

Still Balancing improvement and accountability?

External Quality Assurance in the Nordic countries 1996-2006

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Outline

- The balance between accountability and improvement in external quality assurance (what does it take?)
- Developments in external quality assurance Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland (1996-2006)
- Still balancing accountability and improvement (in the age of accreditation)?
- General trends in Scandinavian external quality assurance

Balancing accountability and improvement – what does it take?

- Careful design and implementation of evaluation methods
- Openness
- Trust
- Involvement by different stakeholders
- Professionalism and communication (formal as well as informal aspects)
- “Effects of Scandinavian external quality assurance of the 1990’es relate to discursive shifts and promotion of internal debates in the higher education institutions” (i.e. stimulation of internal quality culture). (Massy, 1999)

External quality assurance in Denmark

- A three-fold system (external examiners, ministerial recognition and EVA)
- Mix of quality assurance methods including programme evaluations, institutional audits and accreditations at programme and institutional level
- No linkage between funding and the results of accreditations (or other external quality assurance activities)
- But a new accreditation system is in the melting pot

External Quality Assurance in Norway

- The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) established in 2003 as part of the so-called quality reform of the entire higher education system
- A comprehensive system of institutional audits and accreditations (plus revisions of accreditation) based on a principle of “institutional drift”
- Complex relationship between effects and the various methods of quality assurance

External Quality Assurance in Sweden

- One organisation, the Swedish Agency for Higher Education (HSV), carries out a wide range of tasks including external quality assurance
- Two rounds of institutional audits from 1995-2002 has been followed by subject reviews of all study programmes at bachelor level and above
- Subject reviews aim at both improvement and control of compliance with aims and legislation put down by law, and include accreditation(-like) procedures and consequences
- Institutional audits are included in plans for a new cycle of activities (but with "more teeth")

External Quality Assurance in Finland

- A two-fold system based on 1) a ministerial system of governance and recognition of new study programmes and 2) evaluations, audits and accreditations of professional courses carried out by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)
- Accreditations and accreditation(-like) processes have been carried out since 1995, but represent a minor part of the overall activities of FINHEEC
- Institutional audits represent the Finnish response to the goals of the Bologna process

Still balancing improvement and accountability?

- Accreditation is one approach – among others
- Causal links between approach and effects?
- Openness and trust (in evaluation criteria and process)?
- Self-assessment?
- Communication and professionalism (of experts and evaluation professionals)?

A horizontal bar composed of three segments: a dark brown segment on the left, a yellow segment in the middle, and a blue segment on the right.

General trends:

Integration, transformation and
continuity