

IN THE EYES OF OTHERS

External review of the Danish Evaluation Institute

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External evaluation of the Danish Evaluation Institute

Published by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education 2005 Report No. 2005:39 R, ISSN 1400-948X

Contents: Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, Evaluation department, Eva Åström

Design: Swedish National Agency for Higher Education Information department, Lena Ernstson

Photography: Scanpix/Philip Karlberg

Printed by Elanders Gummessons AB, Falköping, April 2005

Printed on environmental paper

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SUMMARY

THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Terms of reference and the nature of the task

In spring 2005, Högskoleverket (the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education) was entrusted with the task of evaluating Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (the Danish Evaluation Institute) (EVA). The brief was to evaluate the totality of the activities of EVA in three central areas: evaluation, knowledge centre activities and revenue-generating activities. The strategic considerations of the Institute have been examined as well as the processes and methods chosen. The management and internal organisation of the Institute have also been analysed. The external framework and conditions applying to the work of the Institute have been considered in the assessment.

The evaluation is a continuation of the extensive quality assurance measures undertaken by EVA since the establishment of the Institute. Another aim has been to qualify the Institute for inclusion in the register of quality assurance agencies active in Europe which is now being developed within the framework of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The evaluation process

The evaluation has been carried out by a panel of assessors consisting of five Nordic experts: Henrik Tvarnö (chair), Secretary General of the Danish Folketing, Sigbrit Franke, University Chancellor and Director General of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, Kirsi Lindroos, Director General of the National Finnish Board of Education, and Rolf Sandahl, Head of Department, The Swedish National Financial Management Authority. Eva Åström, Project Manager at Högskoleverket has been the panel's secretary and been responsible for the implementation of the evaluation.

The self-evaluation report prepared by EVA has served as the basis of the assessments of the panel. Supplementary information has been gathered during a four-day site visit to EVA. The staff, management, Board and Committee of Representatives have been interviewed, as well as chairs of panels of assessors, representatives of stakeholders and the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation.

THE PANEL'S OVERALL ASSESSMENT

The Danish Evaluation Institute was established in 1999. In the course of the more than five years that have passed since then, EVA has taken on all the tasks included in its broad mandate and has built up, with enthusiasm, a sphere of activities, which is to a large extent new. In our opinion, this is an achievement which the management and staff of EVA can be proud of.

The approach and the methods used are in agreement with international practice.

The panel of assessors has examined the activities of EVA in relation to the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies proposed by ENQA. The panel finds that EVA complies with the ENQA quality standards in all essentials. The Institute should, therefore, be well qualified to be included in the register of quality assurance agencies active in Europe in the category of European national agencies that have been reviewed and fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

THE MISSION AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DANISH EVALUATION INSTITUTE

The Danish Evaluation Institute was established with the mission of carrying out systematic evaluations of primary and lower-secondary education, upper-secondary education, higher education and adult education and continuing training. The mission is specified in the Lov om Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (The Danish Evaluation Institute Act, the so-called EVA Act).

The broad mission should be reconsidered

In the opinion of the panel, there are several reasons to reconsider the present broad mission of EVA. The Danish prioritisations with regard to education are different today from when EVA was established. Changes of management and monitoring systems within various sectors of education have been implemented and further modifications are in progress.

The role of EVA as an evaluator of educational quality appears unclear at the present moment, and the independence which is to characterise the work of EVA according to the EVA Act is limited in several respects.

The panel of assessors recommends that the present broad scope of EVA's mission, i.e. the responsibility for evaluation within all educational sectors, be reconsidered.

Insufficient degree of coverage

The problems of the broad mission are illustrated by the difficulties accounted for by EVA in reaching an acceptable degree of coverage within all educational sectors. Although EVA works with great awareness and strategically, it is the panel's impression that the number and scope of the evaluations are insufficient in all sectors, with the possible exception of higher education.

The staffing needs to be strengthened

The panel of assessors considers the staffing of the organisation to be undersized in relation to its mission. More evaluation consultants are needed, primarily with a Ph.D.

If the present broad mission is retained, more consultants should be hired.

The visibility of EVA should be improved

A higher degree of coverage would affect the impact of the evaluations on all sectors of education. A stronger emphasis on control in the evaluations and more attention from the media would also be needed in order to increase the likelihood that the outcomes of the evaluations will result in activities at the institutions.

The expert panel recommends EVA to be more visible in the public debate.

EVA abstains from adding its own analysis to its reports. In our opinion, this is yet another expression of the too unobtrusive and cautious role chosen by and assigned to EVA in relationship to ministries, the media and institutions.

Ph.D. studies are not evaluated

According to the expert panel one important aspect is missing in EVA's mission. Ph.D. studies should be included in evaluations as a part of higher education.

ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

The overall strategic efforts need strengthening

Ambitious efforts go into the strategic management of activities within EVA. However, the breadth and complexity of the mission affect EVA's planning conditions. There is an extensive planning process, which is difficult to keep together, and there seems to be a tendency for the Board and management to be forced to substitute short-term planning at the project level for long-term strategic considerations and problem analysis.

The panel of assessors recommends that parallel strategic processes be adapted/synchronised and that the overall strategic responsibility of the Board should be emphasised more strongly. If the present broad mission is retained, clearer strategies embracing several sectors should be developed for EVA's operations.

A clearer division of responsibilities would entail greater efficiency

A new project organisation has been implemented as part of strategic developments. In the panel's opinion, it is well suited to deal with the breadth of the mission. Possibly, the efficiency of the organisation would increase if the division of responsibilities was made clearer.

The panel recommends that the autonomous responsibility of the project teams and the project management should be further emphasised and that the direct involvement of EVA's management in the projects be reduced.

METHODOLOGY

An impressive evaluation method and impressive efforts for improvement of methodology

The organisation of EVA's evaluation activities is impressive. The implementation of the evaluations appears efficient and competent. By virtue of the international involvement of the management, evaluation experiences and evaluation research are gathered and integrated in EVA's work. The organisation of quality assurance and quality enhancement also commands respect. The panel sees the integration of efforts for improvement of methodology resulting from the new organisation as a strong point.

Weak follow-up is a methodological problem

The greatest methodological weakness, in our opinion, is the follow-up of the evaluations. It is problematic both that EVA does not have a mandate to follow up its own evaluations and that the follow-up systems generally appear weak.

The panel of assessors recommends that EVA be given formal possibilities to do follow-ups and to carry on a developmental dialogue with the evaluated programmes after the conclusion of the evaluations.

PREFACE

Denmark was one of the first countries to establish a system and organisation for the evaluation of the quality of higher education at a national level. Since the beginning of the 1990s it has also been a committed and respected participant in European cooperation on the development of evaluation models and strategies for quality assurance in the educational sector. The management of what was then Evalueringscentret (the Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education) and is now Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (the Danish Evaluation Institute) – EVA – are deeply involved in ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and have in recent years promoted the work of developing an appraisal system for organisations that are active in the quality assurance of higher education in Europe.

In the expert panel we have felt honoured to be entrusted with the task of conducting an external review of the Danish Evaluation Institute, a task that has put us on our mettle. We have evaluated a widely respected institution whose staff possess widely recognised and documented expertise and whose management is both experienced and enjoys an authoritativeness that can hardly be questioned.

The institute was established in 1999, when it was given a broad mandate to undertake systematic evaluations in primary and lower-secondary education, upper-secondary programmes, higher education and adult and continuing training. During the five years that have now elapsed EVA has taken on all of these tasks enthusiastically and developed processes that to all intents and purposes are new. In the opinion of the expert panel, this is an achievement that EVA's management and staff can be proud of.

However, one of the issues that has come into focus in the appraisal is the breadth of the Evaluation Institute's mandate. The choice of strategies and priorities for the future have also been discussed in the light of changes in management and monitoring of quality that has been carried out and is planned in various areas of the Danish educational system. No little attention has also been paid to EVA's social role in Denmark.

The expert panel would like to express its gratitude for having been enabled with EVA's assistance to deepen its knowledge of the conditions that apply to the evaluation of education in Denmark. Our review has also made it possible for us to view the organisation of Sweden's and Finland's evaluation systems in a new light.

Stockholm, September 20th, 2005

Henrik Tvarnö, Sigbrit Franke, Kirsi Lindroos, Rolf Sandahl, Eva Åström

INTRODUCTION

THE EVALUATION BRIEF

The aim of the review

The external review of the Danish Evaluation Institute carried out during 2005 constitutes a continuation of the extensive quality assurance activities that have been undertaken in the Institute since its establishment in 1999.¹

Its brief was laid down in the terms of reference (kommissorium) for the external review of EVA adopted by EVA's board in February 2005 (annex 1).

This states that the EVA Act, the Danish Evaluation Institute Act, will provide an important point of departure for the review. The expert panel is to examine whether the institute fulfils the aims of the act; if its operations are relevant in terms of the act; if they are of adequate quality and if the outcomes of these operations agree with the intentions of the act.

Other aims than those expressed in the act are also to be considered, for instance the aims formulated by EVA in its internal strategic plans and its quality assurance plans.

In addition, the review has an explicit international dimension. For a number of years work has been going on in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) on the development of joint models and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education. In this context a system for peer-review-assessment of quality evaluation authorities and other institutions in Europe has also been studied. The report entitled Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area presented in February 2005 contained a proposed peer-review model that included cyclical reviews and the establishment of a register of the quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. It is suggested that one item of information to be included in this register would indicate the agencies that have undergone peer-review in accordance with ENQA's guidelines and whether this review indicated that their work meets the European standard.

One of the reasons why EVA initiated this external review was that it wanted to qualify for inclusion in this register.

Criteria and other aspects which were to be considered

The review was to cover EVA's collective operations and undertakings in three core areas: evaluations, the knowledge-centre operations and externally contracted activities.

The strategic considerations of the Institute were to be reviewed as well as the processes and methods chosen. The management and internal organisation of the Institute were also to be analysed. The review was also to take into account the external parameters and conditions applying to the work of the Institute.

A list of criteria has been drawn up in EVA and approved by its board (Annex 2). This lists five different themes for the external review:

- EVA's aim, strategy and framework
- EVA's organisation and management
- EVA's knowledge resources
- EVA's processes
- EVA's results

The expert panel was also asked to review the eight aspects of the operations of quality assurance organisations that should be taken into account in an external peer-review according to ENQA's recommendations.²

¹ In addition to this review a number of other activities were carried out that focused mainly on quality assurance of EVA's external cooperative relationships.

² The aspects listed in ENQA's report are:

- Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education
- Official status
- Activities
- Resources

Review model

The terms of reference also lay down how the external review should be conducted. A panel of Nordic experts, consisting of about 5 individuals with specified expertise, is to be appointed.³ The review is to be based on a self-evaluation report drawn up in EVA and a three-day site visit of EVA to be made by the panel. The results of the review are to be presented in a public report.

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education is to be responsible for organising the review and providing the expert panel with secretarial support.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REVIEW

The expert panel – a presentation

The expert panel consisted of five Nordic experts:

- Henrik Tvarnö (Chair), Senior lecturer in history, Director-General of the Danish Folketing, former Rector of Odense University.
- Sigbrit Franke, Professor of education, Chancellor of the Swedish Universities and therefore head of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, former Rector of Umeå University.
- Kirsi Lindroos, Fil.Lic. in education, Director General of the National Board of Education in Finland, former head of the Department for education in the Finnish Ministry of Education.
- Rolf Sandahl, PhD in politics, responsible for evaluation activities at the Swedish National Financial Management Authority, whose previous undertakings include, for instance, the evaluation of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education's evaluation department and the school inspections undertaken by the Swedish National Agency for Education.
- Eva Åström (secretary), Project Manager in the evaluation department of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, has been responsible for the implementation of the review and work on the report.

Organisation of the review and the work of the panel

The expert panel was appointed in the spring of 2005, after the brief had been drawn up, the criteria for the review adopted and the process of self-evaluation had begun at EVA. The panel had, therefore, only limited influence over the organisation and focus of the review.

