.

The results of the above-mentioned seminar are published in this report. The actual texts, however, have been edited for the purposes of this publication. To start with, different concepts close to institutional evaluation are defined. Section 2 deals with the context of evaluation: universities cannot be evaluated isolated from the environment in which they operate. Furthermore, section 3 consists of six cases from different countries and one from the CRE. These examples present different institutional evaluations, including audit-type procedures. All ENQA member states are not included – rather these cases are examples of various evaluation alternatives. Some of the cases represent a long tradition of institutional evaluations, others have just started their work in this field.

Some of the cases were written especially for the seminar and this report, and the authors of these are mentioned in the text. Other cases have been taken from various evaluation publications of the respective countries and the names of these contributors are not included.

The authors of this report hope that this publication will be useful for those involved in institutional evaluations at the national level. They also hope that the report helps to create as well as to support a network of staff members engaged in the planning and implementation of institutional evaluation in the evaluation agencies so that they will be able to collaborate on a more permanent basis.

In Helsinki and Copenhagen,  
6 February, 2001

**Christian Thune**  
Chairman  
ENQA Steering Group

**Kauko Hämäläinen**  
Secretary  
ENQA Steering Group

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# 1 Background

*Kauko Hämäläinen and Staffan Wahlén*

Over recent years, the significance of higher education has increased considerably. Higher education policies have become an important part of social policies. Many countries feel that their economic and cultural future is dependent on an internationally high standard of higher education which is available to the majority of the population, not just a small elite. Higher education institutions today have a prominent impact on society as a whole and their surrounding areas in terms of regional impact in particular. In addition to being the source of individual development, higher education institutions also serve as vehicles for the development of the whole areas.

Higher education institutions have become more open in many ways. While their traditional role has involved the creation and transfer of intellectual capital, institutions now have a third task: to support development in their own region. Higher education institutions have been subject to many changes: international student exchange, distance teaching arrangements, the dramatic development of ICT, the increase in the volume of adult education and student intake in general and the growth of external funding are examples of major operational changes that have taken place recently. The role of research and development activities is also changing. The applicability, societal impact and relevance to industry and the economy are now key issues, alongside traditional basic research and teaching.

Caught in the midst of major changes during the 1980s and 1990s, the maintenance of high-standard higher education, in other words quality, was the key concern of higher education institutions. Quality has also become a central issue in the European Union, not least in order to promote understanding between the different educational systems of EU member countries as the volume of international student exchange programmes and recruitment of labour increases. The definition of quality

has proven problematic for a long time, and definitions issued by individual higher education institutions are largely dependent on their composition, location and personnel structure. In the last 15 years, national and regional evaluations have become increasingly regarded as a means of improving quality assurance.

## 1.1 Evaluation safeguards quality

The evaluation of higher education institutions has a long history. For hundreds of years, teaching, learning and research have undergone assessment. Evaluations measuring learning results and students' satisfaction in their studies are now common routines in many universities. Research has continuously been subject to assessment in relation to the filling of posts, grant application procedures and submission of articles to scientific journals.

Extensive voluntary evaluations covering all higher education institutions in a certain area were initiated in the United States already a hundred years ago. Accreditation has been used as a means to ensure the quality of higher education institutions. Evaluations sprang from the need to define a minimum level for thousands of higher education institutions whose levels had previously been quite heterogeneous. Accreditation was employed as a tool to determine what units were worthy of public funding.

Evaluations of higher education institutions in Europe became more common in the mid-1980s. France was the first country to initiate comprehensive university evaluations in 1984. In Finland, the first institutional evaluations were launched in the early 1990s. Some countries, such as the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Denmark initiated systematic programme and subject evaluations in

the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Some countries have considered the evaluation of quality assurance systems, audits, to be a good way of ensuring quality. This has been the case in, for example, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Evaluation for accreditation purposes has been used in Europe in some countries. In the UK, it has been applied through subject reviews and audits. In some Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, accreditation has been used to determine the minimum level of degree programmes. The newest entrant in the field is Germany, which in 1998 decided to initiate an accreditation system for higher education degrees through its new University Act.

Although Europe has come up with various national evaluation solutions, there are some common features: all encompass self-evaluation conducted by the higher education institutions themselves, as well as a visit of an external review team who utilise self-evaluation documents and interviews, and a final report. The fact that institutional evaluation, accreditation, audit and degree programme evaluation are understood and undertaken in slightly different ways in different countries adds to the variety of evaluations. To some extent, evaluations measure different aspects of higher education. For example, the instructions for self-evaluation may differ, the composition and education of review groups and the content and structure of evaluation reports may vary.

Evaluation has become even more international: higher education is no longer perceived as being an internal matter for a country; rather, there is talk about mutual accountability, which means that one country will need to be familiar with the education system of another and be able to assess its quality, for example, in order to be able to recognise credits in student exchange programmes, degrees or modules. The possibility of judicial relief for students when they study abroad is another reason for this. These developments will guide the development of evaluation systems in the future.

## 1.2 The aim and structure of the report

This report will take a closer look at one evaluation tradition, namely institutional evaluations. The aim is to determine the variety of measures adopted in Europe under this title. We will contemplate mainly on the reasons for conducting an evaluation, the target of evaluations, the experience gained from carrying out evaluations and the utilisation of results. This should enable us to learn from others' experiences, both good and bad. The editors hope that this report will benefit both those who are familiar with evaluation procedures and those who are initiating the planning of institutional evaluations.

First of all, we will define the meaning of evaluation with a view to central evaluation concepts such as audit, programme evaluation and accreditation. Secondly, a wider context in which the institutions of higher education operate today will be reviewed. Thirdly, we will look at the implementation of institutional evaluations in some European countries where the approach has already been established (e.g., France, Finland and Ireland) or has been recently established (Norway). We have also included countries implementing audit-type institutional evaluations in our study, such as the United Kingdom and Sweden. Owing to the close resemblance of the institutional reviews arranged by the Association of European Universities (CRE), these are also included in this report.

After describing country-specific solutions, we will discuss the significance and critical issues of institutional evaluations and, finally, point to some means of further developing the process.

## 1.3 The variety of evaluation concepts

A number of terms are frequently used to refer to more or less similar phenomena, e.g. evaluation, assessment and appraisal. We have chosen to use evaluation as the superordinate term.

To start with, we define what it is we mean by institutional evaluation, then we deal with the concept of an institutional audit which can be considered a special form of institutional evaluations. Accreditation can be targeted at an entire higher education institution or an individual programme.

### Institutional evaluation

The target of institutional evaluation includes all the activities of a higher education organisation. It seeks to answer the question: “What kind of a place for teaching, learning and research is the university under evaluation?” One aim is to provide the management with information on the rationality of objectives, suitability of policy strategies, different evaluation systems, capacity for change and the efficacy and economic aspects of organisational operations. Institutional evaluation does not normally assess directly and comprehensively teaching and research as such.

The evaluation deals with processes of strategic management, decision-making, organisation and quality assurance as well as resources and results. Different countries emphasise different areas in different ways; sometimes the main focus may be on resource allocation, sometimes on mission, visions or strategies.

The aim of institutional evaluation is usually development: to provide feedback to the management of the higher education institution on the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation in order to help them improve the institution’s performance. Sometimes the goal set may be accountability and transparency, in other words, to make operations more visible and efficient. In some countries institutional evaluations are used for getting information for national use.

Institutional evaluations are usually concerned with central factors related to the organisational

functionality and cost-effectiveness. Definite minimum requirements or standards that higher education institutions should meet are not, however, agreed in advance. Therefore the conclusions are based mainly on the external review team’s opinions on well or poorly functioning organisations. Institutional evaluations are mostly based on “fitness for purpose”, and the team assesses the reality compared to the institutional self-defined mission and objectives; obviously, the team’s experience and knowledge will be used to have also some assessment of the “purpose” as defined by the institution.

### Institutional Quality Audit

Quality audit is concerned with an institution’s processes for quality assurance and quality enhancement. The underlying theme in quality audits is the question: how does an institution know that the standards and objectives it has set for itself are being met? More specifically, on what evidence is the assessment on the quality of its work based and are there procedures in place to ensure that the significant processes are followed up and continuously improved?

Whereas quality evaluation (assessment) involves focusing on the separate operations and their results, in quality audit the focus lies on the mechanisms of quality and the ways to develop them, creating improvements in the organisation as a whole. In quality evaluation one often operates with a more normative and static concept of quality, which is, as a rule, defined by preconceived quality criteria. The point of departure in quality audit, on the other hand, is a sense of the concept of quality as a dynamic force.

### Accreditation

Accreditation seeks to enhance the reliability and public image of an organisation or a degree programme. The aim is to ensure that the degree programme or educational institution meets the established standards. In most cases, standards are relatively general. The team’s own perception of common standards is often decisive. Thus accreditation is about development and control. For the purpose of development the institution is provided with feed-

back on the basis of agreed criteria and is thus able to prioritise the most urgent development needs. The idea of control is that on the basis of accreditation, the establishment of a new educational unit can be avoided or the right to award degrees can be given to or removed from an existing unit.

If an educational institution is accredited, it means that it has been recognised as offering a sufficiently high-standard higher education. This decision is formal, and has consequences in the form of recognition, financing or student support. Accreditation includes the idea that a certain unit is adequate or not (“yes or no response”).

We might therefore define accreditation in the following way: a process in which an educational organisation or a degree programme provides information about its activities and achievements to an external body (in the United States, the agencies are self-regulated by the universities themselves). This body evaluates the information objectively and decides whether the organisation or programme meets the requisite standards.

The minimum standards can be laid down by a public authority or a professional organisation (in the United States, by agencies, regional/institutional or specialised/professional ones, set up by universities and colleges under the supervision of the Federal Government). They may determine whether a certain educational organisation is able to initiate

or continue a certain activity. The aim of the minimum level definitions is to ensure educational services of sufficiently high quality. The evaluations are usually based on peer reviews: experts within the field evaluate operations on the basis of agreed criteria.

In brief, accreditation contains the following elements:

- it is based on a minimum level or definition of some kind of threshold value;
- it contains a yes–no setting;
- requirements are set externally, and
- the emphasis is on accountability.

Accreditation is used when a new degree programme or an educational institution is being established, or to secure the quality of those already in existence. Accreditation is awarded for a fixed period. The aim is to determine whether the higher education institution is able to provide a suitable environment for the completion of academic studies. The following issues are frequently taken into account in the accreditation of educational institutions: the objectives of the institute, personnel, students (applicants, student selection procedures, former students, employment), administration, external framework such as premises, libraries and ICT services, teaching, learning, or labour market relations.



## 2 The contexts of institutional evaluations

*Ossi Lindqvist, Chairman of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council*

Institutional evaluations pose a number of new methodological questions and problems. There may of course exist several ‘universal’ or common criteria for such evaluations, but the overall setting may be more complex than generally expected or anticipated. For a successful evaluation, it is important that the process takes into account or at least is aware of the general context and overall environment where the target institution is working.

Usually, the purpose or mandate of the evaluation can be spelled only in an ‘incomplete’ language, and, similarly, the impacts of the process can also be both explicit and tacit. So apparently evaluations cannot be used ‘at their face value’ only; otherwise we may overlook many features that are self-evident but which are crucial for the understanding of the outcome. This is also important in the current European situation with a multitude of higher education institutions working often under very different cultural, political, economic, etc. environments. The same measure across the board may not always be applicable or even feasible. This is also clearly the intended implication of the Bologna Declaration.

