



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Report 2: NOKUT's national role

Evaluation of NOKUT – The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education

Liv Langfeldt, Lee Harvey, Jeroen Huisman,
Don Westerheijden & Bjørn Stensaker



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From quality assurance to quality improvement

In March 2007, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research invited interested parties to submit proposals for an external review of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). The review had two aims. The first was to examine whether NOKUT meets the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”¹ adopted at the fourth ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in Bergen in May 2005. The second was to evaluate the role played by NOKUT in the Norwegian higher education system.

An evaluation of the Quality Reform was completed in 2007. In May 2006, the government appointed a commission charged with making recommendations for the further development of Norwegian higher education in a 20-year perspective. In this context, the Ministry wanted an independent assessment of whether NOKUT is fulfilling its mandate in line with the intentions behind its establishment in 2003. One of the key issues to be assessed was whether NOKUT contributes substantially to both assuring and developing the quality of Norwegian higher education and other post-secondary vocational education. Another important question was how NOKUT understands its own mission and responsibility.

The international evaluation team has delved deeply into the work of NOKUT and come up with two reports. Both will be useful in helping the Ministry, NOKUT and the institutions to further develop and enhance the quality of Norwegian higher and post-secondary education. The reports also represent the first external review of Norway’s national quality assurance agency in line with the requirements of the European standards and guidelines.

Tora Aasland
Minister for Science and Higher Education

¹ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. ENQA report. ISBN 952-5539-04-0.

Preface

This report was commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry for Education and Research to assess whether NOKUT's role in the Norwegian educational system. The Terms of Reference is provided in Appendix 1. The parts of the Terms of Reference addressing the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* are dealt with in a separate report (Report 1).

Following a tender, NIFU STEP was given the contract for the evaluation which was performed by a team of five researchers; Lee Harvey (The Higher Education Academy, UK), Jeroen Huisman (International Centre for Higher Education Management, University of Bath, UK), Liv Langfeldt (NIFU STEP, Norway), Bjørn Stensaker (NIFU STEP, Norway) and Don Westerheijden (Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of Twente, the Netherlands). Two NIFU STEP researchers assisted the evaluation team; Inge Ramberg assisted with the surveys to NOKUT panel members and to evaluated institutions, and Taran Thune provided analyses of NOKUT's audits and accreditation reports.

We are grateful to the many NOKUT panel members and evaluatees who contributed to this evaluation through questionnaire replies, and all the interviewed NOKUT staff and stakeholders and visited institutions who took the time to share their experiences and insight with us.

February 2008,

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the evaluation

This evaluation of NOKUT was initiated and commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. The evaluation has two main purposes:

- To examine whether NOKUT meets the ‘Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in the members states of the Bologna process in Bergen in May 2005.
- To evaluate the national role of NOKUT in the Norwegian educational system.

This report addresses the second one of these aims. The first aim is addressed in a separate report by the same evaluation team. The two aims reflect a twofold background of the evaluation. The first aim is related to the recommendations for (five-year interval) external reviews of quality assurance agencies, put forward in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.² Such evaluations are required for membership in the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The second aim is based in a general national demand for information about, and evaluation of, public agencies.

Being established by the Norwegian Parliament in 2002 and starting its activities in 2003, NOKUT is a relatively young agency. A substantial part of its activity, is however, a continuation of competences and tasks of prior organisations: Network Norway Council (evaluations of higher education) and the National Academic Information Centre (NAIC, dealing with recognition of foreign qualifications).

The main roles and tasks of NOKUT are stated in the Act relating to universities and university colleges and in the Act relating to tertiary vocational education.³ The Act relating to universities and university colleges states that:

NOKUT shall be a professionally autonomous state body which, by means of accreditation and evaluation, shall monitor the quality of Norwegian institutions that provide higher education and recognize qualifications awarded by institutions not subject to this Act. Accreditation and evaluation activities shall be designed in such a way that the institutions can benefit from them in the course of their quality assurance and development work.

The different tasks assigned include:

² Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2007, pp. 28). http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_v03.pdf, referred to henceforth as the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

³ Act no. 15 of 1 April 2005 and Act no. 90 of 29 June 2007.

- Evaluation of higher education institutions' systems for quality assurance
- Accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes, and revision of previously-granted accreditation.
- Evaluations of significance to assessment of the quality of higher education.
- General recognition of qualifications awarded by foreign higher education institutions and Norwegian institutions not subject to the Act relating to universities and university colleges.
- Accreditation, as well as revisions of previously-granted accreditations, of tertiary vocational education

The standards, criteria and procedures for each task are described in Chapter 3.

1.2 The Terms of Reference and the content of the report

The Terms of Reference for the evaluation, given by the Ministry of Education and Research, list 5 topics to be assessed:

- NOKUT's purpose, mandate and strategy
- NOKUT's organisation and management
- NOKUT's qualifications
- NOKUT's performance
- NOKUT's results⁴

These issues are dealt with in separate sections in Chapter 4. Under each issue there are 3 to 5 questions, in total 19 questions. Section 4.6 provides a structured overview of the answers to these questions.

In addition to the specified issues and questions, the Terms of Reference state:

Furthermore, it is of special interest to examine how NOKUT balances its responsibility for quality assurance i.e. its supervisory and control functions with its responsibility for developing a quality culture in education. The evaluation should also examine how NOKUT understands its own mission and responsibility, given in Act no. 15 of 1 April 2005 relating to universities and university colleges.

In designing the evaluation, these two questions have been given special attention. Balancing the control function and the responsibility for developing quality, and NOKUT's interpretation of its own mission and responsibility are overall topics both in the assessments in Chapter 4 and the recommendations in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 2, the data sources and methods for the evaluation are elaborated.

⁴ Section 1.2 of the ToR. In Section 2.1 of the ToR the issues are somewhat differently specified: NOKUT's expertise and results, and NOKUT's methodology and procedures. See Appendix 1.

2 Data sources and methods

The evaluation adopted a research-based approach in order to get a solid basis for assessments and recommendations. The evaluation team comprised independent, high-level experts in higher education evaluation and quality assurance. The team collected a broad set of data from a wider variety of sources and stakeholders, drawing on the latter's experiences and perceptions – without any single stakeholder being represented on the evaluation team. Qualitative and quantitative data are combined, providing a basis for data triangulation and extensive and thorough analyses.

Background information, as well as input on NOKUT's experiences and views was obtained through:

- Self-evaluation reports from NOKUT
- Site visit to NOKUT and interviews with NOKUT leadership and staff
- The formal documents describing NOKUT's standards, criteria and procedures (including acts and regulations)
- Studies of NOKUT's evaluation and accreditation reports

Insight into stakeholders' experiences and views was obtained through:

- Site visits to institutions subjected to NOKUT evaluations and accreditations
- Survey to vocational schools
- Survey to staff, students and leadership at higher education institutions exposed to NOKUT evaluations and accreditations
- Surveys to members of NOKUT's audit, accreditation and evaluation panels
- Interviews with stakeholders (the national interest organisations for students, academic staff, and Norwegian business and industry were consulted, along with the Ministry of Education and Research)

Self-evaluation reports from NOKUT

In line with the two different aims of the evaluation, two self-evaluation reports were demanded from NOKUT. The first (Part 1) presents NOKUT with regard to the membership criteria of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).⁵ The second (Part 2) deals with NOKUT's national role.⁶ Part one was based in the prescribed content for an agency's self-evaluation as described in the European Standards and Guidelines

⁵ Evaluation of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). NOKUT's Self Evaluation Report. Part 1: Membership criteria of ENQA. Oslo: NOKUT 30th August 2007.

⁶ Evaluation of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT). NOKUT's Self Evaluation Report. Part 2: NOKUT's national role. Oslo: NOKUT 16th October 2007.

(2007, pp. 34-47).⁷ For part 2, the questions in the Terms of Reference given by the Ministry (Appendix 1) were the basis, with some elaborations given by the evaluation team:

NOKUT's ability to fulfil its responsibilities and proper role in the Norwegian educational system (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats):

- What have been NOKUT's strategies, actions and processes for implementing their formal mandate in Norwegian higher education?
- What does NOKUT see as the main problems in fulfilling their mandate?
- How does NOKUT handle the dilemma between being a controller of quality on the one hand, and an enhancer of quality on the other?
- Moreover, possible tensions between national needs and agendas on the one hand and the European standards on the other hand, should be dealt with.

Site visit to NOKUT and interviews with NOKUT leadership and staff

The evaluation team conducted a two-day visit to NOKUT. In total 33 persons were interviewed during the visit (see Appendix 2). The interviews elaborated the information given in the self-evaluation reports and provided a better overview of, and insights into, the different aspects of NOKUT's various tasks, as well as a better understanding of NOKUT's achievements and challenges.

The formal documents describing NOKUT's standards, criteria and procedures

The evaluation team reviewed all formal documents describing NOKUT's standards, criteria and procedures, including the acts relating to universities and university colleges and to tertiary vocational education, the relevant ministerial regulations, NOKUT's criteria and descriptions of procedures for its various tasks, as well as documents relating to NOKUT's internal quality assurance system and its annual reports. Most of the documents were made available to the evaluation team in English.

Studies of NOKUT's audit, evaluation and accreditation reports

Studies of the content of the various kinds of NOKUT expert panel reports were conducted to get insight into the operationalisation and weighting of criteria, and the consistency in arguments for negative and positive conclusions.

- Taran Tune (NIFU STEP) conducted a study of the institutional accreditation reports and the quality assurance audits reports (brief studies of all (46) quality assurance audits reports, as well as detailed studies of 15 selected quality assurance audits reports and all (8) institutional accreditation reports).
- The evaluation committee conducted brief studies of selected reports on vocational education programmes (9 negative reports), as well as Master programmes reports (8 negative reports) and all (11) PhD programmes reports.

⁷ http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_v03.pdf

- Concerning the reaccreditations, the team drew on the study of the nursing education reaccreditation already conducted by Finn Daniel Raaen.⁸

Site visits to institutions exposed to NOKUT evaluations and accreditations

The evaluation team visited six selected institutions that had experienced NOKUT evaluations and accreditations (Appendix 2). In total 56 persons were interviewed, covering leadership and administration, students and members of academic staff. The interviews dealt with their experiences and views on the criteria for the audits and accreditations, the NOKUT panels and their site visits, feedback, learning and (other) results of the audits, evaluations and accreditations, NOKUT's function and independence, staff and expertise, information and communication.

Surveys to members of NOKUT's accreditation and evaluation panels

In order to study the experiences and considerations of the persons serving on the panels appointed to assist NOKUT in performing their various tasks (quality assurance audits, (re)accreditations⁹ and evaluations), NIFU STEP conducted a web-based survey of the panel members. NOKUT provided a close-to-complete list of all persons who had served on one or more of their panels, in total 488 persons. The researchers obtained correct e-mail addresses for 431 of these and replies were obtained from 80 percent (344 of the 431, see Appendix 4).

The survey addressed experiences and opinions on a broad set of issues:

- the preparation for the evaluation, and the framework conditions for the evaluation
- the purpose of the evaluation/audit/(re)accreditation (controlling vs. improving quality)
- information sources
- reaching agreement in the panel
- opinions of the quality of the object under review
- organisation of the work
- NOKUT's qualifications, organisation and procedures

As several persons have served on more than one panel, they were asked to relate their answers to the last completed evaluation, audit or accreditation that they had been involved in. The web-based questionnaire also contained ample space for free text comments that provided

⁸ Finn Daniel Raaen (2006): *Akkreditering og sakkyndighet. En analyse av den reviderte akkrediteringen av bachelorgradsstudiene i sykepleie i Norge*. Oslo: Oslo University College, HiO-rapport 2006/13.

⁹ In the survey, accreditations and reaccreditations were combined in the same reply category as we expected many respondents would have difficulties in relating to too many categories. In principle accreditations and reaccreditations are processes with identical purposes. We are aware that they in practice may have different characteristics which we have tried to take into account in our discussions with various stakeholders and during our visits to the institutions.

information and views on issues not covered by the predefined questions. The results of the survey are presented in Appendix 4.

Survey to staff, students and leadership at higher education institutions exposed to NOKUT evaluations and accreditations

NIFU STEP conducted a survey to higher education institutions subjected to NOKUT's various evaluations, audits and (re)accreditations. A strategic sample was composed based on the programmes for the NOKUT panels' site visits 2005 to 2007 and NOKUT's lists of contact persons at the institutions. The intention was to establish a sample large enough for analysing the opinions and experiences of different respondent groups separately (institutional leadership, students and academic staff) and also split the data by the various kinds of accreditations, audits and evaluations. A total of 567 persons mentioned in the site visit programmes were selected. Of these, the team obtained correct e-mail addresses to 526 persons and 64 percent of these completed the survey.

The survey addressed experiences and opinions on a broad set of issues:

- the purpose of the evaluation/audit/accreditation (controlling vs. improving quality)
- the information from NOKUT
- the work associated with the application or self-evaluation
- the visit of the NOKUT panel
- result and impact of the evaluation/audit/accreditation
- NOKUT's qualifications, organisation and procedures

As several respondents had been involved with more than one NOKUT evaluation, audit or (re)accreditation, they were asked to relate their answers to the last one completed. The web-based questionnaire also contained space for free text comments that provided information and views on issues not covered by the predefined questions. The results of the survey are presented in Appendix 4.

Survey to vocational schools

NIFU STEP conducted a web-based survey to institutions/organisations with at least one approved vocational school programme. Correct e-mail addresses were obtained for 63 of these 67 institutions/organisations, and 53 of them completed the questionnaire. It needs to be added that we were not able to obtain e-mail addresses to applicants that had had all their applications refused or not yet had a concluded application.¹⁰ That is, the survey only includes actual, not potential, providers of vocational school programmes. See Appendix 4, which also present the results of the survey.

¹⁰ By September 2007, 125 (potential) providers of vocational school programmes had applied NOKUT for approval, but only 67 of these had obtained at least one approved programme.

The survey addressed experiences and opinions on:

- the information from NOKUT
- satisfaction with how NOKUT performed the evaluation
- result and impact of the evaluation

The questionnaire to the vocational schools was a simplified version of the questionnaire to the higher education institutions, and differently from the two other surveys, the questions were posed in Norwegian.¹¹

Interviews with stakeholders

The evaluation team invited a broad range of national organisations, as well as the Ministry of Education and Research, to elaborate on their experiences, opinions and concerns about NOKUT's activities and role. The organisations interviewed include the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR), the Network for Private Higher Education Institutions (NPH), the National Union of Students (NSU), the Norwegian Association of Students (StL), the Association of Norwegian Students Abroad (ANSA), the Norwegian Association of Researchers, and Forum for Vocational Schools (NHO/Abelia). Appendix 2 provides an overview of the interview programme.

The different groups of stakeholders covered

The table below shows the total number of persons interviewed or surveyed. The number of student respondents and informants is somewhat lower than the team had hoped for. Student response rates are generally lower than other respondent groups. This probably relates both to the fact that students often are somewhat less involved in and informed about NOKUT's activities and that students are more mobile and more often change their e-mail addresses. Nonetheless the team had the views and experiences of a total of 106 students.

Table 2.1 *Number of respondents and informants, by group*

Group of respondent/ informant	Surveys	Site visits/ interviews institutions	Interviews stakeholders	Site visits/ interviews NOKUT	Total
NOKUT staff and leadership				28	28
Members NOKUT panels (excl students)	335				335
Students	89	10	5	2	106
Staff and leadership at evaluated institutions	326	46			372
Other stakeholders	6		13	3	22
Total	756	56	18	33	863

¹¹ As there was only one respondent group (the NOKUT contact person at the institution) and only one kind of NOKUT activity to study, the questionnaire was less complex. The two other surveys were in English to facilitate the international evaluation team's involvement in the analyses. Taking the diversity of the vocational schools into consideration, we judged the risk of misunderstandings too high to pose the questions in English.

3 NOKUT's tasks, standards, criteria and procedures

In this chapter brief descriptions are given of all NOKUT's major tasks. The descriptions are based on the relevant public documents, NOKUT's self-evaluation reports and studies of the expert panel reports produced for the various NOKUT tasks. Analysis and assessments based on a broader set of data sources are presented in Chapter 4.

3.1 Quality audits

Audit of the institutions' internal quality assurance system is the basic cyclic element in the Norwegian system of quality assurance in higher education. All institutions are to be evaluated at least every sixth year. NOKUT makes the decisions concerning timing of the audits and notifies the institutions six months in advance of the visits. The audits are conducted by external expert panels appointed by NOKUT. The panels have three to five members who (together) are to cover a broad set of competencies: quality assurance systems and quality work, professorial qualifications and experience from leadership of higher education institutions, as well as student representatives. Each panel is required to have a non-Norwegian member.

The task of the panel is to assess whether or not the institution's quality assurance system and quality work meets the standards and criteria set by the Ministry and NOKUT. The Ministerial regulation states that:

- Universities and university colleges are to have a system for their quality assurance work that ensures continuous improvements, provides satisfactory documentation of the work and reveals deficiencies in quality.
- The quality assurance system shall cover all the processes that are important for the quality of the study programme, from information to possible applicants to the completion of the course. Routines for student evaluation of the course, self-evaluation and the institution's follow-up of the evaluations, documentation of the institution's work relating to the teaching environment and routines for quality assuring new study programmes must form part of this.¹²

NOKUT's criteria elaborate the purpose of the quality assurance system, lists the Ministry's requirements and the European Standards and Guidelines, and then presents ten aspects to be evaluated, most of which emphasise the desired general characteristics of the system itself. There is little emphasis on the kind of quality work required, and NOKUT emphasises that the

¹² REGULATIONS no. 1040 of 8 September: Regulations governing accreditation, evaluation and approval pursuant to the Norwegian Universities and University Colleges Act. §2-1.

criteria are meant to be flexible enough to be used for all sorts of institutions of higher education.¹³

NOKUTs' criteria for the evaluation of quality assurance systems:

1. The integration of quality assurance in the strategic work of the institution.
2. The institution's defined aims for its work with educational quality.
3. The linking of quality work to steering and management at all levels.
4. The organising of quality work in such mechanisms and measures as will ensure wide participation, with defined distribution of responsibility and authority for the various elements and stages of the work.
5. The collection and organising of information from evaluations and other data sources that are necessary in order to make satisfactory assessments of educational quality in all study units, and the accumulation of this information at higher levels of steering.
6. Analysis of the information and assessment of goal attainment.
7. The institution's use of results from quality work as a basis for decisions and measures that are aimed at the assurance and enhancement of educational quality.
8. The clarification of how quality work contributes to resource management and priorities at the institution (human resources, infrastructure, services).
9. The active participation of students in quality work and the institution's focus on the total learning environment.
10. That an annual report is presented to the board of the institution, offering a coherent and overall assessment of educational quality and an overview of plans and measures for continued enhancement work.

By August 2007, NOKUT had evaluated the quality assurance system of 48 institutions (NOKUT's Self-Evaluation Report, Part 1, page 9). A study of the 46 reports available on NOKUT's web site shows that 5 of the institutions were assessed not to have a quality assurance system complying with the criteria. Of those passing the audit, 27 received overall positive assessments, whereas 14 received more critical assessments (Table A3. 7). The common arguments for *not approving* a quality assurance system relates to lack of implementation (the system exist on paper but not in practice) and lack of system qualities (it is too informal, ad hoc, not convincingly tied to the formal management structures and decision-making system).¹⁴

If the quality assurance system does not pass the audit there is an immediate follow-up procedure for a second audit. There is no case of an institution not passing the second audit. The result of a second failure would be withdrawal of the authority to establish new study programmes (or for non-accredited institutions, a withdrawal of the right to apply for

¹³ NOKUT's Self-Evaluation Report, Part 1, page 10.

¹⁴ Based on analysis of the audit reports conducted by Taran Thune, NIFU STEP.

accreditation of new study programmes). Moreover, an approved quality assurance system is required when applying for institutional accreditation.

3.2 Accreditation of higher education institutions

In the Norwegian system there are three different categories of institutional accreditation, giving the institutions different degrees of autonomy in establishing study programmes: university college, specialised university institution and university.¹⁵ The Ministry of Education and Research takes the formal decision on institutional accreditation, based on recommendations from NOKUT. NOKUT appoints the expert panels conducting the evaluation. There are specific requirements for the composition of the panels, including academic competence, competence in institutional management, representation from abroad, student representation and representation from a relevant sector of work or public service. The procedures include a self-evaluation report from the institution and a panel visit to the institution.

The standards for accreditations are set by the Ministry¹⁶ and elaborated in NOKUT's regulations.¹⁷ In short, the following is required for all accreditation categories, whereas the major differences between the categories concern requirements for accredited study programmes at certain levels and the standard of the research and development activities:¹⁸

- Education, research and development and dissemination as primary activity;
- An organisational model, facilities, infrastructure and services that supports its primary activities;
- Research and development activities;
- A sufficient body of teaching staff with appropriate qualifications in key subject areas of their study programmes;
- A satisfactory academic library;
- Participation in national and international networks.

So far NOKUT has completed eight institutional accreditations (Table A3. 6). Looking at the panel reports concluding that the institution should *not* be accredited, there are three issues dominating the arguments: the standard of the research and development activities, the stability of researcher training and the steering and autonomy of the institution. These seem to have been the criteria most difficult for the panels to assess and for the institutions to fulfil.