The time frame had already been laid down in principle: the self-evaluation was completed between February and April 2005. The expert panel was appointed in March and April and had its first meeting in May, just over a week before the site visit to EVA took place. The aim was to analyse the self-evaluation and draw up an overall structure for the interviews to be made during the site visit and the future report. The site visit took three days at the end of May and most of the work on the report was undertaken from June to August. In the middle of August another visit was made to EVA, when the panel interviewed the board of EVA, the Committee of Representatives and also conducted a follow-up seminar with EVA's staff. On August 23rd a preliminary draft of the report was sent to EVA so that factual information could be checked and the final version was complete at the end of September.

During its site visit in May the expert panel met EVA's management, EVA's 'internal self-evaluation group' and representatives from all of its units/operational areas, as well as a group consisting of chairs of expert panels on various evaluation projects. In addition, two hearings were arranged – the first with representatives of higher education and the other with principals and teachers from primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools. Representatives from the Ministry of Education (UVM) and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (VTU) were also interviewed.

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- Mission statement
 - Independence
 - External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies.
 - Accountability procedures (s. 23–26)

³ The panel is to consist of a chair with managerial experience from the public sector in Denmark, a Nordic expert on the school system, a Nordic evaluation expert on education at more advanced levels and an individual who is an expert on the collection and dissemination of information. One member of the panel also has to be an acknowledged expert researcher or teacher.

The central premises and considerations of the expert panel

During the last 10-15 years many countries in Europe have introduced a system of management by objectives and results in the educational sector. This is a development that has taken place in Finland, Sweden and Denmark, for example. In this way evaluation and monitoring quality have become central instruments in enabling the governments to superintend and guarantee educational standards. National quality assurance agencies, centres and institutes have been established.

The aims of evaluation – development and control

One important issue in this context is whether the role of these evaluations and evaluating organisations is primarily one of inspection or whether they are first and foremost intended to stimulate development.

The standpoint of the expert panel, which has had an impact on both how we view EVA's evaluations and how this external review has been organised, is that both of these ends are legitimate and that it is necessary to strike a balance between them. A one-sided focus on development is not unquestionably going to enhance quality. This type of evaluation tends to lack the substance and precision required for action to ensue.⁴

One way of adding to the impact of an evaluation is to arrange follow-up of its results. One of the recommendations in ENQA's proposed standards for quality assurance organisations is "a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report".⁵

In our experience one-sided evaluations that focus on development are also less effective in providing a basis for political decisions.

Independent evaluation is in the public interest

Basing decisions on evaluation results does not mean, either by definition or exclusively, that they need to be tailored to suit the wishes of politicians or any other decision makers.

The expert panel has analysed EVA's responsibilities in a somewhat broader meaning than that stated in the EVA Act and in the institute's internal strategy documents and mission statement, i.e. in terms of EVA's social responsibilities. The panel feels that EVA, as an official institution which has expert knowledge in the field of education, also has a responsibility to provide information needed by the general public and that effective use of public resources should mean that the questions raised and the knowledge gathered about quality in the various educational sectors should be of general benefit to the Danish community.⁶

In the opinion of the panel independent evaluation agencies should endeavour actively to disseminate the results of their evaluations and other reviews and in this way make their expertise available in public debate.

The subject of the evaluation – conditions, process and result

Another question concerns the subject of the evaluation. What is to be evaluated? The conditions in which education is offered? The actual educational process? Or the results that the education gives rise to?

In the opinion of the panel if an evaluation is to be effective, all three phases as well as the causal links between them need to be explored and analysed. This is necessary, for instance, if the evaluation results are to be comprehensible and to enable them to be used as a basis for relevant recommendations. This type of evaluation must include a frame of reference which sheds light on what conditions are relevant for the educational programme and which problematises its outcomes. The results of evaluations and their impact and usefulness are among the issues often discussed by those conducting research into evaluation.⁷

⁴ For instance Evert Vedung claims that evaluations for the purpose of control that are intended to provide a basis for decisive strategic decisions are often more comprehensive and probe more deeply than evaluations intended merely to stimulate improvement. (p. 103)

⁵ *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, p. 25.

⁶ "But citizens need evaluation to be able to adopt a standpoint on how politicians at various levels behave and call them to account in elections" (p. 100). Vedung maintains that information about the outcomes of political decisions in the field "must be central for citizens".

⁷ In an article in *New Directions for Evaluation* (2000) Karen E. Kirkhart, for instance, presents a model for the analysis of the impact of evaluations. In it she asks whether the impact can be attributed to the evaluation process and also if the impact is intended or not. She

Our external review of EVA has functioned in accordance with the above premises. We have analysed the conditions on which EVA operates and evaluated the way in which it discharges its task. We have also endeavoured to clarify what outcomes the evaluations and other projects have had.

At the same time it has been our ambition to provide EVA with answers to the questions posed to the expert panel. Evaluation of outcomes has, however, given us no little food for thought. According to the list of criteria, the expert panel was to evaluate how “EVA contributes to assuring and developing the quality of teaching and learning in Denmark”. We have however found it difficult to find anything on which to base an opinion about the impact of EVA’s work in these terms. EVA’s mandate does not include following up its own evaluations: instead they are followed up by the ministries, the course providers themselves, or not at all, and this means that there is no collective information about the results of EVA’s work in this sense. The “results” we have been able to account for in this report consist instead of the effects of EVA’s operations reported by the representatives of the various end-users during the site visits.

We have attached great importance to analysing the conditions that apply to EVA’s operations, perhaps even more importance than indicated in our brief. The contents of the EVA Act, ways in which the various educational sectors are organised and have changed, as well as relationships to the government constitute, in our opinion, determining factors for the work of EVA. Moreover these are not conditions that we have taken for granted. Two perspectives have been adopted in formulating many of our conclusions and recommendations: one from the point of view of the conditions that currently apply to EVA’s activities, the other involves questioning these conditions per se. Does the mandate that EVA has been given need amendment? Do the laws and regulations require review? Could the division of responsibilities between EVA, the ministries and the course providers at different levels be different?

Miscellaneous

Even though many of the premises and issues were already given when the expert panel was appointed, we consider that we have had excellent opportunities to conduct an independent review. For instance, we were able to decide ourselves on how the site visit was to be organised and we have had good access to supplementary written documentation. The service we have been provided with by EVA has been impeccable. We have therefore been able to combine EVA’s questions and evaluation criteria with a number of additional questions and aspects that the panel has considered relevant.

We have refrained from commenting on individual projects.

stresses the time perspective, i.e. that impact can be immediate, can be directly linked to the conclusion of the evaluation or that it can occur later, in the long term. Henry & Mark (2003), Henry (2003), Grasso (2003), Leviton (2003) as well as Ginsburg & Rhett (2003) have published articles in the *American Journal of Evaluation* on the use and impact of evaluations. In Sweden evaluation researchers such as Evert Vedung (*Utvärdering i politik och förvaltning*) and Ove Karlsson (*Utvärdering – mer än bara metod*) have looked at the problems relating to the use of evaluations and attention has been drawn to this in Denmark, for instance, by Peter Dahler-Larsen and Flemming Larsen (*Anvendelse af evaluering – Historien om et begreb, der udvider sig*).

THE DANISH EVALUATION INSTITUTE – MANDATE AND OBLIGATIONS

The Danish Evaluation Institute, EVA, was established in 1999. It replaced the previous Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education and its mandate included tasks that were to some extents new and broader than those of its predecessor.

MANDATE – THE ACT ON THE DANISH EVALUATION INSTITUTE

Various roles

The tasks of the Evaluation Institute are described in the Act on the Danish Evaluation Institute.⁸ This says that EVA is to:

- Assist in assuring the quality and development of teaching and education in Denmark
- Advise and cooperate with the Ministry of Education and other public agencies and educational institutions on issues relating to evaluation and quality development in the educational sector
- Compile national and international experiences of educational evaluation and quality development
- Develop and renew methods for evaluation and quality development.

The institute is itself to initiate evaluations and in doing so to decide which educational institutions are to be included. It is also to function as a national knowledge centre in the field of quality and quality assurance in education.⁹

What evaluations and knowledge centre activities will be undertaken is laid down in the institute's annual action plan. Of the public funding granted for evaluations and knowledge centre activities about 2/3 is devoted to evaluations and 1/3 to knowledge centre undertakings. Evaluation is EVA's central task.

Evaluations and knowledge centre undertakings are carried out as part of the institute's official mandate, and also as externally contracted activities. EVA is permitted to undertake evaluation commissions from ministries, educational institutions and other interested parties for payment.¹⁰ The externally contracted activities are increasing in volume from what was initially a very limited level. These are of different types: commissioned evaluations, surveys, advice and the communication of expertise/courses.

A paradoxical mandate

EVA has a complex mandate and in the opinion of the expert panel, one that contains certain elements that appear to be difficult to reconcile. The act makes EVA a public agency with a statutory mandate, while at the same time it is market oriented and dependent on commissions from ministries and from the same bodies as those subject to evaluation according to its action plan. In other words its operations are both state-funded and dependent on revenue. In addition EVA is supposed to act as both evaluator/inspector and as advisor. There is a risk that the institute could end up evaluating activities that its own staff have helped to develop – a risk, moreover, mentioned in the institute's own self-evaluation and by the board, the management and the staff during the site visit.

The expert panel considers that the different and to some extent contradictory roles assigned to EVA may have an impact on the institute's legitimacy. The conclusion of the panel is that there is awareness in EVA of the potential consequences of this multi-faceted mandate. On the other hand there do not appear to be any plans for dealing with these consequences in practice. During the site visit, for example, it became clear that there is no explicit strategy for the externally contracted activities. These are expanding, but no analysis has been made of how this expansion affects the conditions for the work undertaken by EVA on the basis of its action plan.

⁸ Act on the Danish Evaluation Institute, Act No. 290, May 12th, 1999.

⁹ Knowledge is generated in the course of EVA's evaluations that can be circulated to and used by others in internal and external contexts. Knowledge is also acquired during other studies and in connection with conferences, seminars and network meetings. This knowledge is circulated with the help of reports – *Nøgler til Forandring från 2001, Educational Evaluation around the World, Skoleudvikling i Chicago* – and also through courses, conference papers, etc.

¹⁰ According to Section 3 of the act, evaluations may be commissioned by the Ministry of Education, other ministries, general educational councils, county councils, borough councils, public educational institutions, approved educational institutions or those entitled to government support, as well as educational institutions that offer private courses.

An efficient and unobtrusive agency

All of the educational institutions that the expert panel had a chance to speak to during the site visit declared that on the whole they were satisfied with EVA's evaluations. "Professional work" was a frequent comment, "efficient organisation" another. These are judgements that are corroborated by a survey undertaken by EVA of the institutions evaluated, which showed that between 80 and 90 per cent were pleased with EVA's work.

The expert panel also formed a definite impression that EVA bases its evaluations on a model that is in many respects versatile and efficient.

EVA is not menacing and is not intended to be

One possible explanation, to some extent at least, of the benevolent attitude of the educational institutions may be that EVA is perceived in various quarters as a fairly anonymous and "unmenacing" evaluator. This is another impression formed by the expert panel. EVA's mandate gives it little power. Its main task is to assure and demonstrate the quality of the educational system. However, according to the self-evaluation, checking whether the educational system attains its objectives is not something to which priority is primarily ascribed. EVA does not make decisions on the basis of the evaluation results, nor does it follow up the evaluations. Follow-up and any sanctions that may be invoked are decided on jointly by the ministries and the individual educational institutions.¹¹

With its strong emphasis on the development aspect, no responsibility for follow-up and no decision-making powers, EVA can hardly pose a threat to anyone. That this could be a strength was emphasised by several members of its staff during the site visit. Cooperation with the institutions being evaluated is easier. Several considered that there is greater trust and frankness during the evaluation process if there is no risk that it will have negative consequences for the institutions – criticism, qualms, sanctions.

EVA's explicit development of its relationships with the institutions it evaluates on the basis of dialogue and goodwill is an approach that the expert panel considers pragmatic and more than justifiable during the stage in which the institute was focusing on establishing itself in new educational sectors. Hardly any other course of action would have been possible, given the conditions offered by the EVA Act in 1999 and the broad mandate that this involved.