Thus my message here is that the institutional evaluation process must be guided and directed according to the overall context of the institution’s (global) situation. Of course the same observation should apply to any other evaluation related to higher education. So, are we fully aware of the actual context? This discussion should not imply that there did not exist any general rules or measures for evaluations, but the way we use them may depend on the contextual structures. From another point of view, we may also call this issue as a balance between global vs. local evaluation criteria. Are, for instance, effectiveness and relevance self-evident terms and comparable under all circumstances?

I wish to describe here some of the observations that have been gained on this very issue. This is not intended to be an analysis of the current situation in Finland or elsewhere, but only to help in structuring better the evaluation processes and their outcomes.

Compared to the situation of just a couple of decades ago, the universities are now much more open systems; the ‘old’ universities were relatively closed and self-steering in terms of their internal management. Now they live and work in a multidimensional environment, where the actual boundaries to the outside society are ‘fuzzy’ at best. Also, they now perform a much wider multitude of tasks than ever before; of general interest is not only what they do but also how they do it. The relative contribution of outside financing to the overall higher education budget or expenditure is always increasing.

Furthermore, the student body is now much more diversified than ever before, emphasizing such trends as lifelong learning, further education, virtual university, etc. Thus, there is a deepened interest shown by the society at large in all higher education issues (a considerable part of this issue is the fact that, in Finland at least, some two-thirds of an age cohort have been given a place in higher education, i.e. in universities or polytechnics.)

First of all, the dimension of evaluation could be global, supra-national, national, regional, institutional, and so on. And the so-called European dimension is rapidly growing in importance, especially after the Bologna Declaration. In practice, these dimensions often are (and must be) mixed to various degrees in the evaluation process, simply because of the many interdependencies. For instance, a keen interest in the regional role and importance of higher education has emerged in many countries and is apparently becoming a new addi-

tional guiding principle in the public financing of it.

Secondly, universities are working under a national higher education policy or policies, which should give at least some guidelines for their management and direction. Sometimes the 'leash' is very short, sometimes it is almost nonexistent. Is the policy explicit enough to guide an evaluation? But often, despite the existence of such a policy, the entire higher education sector may still appear as a 'black box', which is due to its very multidimensional or 'fuzzy' nature, as discussed above.

'Review 2000' is an example of a higher education policy document for Finland; actually it expresses a wider set of targets that go outside universities. It is focusing "on the tasks and challenges of the public sector in promoting science, technology and innovations in conditions of global change". So higher education is seen as one crucial, but not the only, tool in building the knowledge-based society.

Thirdly, the societal aspects of university management should be expressed and be visible in the institutional strategy. In this turbulent and open world, the university should know where it is going and what it wants to do. The emphasis is thus moving away from the old administration-based approach to active management; and sometimes even the term 'entrepreneurial university' is used. If the strategic issues and targets are clearly expressed, an evaluation of the success and the consequent accountability aspects are easier to do. Yet it is not uncommon to see tactical means and strategic targets entangled in a way that makes opening the knot difficult if not impossible.

A common strategic trend, especially for some of the smaller universities, is focusing on the core skills. This is partially a (reverse) response to the expansion of the tasks the universities have been given or have assumed. Where are the limits of (in)competence? The universities are also facing a new kind of competition to which they have not been used in the past; namely, they have lost most of their old monopolies, including that of doing basic research.

Fourthly, evaluations as such could be seen as serving different aims. For instance, in the Finnish policy (implemented by FINHEEC), institutional evaluations are mostly seen as tools for development. In some other countries, evaluations also emphasize the control aspect between the government or the public and the university.

Fifthly, an important aspect in any evaluation is the availability of relevant data and information for proper analyses. How does one find and use the explicit knowledge/data and so-called tacit knowledge? Even a site-visit to a higher education institution, though often necessary and revealing in many ways, cannot tell everything about the long-term trends and many other crucial aspects. Is the nature of the data or information available forward-looking, or are they just reflections in the rear mirror? The situation on data availability and/or existence and their quality is highly different in different countries, which apparently makes many cross-country comparisons difficult if not impossible.

The role of research on higher education is again growing in importance, and apparently every European country is responding to this demand, though in somewhat differing ways.

Sixthly, one could also run a situational analysis, in order to see what actual degrees of freedom of action a particular institution has in its current environment. It may be bound by external constraints and regulations to such an extent that the management is unable to perform its (strategic) tasks fully (by this I mean something else than mere financial constraints). Though, admittedly, there are also trends of allowing the universities more autonomy, not only in the traditional fields like teaching and research but also in their administrative structures, financial practices, etc.

And finally, one cannot evaluate everything, and thus even the selection of 'what' (and 'how') is actually evaluated is also a value-laden process.

For the long-term success and good impact of the evaluation process, a high degree of transparency is needed and necessary in all its phases. Similarly, the evaluators should indicate openly their methods used and the explicit context where they

do or have done their analyses; thus the results of the evaluation and the subsequent recommendations may appear more coherent and helpful for the institution and its leadership. But at the same time, any evaluation in an open society also serves as 'consumer' information about higher education in general and the particular institute, as well. A truly transparent university should be seen and analysed by the public or by interested parties from the outside even without any formal evaluations.

The list of literature given below is intended merely as examples and general background reading, and not a strict introduction or check-list, for the issues discussed above.

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## 3 Country-specific use of institutional evaluations

### 3.1 FINLAND: Institutional Evaluation of Finnish Universities

*Anna-Maija Liuhanen, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council*

#### Why institutional evaluation?

In 1992, the Finnish Ministry of Education invited two volunteer universities to pilot institutional evaluations. The aim of the pilots was twofold: to evaluate the quality of the universities' activities and to establish an evaluation procedure suitable for all Finnish higher education institutions. Three other institutional evaluations and one focused on teaching followed in 1994–95.

In 1995 the Finnish Government decided that all higher education institutions should be evaluated at least once by the year 2000 (Development Plan for Education and University Research for 1995–2000). It also established the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC), which began its work in January 1996. The Council has carried out 14 evaluations and thus all 20 universities in Finland have been evaluated.

As national evaluations of research and educational fields had been launched in 1984 and 1990 respectively, the institutional evaluations were not the first nor the only external evaluations of Finnish universities, but rather a complementary procedure.

Already in 1986, the government expected that universities create an evaluation system capable of producing sufficient and comparable information of the results of research and teaching and of their costs. A national university database, KOTA, was created. From the very beginning, the information required was fed into the system by the universities themselves. Evaluation was considered an obligation of the universities who were held responsible for the quality of their activities.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s major changes were implemented in public administration and in higher education steering system: the budget system was changed from line item to lump sum budgeting, and an extensive deregulation took place. The changes put the universities in a new situation: self-regulation, management and leadership, quality, evaluation culture, and capacity for change became key words. Like in many other European countries, power seemed to flow to the institutional level (cf. Kells, 1992). Membership in the European Union in 1995 brought about further changes to the funding of university research, for instance.

As mentioned above, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council was established in 1996. The task of the Council, as stipulated in a decree, is to support the higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education in issues related to evaluation. The 12 members of the Council represent Universities, Polytechnics, student unions and employers.

In 1998, the new Universities Act was given. Section 5 of the Act says: "The universities shall evaluate their education, research and artistic activities, and their effectiveness. The universities shall also take part in external evaluation of their activities. The university shall publish the results obtained in the evaluation it has undertaken."

#### What are the specific themes (target areas) of evaluation?

Institutional evaluation can be described as an evaluation primarily targeted at overall resources, organisation, processes and performance of the university. The Finnish evaluations emphasise processes with special regard to management, decision-making and quality. Performance (statistics on inputs and outputs) has had a minor role. The basic issue in institutional evaluation comprise the prerequisites of education and research in each university.

Secondly, institutional evaluation has focused on the university's capacity for change. The quality of teaching and research has not usually been dealt with in institutional evaluations.

The purpose of the evaluations has been to establish and develop institutional evaluation culture, or – in quality terms – to improve the quality of the universities' activities. This emphasises the universities' responsibility for quality and the need for self-regulation (Stenqvist, 1992), as does the fact that the two pilot universities volunteered. No national evaluation scheme was made. Rather, the Ministry was looking for good examples (Jäppinen 2000).

A characteristic feature of the Finnish institutional evaluations is the notion of the university as a process owner. This has allowed the university to define the focus and to influence the implementation for evaluation. Consequently, the focus of evaluation in different universities has varied. For example, in the case of eastern Finnish universities it was on regional role, in the University of Turku, on external impact, while in the case of the University of Art and Design and Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, the main emphasis was on strategies. The follow-up of the earlier education evaluation of the University of Tampere concentrated on the quality assurance of teaching, while in the University of Helsinki, the evaluation focused on administration.

Active participation of the university in the evaluation planning and implementation has been emphasised all through the process. According to the FINHEEC Action Plan: "Evaluations utilize principles of communicative evaluation, i.e. people at different evaluation sites and from different interest groups are invited into a dialogue. Evaluation is regarded as a forum where different views and experiences are exchanged." (FINHEEC 12:2000). An informal motto simply says that evaluation should be useful for the university.

### **How are the evaluations implemented?**

The institutional evaluations have consisted of three parts: institutional self-evaluation, external peer review and published report.

The majority of the evaluations have been made in cooperation between the university in question

and FINHEEC (in the first five cases, the Ministry of Education). In four projects, the evaluations have also involved a foreign partner: in three evaluations it was the Association of European Universities, CRE, and in one the European Foundation for Management Development, EFMD.

The evaluation of the University of Helsinki proceeded differently as it was conducted by using the benchmarking method, i.e. comparative analysis. The partners included the Universities of Amsterdam, Oulu and Stockholm. Since an external evaluation team is not used in benchmarking, the University of Helsinki itself compiled the project report (*Learning by Comparing*, FINHEEC 12:1999).

### **Self-evaluation**

In a self-evaluation process, different methods have been used: inquiries to academic and other staff, students and external stakeholders; different surveys especially in the evaluations of regional role and external impact; departmental self-assessments, often based on questionnaires or checklists prepared by the university steering or working group; teams of reporters combined to different groups commenting on their texts; and an extensive, internet-based inquiry open to academic and other staff and students (Oulu follow-up, 1998). Usually the project has had a steering group, in most cases chaired by a vice-rector, and a working group for planning and implementation of the self-evaluation. Some universities had thematic task forces, which in many cases were existing committees, e.g. university committee for quality of teaching. In addition, the national university database and the statistics of each university have been used.

A representative of FINHEEC (in the early cases the Ministry) has consulted universities during the self-assessment and in preparing for the external evaluation, often as a member of the University's steering group for evaluation.

The universities have presented the process and results of the self-evaluation in a self-evaluation report, which in most cases has been published by the university. In compiling the report, the strong emphasis on university ownership ("you are doing it for yourselves") on the one hand, and the need to report to external peers on the other, may have been

somewhat contradictory. The main audience has, however, been the external review team. The external teams have often recommended the universities to formulate open and candid self-evaluation reports. However, many reports have rather been descriptive than analytical or (self) evaluative, and only few include conclusions, though over the years the quality of the reports has clearly improved.

### External Peer Review

The next step is a site-visit by the external review team. The duration of the visit has been three to five days, according to the size of the university. The programme has been planned by the university in cooperation with FINHEEC and the chairperson of the team. In addition to the university leadership, the team has met and interviewed teachers and researchers, other staff, students, and external stakeholders. In the first evaluations the report was written by the team; in some recent cases FINHEEC has provided a secretary to assist the review teams in compiling the report.

