

Stakeholder cooperation - similarities, differences and good practices

A NOQA project in process

INQAAHE Madrid

4-7 April 2011

Karin Agélii

Stefán Baldursson

Karl Holm

Tove Blytt Holmen

Thomas Lange

Ellen Silleborg

What are we doing

- The Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA) annual joint project 2011.
- The main objective is to create an understanding of different Nordic points of view and practices regarding stakeholder cooperation.
- Particular focus with respect to employers and other representatives of working life.
- Goals of the project: make comparisons, draw conclusions and give examples of good practice within our different countries.
- The findings will be disseminated through workshops for the staff at the Nordic QA-agencies

Main questions during the project

- What is the definition of a stakeholder in our different QA-contexts?
- Who are our main stakeholders?
- How and when do we cooperate with stakeholders?
- What are the benefits of stakeholder cooperation for different actors?
- What competencies are needed from stakeholders taking part in our evaluation of higher education?
- How and where do we find relevant individuals representing working life?

Nordic cooperation in QA

- some statements

- What is a Nordic approach in QA?
- The Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA) has been established by the five Nordic countries and their respective national organizations engaged in evaluation and quality assurance of higher education.
- The main objective of the project is to create an understanding of different Nordic points of view, experiences and practices regarding stakeholder cooperation, in particular with respect to employers and other representatives of working life.

... some more ...

- Governments in each country have assigned one special agency/unit (two in Denmark) to assure and nationally evaluate the quality of higher education.
- Output of the HE sector should be in line with the needs and requirements of the working life and society in general. Essential is to establish sustainable and open cooperation with stakeholders.
- To establish accepted definitions of quality and common general understandings.
- Agencies/units should have autonomous responsibility for their operations.

... even more

- A delicate task for all agencies is that conclusions and recommendations should not be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, governments/ministries or other stakeholders.
- The peer-review model is used when evaluating. Peer/expert groups include representatives from working life.
- A tentative scenario in a peer-less QA-system is that “hard facts” which are easy to gather and measure, for example quantitative figures showing examination rates, retention/drop-out rates or transition rates from university to working life, becomes the main basis for evaluation.

The Nordic QA-agencies

Denmark	ACE Denmark: accreditation of universities EVA: accreditation of colleges and academies
Finland	FINHEEC
Iceland	Ministry of Education and culture working through a group of international experts
Norway	NOKUT deals with more than assessment of HE
Sweden	SNAHE deals with more than assessment of HE

Some general similarities and differences between the agencies

- Assigned by the Ministry/Govern. to conduct national QA
- Using the peer review-model with assessment panels
- Different types of evaluations:
 - Finland (mostly audits) has a strong enhancing and developmental approach
 - Sweden (assessment of subject and programmes) controlling approach with few recommendations attached to the assessments
- Cooperate with the labour market. But the task is differently emphasized. Strongest in Denmark where it is stated in the law. Loosest in Norway.

What is the definition of a stakeholder in our different QA-contexts?

- All agencies can agree on a broad definition f.ex.:
a group or a person representing a group in society which has a special interest in HE
- The stakeholder concept = an “umbrella concept” includes experts/representatives from different fields in society, peers, HEIs, political lobby organisations, the Government/Ministry
- The vocabulary of specific stakeholders (peers, experts etc) is not really set and used in a certain manner within the single Nordic agencies. Might be a need to define...

Who are our main stakeholders?

- the HEIs + representing org. like the rectors' council
- the Ministry/Government through state secretaries and civil servants at the ministry (Iceland is special)
- students through student organisations and single students
- relevant working life/labour market representatives

....Finland/FINHEEC differs and adds various international evaluation organisations (f.ex. ENQA) to the list of their stakeholders

How and when do we cooperate with stakeholders?

- In planned ways which are included in the QA-system
f.ex: - in boards/discussion making groups
 - through invitations to nominate panel members
 - in meetings (assessment panel, self evaluation instruction, site visits etc)
 - in surveys (evaluation of processes)
- In unplanned strategic ways, ad hoc and on demand meetings when it is wise to do so (f.ex. when creating new QA systems, methods and tools)

What are the benefits of stakeholder cooperation for different actors?

- Secures that the output of the HE sector is in line with the needs and requirements of the society in general and the labour market especially
- Acceptance and general understanding of the QA-agencies methods and tools make the assessments run smoothly which in turn (may) enhance the quality of HE...

What competencies are needed from stakeholders taking part in our evaluation of higher education?

- A delicate process to find stakeholders with the suitable knowledge, perspectives and engagement
- Different requirements for different types of stakeholders and for different activities
- The nordic agencies differ in their stated requirements.
- In Denmark f.ex panel members from working life must have an academic degree on at least the same level as the assessed program

How and where do we find relevant individuals representing working life?

The agencies act differently here. The common ways are:

- By nominations (strengthened by CVs etc)
- By strategic hand picking (strengthened by recommendations and CVs etc)
- By letting individuals sign up themselves (strengthened by CVs etc)

Good practices?

Sweden/SNAHE:

- the increasing use of web-meetings to spread information and communicate with stakeholders. Web dialogues can also be used instead of site visits.
- new IT-solutions f.ex. a specially designed on-line database to gather information from the HEIs f.ex. student theses and self evaluations and assessment scores etc from the panel members assessment-scores and motivations

Discussion...

- What do you find important to prioritize concerning stakeholder cooperation?
- Why is it important to analyse the stakeholders and their needs

Thank you very much