However, in 2005 this initial development phase can now be considered to have come to an end and it is time to start thinking in new terms. The aim for EVA should be clearer and more visible than it is today. The one-sided – in the opinion of the panel – emphasis on development should be supplemented by elements of more stringent control. In our experience this kind of clarity does not mean that cooperation with the institutions will be harmed.

On the other hand we are convinced that EVA's evaluations would have more impact and attract more attention – which in its turn would offer enhancement of EVA's role in the community and of quality assurance in the Danish educational system.

No priority given to media attention

EVA has no explicit press strategy that applies to the entire institute. However, there is a regulation that requires the issue of a press release for every report published. In addition to this, information is circulated to the media through EVA's electronic magazine and via articles that the management or consultants sometimes write in the appropriate specialist journals.

No survey has been made of the impact of these measures. Nor has there been any analysis of how EVA is presented in various media.

¹¹ The Ministry of Education can decide on follow-up of the evaluations made by EVA in primary and secondary education and also on sanctions based on these evaluations. According to the EVA Act, the ministry may decide to withdraw the institutions' entitlement to offer certain programmes. The development contracts between the universities and the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation contain provisions about following up evaluations at university level. During the site visit neither EVA nor the institutions evaluated were certain that these follow-up measures were carried out effectively.

In the view of EVA's management, it would be desirable for the evaluations to be given more attention. "Visibility" is also one of seven strategic themes in the institute's strategic plans for 2004-2006: "EVA's evaluations take a form that is designed to create visibility about the strengths and weaknesses of the Danish educational system and EVA's knowledge centre can provide tools for the development of quality". The need of a more proactive press strategy is the subject of discussion in EVA's board.¹² According to the Chair, the aim is for EVA's evaluation reports to become a factor in discussions of education in Denmark.

At the same time, however, EVA wants to avoid becoming more newsworthy by marketing "bad news", as this would undermine the institute's credibility. The press is not generally considered to be interested in positive evaluation results.¹³

Nor is it part of EVA's mandate to attract the attention of the daily press or any other media, as was generally agreed by the ministry, management and most of EVA's staff during the site visit. Concern for EVA's relationship with the Ministry is one of the reasons why EVA's staff may not speak freely to the media. The institute's internal information strategy makes it clear that there is to be no risk of EVA being perceived as a political organisation. The representatives of the Ministry of Education stated that EVA's task is to supply evaluations to provide a basis for public debate. The institute has no mandate to participate in the debate about the political follow-up of its evaluations.¹⁴

Moreover, these representatives claimed, it cannot be taken for granted that EVA's staff have the skills required to participate in public debate.

EVA's staff also considered that a high media profile could also mean that the institute might be perceived as menacing by the institutions.

A public role requires visibility

To counter arguments of this kind, the expert panel would argue that it is necessary to raise yet another question of principle in relation to EVA's role. Whose interests should a state agency like EVA represent?

The EVA Act defines the institute's responsibilities almost exclusively in relation to the ministries, other agencies and the educational institutions. It says who it may cooperate with, how information is to be circulated and what form official relationships should take. There is no mention of results that could interest students and pupils and hardly anything about the information about quality in various publicly-funded educational sectors needed by their parents, or citizens in general. One section of one paragraph refers to information for and responsibilities to the general public: "EVA is to publish all evaluation reports and inform the general public of its activities".¹⁵

The Act thus makes the institute primarily an internal knowledge bank for the various participants in the educational sector and the relatively unobtrusive and diplomatic media strategy that has been adopted fits in well with this role.

But acting like this, in the opinion of the expert panel, does not do full justice to the work of EVA. The knowledge generated by the evaluations and collected within the institute should be exploited more systematically in a broader public discourse on what quality in the Danish educational system looks like and how it could be developed. With no media attention, however, it is hardly possible to reach out to a wider audience.

¹² Minutes of the meeting of the board on August 23rd, 2004.

¹³ How sensitive the issue of media attention can be was confirmed during the site visit by several of the representatives of secondary education. They criticised both the formulation of EVA's press releases and the way the media dealt with EVA's evaluation results, claiming that there is a tendency in the press to present results as more negative than they really are.

¹⁴ During the spring of 2005 there has been discussion in the Swedish media of what have been referred to as "public agencies that generate ideology", i.e. government agencies and boards that adopt standpoints on ideological/political issues and are not objective and impartial as required by the Swedish constitution. For instance, Bo Rothstein, Professor of Political Science, claims that this is a problem for democracy (Dagens Nyheter May 6th, 2005, *Ämbetsverken står för ideologin (Ideology generated by civil servants.)*)

¹⁵ Second paragraph of Section 8: "Evalueringinstitutet offentliggör alle evalueringsrapporter og orienterer offentligheden om sin aktivitet.

Limited circulation in the educational system

Experience derived from the work of EVA most probably circulates in the educational sector primarily in the form of the institute's various knowledge centre projects. EVA's staff offer lectures, courses, conferences and other development support. Written information is circulated through folders, method pamphlets, the website, an electronic news magazine and databases.

But even among course providers at different levels it seems that awareness of what EVA does is limited. The results of the evaluations and the development initiatives hardly receive national coverage. The selected schools and higher education institutions that are directly affected by the institute's evaluations read the reports and benefit from the results presented. This was made clear during the two hearings with representatives from various educational sectors held during the site visit. The impact on others seems to be more marginal. The spin-off effect is described as limited: "Everyone knows what EVA is. On the other hand it is not certain that they know what it does." "Not that much gets read."¹⁶

For an institute with a clear development mandate, limited impact on the educational sector is a problem that has to be taken seriously, in the opinion of the expert panel.

In this context as well, the question of media attention is important. More column inches – in the specialised journals, daily papers and other media – would mean that more course providers would know about evaluation results and the chances of their being used would increase.¹⁷

AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY – THE ENTIRE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

One important reason for the establishment of EVA was that the Government wanted information about quality in the entire Danish educational system. Previously the Evaluation Centre had only evaluated higher education.

EVA's mandate therefore comprises the entire school and educational sector. The institute is to conduct on its own initiative systematic evaluations of education and teaching in primary and lower-secondary schools (18) upper-secondary schools (19) tertiary/higher education (20) as well as adult and continuing training. In addition to the evaluations it was also to gather and circulate knowledge in each of these sectors, or in other words function as a knowledge centre.

To the expert panel this seems, on the basis of its experience, to be an enormously extensive mandate and one which EVA appears to have tackled with great enthusiasm and purposefulness.

Cooperation with two ministries

Since the shift of government in 2001, EVA is accountable to two ministries. Previously the Ministry of Education was responsible in principle for all the educational sectors covered by the EVA Act, but the reorganisation of the government in 2001 shifted responsibility for the long-cycle higher education programmes

¹⁶ In a survey made by EVA among "the 87 organisations entitled to nominate members of the Committee of Representatives" one question concerned how many knew about the evaluations published by EVA between 2001 and June 2004. Among the respondents there was greatest awareness in the higher education sector (79 per cent) followed by the upper-secondary school system (68 per cent), adult and further education (59 per cent) and primary and lower-secondary education (50 per cent).

¹⁷ But the relatively limited circulation of evaluation results in various educational sectors can scarcely be blamed entirely on their failure to reach their potential readers either because of lack of attention in the press or for other reasons. In his book *Utvärdering i politik och förvaltning* Evert Vedung describes four alternative strategies for increasing the usefulness of evaluations. Only one of these involves improving the circulation of their results. He calls the others production focused, end-user focused and measure focused strategies. These assume, for instance, if evaluations have greater relevance and there is greater willingness among end-users to benefit from their results their usefulness will increase. In Ove Karlsson's survey as well, shortcomings in the communication between the evaluator and those evaluated can only be seen as one of several explanations for the failure to use evaluation results. Other reasons are said to be related to weakness in the evaluations themselves and the end-users' own inadequacies.

¹⁸ The mandate includes compulsory education, i.e. the primary and lower-secondary schools run by the state and also private schools that receive public funding.

¹⁹ The Danish term is "ungdomsutbildning" which corresponds to upper-secondary education in Sweden.

²⁰ The Danish term "vidaregående utbildning" refers to all post-secondary education and in this report the terms "tertiary education" and "higher education" are used synonymously.

– university level programmes – to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. This meant that EVA was obliged to cooperate with an additional important government partner.²¹

Dependence

The impression gained by the expert panel is that the Ministry of Education exerts a relatively strong influence over the work of EVA. The Ministry appoints the members of EVA's board and nominates its chairperson. The Minister also issues the ordinance governing EVA and approves its action plans and budget. By virtue of the EVA Act and the ordinance,²² the Ministry is able to extend its influence to the operational level – to the selection of projects and methods.

The Ministry also exerts less official influence over EVA's operations. During the site visit the ministry officials stated that in its action plans EVA "was increasingly shifting in the direction of the prevailing political agenda". In this sense, the institute acts increasingly as a knowledge centre for the Ministry of Education.(23)

But the image of dependence is not unambiguous. During the site visit both the management of EVA and the Ministry claimed that there is a difference between what the relationship between EVA and the Government looks like in theory and how it works in practice. On the whole, thanks to the authority enjoyed by its director and its good relationships with the ministry, the institute has greater scope to make its own decisions and to act than would appear from the official descriptions.

Confidence

The site visit revealed that the relationship with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation differs to some extent. Apart from the evaluations laid down in the EVA Act, there are no binding decisions on cooperation between EVA and the ministry. The cooperation that does exist, for instance in connection with the commissions carried out by EVA on behalf of the ministry, the ministry's comments on the action plan and in the form of regular meetings between EVA's management and officials at the ministry, takes place on a voluntary basis. The contacts that exist are primarily based on the confidence that the ministry has in the current management of the institute.

The panel interprets this to mean that while evaluations of higher education programmes are the cornerstone of EVA's operations, these are not assignments that can be taken for granted. Should the ministry's confidence wane, some of these tasks at least could be assigned to other evaluators.

Restricted independence

The EVA Act affirms the independence of the evaluation institute in relation to the ministries and this was also made clear during the site visit. The lack of interference by both ministries in EVA's evaluations was adduced by EVA's management as one example of this independence: the contents of the reports are the responsibility of the institute itself.

But the expert panel feel that other forms of dependence may exist. Both ministries exert influence over EVA's operations. This may not be surprising in the relationship between a state agency and the Government. What makes the issue of independence particularly pertinent where EVA is concerned is above all the complexity of the relationships the institute has in the educational system and to the government – EVA has links with every educational sector and several ministries – as well as the various and changeable conditions that apply to these relationships both with the sectors and the ministries.

²¹ Two additional ministries are responsible for programmes subject to EVA's evaluations: the Ministry of Culture is responsible for programmes in the fine arts and architecture and the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs is responsible for the maritime programmes.

²² Vedtægt for Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (EVA)

²³ One element in the action plan for 2002 involved a survey initiated by EVA into the effects of four of EVA's evaluations (Effektundersøgelse, 2004). One of its findings was that the institutions that participated were uncertain about who EVA was acting on behalf of, what the purpose of the evaluations was: "Is this being done for the educational institutions, ministry/ministries, is it perhaps for some obscure but very concrete objective or something entirely different?" (p. 29).

EVA's position in relationship to the ministries appears moreover to be unclear. It seems as if it is difficult for the government to decide what EVA's role should be – an agency serving the government's needs or an independent evaluator.

The opinion of the expert panel is that independence from the powers-that-be is decisive for the long-term results of an evaluation organisation.

Different conditions apply in different sectors – tasks have to be assessed and reassessed

EVA's mandate is to support and supplement other quality-assurance measures in the entire educational system. This means that EVA's evaluations and other projects need to be adapted to the changing conditions in each of the educational sectors.

Primary and lower- secondary education evaluated by EVA and soon by a new council as well

The idea of having a state institution to evaluate the quality of the education offered by individual primary and lower-secondary schools is relatively new for Denmark and was introduced when EVA was established. "We are asking ourselves what significance EVA is going to have," is what one representative of the primary sector said during the site visit. "They are so new to the work." During the period 2000-2005 EVA has undertaken 13 action-plan based evaluations²⁴ in the field of primary and lower-secondary education.