¹⁵ In addition all institutions with accredited higher education programmes may use the designation 'university college'.

¹⁶ Regulations no. 1040 of 8 Sept 2005 from the Ministry of Education and Research, §3-3.

¹⁷ Regulations Relating to Standards and Criteria for Accreditation of Programme of Study and Criteria for Accreditation of Institutions in Norwegian Higher Education, NOKUT 25 January 2006, Chapter 3.

¹⁸ E.g. for university accreditation, five accredited Master Programmes and PhD programmes in four different subject areas are required.

Two of the eight applications for institutional accreditations ended up with a negative final decision. There are, however, some notable discrepancies in recommendations and conclusions between different categories of the accreditation processes. Three institutions have obtained institutional accreditation even when the panel initially recommended they should not be accredited. That is, the NOKUT Board, basing its judgement on the report, on the comments from the institution, and in some cases on supplementary panel statements following the comments from the institution, in three out of eight cases decided contrary to the initial panel report. So far the Ministry's decisions have not deviated from the conclusions of NOKUT Board.

All institutional accreditations were based on applications from the institutions. The result is three new universities, one new specialised university institution and two new accredited university colleges. NOKUT is also authorised to initiate reaccreditations of institutions but has so far not done so.

3.3 Accreditation of study programmes at higher education institutions

When establishing study programmes that the institution is not authorised to establish on its own, the study programme needs accreditation from NOKUT. Which study programmes an institution is authorised to establish depends on its institutional accreditation.¹⁹ Expert panels, appointed by NOKUT, perform the assessments. All panel members are required to have academic competence²⁰: the level of competence depending on the level of study, e.g., for the PhD accreditation professorial competence of panel members is needed. Likewise the standards and criteria, and partly the process²¹, depend on the level of the programme. The same criteria apply regardless of field of study.

The criteria relate to the plan for the programme, the academic staff, infrastructure, quality assurance and internationalisation and international cooperation. Some of the major differences in requirements for the different levels concern the plan for the programme and the academic staff. For example, for Bachelor studies at least 20 percent of the staff assigned to the programme are required to have senior lecturer or professorial status, whereas for PhD

¹⁹ Universities are fully authorised to establish study programmes at all levels, specialised university institutions are authorised to establish study programmes at all levels within specific fields, accredited university colleges are authorised to establish study programmes at Bachelor level (and programmes at Master level in fields where it has obtained an accredited PhD programme), whereas non-accredited institutions are not authorised to establish any programmes on its own.

²⁰ Implying that contrary to the audits and the institutional accreditations, there are no student representatives or other stakeholders involved in these assessments.

²¹ For PhD programmes the panel visits the institution before writing the report, this is not normal procedure when accrediting Master programmes or lower studies.

programmes at least 50 percent are required to hold full professorships and the remaining associate professorships. Another central requirement for PhD studies is that the “academic staff shall engage in active research/artistic development work with proper academic breadth at a high international level” and that the academic activities at the institution shall serve to support the programme.²²

A large proportion of the applications concern accreditation of Master programmes. A quantitative overview is given below and in Appendix 3 (Table A3. 1 to Table A3. 4).

Bachelor and shorter programmes

All accredited university colleges are authorised to establish Bachelor and shorter programmes themselves. This implies that all applications to NOKUT in this category come from non-accredited institutions, in practice private institutions. By August 2007, NOKUT had assessed 35 Bachelor programme applications and 74 applications for shorter higher education programmes. 54 percent of the Bachelor programme applications were approved and 9 percent not approved, the remaining 37 percent of the applications were withdrawn, dismissed or for other reasons ended without a formal decision (Table A3. 3). 61 percent of the shorter programme applications were approved, 12 percent not approved, and 27 percent were withdrawn, dismissed or for other reasons ended without a formal decision (Table A3. 4).

Master programme applications

Of the 119 Master programme applications NOKUT have assessed, 96 were approved, 7 were not approved, and 16 applications were withdrawn, dismissed or for other reasons ended without a formal decision (Table A3. 2). Looking at the negative reports we find that in most cases reasons for non-approval relates to the content and level of the study programme, as well as insufficient teaching staff competence and R&D activities to support it.

PhD programme applications

Of the 11 PhD programme applications that NOKUT assessed, 7 were accredited, 3 were not accredited, and one application was withdrawn (Table A3. 1). Common to the reviews of the non-accredited and the withdrawn application, was that the NOKUT panels’ reports concluded that the scholarly content of the programme did not satisfy the criteria related to breadth, depth and internal coherence (and in several cases also that the name of the programme did not sufficiently reflect its content). In other words, these criteria seemed pivotal in obtaining accreditation.

²² Regulations Relating to Standards and Criteria for Accreditation of Programme of Study and Criteria for Accreditation of Institutions in Norwegian Higher Education, NOKUT 25 January 2006, Chapter 2-3.

3.4 Revision of earlier accreditations

In addition to acting on applications for programme accreditations and institutional accreditations, NOKUT may re-evaluate any previously awarded accreditation. Procedures for the reaccreditations are more thorough than for the programme accreditations, including additional data collection to study the academic level and outcome of the programmes, as well as site visits and student representation on the panels. The formal standards and criteria are the same as for accreditation of new programmes, except that the regulations state that emphasis is to be placed on the study programme's academic standards and documented results.

So far NOKUT has completed reaccreditations of:

- all Bachelor and Master programmes in nursing (with a negative outcome for nearly all Bachelor programmes)
- one university college Bachelor programme in journalism (positive outcome)
- one university college Bachelor programme in ballet (negative outcome)
- Master and PhD programmes in pharmacy at two universities (with positive outcome for one university and negative outcome for the other)
- Master and PhD programmes in odontology at two universities (with positive outcomes)
- Master and PhD programmes in law at three universities (with positive outcomes)

The first reaccreditation process (nursing) gave rise to much debate as only one of the assessed 31 Bachelor programmes passed. The main reasons for failure were that the programmes did not meet the demands for at least 20 percent staff with senior lecturer or professorial status, and teaching based on research and development work. The heavy emphasis on such academic demands was said to interfere with what ought to be the essence of nursing education.²³

When not passing a re-accreditation the institution get a fixed time to correct the shortcomings.²⁴ NOKUT will then make a new assessment before ultimately deciding whether or not to withdraw the accreditation of the programme.

3.5 Evaluations to assess quality in higher education

Whereas the NOKUT tasks described above are based on applications from the institutions (programme and institutional accreditations) or NOKUT's own initiatives and plans

²³ Finn Daniel Raaen (2006): *Akkreditering og sakkyndighet. En analyse av den reviderte akkrediteringen av bachelorgradsstudiene i sykepleie i Norge*. Oslo: Oslo University College, HiO-rapport 2006/13.

²⁴ Normally one year. When shortcomings relate to academic staff, NOKUT may set a period of up to two years.

(reaccreditations and audits), evaluations to assess the quality in higher education may be initiated by the Ministry²⁵. The purpose, Terms of Reference and methods of these evaluations may vary. The overall aim of the only evaluation that is completed so far, was to improve the quality of Norwegian teacher training (evaluation of all teacher education programmes 2005–2006). There is also an ongoing evaluation of engineering education with special emphasis on assessing relevance and interaction with the labour market.²⁶ The evaluations are organised much in the same way as the programme reaccreditations and are large projects based on self-evaluations, panels' site visits, stakeholder interviews and various kinds of statistics.

There are no sanctions or general follow-up procedures for these evaluations from the part of NOKUT. NOKUT may still choose to initiate a re-accreditation of programmes that appear not to meet the required standards.

3.6 Accreditation of tertiary vocational education

Tertiary vocational education was introduced as a formal educational category in Norway in The Act of Tertiary Vocational Education of June 2003, and NOKUT was conferred the accreditation authority (starting from 2005). The Ministry's regulations²⁷ concerning the accreditation emphasise four main demands on tertiary vocational education programmes:

- It shall provide competence that may be directly applied in the labour market without any additional general training.
- It shall build on secondary education or similar competences.
- It shall correspond to minimum 0.5 and maximum 2 years of full-time study.
- It shall be a complete and independent study.

In collaboration with stakeholders, NOKUT has developed a set of criteria for accreditation and employs expert panels to assess applications from (potential) providers of vocational education. The criteria are general and it is up to the panels to operationalise and adapt them to the different programmes under review.²⁸ The panels normally consist of two or three experts, and many of the panels handle several applications. In total, NOKUT's lists for

²⁵ Or by NOKUT, but NOKUT has so far not initiated such evaluations.

²⁶ Moreover, an evaluation of pre-school teacher training is scheduled for 2008.

²⁷ Forskrift om godkjenning etter lov om fagskoleutdanning. Ministry of Education and Research, 10 Nov 2003.

²⁸ Vocational education covers a broad range of different fields from diverse technical vocations, to art, health care, maritime studies and religious training. The criteria are divided into three main categories: Input quality (organisation and resources), process quality (teaching, examination) and outcome quality (learning outcome, competence obtained).
http://www.nokut.no/graphics/NOKUT/Artikkelbibliotek/Fagskoler/NOKUT_040504_Fagskole_kriterier_sakkyndig_vurdering.pdf

vocational education contain 179 appointed experts and 1420 received applications.²⁹ The panels make recommendations as to whether or not to approve the programme, whereas NOKUT's director makes the formal decisions (delegated responsibility from the NOKUT Board of Governors). There is a separate Appeal Board for the vocational education, but so far it has received no complaints on the NOKUT case processing (the scholarly judgements may not be appealed against, only the case processing).

Of the 1048 cases that were completed by September 2007, 824 applications were approved, 98 were not approved, and 126 applications were withdrawn, dismissed or for other reasons ended without a formal decision (Table A3. 5). Common reasons for non-approval seem to be that the programme is not at the adequate level for tertiary education, does not provide a complete vocational study, lacks (documented) teacher competencies or lacks (documented) infrastructures.³⁰ In many cases, the application processing is very time-consuming, with panel reports pointing to lacking information and several rounds of new documentation from the school and new assessments from the panel. Some institutions complained about long processing time and the demand to resubmit information because the original information had become outdated, as well. The evaluation team found examples of cases with a total processing time exceeding two years. In 2007, 13 months was the average processing time. As noted above, there are also a high number of cases ending without a formal decision. Taken together, this indicates that the applicants have had problems understanding the procedures and criteria for review, and that NOKUT has had problems in communicating the demands to tertiary vocational education programmes and the demands to documentation in the applications; part of which may relate to the fact that the number of applications have been very high, whereas NOKUT's processing capacity is limited. In addition, there is the more general challenge of establishing a common conception and understanding of tertiary vocational programmes as an educational category.

NOKUT is highly aware of the problems and is presently in a process of reviewing the procedures and criteria, foremost in preparation for new tasks. In November 2007 the Ministry of Education and Research sent out for comments a suggestion for revised regulations for accreditation of tertiary vocational education. It is suggested that institutions may apply for general approval to provide tertiary vocational education instead of having to apply for each single programme. Moreover, NOKUT is conferred the authority to audit the internal quality assurance system of all institutions providing tertiary vocational education.

NOKUT is also authorised (since 2005) to reaccredit previously accredited programmes in tertiary vocational education, but has so far not initiated any reaccreditations. According to

²⁹ Many proposals contain applications for multiple educational sites and programmes. Numbers of applications refer to each single programme and site applied for.

³⁰ Based on a brief study of a selection of the most recent reports and decisions.

the suggested revised regulations NOKUT will also be authorised to reaccredit the institutions.

3.7 Recognition of foreign education

Different from all other NOKUT tasks, the recognition of foreign education is based on applications from individuals – applying for a general Norwegian approval of their education.³¹ There is an electronic application form, and specified criteria for the assessments.³² The judgements are made by NOKUT staff, drawing on their national and international networks, as well as relevant data bases. The challenges include verification of documents from all over the world, as well as serving refugees without documentation.

From 2003 to July 2007 NOKUT had received a total of 8170 applications for general recognition. About $\frac{3}{4}$ of the cases end with a positive decision (Table A3. 8). The average processing time for the applications has been reduced from 4.5 months in 2003 to 2.3 months in first part of 2007.

Whereas NOKUT issues general recognition of foreign education – foremost aimed at the Norwegian labour market – Norwegian accredited higher education institutions themselves issue subject-specific recognitions (needed for those who want to continue their studies at the particular Norwegian institution). The Ministerial regulations state that all recognitions issued by the institutions shall be reported to NOKUT and NOKUT acts as the national information centre for recognition of foreign education.³³

³¹ Also students at Norwegian institutions which are not governed by the Act relating to universities and university colleges may apply to NOKUT for a general recognition of their education.

³² <http://www.nokut.no/sw13118.asp>

³³ For further information we refer to the recent report on the recognition of higher education which elaborates the challenges and suggests measures: *Innstilling fra Utredningsutvalg for godkjenning og godskriving av høyere utdanning i Norge*. (Report from the Brautaset Commission to the Ministry of Education and Research, 5. January 2007).

4 Analyses and assessments

In this chapter findings relating to the five main topics in the Terms of Reference for the evaluation (Appendix 1) are discussed: NOKUT's (1) purpose, mandate and strategy, (2) organisation and management, (3) qualifications (4) performance and (5) results. The conclusions to each of the questions in the Terms of Reference are presented in Section 4.6.

4.1 NOKUT's Purpose, Mandate and Strategy

Strategies and goals

The Norwegian Act relating to universities and university colleges lays down the aims and tasks of NOKUT (cited in Section 1.1 above). NOKUT's Board of Governors has elaborated main goals and strategies as cited below:

Main goals

- The Norwegian system for quality assurance of higher education and tertiary vocational education shall be development-oriented and kept at a high international level.
- In accordance with recognized international practice, NOKUT's evaluations, accreditations and recognitions of qualifications shall be carried out in a correct and efficient manner, with good information and dialogue with the parties that are involved.
- NOKUT's work shall be carried out so as to contribute to the quality improvement efforts of the institutions and provide good information to other stakeholders.
- NOKUT shall be a recognized knowledge centre for quality and quality development in education and recognition of foreign education qualifications.
- NOKUT shall be innovative and take initiatives to develop the agency's ability to fulfil its role in society.

Main strategies

In order to pursue its vision and goals NOKUT will perform its task in accordance with the following strategies:

- maintaining high and suitable competencies within its work areas
- emphasizing active external communication, information and dialogue about activities and results
- participating actively in relevant networks, organizations and projects, and making use of the experiences and results derived from them
- developing a stimulating and inclusive working environment that makes NOKUT a challenging and interesting workplace
- taking totality and context into account when carrying out quality assessments
- developing methods and competencies within a cross-unit framework
- continuously working to strengthen internal quality assurance and quality enhancement, so that critical points in the work processes are uncovered and relevant improvement and development measures are implemented.

Strategic plan for NOKUT (NOKUT 2004)

These goals and strategies from 2004 are clearly formulated and still ambitious and relevant, especially since some of them have not yet been fully accomplished (see below). They point out NOKUT's tasks and challenges in a coherent and straightforward manner, and the evaluation team sees no reason for reformulating the main goals and strategies as presented in the strategic plan.

The next question relates to NOKUT's operational strategies and planning. Given the recent establishment of NOKUT and the high demands, largely driven by its environment, it is understandable that the organisation has worked more on the basis of short-term objectives.

Now NOKUT is setting up annual plans to structure its activities, but a longer-term perspective is called for to handle all the different tasks of the organisation better.

In its operational strategy and activities, NOKUT stays very close to the mandate in the national regulations. It chooses to adopt an approach that is less flexible than it might be; arguing that it is constrained by the legislation and regulations, and also that such an approach helps to gain and maintain legitimacy in the system. The evaluation team was not able to confirm the assumed correlation between keeping firmly to the national mandate and building up legitimacy. Moreover, the team doubts whether this was (and will be) the necessary road to follow for NOKUT. The danger is that NOKUT will routinely follow a narrowly perceived imperative of the law, which may lead to a rather mechanistic and rigid approach to quality assurance (both from the perspective of the agency and the higher education system). This goes at the cost of stimulating higher education institutions to improve and the nourishment of a quality culture.

Supervisory functions: balance between quality assessment and developing quality

Put somewhat differently, NOKUT has chosen to take a rigid route to achieve its ends rather than a more flexible and softer developmental route. It can be argued that the original design of the national quality assurance system indicated a softer approach, as institutional accreditations normally would imply much self-regulation and not require wide-ranging programme accreditation. That universities already have a great degree of autonomy and that this has not been greatly challenged is indicative of the high level of trust in the higher education institutions among Norwegian policy-makers. Nonetheless, NOKUT has chosen to take the ‘maximum’ approach to the regulatory framework, rather than operating a system that ‘minimizes’ regulatory control. The result of the approach adopted by NOKUT is that ‘control’ dominates its approach: the regulatory aspect of NOKUT’s role is emphasised at the expense of the developmental role. In this way, the goal stated by NOKUT that the Norwegian system for quality assurance should be development-oriented has not yet been achieved. Improvement and enhancement of quality follow the control procedures but only as a side effect rather than as a planned enhancement/improvement approach.

The respondents in the survey (both panel members and evaluatees) confirm this picture. They perceive NOKUT’s accreditations and evaluations as primarily aimed at controlling rather than at improving standards and quality. Panel members perceive the aim of the evaluation/accreditation as ‘mainly controlling’ standards/quality (34 percent) or as ‘as much improving as controlling’ standards/quality (50 percent). Respondents from higher education institutions perceive the evaluation/accreditation as more aimed at *controlling* standards/quality than the evaluators do (46 percent answer ‘only’ or ‘mainly at controlling’). There is surprisingly little difference between the different types of evaluation/accreditation regarding this question. Institutional accreditations are certainly perceived as more aimed at controlling than the general evaluations, but the differences are not as large as might be

expected (see Table A4. 10 and Table A4. 25). The imbalance between controlling and improving was also a major concern of the interviewees during our site visits. The view in the institutions seems to be that there is too little focus on quality improvement (including learning and sharing experiences), and much emphasis on ‘counting and control’. A member of the academic staff at a higher education institution put it this way:

The main problem is that NOKUT checks out their boxes (tick marks), finds us OK, and leaves us. Their main question is HAVE YOU (or ‘Haven't you’) which is far too simple to assess quality. (Survey free text reply)

The evaluation team is of the opinion that NOKUT certainly stresses (and lives up to) its control purpose. The quality improvement purpose receives too little attention. Improvement is left largely implicit or it is taken for granted that institutions take up the quality improvement challenge once NOKUT has checked quality. Institutions confronted for the first time with an audit may certainly learn from this. The emphasis on compliance seems to detract from the quality improvement possibilities, especially in the longer term. There is a serious risk that as a consequence of NOKUT’s approach, institutions and their departments in the future will respond to NOKUT’s quality control imperative in a rather bureaucratic-administrative ‘box-ticking’ manner. This may be illustrated for instance by NOKUT’s criteria for the audits of the institutions’ quality assurance work. Most of these focused on the *existence* of a *formal* quality assurance system, and less on the quality works’ effectiveness to *detect* weaknesses and *improve* the quality of the education provided. It is symptomatic that the question regarding the degree to which the system needs to be *implemented*, and inconsistencies in the audit reports on this issue, was a major concern among interviewed stakeholders. Furthermore, the institutions that we visited indicated that they would prefer feedback more useful for their quality improvement in future audits.

At the same time, the team stresses that the institutions themselves and their management carry the prime responsibility with regard to quality improvement. Especially when NOKUT’s major focus is on quality control and on ensuring that minimum standards are fulfilled, it is vital that the main focus of the institutions remains on *enhancing* quality rather than let themselves be reduced to superficial compliance.

4.2 NOKUT’s Organisation and Management

Independence

Formally, NOKUT is an independent agency set up by the Ministry. In all legal respects it is a fully autonomous body, and the Ministry or other third parties may not interfere with NOKUT’s decisions, such as appointing expert panels and organising evaluations, or the conclusions and recommendations made by NOKUT (see Section 3.6 in Report 1).

In the surveys, respondents at the higher education institutions and NOKUT panel members were asked about NOKUT's ability to ensure that the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation or accreditation reports are not influenced by special interests. 54 percent of the panel members and 34 percent of the respondents at the higher education institutions answered that NOKUT's ability to ensure this was good or excellent. Only a few answered that the ability was poor or weak. It is notable however that 28 percent of the panel members and 32 percent of the respondents at the higher education institutions answered 'Don't know' to this question (results are shown in Table A4. 18 and Table A4. 33). This indicates that a substantial amount of NOKUT's stakeholders, as well as NOKUT's external experts, lack sufficient information to have an opinion about the independence of NOKUT's conclusions and recommendations. As confidence in such independence is very important for NOKUT's legitimacy, better information on the procedures to ensure independence seems needed.

Looking at independence in a different context and assessing NOKUT as an independent agency, the evaluation team finds that NOKUT follows the Ministry's mandate (national legislation) strictly and that NOKUT therefore may be perceived in Norwegian society as not independent, but firmly restricted by legislation and a vast set of compulsory tasks on the one hand, and limited resources on the other. From this perspective, NOKUT should consider if it would be beneficial to the system if it takes on more activities relating to the agenda of the institutions and other stakeholders, beyond a narrow interpretation of its legal duties, such as more dialogue on quality improvement and learning from experiences (see Section 4.1 above). Concerning independence it is the evaluation team's impressions that the limitations are more based in NOKUT's interpretation of its legal mandate, as well as limited resources, than the legal mandate itself.

