Trends in quality audits

QAN MEMBERS SURVEY 2018

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The survey

Discussed at QAN Barcelona May 2018

Questions circulated and refined in June/July 2018

Surveymokey open July through to October 2018

13 surveys completed

Additional question emerged in September 2018

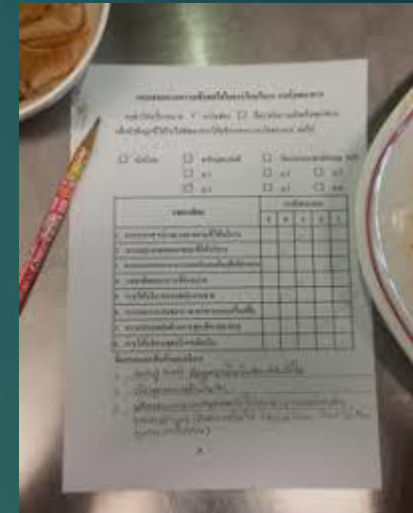Most of the questions were about achieved changes rather than planned changes

Analysis, discussion and drafting autumn 2018

Feedback from QAN colleagues early 2019

Publication of final report May 2019

Report dicussed QAN May 2019

Report circulated to some experts summer 2019

Participating Agencies

Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (AAQ)

Danish Accreditation Institution (AI)

National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of (ANECA)

Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria)

Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya)

Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC)

German Accreditation Council (GAC)

Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)

Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)

Quality Assurance Agency, Scotland (QAA Scotland)

Quality Assurance Agency, UK (QAA UK)

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ)

Audits

Mandatory

Focussed on…

- Teaching and learning (92%)
- Strategy and governance (85%)
- Facilities and infrastructure (85%)

The internal quality assurance procedures of HEIs

Various purposes and objectives: compliance with legal acts; replacement of study programme accreditation; effectiveness of internal quality assurance system;…

The recent past
10 agencies

Main drivers for change

- Legislation (80%)
- ESG 2015 (70%)

Key changes

- Scope (67%) → Examples:
  - FINEEC: increased emphasis on a student-centred approach and societal impact
  - NVAO: trails on specific topics and programmes, educational policy
- Methodology (67%) → Examples:
  - QQI: composition of the panel
  - NOKUT: greater emphasis on written information/submissions than on the site visit

The recent past
10 agencies

Greatest impacts

▶ On higher education institutions: e.g. greater involvement

▶ On agencies themselves: e.g. workload and/or training for staff

Strenghs

▶ Increased ownership and greater autonomy for higher education institutions

▶ Better appreciation of the context of the higher education institutions

▶ Better comparability /consistent treatment, greater transparency

The future
5 agencies

Main drivers for change

- Legislation / agencies own decision (60% each)
- Experience with previous external QA procedures (60%)

Key changes

- Scope (80%) → Examples:
  - UKÄ: include QA of research
  - AI: increae the emphasis on how QA works in practice, follow-up on strategic goals
- Methodology (60%) → Examples:
  - AQ Austria, NVAO: Number of site visits
  - AQ Austria: Assessment rules / assessment scale

The future
5 agencies

Anticipated Impacts

- ▶ The role of the agency: audit will be more dialogue-oriented (less control)

- ▶ Reduced administrative ‚burden' for higher education institutions – instiutions taking greater responsibility for their own quality

Strenghs

- ▶ Appreciation of context

- ▶ Methodology fit for purpose and tailored to the specific type of institution

- ▶ Opportunity to strengthen links between education and research

Wider Agency changes
10 agencies

Predominant cause for change is legislation (70%) and most changes will affect the activities of the agency (70%), its role and funding/ressources (50% each)

- Mergers

- Transformation and / or integration of different commissions

- Additional tasks

Clear impact on agencies themselves (100%)

- Increase in evaluation activities

- Scope to focus on specific QA systems and procedures

- Creation of new committies, employment of new staff/expertise

Wider Agency changes
10 agencies

Strenghs/Opportunities

- Increased transparency
- Wider consistency in decisions

Weakness/Threats

- Internal separation (divided responsibilities) → loss of information
- Communication

Overall trends

Convergence on 3-point scales

Increased methodological transparency

Alterations to methodologies based on experiences: number of site visits; panel composition; panel size

Increased focus on stakeholder engagement

Overall trends

Increasing awareness of the importance of context sensitivity

Closer alignment to institutional strategy and activity

Wider and different scopes

Growth in enhancement-led audits

Greater use of data and other sources of information to complement self-evaluation

Main conclusions

Some report QA as a continuously changing dynamic environment

Other agencies were either quite static or seemed uncertain about changes to come

Growing interest in the relationship between audit and programme accreditation and review

Sensitivity to context means a closer relationship to changes in the HE environment

The European Standards and Guidelines become less relevant to change as we move away from 2015

Main conclusions

Recognition that the audit approach can:

- ▶ improve the focus on quality culture for institutions
- ▶ promote greater ownership of internal QA
- ▶ provide greater adaptability for external QA – different purposes, widened/narrowed scopes

An audit approach places a greater burden on resources for both institutions and agencies

The role of agencies is widening

- ▶ Dialogue partner – facilitator – change agent – initiator – implementer – subordinate

Overarching trends (we think!)

A more complex relationship between compliance and enhancement than just a continuum

Greater differentiation in audits over time

Increasing interest in the relationship to funding process and higher education objectives

Feedback so far

Are we blind to national factors which can be very influential on audit purposes/approaches?

Change continues in QAN agencies – May 2019: the use of data; alignment to objectives for HE

How strongly has the third mission influenced audit?

What is the relationship between agency maturity and these trends?

When do audit changes occur – end-cycle or mid-cycle?

The term 'trust' does not appear in the Report!

Questions

What do you conclude?

Did anything surprise you?

How does these trends reflect what happens in your agency/country?

What is going to change for you?

What trends do you anticipate?

What information are we missing?

What could we explore further?

More provocative questions

Audits (and other external QA procedures) increasingly consider changes in the higher education contexts and environments. Does this mean a pro-active or reactive role for agencies?

Closer alignment to institutional strategy and activity can mean that audit becomes less disruptive but also more supportive of continuous improvement. Is this the right balance? Should external audit be more disruptive?

What is influencing the changes in legislation that seem to be a driver change in agencies?

Thank you!

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