The mandate originally given to EVA was explicitly process oriented. Since then political interests have shifted focus to some extent, for instance since evaluations indicated that the level of primary and lower-secondary education in Denmark was not always pre-eminent in international comparisons. In recent years, therefore, greater focus has been placed on educational outcomes and during 2005 the Government announced a change in the current evaluation and quality assurance system. The Government Declaration of February 2005 included the establishment of a new council for evaluation and quality development in primary and lower-secondary education.

The mandate for this council will be to

- monitor and evaluate the development of the levels at which subjects are taught in primary and lower-secondary education (in relation to international experiences)
- monitor and evaluate the contributions made by primary and lower-secondary education to eliminating negative social legacies and to greater integration
- submit an annual report on quality in primary and lower-secondary education and propose changes.

The council will be supported by a new State Board for Evaluation and Quality Development in Primary Education.²⁵

This new council is intended to have an area of responsibility that coincides with EVA's. "Here we face strategic considerations", was the opinion of the Ministry of Education during the site visit. EVA's mandate may be affected.

Upper-secondary education is evaluated by EVA, the Ministry of Education and by the schools themselves

The upper-secondary education system comprises just over 350 school units of various kinds, such as those run by the state (county councils), those classified as self-owned institutions and private schools that are partially or completely funded by the state. Schools vary in size and specialisation. A number of reforms have been carried out since 2000 and upper-secondary schooling is in a more or less constant state of development. At the same

²⁴ By 'action-plan based evaluations' is meant the evaluations undertaken by EVA by virtue of the EVA Act and which are determined in the institute's annual action plan.

²⁵ For instance this Board will be given the task of developing national tests, responsibility for documenting the results of primary and lower-secondary education, conducting other evaluations of primary and lower-secondary education, administering tests and examinations in primary education and lower-secondary as well as supervising quality and compliance with the Act on Primary Education by municipalities and offering them advice.

time, responsibility for the quality of programmes rests at different levels, both with central authorities and the schools themselves, and the degree of central control varies for different types of programmes.

EVA has found it difficult to make any impact and gain acceptance in the upper-secondary sector, even though in recent years increasing respect for its work has been perceptible. Here the responsibility for evaluations is shared with the Ministry of Education. Altogether 13 action plan evaluations of upper-secondary programmes have been undertaken since 2000.

Higher education is evaluated by EVA and by the course providers themselves

EVA's mandate includes conducting evaluations of higher education on its own initiative. Altogether there are 50 institutions of higher education that offer short-cycle higher education programmes, about 130 offering medium-cycle programmes (26) and about 12 that are subject to the Universities Act and that offer long-cycle programmes of higher education.

The DVU unit, which is responsible for evaluations in higher education, is the largest of EVA's educational units. This is the area in which there is greatest experience and which is best established (27). Between 2000 and 2005 22 evaluations of higher education were conducted in accordance with the action plans.

But EVA's role can hardly be taken for granted. Changes have taken place since 2000 in all areas of tertiary education that affect the conditions for EVA's evaluations:

- The short-cycle higher education programmes were reformed in 2000 and the reform involved the establishment by the institutions of internal quality assurance systems for each programme. Annual self-evaluation and follow-up plans have to be drawn up.
- In connection with the reform of medium-cycle higher education programmes, in 2004 the Ministry of Education drew up, in collaboration with EVA, quality criteria for the entitlement of all the newly established CVU's to call themselves University Colleges.

The draft of the new Universities Act sent out for consultation to the institutions and other stakeholders in November 2002 (28) contained a proposal that would result in EVA's evaluation mandate no longer applying to research-based programmes in higher education – the long-cycle programmes. In the final version of the Act, however, this proposal had been removed and EVA's mandate continued (29).

Nor is EVA's role self-evident where commissioned undertakings are concerned. The Universities Act lays down that the boards of the universities are to sign a "development contract" with the ministry each year. This is to contain the university's account of its plans for the evaluation of its own activities, the results of these evaluations and its plans on how they are to be followed up. EVA may be selected to carry out the evaluations – or another Danish or foreign evaluation agency.

During the summer of 2005 negotiations are taking place between EVA and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation on what form EVA's next action plan will take. Discussions with EVA are intended to provide a basis for the ministry's subsequent negotiations with the universities on the contents of their development contracts.

Adult and continuing training is evaluated solely by EVA

The adult and continuing training sector is also described as heterogeneous, while at the same time it overlaps the regular educational system. This area includes primary education for adults and instruction at the three tertiary levels, corresponding to short-cycle, medium-cycle and long-cycle programmes in higher education in the regular system, as well as labour market programmes, continuing training programmes, preparatory programmes

²⁶ Of these 130 institutions, 115 are organised in 21 larger organisational units, known as Centre for Videregående Uddannelse (CVU's).

²⁷ An internal survey revealed for instance that awareness of EVA's evaluations is considerably greater in higher education than in the other educational sectors (p. 88 in EVA's self-evaluation).

²⁸ The proposals were issued in a publication entitled *Tid for forandring for Danmarks universiteter (A time of change for Denmark's universities)*.

²⁹ The University Act: Lov om universiteter, LOV No.403 May 28th, 2003.

for adults and general adult education and the “advanced matriculation examination (Höjere Forberedelseseksamen)”

The travaux préparatoires of the EVA Act provided for the institute to delay evaluation of adult and continuing training as this was felt to be such a complex area. The first evaluations took place in 2001 and up to and including the action plan for 2005 a total of eight evaluations have been made.

Public interest in these evaluations is described in the self-evaluation as slender. Nor is the sector described as being either particularly interested in evaluating or being evaluated – at least not to any greater extent than is already the case. The self-evaluation claims that there is little experience in adult and continuing training of the type of evaluations that EVA undertakes, or of evaluation as a whole.

Difficult to achieve the overall approach

A multifaceted mandate

Perhaps the most important reason for the establishment of EVA was that the Government’s desire to bring quality to the fore in the entire Danish education system. The expert panel has doubts about whether this has really been achieved. The overall national approach seems in 2005 to be remote. Instead developments are moving towards a sectoral focus in evaluations, i.e. transsectoral evaluations are no longer being undertaken, or undertaken to only a very limited extent. The links with the two ministries and adaptation of EVA’s operations to the various quality assurance systems in use or planned in the various sectors of the educational system results in differentiation of the mandate and difficulties in attaining the overall approach that is assumed to imbue all that the institute does.

Improved conditions are needed for planning

To some extent the sectoral division of the evaluations seems to be linked to the conditions laid down by the Government offices and the different expectations that the two ministries most closely concerned seem to have of EVA’s work – without any obvious coordination. The lack of coordination means that EVA’s mandate is, in practice, at least twofold. The specific needs of the two ministries pull in different directions and EVA’s action plan lists one sector-specific project after the other.

The immediate conclusion drawn by the expert panel is therefore that the current conditions that apply to planning need to be changed. The process of drawing up EVA’s action plans and its strategic planning in general needs to be more coherent and undertaken in consistent dialogue with the ministries most directly concerned. New participants that may in the future be involved in evaluations of the Danish educational system, i.e. the council/board for evaluation and quality development in primary and lower-secondary education, should be included in this dialogue.

Limited coverage affects the impact of the evaluations

One challenge posed by the broad mandate that was mentioned by EVA’s management during the site visit and in the self-evaluation is to attain adequate coverage in each of the educational sectors, above all in primary and lower-secondary schools.

During 2004 a total of eight action-plan evaluations were undertaken: two in primary and lower-secondary education, one in the upper-secondary sector, three in higher education and two in the field of adult education. Each evaluation included a selection of schools or educational units. In the same year there were eight ‘knowledge centre’ projects, divided in more or less the same way between the different educational sectors. On the basis of its experience, the expert panel considers this to be a small number.³⁰

30 During 2004 the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education completed 339 quality evaluations of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the framework of 15 national evaluation projects. In addition a number of evaluations were made in parallel with the national evaluations. The Swedish Board of Education – whose task is to inspect all the local authorities in Sweden and their pre-school and after-school facilities, all compulsory and upper-secondary schools and adult education – inspected 32 local authorities during the same year, which involved a total of more than 1,000 schools (according to the Board’s own website). In Finland the Council for the Evaluation of Education has drawn up a long-term evaluation programme for compulsory schools, upper-secondary schools offering

The evaluations that are produced therefore have the appearance of being relatively specific measures, in the opinion of the expert panel. Hitherto they seem primarily to have been random samples that spotlight selected themes or subject areas.

This means that the chances of any use being made of evaluation results are reduced in a number of ways, perhaps mainly by the relative paucity of educational institutions involved. Our experience is that two of the more lasting effects of evaluations result from the learning process and the enhancement of internal capacity for quality assurance that participation in an evaluation provides.³¹ If only a few institutions take part in EVA's evaluations in the various educational sectors, developmental effects of this kind will be restricted.

The evaluation results also become specific and not obviously of general interest. This reduces their usefulness. Specific course providers who are directly involved may be able to identify with and benefit from the results, but other institutions in the same sector and decision makers are offered findings that may be seen as less relevant and perhaps also less reliable than if they had been based on a greater mass of accumulated knowledge.³²

Doctoral programmes are not evaluated by EVA

The underlying aim of the Bologna process is to create a European Higher Education Area by 2010. As part of this process, the graduate level was introduced as the third cycle in the coherent degree structure for higher education presented at the EU Council of Ministers in Berlin in 2003.³³

However the Bologna Declaration is not binding and the individual member states determine themselves how their national educational systems are to be organised. Denmark has opted not to define doctoral programmes as "education".

This also means that Denmark's doctoral programmes are not evaluated by EVA. In the opinion of the expert panel this is a patent shortcoming in EVA's mandate and indeed also in the evaluation of higher education in Denmark. Higher education, comprising short-cycle, medium-cycle and long-cycle programmes, master's programmes and – according to the definition that has by now become accepted in Europe – doctoral programmes, is a totality and should be evaluated as a whole.

MANDATE AND RESPONSIBILITIES – OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In the opinion of the expert panel there are several reasons for reviewing EVA's current broad mandate. It may no longer be appropriate. Educational policy priorities seem today to differ from those that applied at the end of the 1990s when EVA was established.³⁴ Changes have already been made in supervisory and follow-up systems in various parts of the educational sector and further adjustments are in the pipeline. Is it possible for an institute with a staff of 70 or so to generate transsectoral evaluation results – with national coverage and of high quality – within the scope of these separate supervisory and follow-up systems?

general educational programmes, vocational programmes and adult education. The Ministry of Education decides which of the proposed evaluations are to be carried out. The Board of Education undertakes the evaluations that involve learning outcomes. During 2004 the Board of Education carried out or prepared 11 evaluation projects covering a total of 1,200 compulsory schools. The responsibility for the evaluation of higher education programmes rests with the Council for the Evaluation of the Higher Education Institutions. During 2004 a total of 23 evaluations of varying extent were prepared or carried out.

³¹ The effects of participation and the development of internal capacity is discussed for instance in articles by Scott & Hawke in *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* (2003) and by Preskill, Zuckerman & Matthews in *American Journal of Evaluation* (2003). In the survey undertaken by EVA to gauge the effects of its own evaluations dialogue and reflection were said to be the most noticeable outcomes. These evaluations had to a lesser extent resulted in concrete actions (Effektundersøgelse, 2004).

³² In her article *Evaluation Use: Advances, Challenges and Applications*, for instance, Laura C. Leviton argues for the significance of a planned and accumulated basis of knowledge on which decisions can be based. This article was published in the *American Journal of Evaluation*, Vol. 24, No 4, 2003.

³³ The Bologna process is described for instance in SOU 2004:27: *En Ny Doktorutbildning – kraftsamling för excellens och tillväxt (A new doctoral programme – pooling resources for excellence and growth)*.

³⁴ In its report *Fokus på output i uddannelsesystemet* EVA for instance indicates that there is greater focus on output in the Danish educational system.

EVA's role as the evaluator of educational quality appears today to be unclear and the independence that the Act stipulates is to characterise its undertakings is viewed by the expert panel as restricted in a number of senses.