Organisation and management of core activities

Overall, the survey data give a positive picture of NOKUT's organisation and management of its core activities. In the panel member survey, the framework conditions for NOKUT's core activities – the schedule and assistance from NOKUT to the panels – obtain good scores. In several cases such conditions are assessed as excellent, and for all issues there is a clear majority answering 'Good' or 'Excellent'. Only in a few cases are they assessed lower than 'fair'. On some items notable differences appear between the different kinds of evaluations/accreditations. The panel members for tertiary vocational education approval are clearly least satisfied, but are overall still positive (58 percent answering 'Good' or 'Excellent') with the time and work schedule for the task, whereas the panel members for the general evaluations are most satisfied (76 percent answering 'Good' or 'Excellent', see Table A4. 9 for further details).

This is reflected in responses to the general question about the organisation of the evaluation/accreditation. Whereas 40 percent of the panel members in quality audits answer that the organisation was 'Excellent' (and another 55 percent answer 'Good'), only 8 percent of the panel members for approval of tertiary vocational education answer 'Excellent' (and 51

percent 'Good', Table A4. 17). These results should be related to the difficulties that we noted in processing the applications for approval of vocational education (see Section 3.6 above).

Among the interviewed stakeholders there was a view that NOKUT is more formalistic and bureaucratic than necessary, both relating to NOKUT keeping strictly to its mandate and setting rigid criteria and/or interpreting them formalistically: assessing staff qualification by quantitative criteria in nursing is one often mentioned example. Arguably, when one criterion predominates (as in the case of the quantitative staff criterion), the room for overall comprehensive assessments is severely limited. This is an example of NOKUT's rigid approach to accreditation. It seems that NOKUT has chosen an approach allowing very little discretion, possibly because it feels at this early stage that it needs to be unswervingly consistent, to ensure that there are no claims of unfairness and to reinforce its legitimacy as an evaluating organisation. However, as noted in Section 4.4, there are some concerns about the consistency in practice. It may be that NOKUT feels it has not been granted any leeway by Parliament (in the framing of the legislation) or by the Ministry in its expected implementation. However, the evaluation team points out that a more flexible approach allowing for more professional discretion would be more appropriate for an agency aiming at high international standards and with ambitions of becoming an innovative agency (see NOKUT's strategic plan).

Internal organisation and basis for development activities

In the surveys, both NOKUT panel members and the respondents at the higher education institutions were asked whether NOKUT has an adequate and efficient organisation for performing its duties. The majority of the panel members and also a large part of the respondents at the higher education institutions answered positively,³⁴ indicating that from the stakeholders' point of view NOKUT's organisation in most cases functions adequately and efficiently.

Looking at the organisation from the insiders' point of view, we learnt that there are some concerns within NOKUT that the organisation consists of a number of departments with insufficient interaction and communication. The evaluation team noted that there is interaction between the departments and that plans have been developed to improve interaction. At the same time, the team noted that some of the activities across departments have hardly any point of contact. This is particularly the case for the section that deals with the recognition of foreign diploma's and degrees, which is a task quite separate from the evaluations of programmes and institutions that is the common basis for the other units.

In all, based on the interviews at NOKUT, the team is of the view that the organisation and management structure is adequate. There are still some concerns needing attention. These

³⁴ As would be expected a substantial part reported unable to answer (21 percent of the panel members and 24 percent of the respondents at the higher education institutions, Table A4. 18 and Table A4. 33).

relate to learning and discussion across departmental borders, and the communication between the Board and staff of NOKUT (especially when the Board goes into the details of separate cases).

An analysis and development unit has recently been set up within NOKUT and has started up several projects. The evaluation team was, to some extent, surprised by the focus on data collecting research-type projects, in which the linkage to NOKUT's available data and experiences seems, at least partly, missing. To get substantial results with the limited resources available in the department, an approach more focused on aggregating and systemising already-available material and data would seem to be more appropriate and efficient in a start-up phase. That is, the evaluation team would expect a more (quality) development-oriented approach, focusing on emerging quality assurance issues in order to improve the dissemination of good practices in the system. This should include carrying out system-wide analyses summarising experiences, reports and results across the various NOKUT quality assurance activities (and departments). Such analyses may be expected to yield important, useful information both for NOKUT and the higher education sector.

Information and communication with stakeholders and the general public³⁵

The surveyed panel members are mainly satisfied with the information from NOKUT. 86 percent indicated that the written information from NOKUT about the tasks, criteria and standards was good or excellent, and 71 percent indicated that the secretarial assistance from NOKUT was good or excellent (Table A4. 7 and Table A4. 9).

Moreover, the majority of respondents at the higher education institutions found the information from NOKUT clear and comprehensible, and indicated that they had received sufficient information. However, some improvements regarding information on the criteria and standards for the assessments are needed. As many as 31 percent of the respondents at the higher education institutions stated they had received insufficient information about the criteria and standards for the assessments and 2 percent answer that they received no information at all (Table A4. 26).³⁶

Mostly, the institutions seemed pleased with their NOKUT contact persons and found it easy to communicate with NOKUT. Still, a few communication problems were reported, and some complained about limited capacity, or willingness, in NOKUT to answer questions. On the other hand, several interviewees emphasised that NOKUT's information and communication had improved recently, and that it is now easier to get help. During the stakeholder interviews, the team also learnt that students, affected by reaccreditations, are in some cases insecure

³⁵ Communications on ex ante guidance as well as following-up audits, evaluations and accreditations are discussed in Section 4.4.

³⁶ This question was posed only to the institution's contact person for the accreditation/evaluation and to those who took part in the preparation of the application/self-evaluation.

because of lack of information. This indicates that NOKUT should advise the institutions on how to inform the students about the procedures and about their rights in case of a negative re-accreditation.

Panel members for *tertiary vocational education* approval are on the whole less satisfied than other panel members. As noted above, this relates to the particular difficulties with the applications for approval of vocational education. On the other hand, a large majority, some 80 percent or more of the vocational schools indicate their satisfaction with all formats of communication and information they received from NOKUT, as well as the procedures, from initial application to the final report. Also here, the information about criteria for review receives the lowest satisfaction score (25 percent marked insufficient information, Table A4.42). It should be kept in mind that these figures only include schools with an education programme approved by NOKUT. These schools seem, in general, very enthusiastic about the newly-attained accreditation system for the sector assuring quality and enhancing status, and reply quite positively to the survey. Schools without any approvals (application in process or rejected) have not been surveyed, but through the stakeholder interviews we received reports of discontent with lack of reliable information on processing time, and also general complaints on uncertainty and ambiguity in information and processes (e.g., concerning the documentation needed in the application).

In general, the informants express a wish for more transparency, and more and earlier information on the process, deadlines and the compositions of the panels. Clear schedules and better information on changes in schedules are wanted, especially concerning applications for study programmes (both in higher education and in vocational education). Several respondents suggested that NOKUT should facilitate the institutions to learn from each others' quality assurance work. It was also stated that much can be done to adjust and coordinate databases and the different data needs to make life easier for the institutions, and to improve the basis for the various NOKUT quality assurance/evaluation instruments. Improvement is also requested with regard to consistency of messages from NOKUT, for example, different NOKUT staff members visiting a particular institution within a short period of time should be aware of their mutual activities and messages.

Sometimes, NOKUT's activities attract considerable media exposure, especially the institutional accreditations. It also occurs that panel members individually communicate in the mass media. According to the interviewed stakeholders in the sector, NOKUT should be better prepared to meet the media's demands for information. NOKUT has a role in bringing to the fore more information on the overall characteristics and content of Norwegian tertiary and higher education, and hopefully the new analysis and development department can contribute with such information. It should also be kept in mind that public trust is partly achieved through the trust of the immediate stakeholders, that is, the staff and students at the institutions involved.

The summary conclusion of the evaluation team is that, overall, NOKUT's information and communication with stakeholders is good, and has improved. However, further improvement remains needed, especially concerning better information to the institutions on the standards and criteria and on schedules and changes in schedules, advising institutions on how to inform students on rights and procedures when accreditations are negative, and better communication with the panels for tertiary vocational programmes. Moreover, the Board of Governors needs to improve its communication, particularly on reasons why the Board deviates from the expert panel recommendations.

4.3 NOKUT's Qualifications

In-house expertise

When assessing NOKUT's qualifications, the survey respondents are fairly positive. 62 percent of the panel members and 46 percent of the higher education institution respondents reply that the qualifications of the staff are 'Good' or 'Excellent'. Very few answer that they are 'Poor' or 'Weak' (3 percent of panel members and 9 percent of higher education institution respondents, Table A4. 18 and Table A4. 33).

Throughout the interviews with stakeholders and at the visited schools, the team received positive comments on the qualifications and quality of staff at NOKUT. Complaints were restricted to capacity problems: it was said that NOKUT has too many tasks and too few staff. The only demand for more insight noted by the team concerned the complex vocational sector. Yet there too it was emphasised that capacity was the major problem, not the qualifications of the staff.

The impression of the evaluation team is that the NOKUT staff are capable, professional and committed, even in light of a considerable workload. Some departments of NOKUT have also been able to reduce application-processing time considerably without much increase in staffing. NOKUT reports a low staff turnover rate³⁷ and has been able to increase its staff from 34 persons in 2003 to 50 in 2006. Consequently, there do not seem to be problems attracting and retaining qualified staff. The staff seem to be generally satisfied with their job and workplace, and the leaders of the departments are competent and involved managers, appropriately dealing with high work pressures.

According to the evaluation team, the composition of NOKUT's Board of Governors is sufficiently diverse, but it would be good to include an internationalisation expert, given the considerable amount of work of NOKUT regarding the recognition of foreign degrees and that liaising with other quality assurance agencies is ever more important.

³⁷ In the period January 2005 to September 2007, only 4 evaluation officers have permanently left their positions (NOKUT's self-evaluation report Part 2, page 7).

External expertise

As all NOKUT accreditations and evaluations are performed by external panels, the competences of the appointed panel members are of course fundamental for NOKUT. Panel competences were dealt with both in the panel member survey and in the survey to the evaluatees. By the panel members themselves, both the competences covered by the expert panel (breadth) and the level of competences (depth) receives quite high scores. As much as 85 percent of the panel members consider the competences covered as ‘Good’ or ‘Excellent’, and 86 percent considers the level of competences as ‘Good’ or ‘Excellent’ (Table A4. 9). Turning to the higher education institution evaluatees, 58 percent state that they are fully satisfied with the qualifications of the panel, 26 percent partly satisfied and 5 percent unsatisfied (see Table A4. 30, the vocational schools give slightly lower scores, see Table A4. 44).

As would be expected, there are notable differences between the opinions of those who received a positive and those who received a negative conclusion from the panel. In cases where accreditation was not obtained or the quality system not approved, 18 percent are unsatisfied with the qualifications of the panel, 29 percent partly satisfied and 39 percent fully satisfied. In cases where accreditation was obtained/the quality system approved, on the other hand, 3 percent are unsatisfied with the qualifications of the panel, 24 percent partly satisfied and 63 percent fully satisfied (the remaining have no opinion). Taking into consideration these ‘due differences’ between the opinions of different groups of respondents, the overall picture is that there is a reasonably high confidence in the qualifications of NOKUT panels.

Overall, the interviewees consider the expert panels to be of sufficient quality. Several emphasised that their panel had been qualified, independent and fair. It was, moreover, emphasised that the audit panels are asking the right questions, sometimes provocative, and in that way make the institution more conscious about quality assurance.

The interviewees expressed some concerns. First, there is a concern that there are not enough experts in Norway to call upon, and some have the impression that NOKUT has difficulties finding competent people willing to spend time on NOKUT panels. They commented that a large proportion of committee members are retired, and that in some cases it was questionable if their competences and views were still up-to-date. Also, there are a few concerns that (1) experts may have agendas beyond their role as an expert, and about (2) a ‘liability of newness’ syndrome implying difficulties in getting a totally new programme accredited (see below on the handling of conflicts of interest). Moreover, some were concerned that reaccreditation committees reached different conclusions, pointing to a perceived lack of consistency across committees. Finally, we understood that the NOKUT Board of Governors in some cases ‘overruled’ committee judgements in order to restore consistency, but at the

same time this had the negative consequence that accreditation committees' credibility was called into question and as a result of that NOKUT's credibility overall.

Among the students, there were some concerns about the selection of student members to the panels. Such appointment seems quite popular among the student representatives, and the comments here did not concern the competence of the appointed members, but rather the fairness in competence building. The local student councils would like NOKUT to recruit student members directly from them, not only from the national organisations, and thereby spread connection to and insight into NOKUT's activities more widely within the student organisations.

Procedures for appointing experts and handling of conflicts of interest

NOKUT's procedures for ensuring qualified panels and preventing conflicts of interest are based on specified criteria on the selection of experts and the composition of panels (published on NOKUT's website). The evaluatees have the right to comment on the experts selected and all experts must confirm, in writing, that they do not have any appointments with the institution or programme that is the subject of the evaluation, or any other connection that may cast doubt upon their impartiality.

Half (49 percent) of the panel members and 33 percent of the higher education institution respondents consider NOKUT's handling of conflicts of interest as 'Good' or 'Excellent'. It should be noted that a large part of the respondents lack information about NOKUT's handling of conflicts of interest and appeal procedures, and report that they are unable to assess such issues. As much as 37 percent of the panel members answered 'Don't know' on this question (less surprisingly 45 percent of the higher education institution respondents answered 'Don't know'). Very few replied that the handling of conflicts of interest is 'Poor' or 'Weak' (4 percent of the panel members and 6 percent of the higher education institution respondents, Table A4. 18 and Table A4. 33). In conclusion, the knowledge about NOKUT's handling of conflicts of interest seems to be poor, but the large majority of those with information have confidence in NOKUT's procedures.

On the other hand, in the interviews with evaluatees, much frustration about unfair committees was expressed. The evaluation team was told about cases in which panel members seemed to be biased and where NOKUT handled the problems by overruling the panel recommendations, not by appointing new panel members. Even when problems or bias were revealed early in the process, panel members did not seem to have been replaced. Interviewed institutional representatives emphasised that appointing panel members from competing institutions should be avoided, that more international members should be used in order to avoid conflict of interest, and that NOKUT should take more care to listen to the evaluatees' comments on the proposed panel composition before appointing committees. There seems to be a common perception that panel members from traditional universities are biased against

degrees in non-traditional subjects, e.g. interdisciplinary study programmes. However, it is difficult for the institutions to point out such bias when commenting on the composition of expert panels: even if bias among panel members were expected in advance, criticising the composition of the panel before it actually carries out the evaluation may be perceived as a 'hostile' signal by the panel.

The evaluation team notes that affiliation to the evaluation object is explicitly mentioned in NOKUT's guidelines for avoiding conflicts of interest. However, other forms of conflicts of interest, such as affiliation to *competing* programmes or institutions and issues concerning what might be termed 'scholarly bias' (e.g. against interdisciplinarity), are not explicitly mentioned. Whether such connections may cast doubt on their impartiality, is consequently left to the interpretation of the single expert. According to our informants, there are several cases in which such connections have entailed serious doubt about the expert's impartiality. That such kinds of conflicts of interest are not specified in NOKUT's guidelines makes it difficult for the evaluatees to raise such issues.

4.4 NOKUT's Performance

4.4.1 Criteria

The panel member survey indicates that NOKUT's criteria and standards are an important basis for the assessment in all types of NOKUT evaluations/accreditations (Table A4. 13). 77 percent stated that the standards and criteria were very important for the conclusions of their report and 21 percent answered 'Somewhat important' (Table A4. 12). In some cases, however, the criteria for assessments seem unclear. A substantial proportion of the evaluatees reported that the explication of the criteria was insufficient (cf. Section 4.3 on information and communication). Moreover, unclear criteria were one of the main reasons for difficulties in reaching agreement in the evaluation panels, indicating that the criteria leave room for different interpretations. In the open comments replies, several panel members also expressed concern about the criteria. On the one hand, the criteria were said to be too vague, on the other hand quantitative criteria, and in particular the criteria for assessing staff qualifications, were criticised.

In the interviews, the different sets of NOKUT criteria were discussed. There was much concern about both the criteria for the quality assurance system and the criteria for the accreditation of study programmes and institutions. The comments relating to the different kinds of evaluations and accreditations are presented below.

Quality assurance audits

Some interviewees found the criteria for the institutions' quality assurance system (QA) unclear and written in an unfamiliar language. There were some comments that NOKUT should be more helpful in interpreting the criteria. On the other hand, they realised that the

purpose with the general, non-specific, framing of the criteria was to enable the institutions to interpret the criteria in terms of their own setting and to establish a QA-system adjusted to their institutional needs and traditions. Moreover, the criteria are seen as good in focusing on student evaluation and student participation, and students said they had used the criteria when trying to improve their local QA-systems. Other interviewees emphasised that student participation, in itself, cannot compensate for action when it comes to improving quality. The criteria are seen as having little focus on quality in itself and the audits are said not to focus sufficiently on how the organisation acts upon the information produced by the QA-system. The audits should be more based on the functioning and the follow-up of the QA-system, and more directly linked to actual challenges related to quality control.

It should be noted that the criteria do not seem to tell the institution if its QA-system will pass the audit, and the communication about especially the interpretation of the *implementation* criterion seems inconsistent, which may have misled some institutions concerning the importance of this criterion. Others seem to have been able to pass the audit by producing the right documents, the required formal system and spreading information in advance of the site visits – but still without a clear proof of actual implementation.

Study programmes

The criteria for accreditation of study programmes (higher education institutions) were much less discussed. As mentioned, the informants were concerned about panels' biases against 'new' programmes, finding such biases more important than the criteria as such. Some institutions had experiences from several applications and felt skilled in applying the criteria, but emphasised that they were still unable to give a 100 percent correct guess about the outcome of the applications – that depends on the panel.

Re-accreditation

In the re-accreditations, on the other hand – which are based on the same criteria (see Section 3.4) – there was much concern about non-consistent counting of staff qualifications, and uncertainties about who to include in the calculations. Following the re-accreditation of nursing education, Phase 1, the NOKUT Appeal Board concluded that the demands were not properly defined and some adjustments were made, but problems remain. Some see the staff criteria as very formalistic and counterproductive, and endangering the credibility of NOKUT. Expressions such as 'out of focus' and looking into 'the wrong things' were used in the context of the re-accreditation process. NOKUT and the institutions do not seem to have a shared understanding about how staff qualifications ought to be assessed, and many panel members also expressed serious concerns regarding these criteria.

Accreditation of institution

There are different opinions about the standards and criteria for accreditation of institutions across the stakeholders. Some institutions are happy with the criteria, and find them helpful when planning how to reach their institutional ambitions. Other stakeholders are concerned about the implications of the criteria on the Norwegian higher education system, and some also expressed strong disagreement with the interpretation of the criteria (e.g., operationalisation of the ‘university requirement’ regarding a solid and stable research base). This relates to the important discussion about the impact of the accreditation system on the landscape, diversity and overall adequacy of the Norwegian higher education system. This is further discussed in Section 4.5.

4.4.2 Methods and procedures

The further specification of NOKUT’s role and tasks (following from the national law) relating to processes and procedures are generally clear, and NOKUT’s way of performing their accreditations and evaluations score rather well in the surveys. At the evaluated higher education institutions, 40 percent were fully satisfied with how NOKUT conducted the task, 44 percent partly satisfied and 7 percent dissatisfied. Moreover, only 8 percent were dissatisfied with the evaluation report (and 31 percent partly satisfied and 46 percent fully satisfied, Table A4. 30). Notably the administrative staff at the institutions is more satisfied than the other groups of respondents (Table A4. 32).

Moreover, the evaluated institutions seem, in general, quite pleased with the site visits. The meetings with the evaluation panels provide a good opportunity for the institutions to present themselves (72 percent answer good or excellent), but site visits appear somewhat less successful in giving the institution valuable input from the evaluation panel. Still, more than a third find that the meetings gave valuable input from the evaluation committee or new insights for their institution (32 percent answer good, 5 percent answer excellent, Table A4. 29).

