A Nordic Perspective on European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies

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Presented by:
Signe Ploug Hansen, Special adviser, EVA
Pål Bakken, Adviser, NOKUT

Purpose of the project

- Sharing and comparing practices among the Nordic agencies;

- Interpreting and clarifying the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies

- Providing inspiration for quality assurance agencies in light of European standards.

The six lessons learned

1. National traditions and legislation

- An agency must be regarded in the context of its national higher education system

- The European standards and guidelines imply a challenge to institutions, governments and other stakeholders alike

- Should national traditions and legislation be a reason for allowing exemptions or for rejection?

2. Consistent assessment of agencies

- More precise threshold values are required

- Clarification of the status of the guidelines

- A difficult balance between the need for precise threshold values and generic standards

3. The value of informal practices

- Informal, yet well-established, practices must also be taken into account

- The formal arrangements can be in full compliance with European standards – but this does not guarantee that practice also is in line

- The formal arrangements can be inadequate – but this does not necessarily imply that pracitice is also inadequate.

4. Clearer terminologi

- Different interpretations of terms

- What happens in the translation from English into other European languages

- Policy - Procedures - Mechanisms - Plan

- More reflections on the meaning of these terms might be useful

5. Compliance with all standards?

- Are all standards equally important?

- A review by a panel of peers or experts should include an assessment of an agency's compliance with each of the standards

- The register Committee should make an overall assessment based on the work of the panel of peers or experts distinguishing between vital and less vital requirements of the standards

6. Credibility and validity of the review process

- A Register Committee should consider the credibility of the review processes:

  - A site-visit should be a mandatory element in the review of agencies

  - Peers and experts should be independent from the agencies.