The problem area that this broad mandate gives rise to, can be illustrated by the difficulties reported by EVA in attaining an acceptable level of coverage in all of the educational sectors. Even though EVA's work appears to be deliberate and strategic, the impression of the panel is that the number of evaluations – and their extent – is inadequate in all sectors, with the possible exception of higher education. Focusing resources on one, or possibly two, educational sectors would offer possibilities of attaining a greater degree of coverage. At the same time this would further enhance the quality of EVA's work.

A greater degree of coverage would also increase the impact of the evaluations in the educational sector. The inclusion of additional elements of more explicit inspection in the evaluations together with greater media attention would also be needed to raise the likelihood of these results leading to action by the educational institutions.

The expert panel feels that an important element is missing from EVA's mandate. Doctoral programmes are not currently evaluated by EVA.

Recommendations

- The current breadth of EVA's mandate, its responsibility for evaluation in every sector of the educational system, should be reviewed.
- If the current broad mandate is to continue its contradictory elements require analysis and strategic management:
 - What is the impact on EVA's operational possibilities of its simultaneous dependence on state-funding and market factors?
 - What role is played by the fact that the institute both evaluates educational offerings and is at the same time offering advice to course providers?
- If the current broad mandate is to continue, the conditions that apply to EVA's operational planning should be changed:
 - EVA's independence of the ministries should be made more explicit.
 - Coordination is required of the demands/expectations of the Ministry of Education and of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Development.
- EVA's social mission should be made more explicit.
- Doctoral programmes should be evaluated as one element in higher education.

ORGANISATION AND OPERATIONAL CONTROL

MISSION AND STRATEGIES

The aim of EVA's operations is identified in several different mission and strategy statements. Strategic plans are drawn up internally for several years at a time and also annual action plans that apply to EVA as a whole, as well as the activity plans for the different units. As one stage in the Government's modernisation of the public sector, every year an objectives and outcomes agreement is concluded between EVA and the Ministry of Education. This operationalises the aims laid down in the EVA Act in relationship to the results required of EVA's activities each year. Since 2004 and the Ministry of Finance's measures to raise the efficiency of state institutions, EVA has also formulated a number of quantitative objectives that are published on the institute's website.

The expert panel has formed the impression that EVA works very ambitiously on its strategy. Major resources are devoted to organising its operations to meet the changing circumstances that apply in the educational system in accordance with the EVA Act and the needs of different stakeholders.

Parallel planning processes

The strategic plans cover three years. In its strategy for 2004-2006 seven strategic themes are identified for EVA's operations: coverage, relevance, focus, visibility, range, follow-up, working methods.³⁵ The guidelines for EVA's work are identified and its principal direction. The activity plans of each of the units then indicate how the themes in the strategic plan are to be implemented in various areas, i.e. "goals for impending activities". Activity plans are drawn up for each year covered by the strategic plan and in each unit. They are summarised in a joint activity plan that is presented no later than the end of January of the year to which it applies.

The EVA Act lays down that the institute is to present its statutory operations in an annual action plan. This lists the concrete projects to be undertaken each year. The action plan is submitted to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation at the beginning of October in the year before it is to take effect and has to be approved by the end of the year. Before submission it has been dealt with internally in EVA, in EVA's board and committee of representatives and in more informal discussions with the ministries. EVA's budget is submitted to the Ministry of Education for approval at the beginning of October.

In this way the Ministry of Education in particular is offered the opportunity to influence both the internal strategic process and also the question of which specific projects are to be undertaken.

No explicit problem analysis

To outsiders this would seem to be a cumbersome and not entirely logical planning process, in which, for instance, the projects in the following year's action plan are determined before the internal and more strategic activity plans for the units have been established for the same year.

The panel also finds it difficult to see how the selection of projects in the action plan relates to any more overarching strategic approach to strategic planning and activity plans. For what reasons are different projects selected? The material to which we have had access suggests that problem analysis is lacking. EVA has no possibility of evaluating all the programmes covered by its mandate so that a strategic selection has to be made, based on analysis of a specified problem concept related to EVA's mandate and its overall operational strategies. This is the analysis we have had difficulty in locating.³⁶

³⁵ The strategic plan for 2004-2006 can be summarised as meaning that several educational institutions are to be involved in EVA's activities, that projects are to focus on special/priority issues, that in evaluations and surveys attention is to be paid to process, outcomes and horizontal issues in the educational system, and on the development of tools. In addition evaluations and knowledge centre activities are to be made visible. EVA's expertise and skills are to be offered to the educational sector in the form of a predetermined range of surveys and other tasks, and it must be possible to follow up evaluations. The plan also stipulates that EVA is to participate in the development of methods for educational evaluation.

³⁶ According to the survey of the effects of the evaluations referred to earlier, a number of the institutions involved also wonder what the aim of EVA's evaluations is and why certain institutions are chosen to take part, but not others.

Strategies divided according to educational sector and unit

Sector-specific strategies

EVA's action plans lists the projects to be carried out during the coming year. The vast majority of these are sector-specific. Previously evaluations of a more transsectoral nature have been undertaken, such as the transfer from vocational programmes in upper-secondary education to higher education or the teaching of English in primary and lower-secondary schools, upper-secondary schools and higher education. But during the site visit it became clear that there was a tendency for sector-specific projects to increase, according to the board because the transsectoral evaluations become far too large and unwieldy. Neither the action plan for 2005 nor the draft action plan for 2006 included transsectoral projects. "The different units are being granted independence", was the opinion expressed by one member of EVA's staff during the site visit. To an ever increasing extent, evaluations and other undertakings are being planned and implemented within the respective units themselves (see Annex 3).

This development is hardly surprising, in the eyes of the expert panel. It is a pragmatic solution and could well be inevitable, given the difference in the conditions that apply to EVA's quality evaluations in the various educational sectors and how the planning process is organised and tailored to different interests.

But at the same time this process means that operations are increasingly diverging from the idea that originally led to the establishment of EVA and its broad mandate. It is difficult to see how its current project undertakings could lead to an overall view, a holistic approach and synergies between different projects and educational sectors.

Degree of coverage is the major shared challenge

Instead efforts are devoted to attaining coverage that is at least acceptable in each of the sectors. This is a common feature in the strategies of the units and the theme in the strategic plan on which most emphasis is placed by EVA's management and staff during the site visit. Making sure that enough is done – many institutions should be affected or involved – is a central shared objective and the number of projects should be allocated in proportion to the size of the units. According to management representatives during the site visit the considerations involved are virtually arithmetic.

The degree of systematisation in the selection of projects varies. This is affected by the resources, the complexity of the area and the terms set by various management and quality assurance systems. Projects are chosen on the basis of previous evaluations, ongoing reforms and changes and by the current debate in the sectors. During the site visit this was described as an inductive approach by EVA's management.

The expert panel would like to point out that determining themes and identifying relevant evaluation projects in this way requires EVA's staff to possess a high level of subject expertise and knowledge about the various educational sectors. The projects selected seem to be interesting in themselves.

MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION

EVA was reorganised in 2004. Today its organisation comprises four educational units and three specialist units. The educational units are called grundskoleenheten (primary and lower-secondary unit), ungdomsuddannelseenheten (upper-secondary unit), enheden för vidaregående utbildning (unit for tertiary/higher education) and voksen- og efteruddannelseenheten (adult education and continuing training unit). The specialist units are the metodenheten (methodology unit), ledelsesekretariatet (secretariat) and administrationsenheden (administrative unit).

New project organisation

Mixed project teams – all units involved

The new organisation is project based and the teams are made up of staff from the different units: often there are two consultants from the educational units and one from each of the specialist units, i.e. from the

methodology unit, secretariat and administrative unit. In addition they include an evaluation assistant, i.e. one of the students employed by EVA.

In the project teams the administrative unit staff are responsible for registering documents, travel arrangements, invoices and the practical contacts required in printing and distributing the reports. In this way the administration is made more efficient and the consultants are free to devote themselves unstintingly to carrying out the evaluation and other project tasks. Staff from the methodology unit act as advisers on methodological issues and have particular responsibility for the end-user surveys carried out by private consultants in connection with most of the evaluations. One of the secretariat's information officers is attached to each project to take responsibility for the way in which the reports and other material produced can be communicated to the world at large. The information officers also produce press releases.

This is described by EVA's management as a robust organisation which, when fully implemented, will enhance procedural and organisational flexibility.

Mixing teams offer broad perspectives but unwieldy administration

The idea of introducing a more explicit project-based organisation is, in the opinion of the expert panel, well suited to the institute's broad mandate. With its current human and economic resources EVA has no possibility of undertaking comprehensive evaluations in every sector of the educational system. Organisation on a project basis and the transsectoral/cross-unit composition of the project teams does on the other hand enable the adoption of a broader perspective.

"Circulating know-how and methods between the units" was described during the site visit as a shared challenge within the institute. In this context too the project based organisation seems more than justifiable.

At the same time a complex organisational matrix has been created, with a management team that functions across all the units to manage, and to some extent administer, unit specific or educational sector-specific projects carried out by project teams whose members have been selected on a cross-unit basis. This is an organisation that appears to be administratively unwieldy and difficult to get a grasp of.

The question is how productive it is. The number of evaluations and other projects completed each year seems to be low in relation to the staffing level. This is not, however, a question that the expert panel can answer but one which EVA may have reason to look into more closely. International comparisons with other evaluation organisations could provide a perspective on the efficiency of EVA's working methods and organisation.

As most of the projects are in fact sector-specific, the benefit of mixing staff from different units cannot either be taken for granted.

Management team responsibilities

Another aim of the project-based organisation was to enable project managers to function more autonomously and at the same time reduce the direct involvement of the institute's management team in evaluations and other operations.

EVA's management team decimated

EVA's management team consists of the Executive Director, one director of projects and the director of administration. Nominally EVA has two directors of projects, but one left during 2005. The remaining director of projects is responsible for the staff and the management of projects in primary and lower-secondary education, upper-secondary education as well as adult education and continuing training and she is also responsible for the staff in the corresponding units. In addition she has temporary responsibility for projects involving short-cycle and medium-cycle higher education programmes.³⁷

³⁷ Two senior consultants are acting as heads of the methodology unit and the unit for tertiary/higher education. They have managerial responsibility for most of the projects in these areas and for most of the consultants employed by the units. EVA's executive director has

In other words the current management organisation is provisional in the sense that one of the four principals is missing and her tasks have been allocated to others in the management team and/or temporary deputies. How this situation was going to stabilise did not seem clear when the review was being carried out.

The impression of the expert panel is that this situation has sapped the strength of the management team at a time when the new internal organisation was being launched. EVA's mandate is under review and new demands from the world at large will require further operational development.

Increased delegation would enhance efficiency

In view of the small size of the management team in relation to its extensive responsibilities, the expert panel considers that there are good grounds for reviewing some of the tasks that it has taken upon itself. Direct involvement in projects should be reduced even more. At the moment the management share responsibilities for projects among themselves and monitor their work from start to finish.

More explicit and more autonomous responsibility for the individual project managers would offer greater husbandry of management and staff resources and also add to the efficiency of the project-based organisation. This is a conclusion that has also been made within EVA. According to its own self-evaluation, delegation of responsibility and changes in managerial mechanisms are watchwords in the organisational development that has begun and which needs to be completed for greater operational efficiency.

Board responsibilities and the Committee of Representatives

Governance

EVA's board is appointed by the Ministry of Education and consists of a chairperson and ten members. The primary and lower-secondary sector, the upper-secondary sector and higher education sectors are each represented by three members and one member comes from the adult education and continuing training sector.

The representation of the universities appears to the expert panel to be comparatively weak.

The board is responsible for governance and for determining the overall operation of the institute. At board meetings during 2004, for instance, one standing item on the agenda was EVA's action plan. Discussions also concerned strategic planning, the annual report, EVA's budget and the objectives and outcomes agreement signed with the Ministry of Education.

