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Responsible QA – committing to impact

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Paper proposal form

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Please note that all fields are obligatory. For a detailed description of the submission requirements and Frequently Asked Questions please consult the Call for Contributions.

Author(s)

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Short bio (150 words max): Viveka has a PhD in Medical Sciences from Uppsala University from 2001. After graduation she worked for 10 years in several positions at Sida (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) in the area of research cooperation, primarily with the universities in Africa (Tanzania, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Mozambique) as well as with global organisations such as WHO. She joined UKÄ and the Department of Quality Assurance in 2011 and is Head of Unit since 2013. She has the primary responsibility for institutional reviews, programme accreditations and internationalisation issues.

Name: Robin Moberg

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Short bio (150 words max):

Robin Moberg holds a MA from Södertörn University. At Södertörn University he held the position as president of the student union before he was elected vice president of SFS, The Swedish National Union of Students. As vice president he was responsible for the organisations international work. As a student representative he has wide-ranged experience of assessing higher education, policy making and student involvement in decision making. Moberg was an elected member of the board at Södertörn University and the quality council working with policy analysis and quality assurance strategies. Furthermore, he has worked as studentombudsman and project manager with responsibility for higher education and labor market related issues at a trade union. Since 2013 Moberg works at the Department of Quality Assurance at UKÄ. He has been involved in developing new methods for quality assurance at UKÄ, with special responsibility for gender perspectives.



Proposal

Title: The use of monitoring and evaluation framework and business logic – the way to more responsible external quality assurance?

Abstract (150 words max):

In 2017, UKÄ started to pilot a new EQA model. The guiding principles include: a coherent model in line with ESG and a focus on both output and internal processes. The model comprises four components; institutional reviews, programme evaluations, programme accreditations and thematic evaluations. Given the complexity of the model one challenge is how to use resources wisely to avoid evaluation fatigue. The effects of the earlier system 2011-2014 has been subject to a series of studies, including one by UKÄ (2015). To facilitate future evaluations, UKÄ is now building in monitoring and evaluation in its follow-up framework. This will enable UKÄ to report if and how EQA contributes to development and high quality in the programmes offered.

A preliminary observation halfway through the pilots are overlaps between program evaluations and institutional reviews. Against this background, a clearer reasoning on desirable impact of the different review components is needed in the M&E framework and this will guide UKÄ in the revision of the model.

The paper is based on: research / policy / **practice** (select one)

Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? No.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

Title: The use of monitoring and evaluation framework and business logic – the way to more responsible external quality assurance?

The past

In 2014, The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) completed the mission to evaluate all programmes leading to the award of first or second cycle qualifications during a four-year cycle. Its focus, assessing goal attainment through systematic appraisal of independent projects made it unique in its approach and design and also controversial. This rather explicit output focus entailed placing greater emphasis on control than enhancement, an approach disharmonising with the ESG.

