

The Board of the  
European Association for  
Quality Assurance in  
Higher Education

31 January, 2006

Reg.nr. 649-556/06

## **Evaluation of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education**

We hereby submit the report of an evaluation of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education in order to comply with the Enqa membership regulations stipulating cyclical reviews of member agencies, and to apply for inclusion in the Register of external quality assurance agencies in Europe.

The report concludes that the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education complies with all the standards required of external quality assurance agencies as set out in Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Europe.

The review was concluded in December 2005, and was carried out as a follow-up evaluation with the specific mandate to assess the extent to which the Agency complies with the standards for quality assurance agencies as set out in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

The panel of experts, who were endorsed by NOKUT, consisted of the following:

- Dr. Rolf Sandahl, the Swedish National Financial Management Authority;
- Professor Madeleine Rohlin, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Malmö University College, Sweden;
- Marit Waerness, Cand. Polit. Senior Advisor at Statskonsult, Norway;
- Professor John Brennan, Director of the Centre of Higher Education Research at the Open University, England;
- Kattis Sjunnesson, student in Political Science at Örebro University, Sweden.

Yours sincerely

  
Sigbrit Franke  
University Chancellor

National Agency for Higher Education  
Luntmakargatan 13  
Box 7851, SE – 10399 Stockholm  
Sweden

Kronprinsens gate 9  
Postboks 1708 Vika  
NO-0121 OSLO  
Tel: +47 21 02 18 00  
Fax: +47 21 02 18 01  
postmottak@nokut.no  
www.nokut.no

Oslo 9 June 2005

Inkom  
HÖGSKOLEVERKET

2005 -06- 13

Doss *643*  
Dnr *~~21362-05~~*  
*1440-05 ed*

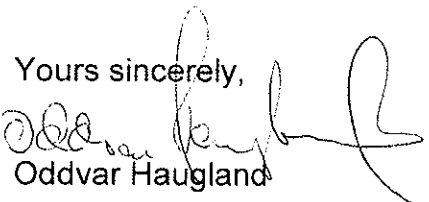
## CONFIRMATION

I hereby confirm that the following members of the panel of experts

Fil dr Rolf Sandahl, Sweden  
Professor Madeleine Rohlin, Sweden  
Cand.polit Marit Waerness, Norway  
Professor John Brennan, United Kingdom  
Student Cathrin Sjunneson, Sweden,

who have conducted an evaluation of the National Agency for Higher Education in Sweden, clearly meet the requirement for independency in this respect.

Yours sincerely,

  
Oddvar Haugland

Director General  
Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education  
Kronprinsensgate 9,  
P.O.Box 1708 Vika  
N-0121 Oslo  
Norway

Inkom  
HÖGSKOLEVERKET

2005 -12- 0 9

Doss 643  
Dnr 11110-05 ad

Stockholm, December 2005

We hereby submit our report “Evaluation of National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden — According to Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”.



Rolf Sandahl, chairman  
John Brennan  
Madeleine Rohlin  
Kattis Sjunnesson  
Marit Waerness

# Evaluation of National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden

**According to Standards and Guidelines for  
Quality Assurance in the European  
Higher Education Area**

**December 2005**

# 1 Background

The Ministers responsible for higher education of 45 European countries meeting in Bergen in May 2005 established the general principles expressed in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). These principles include the establishment of a register of external quality assurance agencies operating in Europe and the cyclical review of such agencies.

## 1.1 Aim

In order to apply for inclusion in the register the National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden (HsV), decided to ask for a review of its evaluation activities to establish whether HsV meets the ENQA standards with regard to both its external evaluation processes and its internal quality assurance. 18 months ago, the Department of Evaluation of HsV went through a similar review.<sup>1</sup> The procedure followed the evaluation process used by HsV in external quality assurance of subjects and programmes and the pattern established by ENQA, i.e. a self-evaluation by HsV, a site visit and an evaluation report. The purpose of this review is to assess if HsV complies with all the criteria established by ENQA.

## 1.2 Organisation of the Review

The review has been carried out by a panel consisting of:

Rolf Sandahl, Ph.D. in Political Science (chair), expert at the Swedish Financial Management Authority

John Brennan, Professor and Director of the Centre of Higher Education Research at the Open University, England

Madeleine Rohlin, Professor and Pro-Vice- Chancellor of Malmö University College, Sweden

Kattis Sjunnesson, student in Political Science at the University of Örebro, Sweden

Marit Waerness, Cand. Polit., Senior Adviser at Statskonsult, Norway

## 1.3 Methodology and criteria

The methodology is based on the principles and criteria established by ENQA in the report “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”. The panel will evaluate whether HsV complies with the following standards valid for external quality assurance agencies:<sup>2</sup>

**Official status.** The agency is formally recognised by competent public authorities in Sweden, i.e. complies with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

**Mission statement.** The agency has clear and explicit goals and objectives for its work, contained in a publicly available statement.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 2003 panel consisted of Rolf Sandahl, Madeleine Rohlin and Marit Waerness.

<sup>2</sup> European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Guidelines for external quality assurance agencies, pp. 22-26. To be found on [www.enqa.net](http://www.enqa.net).

**Activities.** The agency undertakes external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

**Resources.** The agency has adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable it to organise and run external quality assurance processes in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of its processes and procedures.

**Independence.** The agency is independent to the extent that it has autonomous responsibility for its operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in its reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

**External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agency.** The processes, criteria and procedures used by the agency are pre-defined and publicly available. These processes normally include:

- a self-assessment by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member (s), and a site visit decided by the agency;
- publication of a report; including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- 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.

**Accountability procedures.** The agency has in place procedures for its own accountability.

## 1. 4 The report

As a consequence of the review conducted 18 months ago this panel will in its conclusions refer to the earlier evaluation report and the self-evaluation conducted by HsV.<sup>3</sup> Most of the material this report makes reference to is enclosed. To meet the standards required by ENQA, HsV has also submitted a supplementary self-evaluation.<sup>4</sup> To be able to discuss the supplementary self-evaluation and to update earlier information on working procedures, resources, and actions taken etc. two panel members made a one-day site visit on November 18, 2005. The 2004 evaluation, the supplementary self-evaluation and the last site visit fulfil, as the panel sees it, all the necessary background material for making a thorough review. The report will be organised with reference to the standards mentioned above.

## 2 Official status, mission statement and activities

The National Agency for Higher Education (HsV) was established in 1995 by the Swedish government as a state agency responsible for various matters regarding higher education. The task of the National Agency for Higher Education is quite comprehensive. The territory of the agency is 14 state universities 22 state university colleges and 3 non-state institutions. They range from large “traditional” broad universities to specialised institutions of different sizes,

---

<sup>3</sup> Self-Evaluation. The Department of Evaluation at the National Agency for Higher Education, August 2003; Evaluators Required? Reflections on the Department of Evaluation at the National Agency for Higher Education, January 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Self-Evaluation Report for Evaluation of the National Agency for Higher Education: Supplementary information, June 5, 2005.

in, for example, teacher training, visual and performing arts, and agricultural sciences. In addition to these, some small private institutions have the right to award undergraduate degrees in certain specific subject areas.

There are seven departments within HsV: the Department for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications, Department of Statistics and Analysis, the Department for Planning and Research, the Information Department, the Administrative Department, the Legal Department and the Department of Evaluation. It is the Department of Evaluation which is responsible for almost all of the evaluation activities and hence the focus of this review.

Like other Swedish state agencies, HsV is funded by the Government, but formally independent with regard to methodology and decision-making. The legal framework is laid down by the Government, which has specified the goals, roles and tasks in an "Instruction". The Instruction defines as one of the tasks of the agency to *evaluate the quality of non-doctoral studies and doctoral studies, evaluate the quality assurance work of universities and university colleges* and to *monitor the outcomes of these evaluations*.<sup>5</sup>

The agency is responsible for mainly four types of evaluations in order to meet the goals mentioned: *subject and programme evaluations, quality audits and reviews for the right to award degrees and thematic reviews*. One of the main tasks for the Department of Evaluation since 2001 has been, with a cycle of six years, to carry out evaluations of subjects and programmes of all educational provisions for general degrees and professional degrees, including doctoral programmes.<sup>6</sup> Thus, this type is focused in the present report. The agency shall also summarise and publish the results of its undertakings with regard to evaluation, monitoring and follow-up as well as provide information on the activities and the full range of education provided by universities and university colleges.<sup>7</sup>

The Department of Evaluation is thus bound to perform the evaluations defined in the paragraph above, but has the right to initiate any other forms of evaluation as it sees fit. Furthermore, the government specifies for each year various tasks to be performed by the Agency.

The panel concludes that HsV is both formally and legally recognised as the public quality assurance agency of higher education in Sweden, undertakes external quality assurance activities on a regular basis and has clear and explicit goals and objectives for its work, contained in a publicly available statement. Hence, HsV fulfils the ENQA standards on *official status, mission statement and activities*.

### 3 Resources

The ENQA standards require both human and financial resources to enable the agency to organise and run external quality assurance processes in an effective and efficient manner. The number of employees in the Department of Evaluation, the largest of the departments, is, at the moment, 37 persons, 33 project managers, two administrators/secretaries, a Head of Department, and an Assistant Head of Department.

The strategy of the Department of Evaluation is, and has always been, to recruit people with different academic backgrounds, ages, and a balanced gender distribution. All project

---

<sup>5</sup> Swedish Code of Statutes (Svensk Författningssamling), SFS 2003:7, § 3.

<sup>6</sup> Government Bill 1999:28.

<sup>7</sup> SFS 2003:7, §§ 6 and 7.

managers must also have experience of the higher education area, preferably also of evaluation, they must have “social competence” and be good writers. There are no problems in recruitment. The staff turnover is low, lower than two years ago.

The 2004 evaluation concluded that the staff of the Department have excellent competence for carrying out their obligations, and the production level is high. The work of the Department of Evaluation appeared solid and professional, both in a national and an international perspective. This conclusion was drawn through reading reports from the Department and on the basis of discussions with the equivalents of the agency in Norway (NOKUT) and Denmark (EVA). The perception of the high competence of the staff was confirmed by the meta-evaluation undertaken by Ove Karlsson (Report 2002:20) at the request of the Agency. About 40 per cent of the staff today have a Licentiate degree or a doctorate degree.

It is obvious from the self-evaluation as well as from internal enquiries and interviews made at the last site visit that the staff are satisfied with their working-conditions. They maintain that the mixture of different competencies makes the Department a very interesting and stimulating workplace.

The staff also affirm that they have sufficient opportunities to influence their work situation and that there is a very open atmosphere where everybody is free to speak his/her mind. When it comes to support and administrative resources, conditions for carrying out the tasks of the Department are, on the whole, satisfactory. Good facilities in the form of technical support, library, and strong project leadership seem to be in place.

The panel concludes that the Evaluation Department has a competent staff, sufficient internal resources to back up the project managers and financial resources to fulfil their obligations. In this sense, HsV complies with the ENQA standards on *resources*.

## 4 Independence

Like other Swedish state agencies, HsV is funded by the government, but formally independent with regard to methodology and decision-making. The agency's independence from the Government is legally assured, and the agency is also independent from other education institutions and stakeholders.

