

System i kvaliteten - kvalitet i systemet

A conference on university quality systems,
November 28 2003

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1 About the conference

On November 28 2003 the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) hosted an international conference on university quality systems. EVA held the conference in its capacity as national knowledge centre for evaluation and quality assurance. Some 160 representatives from all Danish universities, the Danish Rectors Conference and other interested parties participated in the conference at IDA Meeting Centre in Copenhagen.

In this paper you will find short summaries of the presentations at the conference.

The paper follows the structure and chronological order of the conference. It presents a series of written contributions from each of the six speakers in the form of short resumes recapitulating the themes of the presentations, important issues addressed and conclusion offered.

Program

The conference consisted of the following elements:

9.30 – 10.00	Coffee
10.00 – 10.15	Opening of the Conference Christian Thune, Executive Director, EVA
10.15 – 11.15	The quality system of the University of East Anglia David Eastwood, Vice Chancellor, University of East Anglia
11.15 – 12.15	The quality system of the Uppsala University Annika Lundmark, Senior Advisor, Head of Department of Quality and Evaluation, Uppsala University
12.15 – 13.15	Lunch
13.15 – 14.30	Parallel tracks: Benchmarking as a quality assurance method Asko Karjalainen, Director of Teaching Development Unit, University of Oulu Quality in Swedish universities Staffan Wahlén, Senior Advisor, National Agency for Higher Education Effective course evaluation Gunnar Handal, Professor at the Institute for Educational Research, University of Oslo
14.30 – 15.00	Coffee
15.00 – 16.00	What to consider when establishing a quality system William F. Massy, Professor, President Jackson Hole Higher Education Group, Inc.
16.00 – 16.15	Closing of the conference

2 Opening of the conference

By Christian Thune, Executive Director of EVA

It is my pleasure to welcome so many distinguished representatives from the Danish universities to this conference. Let me first introduce you to the reasons, which convinced EVA of the relevance of organising at this time a conference on university quality systems.

It is an essential part of EVA's mandate to work as a national knowledge centre and to disseminate and initiate relevant methodologies and processes towards quality in education.

With the new Danish university act an even stronger emphasis has been put on the internal quality assurance mechanisms of the universities. EVA is prepared to disseminate knowledge of and international experience with internal quality assurance systems. In this way EVA expects to be able to contribute to the development of the quality systems of Danish universities.

The need for the development of quality systems at the Danish universities should be seen in both a national and international context.

From an international or rather European perspective university quality culture is now firmly on the agenda. Quality assurance is a major element of the Bologna process and has been the focus of increasing attention at European, national and institutional levels.

How well prepared is the Danish university system?

In May 2003 a new act for Danish Universities came into force. Apart from many other interesting elements, the new university act stresses the obligation of the universities to constantly and systematically develop and improve the quality of their educational programmes. Plans for evaluations and follow-up are to be specified in the university development contract, and are to be approved by the Minister of Science. Finally, the universities are to lay down clear guidelines for the documentation systems to be used in connection with the evaluations and their follow-up.

Like any other public institution Danish universities are now facing this challenge. And it is a challenge.

Speaking about quality assurance is one thing – implementation and credibility are other issues.

The proceedings of today's conference will be based on international experiences from foreign universities that have already established quality systems and thus have important knowledge, which is relevant for Danish universities. Based on the international experiences the conference will attempt to address the following questions:

- What is a quality system?
- How do foreign universities work with different quality assurance elements?
- How can Danish universities establish quality systems?

The conference is directed towards management, administrative and teaching staff at Danish universities concerned with quality assurance issues in education. Other

stakeholders i.e. ministries, student organisations and other organisations concerned with university education are also invited.

The programme listed above will consist of presentations addressing the following themes in parts one, two and three.

The first part of the programme focuses on examples of well-functioning university quality assurance systems. There will be presentations from two international universities with good experience in running an internal quality assurance system. The presentations will give brief accounts of the background for establishing the quality system and a structural overview of the various elements that constitute the quality assurance system. The outcomes and benefits of the systems will be highlighted, too.

The second part of the conference consists of three different tracks on benchmarking, involvement of stakeholders, and Swedish university experiences respectively. These tracks will provide a detailed and methodological introduction to experiences with the different parts of a quality assurance system.