Also when assessing NOKUT’s procedures more generally, the respondents are fairly positive, and as could be expected the panel members are somewhat more positive than the evaluatees. When asked about the professionalism and efficiency of the review procedures, 68 percent of the panel members and 44 percent of the evaluatees answer ‘Good’ or ‘Excellent’ (5 percent of the panel members and 13 percent of the evaluatees answer ‘Poor’ or ‘Weak’, Table A4. 18 and Table A4. 33). The scores given on NOKUT’s ability to reach fair, consistent and authoritative conclusions are similar (Table A4. 18 and Table A4. 33). Whereas about half the evaluatees consider NOKUT’s ability to reach fair, consistent and authoritative conclusions as ‘Good’ or ‘Excellent’, there are still 12 percent who think this ability ‘Poor’ or ‘Weak’ (and 20 percent without an opinion). NOKUT should take this as an indication that the quality of its review processes varies and that there is a need to assure professional, fair and consistent procedures better. Especially, the scores given by higher education institution respondents

involved with accreditation of study programmes are low.³⁸ It should moreover be noted that the academic staff express far less positive views on the ability to reach fair, consistent and authoritative conclusions than other the groups.³⁹

Looking more closely at the panel members' experiences there are also some differences between the different types of evaluations and accreditations. The preparation seminars/meetings and the documentation from the institutions are reported to be less important for the audits of the quality assurance systems than for the other types of evaluation and accreditation, whereas the site visits are more important. Although 92 percent of the panel members for the quality audits state that the site visits were 'very important', this figure was 69 percent for the panels for institutional accreditations, and only 55 percent for general evaluations. Only 11 percent of the panel members for the quality audits indicated that the preparation seminar/meeting was 'very important', whereas 33 percent of panel members for institutional accreditations and 35 percent of those for the general evaluations thought it 'very important' (Table A4. 13).

This concurred with the perceptions of the interviewed evaluatees. They perceived the site visits as the main source of evidence for the implementation of the QA-system and as stated above some of them found that the criterion concerning implementation was applied inconsistently. Some students added that they felt that their points of view were not understood by the audit panel and that the report exaggerated the working of the QA-system. In sum, a substantial part of the bases for concluding on the implementation of the QA-system seem related to how oral information at the site visits is interpreted, which may explain why the evaluatees feel that the implementation criterion is not applied consistently. On the other hand it was emphasised that the site visits were useful and inspiring. In particular the preparation work for the visits made the institution more conscious about quality assurance. The institutions also expressed an expectation for more experienced panels and more useful feedback in future audits.

The panels for the accreditation of institutions had more difficulties in reaching agreement than the panels for other kinds of tasks. Panels for accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes had less difficulty (Table A4. 14). The most common reasons for difficulties in reaching agreement were different views among the panel members and unclear standards and criteria (Table A4. 15). The large majority of the panel members (91 percent) however, reported that reaching agreement was relatively easy or very easy (Table A4. 14).

³⁸ 24 percent of the evaluatees involved with accreditation of study programmes answer 'Good' or 'Excellent' and 22 percent answer 'Poor' or 'Weak' on the professionalism and efficiency of the review procedures. 35 percent answer 'Good' or 'Excellent' and 16 percent answer 'Poor' or 'Weak' on the ability to reach fair, consistent and authoritative conclusions.

³⁹ 33 percent of the academic staff answer 'Good' or 'Excellent' on the ability to reach fair, consistent and authoritative conclusions. Similar figures for the institutional leadership are 47 percent, and 48 percent for the students and 57 percent of the administrative staff (Table A4. 34).

There are nonetheless some indications that the formal conclusions of the reports either conceal different opinions of the panel members or that the joint negative verdict of a panel in some cases still results in a formal positive conclusion. In their survey replies, the panel members give more negative statements about the standard or quality of the institution, programme or education they reviewed than prevail from the conclusions of the panel reports or from the rejection rates. Concerning the vocational schools, 37 percent of the panel members state that the quality of the programme to be accredited was below the required level, whereas only 9 percent of the applications receive a negative conclusion. There are similar inconsistencies for programme accreditations for higher education institutions (cf. tables in Appendix 3 and Table A4. 16).⁴⁰ A possible explanation is that keeping to the NOKUT standards and criteria results in a more positive conclusion than keeping to their intuitive academic assessments of what ought to be the required standard.

The team also found that there have been some problems in applying the guidelines of NOKUT by external experts. The most serious problem arises when expert panels are overruled by the NOKUT Board Governors. The team considers that it would be appropriate for the Board of Governors normally to accept the recommendation of the expert panel unless the Board of Governors is aware of any irregularities that would require a reassessment. However, there are two premises for a proper task division: expert panels do what they are supposed to do and the Board of Governors does not exercise unwarranted power. Throughout the interviews, the team was under the impression that both elements needed improvement. That is, current evaluation procedures can be refined (to forestall misinterpretation by experts). It also appeared that the Board of Governors may have taken its remit a bit too serious and that it should put more trust in NOKUT's staff to convey the right message to the panels and in the experts on the panels. It should be kept in mind that an important element in securing legitimacy for NOKUT is the legitimacy of the expert panels. If the conclusion of the initial expert report is changed (after comments or additional information from the evaluatees) it is important that the basis for the change and the panel's new recommendation are communicated clearly to ensure that outsiders understand the role of the NOKUT staff and the NOKUT Board of Governors in relation to the expert panel.

4.4.3 Recognition of tertiary vocational education

As mentioned, there are many challenges related to handing the applications for recognition of tertiary vocational education, and change is already initiated (Section 3.6). Also the data collected for this evaluation indicate a need for improvement. One indication is that the panel members dealing with the vocational schools seem less satisfied with NOKUT than the panel members dealing with higher education institutions. Only 8 percent of the panel members dealing with the vocational schools assess NOKUT's organisation of the task to be

⁴⁰ For the purpose of this evaluation, consistency is only studied on a macro level, not for the individual assessments/reports/decisions.

‘Excellent’, whereas 19 percent of the members on panel for higher education programmes and as much as 40 percent of the members of the higher education institution quality audit panels, find NOKUT’s organisation to be ‘Excellent’ (Table A4. 17). Moreover, panel members for the vocational schools stated that making assessments without a site visit was difficult, and they were not always confident about their conclusions. They also thought the criteria were too much focused on the infrastructure and too little on the teaching outcome, and emphasised that they needed more flexible rules as to what additional information they could ask to reach valid judgements.

On the other hand, according to the survey results the vocational school respondents are more satisfied with NOKUT than the higher education institution respondents. 57 percent of those who got the application approved are fully satisfied with how NOKUT conducted the evaluation.⁴¹ The public vocational schools are substantially more satisfied than the private schools. 60 percent of the public and 48 percent of the private schools are fully satisfied, and whereas none of the public schools are dissatisfied, 13 percent of the private schools are dissatisfied (Table A4. 46). This is understandable in light of the fact that the recognition has had more positive impacts for the public schools (see section 4.5). It should be added that the vocational schools express substantially more satisfaction with the communication with NOKUT than with the expert reports: 66 percent are fully satisfied with the communication with NOKUT about the application and the review, whereas 45 percent are fully satisfied with the report from the evaluation committee. On the negative side 4 percent were dissatisfied with the communication with NOKUT, whereas as much as 15 percent are dissatisfied with the report (the remaining are partly satisfied, Table A4. 44).

Moreover, informants in the sector expressed some concern about the recognition criteria, especially the infrastructure requirements, and the inefficiency in having the infrastructure assessed for every single study programme (implying different panels assessing the same infrastructures).

It was also said that there are many different kinds of organisations providing vocational education, and that NOKUT and its panels do not show sufficient understanding of the ensuing variety of conditions. The use of rather uniform infrastructure requirements and procedures for assessing them therefore was seen as problematic both by evaluators and evaluatees.

4.4.4 Recognition of foreign higher education

As noted in Section 3.7, NOKUT’s recognition of foreign higher education is based on applications from individuals requesting a general Norwegian recognition of their foreign

⁴¹ 39 percent report to be partly satisfied and 4 percent to be unsatisfied (Table A4. 45). The comparable figures for the higher education institutions are 47 percent fully satisfied, 41 percent partly satisfied and 3 percent unsatisfied (Table A4. 31).

education, and NOKUT's challenges include a large number of applications, verifications of documents, as well as serving refugees without documentation. The evaluation team is of the opinion that NOKUT has made substantial efforts in building up expertise in this field, as well as reducing processing time, and manages to handle the applications consistently and fairly.

There are still some minor issues of concern. From the interviews, the evaluation team learnt that the national database for recognition of foreign higher education (NAG) does not function appropriately, and the division of labour between NOKUT and the institutions regarding foreign degrees could be clearer. The latter issue relates to NOKUT's general recognition versus the higher education institutions' subject-specific recognition: it needs much explanation that students end up with different messages from NOKUT and the institution. The evaluation team has not had the possibility of examining the extent of this (possible) problem. However, the team suggests that NOKUT takes care to communicate the difference between a general and a subject-specific recognition very explicitly to the applicants and also keeps in dialogue with the Norwegian higher education institutions to avoid problems in this matter.

The question of NAG on the other hand, relates also to NOKUT's role as a national information centre for recognition of foreign education, serving the higher education institutions. The team has not looked into the details of the problems relating to NAG but understands that more resources now have been allocated to the database so that it can better fulfil its aim of facilitating adequate and consistent recognition of foreign education.

NOKUT seminars relating to recognition of foreign education are regarded as useful and adequate. However, NOKUT's e-mail list can be used more for updates and information to the sector. Also on this topic, NOKUT's limited staff capacity was a concern of the interviewed stakeholders and there was a complaint that institutions sometimes have to wait a long time before getting an answer to specific questions regarding recognition of foreign education. It was, though, emphasised that institutions get very valuable help from NOKUT concerning verification of documents, and that the higher education institutions would like NOKUT to build up even more competence on this matter.

4.4.5 Guidance and follow-up

Although many stakeholders are satisfied with the dialogue with NOKUT in relation to visit arrangements and in relation to general aspects of NOKUT's work (Section 4.2), there are concerns that NOKUT, in trying to be fair and not prescriptive, provided insufficient advice and guidance at the start of the processes. This is a factor that was exacerbated by the rule, for example, that a quality system can only be 'accepted' or 'rejected'. This relates to an unnecessary emphasis on reaching threshold levels for 'accreditation' and inhibits development opportunities. From the point of view of the evaluation team, there are too many high stakes and therefore, NOKUT unnecessarily restricts itself in its developmental role.

There is no procedure for follow-up activities (as long as conclusions are positive) to check if suggestions are implemented and to support improvements. Several respondents commented that they missed follow-up from NOKUT. One put it this way:

We had expected more comments and advice from the evaluation committee than we received, and this we have also stated in our feedback to NOKUT. Most of the 7-8 recommendations from the committee were fair and valuable for our work of quality enhancement. We find it somewhat strange, however, that NOKUT does not bother to see/check if the institution follows up the recommendations in report of the evaluation committee. (Survey free text reply from member of administrative staff at a higher education institution)

Another was concerned that lack of follow-up affected the priorities of the institution:

It is a problem that the institution does not see it necessary to set aside resources to follow up the NOKUT evaluation. This implies that we are not able to take advantage of the possibilities for improvement offered us by the evaluation. (Survey free text reply from a member of the leadership at a higher education institution)⁴²

NOKUT is of the view that there is no provision in the legislation allowing it to do any follow-ups on recommendations made, and also NOKUT seems to think that follow-up without sanctions is not worthwhile. This is an example of NOKUT interpreting its mandate narrowly and not acting proactively. Guidance and recommendations with follow-up can be a much more useful developmental approach than what seems to be the current approach, i.e. no further support for those fulfilling the minimum standards, but rejection and redoing the process in case of negative conclusions. A routine one-year-after follow-up (e.g., by the new Analysis and Development Unit) asking whether feedback was helpful and whether any recommendations have been implemented or whether there are plans for implementation, as well as offering assistance in interpreting the recommendations and feedback in the panel report, in the evaluation team's view will be much more helpful in terms of enhancing quality throughout the higher education system than focusing on sanctions for the few with substandard quality. For sure, adding such a task to the current portfolio will ask more from NOKUT and its staff, but the evaluation team is of the opinion that the benefits outweigh the investments.

4.5 Results of NOKUT's activities

Impact on the quality of education

In the survey the respondents report that the accreditations and evaluations have positive impact on their institution. At the higher education institutions a majority gives high scores (56 percent answer 'Good' or 9 percent 'Excellent') for their self-evaluation or application processes in terms of achieving an overview of the strengths, weaknesses and challenges

facing the institution. Similar scores given on providing input to future planning and improvements are somewhat lower (45 percent 'Good', 4 percent 'Excellent'), but still fairly positive (Table A4. 28).

A considerable part of the higher education institution respondents report positive effects of the accreditation/evaluation. More than a third report positive effects on new routines and procedures, on quality assurance of the education/teaching and on the scholarly discussion regarding learning and teaching. Effects on issues such as the scholarly reputation of the institution, development of new courses/programmes, cooperation between administrative and scholarly staff and the internal resource allocation, are on the other hand less clear (Table A4. 35). As would be expected, the kinds of effects vary across the different kinds of evaluations (Table A4. 37). This is further elaborated below. There are also different opinions in the different groups of respondents. Concerning effects on the quality of the education and teaching, it is notable that whereas 36 percent of the institutional leadership and the administrative staff think the evaluation/accreditation has had a clear positive effect on the quality of the education and teaching, only 12 percent of the students and 23 percent of the academic staff think so (Table A4. 36).

Looking at the overall impact, we find that the proportion of respondents reporting high positive impact is highest for the *institutional accreditations*, and lowest for the accreditations and re-accreditations of programmes (Table A4. 38). It should be added that according to the interviewees the positive effects of the institutional accreditations, as measured by concrete changes, come in advance of the accreditations, at the point when the institution prepares for the accreditation. From the survey data, 63 percent of respondents indicated that institutional accreditations had a clear positive effect on the scholarly reputation of the institution. This is the highest impact score across all effects and evaluation/accreditation procedures (Table A4. 37). The institutional accreditations also have a significant positive effect on setting priorities for research (answered by 40 percent of respondents, Table A4. 37).

Commenting on the *accreditation of study programmes* informants in our interviews at higher education institutions reported few effects of accreditations on the education provided. In the survey, on the other hand, a substantial proportion of the respondents reported positive effects on the quality of teaching.⁴³ Informants commented that fields applying for accreditation obtained more internal resources (to qualify better) and some of the NOKUT reports may also provide helpful advice in developing the programme. However, in many interviews the evaluation team was informed that panel members were not the kind of scholars from whom the applicants would like to take advice. One result of this is that in some cases only labels or

⁴² Translated from Norwegian.

⁴³ 31 percent of those involved with programme accreditation or reaccreditation reported positive effects, whereas 25 percent reported partly positive and partly negative effects (Table A4. 37). We do not have figures for accreditations and reaccreditations separately, as accreditations and reaccreditations were a combined reply category in the survey.

presentations of study programmes have been adjusted to comply with the perceived views of the committee, while the institutions kept their original profile of the programme. Here some also pointed to a lack of follow-up from NOKUT to check if demands were actually fulfilled.

More specifically concerning *reaccreditations* of programmes, informants commented that negative assessments may be valuable as they may be used strategically. For example, comments on a difficult financial situation or bad condition of buildings may be used in negotiations for resources with the Ministry, and non-fulfilment of staff criteria may be used in the institutional battle for resources. The other side of this is of course the negative impact on reputation of failing a re-accreditation. Looking at the survey data, the highest percentage of negative effects is reported in programme (re-)accreditations and this primarily relates to the reputation of the institutions (Table A4. 37, as mentioned above, these figures are not separated for accreditations and reaccreditations). The comments from the respondents include some serious concerns related to this, e.g. that the negative attention following the reaccreditation of nursing education may explain a reduced number of applicants to the study. At the same time the most visible positive effects on teaching and learning are reported in the re-accreditations; especially more research based curricula and more staff with doctoral level competence were mentioned. Some complained, however, about the limited time NOKUT gave for fulfilling the formal staff criteria, because they wanted more time to ensure that they employ the right people.

Informants commented that audits of the *QA-systems* were helpful in the development of institutions' quality systems; specifically they mentioned that they rethought what QA-systems do (self-reflection) and that the audits helped to embed the QA-systems better in institutional leadership. NOKUT's role in this respect was 'forcing us to do it' and to do it faster⁴⁴, it was said, and the efforts entailed more systematic overview and monitoring of activities. The students were particularly concerned about the effects on the attention to their agenda. One of them put it this way:

The most important effect of the NOKUT-visit was that it became easier to make the leadership focus on study quality. They were 'forced' to listen to what the student representatives were concerned about, or put somewhat nicer, it became more relevant to them. [] These were questions about study quality (and in particular treatment of non-conformances) with relevance unrelated to the NOKUT-visit. (Survey free text reply)⁴⁵

Looking at the survey results, 51 percent indicated that the audit had positive effects on new routines and procedures, 43 percent thought it had positive effects on the quality assurance of the education and 31 percent thought it has had positive effects on the quality of the education (Table A4. 37). Still, judging from the interviews, the audits were of little help in effecting

⁴⁴ For instance, it was commented that special efforts were made to spread information about the QA-system to the whole organisation in advance of the visit of the audit panel.

⁴⁵ Translated from Norwegian.

significant changes in basic activities, such as teaching. Moreover, academic staff complained that operating the QA-system cost too much time and some also indicated that as an effect of NOKUT audits their quality assurance became more directed at NOKUT demands than at institutional quality assurance needs. In sum, the most visible changes relates to routines and quality assurance, whereas impact on the quality of education itself are indicated/mentioned by a substantial number of the respondents.

Turning to the *vocational schools*, the team found clear positive impacts of the NOKUT evaluations of study programmes. The quality aspects of education, its quality assurance, as well as school reputation, profited from the approval process, according to the respondents. As much as 77 percent reported positive effects on the quality of education, 82 percent reported positive effects on the quality assurance of education and 71 percent reported positive effects on the scholarly reputation (Table A4. 47). Looking at overall effects, 51 percent of the respondents reported highly positive effects of the NOKUT approval process for the school or the study programme offered, and 43 percent reported moderately positive effects (Table A4. 48). No respondent in the survey reported negative overall effects of the NOKUT approval process. Again we have to bear in mind that we only gathered responses from schools with at least one approved programme. The interviewees in the sector, on the other hand, reported negative effects of the long processing time, resulting in study programmes that could not start and the associated risk of losing students, staff members and income. It should also be noted that the private schools are far less positive than the public ones. Whereas as much as 66 percent of the public schools report highly positive impact of the approval process, only 32 percent of the private schools do so (Table A4. 49). Moreover, looking specifically at the impacts on development of new study programmes, as much as 76 percent of the public schools report a clearly positive impact, whereas 46 percent of the private schools report a clearly positive impact (Table A4. 50).

Impact on the system

At system level, the impacts of the current Norwegian quality assurance system are perceived to be positive by the majority of higher education institution respondents. They found that the system helps putting quality issues on the institutional agenda (77 percent), creates equal framework conditions for public and private institutions (54 percent), and provides students with information about the quality of the education (56 percent, Table A4. 39). Hence, the system clearly has quite positive impact with respect to the many different functions it is expected to handle. It deals with the agenda setting function, it also delivers fairly well on the regulatory and the information functions.

However, NOKUT is also expected to be an agency that should sustain diversity within the system. This function is, for example, operationalised by the different institutional categories in the Norwegian higher education system. Concerning this dimension one could question the current impact of NOKUT. Throughout its evaluation, the team noted that many

stakeholders did not seem to have thought through in depth the impact of NOKUT's activities and decisions on the landscape of the system. This is particularly relevant for NOKUT's task in accrediting institutions. The current regulations invite non-university institutions to try to reach university status, risking to put diversity and other important functions of the higher education system under pressure. Current incentives may be geared too much towards being a research-intensive higher education institution, undervaluing the role of teaching and the qualities of professional studies. A government commission has recently concluded that the current Norwegian accreditation regime leads to fragmentation of Master and PhD educations and inhibits specialisation and task division, not least when attempting to acquire the necessary study programmes for obtaining university status⁴⁶.

From the point of view of this evaluation, it is important to emphasise that the scholarly assessments have a key role in the current accreditation regime, but that our impression is that the evaluation panels have been assigned a more technical than scholarly role. During our visits to institutions and in conversations with stakeholders we have noted that both the criteria and the assessments are disputed. Our judgement is that this result is partly dependent on the technicalities of some of the criteria, but also on their focus, and on the current step by step design of the institutional accreditation scheme. Concerning the latter, the current procedures of accrediting a number of PhD programmes separately before a higher education institution is able to apply for university status invites randomness in what forms the institutional specialisation and profile. The result is that the institutional diversity of the whole system may suffer in the long run. Although we have much sympathy with the attempt to create a separation and role specialisation between political and scholarly assessments in the current system, we do believe that the system could be improved. While the past regime regulating institutional status was based on political decisions with an unclear scholarly foundation, the current regime is based on seemingly scholarly assessments with quite unclear political links. If institutional diversity is an important function for NOKUT, it should receive more explicit attention in NOKUT's strategy and activities.

Priorities and cost-efficiency

Autonomy, efficiency and workload were some of the main concerns of the interviewees' regarding NOKUT's function and priorities. The institutions are in favour of the overall design of the system with general audits accrediting the institutions and giving them autonomy. On the other hand, they express concern about lack of communication between NOKUT's different audit and evaluation instruments. One institution can be subjected to several parallel NOKUT-processes, which implies a heavier workload at the side of the institution. This indicates a need for planning across NOKUT's functions to minimise workload imbalance and, where possible, connect different forms of inquiry, so as to avoid double work on the side of the institutions, as well as inefficient quality control.

⁴⁶ NOU 2008:3. Sett under ett. Ny struktur i høyere utdanning.