But independence could also be seen as a question of independence between the evaluator and the evaluand. The panel finds that there is considerable understanding among the staff of the Department of Evaluation of the importance of good project management – of the composition of the expert panels and the work of the panels, of the quality of the reports and of the legitimacy of HsV. The composition of the panel plays an important role in reducing the risk of dependence and bias. The Swedish higher education area is, like in the other Nordic countries, populated by comparatively few people. One drawback of this condition is that “everybody knows everybody else” in a special subject or programme. One solution, often used by HsV, is to hire experts outside the country. The Department of Evaluation regards the presence of international experts as an important asset. It brings both a broader perspective and a larger measure of impartiality. For language reasons international experts primarily come from other Nordic countries.

The institution under review has the opportunity to recommend names of experts, which gives the process legitimacy in the higher education area. The Agency makes the final decision and has the responsibility to see to it that there is no conflict of interest. Thus, the experts of a



panel never participate in the evaluation of institutions where they are or have been active, or where, for other reasons, they may be connected. Students play a very important role in the evaluation and in the expert panels. So do other stakeholders such as future employers and professional organisations when it comes to higher professional education.

One situation where it is difficult to know if independence is guaranteed is the student representation at the institutions. It is the evaluand who picks the students to be interviewed by the experts. This could and should be improved. One way of doing this is to let the students at the institution or program being evaluated pick the representatives among themselves. This is what HsV encourages the institutions to do, but it seems not to be practiced. Another possibility is to leave this to the Students Union.

The descriptive parts of the draft report are circulated to the institutions, who are asked to comment on points of fact. Once these comments have been submitted, the report is finalised, decided by the University Chancellor, and published on the Agency's website and in a paper version. In case of a negative decision by the University Chancellor, there is a follow-up within one year. Where sufficient improvements are not perceived after one year, the institution in question loses its right to award a degree in the relevant programme/subject.

Swedish law does not allow of appeal against these decisions.

The view of the panel is that HsV have autonomous responsibility for their activities. Furthermore, the evaluation process is as independent as one could ask for and hence complies with the ENQA standards on *independence*.

## **5 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agency**

The ENQA standards require that the processes, criteria and procedures used by the agency should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes normally include, according to ENQA, a self-assessment by the subject of the quality assurance process; an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member (s), and site visits decided by the agency; publication of a report; including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes; and 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.

### *Self-evaluation*

HsV has prepared guidelines for the procedures of self-evaluation, which are updated each year. They specify the different parts of the evaluation procedure and supply suggestions for the successful implementation of the self-evaluation. The guidelines specifically state that the department should appoint a person responsible for the preparation and implementation, that a large representation of different categories should be involved (departmental management, academic staff, doctoral students, undergraduate students, administrative staff, etc.) The time available for conducting the self-evaluation is a minimum of three months, but departments are advised to begin early, which in many cases makes it possible to use additional time.

### *The composition of the panel of experts*

The external panels of experts in the subjects and programmes reviews usually consist of Swedish and Nordic subject experts and students and, where applicable, PhD students. In

evaluations of professional degrees representatives of employers/professional organisations are included.

The size and composition of the panel are adapted to the number of departments and subjects included in the evaluation. HsV makes efforts to achieve a reasonable distribution with regard to age and gender. The experts are chiefly recruited on the basis of proposals from departments. One of the experts is appointed as chair of the panel.

There is a first introduction meeting at which the experts are given information by the Agency staff responsible for the evaluation in question. This meeting contains a survey of the model and process and also an overview of the Swedish system of higher education. This overview has proved to be of great importance not only for foreign experts but also for the Swedish ones. Introduction efforts have increased gradually over the years. This part was emphasized during the last site visit by our panel. But it is also important, as our panel sees it, to ensure consistency and comparability between the panels in situations where the evaluations are very comprehensive and where it's not the same panel conducting all site visits.

#### *Site visits*

All the HsV's evaluations include a site visit. In evaluations of subject and programme, they take place at all the institutions where the subject/programme is taught for a degree. Such a site visit takes half a day to two days depending on the subject/programme. An audit site visit lasts between two and five days depending on the size and complexity of the institution/university. The panel interviews the leadership, deans, selected representatives of departments and other units, and students. In institutions that provide PhD programmes, doctoral students and supervisors are also interviewed. Each category is interviewed separately. The aim of the meetings is to supplement and clarify the department's self-evaluation.

#### *Reports*

The purposes of the reports are threefold:

- They should provide information to the departments on strengths and weaknesses and serve as a tool for development
- They should serve as instruments of accreditation and contain information on whether programmes meet requirements for academic provision
- They should provide information to students and other readers on the state of the subject/programme in the country and at each individual institution.

The reports are divided into three parts: the Experts' report, the Agency's reflections and the Agency's decision. The report is drafted by the agency secretary, but approved by the expert panel, and is thus the panel's text. The report covers all the subjects or programs evaluated.

As mentioned above, the parts of the draft report that contain factual information are circulated to the institutions, who are asked to comment on points of fact. In connection with the publication there is a press release, and the Agency's project manager is available to answer any questions from the media.

#### *Follow-ups*

About three months after the publication of the report the evaluands involved are invited to a follow-up conference. The conference aims to exchange experiences and discuss cooperative efforts, to present examples of good practice, and also to discuss views on the implementation

of the evaluation. A number of proposals for improvements of the methodology have been made and have been taken into consideration for further development.

Evaluations that have resulted in the questioning of degree-awarding powers are followed up after one year. If the weaknesses have not been sufficiently well addressed the institution will lose its right to award the degree in question.

After three years a follow-up of all reviewed programmes and subjects will be made. The aim is to find out how the departments have dealt with the recommendations given in the report and what improvements have been made. The first of these three-year follow-ups covering the 2001 and 2002 evaluations are now under way, using several different methods, for example questionnaires.

The panel finds that HsV has well-defined and well-developed processes in the different stages in the quality assurance procedure. It seems clear both for the evaluands and the experts how the processes function. One explanation of this is that HsV has almost completed a six-year period of this kind of evaluations. Hence, the panel concludes that the ENQA standards for *processes*, *criteria* and *procedures* used by the agency are pre-defined, publicly available and that the requirements regarding all stages in the procedures are met.<sup>8</sup>

## 6 Accountability procedures

To guarantee a professional job there is a need for different mechanisms, both external and internal, to assure that the work will be of a satisfactory level of quality. To make follow-ups among the evaluands, as mentioned above, is one of the external preconditions for maintaining good quality. But quality assurance is not static. The quality demands on the project managers and management will probably increase or perhaps change.

The external review initiated by HsV 18 months ago, which originated before the existence of the ENQA standards, is proof of the agency's own driving force to live up to certain standards in its work. The 2004 evaluation report stated that it was not considered to be necessary for a project manager to be an expert in the field under review, which is also impossible considering all the programmes to be evaluated. The question was rather which competencies should be developed.

According to the 2003 self-evaluation it was mainly up to the individual to take an initiative to develop his/her own competence and who profited by the knowledge acquired. The 2003 panel recommended a common policy for how to develop the competencies of those employed in the Evaluation Department. The panel also stressed in the evaluation report that a deeper discussion regarding the competence needed by a project manager must take place at the Department. An inventory has been made and several activities are now under way.

Since the 2004 evaluation report the Department of Evaluation at HsV has taken further actions to improve its quality assurance. Some examples of improvements are a handbook on the practicalities of the evaluations; regular meetings between management and project managers and each project group; an annual seminar to discuss the experiences of the past year's evaluations. There have also been staff development activities, both on an individual

---

<sup>8</sup> Examples are given in the Supplementary self-evaluation, p. 9.

basis and for the staff as a whole, e.g. interviewing techniques, evaluation theory and practice.<sup>9</sup>

In the panel's opinion HsV accords to the ENQA standard on accountability in that there are reliable mechanisms that support their accountability. For example to support the agency's accountability there are feedback systems with institutions that had been evaluated. Other procedures include feedback mechanisms utilized internally, which have been more and more developed during the last two years.

To sum up: The panel concludes that HsV complies with all the ENQA standards required for external quality assurance agencies. We base our conclusion on a self-evaluation 18 months ago and a supplementary self-evaluation describing the recent developments. In addition the panel made a site visit 18 month ago and another site visit in connection to the present report.

## 7 Some additional thoughts

The panel welcomes the initiatives taken by the Department of Evaluation as a follow up of the evaluation report 2004. Despite our impression from the last site visit that the staff members are quite satisfied with the improvements, we maintain that a deeper reflection regarding the competence needed by a project manager ought to be considered at the Department. This is important, not only in order that the individual staff member should feel that the Department supports his/her development, but also in order to create a common frame of reference providing opportunities for mutual discussions and a common frame work for learning.

Since it is not considered to be necessary for a project manager to be an expert in the field under evaluation which is impossible considering all the subjects and programmes being evaluated, the question is which competences should be developed. Is that not in the field of *evaluation*? The Department of *Evaluation* is that department in the Agency which has the highest formal academic qualifications. About 40 per cent have a Licentiate degree or a doctorate degree. A Ph.D. is not needed, however, according to some of the staff. It seems as if it has more to do with legitimacy both in relation to the evaluation panel and to the subject/programme being evaluated.

Our impression is that the capacity of the highly qualified staff is not "used fully". Have they not developed so much knowledge today that they could be considered experts among the other experts but in other fields? A subject or programme is evaluated from different angles and the curriculum of the subject or programme is just one of them. We think that the staff can improve their evaluative role from another perspective. This comment should be seen as a backdrop to the circumstance that members of expert groups are not generally experts in evaluation but rather in their fields of study or education.

As said in the 2004 evaluation report, the more specific or "unique" the role of project manager becomes, the more likely it is that the quality of e.g. the evaluation reports will improve. The 2003 panel stated that the agency's own reflections in the evaluation reports were mainly a summary of the whole report and agreed with the experts' views. Since it is the

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem

staff of the Agency that participate in all the evaluation projects, as opposed to the experts, it might be reasonable for the Agency to develop a role that makes it unique and is able to contribute substantially to the Agency's part of the report. We think that this will happen if the staff improve their evaluative role, as mentioned above and take the step from being a "facilitator" to being an "evaluator".

Another topic discussed in the 2004 evaluation report was the evaluation model, or rather the limited discussion within the Evaluation Department on this subject. Our impression was that the Department as a whole was uncertain whether its task was to discuss these more general questions. Also in this matter steps have been taken since the 2004 evaluation report. Different projects have been initiated and reported on how to proceed after 2007, i.e. when the present model has been in place for the stipulated six years. One project has elucidated the possibility to use key indicators for choosing evaluation subjects. Another project has dealt more with the model as such, i.e. to choose a new model. An audit model to evaluate the quality assurance work of universities and university colleges but with more attention paid to the impact of these systems is discussed.<sup>10</sup> Currently, five continuation projects are under way and the whole department is involved.

Although HsV fulfils the necessary preconditions required by ENQA standards and guidelines, initiates and implements activities to improve the methodology and skills among the staff, the panel thinks that there still is a potential unexploited. At the same time we are convinced that HsV will exploit this potential during the forthcoming years whatever the next evaluation model will be and do its best to fulfil the requirements for external quality assurance agencies.