The third and final part of the conference focuses on the process behind the establishment of a quality assurance system at a university. An international example is given on how a specific quality assurance system was established, what motivated the set-up of the system, and which factors may impede and enhance such a process.

It is my expectation that the sum of this programme will provide the participants with good food for thought and follow-up in your respective fields of quality assurance.

3 The quality system of the University of East Anglia

By Professor David Eastwood, Vice Chancellor of the University of East Anglia

The University of East Anglia (UEA) is a medium-sized, research-led University in England. The University was established in 1963 as one of a number of new universities, many of which have now established international reputations, including the University of Warwick, the University of York, the University of Lancaster, the University of Sussex and the University of East Anglia. UEA currently has some 13,500 students and is organised around a structure of 19 schools of study, which are clustered into four Groups, which might, for these purposes, be regarded as faculties.

UEA has sought, over the last decade, to develop a quality assurance framework which is rigorous, sympathetic, and which enhances as well as assures the quality of learning, teaching and assessment in the University. In developing its approach to quality assurance, UEA has paid close attention to the national framework as it has developed in the UK since the 1990s, but has sought within UEA to identify and develop best practice. To that extent, what we believe we have developed is a locally-appropriate approach to quality assurance which, nevertheless, fully accords with the requirements of the UK's national quality assurance framework.

As the slides make clear¹, UEA has evolved its approach over the last decade. These developments have gone through a number of cycles as we have reviewed and revised our approach. UEA has sought, as far as possible, to avoid a simple top-down, managerially-imposed approach to quality assurance. Key features of the UEA approach have emerged from a discussion and debate across the institution. The great advantage of this approach is that the University has secured a high level of buy-in to the process and has diminished the difficulties of ensuring compliance.

Central features of the UEA approach have been the development of codes of practice, regular review of our quality assurance mechanisms, and a widespread involvement of teachers and students in the process of development and review.

All course units are now reviewed on an annual basis, all programmes on a quinquennial basis, and close attention is paid to student feedback and to the judgements and recommendations of external examiners. Responsibility for oversight of the quality assurance regime rests with a Pro-Vice-Chancellor, the Academic Registrar, a number of key academic officers, and the University's Learning & Teaching Quality Committee. Detailed work is done at the level of the Groups (faculties) and the individual schools of study. In common with all UK universities, UEA is subject to regular audit by the Quality Assurance Agency. These audits result in published reports carrying recommendations at various levels. These reports are available through the Quality Assurance Agency, and the Agency's approach and codes of practice are available through its website (www.qaa.ac.uk).

In developing its approach to quality assurance, UEA has placed very considerable emphasis on developing and disseminating good practice. It regards clarity, transparency and comprehensiveness as a key characteristic of its approach. It has sought to balance a consistency of process without introducing unnecessary or undesirable rigidities. Above all, the

¹ See EVA's homepage (www.eva.dk) for the slides.

University recognises that what matters most is high quality teaching and exciting learning. Perhaps the most important consequence of its approach to quality assurance over the last decade is that learning and teaching is something which is talked about and reflected on widely across the Institution. The University recognises that teaching is not a private act, and is properly open to scrutiny and assessment. UEA expects its approach to quality assurance to continue to evolve in the coming years, aided both by internal reflection and review and the outcome of Institutional Audits conducted by the QAA and other professional accrediting bodies.

4 The quality system of Uppsala University

By Senior Advisor Annika Lundmark, Head of Department of Quality and Evaluation at Uppsala University

The quality system at Uppsala University (UU) depends on the responsibility of the nine faculties' for quality in education and research. Added to this, there is a Quality Committee with representatives from the faculties, with the Rector as the chair of the Committee. The Committee has formulated the latest policy program for quality development, which has been in use since 2002. This policy program is merely a strategic document. Therefore, an action plan for quality development is decided upon each year, which describes the work in more detail.

A Unit for Quality and Evaluation carries into effect some of the centralized quality work. The head of the Unit for Quality and Evaluation (Annika Lundmark) is the vice chair of the Quality Committee. The aims for the Unit for Quality and Evaluation are (1) policy work in cooperation with the Quality Committee, (2) implementation of the actual action plan, (3) consultative support to faculties and departments concerning self-assessments, course evaluations and other evaluations, (4) covering the national and international discussion of quality issues and (5) exchanging information from the National agency for higher education.