The peer review teams have been appointed by FINHEEC after consulting the University concerned. They have consisted of three to five members, depending on the size of the university. In each team there has been expertise in both evaluation and academic management. In addition, a match between the university profile and the profile of the team has been aimed at. In one case the peer review team was Finnish (University of Tampere, evaluation of teaching, 1995); all other teams have been international. Consequently, the majority (69%) of the experts have been non-Finns (see table 1 below). Usually, there has been one Finnish member in the teams to make sure that the national context is taken into account. However, there were no Finns in the teams appointed by CRE and EFMD, nor was there a discipline based match between the profile of the university and the CRE teams. In five teams there was, in addition to academic members, one member who represented external stakeholders.

Table 1: Home country of the peer review team members (N = 19; University of Helsinki is not included; its benchmarking partners were from Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands)

Country	Ministry of Education 1993–1995	FINHEEC 1996–2000	Total	
Finland	10	16	26	31%
Sweden	4	7	11	13%
Denmark	4	2	6	
Norway	-	1	1	
U.K.	2	11	13	16%
the Netherlands	1	4	5	
Germany	2	2	4	
France	2	2	4	
USA	2	1	3	
Portugal	-	2	2	
Australia	-	1	1	
Belgium	-	1	1	
Ireland	-	1	1	
Italy	-	1	1	
Austria	1	-	1	
Greece	-	1	1	
Slovenia	-	1	1	
Turkey	-	1	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>83</b>	

### Published Report

Following the completion of each evaluation, the university arranges a seminar at which the evaluation report with the recommendations is published and discussed. The report comes out in the FINHEEC publication series under the names of the team members, and it is distributed to all higher education institutions in Finland, to the Ministry of Education, and to different national and international stakeholders.

In the latest evaluations the participation of the external evaluation teams was intensified so that the team was able to take part in planning whenever possible. Moreover, the latest seminars at which the findings of the evaluation were published had the nature of a planning seminar. In this way evaluation has become more firmly rooted in the development processes of the university.

As the peer review teams have been international, the self-evaluation reports have been either translated into or written in English. The language of

the interviews has likewise been English, as has that of the reports of the external evaluation teams with two exceptions being written in Swedish (University of Lapland 1995 and the Swedish Business School 1998) and one in Finnish (University of Tampere 1995). The universities have appreciated the opportunity to receive international feedback in evaluation and welcomed influences from outside their own system. However, the use of foreign language has not been without problems.

FINHEEC has been responsible for the costs of external evaluation.

### Is there a follow-up and how is it organised?

FINHEEC has offered the universities the possibility of a follow-up evaluation. So far, four of the universities that were evaluated in early or mid-1990s (Oulu, Vaasa, Tampere, Swedish Business School) have taken the opportunity and invited some of the peers to revisit the university. The procedure of the follow-up evaluations is similar to that of the usual institutional evaluation. In the University of Jyväskylä the follow-up was carried out in the form of a research into the immediate changes after the evaluation and longer-term impacts of it (Välímää et al. 1998).

A meta-evaluation of the institutional evaluations is being discussed.

### How are the evaluators trained?

As most of the evaluators were from outside Finland, time and money did not allow training seminars. The briefing happened via correspondence and telephone conferences in the triangle FINHEEC – University – evaluators, and in a half-day seminar the day before the site visit. That day the team also met representatives of the Ministry of Education. Publications on the Finnish higher education system and policy were sent to teams in advance. Probably a more thorough training would have been helpful and appreciated. As it was, the whole exercise was very much dependent on the expertise of the peer review teams.

## On the consequences

Each evaluation report includes recommendations to the university, but the number varies substantially, roughly between ten and dozens. To identify areas where, according to the reports, quality assurance and quality improvement would be needed, a review covering the recommendations given by 16 peer review teams to 18 universities was compiled. For the classification of the recommendations, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Education Pilot Criteria 1995 were used. Like other quality awards they focus on continuous quality improvement and on the question “how?”. In line with the Criteria, recommendations concerning resources and structures of the universities, and those referring to different national structures, e.g. degree system and resource allocation, were not included in the review. No attention was paid to the sub-categories, to the scoring system or to the points of the criteria.

Table 2: The recommendations of 16 peer review teams according to the Malcolm Baldrige Education Pilot Criteria 1995

MB Category	N	%
1 Leadership	62	14
2 Information and Analysis	18	4
3 Strategic and Operational Planning	67	15
4 Human Resource Development and Management	66	15
5 Educational and Business Process Management	194	43
6 School Performance Results	-	-
7 Student Focus and Student and Stakeholder Satisfaction	41	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>100</b>

The small number of recommendations in Category 2, Information and Analysis, is open to different interpretations. On one hand, one might think that everything is fine, on the other one asks whether the whole question has remained unnoticed by both the universities and the peers.

For the moment, there is not much research available on the consequences and impacts of the institutional evaluations. (However, see Välímää, J. & al 1998). Different decisions and changes made by the universities as a consequence of the evaluations have been reported in the follow-up reports and in

various articles of local newspapers and university magazines. For example, after the evaluation of three eastern Finnish Universities, which was focused on their regional role, the Prime Minister invited representatives of the Universities and the region to discuss regional development strategies, and the three universities now have a joint regional strategy. Further, the Sibelius Academy is developing evaluation approaches to serve the teaching and learning of music, and the University of Art and Design has changed its entrance examination, following the recommendations of the peer review team, and is now considering a new structure.

In many universities the institutional evaluation has been the beginning of or – in the later cases – a boost for strategic planning. It seems fair to say that one advantage of institutional evaluation is that the university management has been obliged to consider evaluation of its own operations, the state of the university and the responsibility for quality. Thus it has enabled the harnessing of evaluation for the development of teaching, research and other activities. This development corresponds to the aim of establishing and developing evaluation culture in the Finnish higher education institutions. However, critics might say that the evaluations (or the changes in culture) have remained at the institutional level and left the basic units intact.

### **What kind of evaluation?**

Considering the two alternative approaches to quality management in higher education suggested by Brennan – specialist/academic and holistic/organisational – the Finnish institutional evaluations could be described rather academic with some elements of the organisational approach. The academic approach stresses the distinctiveness of higher education institutions, emphasises ‘producer’ concerns, and is exclusive and basically conservative. The organisational approach stresses the essential simi-

larity of all organisations, emphasises ‘consumer’ concerns, and is inclusive and basically adaptive (Brennan 1998, pp. 25–26). The consumer aspect was included in the early planning documents of institutional evaluation (Stenqvist 1991), and it has been heard in all evaluations, but especially in the evaluations of the eastern Finland universities and the University of Turku, which focused on regional role/external impact. Further, the choice of the institutional dimension, and the consequent attention to management and leadership instead of the disciplinary dimension refer to adaptive/organisational approach. Academics as external evaluators represent conservative approach, but coming from other higher education systems they may have been in a better position to see weaknesses and to import new ideas into the universities than Finnish peers or non-academic evaluators would have been.

Barnett has offered an interesting model of power and enlightenment in different forms of quality evaluation (Barnett 1994). The two ends of the power dimension are collegial and bureaucratic, and those of the enlightenment dimension emancipatory (internal understanding) and technicist (external understanding). Barnett places external peer review in the quadrant collegial-technicist, and institutional self-study between the quadrants collegial-emancipatory and bureaucratic-emancipatory. Thus, without going into details, the Finnish institutional evaluations seem collegial rather than bureaucratic (power), but – in spite of the emancipatory purpose (universities as process owners and learners of evaluation culture) – technicist rather than emancipatory (enlightenment). In line with Barnett’s model, the self-evaluation process is usually described as the most useful part of the whole exercise. Why then external evaluation? “Without it we would not have made the self-evaluation”, is the answer often heard.



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## 3.2 FRANCE: Institutional evaluations: the French context

### Background

The Comité National D'évaluation (CNE) was created in 1984 by the law on higher education, a law by which universities were granted administrative, pedagogical, research and financial autonomy. This law concluded a movement initiated 16 years earlier, in 1968, and gave the French universities an autonomy they had never had before. Until 1984, the French higher education system could be characterised as a collection of disciplinary faculties. According to the 1984 law, the faculties had to start to cooperate within the framework of a larger institution which was responsible for the development strategy under the direction of a president. Within this context, the CNE was given the task to evaluate the institutions in order to improve their quality and to legitimate their new role. The idea was to legitimate the practice of evaluation as a counterpart for autonomy.

The CNE is not alone in the vast landscape of French higher education. It has to deal with other relevant evaluation bodies, which include:

- the National University Council (CNU), which evaluates the academic staff and makes decision regarding recruitment and promotion;
- the National Committee of Evaluation of Research (CNER), which evaluates researchers and research laboratories;
- the Ministry of Education, which develops degree programs according to its own guidelines, and which is in charge of the accreditation of degrees and institutions;
- the General Inspection of the Administration of National Education (IGAEN), which evaluates the management staff.

Thus evaluation and quality assessment of higher education is shared by a number of different actors. All these bodies evaluate some aspects of the academic life but only the CNE evaluates the overall policy and functioning of the institutions.

### Objectives, principles and procedures

#### Objectives of evaluation

As stated above, the main objective of institutional evaluations is to improve the functioning of Higher Education institutions in the area corresponding to its Public Sector missions:

- education and continuing education;
- scientific and technological research and the use of research results;
- dissemination of academic and technical knowledge ;
- international co-operation.

This objective cannot be reached unless the culture and the practice of quality assessment in Higher Education are promoted and developed. Promoting and developing evaluation is another objective of the CNE.

#### General principles of evaluation

- 1 Qualitative evaluation. The CNE considers that Higher Education institutions are complex struc-

tures which can be analysed only within their specific context and through qualitative categories. We resort to performance indicators and statistical data in order to support qualitative analysis.

- 2 A concerted process. The understanding of a complex structure depends on the quality of exchanges between the CNE, people in charge of this structure and the “users”, the students.
- 3 A European framework. The CNE has adopted the principles defined by the European Pilot Project:
  - internal evaluation;
  - external evaluation;
  - peer review;
  - report made public.

### Evaluation Procedure

The evaluation of a higher education institution is performed in two stages. First, an internal evaluation is organised by the institution itself. The self-assessment reveals how an institution regards itself in view of both qualitative and quantitative data. A guide for evaluation, written by the CNE, steers the self-assessment process.

Following the internal evaluation, the CNE coordinates an external evaluation made by experts, mainly chosen from the academic community. A training session sets out concepts and methods of an evaluation programme and briefly presents the institution. Each expert is required to concentrate on a specific area. A three-day visit is organised for all the experts in the institution.

The final report is the synthesis made by the CNE from the experts individual and confidential work. The CNE then suggests recommendations to the institution. The implementation of these recommendations is not legally compulsory but they are often adhered to by the universities.

### The Activities of the CNE

The CNE activities consist of four types:

- institutional evaluation;
- disciplinary evaluation;
- thematic studies;
- evaluation of higher education network in a given region (area-based evaluation).

Institutional evaluation is the main task of the Committee. In 1996, the CNE completed the first round of evaluations covering some 90 universities. At that time, it decided to explore different approaches, enlarging the scope of its work. Three innovations were made.