Moreover, the system overemphasises the accountability dimension. NOKUT has certainly brought quality in the picture for everyone involved in education. At the same time, paradoxically, looking at the overwhelming amount of positive decisions regarding programme accreditation and quality systems, questioned to what extent NOKUT's mandate may go beyond what is needed in the Norwegian system. This, and what we pointed to above concerning parallel processes at NOKUT and at the institutions, ties in with the question on cost-effectiveness and efficiency. The procedures require a considerable staff input, not only at NOKUT, but also at the institutions as well as by panel members. Acknowledging that quality control is not possible without serious human resources, certainly when a new system is set up, the evaluation team challenges the priorities and cost-efficiency in the current set-up of the overall system. In sum, it seems that NOKUT has too many control focused instruments in its armoury. In chapter 5 it is therefore recommended that the current set-up of the national quality assurance scheme is changed in favour of a stronger emphasis on development, but also on output of activities undertaken. Moreover, how the general evaluations demanded by the Ministry relate or should relate to regular NOKUT's audits and accreditations is unclear. In the current set-up information gained in the general evaluations are not used or integrated into NOKUT's general mission of quality assurance and enhancement.

As noted above, NOKUT's activities are strictly linked to the agency's objectives and strategy. Looking for priorities in NOKUT's Strategic Plan or other relevant documents, however, the team found no priorities among the different tasks. It is still possible to identify some conscious, but not publicly stated, priorities concerning efficiency. Some of NOKUT's choices indicate that focus on control and 'shock-effects' are used to get the most out of limited resources. For instance the choice of nursing education for the first programme re-accreditation, was an effective way to get attention for the criteria and visible effects of NOKUT's activities, and this was also part of NOKUT's intention. By starting with a subject area without much tradition or focus on R&D activities nor teachers with high R&D competence, NOKUT very efficiently drew attention to such demands. Moreover, in taking care of its combined task of controlling and developing quality, the underlying idea seems to be that the controlling activities can take care of both; that emphasising quality control gives the institutions incentives for quality enhancement. Resources are limited and the control aspect is currently given priority as it is seen as most efficient in achieving effects and fulfilling NOKUT's dual mission.

4.6 Conclusions

This section provides a structured overview of the evaluation teams conclusions on the questions posed in the Terms of Reference (Appendix 1).⁴⁷ The headings below are those of the Terms of Reference, but their order is adjusted to facilitate a coherent presentation.

4.6.1 NOKUT's Purpose, Mandate and Strategy

Whether NOKUT's strategies and goals are clearly formulated

The Norwegian Act relating to universities and university colleges and the ministerial regulations clearly formulate NOKUT's aims and tasks. The goals and strategies are further elaborated by NOKUT's Board of Governors in NOKUT's strategic plan. The evaluation team finds the goals and strategies in the strategic plan (from 2004) clearly formulated and still relevant and ambitious. However, several of the goals have not yet been reached. The developmental orientation sketched out by NOKUT is for example not shared by the respondents to our surveys and by stakeholders interviewed.

Whether NOKUT's strategy, goals and activities correspond to the purposes and activities outlined in the Acts⁴⁸

In general NOKUT's strategy, goals and activities stay close to the aims and activities outlined in the Acts, and the organisation seem well designed to ensure keeping to the formal mandate. It should be added that in its first period, the balance between the different tasks is formed by the many applications for accreditations, and that there are reaccreditations tasks assigned to NOKUT not yet taken up: reaccreditations of higher education institutions and reaccreditations within tertiary vocational education.

Another question is to what degree NOKUT's interpretation of its mandate allows it to fully satisfy the part of its mandate relating to developing quality. This is further discussed below.

Whether NOKUT has a consistent understanding of its supervisory functions

NOKUT takes its supervisory functions seriously and put much effort in avoiding inconsistent interpretation of criteria and ensuring equal and fair assessments and decisions. The approach chosen allows little discretion and room for independent scholarly assessments. There are still concerns about the consistency and fairness of assessments and decisions (see below).

⁴⁷ The question concerning the ENQA membership criteria is answered in Report 1.

⁴⁸ Section 2-1 of Act no. 15 of 1 April 2005 relating to Universities and University Colleges and in section 2 of Act no. 56 of 20 June 2003 relating to Vocational Post-Secondary Education.

Whether NOKUT manages to balance its responsibility for assuring quality with its responsibility for developing quality

In the current situation NOKUT's supervisory role is emphasised at the expense of the developmental role. Improvement and enhancement of quality follow the control procedures but only as a side effect rather than as a planned enhancement/improvement approach. The lower weight on the developmental role seems partly a consequence of NOKUT interpreting its mandate and authority relating to follow-up activities too narrowly (see below).

4.6.2 NOKUT's Organisation and Management

Whether NOKUT acts independently from the Ministry within its legal mandate

NOKUT acts as a professional body independent from the Ministry. In all legal respects it is a fully autonomous body, and the Ministry or other third parties may not interfere with NOKUT's decisions, such as appointing expert panels and organising evaluations, or the conclusions and recommendations made by NOKUT. There are, however, some concerns relating to conflicts of interest in the expert panels (see below).

Still, the legal mandate is in some areas quite detailed, and allows little room for professional discretion. That being said, the evaluation team also finds that NOKUT's legal mandate gives more authority to initiating procedures aimed at developing educational quality than NOKUT currently makes use of. In other words, NOKUT could act more independently than it actually does even within its current mandate, and the limitations are to some extent more based in NOKUT's interpretation of its legal mandate, as well as limited resources, than the legal mandate itself.

Whether NOKUT's system of organisation and management facilitate the professional and efficient running of the agency's activities

From the stakeholders' point of view NOKUT's organisation in most cases functions adequately and efficiently, but in some cases NOKUT is more formalistic and bureaucratic than necessary. The evaluation team finds that the internal organisation and management structures are adequate. The design of the audits and (re)accreditations, on the other hand, could be more flexible.

Whether NOKUT disseminates information and communicates with stakeholders and the general public in a clear and transparent manner

NOKUT's information and communication with stakeholders is good, and has improved. There are still some concerns relating to better information to the institutions on the standards and criteria and on schedules and changes in schedules, advising institutions on how to inform students on rights and procedures when accreditations are negative, and better communication with the panels for tertiary vocational programmes. Moreover, there are some concerns relating to the communication of the Board of Governors, to better explain the reasons why the Board in some cases deviates from the expert panel recommendations.

4.6.3 NOKUT's Qualifications

Whether NOKUT possesses sufficient expertise to fulfil its purposes in an efficient manner

In its first period NOKUT has had some capacity problems. Even in light of a considerable workload and heavy efforts to reduce application-processing time, NOKUT staff seems capable, professional and committed. In general, the stakeholders are quite pleased with NOKUT's qualifications. The only issue on which some stakeholders demand more insight concerned the complexity of the vocational sector.

Whether NOKUT is an attractive workplace that manages to attract and retain qualified staff

NOKUT has a low staff turnover rate and is able to attract and retain qualified staff. The staff report to be generally satisfied with their job and workplace, and the leaders of the departments are competent and involved managers, appropriately dealing with high work pressures.

Whether NOKUT uses expert panels efficiently and sensibly

All NOKUT accreditations and evaluations are performed by external panels, and NOKUT appreciates the competences and functioning of the appointed panel members as fundamental for NOKUT. In some cases there has been divergence between the panels' and the Board of Governors's conclusions, and the role of the NOKUT Board of Governors vis-à-vis the expert panels seems not adequately defined. This is not a very efficient or sensible use of expert panels.

Whether NOKUT brings in external expertise when this is needed and/or desirable and routinely assures itself of the quality of these external contributions

The surveys show that among those being evaluated by NOKUT there is a reasonable high confidence in the qualifications of the NOKUT expert panels. Moreover, the quality of review processes is generally high, but varies. There is still a need to better ensure professional, fair and consistent procedures, and to forestall experts' misinterpretation of procedures and criteria and avoiding undue biases (see next item).

Whether NOKUT has developed sound procedures for appointing qualified members to the panels of experts, thereby securing the necessary expertise for each exercise of recognition, evaluation and accreditation

NOKUT's procedures for ensuring qualified panels and preventing conflicts of interest are based on adequate and publically available criteria on the selection of experts and the composition of panels. There are, however, some concerns relating to the handling and interpretation of the guidelines. Whereas avoiding appointing members with an affiliation to the evaluation object is explicitly mentioned in NOKUT's guidelines, more complex conflicts of interest such as affiliation to *competing* programmes or institutions and issues concerning

what might be termed ‘scholarly bias’ (e.g. against interdisciplinarity), are not explicitly mentioned. Whether such connections may cast doubt on an expert’s impartiality, seems left to the interpretation of the expert him/herself. When such kinds of conflicts of interest are not specified in NOKUT’s guidelines it is difficult for the evaluatees to raise such issues. According to our informants, there are cases in which such connections have entailed serious doubt about an expert’s impartiality without this causing replacement of the expert.

4.6.4 NOKUT’s Performance

Generally, there seems to be consensus in the field of higher education in Norway that NOKUT is doing what it should be doing and that there is general satisfaction among those in higher education institutions that have been evaluated by NOKUT under one of its schemes (survey results). There are some issues that need specific attention. For one, namely processing time, improvement is already visible. There was much concern among stakeholders about the time it took to obtain an answer to an application for programme accreditation. After initial problems due to the large number of requests, NOKUT has been able to shorten processing time for most of its tasks (even when demands have increased). The evaluation team understands the critical comments from institutions (in particular vocational schools) about the serious inconveniences that the delay has brought about but is of the opinion that NOKUT is making improvements.

Whether NOKUT’s criteria for evaluation and accreditation are fit for purpose

In general NOKUT’s criteria are clearly formulated and form an important basis for the assessment in all types of NOKUT evaluations/accreditations. To better address the central issues of quality control and quality improvement there is still room for refining the criteria. Currently the criteria for the quality assurance audits are not sufficiently addressing achievements concerning the quality of education. Turning to the criteria for the accreditation of study programmes, and in particular their application in reaccreditations, NOKUT and the higher education institutions do not seem to have a shared understanding about how staff qualifications ought to be assessed, and many panel members also expressed serious concerns regarding this criterion. In other words, NOKUT has not yet been able to settle criteria for assessing staff qualifications which the evaluatees find meaningful and adequate.

Whether NOKUT’s methods and procedures are fit for purpose, well defined and easily accessible

NOKUT’s methods and procedures for evaluation and accreditation are well defined and easily accessible, and in general the stakeholders are quite satisfied with the way NOKUT perform the evaluations and accreditations. A specific needed improvement concerns the assessments on the implementation of the quality assurance system. These assessments seem heavily dependent on the site visits, and evaluatees feel that the implementation criterion is not consistently applied.

As noted above, it is the opinion of the evaluation team that the overall composition of the NOKUT tool-box implies too much focus on quality control and too little focus on improving quality. There are for example so far no follow-up procedures to ensuring incentives for enhancing quality of education and not just fulfilling the formal minimum standards.

Whether NOKUT's procedures facilitate continuous feedback regarding the quality of the agency's own operations and results

NOKUT has adequate internal quality assurance routines⁴⁹, and publishes a yearly report focused on its internal quality assurance.⁵⁰ Even if NOKUT's procedures for internal quality assurance are well functioning, transparent and self-critical, this cannot guarantee against all deficiencies and some of NOKUT's accreditation processes have been rather lengthy.

To further develop the ability to improve and avoid deficiencies, external feedback could be more systematically dealt with. Here the evaluation team sees a role for NOKUT's new Analysis and Development Unit.

Whether NOKUT has sound procedures for the recognition of foreign higher education and for other vocational post-secondary education

The evaluation team finds that the recognition of foreign higher education works well. Further improvement needed relates specifically to the databases and communication with stakeholders within this field.

Regarding the recognition of vocational education much has been achieved in short time. Improvement of criteria and procedures for the recognition of vocational education is still needed. Currently the stakeholders see both the criteria and the procedures as problematic. It should be noted that the private schools are far less satisfied with NOKUT than the public schools, and they are less positive to the impacts of the NOKUT approval process.

4.6.5 Results of NOKUT's activities

Whether NOKUT contributes substantially to assuring and developing the quality of Norwegian higher education institutions and other post-secondary vocational education (ISCED 4)

NOKUT is effective in *assuring* quality, and the accreditations also initiate some quality improvement at the institutions when preparing for the accreditations. As mentioned above, NOKUT has not been able to be equally effective in *developing* the quality of Norwegian higher education institutions and tertiary vocational education. It should still be emphasised that a large part of the survey respondents are quite positive concerning the effects and impacts of NOKUT's evaluations and accreditations on improving quality.

⁴⁹ http://www.nokut.no/graphics/NOKUT/English%20pages/NOKUT/qual_ass_system.pdf

⁵⁰ http://www.nokut.no/graphics/NOKUT/English%20pages/NOKUT/qal_ass_rep.pdf

On the other hand, some serious negative impacts relating to decreased recognition following reaccreditations are also reported. In Chapter 5, a softer approach to quality assurance is recommended to avoid such negative effects.

Whether NOKUT's regulations, methods and reports represent an efficient and cost-effective use of resources

Cost-effective use of resources is given high priority in NOKUT, much has been achieved in short time and processing time has been cut considerably. The evaluation team still finds that too many resources are spent on superfluous (input-)quality control, and in Chapter 5 it is recommended to restructure the national quality assurance scheme to focus more on quality improvement and a stronger output orientation.

Whether NOKUT's set of priorities and achieved results reflect the agency's objectives, strategy and activities

On the overall level, NOKUT priorities and results reflect its objectives and strategies. The tasks are adequately performed and significant results are achieved. Looking into the main goals and strategies specified in NOKUT's strategic plan the evaluation team emphasises that the items 'contribute to the quality improvement efforts of the institutions' and 'taking totality and context into account when carrying out quality assessments' could be taken better care of (recommendations next chapter).

5 Recommendations

The evaluation of NOKUT and its activities has disclosed a national agency that has managed to put quality on the agenda in Norwegian tertiary education. The challenges concerning building up numerous activities while simultaneously handling the growing demand for the services provided have, in most respects, been successful. The routines and procedures established points to an agency with high ambitions and with a growing self-confidence. And although there are debates about how NOKUT performs its duties, many stakeholders do think that NOKUT is a legitimate and necessary actor within the sector.

That being said, the evaluation has also disclosed areas where the evaluation team believes there is room for improvements. In this chapter, we offer recommendations that we believe can further develop NOKUT and its activities. When discussing possible areas for improvement, the evaluation team has employed a system perspective in which the laws and regulations structuring NOKUT and its activities have been taken into account. However the team has also taken account of feedback from the stakeholders relevant to the agency. Hence, the team acknowledges that issues under the headings ‘regulations’ and ‘resources’ cannot be resolved without ministerial involvement since the Ministry is the most important regulator for NOKUT. At the same time, the evaluation team is also of the view that ‘enhancing quality’ (see below) can only happen if NOKUT, the institutions and other stakeholders further develop and strengthen their dialogue in the future.

Regulations

1. Although NOKUT is an independent agency, there are clear limits to this autonomy. The laws and regulations guiding NOKUT’s work, objectives and activities, are quite detailed and on some issues leave little room for NOKUT as a professional agency. It should also be pointed out that quite detailed laws and regulations make flexible and fitness-for-purpose approaches difficult to apply. The Ministry and NOKUT should evaluate the current regulations with the aim of increasing the flexibility and appropriateness of the agency’s operations.
2. The evaluation team has sympathy for the need of the Ministry to initiate specific evaluations of Norwegian higher education. However, the team recommends that the Ministry ensures that requests for such evaluations do not overlap or interfere with ongoing evaluation activities of NOKUT and, further, to consider whether specific evaluations put a too high working pressure on NOKUT. The Ministry may consider supplying more additional resources for comprehensive additional evaluations.

Resources

3. Given the size of the Norwegian higher education system, and what the evaluation team sees as the main challenges concerning quality assurance, the evaluation team is

of the opinion that NOKUT is adequately supplied with respect to resources (staffing and funding). However, a further increase in the workload might have dramatic consequences for the capacity of the agency to respond to the demand for accreditations and evaluations, and the agency may face a situation of insufficient staff and financial resources. It is recommended that NOKUT, together with the Ministry, engage in a discussion of what should be the prioritised evaluation tools and activities for the future. The evaluation team recommends rethinking the evaluation instruments and their functioning allowing for the development of a national evaluation scheme that is more focused and cost-efficient (see below).

4. One important step to enable better use of resources is related to the overall planning of the evaluation activities. Multi-year plans, based on a long-term strategy, and with Ministry commissioned evaluations budgeted separately/fully financed, would allow NOKUT to meet the demands of such requests from the Ministry without affecting the personnel resources available for performing its regular/core tasks.
5. Given the small size of the new Analysis and Development Unit, and the increasing accountability and information challenges of NOKUT, the agency should also consider allocating more resources to these and related activities. This could be organised in various ways. For example, one option is to formally allocate staff and resources to these activities, while another option is for NOKUT staff to operate in a more seamless fashion between departments and activities.

Strategy and planning

6. For NOKUT to take on a more pro-active role concerning the enhancement of quality, the evaluation team recommends NOKUT to initiate a process that should end up with a mid-term to long-term strategy (three to five years) for stimulating continuous improvement of Norwegian higher education. The team is of the view that this is necessary to prevent fragmentation of NOKUT activities caused by an increasing growth in the external demands for accreditations and evaluations.
7. Developing and instigating such a strategy is the responsibility for the NOKUT Board of Governors. This would imply that the Board should focus less on being an 'executive' body associated with accreditation decisions and should spend more time on supervisory and strategic activities.
8. Enabling the transformation of NOKUT from being predominantly a reactive agency, mainly dependent on applications concerning accreditations from higher education institutions, to a more pro-active agency will rely on the allocation of organisational resources to the strategic aims and objectives and the perceived relevance of the activities conducted.

Enhancing quality

9. The data collected through the evaluation of NOKUT suggests that the agency is much associated with control activities, and less with institutional and academic

development. The evaluation team recommends that NOKUT finds a better balance between control and improvement for the future. Currently, there are relatively few differences in effects between various evaluation methods, which again points to the need to articulate the differences in focus among NOKUT's evaluations. The evaluation team recommends, in particular, that the quality audits be revised and further tailored as a tool for quality improvement (see below).

10. The evaluation team is also of the opinion that a continuous dialogue between the agency and the sector is a critical factor for success for stimulating enhancement. Follow-up of earlier evaluations and accreditations should be the starting point for this dialogue. The evaluation team would recommend that a more structural approach for follow-up is established in which systematic feedback mechanisms for stimulating quality improvement processes, revisits to institutions, and a system for spreading best practices, is implemented.
11. Specific evaluations of innovative practices within the sector could be one way to further stimulate improvement in the sector. Such evaluations should be characterised as something between an ordinary evaluation and a development project, and should be designed with the purpose to enhance quality of education.
12. Given the distinctive role of the current evaluation panels, the evaluation team points out that the NOKUT staff could take on a stronger enhancement-oriented role than seems to be the case at present. For example, more guidance to evaluatees in advance of accreditations and evaluations is something the sector needs and would appreciate.
13. NOKUT should also consider how its accountability function could be further improved through disseminating information. NOKUT has initiated some important activities including an annual conference for the sector. Nevertheless, the evaluation team thinks that NOKUT could contribute with more substantial information concerning the quality of Norwegian higher education. The new Analysis and Development Unit is a promising step in this regard, especially if its activities are related to bringing about more information on the characteristics, substance, strengths and weaknesses (and the improvements taking place to alleviate them) of higher education in Norway. Such information could function as valuable corrections to anecdotal and *ad hoc* information about the quality of Norwegian higher education.

Refining criteria

14. Criteria for the audits of quality assurance should be more focused on assessing what enhancement of the quality of education has been achieved. Currently the assessments on the implementation of the QA-system are heavily dependent on the site visits, and evaluatees feel that the criterion concerning the implementation of the QA-system is not consistently applied. The evaluation team does understand that such an approach has been necessary in a start-up phase but, for the next round of audits, a more refined and impact-oriented approach should be applied.

15. Programme (re)accreditations: A shared understanding of how to assess staff qualifications is needed. The formulation and relevance of the criteria used by NOKUT should be looked into since past reaccreditations seems to have created considerable confusion about how certain criteria should be interpreted, and the relative importance of certain criteria (search for procedures and criteria to ensure that the evaluatees agree that assessments are meaningful and adequate). The evaluation team would warn against attributing too much weight to a limited number of quantitative criteria, effectively disregarding criteria of a more qualitative character. The team would advise NOKUT to develop a more holistic, coherent and flexible set of criteria.
16. Given the diverse landscape of study programmes in Norway, NOKUT should also consider developing differentiated sets of accreditation criteria for different kinds of study programmes (e.g. criteria for academic vs. professional study programmes). This could also be seen as a valuable process with respect to the establishment of a national Qualification Framework in Norway, and as an important step for clarifying the roles and responsibilities between NOKUT's criteria and the criteria of a forthcoming national framework.