The background for the actual quality system at UU is, among other things, the preparation for the demands from the National agency for higher education since 1995. The National agency shifted focus from quality audits to quality assessments in 2000-01. This means that every subject and program in all Swedish institutions shall be assessed between 2001-2006. The centralized resources for quality and evaluation at UU were increased in 2001 to better meet the actual demands. There is another unit at the central level, which, in many matters, cooperates with the Unit for Quality and Evaluation, namely, the Unit of Teaching and Interactive Learning (UPI). The main aim for UPI is to enhance quality in teaching and learning.

Some values are important in all work with quality issues:

- Quality is created and shaped in faculties and departments by teachers and students.
- The central strategies and actions must reinforce a culture of quality enhancement.
- The Rector's engagement is essential for a well-functioning quality system.
- An active student union enhances work with quality issues.
- Some external evaluations promote the internal quality work.

In the last two years, some activities have been of certain importance for the legitimacy of quality issues. One example is a thematic evaluation of the PhD-education at UU, a crucial part of the action plan for quality development 2002-2003. It started with a questionnaire to all PhD-students at UU. The results were analysed and described in separate reports to each department, which then made proper self-assessments. An analysis of the results for all faculties was also summarized in a report. At present the faculties are analysing the self-assessments from the departments and discussing suggestions for enhancement. Some outcomes and benefits from this work have already resulted in improving weak points in the PhD-education of certain departments.

Some conclusions from the experiences at UU are that:

- It is necessary to have some external demands, especially in the initial work of building an internal quality system,
- It is important that as many teachers and students as possible are involved in some elements of the quality system (incl. pedagogical training) *and find it useful*,
- The Rector, the university management and the university board must be involved both in discussions and decisions, *and find this work useful*,
- The quality system must be well known and it is also very important to have quality in the quality work in order to strengthen the legitimacy of the system.

By Director Asko Karjalainen, Teaching Development Unit at University of Oulu

Benchmarking always includes some sort of comparison through an active interaction with partner(s), and it serves immediate quality development. It is not ranking, which means external grading of institutions based on more or less questionable statistics. It is not an academic comparative evaluation or evaluation where only paper-based analyses are made.² During the last decades the concept of benchmarking has anyhow become broader and broader so that we could at present speak about a benchmarking sphere, where the concrete definitions and applications differ depending on the institutional or departmental values and quality cultures. Quality culture defines the concept of the quality aspired and it gives guidelines on how to choose decent methods for quality assurance and development. There is a remarkable difference in the methodology depending on whether the main interest of the institution is to maintain certain minimum standards or if the purpose is to reach top quality. Depending on the culture, an organisation may have, for example, competitive or cooperative orientation, and the concept of (true) benchmarking is specified to mean analytic comparative evaluation based on statistics, or stimulating peer visiting some accurately identified best of class organisations.

TABLE. Examples of benchmarking activities as a part of the quality assurance system in higher education institutions

BENCHMARKING	Competitive orientation	Cooperative orientation
Evaluation based on benchmarks	To identify the own situation by comparison of the academic standards across institutions.	To define joint academic standards.
Evaluation for seeking best practices	To learn (to create innovations/to manage change) by observing practices of the others.	To create mutual advantage.

Every benchmarking type does have a methodology of its own, but there are three common activities (or phases) always included in the process: 1. assessing one's own practices (self-evaluation), 2. observing practices of the others (comparison), 3. improving one's own practices (development). The concrete method will be specified by answering the six further questions: Why benchmark? What to benchmark? How to benchmark? Who to benchmark with? How to collect and analyse the information? How to improve?