1. The main innovation included the “politique de site”, an area-based approach. Because of the development of closer relationships with local authorities and the co-existence of several universities (sometimes with the same disciplines) within a single town or region, it had become necessary to analyse the coherence of policies developed by universities with regard to the regional context. Many of them have been implemented, for example Lyon (4 universities, 3 polytechnics and a teacher training school) and Normandy. The area-based evaluation must be considered as a natural outgrowth of both political and administrative decentralisation and one-by-one institutional evaluation.
2. The second innovation concerned the evaluation of disciplines. Several reasons justified this innovation. The first one was the international perspective, particularly the European one, which can be best enforced at the discipline level, with the final goal of developing degree equivalencies within the European Union. The second one was the aspiration to compare universities at an appropriate level which, however, has proven to be impossible because of the great heterogeneity of universities (size, historical, geographical and sociological conditions, disciplines represented, research activities, etc.).
3. The third one was directly connected with the institutional evaluation. These evaluations actually highlight the fact that many problems are discipline-based problems which cannot be solved or even understood within the institution, but require a national analysis. Here again, just as for the area-based evaluation, discipline evaluation can be considered as an outgrowth of institutional evaluation.

## The Second Round of Institutional Evaluation

In 1996, the CNE started the evaluation of universities that had already been evaluated once. The goal was to evaluate the implementation of the initial recommendations and to measure change. From the first to the second-round evaluations, the procedure has been changed. It has been lightened to become selective for two reasons:

1. First, the heavy task of describing all aspects of an institution had become less necessary because the legitimacy issue was no longer critical and the academic community did not so much need a university-wide report to be assured of institutional unity.
2. Secondly, the CNE wanted its recommendations to become more efficient for quality improvement and decision-making: only the main issues identified by self-assessment and external evaluation were to be included in the recommendations.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, a new relationship has been established between the government and the institutions. It consists of a four-year contract developed by the university and negotiated and agreed upon with the government. The contract presents the main goals of the university for the next four years, a general development strategy which addresses the full spectrum of institutional activities: teaching, research and management. The contract includes financial clauses for each of the projected actions. It only concerns 10 % of the overall funding, but it gives the university president enough resources to implement university-wide activities. For the past ten years, the contractual procedure has contributed to development of institutional culture within the French academic landscape.

It was then logical to link the CNE activities chronologically to the contractual agenda. This means that the CNE chooses the universities that are, for a specific year, in a contractual wave (about 20 universities a year). It is expected that due to the link the recommendations will be more effectively implemented. As the evaluation intervention takes

place when the university is carrying out a reflection on itself, the internal phase of evaluation is more closely connected with strategic development, and the recommendations become more operative.

### Challenges

There are some challenges related to the context in which institutional evaluation is carried out. Three of them should be mentioned:

1. First of all, a problem of adaptation. The question is: how do we move from a “legitimizing process” to an activity-centred quality assessment process?
2. The second one is the problem of scale. How can we simultaneously deal with the general policy of a university as defined in the contract and with the issues related to core activities of the universities: degrees, students, the quality of courses, quality of research etc.?
3. The last problem concerns international cooperation. In France, and in many other European countries, institutional evaluation is readable and understandable mainly within the national framework. How do we link the national specificity of institutional evaluation with the necessity of developing degree equivalencies in Europe?

## 3.3 IRELAND: Institutional Reviews – National Council for Educational Awards

### The National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA)

The NCEA is a government agency responsible for non-university educational awards and course approval. It was established in 1972 and was given statutory powers and responsibilities by the National Council for Educational Awards Act, 1979. The general function of the Council is:

*“to encourage, facilitate, promote, co-ordinate and develop technical, industrial, scientific, technological and commercial education, and education in art and design, provided outside the universities, whether professional, vocational or technical, and to encourage and promote liberal education.”* (NCEA Act, 1979)

The NCEA Act gives the Council the authority to approve courses and to grant educational awards (e.g., degrees, diplomas and certificates) in relation to these, at designated institutions. Some institutions are named in the Act or designated in a Statutory Order made by the Minister for Education. Other institutions may apply to the Minister to be designated. The Minister is required to consult the Council in relation to all such applications.

The NCEA also has a role in advising the Minister for Education, in relation to the costs and financing of approved courses.

### **NCEA Quality Assessment Procedures**

The current NCEA system of external quality assessment has five main elements:

- (1) Institutional Reviews;
- (2) Full Course Evaluations;
- (3) Programmatic Reviews;
- (4) External Examiners; and
- (5) National Quality Reviews.

Although this paper is principally concerned with Institutional Reviews, a brief outline is given of the other methods of quality assessment, to indicate the respective role of each of these in the overall system of quality assurance and monitoring.

#### **Full Course Evaluation**

Every new course, which an institution wishes to lead to the granting of NCEA awards to successful students, must first be submitted to the NCEA for approval. The submission document sets out the course aims and objectives, subject content, and proposed teaching and assessment methodologies. The NCEA appoints a team of assessors, including academic and industrial members, to consider the submission, visit the institution and make a report

with recommendations. The relevant NCEA Board of Studies considers the Assessors' report and makes a recommendation to the Academic Committee of the NCEA regarding approval of the course. The Academic Committee makes its decision on behalf of the Council of the NCEA. This procedure applies to all proposed new courses and must be completed before students are enrolled. The evaluation, accordingly is “ex ante”. Although the Assessors' visit normally involves a substantial amount of dialogue and mutual adjustment of positions, the evaluation is mainly an external process.

#### **Programmatic Reviews**

Courses are approved by the NCEA for a limited period, which does not exceed five years. All approved courses are reviewed at five-yearly intervals by means of Programmatic Reviews. Each institution is required to undertake such reviews on a self-study basis, and to make a Programmatic Review Submission to NCEA for renewal of approval of the suite of approved courses in the major discipline groups. These disciplines correspond to the NCEA Board of Studies structure – “Business Studies”, “Engineering and Technology”, “Humanities” and “Science and Computing”. These submissions are considered by a group of NCEA assessors, who visit the institution and report to the NCEA in the same way as in the case of Full Course Evaluations. On the basis of the outcome of the Programmatic Review, the NCEA decides if approval of the courses should be extended for a further five years.

#### **External Examiners**

The NCEA appoints External Examiners to every approved course. They have responsibility for monitoring the standard of student performance. External Examiners may be nominated by the institutions and are appointed for a three-year term of office. They must approve every examination paper, moderate a sample of scripts, certify the marks or grades awarded to each student, attend the relevant Board of Examiners meeting, and report to the NCEA regarding the standard of the examinations.

## National Quality Reviews

Individual discipline subject areas are evaluated across all designated institutions. This quality assurance process is still in its initial stages and will be reviewed on completion of a number of projects.

## The NCEA Institutional Review Process

### Philosophy and Goals of Institutional Review

The Institutional Review is designed as a joint process, conducted by the institution and the NCEA. Both work in partnership to make proposals and recommendations and agree a plan for the development and enhancement of the quality of the institution. A five to ten year span of development is envisaged. The NCEA approach to quality assurance is based on the principle that the primary responsibility for achieving and maintaining quality rests with the institution, which should carry out a self-evaluation in this regard. The role of the NCEA is to act as a guarantor of national standards in relation to its awards.

The Institutional Review process has two principal goals:

- to enhance the quality of the institution's work; and
- to provide an element of public accountability.

Quality improvement is regarded as the more important goal in the longer term. Accountability is necessary to ensure confidence among students, funding agencies, other educational institutions, other stakeholders and the general public, that the institution is being properly managed, making good use of its resources and providing services of an adequate standard.

### Methodology of Institutional Review

Institutional Reviews are based on a **self-study** by the institution, followed by **peer review**, including a **site visit**, and a **report**. There is a five-year cycle of reviews. The first of these commenced in 1988/89. Institutional Reviews and Programmatic Reviews in each institution are scheduled in advance for each five-year period. Each multi-discipline in-

stitution is therefore involved in a major review every year, either an Institutional Review or a Programmatic Review of one of its discipline groups. The standard methodology is varied to take account of significant differences in the scale, structures and ethos of the wide variety of institutions in the NCEA sector.

The focus of Institutional Review is on the Institution as a whole – its mission and goals, progress over the previous years, strategic plans, staffing and other resources and the general operating environment.

The Institutional Review process should provide the Institute with a strategic planning instrument to facilitate its academic planning. It should also provide the NCEA with the information necessary to enable it to

- satisfy itself regarding the quality of the Institutions work and the facilities available at the Institution; and
- assist in the co-ordination of course provision in a national context.

### The Institutional Self-Study

The organisation of the self-study is a matter for the institution itself. The NCEA, however, requires that the self-study document which will be considered by the peer review group should address the following:

- (1) Mission and Goals of the Institution;
- (2) Governance and Management Structures;
- (3) Academic Policies and Procedures;
- (4) Institutional Resources; and
- (5) Institutional Planning.

A detailed checklist for addressing issues under these headings is provided to facilitate institutes, both in conducting the self-study and in presenting the self-study report. The level of detail provided will vary between Institutions, according to the Institution's structures, organisations and ethos.

Institutions differ considerably in their approaches to carrying out a self-study and preparing the self-study report. In many cases an elaborate structure of committees and working parties is used, the intention being to involve as many as possible

of the institution's personnel in the exercise. In other cases a "top-down" approach is preferred, with the study being closely controlled by top management and the report being written by one or two persons in senior positions.

### **Institutional Review Assessors**

The NCEA has a set of guidelines which determine the composition of the Institutional Review Group. This group usually consists of:

- a Chairman;
- the head of a peer institution;
- two senior academics, one of whom should, where possible, be from outside of Ireland;
- two from outside the educational sector;
  - one from the industry/services sector;
  - one from the professions;
- the Director of the NCEA, or a nominee.

An NCEA professional staff member with responsibility for drafting the report also accompanies the group. The personnel to be selected are agreed with the institution. The institution may also propose names of suitable assessors.

### **Site Visit**

The self-study preceding the institutional site visit is the most important contribution to the goal of quality improvement of Institutional Reviews. It stimulates appropriate strategic management decisions. Nevertheless, the site visit is an important part of the process, and is a major factor in ensuring the public accountability dimension of the evaluation exercise.

An NCEA site visit normally takes one or two full days. During this time the assessors discuss the self-study report with the institution's top management and visit the various campus facilities. Functional managers of central services are involved in the discussions where necessary. It is less usual to involve Deans and Department Heads. These are usually only involved if there are substantial changes proposed in the orientation of the institution's teaching and research programmes. The detail of these programmes are addressed in the context of Programmatic Reviews.

### **The Institutional Review Report**

Following the site visit, the assessors prepare a draft report, usually quite a brief document (not exceeding 10 pages), which summarises their findings. The institution is given an opportunity to verify factual detail and make general observations on the draft. This is then submitted to the Council of the NCEA.

The report usually includes recommendations which are grouped in three sections. These sections are addressed to:

- (1) the institution;
- (2) the Council of the NCEA; and
- (3) the institution's main funding agency.

The Institutional Review Report is not a public document. Where necessary, relevant parts of the report are sent to organisations with a role in implementing the recommendations.

NCEA follow-up action includes a special visit to the institution by the Director of the NCEA midway between reviews, to discuss progress on implementing recommendations and to prepare the initial action for the next review. Specific recommendations concerning teaching and research programmes are communicated to the relevant NCEA Boards of Studies, course assessors and external examiners. These will take such monitoring or review actions as they consider necessary.

## **3.4 NORWAY: Institutional evaluations in Norwegian higher education**

*Jon Haakstad, Network Norway Council*

### **The agent: The Network Norway Council**

The Network Norway Council (NNC) was established in 1998 as an advisory body on higher education to the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. The Council's mission, however, also included a responsibility for quality assurance in the higher education sector and the task of carrying out national evaluations.