---

<sup>10</sup> "Nytt system för lärosättesbedömningar", Utvärderingsavdelningen, Högskoleverket 2005-10-17 och "Nyckeltalsprojektet: jämförelse av pilotstudie – utvärderingsresultat", Utvärderingsavdelningen, Högskoleverket.

## **Annexes**

Review of the Evaluation Activities of National Agency for Higher Education:  
Terms of Reference

Self-Evaluation Report for Evaluation of the National Agency for Higher  
Education: Supplementary information, June 5, 2005

Self-Evaluation Report, Department of Evaluation, 2003

Evaluators Required? Reflections on the Department of Evaluation at the  
National Agency for Higher Education, January 2004

# REVIEW OF THE EVALUATION ACTIVITIES OF NATIONAL AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION: Terms of Reference

## **Background**

The Ministers responsible for higher education of 45 European countries meeting in Bergen in May 2005 established the general principles expressed in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) as a result of the 2003 Berlin Communiqué. These principles include the establishment of a register of external quality assurance agencies operating in Europe and the cyclical review of such agencies. In order to apply for inclusion in the register the National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden (HsV), has decided to ask for a review of its evaluation activities.

18 months ago, the Department of Evaluation of HsV went through a similar review. The procedure largely followed the pattern later established by ENQA.

## **Terms of reference**

### **Aim**

The aim of the exercise is to establish whether HsV meets the ENQA standards with regard to both its external evaluation processes and its internal quality assurance.

### **Organisation of the Review**

The panel members should have expertise in and practical experience of evaluation of higher education. They should be independent of HsV.<sup>1</sup>

The review panel should include

- national and international experts on quality assurance in higher education
- a student

---

<sup>1</sup> The Norwegian quality assurance agency, Nokut, has proposed the names of those who serve on the present panel.

- a senior member of a higher education institution management.  
The panel should have an equal gender distribution.

### **Methodology and criteria**

The methods should be based on the principles and criteria established by ENQA in its report "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area". Thus HsV will prepare a self-evaluation, which will supplement the document prepared for its 2003 evaluation. The panel will meet as it sees fit and is free to seek additional information regarding HsV evaluation activities at its discretion.

The following criteria apply:

- HsV is formally recognised by competent public authorities in Sweden
- HsV undertakes external quality assurance activities on a regular basis
- HsV has adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial to enable it to organise and run external quality assurance processes in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of its processes and procedures.
- HsV has clear and explicit goals and objectives for its work, contained in a publicly available statement
- HsV is independent to the extent that it has autonomous responsibility for its operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in its reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.
- The processes, criteria and procedures used by HsV are pre-defined and publicly available. These processes normally include:
  - A self-assessment by the subject of the quality assurance process
  - An external assessment by a group of experts, including at least one student member
  - site visits
  - publication of a report
  - a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of recommendations
- HsV has in place procedures for its own accountability.

### **Report**

The panel will prepare a report of a maximum of 10 pages containing its conclusions and recommendations in relation to the aims of the review and the criteria specified above.



**Expected workload and time frame**

It is estimated that the workload of the panel will be equivalent to approx. two weeks full time for the chair and one week for other members.

The panel should present its report should no later than 15 October 2005.

**Reports prepared for the review**

Self-evaluation by the Department of Evaluation at the National Agency for Higher Education (2003)

Evaluators required? Reflections on the Department of Evaluation at the National Agency for Higher Education) (2004)

Self-Evaluation Report for Evaluation of the National Agency for Higher Education: Supplementary Information.

The Committee will be free to request any relevant material besides that which has been specified above.

# Self-Evaluation Report for Evaluation of the National Agency for Higher Educa- tion: Supplementary information

Stockholm, June 5, 2005

## INTRODUCTION

The Department of Evaluation at the National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden, went through an evaluation process approximately 18 months ago. To a large extent, the procedure followed the one proposed by ENQA in the document Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Thus, a self-evaluation report was prepared (*Self-Evaluation by the Departments of Evaluation at the National Agency for Higher Education*), a panel of experts was nominated and appointed, a site visit by the experts was undertaken, and a report was published: Sandahl et al. *Utvärderare sökes! Några reflektioner kring Högskoleverkets utvärderingsavdelning*. Högskoleverket 2004 (Evaluators required? Reflections on the Department of Evaluation at the National Agency for Higher Education). To a large extent, the self-evaluation report and the experts' report cover the points proposed by ENQA, and that which is not touched upon to a sufficient degree is dealt with in other reports (xxxx / xxxx/ xxxx/). They are all part of the material submitted to the panel. However, some of the information proposed in the Annex of the ENQA report is not included in the original documents, either because it was not asked for or because developments have taken place since the time of the publication of those reports. This supplement provides the missing facts. It is organised in accordance with the structure of the Annex of the ENQA report. Thus the numbering of sections refer to sections in Standards and Guidelines.

## 2.1.1 A brief outline of the national higher education system

### ***Degree structure***

The Higher Education Ordinance lays down which degrees may be awarded in Swedish higher education. Higher education (with the exception of doctoral studies) is organised in the form of courses of different lengths, which may be linked together to constitute programmes with varying levels of individual choice. Students may also themselves combine different courses into a degree. The extent of a study programme or a course is measured in credits. One credit corresponds to one week of full-time study, and an academic year normally consists of 40 credits, usually divided into two semesters. One credit corresponds to 1.5 ECTS credits.

Swedish higher education is a two-tier system, formally divided into basic education, which roughly corresponds to the concepts of undergraduate and graduate studies, and doctoral studies. The recognised degrees in basic education are further divided into general and professional degrees. *General degrees* may be geared towards a specific subject, or in some cases, towards a profession. They are known as *kandidatexamen* (Bachelor), which requires 120 (180 ECTS), 60 of which must be in one subject including a 10-credit degree project; and *Magisterexamen* (Master), which requires an additional 40 credits (60 ECTS) including a 10-credit Master's thesis.

Most of the *professional degrees* are considered to be regulated degrees (according to EC legislation). They are usually known by the name of the profession they lead to (*läkarexamen* (e.g. University Medical Degree), *juristexamen* (Master of Laws)).

Two degrees are presently offered at the postgraduate level: the PhD and the Licentiate.

Sweden's adaptation to the Bologna process is likely to impact on the future degree structure. The proposed structure will introduce a formal division of higher education into three cycles or levels: Undergraduate, graduate and doctoral levels.

### ***Institutional structure***

Swedish tertiary education is provided mainly in a unitary higher education sector, comprising universities and university colleges. Today, there are 14 state universities 22 state university colleges and 3 non-state institutions. They range from large "classic" broad universities to specialised institutions of different sizes, in, for example, teacher training, visual and performing arts and agricultural sciences. In addition to these, a number of smaller private institutions have the right to award undergraduate degrees in certain specific subject areas.

### ***Procedures and involved parties in establishing new subjects, programmes and institutions***

The main difference between universities and university colleges has to do with the right to provide doctoral studies. Swedish universities are run and financed by the state and have a general right to award higher education degrees, including postgraduate level degrees. This also means that the universities have the right to choose for themselves in what subjects they wish to provide doctoral programmes and the responsibility for the quality of that provision. Universities thus have their own procedures for the establishment of new subjects and programmes at all levels.

University colleges may receive accreditation in specific “research areas”, giving them the right to award postgraduate degrees within a broad subject area (health science, engineering sciences, natural sciences, humanities/social sciences). In exceptional cases a university college may also be accredited for university status. Such accreditation is decided by the government after an evaluation made by the National Agency for Higher Education. This procedure involves the preparation of an application by the institution, the appointment of a team of experts by the Agency, a site-visit by the expert team and a report by the team followed by a recommendation to the government from the Agency.

Other quality assurance procedures for which the National Agency is responsible are

- Two rounds of quality audit of all Swedish higher education institutions 1995 – 2002.
- A six-year cycle of evaluation of subjects and programmes at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral level 2001 – 2006.
- Thematic evaluations of higher education institutions’ processes and outcomes with regard to certain aspects of quality (e.g. internationalisation, gender equality and student influence).

All these are described in detail in the attached self-evaluation from 2003, esp. pp 10 - 32.

## **2.1.2 A brief account of the history of the particular agency and of the evaluation of higher education in general**

### **Mission statement**

#### **Establishment of the Agency**

The National Agency for Higher Education (HSV) was established in 1995 by the Swedish government as a state agency responsible for various matters

regarding higher education. Like other Swedish state agencies, NAHE is funded by the government, but formally independent with regard to methodology and decision-making.

The legal framework is laid down by the Government, which has specified the goals, roles and tasks in an "Instruction" (SFS 2003:7). The following sections apply to quality assurance:

*"Evaluation*

3§ The Agency shall

1. assess the quality of non-doctoral studies and doctoral studies
2. evaluate the quality assurance work of universities and university colleges
3. Monitor the outcomes of the evaluations referred to in 1. and 2."

"6§ The Agency shall summarise and publish the results of its undertakings with regard to evaluation, monitoring and follow-up.

7§ The Agency shall

2. be responsible for information on the activities and the full range of education provided by universities and university colleges."

Furthermore, the government specifies for each year various tasks to be performed by the Agency.

Current evaluation procedures are outlined in Government Bill 1999:28, which states that

"The National Agency for Higher Education should be given the task, from 2001 with a cycle of six years, to carry out evaluations of subjects and programmes of all educational provision for general degrees and professional degrees, including doctoral programmes. These evaluations should comprise assessments for the right to award degrees. If the Agency finds that there is cause to revoke a right to award a doctoral degree, the matter should be referred to the government for a decision ... Students should be informed of the outcomes of the evaluations and other forms of follow-up studies."

The Agency is thus bound to perform the evaluations defined in the paragraph above, but has the right to initiate any other forms of evaluation as it sees fit.

The Agency has a number of other duties with regard to higher education, notably evaluation of foreign degrees, statistics and analysis, planning and research, information, legal monitoring.

For the organisation, please see the self-assessment of the Evaluation department, p. 7.

For international activities of the Agency with regard to quality assurance, please see the Self-Evaluation of the Evaluation Department, pp. 25-26.

### **2.3 Evaluation method applied by the Agency (2.3.1 – 2.3.3)**

A thorough description of the methodology and the role of the external expert group is provided in the Self-Evaluation Document pp. 16 – 24 and in the Evaluation Report (throughout).

#### **2.3.4.1 An account of the procedures related to self-evaluation.**

The Agency has prepared guidelines for the procedures of self-evaluation, which are updated each year. They specify the different parts of the evaluation procedure and supplies suggestions for the successful implementation of the self-evaluation. The guidelines specifically states that the department should appoint a person responsible for the preparation and implementation, that a large representation of different categories should be represented (departmental management, academic staff, doctoral students, students administrative staff, etc.)

The time available for conducting the self-evaluation is a minimum of three months, but departments are advised to begin early, which in many cases makes it possible to use an additional month.