By using (certain types of) benchmarking evaluation, an academic organisation should get better results or attain more reasonable processes than without it. Managerial staff should perceive benchmarking as a tool for providing noticeable added value to the action focused on. Benchmarking should be used in a way best applicable. There is evidence that benchmarking works at its best when used as a continuous quality development tool with active participation and shared commitment to the process. Systematic organizing, explicit procedure and willingness to act upon the results are also found to contribute to success. Benchmarking offers inspiration, object lessons and broader perspective. It helps you to perceive alternatives. It helps you to create ideas of a higher order. The rule of thumb seems to be, at all levels of the university organisation, that benchmarking should be used to stimulate innovations and to enhance concrete change. Then it is worth accomplishing. University leaders can use benchmarking to promote organisational change. Department heads and program leaders can use it as an instrument to further curricular changes, to assist international cooperation, to encourage teaching development activities, etc. Instead of having static and classificatory

² In Finland there is quantitative database called KOTA, which makes it very easy to compare some basic statistics between Finnish universities. This kind of information serves needs of overall comparison. Comparison based ~~to~~ on the KOTA-database is not benchmarking if we agree; that benchmarking always needs an active, social, interaction with partners.

functions, benchmarking evaluation prefers to act as an active and future oriented element in a quality assurance system.

At the departmental level, the question about ownership of the benchmarking practices is the most critical. An interesting new application could be the benchmarking portfolio.

Benchmarking portfolio means that a department keeps a continuing record of the benchmarking cases in the course of time. The essential task of the benchmarking portfolio is also to reflect and (re)define the idea, role, purpose and the function of the benchmarking evaluation in the department's quality assurance system and to develop it further. In benchmarking portfolio the grass-root level utilization of evaluation results becomes explicit. It also makes visible the quality network, which accumulates through the benchmarking cases.

6 Track 2: Quality in Swedish universities

By Senior Advisor Staffan Wahlén, National Agency for Higher Education in Sweden

The role of universities vis-à-vis the state has changed considerably over the last 15 years. On the one hand, a lot of tasks have been handed over to universities, often without commensurate resources. On the other hand universities have become more autonomous, they are given the opportunity to do what they are supposed to be doing provided that they live up to the quality expected of them and expected by themselves. This requires internal evaluation and, perhaps, external evaluation processes.

In Sweden at the national level, essentially two forms of evaluation have been applied during the last 10 years. In 1995 a model of quality audit of higher education institutions was introduced to review the way in which universities and colleges deal with various aspects of assuring and enhancing their activities. The aspects include:

- Leadership
- Strategies for quality assurance and enhancement
- Cooperation with stakeholders
- Internal quality processes (e.g. internal evaluation, staff development)
- Universal involvement of staff in quality processes
- Internationalisation
- Equity

The impact of the audits has been mixed. The concept of quality processes has been largely accepted. This has resulted in the large majority of institutions having at least developed and partly implemented their processes, and, in about one-third of institutions, having both developed goals and strategies and fully implemented these as part of their annual activities, and developed them further. However, one conclusion has been that they have focused too much on leadership and strategies as organisational skills rather than on innovation. The most problematic criticism is the students' complaint that this kind of review has not provided them with sufficient information on outcomes and programme quality on a comparative basis.

Institutional quality work

Generally, there seems to be a difference in the management of quality work between large institutions and smaller colleges in that the smaller ones are characterised by more pronounced top-down management with the introduction of a norm system to be followed by the departments and staff, supervised by the vice-chancellor. If there is a vision, it is very often to be promoted to university status. A spirit of decentralisation is seen more clearly in the universities. There, the idea of mission or vision is more common. The vision is then broken down into goals at faculty level. Norms exist, of course, but they are often more implicit.

Both large universities and smaller colleges seem to be committed to creating a quality culture embraced by the whole institution. An example of how this is envisaged can be taken from the University of Göteborg, which has established a programme according to which each faculty and unit is responsible for assuring and developing the quality of its own activities. At the same time, the central university management must have the power to exert a leadership role, since it is responsible for the whole of the institution.

This is achieved through recurrent quality audits on a peer review basis by the university management. It is left to the individual faculties to determine, on the basis of the Higher Education Act and Ordinance and on the basis of the vision and general policies of the university, how their quality systems should operate. The audit is not a control that the faculties and departments follow in a strict pattern established by the university, but rather that they have worked out a reasonable model themselves, which they adhere to. The audits will then largely be a discussion of suitable quality assurance and enhancement arrangements, which could be taken up by others in the spirit of a learning organisation. It's a peer review by colleagues in other faculties and departments, which is mainly directed at one's own faculty, but whose result should be reported in the last instance to the university leadership. In order to facilitate the internal discussion within the university and to disseminate examples of good practice, the university's quality council arranges recurring seminars on the experiences of various kinds of internal and external reviews. Best practice is also spread through leadership seminars and other programmes.