In addition to evaluations commissioned by the institutions themselves, the Norwegian Institute for Studies in Research and Higher Education carried out several national evaluations during the 1990s, notably of a variety of subject areas, while the Norwegian Research Council has a long-established mandate to undertake evaluations of research. This division between research and education was upheld when the Network Norway Council (NNC) was established in 1998 as an advisory body to the Ministry. As part of its mission, the NNC took over from the Norwegian Institute the responsibility for quality assurance and evaluations in higher education, while the Research Council continues to take care of evaluations of research.

As its main tool of reviewing quality in higher education on a national level, the Council has chosen to develop a system of quality audit. This means that institutional evaluations will play only a supplementary role in the Norwegian approach to quality assurance. But the very recommendations that underpinned the decision to opt for audit as a “national” system also stressed the need for such supplementary evaluations, both subject and institutional evaluations.

In fact, institutional evaluations have taken a dominant position among the Council’s early projects, as an evaluation of the University in Tromsø in 1999 is now being followed up with similar evaluations of Norway’s other three universities, the University of Oslo, the University of Bergen and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim.

### **Institutional evaluations and (institutional) quality audit**

The use of the terms “quality audit” and “institutional evaluation” to describe complementary or different evaluation procedures in the paragraph above makes it necessary to explain how they are understood by the Network Norway Council. Both types are “institutional” in the sense that they are directed towards the entire institution and not a subsection of it and both address the responsibility of institutional leadership. Still, they are very differently targeted:

By “quality audit” is meant a systematic review of the way in which institutions handle their responsibility for educational quality. The object of the assessment is primarily the institutions’ own quality assurance work – and only indirectly the educational quality of specific programmes or subject areas. Quality audit, in our practice and usage, is concerned with the educational side of the institutions’ activities. Research activities are looked at only in so far as they inform and support educational services.

“Institutional evaluation” entails a fuller assessment of the institution and has a much broader scope. Typically, an institutional evaluation will investigate the institution as an organisation and assess its steering system and strategies, its academic profile in teaching and research, its infrastructure and the way it serves staff and students, its cooperation with the outside world, its economic and administrative efficiency, and the extent to which it reaches its goals as an academic institution.

### **Background: the evaluation of the University of Tromsø**

The project was initiated by the university itself before the NNC had become fully operative, with the original aim of assessing how well the institution was solving its given and chosen tasks, and how well it was utilising its resources, after a period of thorough reorganisation. When the NNC took over operational responsibility for the project in March 1999, the scope of the evaluation was broadened somewhat, bringing it fairly close to a traditional formula for institutional evaluations. As the NNC considered itself to be “fresh in the game” of carrying out evaluations, the Norwegian Institute for Research in Higher Education was brought in as a supporting partner with particular responsibility for developing quantitative data. By hiring a project manager from the Danish Evaluation Institute to act as secretary to the external committee, the Council could also draw on the longer experience of this agency.

The Evaluation Report was published in November 1999. At that time the Ministry had already declared its intention to have the other three universities evaluated as well.

## The aim of the three university evaluations

The reason for conducting the evaluations will appear from their two-fold aim:

- to offer assessments and recommendations on central areas of activity that may contribute to the institutions' qualitative and strategic development.
- to inform the authorities and the general public about the institutions' ability to solve their societal tasks.

The Ministry, which has commissioned these evaluations, has given no further reason why they should be carried out.

It emerges from the aim that the evaluations will have both a control and a developmental function, with an emphasis on the latter.

## Target areas

The three evaluations will build on the formula that was found for the Tromsø project and the experiences that were won from it. A "core plan" for the three evaluations, stating what should be common denominators among them, was formally adopted by the Council on 15 June, 2000. In addition to being a steering instrument, the core plan will enable evaluators to draw some direct and relevant comparisons between the institutions.

The plan states that the three evaluations – as long as they address the common themes – may have different profiles, depending on the specific wishes of the institutions themselves. As the packet of common themes is relatively comprehensive, such profile will probably be easier to obtain by stressing or reformulating already given themes than by adding new ones.

The themes are organised under 6 main areas:

1. The institution as an organisation (including resource allocation, organisational structure, steering, leadership and policy implementation)
2. Academic profile and strategy (including research volume in subject areas, study programmes, cooperation with external institutions, internationalisation and internal quality assurance and development.)

3. Staff competence: its status, relevance, utilisation and development (including recruitment policy and competence development policy for academic and administrative-technical staff.)
4. Catering for students (including student recruitment policy, measures for first-year students, systematic practice regarding tutoring and student feed-back, and students' course evaluation.)
5. Infrastructure for work and study (including spatial facilities, equipment, support facilities like ICT and libraries, information and service functions, catering and recreational facilities, personnel management.)
6. Outcomes (in research volume, externally obtained research means, student applicant numbers, candidate or credit output, grade levels, failure rates, income beyond basic grant, economic result and scope for strategic manoeuvring.)

## Participating agents

The project considers three agents with influencing powers:

- the NNC, which provides the basic plan (with common themes), directs and administers the projects, formulates the mandate of the external committees, organises site visits and provides secretarial support for the external committees. The NNC also has the chief responsibility for the choice and production of quantitative data and other documentation.
- the institutions themselves, which take part in the planning of the individual projects, contribute to the formulation of specific evaluation themes for each evaluation, organise and conduct a self-evaluation, produce any requested documentation and helps prepare the external committee's site visit.
- the external committee will conduct an evaluation of the university in accordance with its mandate. The committee will have at least 5 members with extensive knowledge about the role and activities of universities. There must be international representation as well as expertise from external fields, and also student representation.



Building on the “core plan” for all three evaluations, the NNC and the university will negotiate a project plan for each individual evaluation. The project plan will contain the specific evaluation themes and a list of which data should be produced.

### Process and reports

Each evaluation project will consist of a self-evaluation and an external evaluation, both resulting in separate reports. Both the internal and the external evaluation must address the themes of the project plan with assessments and recommendations, but the institution is free to choose its own methodological and organisational approach for the internal evaluation, and even to include additional themes. The external evaluation follows a given mandate that corresponds to the themes of the project plan. The external committee’s report is the responsibility of the committee alone, but is “owned” and published by the Network Norway Council. The external committee should have an opportunity to influence its own mandate and the choice of documentation.

Each project will be rounded off with a conference to discuss the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, where representatives of the NNC, the institution and the external committee take part.

According to the plan, the first evaluation will start in the beginning of 2001, after project planning during the autumn of 2000. The duration of each project is estimated at roughly one year, with the second and third project starting with a half-year interval after the preceding one. That means that the last evaluation will be finished by the end of 2002.

### Follow-up

The mandates for the external committees will demand that the final reports give the institutions advice on what measures may be introduced in order to maintain qualities, improve weaknesses and meet challenges.

It is however not the one of the operative tasks of the NNC to see to it that the institutions act on the insights and the advice that come out of the evaluations. That responsibility still rests with the

Ministry – and with the institutions themselves. But the NNC will ask to be informed about follow-up measures and their results.

Judging from what happened after the evaluation of the University of Tromsø, the Ministry will ask the institutions to draft action plans within half a year after the external report is presented to them and to discuss it with the Ministry.

### A learning process

The Network Norway Council is still a relatively fresh and inexperienced evaluation agency. Our strategies and methodologies are therefore developing from one project to the next. In the field of institutional evaluations we have only one finished project to build on but the lessons we learned from the Tromsø evaluation have led to certain changes in the new projects. Most important here are perhaps:

- more concern with outcomes. However well an institution seems to be working by its own standards, it must – in the final analysis – be judged on how well it utilises its resources to perform given and chosen societal tasks in education, research and knowledge dissemination to the world outside.
- more concern with factual knowledge about the institution. In order to make an assessment of outcomes, a solid and sophisticated data base is needed. We are constantly working to extend and sharpen the factual foundation of the qualitative judgements.
- more preparatory work in relation to the self-evaluation part. This does not mean that the NNR will give detailed instructions for the self-evaluation, but that aims and expectations as to what the evaluations should produce of documentation, analysis, assessments and recommendations are made clear and that the institution is given ample time to organise and carry out its self-evaluation project.

These changes may seem to indicate a swing towards a “harder” approach. This is only relative and a matter of degree, though. The Tromsø evaluation was in most respects a successful one and our basic

attitude to institutional evaluations is still one of openness and development-orientation. Consequently, the NNC and the institutions will have common training seminars for key personnel in preparation of the projects.

### 3.5 SWEDEN: Academic Audit in Sweden

*Staffan Wahlén*

#### Background of audits and other forms of evaluation

As a result of the 1993 Higher Education Reform Swedish higher education institutions gained (relative) autonomy. The responsibility for e.g. the organisation of studies, appointments, and internal allocation of resources was decentralised. A new, largely performance-based system of funding universities and colleges was introduced, based on student achievements as well as on student numbers, in order to ensure intensified development of teaching, research and administrative processes. Each institution is responsible for developing the quality of its own activities, but also for demonstrating to the government the standard of its quality enhancement mechanisms. It was emphasised that, in the words of the 1993 Higher Education Act, “the available resources must be used efficiently in order to ensure high quality activities.”

It was thus made clear that each institution was responsible for maintaining and improving the quality of its activities, and was accountable to the government and society for this. It may be maintained that universities and colleges have always been quality-driven. What has now been added, however, is that they must have (and demonstrate that they have) systematic improvement processes regarding undergraduate education, graduate education, research and administration. They are required to develop routines for reflecting on their activities, and make corrections whenever necessary for the sound improvement of the institution.

The institutional audit of the quality enhancement

programmes of universities and colleges developed by the National Agency for Higher Education is part of the evaluation model established by the Government. Other forms of national evaluations carried out by the Agency are:

- national assessment of subjects and programmes. Areas for evaluation are selected on the basis of identified problems or other criteria;
- evaluation of education programmes for accreditation. This has proved one of the most effective quality-driving measures to improve standards at university colleges. It is carried out on the basis of established criteria, the same for all evaluations, among which are the ratio of teachers with a Ph.D. degree, the number and scope of advanced courses, library resources and other facilities.

#### Quality audit

The only form of evaluation so far which involves all higher education institutions is the academic or quality audit, which focuses on institutional processes for quality assurance and enhancement.

All 36 institutions of higher education were audited between 1996 and 1999, and a second cycle is now under way, at the same time as a new overall model of programme/subject evaluation is being developed.

#### Process

The audit follows the standard procedure of self-evaluation, peer review, and public report. The administration of the work is the responsibility of a project officer of the National Agency, whose task it is to see to it that the audit is conducted in accordance with the general principles established by the Agency.

Audit teams are appointed by the National Agency for Higher Education in consultation with the institution. The teams consist of two or three well-established academic leaders, one person from industry or public administration and one student. Each team has a secretary, who is usually an experienced university administrator.

Table 1: Categories and numbers of members of teams in the first round of audits

Category	Number
Academic leaders (rectors, deans etc.)	80
Professors in leading positions	46
Students	36
Professionals	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>

There is a one-day induction for the auditors, run by the Agency. In the later audits, we have been able to draw on the experience of the first review teams, and members of those teams have provided their experiences of the process and given advice to new teams.

The review process begins with a meeting between the chairperson of the audit team and the management of the institution in order to establish the parameters, decide on a timetable etc.

The self-evaluation is the full responsibility of the institution and is expected to be a recurring exercise for the development of the individual university. Each of them is therefore unique. The Agency's project officer provides advice if asked to. In later audits, institutions have also drawn on the experience of those already evaluated. The process usually takes four to six months, and results in a document, which is sent to the audit team together with other pertinent material (quality enhancement programme, other policy documents, internal evaluation reports etc.). The self-evaluation document commenting on the strengths and weaknesses of the quality enhancement efforts is the basic point of departure for the visiting team.

