

Exploring opportunities: Innovative practices in higher education quality assurance

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The study

Towards standardisation or more diversity in HE-quality assurance?

- What are new tasks and roles of QA agencies in various European countries?
- What are key factors driving these tasks/roles, and how will they impact practices in the future?

Background:
More
uncertainty...

Trends in Europe

- A European higher education system where QA has a key role (ESG)
- Still national jurisdiction over higher education – national agendas matter....
- QA as an instrument for political opportunism
- QA pressured by other developments – new players, complaints about bureaucracy, national reform attempts

The theoretical point-of-departure:

- Agency drift – agencies taking up new tasks, roles and responsibilities
- Europeanization and national jurisdiction may open up for more standardization and more diversity at the same time
- Two strategic directions:
 - New tasks
 - New fields

Data, methods & funding

Approach:

- Initial mapping of «interesting cases»
- Six agencies identified (A3ES, evalag, FINEEC, NVAO, QQI, UKÄ)
- Interviews (17) and document analysis
- Funded by NOKUT

Results (1)

A3ES (2009):

- Strong focus on research and analysis – links to an independent research centre (CIPES)

Evalag (2000):

- One of ten agencies operating in Germany
- Consultancy and R&D project as a way to position itself in the competition?

Results (2)

FINEEC (1996/2014):

- History - a small focused agency
- Merger broadening the scope of activities – covering all levels in education – and new cross-sectoral evaluations carried out

NVAO (2003):

- Cross-border agency (Netherlands/Flanders)
- «Appreciative approach» (Flandern) – a move away from standards and compliance, inquiry driven methods – no template, no comparison

Results (3)

QQI (2012 after a merger):

- Focus on «qualifications» – and responsible for the qualification framework
- New regulative role (private sector) – including financial viability/increasing focus on transnational education

UKÄ (1995/2013):

- Combining QA with a range of other tasks (producing national statistics)
- Piloting QA of research

Reflections

Incrementalism, innovation or transformation?

- «Change» as the (new) normal...
- National authorities still important as configurators, orchestrators of QA (mergers, new tasks, etc)
- Agencies in need to navigate between European and domestic expectations and roles
 - Agencies pursuing both strategic options: new tasks AND new fields...
 - Definition of a QA agency is in flux...?

Access to the
report

Download the report here:

<https://nifu.brage.unit.no/nifu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2720712/NIFUarbeidsnotat2020-7.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>