The present

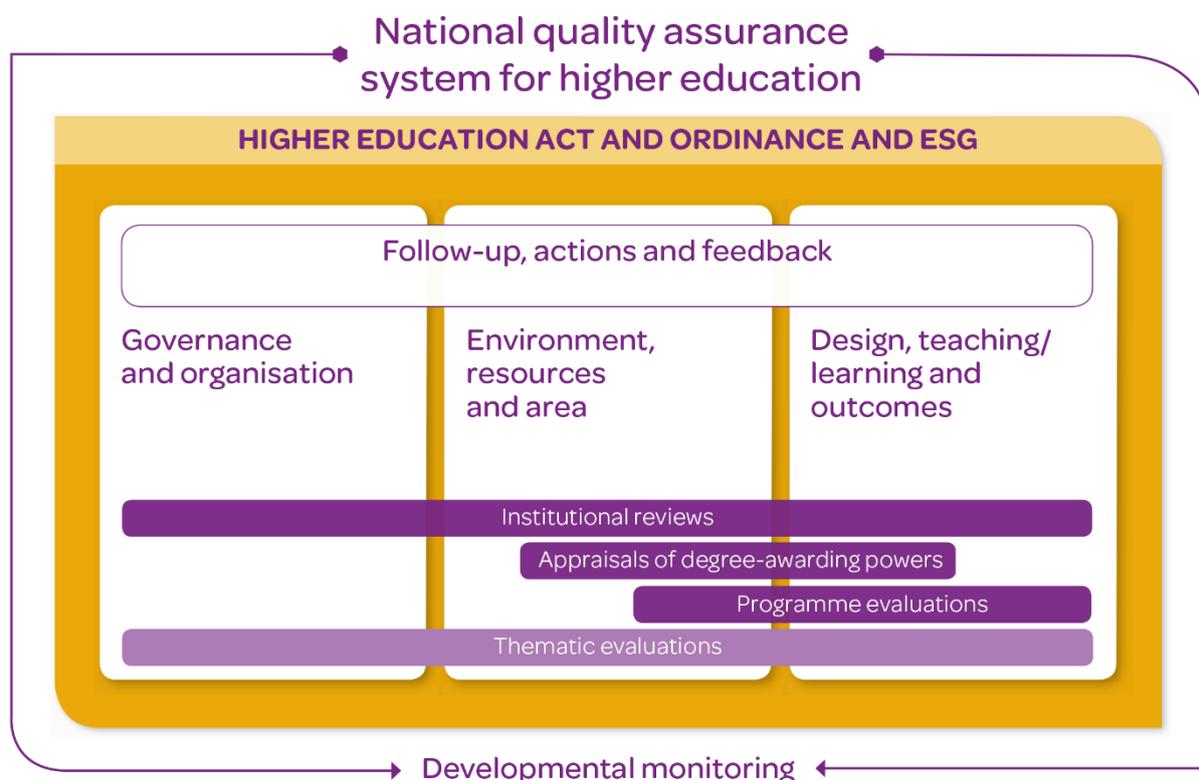
In 2016, UKÄ was given the mandate to develop and implement a new system in accordance with the ESG (*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*) as well as the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance. The objectives of UKÄ's reviews are to assess the quality of the study programmes and contribute to the HEIs' work with quality improvements in higher education. Hence, the new model for EQA has a focus on both control and enhancement. Other guiding principles have been a reinforced role of students and labour market representatives and a focus on both output and internal processes. It comprises four components; institutional reviews, programme evaluations, appraisals of degree awarding power (programme accreditations) and thematic evaluations. In the new system, HEIs and UKÄ have a shared responsibility for quality assurance in higher education. Valuing this shared responsibility has been a core principle of UKÄ in its work with the government assignment to develop a new system for quality assurance in higher education. It has been important to create a clear link between UKÄ's reviews and the quality assurance processes at the HEIs, while also considering how UKÄ's reviews can contribute to further improving HEIs quality work.

The reviews will be based on aspects developed in dialogue with representatives from HEIs, teachers, students, employers and the labour market. The aspects are grouped into four aspect areas, which have been defined based on what part of the HEI's activities they cover. The four aspect areas are:

- governance and organisation
- environment, resources and area
- design, teaching/learning and outcomes
- follow-up, actions and feedback.

In addition to the four aspect areas, the reviews include three perspectives. These perspectives are:

- **student and doctoral student perspective.** How does student influence work in practice? Are students given opportunities and incentives to participate in the HEIs' quality assurance processes and the development of courses and programmes?
- **working life perspective.** Are the courses and programmes useful and how well do they prepare students for future careers?
- **gender equality perspective.** Is equality between women and men taken into account and promoted in the processes at every level of the HEIs organisations?



The aspect areas and perspectives described above form a common basis for UKÄ's reviews within the four components. The relevant aspect areas to be assessed differ between the components because they have different purposes and focuses (Figure 1). For the same reason, the detailed aspects and the assessment criteria may vary in the different components.

Institutional reviews will include all aspect areas. The reviews' focus will be on how well the HEIs' quality assurance processes, including monitoring, action and feedback processes, help to develop



and ensure the quality of the courses and programmes. Furthermore, appraisals of degree-awarding powers and programme evaluations will include the aspect areas 'environment, resources and area', 'design, teaching/ learning and outcomes' and 'follow-up, actions and feedback'. Programme evaluations will focus on actual results and on the follow up processes related to the programmes' results while the appraisal of degree-awarding powers will focus on prerequisites and processes. The focus of the thematic evaluations will vary depending on the theme being evaluated.

However, given the complexity of the system, e.g. the number of review components, the different perspectives to take into consideration and stakeholder expectations, challenges include how to use resources wisely to avoid evaluation fatigue. Further, is the model fit for purpose in relation to intended outcomes of the different reviews? These are issues that will be tested in the ongoing pilots of the institutional reviews and programme evaluations.

Impact studies

Impact studies of external quality assurance in higher education are rare in a global perspective. The effects of the Swedish evaluation system 2011-2014 has been subject to a series of studies, including the one by UKÄ from 2015 (1). The report by UKÄ also contains a comparison between the effects of the 2011–2014 evaluation system and the system adopted between 2001 and 2006. This is particularly interesting to study since the approach (scope, focus and assessment material) of the two systems to a large degree differed. A few reflections based on the arguments and findings in the report are offered below which may be of value for discussions of future evaluation systems.