The board appoints EVA's Executive Director, subject to approval by the Ministry of Education. The board itself decides on the recruitment and appointment of the other members of EVA's staff.³⁸

Decisions as operational level

The board also makes decisions at operational level. It is responsible for the overall strategies involved in determining the organisation and choice of methods for evaluations – with the proviso that self-evaluation must always be included – and approving the terms of reference³⁹ for each individual evaluation, including their budgets and timetables. The board determines the composition of the expert panels and their remuneration and the evaluation reports are submitted to the board for comment.

Judging from the minutes of the board meetings⁴⁰ most of the items dealt with concern relatively specific issues – decisions about the terms of reference for individual evaluations and their reports. Discussion relating to the action plans seems to deal with operational concerns rather than strategic issues.

The expert panel would like to see the board intensify its involvement in EVA considerations of its overall operational strategy. In the opinion of the expert panel this needs to be systematised while at the same central

managerial responsibility for a couple of projects in the university sector. The senior consultants are not members of the management team. Nor are the unit coordinators, who coordinate what goes on in the units and between them and other units.

³⁸ The power to appoint members of the institute's staff may also be delegated to the Executive Director.

³⁹ The Danish term is "kommissorium".

⁴⁰ The expert panel has had access to the minutes of all the board meetings held in 2004.

issues relating to EVA's mandate and its future operations should be given more prominence on its agenda than has hitherto been the case.

Committee of Representatives

The board also appoints what is known as the Committee of Representatives, which consists of 27 members and covers all educational sectors. Its composition is laid down in the EVA Act. The main task of the committee is to safeguard the interests of the organisations specified in EVA's strategic planning by expressing opinions on the institute's action plans, annual reports and accounts. According to the self-evaluation the committee also act as a sounding board for EVA's management.

The expert panel is impressed by the breadth of the contacts provided by the Committee of Representatives.

EVA'S STAFF

In the spring of 2005 EVA had a staff of 74. Five of these had previously been employed by the Evaluation Centre, the remainder have been recruited during the last five years. Three-quarters are women and the median age is 36. The low median age can partly be explained by the fact that 18 of the staff are students, appointed to act as evaluation assistants.

Small staff in relation to the mandate

The EVA Act lays down that certain methodological elements are obligatory in the institute's evaluations. Self-evaluations are to be conducted by the educational institutions concerned and an external expert panel is to be appointed and given responsibility for the contents of the evaluation. In its own self-evaluation, EVA claims that these requirements are a drain on resources and limit the number of evaluations that can be undertaken and also their ambit. This therefore makes it more difficult for EVA to achieve systematic and comprehensive coverage in the different sectors.

When the new project-based organisation has been fully implemented so that projects and project managers can act with greater independence, EVA's management believe it will be possible to employ more consultants and therefore also undertake more projects. With the current organisation and division of responsibilities the management can hardly cope with more.

The impression of the expert panel is that the current staffing level is far too small in relation to the extensive mandate. More consultants need to be appointed. We do not consider that the potential rise in productivity alluded to earlier, i.e. that more effective organisation might enable the production of a greater number of more extensive evaluations with the current number of staff, will be adequate.

The panel's impression was corroborated indirectly by both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. During the site visit they both stated that they were very pleased with the evaluations carried out by EVA, which were described as "professional and effective". At the same time limitations could be perceived from both quarters in EVA's expertise and resources.

In the current situation representatives of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation do not consider that EVA has adequate resources to enable it to take sole responsibility for quality development in the university sector. EVA has a number of tasks in this sector and will probably be assigned even more in the future. But if its staff cannot be offered scope to develop methodologies and their own qualifications, there is a risk that the quality of their work will be impaired. This would then weaken EVA's competitiveness when several evaluators offer the universities their services.

The Ministry of Education expressed hesitation about the quality of some elements of the analytical studies carried out in EVA. There were doubts about whether EVA had adequate expertise and resources to enable it to discharge its knowledge centre commitments at a sufficiently advanced level in every sector. As a rule, however, the ministry is satisfied with the quality of EVA's reports.

Qualification profiles

Most of its staff enjoy working at EVA, this is made clear by previous surveys and was also emphasised during the site visit. When posts are advertised there are normally hundreds of applications for them.

Priority given to sectoral and methodological knowledge

When consultants are appointed, priority is given to sectoral knowledge and methodological skills rather than to research experience. Most of the staff have either experience from teaching in one or more sectors or knowledge about the analytical methodology of the social sciences, but none have PhD's. However, it is stated in the self-evaluation that an undergraduate degree combined with systematic skill-enhancement enables the consultants to function very effectively as project managers and members of the project teams in the model adopted by EVA.

The expert panel agrees that EVA's staff need to possess methodological and sectoral awareness. In particular, when making the strategic selection of projects and areas on which to focus knowledge is required of the different conditions that apply and the discussions that are taking place in the relevant sectors.

Postgraduate training and research experience is lacking

In the eyes of the expert panel, however, methodological and sectoral awareness is not enough. Consultants who have studied at PhD level are also needed. PhD programmes provide a methodological and analytic training that is necessary if the staff are to be able to transcend the framework implicit in the EVA model and develop its operations in methodological terms, i.e., "develop and renew methods for evaluation and quality development", which is one of EVA's four main tasks. Internal skill enhancement and network creation can hardly provide this kind of advanced methodological knowledge. During the site visits, the representatives of higher education also expressed a desire for greater methodological awareness in EVA's staff "so that they can support and enhance the work of the panels."

Research experience also adds to the quality of the analysis undertaken. During the site visit, several members of the staff saw problems in the current "practical orientation" of EVA's operations and considered that a theoretical or research-based understanding of EVA's evaluation mandate was lacking. Others objected that "we evaluate what goes on in practice, we are not meant to be a research institute". At the same time the representatives of the ministries and of the educational institutions broached the question of whether the qualifications of EVA's staff were adequate for the tasks for which it is responsible today.⁴¹

Staff with research qualifications would, in the opinion of the expert panel, mean augmentation of the institute's capacity and could provide enhancement of the quality of the knowledge centre undertakings.

One way of attracting staff with more advanced academic qualifications and at the same time retaining those already on the staff could be to make the contents of their work more advanced, for instance by making the projects more autonomous.

ORGANISATION AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT – SUMMARISING CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The breadth and complexity of its mandate affect the conditions that apply to EVA's planning. The needs of many stakeholders have to be satisfied and educational programmes offered on widely differing terms have to be evaluated and developed. The planning process then becomes extensive and difficult to integrate and, even though major resources are devoted to strategic considerations, there seems to be a tendency for both the board and management to feel compelled to replace long-term strategic deliberation and problem analysis with more short-term planning at the operational level.

⁴¹ The Ministry of Education's representatives claimed, for example, that the knowledge centre function needed to be developed through the establishment by EVA of relationships with national and international research environments, through the development of contacts, information activities and exchanges of experience with ministries and institutions as well as through enhancement of the general level of expertise.

One strategic measure has been the implementation of a new project-based organisation, which the expert panel feels is well suited to cope with the breadth of the institute's mandate. The independent responsibilities of the project managers and the members of the project teams have been augmented. It is possible that this organisation could gain in efficiency from an even clearer division of responsibilities. EVA's management and board should take more explicit responsibility for long-term and strategic planning and the project teams for the conduct of operations.

At the same time the expert panel feels that staff resources are under-dimensioned in relation to the mandate. More consultants, primarily with research qualifications, are required.

Recommendations

- Internal work on strategy should be developed:
 - Parallel strategy processes need to be adapted to each other/synchronised.
 - Greater emphasis should be given to the board's overall strategic responsibility.
 - Problem analysis on which to base strategic considerations should be enhanced.
 - If the current broad mandate is retained, more explicit transsectoral operational strategies need to be developed.
- EVA's organisation can be made even more efficient:
 - The management system needs stabilisation; the vacant position as Director of Projects needs to be filled on a more permanent basis.
 - The project-based organisation should be strengthened by emphasising even more clearly the independent responsibility of the project managers and simultaneously reducing the direct participation of the institute's management in individual projects.
- Enhancement of human resources is needed:
 - Consultants with research qualifications and/or research experience need to be recruited.
 - If the current broad mandate is retained, several more consultants need be appointed as well.

METHODS AND WAYS OF WORKING

The impression formed by the expert panel is that EVA's method and the way in which it operates have gained broad acceptance by the ministries as well as administrators in the schools and educational institutions in Denmark. The work carried out, above all the evaluations, is considered to be expert and professional. "They have a very efficient organisational method" was also the opinion of the chairs of the expert panels who took part in the site visit.

METHODS AND MODELS

In the ordinance⁴² EVA is described as the state's knowledge centre in the area of educational evaluation and quality development. EVA's activities are to consist of three main types: action plan evaluations, knowledge centre projects and externally contracted activities (IDV). The scope for selection and development of implementation methods varies for the different activities. The organisation of evaluations is relatively fixed. The EVA Act lays down a number of methodological requirements that have to be fulfilled.

However neither the Act nor the ordinance contains any regulations about how the knowledge centre projects and externally contracted activities are to be organised. This is decided by EVA's staff. Nor are these operations often listed for discussion on the agenda for board meetings.

Knowledge centre activities

The knowledge centre activities are multifaceted. For higher education and for upper-secondary education they are based primarily on knowledge developed in connection with the action plan evaluations and that is circulated in other contexts, in the form of articles, for instance, small publications, conferences and internal training sessions. In the primary and lower-secondary sector and in the field of adult education they consist mainly of studies and surveys that are carried out alongside the evaluations and also – where primary and lower-secondary education is concerned – of courses and advice of a more consultative nature.

During the site visits varied opinions were expressed about the various knowledge centre projects. The representatives of the ministries and of higher education in particular were doubtful about their quality, whereas in the primary and lower-secondary sector the projects were described as valuable and beneficial.

The evaluations

The EVA Act and the EVA Ordinance lay down certain parameters for the implementation of action plan evaluations: they must include self-evaluation and information about the implementation of the evaluations must be provided for all institutions taking part. An external expert panel is to be responsible for appraisal of the self-evaluation reports and for the contents of the official evaluation report. The institutions evaluated are to be provided with an opportunity to react to the report before it is published.

During the site visit several members of EVA's staff considered that these methodological requirements were an unnecessary drain on EVA's resources. Others considered it positive that the act laid down certain methodological requirements. These function as a guarantee of quality and help to enhance EVA's legitimacy.

The expert panel can affirm that EVA's evaluations are carried out in accordance with international practice. It finds it difficult, however, to understand why the evaluation methodology should be stipulated by law. This limits EVA's scope to "develop and renew methods for evaluation and quality development" as laid down in its mandate.

Site visits are not obligatory but are nevertheless included in all of the evaluations and often pilot studies and end-user surveys are conducted as well. EVA is not responsible for follow-up. Here responsibilities lie with the ministries and/or the individual educational institutions.

⁴² Vedtægt for Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (EVA).

Differentiation between the evaluation methods for the various educational sectors has taken place. In normal cases an evaluation takes about one year to complete.

Pilot studies

In general a pilot study is undertaken in a field before the terms of reference for a project are determined by EVA's board. One permanent feature in these studies consists of meetings with stakeholders in which the project team probes which specific issues need to be spotlighted and what the political agenda in the area looks like. Experiences from these meetings were described in the self-evaluation as very positive.

Expert panels

An expert panel is then appointed, comprising 4-5 experts per evaluation. Altogether about 50 experts are engaged each year. The panels are put together on the basis of a requirement profile drawn up in collaboration between the project team and EVA's management and which is included in the terms of reference for the project. Certain requirements apply for all projects, for instance that panels must include women and men, as well as Nordic representatives and employers representatives.

As a rule there are no student or pupil representatives and this is a shortcoming in the opinion of the expert panel. The questions posed by students and pupils differ from those of established teachers and researchers and therefore help to widen the perspective of the evaluations.

According to the self-evaluation, the recruitment of experts is a long process that requires a great deal of resources and is very dependent on the knowledge and contact networks of the consultants. During the site visit both EVA's staff and the representatives of the institutions described the composition of the panels as a decisive factor if the evaluation model is to function. On the whole the results are described as successful.

One proposal from the expert panel is that the institutions to be evaluated could also be involved in the process of appointing experts. Appointing the experts on the basis of recommendations from the institutions rather than merely presenting their names would offer a different kind of guarantee of their legitimacy. Involving the institutions in the recruitment process would also mean that they would become more active partners in the evaluation. They would share responsibility for the completion and outcome of the process.