Lund University has developed a quality assurance and enhancement programme with overall goals and a strategy to attain the goals. The program also specifies how the strategy should be implemented across the university, how the results should be reported and who is responsible. The programme and detailed descriptions of various components are to found on the Lund University web site: www.evaluat.lu.se

Some recent national developments

Because of student and government dissatisfaction with the information they could obtain from the audits, Sweden introduced a review of all subjects and programmes across the country, in a comparative perspective in six-year cycles, and with the power of sanctions.

This is a large-scale undertaking for the Agency, but even more so for the institutions. In any one given year, an institution may have to deal with six or seven different evaluations. In order to come to terms with the demands, universities and colleges have had to develop internal quality assurance mechanisms. It's a question both of establishing mechanisms to deal with practical aspects and of supporting departments in the preparation of self-studies and, finally, of dealing with the outcomes and, perhaps, of disseminating examples of best practice internally and from one's own university to others.

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*
(T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets).

By Professor Gunnar Handal, Institute for Educational Research at the University of Oslo

After having sorted out some matters of terminology, I briefly looked at the purposes of course evaluation and saw these in the perspective of different views on university education and teaching. The processes of restructuring that European universities are going through now may to some extent change their functions in society and their character as academic institutions. There seems to be a shift from an idea of universities as institutions for '*Bildung*' towards institutions for the *training* of a flexible and mobile workforce. This trend may also influence the way we carry out course evaluations and how we act upon their results. There is a risk that we see course evaluations as opinion polls among customers in a market, instead of as a means of communication between responsible partners in a 'joint venture'.

I then briefly sorted out the three main functions of course evaluation: Quality *enhancement*, quality *control* and quality *demonstration* and focused on the first of these functions in the rest of my presentation.

A fair share of my presentation concerned methods of course evaluation that can be used in relation to this function at the level of modules or programmes. But first I presented some ideas for more overall use of evaluation at the institutional level, using as an example an instrument that has been developed at my own university.

The methods I talked about for formative use at the module level are partly in the form of written responses and partly by using oral methods. The main idea, however, was to present ideas about methods in the perspective introduced above of course evaluation as a means of communication between students and teachers.

After this search in the toolbox, I pointed out some dimensions along which we make our decisions when we design and carry out our course evaluations. Finally, I dealt with the million kroner question about how to turn results from course evaluations into quality improvement. I did this by trying to figure out why this is so difficult, because I think that the suggestions for 'solutions' must lie in the understanding of the problem.

I ended up with some recommendations for future work in this area – and a memento!

8

What to consider when establishing a quality system

By Professor William F. Massy, President of the Jackson Hole Higher Education Group, Inc.

The presentation began with the question, "Why have an internal quality system?" Four reasons were presented. To begin, massification, high-stakes research, and technology have changed the university. A broader and more diverse student body seeks education that is fit for purpose, research has become a mainstream activity rather than something done for its own sake or in support of teaching, and technology is upending the teaching and learning paradigm. Second, markets lack essential information about education quality and so do universities. Therefore, one cannot rely on the "invisible hand" of the market place or self-correcting internal mechanisms to assure and improve quality. Third, while learning is as much the responsibility of professors as of students, too few professors approach the subject systematically. PhDs receive disciplinary training but little if anything on best practices in teaching or how students learn. Finally, research does not automatically produce education quality. Such quality requires systematic effort and a proper balancing of effort with research. Following the analysis of Stanford's Nobel prize-winning economist Kenneth Arrow, the presentation showed the research and education quality shift from being complements in the Humboltian tradition to being substitutes as faculty spend less of their discretionary time on educational tasks.

Exemplary quality systems embed quality assurance in the broader context of 'Education Quality Work' (EQW), integrate quality assurance with quality improvement, give primary responsibility to professors, establish systematic roles for programmes, faculties, and the central university, and embrace the mantra, "Trust but check". Education quality work is the pivotal concept, so the presentation considered it at some length.