#### **2.3.4.2 An account of the procedures related to the site visit**

Interviewing protocol are prepared for each specific project and are based on an operationalisation of the quality aspects presented in the manual:

- The composition of the student body
- Teacher qualifications and staff development
- Gender equality and diversity
- Goals contents and organisation of the programme
- Library and other information resources
- Premises and equipment
- A critical and creative environment
- Teaching and learning methods
- The work situation of the academic staff
- The organisation of the programme
- Co-operation and internationalisation
- Forms of assessment
- Degree projects/theses

- Pass rates
- Follow-up of graduates and alumni

Students are important informants in the process. Students are selected to represent different levels and courses. We attempt to have the student unions or student representatives from various courses select suitable interviewees, but are not always successful

The length of the visit depends on the size of the subject and department. Biology with many students and a wide variety of courses and orientations requires longer visits than, say, Dutch with few students and a simple and clear structure. Ordinarily, visits last for one or two days.

Each visit would contain six or seven meetings in a day, averaging 45 minutes to one hour. The Agency staff member acts as secretary and takes down notes, distributed to the panel members, only for their internal use. An ordinary visit would start the evening before the interviews with a preparatory discussion in the expert panel on the basis of the self-evaluation report. A one-day interview block would consist of meetings with the department head and his/her staff, students, teachers, graduate students, researchers/advisors, the faculty dean or sometimes the vice-chancellor and then finally with the department head again. The reason for interviewing the dean or the vice-chancellor is to obtain information of the standing of the subject or programme internally. In between each interview there are short periods for the expert panel to sum up the main points made. At the end of the day there is also a brief summing up session of the day as a whole.

After a few days the notes prepared by the secretary are circulated to the panel, who are asked to comment and add their own impressions. On the basis of the material the secretary prepares a draft version of the section of the report pertaining to the university in question.

#### 2.3.4.3 The reports (see also pp. in the Department's self-evaluation

The purposes of the reports are threefold:

- They should provide information to the departments on strengths and weaknesses and serve as a tool for development
- They should serve as instruments of accreditation and, contain information on whether programmes meet requirements for academic provision
- They should provide information to students and other readers on the state of the subject/programme in the country and at each individual institution.



Thus each report has three sections

- A formal decision by the University Chancellor on whether the subject/ programmes meet minimal requirements
- An analysis of the subject area and its overall standing in Sweden
- A feedback to each institution

The report is drafted by the agency secretary, but approved by the expert panel, and is thus the panel's text. The length and complexity of the report varies with the subject/programme and may contain anything from 25 to 500 pages. It contains documentation, analysis and recommendations by the expert panel and a decision and reflections by the Agency.

The descriptive parts of the draft report are circulated to the institutions, who are asked to comment on points of fact. Once these comments have been submitted, the report is finalised and published on the Agency's website and in a paper version. In connection with the publication there is a press release, and the Agency project manager is available to answer any questions from the media.

In case of a negative decision by the University Chancellor, there is a follow-up within one year. Where sufficient improvements are not perceived after one year, the institution in question loses its right to award a degree in the relevant programme/subject.

There is a follow-up with the departments evaluated and the expert panel about three months after publications in order to discuss the lessons learnt and the immediate effects of the report and the evaluation process. After three years there is a written follow-up, in which the subjects/programmes are asked to comment on the developments since the evaluation.

### **2.3.5 System of appeal**

There is no formal system of appeal against decisions. However, those under review can express their opinions in at least two ways:

- descriptive sections of reports are distributed for comment and factual corrections.
- the first follow-up conference three months after the publication of the report gives every possibility of voicing views on both process and results of the evaluation.

## **Update on developments in methodology and quality assurance of the activities of the Department of Evaluation**

In the Results section of the Department's 2003 self-evaluation, strengths and weaknesses are discussed and a few points for improvement are mentioned.

- *"A strategy for follow-ups /of the findings/ of the subject and programme reviews should be prepared."*

This has been initiated. A letter has been sent to all relevant institutions asking them to detail how they have dealt with the reports, and in particular how they have handled the recommendations of the expert panels.

- *"Discussions on the design of a new evaluation model from the year 2007 need to be initiated."*

Working groups have been set up at the Department with the brief to come up with suggestions in three areas:

- the development of an audit model
- the development of a model of appointing "centres of excellence" in teaching and learning
- the development of key figures to monitor the performance of programmes and subjects.

These groups will report in October 2005.

A number of other developments have taken place since the self-evaluation was completed both with regard to the Department's assurance of the quality of its own activities and with regard to development of evaluation methodology. These developments are summarised below:

### **Quality assurance**

- Follow-up questionnaires have been sent to all those responsible for quality assurance at the higher education institutions, to all vice-chancellors and to the members of all the expert panels. The answers have been analysed and action has been taken where it has been deemed reasonable.
- Seminars have been arranged with those responsible for quality assurance at the higher education institutions
- Seminars have been arranged with student and doctoral student members of expert panels to discuss their experiences.

In order to ensure efficiency of administrative and evaluation processes the following measures have been taken. These are some examples:

- A handbook on the practicalities of the evaluations has been developed
- All relevant documents are to be found on the Agency's Intranet
- Tools for budgets and budget monitoring have been developed.
- The Department management has regular meetings with project managers and each project group
- A Department seminar is arranged annually to discuss the experiences of the past year's evaluations.

A number of staff development activities have taken place, both on an individual basis and for the staff as a whole. These are some examples:

- Working in projects. A two-day course for the entire staff.
- Oral presentation
- Interviewing techniques
- Evaluation theory and practice
- Report writing

Furthermore, several thematic seminars have been held in conjunction with the Department's weekly meetings. These are some of the themes addressed:

- Working in projects
- Our evaluation model
- International issues.

self-evaluation  
Dep. of Evaluation  
Preconditions 2003,

## **The Higher Education Sector**

### **Size and general organisation**

The Higher Education sector in Sweden comprises 36 public institutions and 13 private ones. The latter include three large institutions (Chalmers University of Technology, The Stockholm School of Economics and Jönköping University College), whereas the other ten are very limited.

There are over 300 000 students at the undergraduate level. The largest institution is Göteborg University with 30 000 students, Lund University has 28 000 and both the Universities of Uppsala and Stockholm have over 20 000 students each. The Schools of visual and performing arts have between 40 (the College of Opera) and just over 800 students.

There are over 18 000 active PhD students and about the same amount of teaching staff.

Both public institutions and the National Agency for Higher Education report directly to the Government (the Ministry of Education and Science). The Government appoints the Vice-Chancellors.

The general framework of the organisation and governance of higher education is given in the second section of the Higher Education Act. It gives a great amount of freedom to the institutions to organise their activities and mode of governance. Some of the National Agency Reviews have expressed criticism of the governance and decision-making structures of institutions, but the Agency cannot require changes.

### **Finance**

The cost of the entire higher education sector, including the cost of student support and central agencies amounted to SEK 47.2 billion (USD 7 billion) in 2002. This corresponds to about 2 per cent of the GNP and puts Sweden fifth among some 25 countries in the OECD area.

Undergraduate education and postgraduate studies are funded separately. Institutions receive funding for undergraduate education in the form of a sum per FTE and per full time equivalent student achievement (FTSA) according to a formula. The funding varies considerably between areas of study. For Arts/Social Sciences it is about SEK 30 000 per study place, for Medicine about SEK 110 000 and for media studies over 400 000. Institutions can then use their own formulae for internal allocations.

The major complaint of institutions is that the annual increase in funding does not correspond to rising salary costs. In practice, this means that the current expansion of the number of students is not clearly related to an increase in the number of teaching staff.

## **The organisation of the National Agency**

### **Executive leadership and Board**

The National Agency is headed by the University Chancellor. There is a Board responsible for matters of principle, important regulations, and the general focus of activities within the scope of goals and guidelines laid down by Parliament and Government.

The University Chancellor has a secretariat consisting of six persons. A steering group, which meets once a month, discusses general issues on coordination of activities and policy matters. The group consists of the University Chancellor, the head of her secretariat and the heads of the departments.

### **The Department of evaluation**

There are seven departments: the Department for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications, Department of Statistics and Analysis, the Department for Planning and Research, the Information Department, the Administrative Department, the Legal Department and the Department of Evaluation.

The Evaluation Department is the Agency's largest department with 32 employees in spring 2003: 28 project managers, two administrators/secretaries, a Head of Department and an Assistant Head of Department.

Our strategy is to recruit people with different academic backgrounds and ages and a balanced gender distribution. All project managers must also have experience of the university sector, preferably also of evaluation, they must have "social competence" and be good writers.

## **The focus of Agency operations**

### **The mission of the Agency**

The goals, contents and forms of the Agency's operations are determined by two main documents: the Ordinance, which contains the Instructions for the Agency and the annual budget document. According to the Instructions some of the principal functions of the Agency are information, legal supervision, monitoring and follow-up and evaluation.

Further, the activities of the Agency are determined by a number of overall goals given in the annual budget document. These statements are relatively unchanged from year to year. In the last few years, however, the instrumental significance of higher education has been emphasised. For the year 2003 the overall goals are said to be:

- Sweden should be a leading knowledge society characterised by high quality education and lifelong learning for growth and justice.
- The quality and international competitiveness of higher education and research should be improved. Higher education should cater for the needs of the labour market as well as for student demand.
- 

It should be emphasised that the mission of the Agency as a whole must be seen in the light of the 1993 higher education reform. The new rationale of governance in the form of management by objectives, decentralisation of responsibilities and a funding system based on results and quality assurance has made control *ex post* much more necessary than previous systems based on governance by rule. There were high hopes for fruitful cooperation between different functions of the Agency such as evaluation, statistics, analysis and planning and research, which would result in a good overall picture of the activities of universities and university colleges.

#### **The mission of the Evaluation Department**

The activities of the Evaluation Department are also governed by the annual budget document and by the Higher Education Act and Ordinance:

- The National Agency for Higher Education shall contribute to the improvement of quality in the operations of higher education institutions through different modes of evaluation.
- The National Agency for Higher Education shall decide which public universities and university colleges may award degrees in undergraduate education.

In order to meet these goals the department works with essentially three types of evaluations: subject and programme reviews, quality audits and reviews for the right to award degrees. The 2003 budget document states that the first two types should be clearly developmental. It is important, however, to emphasise that they also have a control function. The subject and programme reviews include the assessment of the right to award degrees for the subject/ programme in question. In serious cases of quality deficiency the right may be withdrawn. The audits have a less distinct control function, but they, too, are a part of the monitoring of the activities of universities and university colleges. The reviews for the right to award degrees consider the applications of higher education institutions to award different types of

general or professional degrees or to obtain partial or full university status. These reviews could be described as accreditation.

The first two tasks are planned in cycles: the subject/programme reviews in six-year cycles, the audits in three-year cycles. The reviews for degree-awarding powers are made on application.

A fourth task is evaluations, initiated by the Agency, of certain themes. One example is an evaluation of how institutions work with student influence, gender equality and social and ethnic diversity as quality indicators, carried out in the year 2000 and followed up in 2003. A major three-year evaluation of the so-called promotion reform<sup>1</sup> was terminated in 2003. For 2004 reviews of internationalisation and cooperation of universities with society (the third task) will take place.

All in all, the core activities of the Evaluation Department may be said to be characterised by two functions which are often difficult to combine: control and enhancement.