The team goes through the material over a period of about one month, and then visits the institution for two to five days depending on the size and complexity of the institution.

An interim report, containing a critical review of the institution's quality assurance and enhancement processes and recommendations for improvement, is sent to the Rector of the institution, who is given the opportunity to comment on points of fact. The report, which is written by the team's secretary and checked for consistency with the overall principles, is the collective responsibility of the audit team, but the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities writes

an introduction highlighting the observations which he thinks are pertinent.

It is published and distributed widely to Government and Parliament, to all other higher education institutions, student unions, and to the press.

## Content

Each institution is obliged by government decree to prepare a quality enhancement programme. This programme is expected to guide the quality work of the institution, and both the self-evaluation and the audit itself relate to it. In this light the following questions are focused:

- The strategies of the quality enhancement processes: What policy, plans and programs have been developed to realise overall goals, ambitions and targets for quality enhancement? How have the goals been operationalised? What form has been given to the organisation and distribution of responsibility? How have priorities been set?
- Leadership: How is leadership exercised on different levels to e.g. impart visions, create motivation, participation and responsibility, develop competence and strategically implement and follow up on quality enhancement programs?
- Co-operation with stakeholders: In what ways have the stakeholders been identified, their needs and demands determined, and how has the institution co-operated with them?
- Involvement in quality enhancement processes: How and to what extent are teachers, researchers, administrative staff and students committed, involved and responsible participants?
- Integration: How is quality enhancement integrated into university work and its various components?
- Systems of evaluation and follow-up: What methods, routines and measures have been adopted for recurring evaluations and the resultant development?
- External professional relations: In what ways is the university pursuing national and international contacts of long-term and permanent importance for the professional nature and future direction of university activities?

## Results

The main impression is a positive one. The following table shows the distribution of recommendations, and it is clear that leadership and strategies have been at the focus of the teams' attention.

Table 2: Types of recommendations of audit teams

Areas	Number of recommendations	%
Leadership	108	21
Strategies for enhancement	73	15
Involvement in quality enhancement	63	12
Staff development	63	12
Systems of evaluation and follow-up	62	12
Stakeholder relations	44	9
Internationalisation	22	4
Equity	17	3
Other	58	12
Total	510	100

One major ambition of the colleges is building up a research potential in various ways, e.g. by encouraging staff without Ph.D.s to pursue doctoral studies. Other shared ambitions highlighted in the reports include programmes for evaluating teaching, the integration of quality enhancement into the regular work of the institution and developing ICT strategies.

As is clear from the above table, academic leadership is discussed at great length in most reports. Several reports stress the conflict between the collegial form of leadership and the need for more managerial structure imposed by demands for efficiency. This conflict is present, to a higher or lower extent, at all the institutions, including the smaller ones.

Strategic, reasonably long-term programmes, stating clear operational goals for the quality enhancement ambitions are considered to be necessary tools for effective management. The clarity of the strategies and programmes audited varies from vagueness to the statement of specific objectives and targets.

Identifying and co-operating with the stakeholders of higher education are necessary ingredients in university strategies and in the opinion of the audit groups; the efforts and success of the institutions in this respect vary. It may be easier for a

smaller regional college to co-operate with the surrounding community than for a centuries-old institution.

One of the main criticisms of institutions' quality efforts concerns evaluation procedures and follow-up both as regards quality enhancement and other activities. It appears that the lack of both operational goals in some institutions and the lack of sufficient data in others prevent them from interpreting and acting on the results of their activities. In fact, the effects of educational efforts are studied only sporadically. Evaluations are not always stringent and consistent enough, and, above all, not always used in the planning of future courses.

Other areas covered by the audit groups include staff development and recruitment of staff. Staff development in the colleges focuses on Ph.D. programmes for teachers without doctorates.

Finally, generally positive, although comparatively few, comments are made concerning efforts in the areas of promoting internationalisation and equal opportunities.

## Effects

The reports have been widely circulated throughout the institutions. Reactions from universities are mostly positive, and there is at least one case of unreserved enthusiasm, even in the face of fairly severe criticism. That particular institution argued that the report gave the management the strength to pursue policies which would otherwise have been accepted only reluctantly. One rector expressed the opinion that the visiting team should be transformed into a permanent advisory group. After all, there was no other group which knew the institution and its strengths and weaknesses so well. The audits have been commented on favourably in the university or college internal staff magazines, with indications that the areas commented on in the reports are now at the focus of the rector's attention.

The impact may be briefly summarised as follows:

- audits have affected internal quality processes positively to a fairly large extent
- similar developments may be discerned at different institutions

- quality work has not yet reached the critical mass needed for self-sustained growth, which is the reason for the second cycle.
- an important aspect is the learning process for both institutions and, not least, the visiting teams.

### Post-script

The Swedish Government decided in late 1999 that the future focus of quality assurance will be on assessment of programmes and subjects. All study programmes and subjects will now be assessed over a six-year period beginning in the year 2001. Institutional review will still be a part of the evaluation system, but the model described above will be simplified and adjusted to take into account the results of assessments.

## 3.6 UNITED KINGDOM: Institutional reviews

### The purpose of and approach to institutional review in UK higher education

- 1 The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK is to promote public confidence that quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced. To this end, the Agency carries out academic reviews of the performance of subjects and institutions. This paper describes the method and procedures for carrying out academic reviews in respect of institutions.
- 2 Institutional review addresses the ultimate responsibility for the management of quality and standards that rests with the institution as a whole. It is concerned particularly with the way an institution exercises its powers as a body able to grant degrees and/or other awards. It results in reports on the degree of confidence that may reasonably be placed in an institution's effectiveness in managing the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its programmes.

- 3 The process of whole institution review is a continuous and dynamic engagement with the institution and its internal processes over the six years of the review cycle. Much of this engagement is through the sequence of subject reviews during the cycle, which will generate considerable evidence about the way in which institutional systems are working in practice. Nevertheless, there remains a 'senior layer' in the institutional structure where the overall responsibility for quality and standards resides, and which provides the focus for an overall, 'capstone' review of the effectiveness of management of that responsibility.
- 4 Specifically, institutional review addresses the robustness and security of the systems supporting an institution's awarding function. In most cases, these will relate to the exercise of the institution's own powers. Where an institution does not have direct awarding powers, the review will consider the exercise of any powers delegated under a validation or other collaborative agreement. Review will be concerned with:

- procedures for approval, monitoring and review of academic programmes;
- procedures for acting on the findings of external examiners, subject reviews, and other external scrutinies;
- overall management of assessment processes;
- overall management of any credit systems;
- management of collaborative arrangements with other institutions.

### Code of Practice

- 5 The Agency publishes a Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, with sections addressing good practice in individual areas of academic management. Those sections relating directly to quality and standards provide both institutions and reviewers with a background against which judgments can be made. Reviewers will expect institutional systems to have at least an 'equivalent effect' to the precepts of the Code.

## The institutional profile

- 6 The Agency will maintain a dynamic profile of each institution. This will contain the conclusions from the Agency's most recent review of each subject, from the last institutional review, and from any separate reviews of collaborative provision. This profile will provide much of the primary evidence required for institutional review.
- 7 The profile, and the reports on which it is based, will provide institutional review teams with:
  - examples of implementation of institutional quality assurance procedures;
  - examples of adherence to the precepts of the Code of Practice;
  - trends in quality assurance practices;
  - possible problem areas for particular scrutiny at institutional level;
  - examples of good innovative quality assurance practices.
- 8 Institutional review will provide a summation and renewal of the institutional profile. Reporting on the degree of confidence that may be placed in an institution's management of its standards and quality will be a major factor in determining the intensity of scrutiny that is appropriate for subject reviews.

## Review events

### A Main review

- 9 Once in every six-year cycle a review team will visit each institution. The purpose of the review visit is to gain insight and understanding into the ways in which an institution is managing its quality of provision and the academic standards of its awards. It will last no longer than necessary for the review team to gather sufficient reliable evidence on which to base a report. In deciding the duration of the visit, regard will be given to the institutional profile and the institution's self-evaluation. Typically a visit will last two or three days, but in exceptional circumstances (eg in the case of a particularly large or complex organisation, or one which has not presented itself very effectively in its self-evaluation) it might be longer. Equally, for a small in-

stitution with a well-presented self-evaluation and limited range of provision, it might not be necessary to visit for longer than one day.

- 10 During the visit, the team will:
  - test and verify (so far as possible) the judgements in the self-evaluation;
  - review with the institution any specific concerns arising from reviews of subjects or collaborative provision;
  - gather any further evidence necessary to enable it to form a view on the effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for the overall management of quality and standards, and of its awarding function.
- 11 All reviews conducted by QAA are conducted by 'peer review'. For institutional review teams are made up of individuals appointed by QAA who hold, or have recently held, senior management positions in higher education institutions. Selection is undertaken by the Agency with the intention of ensuring that reviewers:
  - are knowledgeable about HE institutions;
  - have wide experience of academic management and quality assurance;
  - can readily assimilate a large amount of disparate information;
  - can analyse and make reliable judgements about complex arrangements;
  - can hold discussions at a high level about strategic and operational approaches;
  - have personal credibility with senior managers and heads of HE institutions.Teams consist of three reviewers and one review secretary whose role is to maintain a record of the visit.

### B Interim appraisal

- 12 Three years after the last full institutional review, this discussion will be undertaken with each institution to take stock of the institution's performance in the maintenance, development and enhancement of its standards and quality of provision.
- 13 The purpose of this discussion will be to carry out an interim appraisal of the institutional profile generally, in the light of conclusions of sub-

ject reviews and any reviews of collaborative provision that have taken place in the last three years. Particular attention will be given to action taken in response to the findings of subject reviews and to action points from the previous institutional review.

14 The interim appraisal is an opportunity to:

- review progress in addressing action points from the previous institutional review, and consider whether action taken by the institution now warrants a different degree of confidence being placed in its systems;
- consider whether there are any recurring problems arising from subject reviews that require particular attention in future subject reviews;
- consider the general trends of subject reviews, action taken to follow up issues identified in them, and the impact such matters should have on future intensity of scrutiny.

15 If subject reviews have disclosed a pattern of difficulties, the interim appraisal may be used in a more formal way to address these. In this event, the discussion may involve one or more academic reviewers as well as a member of the Agency's staff. The institution may be invited to provide a written commentary on the action it has taken to address the difficulties. In the light of the appraisal, the Agency may propose a further review of action to address the matter, or may bring forward the date of the main institutional review.

### C Collaborative activity

16 Collaborative activity is defined as a collaborative or partnership arrangement, with another institution or organisation, involving the provision of programmes of study and the granting of awards and qualifications. Arrangements which involve the implicit or explicit endorsement by the institution of third party services are also included in the definition, whether or not use of such services is a condition of registration for the institution's programme or award.

17 The purpose of the review of collaborative activity is to establish the extent to which an institution is:

- assuring the quality of programmes offered by, or in association with, a partner organisation for the institution's own awards;
- ensuring that the academic standards of its awards gained through study with partner organisations are the same as those applied within the institution itself.

### Self-evaluation document

18 The starting point for the main review will be a self-evaluation document. This will contain the institution's analysis of how effectively it manages the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards, and how it meets the expectations of relevant precepts of the Code of Practice.

### Reports

19 Institutional review will result in a published report once in each six-year cycle, following the main review, on the effectiveness of an institution's systems for managing the quality of its provision, the standards of its awards and the security of its awarding function. The report will be narrative in style, and will identify both good practice and matters where the Agency believes that improvement action should be taken.