Self evaluations

The terms of reference lay down which institutions are to be included in each of the evaluations.⁴³ The institutions are informed at least six months before the evaluation is to take place.

Here the expert panel would like to point out that as only a selection of institutions are included in each evaluation, the individual evaluations do not have national coverage either.

The institutions to be evaluated write their own self-evaluations and these are described by EVA in its self-evaluation as a central feature. The representatives of the institutions also referred to the significance of the self-evaluations. The issues raised in the self-evaluations are also those that the expert panel appointed for the project will focus on during the site visits and in its report.

The institutions' self-evaluations are produced according to a set of guidelines – one for each evaluation – produced by EVA. These describe the themes that the expert panel want to focus on during the project. To what degree self-evaluation is steered varies in different projects, from the open and adaptable form taken by the guidelines for university audits to the strict templates, containing for instance predetermined criteria, used for accreditation. For the primary and lower-secondary sector a specific self-evaluation model has been devised, known as the ABC model.

According to EVA's own self-evaluation, there is a great deal of discussion about introducing a standardised self-evaluation manual in which certain features would be the same for all evaluations.

⁴³ In higher education the evaluations of programmes include all, or virtually all, of the higher education institutions offering the relevant subjects.

The expert panel feels that this could be a good idea. A joint basic manual would create scope for comparison between different evaluations and therefore between different sectors as well. In this way coverage could be augmented indirectly, both in and between the educational sectors. Moreover a standardised manual would save a great deal of work.

Site visits

As a rule a site visit will last for one day at each institution.⁴⁴ The aim is to reduce the workload for the expert panel and to avoid evaluations taking more than one year to complete. For this reason not all the institutions that have completed self-evaluations are visited. Trials have been made to avoid site visits by arranging joint seminars to which several school units are invited.

During the visits the expert panel will talk to different groups of employees and students.

End-user surveys

End-user surveys are carried out in connection with most evaluations and they are undertaken by external consultants. Quality assurance for these surveys requires a great deal of work by the project teams, above all by the representative of the methodology unit. The surveys take the form of questionnaire surveys or focus groups. They are addressed to pupils/students, parents, alumni and/or potential employers.

Audit and accreditation evaluations do not normally include end-user surveys.

In its own self-evaluation EVA points out that it gives priority to depth rather than breadth in its evaluations. This is also the impression formed by the expert panel. Within the framework of a this kind of strategy, end-user surveys in particular, and also pilot studies, would appear to be central and very appropriate elements.

Evaluation reports

Evaluation reports are official. Before they are published each of the institutions evaluated is entitled to read through the descriptions and appraisal and to correct errors of fact. Individual assessment of specific programmes/institutions are not generally included in the evaluation reports on the primary and lower-secondary or upper-secondary sectors, but the conclusions and recommendations are expressed in general terms. The idea is that this will give the reports greater general usefulness. In addition, it is intended to avoid "making an exhibition" of individual institutions.⁴⁵

However, the expert panel feels that without individual feed-back it can be difficult for specific institutions to see the benefits of participating in an evaluation, and this may well affect interest in the evaluations as well as their impact.⁴⁶ In addition it becomes easier for the individual institutions to offer excuses for the results of an evaluation. Criticism that is expressed in general terms can always be explained as referring to some other institution.

EVA itself does not express its own institutional opinions or values in the report. It does not consider that the EVA Act gives it any mandate to do so. The reports account solely for the opinions of the expert panel and the project team's task includes ensuring that no other conclusions are presented than those for which support can be found in the various kinds of material available in the project.

In the view of the expert panel, this can be taken to mean that each evaluation stands, as it were, on its own two feet, that its conclusions and results relate only to the specific evaluation and the circumstances that apply to it. The panel regards this as a failure to derive full benefit from the extensive knowledge that EVA has accumulated during the years. The project teams and EVA's management could well add their own analysis to the panel's, as a supplement, and this could be based on the institute's collective experience from different evaluations.

⁴⁴ Some visits take only half a day, while audit visits extend over several days.

⁴⁵ In the evaluations of higher education and adult education individual judgements are most often, but not always, expressed.

⁴⁶ In the survey into the effects of the evaluations referred to earlier the institutions said that they expected a more individual response to the information they had submitted in their self-evaluations and to the effort they had made. It should be possible to identify their own institution in the reports if the conclusions and recommendations were to be of any use.

In analyses like these synergies could be developed between evaluations, as well as between evaluations in different educational sectors. What common trends can be seen in the teaching of languages in higher education in Denmark? How is the administration of the primary and lower-secondary school organised in the different Danish municipalities? How well does mathematics teaching in the upper-secondary school offer preparation for more advanced study? How well do teacher-training schemes correlate with the demand for more advanced subject knowledge in core subjects that faces teachers in the Danish school system and which, in view for instance of the PISA survey, should also be demanded of their pupils?

Follow-up

Following up the results is the concluding stage of an evaluation process and one that, in the eyes of the expert panel, is very central in ensuring that the evaluation is not merely a ritual but will also result in action.

Normally the body that conducts the evaluation will also be responsible for following it up. Other solutions, such as the model opted for in Denmark, can also function. Every educational institution accountable to the Ministry of Education and which has participated in an evaluation by producing its own self-evaluation has to draw up a plan for how it is to be followed up. Within six months of the publication of the report, this plan is to be published electronically, i.e. presented on the institution's website.⁴⁷ In the development contracts between the universities and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation plans have to be included for evaluations and their follow-up. The governances of the different universities are responsible for these plans.

This solution means, however, that responsibility is divided between several participants with the obvious risk that the process will lack coherence and impact, or that no follow-up at all will take place. During the site visit the representatives of higher education in particular criticised the incongruity they consider to exist between EVA's evaluations and political reactions to them.⁴⁸ EVA's management and the Committee of Representatives also expressed a desire for more obvious political interest in EVA's evaluations.

In its self-evaluation EVA expresses a desire for "formalised possibilities to conduct a development-oriented discussion with the programmes evaluated" when evaluations have been completed. This is one with which the expert panel concurs. Making EVA responsible for follow-up would lend more weight to the current evaluation system.

Moreover the conditions that apply to internal planning and strategy at EVA would be improved. At the moment EVA has very few possibilities of finding out what is actually achieved by its evaluations and its knowledge centre operations. As a result it has an incomplete basis for the adaptation and effectivisation of its own workings.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

The responsibilities of the methodology unit

The responsibility for quality assurance and quality development at EVA has been assigned to the methodology unit. A strategic document for the period 2005-2007 states that the unit is to develop tools that can be used to create a systematic quality assurance system and guarantee possibilities of following up results from internal quality assurance surveys.⁴⁹ In doing so it is to focus on practice: the unit is to develop tools, methods and training programmes that enhance practical evaluation procedures.

Internal skill enhancement

EVA devotes a relatively large proportion of its resources to internal skill enhancement. Personal Development Interviews take place regularly and are followed up, and the staff are offered both collective and individual

⁴⁷ Bekendtgørelse om opfølgning på evaluering ved Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut m.v.

⁴⁸ At the same time, the same individuals felt that EVA "should not become a public authority," which could be the consequence if the institutions were obliged to comply with EVA's recommendations and account for this compliance.

⁴⁹ *Vision, mål og strategi 2005-2007*

training. EVA's staff participate in several Nordic and other international networks and organisations in the fields of evaluation and education.

There are plans to coordinate responsibilities for personnel policies. At the moment there is no personnel director.

Management tools

A statement of goals and an overall description has to be drawn up for every project. These provide the parameters for the project in terms of resources, what quality requirements will apply to its results and the tasks of the project manager and the members of the project team. Internal and external communications also have to be described. The contents are determined jointly by the project team, the project manager and the head of the project. The goal statement and overall description provides the basis of the follow-up that has to take place no later than two months after conclusion of the project.

The Evaluation Manual contains a description of the organisation of a typical action plan evaluation. This states which procedures are obligatory, offers advice and guidance on practical issues and also offers samples of various standard letters and templates.

Manuals are also being developed for accreditation reviews and externally contracted activities.

In the context of the organisational changes in 2004 a new time-tracking system was also developed.

Quality assurance of external partners

In its own self-evaluation EVA accounts for 16 different activities that are all intended to assure the quality of EVA's cooperation with various external partners, such as institutions, panels of assessors, external consultants and the committee of representatives. The reception by the outside world of EVA's evaluation methods and procedures, conferences, courses, electronic tools and advisory activities are evaluated through the use of external "barometers" and other studies.

In the opinion of the expert panel these measures must be considered to be very ambitious.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES – SUMMARISING CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

EVA's evaluation organisation is impressive. The evaluations appear to be conducted efficiently and with competence. The approach and methods adopted concur well with international practice. With the help of the international commitment of the management, first and foremost, the findings from evaluations and evaluation research are garnered and integrated into EVA's own working methods. The organisation of quality assurance and quality development also evokes respect. The way in which the new organisation has integrated methodological development measures is seen by the expert panel as a strength.

The most significant methodological weakness perceived by the expert panel relates to the follow-up of the evaluations. This is problematic partly because EVA has no mandate to follow up its own evaluations and also because the follow-up system seems in general to be weak. Follow-up is an indispensable element in the evaluation process, a necessity if evaluations are to have any impact. Moreover EVA needs to conduct follow-ups to acquire a platform on which it can base the development of its own operations.

The evaluation reports that the expert panel has seen all seem to be interesting in themselves. The usefulness of the findings of these evaluations would be enhanced if all the institutions evaluated were to receive their own individual feed-back.

EVA's failure to add its own analysis to the reports seems to the expert panel to be further expression of the far too reticent and cautious role that, in our opinion, it has itself chosen and that has been allocated to it in relation to the ministries, the media and the educational institutions.

Recommendations

- EVA should be given the formal possibilities of organising follow-up and carrying on a development-focused dialogue with the programmes evaluated on completion of the evaluations.
- EVA's project teams and management should add the institute's own analysis of the evaluation findings to the report submitted by the expert panel.
- The reports should contain individual assessment and recommendations for each of the institutions participating.
- Student representatives should be included in the expert panels for higher education. In evaluations in the upper-secondary and primary and lower-secondary sectors the interests of pupils can be taken into account either through the pupils themselves and their representatives or possibly with the help of parent representatives.

ANNEX 1: TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EXTERNAL REVIEW OF EVA

Introduction

By act of parliament of 1 May 1999, EVA was established as a permanent institution. EVA is responsible for carrying out systematic external evaluation of educational programmes in Denmark and for acting as the Danish Government's knowledge centre within the field of educational evaluation. The act introduced systematic external evaluation as a compulsory part of the improvement of quality throughout the educational system.

As the former Evaluation Centre was integrated into EVA, there was substantial previous experience on which to base its activities. Nevertheless, EVA's first years were characterised by the fact that a new institution with new assignments would have to be created. As part of the establishment phase, EVA prepared its first strategy – Strategy Plan 2001-2003. One of the focus points of this strategy was the desire to ensure the quality of our key functions, processes and services. As a consequence of that decision, internal quality assurance has been given a high priority, and quality assurance mechanisms have been established for EVA's key activities. This means that EVA continuously has been collecting user assessments of the quality of its activities while having carried out its own evaluation and assessment of its processes and procedures. The natural next step for EVA is now to supplement its ongoing quality improvement activities by external review, involving a general assessment of activities and priorities by independent, external experts.

Purpose

The purpose of the review is to clarify whether:

- EVA lives up to the aim expressed in the act and fulfils its other purposes, including relevance, quality and effects of EVA's activities.
- EVA has established relevant strategies, processes and procedures that support this aim and whether these will yield the expected results, internally as well as externally.

The review will be subject to the same frameworks and conditions as those governing the institute. It may be a matter of premises which, on the one hand, have turned out to be of significance to the implementation of EVA's activities, on the other, to have changed concurrently with the development of the educational sector. This means that the review may consider whether, for instance, expectations and discussions among stakeholders and those undergoing evaluation about evaluation and the political agenda, nationally as well as internationally, have been of significance to the institution's activities.