#### **Projects initiated by the Department alone or in cooperation with other departments**

The Department's evaluations often point to general problems that should be further researched and followed up in a wider context. Such studies would contribute to meeting the overall goal of enhancing the operations of higher education institutions. There are, however, limited resources for this form of analysis, since the core activities take most of the time and funds.

It is possible that a simplified framework for subject and programme reviews may free resources for projects of the kind indicated above, if this is deemed to be desirable. Currently, studies related to evaluations are carried out in cooperation between several departments. Examples are *Through students' eyes* and *Through PhD students' eyes* - two large questionnaire-based investigations of students' and PhD student' views on their studies and study conditions. They are done in cooperation with the Department of Statistics and Analysis. In addition, there are several enquiries made in cooperation with the Legal Department.

Evaluation of higher education is one of the most important tasks of the Agency. One of its other major assignments is to provide overall information to current and presumptive students on operations and results at the higher education institutions. The main responsibility for this rests with the Information Department. Information on quality issues and results of evaluations is prepared by the Information Department in collaboration with the Evaluation Department, and the departments often have different views on the form and contents of this information.

---

<sup>1</sup> In 1998 the possibility of promotion from senior lecturer to professor was introduced. Previously, the only way of obtaining a professorship was through applying for a formally advertised post in competition with other candidates.

## **Interpretation of the assignment**

The assignment of the Evaluation Department is interpreted in the annual action plan.

## **Framework of long-term assignments/projects**

The core of the activities carried out at the Evaluation Department is dominated by two large assignments: the subject and programme reviews and quality audits. The overall contents of these assignments and guidelines for implementing them were originally planned in talks between the Agency and the Ministry of Education and Science. The next steps in the preparations were planning conferences with participants from the Agency and from institutions. From then on the general framework has remained more or less the same. These preparatory steps have played an important role for the internal and external acceptance of the assignment.

The Evaluation Department has prepared guidelines for the implementation of the different types of reviews. The results of reviews have been presented as reports or sometimes policy documents. The degree of freedom allowed in the individual project and project manager is mainly at the level of practical implementation.

## **Planning at three levels**

Projects are planned at three levels. To start with, there is an general structure for activities expressed in the Agency's action plan, which is approved by the Chancellor. She also decides on overall Agency projects. Resources based on planned activities are allocated to the different departments at this stage.

Next, more detailed planning takes place at the department level and projects are staffed. Project budgets are prepared by the designated project managers on the basis of earlier experiences and finally approved by the department head, often after negotiations. The project manager then finalises the planning.

## **The Project Manager's planning**

Every year the department contacts the rectors of the universities and colleges involved in that year's evaluation activities to obtain their views on the planning. The institutions further appoint contact persons for each programme/subject under review.

The project manager organises a first meeting with representatives of the departments in order to agree on the delimitations of the project and the



special needs of those concerned. This involves a discussion of how to adapt the self-study manual to fit the requirements of the subject/programme under review.

The project manager is responsible for the recruitment of the expert panel. The members are appointed on the basis of proposals from the institutions/departments and other sources. In a few cases the chairperson has been appointed first, and has then been able to influence the choice of experts.

The project manager has a certain amount of discretion to decide on the size of the panel, the number meetings, and special investigations within the scope of the project. Sometimes this freedom may lead to uncertainty as to the principles to be applied in different reviews.

Similar principles have applied to the quality audits, whereas the discretion of the project manager has been less pronounced in the evaluations for the right to award degrees.

Individual staff members who have proposed projects agreed by the leadership are often given great freedom to select the appropriate methods. On the other hand the funding of such projects are sometimes felt to be limited.

## **Economy**

### **Special budgeting conditions**

Ever since it was established in 1995 the Agency has been fortunate enough to have a sound economy, and it is able to finance its activities without any real difficulties.

The head of the department has the final responsibility for the economy of the department, but the Evaluation Department is unique in that the responsibility for individual projects has been delegated to the project managers. The reason for this delegation is partly to emphasise the responsibility of the individual for his/her project, and partly to simplify the practical handling of accounts.

The subject/programme reviews are the most costly ones at the department, and the planning of the department's economy and activities are affected by how they are implemented. It has transpired that with the tools currently available, it is difficult to make a reliable prognosis for the majority of these reviews. In most cases they have turned out to require more time than planned.

Another difficulty is that the projects often cover three years (year 1: planning, year 2: implementation, and year 3: report and follow-up), and that the majority of the costs affect year 2, i.e. the year of the site visits. At the end of each year, the project manager submits a budget for the coming

year. The budgets of the department and the whole Agency are then followed up continually by the Chancellor and the heads of department, in order to make it possible to make prognoses, and to adjust activities. These follow-ups have not been successful as prognostic instruments for the total spending.

A further complication is that the tax authorities require data on experts living abroad for taxation purposes. We have a large number of foreign experts, and since the decisions of the Tax Board are valid for only six months, we have to make several applications for the same person. Furthermore, a decision may take anything from 10 days to three months from the date of application.

Another item that is difficult to prognosticise is travel. Experts come from various places, in Sweden and abroad, and the actual cost of travel varies enormously.

It goes without saying that the various policy documents of the Agency affect the department's work considerably. The large number of external experts and the considerable amount of travel makes it difficult always to apply the principles of these documents.

So far, it has been possible to finance all projects and to allocate additional funding to projects that have exceeded their budget.

### **Improving the budget process**

In order to facilitate and improve the budget process, it is continually revised. Further, the Agency has contacted the Tax Board in order to speed up the handling of decisions regarding the non-Swedish experts.

In 2003, the whole department has attended a course in project management aiming at emphasising the project manager's responsibility for the project as a whole, including the planning, the economy and the implementation and the result. Increasing demands are placed on the economic prognoses and follow-ups.

## **Working conditions**

### **Working climate**

There is a good working climate at the Agency and the department. This is clear from two work-place surveys made in 2000 and 2002. They show that a large majority of the staff at the Agency feel they have sufficient opportunities to influence their situation at work. The same result applies to the Department of Evaluation – 88 per cent think that there is a good co-operative spirit within the department. In contrast, only a minority of the Agency's staff feel that co-operation between departments works satisfacto-

rily. The same opinion prevails in our department. The atmosphere within the Agency as a whole is characterised by openness; 88 per cent feel that they can express their opinions freely.

The Department of Evaluation stands out negatively in one respect in both surveys: it accounts for the largest proportion of expressions of stress.

### **Flexible working hours**

The Agency staff have the freedom to adapt their working hours to their specific needs within the framework agreed between the employer and the union. This is a necessity considering the tasks of the Evaluation Department, with a considerable amount of travelling and work on weekends and evenings.

Moreover, there has been a positive response to individual needs of partial leave of absence for child care. This applies to both female and male staff.

### **Overtime**

The departments' work is seasonal in the sense that often there is a heavy workload in autumn and winter. During this period it is not unusual for the 30 hours allowed to be carried over from one month to the next to be exceeded. The staff are compensated for this in the form of a corresponding amount of free time. Monetary compensation is allowed only with the explicit agreement of the head of department.

Only to a certain limited extent, during periods of heavy workload, are staff allowed to work from home. The conditions for this are not regulated by a policy, however.

### **Time reports**

The Agency has adopted a system of reporting and recording the time spent on each project by staff. This is used in order to follow up the total costs of projects in order to produce better and more reliable prognoses and in order to meet government accountancy demands.

Each month the staff report the number of hours they have spent on the various projects to the officer responsible for the department's accounts, who passes the information on to the Agency's administrative department, where it is registered. These data should be discussed and analysed, but for various reasons they are not reliable. Some staff do not record their actual working hours, some do not report at all, others only sporadically. This is due to insufficient instructions and to a general feeling that it is unimportant for the individual. It is difficult to report these data within the framework of the current report system.

There has been no general discussion within the department on how time is spent and reported. Thus, the staff do not get any feedback and the process of reporting seems useless.

The reports are used in the quarterly follow-ups but are hardly good indicators of goal attainment.

### **Salary levels and careers**

According to the Agency's pay policy women and men should have equal pay for work that is considered equal or equivalent. The average monthly salary in the Agency is SEK 28 850 for men and 28 900 for women (2002). In the negotiations for 2002 the average result for women was 4.68 per cent and for men 4.27 per cent.

The salary levels at the department vary considerably, partly depending on age and earlier experience. The previous salary level is also a central factor as well as the job market situation at the time of the appointment. The salary range at the department is 21 500 – 36 300. The average is 28 079 and the median salary is 29 000. For men the average monthly salary is 27 061 and for women 28 568.

The Agency's "flat" organisation makes it difficult for anyone to be promoted to higher levels. All staff are quickly given responsibility for a project as project managers. There is no correlation between the promotion to project manager, the result of a successful project and the development of a person's salary level.

### **Gender equality**

There should be an equal proportion of men and women at the Agency and in all working groups. This goal is largely achieved in recruitment and efforts promoting mobility inside the Agency. The proportion of men and women at the department was 11 men and 19 women in May 2003, i.e. 37 per cent men and 63 per cent women. There is a considerable variation with regard to age, from below 30 to above 60. This distribution is the result of a conscious strategy. There is an under-representation of men over 50 at the department.

Agency staff should have equal rights and opportunities to develop, irrespective of their gender. The head of the department is responsible for the implementation of this principle. Further, all employees should be given the opportunity to combine work with parenthood.

The Agency has a policy against sexual harassment. The head of the department is responsible for compliance with this policy. Complaints should be lodged with the head of the department, but anyone who, for some reason, does not want to apply to the head, may turn directly to the Personnel Unit.

The head of each department is responsible for improvement of gender equality within his or her department. He/she annually appoints one member of staff as a member of the Agency's gender group and sees to it that this person is given the means of spending time on this task within the scope of normal working hours.

It is the responsibility of each staff member to integrate equality perspectives in his or her daily activities. The staff of the Agency should consequently have a good knowledge of gender equality issues and apply this knowledge in his/her daily work.

The Evaluation Department is a workplace characterised by a relatively high level of equality. There is a high level of awareness, not least among the leadership, of the importance of integrating equality in daily work.

## **Infrastructure**

### **Libraries and internal information**

Besides the Agency's own reports and other publications the Agency's library comprises Parliamentary records, scientific journals and literature on higher education, economics and leadership, information technology, social and legal science. There are also staff magazines from universities and colleges as well as student union papers.

The library has an annual budget of about SEK .5 million. A large portion of this allocation is used for journals. Journals specialising in evaluation are kept at the Evaluation Department. New purchases are made eight times per year and new acquisitions are then shown on the Agency Intranet.

Besides making searches through the internal computer network, staff members can also search via the national database LIBRIS. The librarian helps to place orders for external loans. The library's website also gives access to the National Encyclopaedia and about 20 000 electronic titles. Some journals can also be accessed electronically.

Information on current events at the Agency and within the higher education sector as well as from the University Chancellor is published on the Agency's Intranet together with important decisions and minutes from internal meetings.

There is a weekly update of what has been written in the press about the Agency and the higher education sector, as well as a weekly newsletter on international developments.

It is not clear how these resources are used by the members of the Evaluation Department staff.