An illustration of a future national quality assurance scheme (Higher education)

Based on the above, the evaluation team would like to suggest in more detail what a national evaluation system more focused on development could look like. In this suggestion, the current institutional accreditations are not taken into account. There are two reasons for this. First, the evaluation team finds that the question concerning institutional accreditation is tied to issues of the structure of the higher education system, like numbers and types of higher education institutions, which go far beyond the mandate of the current evaluation. Second, the evaluation team is of the opinion that the institutional accreditations are more of a control-tool than an enhancement tool. Given the current emphasis on control in Norwegian quality assurance, the evaluation team would like to strengthen the enhancement dimension of the whole system. The team is of the view that this can be achieved by keeping the main instruments of audit, re-accreditation and national evaluations, but in a transformed way:

- A. The team recommends the continuing use of an audit approach as the most important evaluation tool in Norwegian higher education. This tool is relevant for making higher education institutions take responsibility for their own quality work but its focus needs developing. The team especially emphasises the use of a more targeted audit approach, which works as follows:
 - An improvement audit, focusing on quality improvement and exploring (i) how the quality system works in practice (ii) its impacts on institutional outputs.
 - Looking more deeply, during the audit, at (i) system-wide issues, for example the way ECTS is applied or how student feedback is used in follow-up and improvement work in the institution (ii) specific issues the institutions want to be included or institutional issues which have been brought to the attention of

NOKUT as areas for further exploration (including the possibility of initiating (re-)accreditation of already-licensed study programmes at a later stage, see below).

- Making clear recommendations for action to the institution. Such recommendation should balance the expert view of outsiders with the institutional responsibility Norwegian higher education institutions have for developing their own quality.
 - Follow-up within a specified period (by letter in the first instance) to see what changes have resulted from the audit. In case of insufficient action taken after an audit, there should be an opening for re-auditing to investigate reasons for lack of improvement, or alternatively to initiate re-accreditations of study programmes which appear at risk regarding quality of output. However, the team recommends that the current negative sanction of losing institutional self-accrediting rights be discontinued. This is not a targeted sanction and fails to address existing quality problems at the level of study programmes. Opening up for re-accreditation is in the view of the team a more proper form of reaction.
 - Publication and dissemination of a follow-up report or letter documenting how the institution is working to improve quality.
- B. The evaluation team is of the opinion that the current programme accreditation scheme is not very focused and flexible. Much resources and capacity is tied up in a very standardised procedure for accrediting new programmes with less resources and capacity for more targeted action. The evaluation team would recommend that NOKUT initiate a licensing procedure (via documentation) to bring down the processing time, and instead use most of the accreditation resources on re-accreditations of existing programmes where needed. Such re-accreditations may follow from an audit undertaken by NOKUT, or may be initiated independently. The evaluation team believes that system-wide re-accreditations should not be conducted, at least not on a regular basis, as they are very resource-demanding and bring issues of equality rather than quality to the fore.
- C. The evaluation team is positive about the existence of some system-wide evaluations as required by the Ministry, by the sector, or on other grounds. We would recommend these, especially if the emphasis continues to be on development. The evaluation team is of the view that a combination of audits, with their institutional focus, and national evaluations, with a focus on disciplines or study programmes, will provide an optimum means of stimulating quality enhancement.

Refining the instruments (Vocational education)

17. The evaluation team recommends that current criteria and procedures for the recognition of vocational education be changed. Currently, stakeholders have concerns about the adequacy, efficiency and effectiveness of procedures and criteria.

18. The evaluation team is aware of current national initiatives suggesting that institutions may apply for general approval to provide tertiary vocational education instead of needing to apply independently for each single programme, and endorses these. This general approval should be linked to an existing and well-functioning institutional quality assurance system, and NOKUT should be authorised to audit the QA-systems of the institutions seeking approval to provide vocational education.
19. For smaller organisations/schools where individual programmes still have to be accredited by NOKUT, there should be a concerted effort to reduce processing time, setting a target close to four months. NOKUT should consider whether this will demand internal reallocation of staff and resources.

Expert panels' impartiality and authority

20. The evaluation team recommends that more efforts are taken by NOKUT to avoid panel members with a conflict of interest related to issues such as affiliation to competing programmes/institutions and scholarly bias.
21. NOKUT is also advised to use more experts from outside Norway during evaluations and accreditations. Beside the advantages concerning impartiality, the use of foreign experts may also bring about new and broader perspectives as to how Norwegian tertiary education could be further improved.
22. Procedures and criteria should be refined to forestall misinterpretation by experts, as well as bias. Confusion of the role of the NOKUT Board of Governors *vis-à-vis* the expert panels should be avoided. To increase the legitimacy of the whole accreditation procedure, the process should be designed in such a way that, in general, expert panels are not overruled by the NOKUT Board of Governors.

Recognition of foreign education

23. Further improvement of databases and communication regarding recognition of foreign education can be achieved, and NOKUT is encouraged to increase its international collaboration to provide faster in-depth information about foreign education.

Appendix 1 Terms of Reference

Extract from: 'Evaluation of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education. Contract Notice' Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, March 2007.

1.2 About the Evaluation of NOKUT

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research has decided that an evaluation of NOKUT will be carried out in 2007. The evaluation has two objectives: The first objective is to examine whether NOKUT meets the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area"⁵¹ adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in the member states of the Bologna process in Bergen in May '05. The second objective is to evaluate the national role of NOKUT in the Norwegian educational system. Separate reports should be written for each of these objectives. It is not possible to submit a proposal on only one of the parts of the evaluation.

The following areas should be taken into consideration in the evaluation: NOKUT's purpose, mandate and strategy, NOKUT's organisation and management, NOKUT's expertise and results, and NOKUT's methodology and procedures. Furthermore, it is of special interest to examine how NOKUT balances its responsibility for quality assurance i.e. its supervisory and control functions with its responsibility for developing a quality culture in education. The evaluation should also examine how NOKUT understands its own mission and responsibility, given in Act no. 15 of 1 April 2005 relating to universities and university colleges.

1.3 About NOKUT

NOKUT was established by the Norwegian Parliament, Stortinget, in 2002 and commenced its activities as from 1 January 2003. NOKUT is an independent government agency. The purpose of NOKUT is to supervise and help develop the quality of higher education, and, since 2004, other post-secondary vocational training in Norway at ISCED 4 level. This is done through evaluations, as well as through accreditation and recognition of quality assurance systems, institutions and course provisions.

In addition, NOKUT processes individual applications for general recognition of foreign

⁵¹ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. ENQA report. ISBN 952-5539-04-0

higher education qualifications. As the Norwegian ENIC-NARIC centre, NOKUT is also responsible for providing foreign institutions and partners with information about the Norwegian educational system, and the system for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications. NOKUT is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). NOKUT employs some 50 staff and is headed by a board composed of seven members who hold the overall responsibility for the operations and the decisions taken. It has an annual budget of around 40 M NOK.

The basis of NOKUT's activities is stated in Act no. 15 of 1 April 2005 relating to universities and university colleges Chapter 2 and § 3-1, with corresponding regulations, and Act no. 56 of 20 June 2003 relating to post secondary vocational training section 2, with corresponding regulations.

1.4 The Contract Notice

This document contains administrative conditions and award criteria for the procurement. The contractual terms will be available by 12 April 2007.

2 Description of the procurement

2.1 Description of the evaluation

The following elements should be considered in the evaluation:

NOKUT's Purpose, Mandate and Strategy

It should be evaluated whether:

- NOKUT's strategies and goals are clearly formulated
- NOKUT's strategy, goals and activities correspond to the purposes and activities outlined in section 2-1 of Act no. 15 of 1 April 2005 relating to Universities and University Colleges and in section 2 of Act no. 56 of 20 June 2003 relating to Vocational Post-Secondary Education.
- NOKUT meets the membership criteria of ENQA.
- NOKUT has a consistent understanding of its supervisory functions.

Organisation and Management

It should be evaluated whether:

- NOKUT's system of organisation and management facilitate the professional and efficient running of the agency's activities
- NOKUT is an attractive workplace that manages to attract and retain qualified staff

- NOKUT disseminates information and communicates with stakeholders and the general public in a clear and transparent manner
- NOKUT acts independently from the Ministry within its legal mandate.
- NOKUT manages to balance its responsibility for assuring quality with its responsibility for developing quality.

NOKUT's Qualifications

It should be evaluated whether:

- NOKUT possesses sufficient expertise to fulfil its purposes in an efficient manner.
- NOKUT brings in external expertise when this is needed and/or desirable and routinely assures itself of the quality of these external contributions.
- NOKUT uses expert panels efficiently and sensibly
- NOKUT has developed sound procedures for appointing qualified members to the panels of experts, thereby securing the necessary expertise for each exercise of recognition, evaluation and accreditation.

NOKUT's Performance

It should be evaluated whether:

- NOKUT's methods and procedures are fit for purpose, well defined and easily accessible.
- NOKUT's procedures facilitate continuous feedback regarding the quality of the agency's own operations and results.
- NOKUT's criteria for evaluation and accreditation are fit for
- NOKUT has sound procedures for the recognition of foreign higher education and for other vocational post-secondary education.

NOKUT's Results

It should be evaluated whether:

- NOKUT's regulations, methods and reports represent an efficient and cost-effective use of resources.
- NOKUT's set of priorities and achieved results reflect the agency's objectives, strategy and activities.
- NOKUT contributes substantially to assuring and developing the quality of Norwegian higher education institutions and other post-secondary vocational education (ISCED 4).

Appendix 2 Overview of the evaluation team's site visits and interviews

A Visits to institutions with experiences from NOKUT audits, evaluations and accreditations

In total 56 persons were interviewed at these site visits: 31 persons representing the institutional leadership and administration, 10 students and 15 members of academic staff.

University of Oslo, UiO (1 Oct 07)

Bodø University College, HiBo (2 Oct 07)

MF Norwegian School of Theology (3 Oct 07)

Folkeuniversitetet Adult Education Association (3 Oct 07)

Norwegian University of Life Sciences, UMB (4 Oct 07)

Akershus University College, HiAk (4 Oct 07)

B Visit to NOKUT

In total 33 persons were interviewed (and 9 of them twice):

28 NOKUT staff members and leadership

2 student representatives in NOKUT Board/the Appeal Board

3 other external Board members

20th of November

09.00 – 10.00	Meeting with Oddvar Haugland and the 4 members of the group preparing the self-evaluation report(s)
10.00 – 10.45	Meeting with Head of the Quality Audit Unit, Jon Haakstad
11.00 – 12.30	Meeting with staff of Quality Audit Unit (4 persons)
13.15 – 14.00	Meeting with Head of the Accreditation Unit, Tove Blytt Holmen
14.00 – 15.00	Meeting with staff in the Accreditation Unit (higher education, 6 persons)
15.15 – 16.15	Meeting with staff in the Accreditation Unit (tertiary vocational education, 3 persons)
16.15 – 17.30	Meeting with Chair and members of NOKUT Board (Petter Aaslestad; Ragnhild Kvålshaugen; Per Arne Syrrist; Mikael Strand; Wenche Frøstad)

21st of November

09.00 – 09.45	Meeting with Head of external communication Dorte Birch, and Head of administration Per Øyvind Mathisen in NOKUT
09.45 – 10.15	Meeting with head of the International Recognition Unit, Ida Lønne
10.15 – 11.00	Meeting with the staff in the International Recognition Unit (8 persons)

11.15 – 11.45	Meeting with the Research and Analysis Unit (2 persons)
11.45 – 12.30	Meeting with Secretary of the two Appeal Boards Eva Liljegren and one student member of the Appeal Board for Higher Education (Øistein Østtveit Svelle, StL)
13.30 – 15.30	Closing meeting with the NOKUT leadership (Oddvar Haugland, Jon Haakstad, Tove Blytt Holmen, Ida Lønne)

C Interviews with stakeholders

All interviews were conducted at NIFU STEP's location in Oslo. In total 18 persons were interviewed.

Programme evaluation team interviews 22nd November 2007

09.00 – 10.00	Meeting with the Ministry of Education and Research (KD), Department of Higher Education Toril Johansson, Director General Lars Vasbotten, Section for Ownership and Governance Marie Wien Fjell, Section for Budget and Finance Tone Flood Strøm, Section for Higher Education Structure and Quality Assurance
10.00 – 11.30	Meeting with the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR) and the Network for Private Higher Education Institutions (NPH) Jarle Aarbakke, Chair UHR Ola Stave, Secretary General UHR Guri Bakken, Deputy Secretary General UHR Vidar L Haanes, Chair NPH Jan Duvaland, NPH
12.15 – 13.30	Meeting with the National Union of Students (NSU), the Norwegian Association of Students (StL), and the Association of Norwegian Students Abroad (ANSA): Knut Høgetveit, NSU Sine Halvorsen, StL Maria Christensen, StL Anders Fjelland Bentsen, President ANSA Elin Kollerud, Head of ANSA Information Centre
13.30 – 14.30	Meeting with the Norwegian Association of Researchers (Forskerforbundet): Kari Kjenndalen, Secretary General Sigrid Lem, Deputy Secretary General

15.00 – 16.00 Meeting with the Business Association of Norwegian knowledge- and technology based enterprises (Abelia):
Knut Erik Beyer-Arnesen, Chair Forum for Vocational Schools

Additional interviews

Kjell Frønsdal, Chair of the NOKUT Appeal Boards, was interviewed by Liv Langfeldt 29 Nov. 07.

Appendix 3 Quantitative overview of NOKUT's activities

(Number of accreditations, audits, evaluations, recognitions – and rejections rates)

Overview of NOKUT's programme accreditations, success rates

Table A3. 1 Overview PhD Programme accreditations by year

Year	Approved	Not approved	Withdrawn	N
2004	66.7		33.3	3
2005	50.0	50.0		6
2006	100.0			1
2007*	100.0			1
Total	63.6	27.3	9.1	11

Source: Lists provided by NOKUT

*Year the application was approved/disapproved or the case ended.

**As by 28 August 07. 9 applications were under review, these are not included in the calculations.

The 9 applications include 5 from HiAdger, 4 from HiBodø, 1 from BI and 1 from HiOslo.

Table A3. 2 Overview Master Programme accreditations by year, percent

Year*	Approved***	Not approved	Withdrawn/dismissed/other	N
2003	100.0	0.0	0.0	8
2004	77.4	9.7	12.9	31
2005	80.6	5.6	13.9	36
2006	80.0	0.0	20.0	25
2007**	78.9	10.5	10.5	19
Total	80.7	5.9	13.4	119

Source: Lists provided by NOKUT

*Year the application was approved/disapproved or the case ended.

**As by 28 August 07. 9 applications were under review, these are not included in the calculations.

One application may concern more than one program. In one case were one of the two programs were approved and the other not, the application is counted as two separate applications. Except for this case the unit of analysis is the application, not the program.

*** 3 of the programmes were accredited based on the applying institution's self-accreditation authority.

Table A3. 3 Overview Bachelor Programme accreditations by year, percent

Year*	Approved***	Not approved	Withdrawn/dismissed/other	N
2003			100.0	2
2004	66.7	13.3	20.0	15
2005	70.0	10.0	20.0	10
2006	14.3		85.7	7
2007**	100.0			1
Total	54.3	8.6	37.1	35

Source: Lists provided by NOKUT

*Year the application was approved/disapproved or the case ended.

**As by 27 August 07. 6 applications were under review, these are not included in the calculations.

***6 of these were approved administratively/without a review panel.

Table A3. 4 Overview of accreditations of shorter (1/2-2 years) higher education programmes, by year, percent

Year*	Approved***	Not approved	Withdrawn/dismissed/other	N
2003	93.3	6.7		15
2004	52.6	15.8	31.6	19
2005	59.1	13.6	27.3	22
2006	43.8	6.3	50.0	16
2007**	50.0	50.0		2
Total	60.8	12.2	27.0	74

Source: Lists provided by NOKUT

*Year the application was approved/disapproved or the case ended.

**As by 27 August 07. 10 applications were under review, these are not included in the calculations.

***12 of these were approved administratively/without a review panel.

Table A3. 5 Overview of accreditations of vocational school programmes, by year, percent

Year*	Approved	Not approved	Withdrawn or dismissed	N
2005	26.2	2.4	71.4	42
2006	77.1	13.9	9.0	599
2007**	85.6	3.6	10.8	388
Total	78.6	9.4	12.0	1048

Source: Table provided by NOKUT

*Year the application was approved/disapproved or the case ended.

**As by 7 Sept 07. A large number of applications were under review and are not included in the calculations.

Table A3. 6 Applications for institutional accreditation: Overview of decisions

Accreditation decision	Institution
Accredited based on panel recommendation	Diakonhjemmet Høgskole (as university college in 2005) Høgskolen i Stavanger (as university in 2004) Norges Landbrukshøgskole (as university in 2004)
Accredited against (initial) panel recommendation	Menighetsfakultetet (as specialized university in 2004) Norsk Lærerakademi B&M (as university college in 2006) Høgskolen i Agder (as university in 2006)
Not accredited	Norges Informasjonsteknologiske Høgskole (as university college 2004) Høgskolen i Molde (as specialized university in 2007)

Table A3. 7 Outcome of NOKUT's quality assurance system audits 2003-2007, percent*

Outcome of audit	Institutions				Total
	Universities	Specialized university	University colleges	without inst. accreditation	
Acceptable: positive assessments	66.7	60.0	45.8	81.8	58.7
Acceptable: critical assessments	33.3	20.0	37.5	18.2	30.4
Not-acceptable		20.0	16.7		10.9
N	6	5	24	11	46

Source: Analyses of audit reports conducted by Taran Thune, NIFU STEP. Categorisation into institutional categories by status in 2007.

*Reports completed by September 2007 are included in the calculations.

Table A3. 8 Applications to NOKUT for general recognition of foreign education. Number of applications and outcome 2003-2006

Year	Total applications	Positive decisions/degree equal to Norwegian:				No positive decision/rejection	
		Below Bachelor or no degree	Bachelor	Master	PhD	Count	percent
2003	1614	315	591	97		611	37,9
2004	1816	325	883	163	3	442	24,3
2005	2452	408	1264	191	5	584	23,8
2006	2288	443	1112	177	7	549	24,0
Total	8170	1491	3850	628	15	2186	26,8

Source: The NOKUT self-evaluation report, part 2, page 26.

Appendix 4 Results of the surveys

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Summary results

The panel members

- Panel members are mainly satisfied with the information and preparation for the work. Panel members for tertiary vocational education approval are somewhat less satisfied than other panel members.
- Concerning the organisation of the evaluation/accreditation, the panel members for tertiary vocational education approval are clearly least satisfied, whereas the panel members for the audits of quality assurance systems are by far most satisfied.
- The framework conditions – in terms of schedule, panel members’ competencies, and assistance from NOKUT – obtain reasonable good scores. In several cases such conditions are assessed as excellent. Only in a few cases they are assessed lower than ‘fair’.
- Panel members perceive the aim of the evaluation/accreditation as ‘mainly controlling’ standards/quality (34 percent) or as ‘as much improving as controlling’ standards/quality (50 percent). There is surprisingly little difference between the different types of evaluation/accreditation regarding this question.
- The NOKUT standards and criteria, the panel members’ competences, the site visits and the discussions within the panel appear to be the most important bases for the assessments. NOKUT’s preparing seminars/meetings and the self-assessment report/documentation from the institution under review seem somewhat less important. There are some interesting differences between the different types of evaluation/accreditation: the preparing seminars/meetings and the self-assessment report are less important for the audits of the quality assurance systems than the other types of evaluation and accreditation, whereas the site visits are more important (92 percent state ‘very important’).
- The panels for the accreditation of institutions have somewhat more difficulties in reaching agreement than other kinds of panels. Panels for accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses have less difficulty. The most common reasons for difficulties in reaching agreement are different views among the panel members and unclear standards and criteria.
- 38 percent state that the quality of the program/institution to be accredited/approved was below the required level. This is far more than NOKUT’s rejection rates and should be looked closer into. (For the purpose of this evaluation, consistency is only studied on a macro level, not for the individual assessments/reports/decisions.)
- The panel members give NOKUT good scores on qualifications, organisation and procedures (including qualified staff; adequate and efficient organisation; professional and efficient review procedures; adequate handling of conflicts of interest; ability to assure that the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation/accreditation reports are not influenced by special interests; ability to reach fair, consistent and authoritative conclusions; adequate appeal procedures).

Respondents providing tertiary vocational education

- A large majority, some 80 percent or more of the vocational schools indicate satisfaction with all formats of communication and information they received from NOKUT as well as the procedures from application to the final report.
- The issues with lowest satisfaction scores are information about criteria for review (25 percent answer insufficient information), and the report from the evaluation panel (15 percent are unsatisfied with the report).
- The vocational school respondents report high positive impacts of the evaluation on the educational programmes. The quality aspects of the education, its quality assurance, as well as school reputation, have profited from the approval process according to the respondents. In total, 94 percent of the respondents report moderate or high positive effects of the NOKUT approval process for the school and/or the educational programme offered. No respondent reports any negative effects of the NOKUT approval process so far. However, the private schools are far less satisfied with NOKUT than the public schools, and they are less positive to the impacts of the NOKUT approval process.
- It should be noted that that the survey only includes schools which have obtained approval of at least one vocational education programme. We were not able to acquire e-mail addresses to applicants without any approved educational programme. Only 4 of the 54 replies concerns applications that were not fully approved. Likewise the 'in-process' applications are *not covered*, which cause a serious bias in the survey as the main problem with the vocational school applications seems to be long processing time.