- Approach and aims in an evaluation system are important, but perhaps even more important are what is appraised. In other words, the materials being used as assessments in the evaluations (self-evaluation, degree projects, site visit) are probably more important than the specified aims of a system. The recent Swedish system focused on the students degree projects as the main material used for assessment, thus HEIs work with improving the degree projects was a major effect.
- One of the conclusions in the report is that the idea of control and enhancement as being opposites is an oversimplification. Evaluations that focuses on control of results could also be enhancing.
- Control requires transparency, in which there is a risk of focusing on quantitative data while with increased focus on qualitative data there is a risk of reduced transparency and comparability.
- Covering and doing everything in an evaluation system may reduce the impact of specific parts. Extending the material used and spreading the weight ascribed to its different material evenly with the intention of providing stronger grounds for the evaluation may mean that the effects of its individual parts are reduced.

The impact study reported above was not part of the initial planning of the EQA system 2011-14. It was made possible partly because of a comprehensive survey undertaken on behalf of the Parliamentary Committee on Education by the Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy Translation at Aarhus University (2) It was also made possible through UKÄ's own data collection and processing. The most important internal material for UKÄ was the follow-up reviews of programs that were assessed as being of inadequate quality. In the report there is a quantitative count of these follow up measures which give a picture on what measures are most common. Other materials were also used, such as interviews with programme managers on programmes that was being assessed as having adequate quality. A survey to peer reviewers also gave interesting results.



However, one important observation is that it was quite time-consuming to summarize conclusions of a model after completion, when self-monitoring and self-assessment is not built into the model. It included a lot of manual data collection and processing.

UKÄ is now building in monitoring and evaluation in its follow-up framework (M&E framework) with outputs, outcomes and impact and indicators that will be used to measure these results. The focus of the M&E framework will be on the methodology and how it can be improved as well as on the effects of the system on HEIs and its activities. Hence, the aims of the M&E framework are twofold; to enable UKÄ in a swift and well-planned manner to revise the method, and to report on short and medium term effects. The latter is also in line with the government's instruction to UKÄ, stating "the Authority shall annually report on how quality assurance contributed to quality development and high quality in the university's activities". The M&E framework would also enable UKÄ to fulfil ESG 3.4 – thematic analysis: *Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.*

In order to achieve the first aim a number of questionnaires have and will continue to be sent out to the HEIs being part of the pilot but it will also include a number of structured interviews and meetings with the expert panels and the involved HEIs.

The pilots

A preliminary observation halfway through the pilots is that there are too much of overlaps between program evaluations and institutional reviews. For example, the judgements of the programme evaluation contain information that better serve the purpose of the institutional reviews, e.g. QA procedures to ensure the right competence of its staff. The previous cycle of programme evaluations was criticised for its explicit and narrow results focus. As it looks now the pendulum might have turned too far in the other direction. Furthermore, questionnaires to the HEIs being part of the pilots indicate a too large number of assessment criteria and issues, which also tend to recur and overlap. This statement is also confirmed by the expert panels with the consequences that the estimated time for the assignment is insufficient.

Against this background, a clearer reasoning on the desirable impact of the different review components both at an overall level but also in the different parts is needed. This will be clarified in the M&E framework and will guide UKÄ in the revision of the model. For example, what is the desirable impact of the gender equality and student perspectives in the institutional reviews and programme evaluations, respectively. It is anticipated that this logic would help UKÄ to streamline the method which would entail a more efficient use of resources.

The intention of the presentation is to share and discuss experiences of this learning process with the audience.

References:

1. The effects of programme evaluations. An analysis of the effects of the national evaluation system 2011–2014. Report 2015:21. The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) 2015
Authors: Henrik Holmquist, Carl Sundström, Gun Eriksson, Charlotte Ejsing
2. Autonomi och kvalitet – ett uppföljningsprojekt om implementering och effekter av två högskolereformer i Sverige. (Autonomy and quality – a follow-up report on the implementation and



effects of two higher education reforms in Sweden). Rapporter från riksdagen (Reports from the Swedish Parliament) 2014/15: RFR5 huvudrapport.

Discussion questions:

- How can EQA agencies work to improve the knowledge about the outputs, outcomes, effects of EQA procedures?
- How can EQA agencies work with M&E framework, business logic/program theory in its planning of EQA?
- How can EQA agencies doing both institutional reviews and programme evaluations ensure relevance and an efficient use of resources and avoid unnecessary overlaps between the two review components?

Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 24 July 2017 to QAForum@eua.be. The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith_Jones.doc. Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.