**Computers and other equipment**

All the staff at the Evaluation Department have both a stationary computer and a laptop with specially adapted software. The need of support varies among the staff and the support given is often felt to be insufficient.

All staff have their own stationary office telephone. Mobile phones can be borrowed for site visits or other journeys. This is such a complicated procedure that most staff elect to use their own mobiles instead.

On each floor of the building there is a printer, a copying machine and a fax. Printers function well for the most part and are serviced regularly.

**Offices and other premises**

The Agency moved to a new building in June 2003 and most of the Department staff have a good impression of the new and newly renovated premises. The major drawback is that the Department staff are now located on two different floors. The consequences of this state of affairs for cooperation and unity are still unclear.

All staff members have their own office, which are in most cases somewhat smaller than in the previous building. There is a certain lack of large meeting-rooms.

# Process

## **Planning and implementing reviews**

The work of the Department is dominated by three forms of review: subject and programme reviews; quality audits and reviews for degree-awarding powers. The process of these activities is described in the following.

Subject and programme reviews and quality audits comprise the following main phases.

- Departmental/institutional self-assessment
- Putting together the panel of experts
- Site visit
- Writing the report
- Follow-up

The reviews for degree-awarding powers require the institution to submit a description of its own capacity for providing the education in accordance with the application. Otherwise, this form of review follows the general process outlined above.

## **Self-assessments**

The departmental/institutional self-assessment is usually regarded as the most valuable phase of the Agency's evaluations. It is intended to promote the department's/institution's own quality enhancement and also to be a basis for the Agency's assessment.

The Agency has prepared written guidelines for self-assessments – for example, broad participation is recommended – and what they should contain. The departments/institutions are also encouraged to suggest adaptations to suit their own particular subjects.

Departments and institutions often point out that the self-assessment activities are demanding and expensive. At the same time they usually find the work meaningful. The possibility of adapting the guidelines to suit their special conditions have meant a lot for the acceptance of this phase.

The most common shortcomings of the self-assessment reports are the lack of analysis and self-criticism. Furthermore, the demands for quantitative data have been difficult to meet. These demands have been reduced. In cases of major deficiencies, supplementary information has been asked for.

### **The composition of the panel of experts**

The external panels of experts in the subject and programme reviews usually consist of Nordic subject experts and students and/or PhD students. In reviews of professional degrees representatives of employers/professional organisations are included. The Swedish experts on a panel never participate in the assessment of institutions where they have been active, or where, for other reasons, they may be biased. The size and composition of the panel is adapted to the number of departments and subjects included in the review. We make efforts to achieve a reasonable distribution with regard to age and gender. The experts are chiefly recruited on the basis of proposals from departments. One of the experts is appointed as chair of the panel.

There is a first introduction meeting at which the experts are given information by the Agency staff responsible for the review in question. This meeting contains a survey of the review model and process and also an overview of the Swedish system of higher education. This overview has proved to be of great importance not only for foreign experts but also for the Swedish ones. Introduction efforts have increased gradually over the years.

The Evaluation Department regards the presence of Nordic experts as an important asset. It brings both a broader perspective and a larger measure of impartiality. The reviews are given more legitimacy by the fact that institutions have the opportunity to recommend names of experts. However, this method also makes it possible for them to propose people who they know have a positive view of the institution, and to reject those who may be critical. Thus, there is a risk that the experts might act as a conservative force. We have therefore considered it important to supplement the recommendations of the institutions with further references and to come up with proposals of our own. In the last resort it is the Agency that decides the membership of the expert panels.

The audit panels are recruited among the leadership of Swedish and Nordic higher education institutions. Also the panels include representatives of business and industry or public administration. In this case, too, the selection of panel members is discussed with the institution before the Agency appoints them.

The panels for reviews for degree-awarding powers are smaller, since their task is to review *one* subject at *one* institution. The institutions have limited possibilities of affecting the selection of panel members. These panels do not usually include international members.

### **Site visits**

All the Agency's reviews include site visits. In subject and programme reviews they take place at all the institutions where the subject is taught for a degree. A typical visit lasts for one day, and the panels interview the department leadership, students, teaching staff, programme coordinators etc. At



institutions that provide PhD programmes doctoral students and supervisors are also interviewed. Today, it is also mandatory to meet with faculty leadership, or, at small institutions, the Vice-Chancellor. Each category is interviewed separately. The aim of the meetings is to supplement and clarify the department's self-assessment.

The information gathered at the site visits is very important for the assessment of the activities of the individual department. The limited amount of time makes it necessary for the visit to be planned meticulously and for the panel to be well prepared. This is especially important in large reviews which require the panel to be divided up into several smaller groups during the visit. As a rule, it takes several visits before a panel is wholly familiar with the task and has found well functioning means of cooperation. There is every reason to develop further the introduction in order for the site visits to work well from the very beginning.

The audit site visits last between two and five days depending on the size and complexity of the institution. The panel interviews the leadership, deans, selected representatives of departments and other units, and students.

### **Follow-ups**

About three months after the publication of a subject or program review the departments involved are invited to a follow-up conference. The conference aims to exchange experiences, discuss cooperative efforts, to present examples of good practice, and also to discuss views on the implementation of the review. A number of proposals for improvements of the methodology have been made and have been taken into consideration for further development.

Reviews that have resulted in the questioning of degree-awarding powers are followed up after one year. If the weaknesses have not been sufficiently well improved the institution will lose its right to award the degree in question.

After three years a follow-up of all reviewed programmes and subjects will be made. The aim is to how the departments have dealt with the recommendation given in the report and what improvements have been made. These three-year follow-ups have not yet taken place, but several different methods will be used, for example questionnaires, interviews or meetings. A strategy for this phase and for how results should be dealt with is needed.

Until the year 2000 the quality audits were followed up through a written statement by the institution and a visit by the University Chancellor. This procedure has been phased out.

This year the national thematic review from 1999 of how institutions work with gender equality, student influence and social and ethnic diversity is being followed up specially.

The Agency annually reports to the Government on the progress, development and results of the review system. The primary aim of this report is

to provide the Government with an account of the current state of affairs, but it also gives the Department an opportunity to reflect on the reviews that have been made during the year and to give general information to all those who are interested in the quality of higher education in Sweden.

One further attempt to find the effects of the Agency's quality reviews has been a questionnaire to those responsible for quality matters at universities and colleges. The answers have been collated and been discussed at a conference in Spring 2003.

### **Reports**

The writing of the reports of reviews for degree-awarding powers and quality audits rarely pose any problems. The reports of subject and programme reviews, on the other hand, are bigger and, therefore, more problematic, both with a view to the amount of work involved and the question of who are our readers. They are divided into three parts: the Experts' report, the Agency's reflections and the Agency's decision.

The Experts' report consists of a section providing assessments of each of the institutions, a section which assesses the general status of the subject/programme in Sweden. The Agency's reflections, written by the project manager emphasises those aspects that are particularly important from an overall national perspective. The final part is the Agency's decision on the degree-awarding powers. It is clear that not all readers perceive the difference between these three parts and how to relate to them.

The work is further complicated by the fact that it is the project managers that write more or less the whole report, including the bulk of it that contains the experts' views. It is a difficult task to create a whole out of the often conflicting impressions provided by the various member of the panel. The large projects involve several staff members, which means that the stylistic qualities of different writers must be made consistent.

In many reviews much energy is spent on creating a suitable structure of the report. We have the ambition that the writing of the reports should begin as early as possible and that drafts of the section related to the individual institutions should be written soon after the site visit. The final design of the report will, however, depend on the special focus and findings, and for obvious reasons these will be apparent to the experts only after the majority of the institutions have been visited. Consequently, most of the writing will take place towards the end of the project. This circumstance, in conjunction with the fact that the project managers have a high level of ambition and eventually feel tired of the material, often leads to stress at this phase.

### **Changes in assessment practice**

Clearly, the composition of the panel as well as the backgrounds and values of the individual members play a role for the assessments made. The Agency

tries to minimize the number of differences in assessments through directives of how reviews should be implemented, through common quality aspects, and through training of experts. In large-scale reviews it is even more important to have a consistency in the way assessments are made, especially if the panel is divided up into subgroups in the course of the activities.

The quality aspects have remained more or less the same through the years of subject and programme reviews. Panels have sometimes chosen to focus different aspects in order to take the special conditions of different subjects into account. The Agency encourages such initiatives.

In the first year a subject/programme review could result in either the degree-awarding power being questioned, or in “serious criticism” or in full approval. A discussion of the suitability of such grading led to only two levels: “questioning” and “approval”.

After this change several institutions have had their degree-awarding powers questioned in more cases than earlier, and it now looks as if our ambition level has changed noticeably. However, we maintain that the change has to do with the fact that results can now be expressed at two levels only. There is reason to believe, for example, that many of the bachelor engineering degrees which were questioned would have received only “serious criticism” if that level had still been applied.

It is important for the Agency to reflect on the effects of the different principles of assessment. The two-level scale gives a clearer result, but also involves a risk that the identified shortcomings lead to consequences that are too far-reaching. In a long-term perspective, this may result in more reluctance on the part of panels to point out shortcomings.

### **The relation of reviews to other Agency activities**

Our different kinds of reviews are the core of the Agency, and other activities relate in some way or other to them. All the staff at the Evaluation Department are involved in these tasks. IN 2002, 11 subject and 4 programme reviews had been carried out, together with 14 quality audits. A large number of reviews for degree-awarding powers have been carried out at the same time and staff members have also participated in projects together with other departments. Our work also involves other activities, for example arranging conferences and meetings with quality management staff at the institutions. Thus, one and the same person may be involved in a large number of activities – which is both stimulating and distracting.

Since quality reviews are central to the Department, many discussions, seminars and other meetings deal with these tasks. Staff development also aims at further development of reviews and of our competence as evaluators and project managers.

### **The role of the staff of the Evaluation Department**

The staff of the Evaluation Department have different roles in all the different types of projects in which we participate. We coordinate projects, which involves a responsibility for establishing review panels as well as for making project logistics work, i.e. travel, lodging, planning of site visits, meeting facilities, distribution of information and material. Project managers are also responsible for the writing of almost all the texts and for seeing to it that they conform to established principles (quality aspects, and other perspectives).

The character and importance of these roles differ. That practical arrangements function is fundamental for the success of the whole project. Unfortunately, the need to focus on practical arrangements often means that both time and efforts are taken from the tasks that are more central to the contents of the project. When the often heavy travel periods and site visits are over, the project enters a period when much energy goes into seeing to it that the contents of the report live up to what is expected. The larger the project, the more demanding is this process, and the nearer the end of the project, the greater the responsibility of the project manager for the writing process.

These difficulties could be solved through better allocation of work and a delegation of responsibilities for the different tasks involved in the project. The project manager could then focus on managing the project and thus make his/her role clearer. The question is if the staff members would accept such a scheme or if the project managers would be willing to share responsibility.

It may be added that the project manager often has to spend time doing administrative tasks such as dispatching large quantities of material to the panels and sometimes booking hotel rooms and making travel arrangements.

