

THE NORDIC QUALITY ASSURANCE NETWORK IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Annual meeting in Turku, Finland
May 11-12, 2004

MEETING MINUTES

Participants

Birgitte Grum-Schwensen, EVA
Dorte Kristoffersen, EVA
Signe Ploug Hansen, EVA
Christel Sølvhjem, EVA
Christian Thune, EVA

Pål Bakken, NOKUT
Astrid Børsheim, NOKUT
Jon Haakstad, NOKUT
Berit Kristin Haugdal, NOKUT
Oddvar Haugland, NOKUT
Tove Blytt Holmen, NOKUT

Sigbrit Franke, HSV
Eric Lindesjö, HSV
Ragnhild Nitzler, HSV
Staffan Wahlén, HSV

Ossi Tuomi, FINHEEC
Pirjo-Liisa Omar, FINHEEC
Anna-Maija Liuhanen, FINHEEC
Sirpa Moitus, FINHEEC

Valgerður Freyja Ágústsdóttir, Iceland

Kimmo Hämäläinen, ENQA

Sharing of national experiences

For the first time all the Nordic countries are involved in similar kind of evaluations, namely auditing. With comparable and overlapping agendas, the need to share our national experiences and ideas with each other to learn from them is increasingly significant. It will, therefore, be both important and interesting to follow the national developments of each Nordic country. In consequence, the sharing of experiences and comments are welcomed and encouraged within the Network also in the future. One future question to be discussed in the Network is audit criteria.

Nordic Representation in ENQA

The Nordic countries have had an active and also a visible role in the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) from the start. Currently 3 representatives from the Nordic countries are members in the ENQA Steering Group. In the future, it is expected that such a large representation of the Nordic Countries in the Steering Group will not be probable. Thus, the Nordic countries need to strengthen their cooperation and concentrate their efforts to have their voices heard.

Christian Thune proposed that for ENQA's upcoming General Assembly in June 2004, the Nordic countries should together nominate one candidate for the elections to secure a place in the Steering Group (will be changed to a board in June). The elected ENQA Board will consist of 9 rotating members. He proposed Sigbrit Franke from Sweden as the Nordic

candidate. The aim would be to nominate Christian Thune for 1 year and Sigbrit Franke for 3 years into the Board. Denmark, Norway and Sweden agreed to this proposition, and Finland will inform of its decision after a consultation with the Chairman of FINHEEC.

Publications of joint Nordic projects

The future reports of the network will all be published in pdf-format on the Internet. The reports will be put on the network's web page under FINHEEC's web site¹ and each agency will take care of making a link from its own web site to the report.

The question was raised whether the network should agree on some kind of common guidelines or procedures for all its joint projects, so that the same practical questions concerning for instance the publication of the report would not have to be determined again for each project.

It was also suggested that, in addition to a descriptive approach, the conclusions in the reports could have a more analytical approach in the future in order to increase the report's contribution. It would also be helpful if the project aims were clearly defined in the beginning of a project.

Student Involvement in Quality Assessment of Higher Education in the Nordic countries

It was decided that the report on student involvement will be published as it is, even though situations have somewhat changed since it was first written in the spring of 2003.

Additionally, it was decided that the report's cover page will contain the network's and the editors' names, the first page after the cover will have the working group members' names listed, and the summary will be transferred from the end to the beginning the report.

The joint Nordic project: a Comparative Analysis of Systematic Quality Work of Higher Education Institutions

The next project of the Nordic Network was launched in the meeting. The initial idea of a benchmarking project was abandoned. Instead, the project will be a comparative analysis of systematic quality work in the higher education institutions.