EQW aims to *improve* and *assure* the quality of education by applying modern quality principles in ways that are understandable and acceptable to academics. By providing the 'guidance system' for education quality, it supports but is not the same as teaching itself. EQW should be comprehensive, principled, evidence-based, and reflect a culture of quality.

Education quality work spans five domains of activity that can be performed only by academic staff: (1) determination of desired learning outcomes; (2) design of curricula; (3) design of educational processes; (4) design of student assessment measures; and (5) implementation quality assurance. Notice that the last item, quality assurance, is embedded in a broader system oriented toward quality improvement.

Research on quality processes in business, government, and non-profit entities has identified seven principles that can help improve EQW: focus on *process* in every domain; define quality as *student learning attainment*; strive for *coherence* in curricula, teaching methods, and assessment; work *collaboratively* for mutual involvement and support; base decisions on *evidence* wherever possible; identify and learn from *best practice*, and make *continuous improvement* a high priority. For example, the use of evidence in assessing student performance should cover knowledge and skills taught *throughout the curriculum*, involve *multiple judgments* of student performance, use information on *multiple dimensions* of student

performance, and involve *more than surveys* or *self-reports* of competence or growth by students. More generally, evidence should be intentional and purposeful, integrative and holistic, and entail interpretation and reflection. It may either direct or indirect and qualitative or quantitative. Unfortunately, an increasing number of observers believe that these principles are often ignored.

One can identify five levels of quality process maturity. 'No Effort' is associated with traditional methods and little quality consciousness. 'Firefighting' means reaction to problems, ad hoc adjustments, and little focus on quality principles. 'Emergent Effort' reflects individual initiatives in most domains and experimentation with quality principles. 'Organized Effort' involves initiatives that are planned and tracked, approaches that are based on principles, and metrics and norms that are evidence-based. Finally, 'Mature Effort' means continuous improvement, shared organizational learning, and – most of all – an embedded culture of quality.

Quality begins at the programme level with teaching and learning itself. EQW also begins at the programme level, where programme leaders should organize the staff's efforts, then motivate and work with them to move up the maturity curve. At the next level, deans and Faculty councils should inform and motivate the program leaders, monitor progress, and work with laggards to improve performance. Finally, university officers and committees should establish expectations for good EQW, provide financial and technical support, hold the deans accountable for working with programmes, and disseminate best practice.

University officers also should be responsible for getting EQW established in their institutions. The objective should be to use top-down initiatives to stimulate bottom-up improvements and to demonstrate that the improvements sought are intellectually interesting, practical, and consistent with academic values. The proposed approach is a program of 'Internal academic audits'.

When fully established, such a program would evaluate each programme's EQW maturity on a regular basis – perhaps every 5 to 7 years. Each cycle would include an introductory workshop, a self-study, an audit visit, and a report that is disseminated widely across the institution. The workshop introduces the domains and principles of EQW and asks staff to reflect on how these ideas might help improve teaching and learning. The self-study carries the reflection process further and provides a framework for discussions among the auditors, academic staff, and cognizant dean. Auditors can be internal rather than external, include non-academics, and need not know the discipline. The audit's focus is on improvement; however accountability can be invoked if necessary because the audit responses are hard to fake.

Academic audit offers a number of advantages. It engages academic staff in non-threatening structured discussions of education quality. It demonstrates that modest efforts to improve EQW can benefit both teachers and learners without stifling research. It furthers both the improvement and accountability agendas. Finally, it can be done at low cost.

Experiences in Hong Kong and at the University of Missouri confirm the value of audit. Professors see the questions as *meaningful, interesting, and challenging*, and the auditors can determine unequivocally whether programme staff takes EQW seriously. The audits *focus attention* on EQW and stimulate the *sharing of best practice*, and they do this with a *light touch*.

For more on education quality work and academic audit see William F. Massy, *Honoring the Trust: Quality and Cost Containment in Higher Education* (Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), and William F. Massy, "Academic Audit for Accountability and Improvement"; in Joseph C. Burke (Ed.), *The Many Faces of Accountability: Holding Higher Education Responsible for Performance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, forthcoming in early 2004).³

³ See slides from the presentation on EVA's homepage (www.eva.dk).