20 The report is based on the recommendations and draft text received from the team. The production of the final report is coordinated by the QAA Assistant Director who has had responsibility for co-ordinating the review. Overall responsibility for the content of the report lies with the Agency.

21 Action points will be categorised as 'essential', 'advisable' or 'desirable' on the following basis:

- **essential** – matters that are currently putting academic standards and/or quality at risk, and which require urgent corrective action;
- **advisable** – matters that have the potential to put academic standards and/or quality at risk, and which require either preventive, or less urgent corrective action;
- **desirable** – matters that have the potential to enhance quality and/or further secure academic standards.

In the case of any action point rated as ‘essential’, the Agency will normally seek from the institution an account of action taken to address the matter, 12 months after publication of the report.

- 22 Reports will also contain a statement of the degree of confidence that the Agency considers may reasonably be placed in the continuing effectiveness of the institution’s quality assurance arrangements. Normally, such statements will relate to the overall arrangements that an institution has in place. A separate statement may be made in respect of an institution’s overall collaborative arrangements, as a result of a separate review of that collaborative provision. A confidence statement on overseas collaborative provision generally will not normally be made as a result of a review of partnerships in one country only, if an institution has such partnerships in more than one country.
- 23 A statement that confidence cannot be placed in institutional arrangements for the management of quality and standards should be a rare occurrence. Such a statement would be likely to result from a number of matters requiring ‘essential’ action, the combined effect of which is to render ineffective the quality assurance arrangements as a whole.
- 24 A statement that limited confidence can be placed in institutional arrangements for the management of quality and standards will normally be made if there is one, or a small number of matters requiring ‘essential’ action, and it is clear that the failings could readily be put right. Such a statement might also result if there were no ‘essential’ action points, but a large number of matters where action is ‘advisable’. The judgement will depend on the nature and weight of the ‘advisable’ action points.
- 25 In all other cases a statement will be made that overall confidence can be placed in institutional quality assurance systems. The term ‘overall confidence’ does not necessarily mean that there are no matters where improvement could be made; but minor weaknesses only should not

place an institution in a lower category. The narrative of the report will discuss strengths and weaknesses, and will also identify exemplary features of the arrangements.

26 To be deemed ‘exemplary’, a feature must:

- represent sector-leading best practice; and
- be worthy of dissemination to, and emulation by, other institutions with comparable missions; and
- make a significant contribution to the success of overall institutional arrangements for assuring quality and standards.
- the characteristics of exemplary features will, by their nature, vary between institutions, but such features will be broadly comparable in weight and significance.

## **Guidelines for producing self-evaluation documents for institutional review**

### **Introduction**

- 1 An institution’s self-evaluation is the principal reference document considered by an academic review team undertaking an institutional review. It will be produced once every six years, in preparation for the six-year review. It will not be required for the interim appraisal meeting. The document describes briefly, analyses in some depth, and comments upon, the effectiveness of the way the institution discharges its responsibility for academic standards and quality. The document should refer to the findings of subject reviews and any implications of these for the effectiveness of the institution’s overall management of quality and standards. The self-evaluation should also indicate how the institution has responded to the expectations of the precepts contained in the Agency’s Code of Practice on the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education. Preparation of the self-evaluation should be undertaken in the light of the objectives, outcomes and scope of institutional review, which are summarised in the following three sections.



### **Purpose of the self-evaluation**

- 2 The Agency's review asks each institution:
  - to demonstrate that it is discharging effectively its responsibility for the standard of all awards granted in its name, and for the quality of the education provided by it to enable students to achieve that standard;
  - to confirm and demonstrate that the ways in which it assures academic standards and quality reflect the expectations contained in the precepts of the Agency's Code of Practice.
- 3 The self-evaluation provides the main opportunity for the institution to set out its considered answers to these questions, and it is largely upon this document that a view of its effectiveness as an awarding body will be based in the first instance. Because of this the institution should ensure that the self-evaluation is an accurate and verifiable statement of the true state of affairs and is not used as an opportunity to make exaggerated claims that will cause the review team to doubt the reliability of the institution's view of itself.
- 4 Where an institution is in the process of making changes to aspects of its systems or procedures at the time of the review, evidence may not yet be available to illustrate the effectiveness of the new procedures. Where this is the case, the institution is encouraged to address in its self-evaluation the way in which it is managing the process of change.

### **Nature of the self-evaluation**

- 5 At the heart of the review team's enquiries is the way in which the institution acts as an awarding body. The self-evaluation will need to reflect this. The 'awarding body function' is not simply a question of the soundness of the administrative procedures the institution follows when awarding degrees and other qualifications (although it does include this). It is a wider matter that reflects the institution's role as a member of the UK's higher education community, charged with a public responsibility for granting nationally (and internationally) recognised academic awards in a coherent and consistent

manner. How policies and procedures are decided, how they meet the expectations of the higher education sector as a whole (through, for example, use of the qualifications framework, subject benchmark statements and the Code of Practice), their specific contribution to securing academic standards and quality, and their effectiveness in achieving their objectives, provide a major focus for institutional review. The extent to which these matters are dealt with cogently and candidly in the institution's self-evaluation will be an important contributory factor in the review team's ability to judge how far the Agency can have confidence in the institution as an effective awarding body.

- 6 The self-evaluation should include reflections on the outcomes of subject reviews. These reports provide valuable audit trails to test the efficacy of the application of institutional policies within departments and other units. The self-evaluation should analyse the effectiveness of, rather than merely describe, an institution's quality assurance policies and processes, although some description will be necessary to enable the review team to understand the context in which policies are enacted. If the document does not contain careful and accurate analysis, the review team may ask for a longer visit, so that it can undertake its own fuller enquiries. Where an institution expresses a view that it is satisfied with the effectiveness of its processes, the evidence upon which this view is based should be made clear in the self-evaluation.
- 7 Some institutions – those without the necessary powers – do not have the responsibilities of degree-awarding bodies. Nonetheless, they have similar obligations to meet the requirements of the institution for whose awards their students are registered and may, in addition, award their own certificates and diplomas. As effective partners in collaborative activities they will be committed to ensuring that the academic standards and quality of provision of their students' awards and programmes are safeguarded as much by their own actions as through the formal responsibilities of the awarding institution. The self-evaluation will provide an opportunity for these

institutions to show that they are aware of their informal as well as formal responsibilities and can demonstrate their commitment to ensuring academic standards and quality.

### Scope of the self-evaluation

- 8 Review at institutional level relates to all educational provision for which the institution has responsibility, including undergraduate, post-graduate (taught and research), full-time, part-time, collaborative, overseas, distance and internet learning. The self-evaluation should reflect all of an institution's activities covered by these areas. Collaborative activities need not be included if it has been agreed that these will be subject to a separate review. In all other cases, the self-evaluation should consider the ways in which the institution addresses the precepts of the section of the Code of Practice on collaborative provision.

## 3.7 ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES: CRE institutional reviews – a tool for change

*Sami Kanaan<sup>1</sup>, Programme Manager, Co-ordinator of the CRE Institutional Evaluation Programme*

### Introduction

Universities have always had to respond to changes in their environment and have proved themselves remarkably persistent organisations. But today, more than ever before, they must deal effectively with new challenges if they are to successfully carry out their mission. Strategic management has acquired a new importance for higher education in this context, and management for quality has moved centre stage.

Universities are traditionally characterised in organisational terms by diffusion of decision making power and a low level of effective authority at the top of the institution. These are the characteristics that should be taken into account when designing a quality assessment system for the processes and products of higher education.

The concept of quality is as elusive as it is pervasive. The concept is first political: governments in several European countries have started to establish a direct or indirect link between the production of quality and the allocations of funds (even if, in most cases, this link only affects the funding in a marginal proportion). Quality is also a subjective concept. And it is multi-dimensional. Thus, evaluating higher education processes or products implies working with interlocking criteria. That is why ranking of universities on a single issue is not a convincing instrument to portray differences in quality.

When speaking of quality it is necessary to make a distinction between “VALUE” and “EXCELLENCE”. Excellence as perceived by the academic community is associated with the dynamics of developing knowledge. The “reputational approach” to quality, using the mechanism of peer review, allows academics to make distinctions in the quality of their peers. Value as defined by the rest of society is concerned with the accountability of the university – the requirement to demonstrate responsible action to external constituencies. The “(student) outcomes approach” to quality, based on the measurement of outcome indicators, has played an influential role in assessment, notably in the US and in the UK.

### The CRE aim

Evaluation in the form of peer review when purely internal to the higher education system at the level of single disciplines does not completely reassure governments or other stakeholders in society. The outcomes approach has been criticised for its heavy reliance on narrow performance indicators. The CRE review takes the approach of stimulating the universities to reflect on their functioning as organisations that have a considerable degree of autonomy

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<sup>1</sup> in co-operation with Jacqueline Glarner, CRE Programme Officer

in how they will pursue internal excellence while delivering value to external customers. Therefore, CRE offers its members an external supportive review as a tool:

- to help improve their quality management processes
- to help them develop a strategy of change, enabling them to cope with the challenges facing them

The request for a review is voluntary; the initiative to begin the process lies, therefore, with the university.

### **The CRE methodology**

The process is as follows:

- process co-ordination by CRE
- internal self-evaluation by the university
- external validation by foreign peers (nominated by CRE) during a set of two site visits, culminating in an oral and written report to the university.

CRE's process thus supports the assessed institution in the following:

- an identification of the university's aims and concerns
- an analysis of the institution's capacity for action in a competitive world
- an understanding of those balances that shape its desired profile
- recommendations for long term development
- impetus for institutional change

This process is managed by a Steering Committee appointed by the CRE Board and supported by the CRE secretariat. This Committee selects the institutions for review and organises the review teams. Each team comprises a chairperson, two other reviewers and a secretary, all foreign to the country to be visited. The reviewers are acting or former university rectors and they are working on a voluntary basis; their specific knowledge of European higher education systems is taken into account when composing the teams.

The university's self-evaluation is an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

(SWOT) of the institution in its specific socio-economic context. It should describe and analyse the role of quality within the institution and the methods by which it is nurtured. Existing data is used, to limit unnecessary work, and each university is free to organise its self-evaluation in its own way. Senior management must nonetheless be involved, because the purpose of the exercise is to help improve the development of the Institution as a whole.

A two-day preliminary visit enables the foreign reviewers to develop an understanding of the national higher education system and the local context. It is also the occasion for the university and the review team to arrive at a common understanding of their expectations. Finally, the preliminary visit can be used to make the CRE review better known in the university. After the visit, the visiting team can request brief additional reports on aspects as yet unclear and express specific demands regarding the programme of the main review visit.

The main review (three days) follows a pre-defined, intensive schedule of meetings with a wide variety of actors within the institution, including students, as well as with partners outside the university; during these interviews, the reviewers test the image drawn by the university in the self-evaluation. The review team meets with the rector at the beginning of the visit, and at the end to give an oral report. The comprehensive written report sent afterwards is proposed to the university for comment, mainly on eventual factual errors. The university can then give its opinion on the usefulness of the exercise for the institution's further strategic development.

The report is written by the team secretary and the overall responsibility for the content of the document lies with the team and its chair. The report follows a predetermined format, emphasising the university's capacity for change. It is the institution that decides on its eventual publication. CRE, nevertheless, encourages the university to make the report public so that it can fulfil a function in the external as well as the internal assurance of quality.

The calendar for the above spans the full academic year, from the university's self-evaluation in the autumn to the presentation of the written report the following summer.