### **Methodological considerations**

In all forms of evaluation the object and the attributes to be evaluated are important to the methodology to be used. In the different kinds of assessments made by the Evaluation Department the object is either at the department level or at the institutional level. What is assessed is the quality of the object, which is considered from two different perspectives. It is seen as a static concept, when the assessment is about whether the object meets, or does not meet, preconceived quality criteria. This perspective occurs primarily in the reviews for degree-awarding powers and affects primarily the department level. It is seen as a dynamic concept when the assessment is about how successful the processes of developing, assuring and enhancing quality are. This is the case in quality audits and concerns primarily the institution as a whole.

The subject and programme reviews concern mainly the department level. The combined aims of contributing to the quality enhancement of departments and of assessing whether the institution should maintain its right to award a specific degree make it necessary to use both these perspectives. As will be seen, this results in limitations to how suitable different parts of the methodology are.

The methods and reasons are most distinct in the reviews for degree-awarding powers as the aims are more or less unambiguous. Because of their complex aims the subject and programme reviews and quality audits, on the other hand, contain parts based on earlier evaluation models as well as parts that are unique.

### **The origins of the methods**

The basis of the methods originates in the 1993 higher education reform and the new degree structure from the same year. The new steering mechanism based on management by goals and results rather than by rule established new demands for different kinds of evaluations. The first evaluations were assessments of a number of applications for the right to award masters' degrees in a number of subjects. These applications were submitted to the Government by colleges that did not have a permanent research organisation. In the mid-1990s the institutions' efforts to assure and enhance the quality of their activities were focused and the quality audits were initiated.

*The reviews for degree-awarding powers* aim to establish comparable national educational standards. A master's degree in a subject should be comparable but not identical, regardless of the institution where it is awarded. From this perspective, criteria for a number of quality aspects were formulated. These aspects are an interpretation and concretisation of the Higher Education Act and Ordinance and are the basis of all applications for the right to award degrees. In a similar way further criteria are developed for the reviews for the right to award various professional degrees.

The foundation of the *quality audits* is that there does not exist a national model of quality assurance and enhancement and that such a model is not desirable. Each audit is thus unique and based on the conditions prevailing at the specific institution. What is assessed is then the development there, and how it can be strengthened. The common frame of reference developed to support the auditors is the notion of what constitutes excellence in the higher education institution. The focus of the audits is to illustrate and assess how well the chain plan – do – check – act works. The audits also aim to analyse how well quality work is accepted at different levels in the institution.

Subject and programme reviews may be said to be a combination of these two views. The bases of the reviews for degree-awarding powers are a natural frame of reference for the aim of determining whether the institution should

retain its right to award a specific degree. In order to meet the enhancement goal (or as it is expressed in the Government Bill “to mobilise the inner forces of quality enhancement in higher education” a focus on fitness for purpose is a suitable point of departure.

### **The scientific basis of the reviews**

The theory-oriented approach often stated as the basis of the subject and programme reviews is founded on an overall perspective of preconditions – process – outcome. The model aims to explain the relationship between these three steps on the basis of information on and analysis of each of them. The method enables the reviewers to make statements on what enhancement measures are necessary and possible in order to achieve the main goal of promoting the development of the object under review. It is particularly important for the success of the undertaking that the reviewers formulate a distinct frame of reference to serve as a grid.

In all the subject and programme reviews so far, such frames of reference have been developed, but the scope and quality have varied, and often they have been formulated at the end of the review process.

Finally, it must be said that the main activity of the Department is not research. This does not mean that what we do cannot be based on or be described with the help of scientific models.

## **Prioritised perspectives**

### **The student perspective**

The student perspective is central to several of the questions we ask departments in the self-assessment guidelines.

Students are always represented in our review panels as matter of principle. In order to focus their situation in the panels the Department invited students to a seminar on 6 November 2002. In the seminar the general opinion expressed by the students/doctoral students was that they had been respected as members of the panels.

During the site visits it is the panel’s ambition to meet students from different levels and with different specialities. The interviews with students are often very important for what is finally written in the report.

In connection with the publication of the report the Information Department prepares a special summary aimed at students. This summary is published on the Agency’s website for students: studera.nu. It also contains certain factual information besides that which is taken from the report.

The Agency has participated in a Nordic project examining student participation in quality reviews and in self-evaluations.

Though the Department works actively to include a student perspective in the reviews, we sometimes notice that the self-evaluations have been carried out with poor acceptance among staff and students. Often they have not even participated in the process and have received the self-evaluation report only a few days before they are due to meet the panel. Sometimes the students do not really seem to understand the aim of the site visit.

### **The gender and equality perspective**

In order to meet demands for gender equality we always make efforts to have equal representation of men and women on the panels. However, it has turned out that it is sometimes difficult to recruit women. It is a well-known fact that highly qualified women academics are in high demand for representation on boards and teams of experts.

The guidelines for self-evaluation contain questions on equality and gender issues. The departments are asked to describe and analyse how equality between men and women is observed and promoted in the programme and at the department generally, and how gender issues are dealt with in teaching and examination. These issues are also covered at the site visits.

In a seminar led by an external consultant in 2003 the Evaluation Department has discussed how we could work to obtain more knowledge and to integrate more efficiently the equality and gender perspectives in our activities.

### **Social and ethnic diversity**

The guidelines for self-evaluation also include a question on what departments do to promote social and ethnic diversity. These aspects are not consistently paid attention to at site visits, however. We make no attempts to recruit experts from particular social or non-European ethnic groups.

## **Cooperation and internationalisation**

### **Universities and colleges**

We cooperate with universities and colleges as a matter of course, in line with the general orientation of the Department's activities. We regularly contact the institutional managements every year for planning the next set of reviews. Also, there is at least one annual meeting of the institutional managements and the leadership of the Agency, at which evaluation issues are a central part. There are also formal and informal discussions with the Association of Swedish Higher Education and in the University Chancellor's Council of Vice-Chancellors (a group four Vice-Chancellors representing different kinds of institutions).

In recent years the Evaluation Department has arranged regular conferences with quality managers at the institutions. They are invited at least once every year to discuss how we can improve the conditions for the different forms of evaluations and their implementation. These meetings also serve as an opportunity for exchanging information among institutions.

The Agency, largely the Evaluation Department, is also responsible for the regularly recurring Quality Conference, arranged in cooperation with different institutions. Five such conferences have been organised so far, and between 400 and 500 participants enrol each time.

Individual staff members have extensive contacts with universities and colleges mainly in connection with each project. These contacts have improved considerably during the last year, mainly because of improved routines at the Agency as well as at institutions.

The Department has established a position as Deputy Head of Department responsible for planning, contacts, monitoring and follow-up. This has resulted in a stricter process, from the first contacts with institutions in preparation of a new round of reviews to the final and follow-up stages. Thanks to these procedures, contacts between each project and the institution have become much smoother.

#### **Other actors in the higher education sector**

The leaderships at the Ministry of Education and Science and the Agency meet regularly. The University Chancellor, her office staff and the Head of the Evaluation Department meet above all the State Secretary for higher education and the Director General for higher education to discuss the Agency's activities in general and the implementation and results of reviews in particular.

There are certain contacts with the Swedish Research Council when experts are appointed. The Council's response varies. The Agency has cooperated with another research council in connection with a joint review of undergraduate studies, postgraduate studies and research in the field of social work.

Individual staff members participate in the activities of the two Swedish associations for evaluation.

#### **International contacts**

The Agency (the Department) participates actively in the work of three international networks for evaluation organisations:

- *The Nordic Network*, which consists of the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA), the Norwegian organisation, NOKUT, the Finnish Council for evaluation of higher Education, FINHEEC, and the Icelandic Ministry of Education. Representatives of these organisations meet annually to discuss the situation in the respec-



tive countries. Almost every year a joint project on a specific evaluation theme is carried out. In 2002 there was an exchange of staff between EVA and the Agency. One member of staff from the Department spent a few months at Eva, and a staff member from EVA spent a similar amount of time at the Agency.

- Department staff members participate in the annual meetings and contribute to some of the seminars and workshops organised by the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (ENQA), a *European organisation*, which plays a role in the development of the Bologna process and European higher education policy. Besides participating in European development of quality assurance and enhancement in higher education, ENQA arranges a number of seminars and workshops on different themes and also publishes a series of “occasional papers”.
- An international network, The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) organises a major conference every second year. In spring 2003, four staff members participated and contributed papers.

Individual members of staff participate in conferences arranged by other international organisations (for example, the European Associations of Institutional Research/EAIR, The International Evaluation Association, The American Evaluation Association). Also, we have direct contacts with other, mainly European evaluation agencies, for example in the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands and France.

The Department participates in the international discussion on accreditation. The meaning of the concept of accreditation has been discussed in a joint working group of the Association of Swedish Higher Education and the Agency. The work has resulted in a publication. The Agency participates in an international research project on accreditation in Europe led by CHEPS in the Netherlands and the University of Kassel in Germany, and we have also participated in a Nordic project aiming at trying out a model of mutual recognition of evaluation agencies.

So far, the Department has not played a major role in the Bologna process. This is a shortcoming which should be addressed.

The international contacts are important in at least three different ways:

- They contribute to the development of the staff who participate in the work. It is one of the policies of the Agency that anyone who participates at a conference should present a paper or a poster or contribute in some other way. This makes it possible for the individual staff member to establish con-

tacts and to develop his/her analytical writing and his/her ability to appear in public.

- Participation in the Nordic Network, where we are most active and which affects the Department to a fairly large extent, helps to support those who take part in exchange programmes, meetings and joint projects. Above all the exchanges contribute to reflection on similarities, differences and developments.
- It is necessary to participate in the work of the other international networks and organisations in order to obtain information on international developments and, to some extent, contribute to them.

The weekly Department meetings provide an opportunity to disseminate information on international developments, but there is no clear impact internally. There is no general awareness of what is going on internationally. We need a strategy to disseminate information and to provide opportunities for more staff members to share international experiences.

# Results

## **Impacts on the higher education sector**

### **Subject and programme reviews**

In 2001 and 2002 the Evaluation Department conducted a total of 486 subject and programme reviews (one review is defined as an evaluation of either undergraduate provision or postgraduate provision in a subject at one institution).

In connection with the 2001 reviews the right to award a degree was questioned in eight cases because the department concerned did not meet the requirements for higher education provision. The institutions concerned had to take steps to remedy the deficiencies within a year. In another ten cases there was “serious criticism”. The institutions were then given a certain amount of time to submit an action plan, and the Agency then decided on possible consequences. In the following year the number of unacceptable instances was 38.

The Evaluation Department has not yet begun the follow-ups that form part of the national evaluation programme. The knowledge we have of the enhancement effect of the reviews comes from feedback conferences, a few months after the termination of each evaluation project. The Department has also sent out a questionnaire to the quality managers at the institutions. In their answers they give many examples of how quality has been promoted, even if some of the improvements may be only partly due to the reviews. The concrete changes indicated by the institutions concern primarily improved systems for quality assurance.

### **Quality audits**

The first quality audits were made in 1995 – 1998, and in 2002 a four-year follow-up round was terminated. A total of 72 audits have been made. The Agency has decided not to repeat the audits in the same way a third time.