Respondents at higher education institutions (HEIs)

- Respondents at higher education institutions perceive the evaluation/accreditation as somewhat more aimed at *controlling* standards/quality, than what the evaluators do (46 versus 39 percent answer 'only' or 'mainly at controlling').
- A large majority finds that they have received sufficient information and that the information was clear. They still seem somewhat less satisfied with their contacts with NOKUT and the information they receive than the vocational school respondents.
- 31 percent of those who participated in preparing or who was the institutional contact for the evaluation, report that they received insufficient information about the criteria/standards for assessments (2 percent report receiving no information at all, and 64 percent report sufficient information).
- A majority gives high scores (56 percent answer good or 9 percent excellent) on the work with the self-evaluation report/application in terms of giving better overview of the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the institution. Similar scores given to providing input to future planning and improvements are somewhat lower (45 percent good, 4 percent excellent).

- The meetings with the evaluation panel seems good in terms of giving the institutions an opportunity to present themselves (72 percent answer good or excellent) and somewhat less able to give the institution valuable input from the evaluation panel. Still, more than a third find that the meeting gave valuable input from the evaluation committee or new insight for their institution (32 percent answer good, 5 percent answer excellent).
- NOKUT's way of performing their accreditations and evaluations score rather good. 40 percent is fully satisfied with how NOKUT conducted the task, 44 percent partly satisfied and 7 percent unsatisfied. Only 8 percent is unsatisfied with the evaluation report (and 31 percent partly satisfied) and 5 percent unsatisfied with the qualifications of the committee (and 26 percent partly satisfied).
- Also when assessing NOKUT's qualifications, organisation and procedures more generally, the respondents are fairly positive (but as could be expected somewhat less positive than the panel members' assessments on these issues). It should be noted that a large part of the respondents lack information about NOKUT's handling of conflicts of interest and appeal procedures, and report to be unable to assess such issues.
- A considerable part of the respondents report some clear positive effects of the accreditation/evaluation. More than a third reports clear positive effects on new routines and procedures, the quality assurance of the education/teaching and the scholarly discussion on learning and teaching. Effects on issues such as the scholarly reputation of the institution, development of new courses/programs, cooperation between administrative and scholarly staff and the internal resource allocation, are on the other hand somewhat mixed (Table A4. 35). The share reporting high positive impact is highest for the institutional accreditations, and lowest for the accreditations/reaccreditations of programmes (Table A4. 38).
- Also at system level, the impacts of the current Norwegian quality assurance system are perceived to be positive. A majority find that the system helps putting quality issues on the institutional agenda (77 percent), create equal framework conditions for public and private institutions (54 percent), and provide students with information about the quality of the education (56 percent).

1. Survey to panel members

Respondents and response rates

Table A4. 1 Panel member survey: Response rates, percent

Sample category	Counts	Response rate (%)	
		Complete sample	Incomplete sample
'Universe': List of panel members provided by NOKUT	488	70.5	75.4
Requested sample: Panel members with a listed e-mail address	474	72.6	77.6
Obtainable sample: Respondents presumably with correct e-mail address (no rejection notes)	431	79.8	85.4
Replies (counts)		*344	**368

*Obtained complete sample = Respondents completing the survey

**Obtained incomplete sample = Respondents accessing the survey (including those completing parts of it)

The response rates of the student representatives are somewhat lower than for other panel members. Of the 32 student representatives on the lists of panel members, 20 completed the form (63 percent), 3 more accessed the survey without completing it, and 9 gave no reply.⁵²

Table A4. 2 Panel member survey: Response rates by type of accreditation/evaluation, percent

Type of NOKUT accreditation/evaluation	Completed form	Opened the form without completing	No reply	N
Recognition of tertiary vocational education	61.8	8.8	29.4	170
Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions	82.4	7.8	9.8	51
Accreditation (of higher education institutions or accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses)	77.4	6.0	16.5	248
Evaluation of the quality of higher education	100.0	0	0	5
Total	72.6	7.2	20.3	474

⁵² These calculations include the panel members we could identify as students in the lists provided by NOKUT. There might have been more students among the panel members (not all panel members in the lists had a 'title' added to their names).

Table A4. 3 Panel member survey: Type of accreditation/evaluation

'Please indicate what kind of NOKUT accreditation/evaluation you have been involved in'	Frequencies	Percent
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education	111	31.1
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions	39	10.9
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions	42	11.8
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	140	39.2
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education	21	5.9
f. Other/unsure	4	1.1
Total	357	100.0

Note: Several respondents had participated in more than one NOKUT accreditation/evaluation and were asked to relate their answers to the most recent completed accreditation/evaluation they had contributed to. The replies may differ from what appears to be their most current task according to NOKUT's lists (cf. response rates table above). Below the replies from the respondents answering 'Other/unsure' is analysed according to the category in NOKUT's panel member lists. The remaining are analysed according to the respondents' account of the kind of evaluation.

Table A4. 4 Type and year of accreditation/evaluation, panel members survey replies, percent

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	N
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education		2.7	12.7	48.2	36.4	110
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions	7.7	5.1	10.3	25.6	51.3	39
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions	7.1	16.7	21.4	19.0	35.7	42
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	1.4	6.5	32.6	25.4	34.1	138
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education	4.8	9.5	19.0	38.1	28.6	21
f. Other/unsure		25.0	25.0	25.0	25.0	4
Total	2.5	6.8	21.8	32.5	36.4	354

There are high response rates for all years.⁵³ The higher numbers of respondents for the later year in the table above reflect that several of the panel members have taken part in more than one evaluation/accreditation and were asked to relate their answer to their most recent NOKUT task, and also that NOKUT have conducted more evaluations in the latter years.

Table A4. 5 Panel members' background: position

Respondent's position at the time of the accreditation/evaluation	Frequencies	Percent
a. Scholarly position in a higher education institution	254	71.5
b. Scholarly position in another kind of institution	19	5.4
c. Student	19	5.4
d. Other	63	17.7
Total	355	100.0

One of the respondents answering 'other' was a student representative according to the lists provided by NOKUT and is counted as such in the analysis.

⁵³ 80 percent for 2003 and those that were registered with more than one year in the NOKUT lists; about 70 percent for the years 2004, 2005 and 2006, and 88 percent for 2007 (completed forms as percentage of the requested sample of 474 panel members).

Table A4. 6 Panel members' background: country

'Where did you live at the time of the accreditation/evaluation?'	Frequencies	Percent
a. In Norway	279	79.0
b. Outside Norway	74	21.0
Total	353	100.0

Experiences and opinions of view of the evaluators

Preparation and framework conditions

Table A4. 7 Panel members' opinions about the preparation for the evaluation/accreditation, percent

To what degree was the following preparation for the evaluation/accreditation adequate?	1 Poor	2 Weak	3 Fair	4 Good	5 Excellent	Not applicable	N
a. Written information from NOKUT about the task, including explication of criteria/standards for assessments	0.3	2.3	11.1	61.5	24.5	0.3	351
b. Preparing seminar/meeting for panel members	4.3	6.1	12.3	29.8	11.3	36.2	326

Table A4. 8 Panel members' opinions about the preparation, average score by type of evaluation/accreditation

Written information from NOKUT about the task, including explication of criteria/standards for assessments	Mean	Lowest score	Highest score	N
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education	3.9	1	5	108
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions	4.2	2	5	38
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions	4.1	3	5	41
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	4.1	2	5	142
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education	4.1	3	5	21
Total	4.1	1	5	350
Preparing seminar/meeting for panel members	Mean	Lowest score	Highest score	N
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education	3.3	1	5	64
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions	3.8	2	5	35
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions	4.1	1	5	35
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	3.5	1	5	57
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education	3.6	1	5	17
Total	3.6	1	5	208

Scale: 1=Poor; 2=Weak; 3=Fair; 4=Good; 5=Excellent. ('Not applicable'-replies are not included in the calculations.)

Table A4. 9 Panel members' opinions about the framework conditions for the evaluation/accreditation by type of evaluation/accreditation, percent

To what degree did you find the framework conditions for performing the evaluation/accreditation adequate in terms of:	1 Poor	2 Weak	3 Fair	4 Good	5 Excellent	Not applicable	N
Available time/work schedule							
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education	3.8	6.7	31.7	51.0	6.7		104
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions		7.9	21.1	57.9	13.2		38
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions		2.4	28.6	52.4	16.7		42
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	1.4	3.6	23.0	60.4	9.4	2.2	139
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education		4.8	19.0	57.1	19.0		21
f. Other/unsure				50.0	25.0	25.0	4
Total	1.7	4.9	25.6	56.0	10.6	1.1	348
The areas of competence covered by the expert panel (breadth)							
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education		1.0	12.6	67.0	15.5	3.9	103
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions			18.4	55.3	26.3		38
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions		2.4	4.8	54.8	38.1		42
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses			8.6	58.3	27.3	5.8	139
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education			4.8	71.4	19.0	4.8	21
f. Other/unsure				50.0	25.0	25.0	4
Total		0.6	10.1	60.8	24.5	4.0	347
The level of competence of the expert panel (depth)							
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education		2.0	10.9	61.4	20.8	5.0	101
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions			7.9	65.8	26.3		38
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions	2.4		9.5	50.0	38.1		42
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses		1.4	6.5	49.6	38.1	4.3	139
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education			14.3	52.4	28.6	4.8	21
f. Other/unsure			25.0	25.0	25.0	25.0	4
Total	.3	1.2	9.0	54.8	31.0	3.8	345
Secretarial assistance from NOKUT (If applicable)							
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education	1.9	4.8	23.1	33.7	17.3	19.2	104
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions	2.6	2.6	7.9	39.5	47.4		38
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions		7.3	4.9	34.1	43.9	9.8	41
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	.7	3.6	12.4	28.5	22.6	32.1	137
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education	4.8		23.8	28.6	38.1	4.8	21
f. Other/unsure			.0	25.0	25.0	50.0	4
Total	1.4	4.1	14.8	31.9	27.2	20.6	345

Purpose of the evaluation/accreditation

Table A4. 10 Panel members' perceptions of the aim of the evaluation/accreditation, percent

In your opinion, was the evaluation/accreditation mainly aimed at controlling standards/quality or at improving the standards/quality?	Recognition of tertiary vocational education	Evaluation of internal quality assurance in HEIs	Accreditation of higher education institutions	Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	Evaluation of the quality of higher education	Total
Only at controlling	8.5		7.1	5.0		5.5
Mainly at controlling	32.1	34.2	35.7	34.8	28.6	33.6
As much improving as controlling	47.2	57.9	47.6	48.9	57.1	49.7
Mainly at improving	7.5	7.9	4.8	9.2	14.3	8.3
Only at improving	0.9			0.7		0.6
Neither controlling nor improving	0.9		2.4	0.7		0.9
No opinion	2.8		2.4	0.7		1.4
N	106	38	42	141	21	348

Information sources

Table A4. 11 Panel members' opinions about the self assessment report/documentation/application from the institution under review, percent

How would you rate the self assessment report(s)/documentation/application(s) submitted in terms of giving	1 Poor	2 Weak	3 Fair	4 Good	5 Excellent	Not applicable	N
An accurate description of the object(s) under review	3.3	11.0	36.0	42.9	5.1	1.8	336
Sincere accounts for strengths and weaknesses of the object(s) under review (sincere assessments)	2.4	15.2	43.3	30.9	3.9	4.2	330
Sufficient information for forming an opinion about the object under review	2.4	11.0	39.4	40.6	5.1	1.5	335
A basis for the institutions' own future efforts in quality improvement	2.7	9.9	42.8	34.7	5.4	4.5	334

Table A4. 12 Panel members' opinions about the importance of information sources, percent

How would you rate the importance of the following information sources for the conclusions of the panel's report?	Unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important	Not applicable	N
NOKUT's standards and criteria	1.2	20.8	76.8	1.2	341
NOKUT's preparing seminars or meetings*	(9) 5.1	(51) 27.8	(39) 21.3	45.8	334
The self assessment report(s)/documentation/application(s)	0.3	33.3	61.6	4.8	336
Visits to the institution(s) under review*	(11) 5.4	(15) 7.2	(74) 35.4	52.0	333
Your own experiences and competences	0.3	16.2	82.9	0.6	340
The discussions within the panel	1.5	12.6	82.6	3.2	340

*In brackets: Percentages when 'Not applicable' are excluded from the calculations.

Table A4. 13 Panel members' opinions about the importance of information sources by type of evaluation/accreditation, percent

How would you rate the importance of the following information sources for the conclusions of the panel's report⇒	Percent answering 'Very important' under the various issues**						N
	*Crite./stand.	Preparing seminar	Self-assessm	*Site visit	Own experi.	Discu. within panel	
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education	76,0	(35) 20,0	62,2	(27) 9,1	85,9	84,8	98-101
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions	78,9	(13) 10,5	45,9	(97) 92,1	73,7	92,1	37-39
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions	78,0	(46) 33,3	55,0	(93) 69,2	73,2	73,2	39-42
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	78,0	(56) 19,7	67,1	(77) 26,3	87,2	79,4	137-141
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education	66,7	(44) 35,0	61,9	(73) 55,0	76,2	95,2	20-21
Total	76,8	(39) 21,3	61,6	(74) 35,4	82,9	82,6	333-341

*In brackets: Percentages when 'Not applicable' are excluded from the calculations.

**Cf. table above for the full text of the questions.

Reaching agreement in the panel

Table A4. 14 Panel members' opinions on the processes of reaching agreement by type of evaluation/accreditation, percent

How would you characterise the expert panel's internal processes of reaching agreement on the conclusions and recommendations of its report?	Very difficult to reach agreement	Somewhat difficult to reach agreement	Relativity easy to reach agreement	Very easy to reach agreement	N
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education		8.1	62.6	29.3	99
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions	2.6	5.3	57.9	34.2	38
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions	7.3	14.6	36.6	41.5	41
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	1.4	2.9	35.3	60.4	139
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education		23.8	47.6	28.6	21
Total	1.8	7.4	46.7	44.1	338

Table A4. 15 Difficulties in reaching agreement

What produced difficulties in reaching agreement? Please select one or more alternatives.	Frequency
Panel members had different views	23
Insufficient information about the object(s) under review	9
Unclear standards and criteria	13
Consideration about consequences of the panel's decision for the unit(s) under review	6
Other reasons*	3

Panel members who answered 'very' or 'somewhat' difficult to reach agreement were posed this question.

*These answers relate to: 1) inadequate chairing of the panel, 2) panel members wanting to prevent the accreditation of institutions, 3) NOKUT's project official interfering when the conclusions were to be drawn.

Assessment of the object under review

Table A4. 16 Panel members' opinions on the quality of the object under review, by type of accreditation percent

What was your opinion about the quality of the institution/program/education under review?	Clearly above the required level	Just above the required level	Just below required level	Clearly below the required level	No opinion	N
Recognition of tertiary vocational education	9.4	47.9	19.8	16.7	6.3	96
Accreditation of higher education institutions	25.0	45.0	12.5	17.5		40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	15.4	38.2	23.5	18.4	4.4	136
Total	14.7	42.6	20.6	17.6	4.4	272

Assessments of NOKUT

Table A4. 17 NOKUT's organisation of the evaluation/accreditation: Panel members' opinions by type of evaluation/accreditation, percent

How would you characterise NOKUT's organisation of the evaluation/accreditation?	1 Poor	2 Weak	3 Fair	4 Good	5 Excellent	Not applicable	N
a. Recognition of tertiary vocational education	1.0	8.1	26.3	50.5	8.1	6.1	99
b. Evaluation of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions		2.6		55.3	39.5	2.6	38
c. Accreditation of higher education institutions		2.4	19.5	46.3	29.3	2.4	41
d. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes and courses	1.4	3.5	16.3	55.3	19.1	4.3	141
e. Evaluation of the quality of higher education		9.5	9.5	52.4	28.6		21
Total	0.9	5.0	17.4	52.6	20.0	4.1	340

Table A4. 18 NOKUT's qualifications, organisation and procedures: Panel members' opinions, percent

To what degree do you think NOKUT fulfils the following conditions for performing its duties?	1 Poor	2 Weak	3 Fair	4 Good	5 Excellent	Don't know	N
a. Qualified staff	0.6	2.4	13.5	46.8	15.3	21.5	340
b. Adequate and efficient organisation	0.3	3.2	19.2	46.3	10.3	20.6	339
c. Professional and efficient review procedures	0.6	4.2	14.3	52.8	15.5	12.5	335
d. Adequate handling of conflicts of interest (rutiner for å sikre habilitet)	1.2	2.4	10.4	37.1	11.6	37.4	337
e. Ability to assure that the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation/accreditation reports are not influenced by special interests (eksempelvis faglige særinteresser)	0.9	3.6	13.7	43.8	10.1	28.0	336
f. Ability to reach fair, consistent and authoritative conclusions	1.2	2.7	15.0	51.0	13.6	16.5	339
g. Adequate appeal procedures	0.6	3.0	10.9	42.0	11.2	32.2	338

2. Survey to higher education institutions exposed to accreditation/evaluation

Respondents and response rates at higher education institutions (HEIs)

Table A4. 19 Survey of staff and students at accredited universities and university colleges: Response rates, percent

Sample category	Counts	Response rate (%)	
		Complete sample	Incomplete sample
Strategic sample of listed staff and student members in site visit programs provided by NOKUT	567	59.1	63.1
Obtainable sample: Respondents presumable with a correct e-mail address	526	63.7	68.1
Replies (counts)		*335	**358

*Obtained complete sample = Respondents completing the survey

**Obtained incomplete sample = Respondents accessing the survey (including those completing parts of it)

The 'Universe' are composed of the staff and students listed in programmes for NOKUT-committee site visits in 2005, 2006 and 2007 (provided by NOKUT) and NOKUT's lists of contact persons for the evaluations, which we estimate to 1200 individuals.⁵⁴ From these programmes we established a strategic sample of four groups of respondents: institutional leadership, academic staff, students, and administrative staff. The intension was to include staff and students involved with different types of NOKUT accreditation and evaluation processes from a broad spectrum of universities and colleges as well as to establish a sample in which the opinions and experiences of at least the first three groups of respondents could be analysed separately (institutional leadership, academic staff and students).

It should be noted that the response rates of the student representatives in the survey are significantly lower than for the other respondents. Of the 175 selected student representatives on the programs of the panel member site visits, 62 completed the form (35 percent), 7 more students accessed the survey without completing it, and 80 gave no reply, even after the second reminder addressed specifically to the students, encouraging them to contribute with their opinion.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The sample of site visit programs obtained form NOKUT was still incomplete.

⁵⁵ Several students did in fact respond in private e-mails that they were absent at the site visit. We believe that many students found it hard to answer the questions due to that they hardly had any prior experience with NOKUT. In addition, low response rate among students are caused by high mobility and short validity of student e-mail addresses. We were unable to find the correct e-mail-address to 26 student respondents where the invitation to take part in the survey were undeliverable to the identified address.

Table A4. 20 HEI staff & student survey: Type of accreditation/evaluation

'Please indicate what kind of NOKUT accreditation/evaluation you have been involved in'	Frequencies	Percent
a. Evaluation of the internal quality assurance system of my institution	168	46.9
b. Accreditation of my institution	44	12.3
c. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of education programmes/courses	80	22.3
d. Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	57	15.9
e. Other/unsure	9	2.5
Total	358	100.0

Table A4. 21 Type and year of accreditation/evaluation, HEI survey replies, percent

	2004	2005	2006	2007	N
a. Evaluation of internal quality assurance of my institution	1.4	15.6	35.3	43.7	167
b. Accreditation of my institution		13.6	47.7	36.4	44
c. Accreditation/revision of accreditation of education programmes and courses		20.3	19.0	59.5	57
d. Evaluation of the quality in my institution		19.3	54.4	26.3	57
f. Other/unsure		12.5	1.5	50.0	8
Total	0.8	16.9	35.8	43.7	355

Note: The percentages do not add up to 100 due to the fact that ten respondents did not indicate the year of accreditation/evaluation. The three respondents reporting '2004' are probably a result of faulty memory, as respondents were selected from NOKUT site visit programmes in the period from 2005 to 2007. The respondents were asked to respond accordingly to the "most recently completed accreditation/evaluation you have been involved in".

Table A4. 22 HEI staff & student survey: Respondents' position

Respondent's position at the time of the accreditation/evaluation	Frequencies	Percent
a. Member of the institutional leadership (Rector/vice-rector, Board member, Dean, Director, etc)	137	39.4
b. Member of the academic staff/scholarly position	99	28.4
c. Student	69	19.8
d. Member of the administrative staff	37	10.6
e. Other	6	1.7
Total	348	100.0

Note: As noted in the text, the student response rate is low and their replies may not be representative. The number of administrative staff respondents is rather small, but not considered a problem. The administrative staff is also rather scarcely represented in all the site visit programs obtained from NOKUT.