## Results

CRE is promoting a culture of quality in universities throughout Europe, by helping member institutions to learn from one another. Good practise in achieving quality, or striving for it, is being identified and will be shared among CRE members – mainly through CRE periodical “issue reports”, which highlight the importance for each of the universities participating in the review of the following:

- their mission
- their strategic choices / profile
- their environmental constraints
- their quality approaches
- their capacity for change, and this however different the universities are.

Concerning the management of quality in particular, experience to date shows that almost all universities reviewed either have evaluation activities or are in the process of launching them. These activities relate mainly to teaching; mechanisms for evaluating research are shared between governmental agencies and disciplinary groups. But in most of the institutions, no fully developed strategy for quality management was obvious.

As far as an explicit feedback is available, the institutions that participated in the programme since 1994 (almost 70) appear very pleased with what it has brought them. This is confirmed by the fact that many of those which had the review in the earlier years have asked for a follow-up visit of the review team, approximately two to three years after the end of the review process.

It has been stressed by most institutions that the self-evaluation was the occasion for the universities to increase their understanding of what they were trying to do, and how well they were doing it. In this sense, the most valuable impact for the university is provided by the impetus for change, based on a sound self-diagnosis, validated by the external peers.

## Recent developments

An important management issue for CRE is the training of the reviewers. A debriefing seminar is held at the end of each academic year, combined with a short induction course for the reviewers. CRE works closely with CHEPS, the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies at the University of Twente in the Netherlands, which is monitoring the programme and helping produce guidelines for the reviewers, and the participating universities.

Another key issue is the format for the follow-up visits already mentioned. The main aim is to take stock of the reforms implemented by the university after the end of the review process and if necessary to give a new impulse for change, but it is also an excellent way for CRE to assess how far our procedure is really effective.

In 1999, an expert scrutinised a sample of CRE review reports in order to assess their coherence with the guidelines and the stated aims of the process (pertinence and relevance). This is a preliminary step for the general review of the CRE programme, for which a panel of high-ranking experts has been appointed. It will start its work in January 2001, in order to take stock of the experience after five years of operation and give a basis for the future development of the programme. Thus, CRE should fulfil its obligation of being accountable towards its members. In this context, the participation in the Biennial Conference of the International Network of Quality assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) in Santiago de Chile in May 1999 was very useful, since the main focus was “Evaluating the Evaluators”.

Meanwhile, the Steering Committee of the programme decided to work on different initiatives to develop the programme. Regional dissemination seminars are planned or have taken place, possibly linked to national follow-up discussions in countries where two or three universities have already participated in the programme (like in South Western Europe). At the international level, we are planning to develop institutional evaluation in Latin America in co-operation with local partners, mainly in the framework of the CRE Columbus Programme.

We are also looking at developing co-operation with the US bodies responsible for institutional accreditation in order to foster mutual learning from our experiences, which should allow CRE to tackle the very sensitive and important issue of accreditation as one possible formal goal of institutional evaluation. Accreditation has now a high position on the agenda within the so-called Bologna process. In their declaration signed in Bologna on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 1999, 29 ministers of education in Europe clearly expressed their intention to promote a European higher education space, quality assurance (and possibly accreditation at European level) being one of the main tools to ensure the transparency and the compatibility of the higher education supply.

Also in a European context, the newly created European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), under the auspices of the European Commission, should become the main platform of exchange on quality issues in Europe. CRE is representing the different organisations of higher education institutions in the Network Steering Group.

On a more practical level, in order to match specific needs of our member universities, we envisage to develop specialised reviews, which would focus on specific aspects of institutional management. The first aspect to be considered is internationalisation. In partnership with the IMHE programme of the OECD and the Academic Co-operation Association (ACA), CRE launched the Internationalisation Quality Reviews (IQR), to answer the strong internationalisation movement in higher education.

Another new specialised review offered by CRE is focusing on the strategic management of information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning. The ICT reviews are supported by a knowledge base for good practice and by mutual learning activities.

Finally, we would like to encourage universities to implement their own follow-up processes to improve on a continuous basis their quality assurance policy and their strategic management. To do this, CRE will develop a mutual learning approach among volunteer institutions. We already have different publications to support this objective, such as the Textbook on Strategic Practice by Pierre Tabatoni and Andris Barblan, and the TEMPUS Handbook on Institutional management. We also plan to develop the use of the World Wide Web for this purpose (as already done in a CRE pilot project in the field of the strategic dimension of the use of Information and Communication Technologies in universities).

## **Conclusion**

CRE considers that its work on institutional evaluation complements both disciplinary evaluation on the one hand and national evaluation initiatives on the other hand. The specificity of the CRE programme is that it is a service offered to the member universities of the association with the objective of assisting them in their efforts in quality management as well as in institutional development.

## 4 Conclusion

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The descriptions and analyses of institutional evaluations in the various articles demonstrate both similarities and differences among the European countries. The methods are similar, if not identical: self-assessment, followed by peer review, site-visit by review team and report. It is not likely that this formula will change in the foreseeable future.

But within this general model there are differences of focus and procedure, which may point to future development.

### 4.1 Purpose of institutional evaluations

Institutional review in the European countries serves a number of purposes ranging from institutional development to a clear focus on accountability. In some countries it is used as an element in a national systems evaluation together with other methods. In others it is used mainly in support of institutional development.

Finland carries out institutional review for a variety of reasons. The main goal appears to be improvement of institutional organisation, processes and performance, including capacity for change. Different aspects are focused in different reviews, depending on the needs of the institution and higher education. Thus, some reviews have concentrated on internal strategies of universities whereas others have highlighted the regional role and regional impact of the institution. Yet others have dealt primarily with administration in a comparative perspective.

France has carried out institutional reviews since the mid-1980s. The main target has been improvement of education and research, dissemination of research results and internal co-operation. In recent years, combined reviews of all higher education institutions in a city or an area (area-based evalua-

tions) have been developed. A special consideration in this type of review has been co-operation between institutions to use resources effectively.

The emphasis in Irish reviews is on improvement of institutions and quality enhancement, but also on accountability. Several methods of evaluation are currently used in Ireland, and it is still unclear whether institutions, programmes or some other level will be focused in the future.

Norway defines institutional review as a broader concept than audit, which is said to be more concerned with assessing the institutions' systematic work with educational quality. Institutional review deals with an institution's overall strategic and qualitative development. Themes for consideration in institutional reviews have been organisation, strategic leadership, infrastructure, academic profile, staff competence, relations with the outside world and outcomes in relation to strategic goals.

Sweden has focused on seven aspects in quality audit: institutional strategies, leadership, internal co-operation, involvement of staff and students, integration of quality measures in the strategic work of the institution, evaluation and external professional relations. The principal aim has been improvement of institutional processes to enhance education (primarily) and research.

The UK is altering its audit model to take account of the programme reviews implemented over a six-year cycle and the profile of the institution the Quality Assurance Agency develops as a result of them. The main focus is on accountability and institutional evaluations are closely connected to programme reviews and institutional quality assurance measures. Thus the aspects under review are: Procedures for approval, monitoring and review, procedures for acting on reviews, management of assessment systems, management of credit system, collaborative arrangements. Furthermore, the Quality Assurance Agency is establishing two kinds of

norms against which results can be judged: subject standards developed by the Agency together with academics, and a Code of Practice for universities developed by the Agency.

CRE is different from all the other organisations represented in this overview in being exclusively improvement-oriented and introducing a European dimension in evaluation. Its main goal is to help institutions which request a review to develop a strategy of change.

## 4.2 Features of evaluation

### Self-assessment

Self-assessment is the central element of all institutional reviews described in this report. The stringency of instructions varies, however. In Norway the institution is free to choose methodology and organisational approach to suit the purpose and interest of the university. In Finland, too, the self-review is for the university's own good, but is also expected to reflect the interests of consumers (students, external stakeholders, surrounding community etc.). In the Swedish model there is a similar freedom, but a list of themes to be addressed points to those aspects which are the focus of attention.

The Irish and British models appear to have a more top-down approach. In Ireland there is a concentration on organisational matters (mission and goal, governance and strategies, academic policies, the use of institutional resources and institutional planning), which should be reflected in the self-assessments. The UK is establishing a clear link between programme reviews and institutional reviews. Thus, an important aspect of self-evaluations is expected to be how the institution deals with the quality of programmes and the findings of programme reviews as expressed in the Quality Assurance Agency's institutional profile. Self-assessments are also expected to address the extent to which an institution adheres to the Code of Practice established by the QAA.

### Peers and public reports

Peer review is the established procedure for institutional reviews as well as for programme reviews. What constitutes a peer in institutional reviews is, however, less clear. Most often the teams are made up of men and women with experience of academic leadership at various levels. Some countries, notably Ireland, Finland and Sweden, include stakeholders (primarily from business and industry, and in the case of Sweden, also students).

Finland is the only country with a clearly international profile in its institutional evaluations. Evaluation teams include national as well as international (mostly from English-speaking countries) experts, and self-evaluations and other relevant material are consequently translated into English. Site visits are to a large extent conducted in English. There is also at least one example of comparison with universities in other countries. It may be added that Sweden uses experts from the other Nordic countries. CRE reviews are by definition international.

Reports are public in all countries represented in this report except Ireland. In the case of CRE, it is up to the institution to decide upon the publication of the report but CRE strongly recommends to make it public and almost all universities did do so.

## 4.3 What is the future?

Institutional evaluations in the countries represented in this report seem to be developing in different directions. Norway is struggling to develop a model which takes outcomes more into consideration; France, which is one of the countries in which institutional evaluation was first implemented, seems to be moving in the direction of programme reviews. Sweden, too, is shifting the balance from the institutional level to the programme/subject level, whereas Ireland and Finland are exploring several roads on a more eclectic basis. In the British model institutional evaluations are linked to programme reviews, in that one of the aims is to examine how institutions as organisations meet their responsibil-

ity to develop and enhance their programmes on the basis of programme reviews.

The future may very well be found in such a combination of programme and institutional evaluation. It could take the form developed in the British model, where programme review is one of the bases of institutional evaluation. The other alternative is placing greater trust in institutions themselves by emphasising their responsibility for enhancing the quality of their performance in recurring institutional evaluation, in which they are asked to demonstrate that their quality enhancement and assurance processes are reliable.

It is a little surprising that evaluation of research is not included in institutional evaluation. It would be worth experimenting to include all functions of the universities in institutional evaluations, not only e.g. administration and teaching. In Finland there has already been attempts to evaluate programmes and research at the same time by the same evaluation team.

One essential question in relation to institutional evaluation is who has the main responsibility for following up the results and ultimately for decisions made as a consequence of institutional evaluations. Is it the university itself or a national quality assur-

ance agency or both? It seems as if there is a gliding scale, on which the CRE evaluations are at the end of complete institutional responsibility, and institutions in other countries find themselves at different points further up in the direction of accountability. This is an especially important issue when considering the use and usefulness of institutional evaluations. The nearer we come to state (agency) intervention, the more our evaluations will resemble accreditation

Institutional evaluations will play many roles also in the future. It is essential that they play a part in accountability and in providing information for the outside world, thus making higher education more transparent. But the main aim, in our view, should be improvement. Evaluations do not have a value in themselves, and are useless unless process and the results lead to improvement of higher education institutions and higher education. A central question is whether evaluations help to improve higher education institutions in practice. This can only happen if the staff of the universities is motivated and committed to the evaluation. And they can only be motivated if they take an active part in the planning and implementation of the evaluations.