The purpose of the review is to assess all of EVA's activities within the three key areas: evaluation, knowledge centre and externally contracted activities. EVA's organisation and management will also be involved in relation to the activities of the key areas.

The organisation of the review

A panel of experts will be appointed with members from the Nordic countries. The members of the panel must fulfil a number of requirements. First of all, the panel must be capable of reviewing an institute with a commission such as EVA's. To fulfil this requirement, the panel must include members with experience of politically governed organisations. Secondly, the members must have knowledge about and theoretical or practical experience of evaluation within the field of primary and secondary education and the further education system. At the same time, the panel must be sufficiently independent of both the Danish educational system, its decision-making processes and of EVA in order to ensure the reliability of the panel's assessments and recommendations.

The panel will consist of approximately four individuals whose combined profiles will cover:

1. A chairman with a good reputation and with managerial experience within the Danish public sector
2. A Nordic expert of evaluation within the field of primary and secondary education
3. A Nordic expert of evaluation within the field of further education
4. An expert within the field of communication and accumulation of knowledge.

In addition, one member must be an academically recognised researcher and/or teacher.

The Swedish 'Högskoleverket' will organise the review and supply the necessary secretarial assistance to the expert panel. EVA will pay the costs of 'Högskoleverkets' participation and will also pay fees to the members of the expert panel.

The evaluation procedure

It goes without saying that when an evaluation agency is reviewed, a very high level of professionalism is required of those who carry out the review. The procedures that are used are and should be based on the same procedural principles as those applying to the evaluation of educational programmes, i.e. self evaluation, site visit by the external expert panel and a public report.

The review will be based on a number of criteria which, on the one hand, are a reflection of the expectations of EVA as expressed in the act and, on the other hand, the aims and objectives that EVA has formulated for its activities in its strategy plan, organisational accounts and internal quality assurance mechanisms. European standards for evaluation institutions are also included⁵⁰. The criteria are to be approved by EVA's executive committee and will be submitted with these terms of reference for hearing in the Ministry of Education (UVM), the Ministry of Research, Technology and Innovation (VTU) and the committee of representatives.

Self evaluation

The basis for the external review is a self evaluation report to be prepared by EVA. The self evaluation report will both provide the basis for the work of the panel and provide EVA with a basis for continuing quality improvement. The aim of the self evaluation report is partly to be analytical and point to strengths and weaknesses of EVA's priorities and practices within the fields covered by the evaluation, partly to include proposals for improvements and adjustments. The self evaluation must also take into account the results of EVA's own quality assurance mechanisms.

The expert panel's visit

The expert panel will conduct a three-day visit to EVA as part of the review. The aim of the visit is primarily to verify and amplify the information contained in the self evaluation report. The site visit will be planned in cooperation with EVA and will, together with the self evaluation report and the user survey, if any, provide the bulk of the material on which the panel will be making its conclusions and recommendations.

During the visit the panel will arrange a number of interviews based on the self evaluation. The sequence of interviews will include meetings with, among others, EVA's executive committee, management and staff as well as a relevant cross-section of evaluated institutions. It will also be of relevance to the panel to discuss the themes of the review with other interested parties, and the panel will select the individuals it wishes to meet during the visit.

Written documentation

During the review, the expert panel may ask EVA for supplementary written documentation as a contribution to a full and comprehensive understanding of the institute's objectives, activities, strategies, processes and procedures. Of course, other material on the Danish educational system may form part of the panel's documentation. If, in addition, the panel decides that further documentation is needed, it may carry out supplementary user surveys.

Report and follow-up

Based on the documentation acquired, the panel will prepare an evaluation report with its conclusions and recommendations. The report must answer the questions posed with regard to the purpose of the review and must address the fulfilment of the criteria defined. The report will be published. Prior to its publication, EVA

⁵⁰ At their Berlin meeting in September 2003, the EU's ministers of education gave ENQA the authority to report to the meeting of ministers in Bergen in May 2005 on quality assurance and evaluation of evaluation institutes and on the relevant standards and criteria. ENQA's work in this respect is approaching its conclusion, and the report will include proposals on the establishment of a European register of evaluation institutes. In future, membership of ENQA and admission to the register will depend on a positive review of the evaluation agencies in terms of current European Standards. Consequently, these standards must also be included in a review of EVA.

will be given the opportunity to correct factual or technical errors and comment on the process and findings of the review.

Following the review, EVA will prepare a follow-up plan to be published on EVA's home page. In the event that conclusions and recommendations are contrary to the legal basis and thus go against the ministries, the follow-up of these themes will be discussed with the ministries prior to the publication of the follow-up plan.

Timetable

February 2005: Terms of reference to be discussed by the executive committee and submitted to UVM, VTU and EVA's committee of representatives for comments.

Launch of self evaluation.

April 2005: Self evaluation completed.

May 2005: Self evaluation report to be discussed by executive committee and submitted to the expert panel.

May 2005: Expert panel visits EVA.

Beg. August 2005: Expert panel submits draft evaluation report for hearing.

End. August 2005: Expert panel hands in final evaluation report.

Annex

Criteria for the evaluation of EVA.

ANNEX 2: CRITERIA FOR THE REVIEW OF EVA

In its assessment of EVA, the expert panel will take into account a number of criteria, cf. the terms of reference. The criteria have been prepared on the basis of the expectations of EVA expressed in:

- The act on the Danish Evaluation Institute
- EVA's strategy for 2004-2006
- European standards for evaluation institutes as formulated by ENQA for the purpose of the so-called Bologna process and presented to the group of ministers of education at the Bergen meeting in May 2005.

The criteria have been divided into the following themes:

- EVA's objectives, strategy and framework
- EVA's organisation and management
- EVA's knowledge resources
- EVA's processes
- EVA's results.

EVA's objectives, strategy and framework

It is to be assessed whether:

- EVA has a clear strategy and clear objectives and that both are accessible to the public
- EVA's strategy and objectives reflect the requirements laid down in act:
 - to safeguard and develop the quality of teaching and education in Denmark
 - to advise and cooperate with the Minister of Education and other public authorities and educational institutions on matters of evaluation and quality improvement of educational fields
 - to gather national and international experience of educational evaluation and quality improvement and
 - to develop and renew procedures of evaluation and quality improvement.
- EVA's strategy and objectives provide relevant and valid answers to challenges in the institute's surroundings and field of activity
- EVA is independent of the Ministry of Education and other authorities. EVA has independent responsibility for the evaluation processes and procedures employed and is independently responsible for submitting its reports without influence from third-party authorities.

EVA's organisation and management

It is to be assessed whether:

- EVA's organisation and management system supports professional and efficient handling of its responsibilities
- EVA's management contributes actively to improving the institute's organisation and relations to the surroundings
- EVA's resource basis in terms of funding and number of staff is consistent with EVA's function as a professional and efficient evaluation institute and allows for continuous improvement of EVA's procedures and methods
- EVA is an attractive workplace that is capable of attracting and retaining qualified staff
- EVA has a clear and open communication with and to the surroundings.

EVA's knowledge resources

It is to be assessed whether:

- EVA composes its staff with a view to providing the organisation with the right knowledge and the right qualifications with respect to the nature of the individual assignment
- EVA ensures that the knowledge and qualifications of its staff are maintained and improved for the benefit of the individual employee and the organisation as a whole
- EVA uses external knowledge resources where appropriate and subjects these contributions to the performance of its duties to quality assurance procedures.

EVA's processes

It is to be assessed whether:

- EVA's evaluations are regular and systematic in relation to the educational system.
- EVA's methods and procedures are predefined and accessible to the public. As a main rule, these procedures include:
 - Self evaluation
 - An external evaluation group that matches the requirements in terms of academic expertise as well as user and student representation
 - Site visits by EVA and the evaluation group to the institutions or programmes undergoing evaluation
 - Publication of a report containing the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation
 - A procedure to follow up among those who have been evaluated with respect to the recommendations of the evaluation report
- EVA has procedures to ensure continuous feed-back on the quality of processes and results.

EVA's results

It is to be assessed whether:

- EVA' production of reports, memos, tools and services etc. reflect efficient use of resources
- EVA's products and services reflect the institute's strategy and objectives
- EVA contributes to safeguarding and improving the quality of teaching and education in Denmark.

ANNEX 3: SECTOR-SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

The descriptions of the strategies for the various educational sectors provided in the self-evaluation can be summarised as follows:

Primary and lower-secondary schooling: In Denmark there are about 1,700 primary and lower-secondary schools. This means that the degree of coverage is a central issue in EVA's strategies in this sector, one reason being the focus on improved interaction between evaluations, knowledge centre measures and externally contracted activities and also thematic evaluations in which a selection of schools and municipalities participate. Evaluations during 2005 will, for instance, focus on school administration, qualifications in mathematics and the interaction of attitudes to learning, organisation and physical parameters. Another strategy in recent years has been to look more closely at what goes on in schools with a focus on conditions and processes. This is where information is lacking today. The externally contracted activities have expanded in the primary and lower-secondary sector, mainly in advisory activities. The projects planned for 2005 total 17 in all. The number of knowledge-centre measures is also relatively large.

Upper-secondary sector: In the upper-secondary sector degree of coverage is also a central strategic theme, together with the issue of *timing* – adapting EVA's activities to the reforms being planned and implemented. Most of the knowledge centre projects are carried out in connection with evaluations and externally funded activities in this sector are limited.

The upper-secondary sector is the one in which the expert panel considers that the problems caused by EVA's broad and heterogeneous mandate can be seen most clearly. If EVA is to be able to work as systematically as is needed and with a degree of coverage that is substantially higher than today, considerable augmentation of the institute's resources will be required.

Higher education: The evaluation system that has been established in the long-cycle higher education programmes involves all the universities and, in that sense, it provides national coverage. On the other hand one could well ask in what sense it offers a *national picture* of quality in the sector. These evaluations and follow-ups are planned by each institution and presented in their own development contracts. The main strategy chosen by EVA to supplement the quality assurance system that has evolved in this way between the universities and the ministry consists of *auditing*, i.e. reviews of each higher education institution – mainly audits of the institutions' own internal quality assurance systems. The two first audits were carried out in 2003. It is intended to audit all twelve universities in the course of a six-year period. Programme appraisals are also conducted.

In the medium-cycle higher education programmes the reforms that have taken place in recent years have led to the establishment of what are called "professional bachelors' programmes" (*professionsbachelorutbildningar*). These have been evaluated since 2004 at the rate of about 25 institutions each year. In 2009 evaluation of all the institutions will have been completed. In the short-cycle higher education programmes, evaluations concentrate on the institutions' own internal quality assurance systems.

In the opinion of both the expert panel and of the institutions' representatives these are in many respects well-considered strategies. With the help of audits and accreditation reviews, eventually EVA will be able to offer a total picture of how quality assurance is managed in the sector. At the same time the institutions themselves bear the main responsibility for evaluating the quality of their programmes. However, the link between quality assurance systems and the quality of programmes can hardly be taken for granted. Far-reaching cooperation and also coordination between EVA's evaluation measures and those of the institutions will be needed if this evaluation system is to function coherently.

Knowledge centre operations in this sector are closely linked to the evaluations and are intended primarily to support the methodological development of the evaluations, for instance through publications and conferences. The unit plans to be more pro-active in its externally contracted activities to ensure that it receives evaluations commissions from the universities and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation.

Adult education and continuing training: The organisation of evaluations of adult education and continuous training programmes is governed by three strategic challenges: maintaining a focus on the concept of lifelong

learning, managing the interaction with the other educational sectors and taking into account the interplay between training and vocational experience in the evaluations – in other words a fairly extreme holistic concept in the view of the expert panel. From a methodological point of view the evaluations have to be planned so that they involve as many educational institutions as possible and that the subject of the evaluations or their themes are selected “where evaluation needs are greatest”. Knowledge centre activities focus on collecting knowledge of experiences in Denmark and elsewhere about lifelong learning and also on new methods for training and circulating information. Dialogue meetings have been held in which members of EVA’s staff participate in the creation of Nordic networks. Few externally contracted projects have been undertaken.

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