Project aim

- support HEIs in developing systematic internal quality work
- produce information for QA agencies of the support HEIs need in the QA work
- make visible the QA agencies' arguments on why a particular HEI has good internal quality work
- sharing good practices of systematic quality work in the HEIs

Method

The project method is a comparative analysis of Nordic HEIs' systematic quality work. Each country will nominate one HEI into the project, altogether five HEIs. The HEIs will be asked to describe their QA practices and also what kind of support they need in their QA work from the national QA agency. A Nordic jury (project group?) will decide the best example of quality work from the five HEIs. In addition to choosing one example (HEI?), the objective is to promote and share good practices of quality work, which will be published in a report.

The national QA agency decides the manner of choosing its national representative, e.g a national competition or by invitation. Each agency will have to argue on what grounds it has chosen the national representative into the project. It will need to deliberate thoroughly the criteria used in the decision and why the agency considers the chosen HEI to have good quality work. This will enable comparison and analysis of the Nordic agencies' arguments on what is regarded as good quality work. The idea is to increase mutual understanding of the

¹ Should Nordic Networks web page be transferred under EVA for the next year?

reasons behind the differences. In addition, the analysis might offer a possibility to later construct a common Nordic framework of good quality practices.

Scope

The scope of the project will be to look at the systematic quality work of the HEIs, not QA systems, and the HEIs' overall quality work, not particular themes. However, it has not yet been discussed what is meant by the overall quality work of a higher education institution; does it include research, teaching, management etc.? In the aftermath discussions of the meeting, one suggestion was to concentrate only on undergraduate education, which would limit the range considerably.

There is a risk of offering strict guidelines of what is good quality work, thus it needs to be emphasized that the chosen HEIs are examples of good practices, but not the only way of doing things. In general, the project descriptions should be formulated so that they do not strongly underline the competitive aspects of the project.

Preliminary timetable

- June 14, 2004: project plan ready
- Mid August 2004: country descriptions for the project group
- September 14, 2004: first meeting of the project group
- December 1, 2004: agencies submit their nominees and arguments
- January 2005: project group meets to discuss the HEI nominees and agencies
- March 2005: final decision made on which Nordic HEI is chosen to be the "best" example of quality work
- April/May 2005: writing of the report

Project Group

Christel Sølvhjem, EVA
 Eric Lindesjö, Höskoleverket
 Astrid Børsheim, Nokut
 Valgerður Freyja Ágústsdóttir, Iceland (to be confirmed)
 Anna-Maija Liuhanen, FINHEEC
 Pirjo-Liisa Omar, FINHEEC

Project plan

It was agreed that FINHEEC makes a project plan, which will be circulated in the agencies for further discussion and comments.

Financing

Each agency pays for its own costs.

Working groups

In the summing up of Wednesday's parallel theme sessions, the following conclusions were made:

Results

Dorte Kristoffersen will email everyone a copy of a publication on the Danish qualification keys.

Criteria for experts

Dorte Kristoffersen will email everyone the expert criteria discussed in the theme session.

It was decided that each agency nominates its contact person for the Nordic requests of experts. Denmark (Signe Ploug Hansen), Norway (?) and Sweden (?) nominated theirs in the meeting, and Finland promised to inform Dorte Kristoffersen of its contact person later. Iceland?

Norway has set criteria for the academic qualifications of evaluation experts. When recruiting international experts, it is not always straightforward what the level of an academic title is. Thus, there is a need to understand the professional level of a title across the Nordic countries. The specifications for academic titles for each Nordic country are available on the website of the Information Network on Education in Europe at:
<http://www.eurydice.org/Documents/Glo3/en/FrameSet.htm>.

Change of the Network Chair

In the end of the meeting, the change of the Network Chair took place. The network's official representative and Chair for May 2004-May 2005 is Denmark/EVA. Dorte Kristoffersen will act as the Chairperson of the Nordic Network. FINHEEC will update this change to the Nordic Network website.

The annual meeting for 2005 was set for the last week of May (24-25 May) to be held in Denmark. Initial suggestions as the meeting's topics were the following:

- Quality frameworks;
- Audits;
- Implications of the Bergen Communiqué.