In contrast to the Agency’s other reviews the audits never lead to sanctions. The element of control is thus toned down. Certain universities and colleges maintain that this makes the audits toothless and that this is one of the reasons why quality work has a low priority in some institutions. Others claim that it is precisely the absence of a clear control element which gives the audits legitimacy. After the first four years it could be seen that quality work at most of the institutions was still in an early phase. After another

four years it is still only about one-third of the institutions that can demonstrate well-developed quality assurance and enhancement systems. At the same time nearly all institutions seem to have made clear progress between the first and the second round. Revised policy documents, the establishment of quality coordinators and quality groups, alumni follow-ups, student barometers and employer questionnaires are some concrete examples of such improvements. Several quality coordinators claim that they have found the audit recommendations useful.

#### **The reviews for the right to award degrees, to obtain a scientific area or university status**

The National Agency has conducted over 600 reviews for the right to award masters and bachelors degrees and various professional degrees. Just below one-fourth of the applications have been rejected. The Agency has also handled some ten applications for a scientific area or for university status.

These reviews are normally followed up after a certain period of time and in the subject and programme reviews. About half of the reviews have been followed up, which has resulted in the withdrawal of the right in seven cases.

The Agency has not systematically followed up the development of the institutions which have been granted the right to award degrees, scientific area or university status, but in the subject and programme reviews we can see how those evaluations have affected the activities of the institutions. These institutions seem to have strengthened the subjects and programmes concerned after the evaluations. So even if the main purpose of the reviews is control, they seem to have led to enhancement.

#### **Other activities at the Evaluation Department**

Other activities carried out at the Evaluation Department include special tasks given by the Government and special projects initiated by ourselves.

Since 2001 the Department has been responsible for two Government projects: The "LUMA project" (a trilateral comparative evaluation of chemistry and mathematics at some higher education institutions in Hungary, Sweden and Finland) and the recently initiated project Study support for certain naprapathy and chiropractice programmes. The Enquiry into the situation of "small" languages – a government project which the Department for Planning and Research was responsible for with our support – was established as a consequence of the subject review of Classical Languages.

At present the Evaluation Department is conducting, or has recently concluded, three special projects. The project on the promotion reform, which has just been concluded, is an evaluation of the impact of the 1999 reform of the structure of academic posts. As a consequence, the Department has recently received a Government commission to investigate the special situa-

tion and the future role of instructors (teachers without a PhD) in higher education.

The project Specialist Nursing – Admission Requirements and Student Numbers will analyse the design of the Specialist Nursing programme. The project was initiated in 2003.

### **Analysis – impact in the higher education sector**

What we know about the impact in the higher education sector is described in the Department's annual report to the Government in the publication *How did things turn out?* The follow-up of results and effects is largely limited to checking that deficiencies identified in the reviews have been remedied.

One observation is that the self-evaluation activities lead to development, not least because they contribute to raising the awareness of quality issues in the institution. Many departments have introduced the Agency's evaluation model in their own work.

An important future task is to examine the extent to which good quality work in an institution leads to higher quality in the educational provision.

Reviews and enquiries tend to generate new questions, and new reviews, enquiries and projects are initiated as spin-off effects of those already concluded. However, The Department's current resources, and maybe also the organisational structures, limit the staff members' opportunities to carry on such projects. One example is the project Structural issues, which was planned for 2003 but which was postponed until further notice at a fairly early stage.

It would, however, be useful to know more about which qualitative and quantitative efforts lead to higher quality.

### **Impacts outside the higher education sector**

#### **Mass media**

The monitoring of the press coverage of our activities carried out by the Information Department shows that our results reach an audience. All our subject and programme reviews are noted by the press. Reviews of great national interest are brought up by radio and newspapers.

A media analysis from July 2002 establishes that the Agency presence in the press has increased by over 25 per cent since August 2001. Publicity is most significant in the month of March. This may be due to the fact that most of our reports are published during that period. The media analysis also confirms that quality reviews are among those areas that arouse the greatest interest in the media. But it is not only evaluation reports that are

noted. A report generating widespread interest was the final report on the promotion reform

Media reports on our reviews have become of more local interest. In spite of this, the majority of media consumers obtain information about our activities via the press in the large cities.

The Agency is rarely criticised in the media. Analyses and reviews are most often presented without questioning.

### **Parliament**

The work of the Agency has been noted in Parliament. A search for the word *Högskoleverket* shows that during the previous parliament the work of the Evaluation Department was mentioned in nearly forty speeches. A minority concerned our control activities, i.e. reviews for degree-awarding powers or university status. Most were unspecific references to our subject and program reviews.

The Minister of Education and Science is responsible for the vast majority of these statements, but all parties are represented. Other activities mentioned concern the report on the promotion reform. Representatives of all parties speak with appreciation about the activity of the Department.

## **Summary analysis of the activities of the Evaluation Department**

### **Strengths**

- The Evaluation Department's staff is committed, well educated and has experience as evaluators. There is a mix of competencies and ages and the staff get along well in their work and with each other.
- The Department uses internationally accepted models for its different kinds of evaluations, and our work is looked upon as advanced.
- The Department has excellent relations with the higher education sector, nationally and to some extent internationally.

### **Weaknesses**

- There is an uneven workload over the year with considerable pressure on project managers and other staff at times.
- The role of project manager is sometimes heavy, and the situation is exacerbated by the fact that a number of administrative chores end up on the project manager's desk.
- The time accounting system does not work satisfactorily and cannot be used as a planning and monitoring instrument.

- Projects involving international engagements are unevenly distributed among the staff.
- “Social and ethnic diversity” is not in practice the high priority perspective of reviews that it should be according to Government directives.

**The following weaknesses should be addressed in the next few years:**

- The space for analytical studies of the reviews should be increased. Such studies will become of particular interest when the three-year follow-ups are initiated in 2004 – 2005.
- A strategy for the follow-ups of the subject and program reviews should be prepared.
- Discussions on the design of a new evaluation model from the year 2007 need to be initiated.
- The staffing situation needs to be addressed.

# The Department's quality assurance and quality enhancement efforts

## **Staff development**

### **Staff members' own responsibility**

Since February 2003 The National Agency has had a new policy for staff development. It defines staff development as a tool that includes everything that increases the competence of the staff members, for example new and more advanced tasks, introduction programmes, courses, seminars, participation in networks, supervising or mentor programmes. The policy states that each staff member is responsible himself/herself for his/her own development and that it should be planned in development discussions with the head of department.

As a rule, courses and training programmes that have been offered have been introduced at the staff's own behest. These requests have sometimes been the result of development discussions.

Most of the courses have been purchased by the Personnel Department, who have, for the most part, been responsible for the administration of the programme. Often external course providers are used. Sometimes internal courses have been arranged, for example by the Information Department.

### **Courses and training programmes**

In a questionnaire for this self-study, the staff members have been asked to list the courses/training programmes that they have participated in. Several respondents name the same or similar courses. In all, everybody has been offered over 15 courses. Only two respondents have participated in courses outside this "package". These courses included an external evaluation training programme, an EU course and two postgraduate courses in education.

Some courses are compulsory, for example, the project manager training given in 2003. All staff members participated. There is a positive correlation between the number of courses a person has taken and the duration of employment.

Most courses have been judged to be rewarding and there were only a few negative judgements. There is, however, a need to systematise the provision. The department would profit from a strategy for staff development. It is



also important that courses are repeated with a certain amount of regularity as new staff members are employed.

### **Monitoring external developments – conferences**

The Agency Platform for 1999 – 2004 establishes that the Agency should have an open dialogue with various actors and groups that can be said to constitute its stakeholders. This dialogue is mainly carried out by the University Chancellor and the Head of Department, and, to a large extent, also through the various contacts of staff members – via conferences and networks.

Participating in conferences and seminars is an important part of the monitoring of external developments. The questionnaire shows that this is an area where we are active.

In total, staff members have participated in about 50 conferences and seminars in the last two and a half years. Most of us have taken part in the Agency's quality conferences. We participate in other conferences mostly on our own initiative. Finding these conferences takes time and knowledge and probably well functioning networks. The questionnaire shows that it is most often the most experienced staff members who participate in conferences. Conferences and seminars are generally rated as less valuable than courses and training programmes.

The Department's policy states that the person who goes to a conference should submit a paper. Since there is no general strategy for how conferences should be used – for individual development or for the development of the Department as a whole – the purpose of participation is unclear. Feedback to colleagues does not work very well.

### **External networks and reference groups**

Participation in external networks is not as common as participation at conferences. It is unevenly spread among the staff members – some take part, others not at all. There are many specialised networks, which requires a certain amount of knowledge and contacts. It is generally the most experienced staff who join networks and external enquiries.

### **Methodology development**

The staff of the Department enjoy a considerable measure of freedom as well as responsibility. Anyone who is responsible for a project has a relatively large amount of space in which to plan and implement it. However, the methods and models of our reviews limit this freedom and any development efforts carried out within that framework.

### **Support**

Internal support has improved considerably in the last few years. This is largely due to the introduction of a new post, Assistant Head of Department, responsible for planning, coordination and monitoring of activities. This has led to increased systematisation, including:

- The internal instructions found on our Intranet describe the process from preparations to the final filing of documents. They also include important experiences from earlier reviews. They are updated continually.
- The project managers for each year's reviews meet regularly to discuss their experiences and problems and to raise questions of common interest.
- After the conclusion of each review, there are follow-up meetings with the project group concerned in order to gather experiences from the review and the work of the group.
- Documents from earlier projects are collected in a file to serve as inspiration for future project managers.
- There is now a decision that the section of the report known as the *Agency's Reflections* should be discussed at one of the weekly Department meetings before the reports are published.
- Project managers should submit written accounts of their experiences.

In autumn 2003, monitoring meetings between the project group and the Head of Department were introduced. They take place about half-way through the project.

A number of Department meetings have addressed questions such as appointment of expert panels, reports and self-evaluation guidelines. One meeting has also been devoted to a follow-up of the project manager training that all staff members have attended.

### **Other forms of quality assurance and enhancement**

In 2002 three external scholars reviewed the work of the Department, and especially the perception of expert panels and institutions of the model.

An external evaluation expert has written a discussion paper on the evaluation model used by the Agency.

One staff member has been responsible for project on whether and how degree projects (theses) can be used as part of the material for evaluation.

The work of the Advisory Board is an important part of assuring the quality of our own work.

## **Summary of quality assurance and enhancement activities**

### **Strengths**

- There are good opportunities for participating in staff development
- There are also reasonable opportunities for participating in conferences and seminars
- The Department has high ambitions and a great interest in developing methodology, and a number of projects are carried out to assure the quality of our work.
- The Department is aware of the problems of the organisation, of internal and external cooperation, the economic situation and the infrastructure. A number of different activities have been carried out and are planned for the future. The organisation of the work and the economic situation are monitored.

### **Weaknesses**

- We need a long-term strategy for staff development
- We need to clarify the aims of conference participation and improve feedback to the rest of the Department.

### **Some further points that need to be addressed**

- Cooperation with other departments should be developed. It is essential that better reciprocity be achieved.
- We need a more systematic discussion, in the form of internal seminars, of methods including a review of earlier stages and an introduction of quality assurance and enhancement issues for new staff.