Table A4. 23 HEI staff & student survey: the ways you contributed to the evaluation (several answers allowed)

Respondent's position at the time of the accreditation/evaluation	Frequencies	Percent
a. I was my institution's contact person for the accreditation/evaluation	60	17.2
b. I took part in the preparation of the application/self-evaluation	122	35.1
c. I took part in the evaluation committee's visit to my institution/was interviewed by the evaluation committee	293	84.2
d. Other ways	21	6.0
Total	348	100.0

Outcome of accreditation/evaluation

82 percent of the respondents answering the question about the conclusion of the accreditation/evaluation, report a positive outcome. There are notable differences between the different types of accreditations and evaluations. For the evaluation of the quality assurance systems, as much as 96 percent report a positive result. For the accreditation and revision of accreditation of education programmes only 47 percent report a positive outcome.

Table A4. 24 Was the conclusion of the accreditation/evaluation positive or negative? Replies of the HEI respondents' by type of accreditation/evaluation, percent

Type of accreditation/evaluation	Positive	Negative	Other	N
Evaluation of the internal quality assurance system of my institution	96.9	1.2	1.9	162
Accreditation of my institution	86.0	4.7	9.3	43
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of education programmes/courses	46.8	32.5	20.8	77
Total	81.6	10.3	8.2	282

Positive = accreditation was obtained/the quality assurance system was approved

Negative = no accreditation was obtained/the quality assurance system was not approved

Experiences and opinions of leadership, staff and students at higher education institutions

Purpose of the evaluation/accreditation

Table A4. 25 *Evaluees' (HEIs) perceptions of the aim of the evaluation/accreditation, percent*

In your opinion, was the evaluation/accreditation mainly aimed at controlling standards/quality or at improving the standards/quality?	Evaluation of internal quality assurance system of my institution	Accreditation of my institution	Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	Other/ unsure	Total
Only at controlling	4.9	9.3	12.7	3.7	28.6	7.5
Mainly at controlling	36.8	51.2	39.2	35.2	14.3	38.4
As much improving as controlling	48.5	25.6	40.5	44.4	28.6	42.8
Mainly at improving	9.2	9.3	6.3	13.0	28.6	9.5
Only at improving						0
Neither controlling nor improving	.6	4.7		1.9		1.2
No opinion	.0	.0	1.3	1.9		.6
N	163	43	79	54	7	346

Information

Table A4. 26 *Evaluees' (HEIs) opinions about the information received, percent*

To what degree did you receive sufficient information from NOKUT?	No information at all	Insufficient information	Sufficient information	Not applicable	N
a. Guidelines for writing the application/self-evaluation	2.0	17.0	67.3	13.6	147
b. Explication of criteria/standards for assessments	2.1	30.6	63.9	3.5	144
c. Information about the evaluation committee	.7	11.5	85.8	2.0	148
d. Information about the evaluation process		18.2	79.1	2.7	148
e. Information about the meeting with the evaluation committee	.7	9.5	85.8	4.1	148
f. Information about the conclusions of the evaluation committee	2.7	10.8	83.1	3.4	148
g. Information about appeal procedures (if applicable)	4.4	12.6	49.6	33.3	135

Note: Questions posed only to institution's contact person for the accreditation/evaluation and to those who took part in the preparation of the application/self-evaluation.

Table A4. 27 Evaluatees' (HEIs) opinions about the NOKUT's information, percent

All in all, to what degree was the provided information clear and comprehensible?	Altogether unclear	Mostly unclear	Mostly clear	Altogether clear	Don't know/na	N
a. Written information from NOKUT	1.3	10.0	56.7	26.0	6.0	150
b. Information provided in oral communication with NOKUT	.7	14.0	42.0	28.7	14.7	150
c. Information available at the NOKUT website	2.0	4.7	48.0	16.9	28.4	148

Note: Questions posed only to institution's contact person for the accreditation/evaluation and to those who took part in the preparation of the application/self-evaluation.

The self-evaluation

Table A4. 28 Evaluatees' (HEIs) opinions about the self-evaluation, percent

To what degree did you find the work with the application/self-evaluation report productive in terms of:	1 Poor	2 Weak	3 Fair	4 Good	5 Excellent	Not applicable	N
a. Getting better overview of the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of my institution	1.7	5.0	25.2	56.3	9.2	2.5	119
b. Providing input/suggestions to my institution's future planning and efforts to improve our activities	1.7	9.2	37.0	44.5	4.2	3.4	119

Note: Questions posed only to those who took part in the preparation of the application/self-evaluation.

The site visit

Table A4. 29 Evaluatees' (HEIs) opinions about the meeting with the evaluation committee, percent

To what degree did the meeting with the evaluation committee give:	1 Poor	2 Weak	3 Fair	4 Good	5 Excellent	No opinion	N
a. Your institution a good opportunity to present itself	.3	5.2	20.7	56.2	15.5	2.1	290
b. Time and opportunity for you to discuss challenges and problems high on the institutional agenda	4.5	17.9	31.6	34.0	7.9	4.1	291
c. New insight for your institution/valuable input from the evaluation committee	5.2	21.1	31.1	32.2	4.5	5.9	289

Note: Questions posed only to those who took part in the site visit/were interviewed.

Satisfaction

Table A4. 30 Evaluatees' (HEIs) satisfaction with NOKUT, percent

Are you satisfied with how NOKUT performed the evaluation/accreditation with respect to:	Was the conclusion of the accreditation/evaluation positive or negative?				N
	Unsatisfied	Partly satisfied	Fully satisfied	No opinion/Not applicable	
a. Communication with NOKUT before, during and after the evaluation/accreditation	7.1	33.4	31.7	27.8	338
b. The qualifications of the evaluation committee	5.0	25.7	57.5	11.8	339
c. The meeting with the evaluation committee	3.8	33.3	58.1	4.7	339
d. The final report from the evaluation committee	8.3	31.3	46.3	14.2	339
e. Your overall satisfaction with how NOKUT conducted the evaluation/accreditation	7.4	43.6	40.1	8.9	337

Table A4. 31 Evaluatees' (HEIs) satisfaction with NOKUT, by result of application, percent

Your overall satisfaction with how NOKUT conducted the evaluation	Was the conclusion of the accreditation/evaluation positive or negative?				Total
	Positive	Negative	Other		
Unsatisfied	2.7	31.0	18.2		6.9
Partly satisfied	41.1	37.9	59.1		42.2
Fully satisfied	47.3	24.1	18.2		42.5
No opinion/Not applicable	8.9	6.9	4.5		8.4
N	224	29	22		275

Positive = accreditation was obtained/the quality assurance system was approved

Negative = no accreditation was obtained/the quality assurance system was not approved

The question was not posed to those involved with general evaluations.

Table A4. 32 Evaluatees' (HEIs) satisfaction with NOKUT by type of respondent, percent

Your overall satisfaction with how NOKUT conducted the evaluation	Respondent's position at the time of the evaluation			
	Member of the institutional leadership	Member of the academic staff	Student	Member of the administrative staff
Unsatisfied	8.2	8.2	4.7	5.4
Partly satisfied	47.8	50.5	29.7	35.1
Fully satisfied	41.8	30.9	43.8	51.4
No opinion/Not applicable	2.2	10.3	21.9	8.1
N	134	97	64	37

Table A4. 33 NOKUT's qualifications, organisation and procedures: Evaluatees' (HEIs) opinions, percent

To what degree do you think NOKUT fulfils the following conditions for performing its duties?	1 Poor	2 Weak	3 Fair	4 Good	5 Excellent	Don't know	N
a. Qualified employees	1.5	7.2	27.3	36.6	9.6	17.7	333
b. Adequate and efficient organisation	.9	11.4	30.3	30.6	2.4	24.3	333
c. Professional and efficient review procedures	2.4	10.6	27.5	36.9	6.6	16.0	331
d. Adequate handling of conflicts of interest (rutiner for å sikre habilitet)	.9	5.4	16.6	28.6	3.9	44.6	332
e. Ability to assure that the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation/accreditation reports are not influenced by special interests (eksempelvis faglige særinteresser)	2.7	8.4	22.9	30.4	3.9	31.6	332
f. Ability to reach fair, consistent and authoritative conclusions	1.8	10.0	24.8	39.0	4.5	19.9	331
g. Adequate appeal procedures	1.8	6.1	18.5	29.8	3.6	40.1	329

Table A4. 34 NOKUT's ability to reach fair, consistent and authoritative conclusions: Evaluatees' (HEIs) opinions by type of respondent, percent

Respondent's position at the time of the evaluation	To what degree do you think NOKUT fulfils the following conditions for performing its duties?						
	Ability to reach fair, consistent and authoritative conclusions						
	1 Poor	2 Weak	3 Fair	4 Good	5 Excellent	Don't know	N
Member of the institutional leadership	1.5	16.5	29.3	43.6	3.0	6.0	133
Member of the academic staff	2.1	7.2	26.8	28.9	4.1	30.9	97
Student	1.6	3.3	14.8	41.0	6.6	32.8	61
Member of the administrative staff	2.7	2.7	18.9	48.6	8.1	18.9	37

Results and impact

Table A4. 35 *Evaluees' (HEIs) opinions about results and follow up, percent*

So far, has the evaluation/accreditation had any positive or negative effects at/for your institution concerning:	No effects	Clearly negative	Partly negative/ partly positive	Clearly positive	Don't know	N
a. Effects on the quality of the education/teaching	24.5	1.5	23.2	28.1	22.6	327
b. Effects on the quality assurance of the education/teaching	13.2	.9	27.3	36.8	21.8	326
c. Effects on the scholarly reputation of the institution	15.6	4.9	18.7	31.0	29.8	326
d. Effects on the scholarly discussion on learning and teaching	19.4	2.2	22.8	35.4	20.3	325
e. Effects on staff engagement in learning and teaching questions	21.2	.9	28.8	31.6	17.5	326
f. Effects on student involvement in learning and teaching questions	29.1	.9	19.9	23.5	26.6	327
g. Effects on the development of new courses/programs	29.4	2.5	19.3	25.2	23.6	326
h. Effects on the criteria for the recruitment of teaching staff	30.2	1.2	15.4	21.8	31.4	325
i. Effects on the criteria for the recruitment of research staff	30.2	1.2	14.2	21.6	32.7	324
j. Effects on the criteria for the recruitment of administrative staff	38.2	.6	13.2	9.8	38.2	325
k. Effects on new routines and procedures	14.1	1.5	23.3	40.8	20.2	326
l. Effects on the governance structures of the institution	27.1	1.2	19.7	20.0	32.0	325
m. Effects on the internal resource allocation	29.2	3.4	24.0	13.2	30.2	325
n. Effects on the cooperation between administrative and scholarly staff	29.0	2.5	25.6	18.8	24.1	324
o. Effects on setting priorities for research	27.4	2.8	17.2	25.2	27.4	325
p. Effects on the resources and facilities for research	34.2	3.4	15.7	18.5	28.3	325
q. Effects on the supervision of research students	31.9	.6	15.5	16.7	35.3	323

Table A4. 36 *Evaluees' (HEIs) opinions about effects on the quality of the education/teaching, by type of respondent percent*

Respondent's position at the time of the evaluation	So far, has the evaluation/accreditation had any positive or negative effects at/for your institution concerning: Effects on the quality of the education/teaching					N
	No effects	Clearly negative	Partly negative/ partly positive	Clearly positive	Don't know	
Member of the institutional leadership	24.6	0.7	25.4	36.6	12.7	134
Member of the academic staff	28.1	2.1	26.0	22.9	20.8	96
Student	24.6	3.5	10.5	12.3	49.1	57
Member of the administrative staff	13.9		27.8	36.1	22.2	36

Table A4. 37 *Evaluees' (HEIs) opinions about results and follow up by type of evaluation/accreditation, percent*

So far, has the evaluation/accreditation had any positive or negative effects at/for your institution concerning:	No effects	Clearly negative	Partly negative/ partly positive	Clearly positive	Don't know	N
Effects on the quality of the education/teaching						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	24.2	0.6	21.7	26.1	27.4	157
Accreditation of my institution	37.5		17.5	20.0	25.0	40

Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	23.4	3.9	24.7	31.2	16.9	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	15.2	2.2	28.3	39.1	15.2	46
Effects on the quality assurance of the education/teaching						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	8.3		29.3	42.7	19.7	157
Accreditation of my institution	30.0		22.5	15.0	32.5	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	15.8	2.6	22.4	39.5	19.7	76
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	8.7	2.2	26.1	37.0	26.1	46
Effects on the scholarly reputation of the institution						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	16.8	0.6	13.5	30.3	38.7	155
Accreditation of my institution	12.5	2.5	10.0	62.5	12.5	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	11.7	13.0	18.2	27.3	29.9	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	19.1	8.5	38.3	17.0	17.0	47
Effects on the scholarly discussion on learning and teaching						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	23.2		15.5	39.4	21.9	155
Accreditation of my institution	30.0		25.0	30.0	15.0	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	9.1	7.8	35.1	28.6	19.5	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	13.0	2.2	21.7	43.5	19.6	46
Effects on staff engagement in learning and teaching questions						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	22.9		25.5	32.5	19.1	157
Accreditation of my institution	28.2		28.2	25.6	17.9	39
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	18.2	2.6	27.3	33.8	18.2	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	13.0	2.2	39.1	34.8	10.9	46
Effects on student involvement in learning and teaching questions						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	28.0		18.5	28.7	24.8	157
Accreditation of my institution	35.0		15.0	17.5	32.5	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	28.6	2.6	22.1	16.9	29.9	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	28.3	2.2	21.7	23.9	23.9	46
Effects on the development of new courses/programs						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	27.4	0.6	19.7	23.6	28.7	157
Accreditation of my institution	37.5		7.5	35.0	20.0	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	23.4	7.8	22.1	24.7	22.1	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	40.0	2.2	17.8	26.7	13.3	45
Effects on the criteria for the recruitment of teaching staff						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	30.6		12.7	17.2	39.5	157
Accreditation of my institution	35.0	2.5	17.5	17.5	27.5	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	20.0	4.0	21.3	33.3	21.3	75
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	39.1		13.0	23.9	23.9	46
Effects on the criteria for the recruitment of research staff						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	30.3		12.9	16.8	40.0	155
Accreditation of my institution	25.0	2.5	10.0	30.0	32.5	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	26.0	2.6	23.4	27.3	20.8	77

Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	40.0	2.2	4.4	24.4	28.9	45
Effects on the criteria for the recruitment of administrative staff						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	29.0	1.3	12.3	12.9	44.5	155
Accreditation of my institution	47.5		10.0	15.0	27.5	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	42.9		16.9	6.5	33.8	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	52.2		10.9	2.2	34.8	46
Effects on new routines and procedures						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	9.0	1.3	19.2	51.3	19.2	156
Accreditation of my institution	20.0	2.5	35.0	25.0	17.5	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	20.8	2.6	20.8	27.3	28.6	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	13.0		28.3	45.7	13.0	46
Effects on the governance structures of the institution						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	20.0	1.3	17.4	23.2	38.1	155
Accreditation of my institution	27.5		20.0	25.0	27.5	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	35.1	2.6	20.8	13.0	28.6	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	34.8		23.9	19.6	21.7	46
Effects on the internal resource allocation						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	28.8	3.2	19.2	14.1	34.6	156
Accreditation of my institution	22.5	2.5	30.0	10.0	35.0	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	28.9	6.6	26.3	11.8	26.3	76
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	37.0		28.3	17.4	17.4	46
Effects on the cooperation between administrative and scholarly staff						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	26.9	1.9	26.9	17.9	26.3	156
Accreditation of my institution	30.0	2.5	30.0	15.0	22.5	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	31.6	3.9	19.7	23.7	21.1	76
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	31.1	2.2	24.4	20.0	22.2	45
Effects on setting priorities for research						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	31.6	2.6	13.5	16.8	35.5	155
Accreditation of my institution	25.0	2.5	12.5	40.0	20.0	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	23.4	3.9	18.2	31.2	23.4	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	21.7	2.2	26.1	34.8	15.2	46
Effects on the resources and facilities for research						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	32.3	3.9	16.1	12.3	35.5	155
Accreditation of my institution	45.0		7.5	30.0	17.5	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	27.3	6.5	19.5	23.4	23.4	77
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	43.5		13.0	23.9	19.6	46
Effects on the supervision of research students						
Evaluation of internal quality assurance system in my institution	31.0		16.8	11.0	41.3	155
Accreditation of my institution	35.0		12.5	22.5	30.0	40
Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	28.0	1.3	14.7	22.7	33.3	75
Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	39.1	2.2	10.9	23.9	23.9	46

Table A4. 38 *Evaluees' (HEIs) perceptions of impacts of the evaluation/accreditation, percent*

Overall, what kind of impact do you believe the NOKUT evaluation/accreditation has had on your institution?	Evaluation of internal quality assurance system of my institution	Accreditation of my institution	Accreditation/revision of accreditation of higher education programmes/courses	Evaluation of the quality of the education in my institution	Other/unsure	Total
High positive impact	15.8	19.5	9.0	8.3		13.3
Moderate positive impact	66.5	73.2	59.0	68.8	57.1	65.7
No impact	7.6	7.3	3.8	4.2	14.3	6.3
Moderate negative impact	1.3		6.4	6.3	14.3	3.3
High negative impact			3.8			0.9
Don't know/too early to say	8.9		17.9	12.5	14.3	10.5
N	158	41	78	48	7	332

Table A4. 39 *Evaluees' (HEIs) perceptions of impacts of system level, percent*

How would you rate the impact of the current national quality assurance system in Norway with respect to:	No impact	Positive impact	Negative impact	Don't know	N
Putting quality issues on the institutional agenda?	7.4	77.2	1.5	13.8	325
Providing students with information about the quality of the education?	18.8	56.0	2.8	22.5	325
Creating equal framework conditions for public and private institutions?	5.2	54.2	1.8	38.8	325
Ensure the public accountability of the education sector?	17.4	49.4	4.3	28.9	322
Facilitate internationalisation of education?	24.8	42.2	1.2	31.7	322
Developing a more solid basis for resource allocation/distribution within the higher educational system in Norway?	22.1	26.2	3.4	48.3	321
Stimulate diversity/division of labour within the national education system	24.1	18.5	4.9	52.5	324

3. Survey to vocational schools applying for approval

Respondents and response rates

A separate web-survey in Norwegian, with similar items to the higher education institutions, were addressed to institutional contacts at tertiary vocational education institutions accredited by NOKUT.

By September 2007, 125 different (potential) providers of vocational education had applied NOKUT for approval of at least one educational programme, and there were 67 schools with at least one approved application. As we were not able to acquire e-mail addresses to applicants without any approved educational programme, the survey only includes schools which have obtained approval of at least one vocational education programme. Likewise the 'in-process' applications are not covered, which cause a notable bias in the survey as the main problem with the vocational school applications seems to be long processing time. To include potential providers of vocational educations with an application under review was, however, considered too complicated (because of the diversity of the organisations involved and the possibility of identifying correct e-mail addresses).

Of the 67 schools with at least one approved application, we obtained a correct e-mail address to 63. Of these 63 schools, 53 completed the form. This gives a response rate at 84 percent.

50 of 54 applications (93 percent) from the respondent suppliers were approved, while two were partly declined and two entirely declined by NOKUT. This implies that 4 of 54 replies concerns applications that were not fully approved. This is not very far from NOKUT's own figures for the success rate of these applications – about 90 percent⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ For the period 2005 to September 2007, not including the applications which were refused or withdrawn.

Table A4. 40 Survey of institutions of tertiary vocational education: Response rates, percent

Sample category	Counts	Response rate (%)	
		Complete sample	Incomplete sample
'Universe': List of accredited institutions/suppliers provided by NOKUT	67	79.1	82.1
Requested sample: Respondents with a listed e-mail address	66	80.3	83.3
Obtainable sample: Respondents presumably with correct e-mail address (no rejection notes)	63	84.1	87.3
Replies (counts)		*53	**55

*Obtained complete sample = Respondents completing the survey

**Obtained incomplete sample = Respondents accessing the survey (including those completing parts of it)

Table A4. 41 Survey of institutions of tertiary vocational education: institutional distribution

Area of accreditation	Frequencies	Percent
a. Technical training (Teknisk utdanning)	19	34.5
b. Maritime education (Maritim utdanning)	6	10.9
c. Education in health- and social professions (helse- og sosialfag)	11	20.0
d. Religious training (Bibelskoleutdanning)	1	1.8
e. Music and Arts education (Kunstutdanning)	8	14.5
f. Other	10	18.2
Total	55	100.0

Technical training and education in health- and social professions are dominant among the accredited institutions in our survey. 30 of these institutions are publicly owned and 24 are privately owned. Both technical training and education in health- and social professions in tertiary vocational education, are mainly organized by public interests, contrary to the music and arts where all accredited institutions are privately owned.

Experiences and opinions of the vocational schools

(Replies from the institutional contacts at the schools)

Information

Table A4. 42 Vocational schools' opinions about the information received, percent

To what degree did you receive sufficient information from NOKUT?	No information at all	Insufficient information	Sufficient information	Don't know	N
a. Guidelines for the application	1.9	13.2	84.9		53
b. The criteria for approval		24.5	73.6	1.9	53
c. Information about the evaluation committee	3.8	15.1	81.1		53
f. Information about the result of the evaluation		9.4	88.7	1.9	53
g. Information about appeal procedures	3.8	7.7	84.6	3.8	52

Table A4. 43 Survey of institutions of tertiary vocational education: opinions about the information from NOKUT, percent

All in all, to what degree was the provided information clear and comprehensible?	Altogether unclear	Mostly unclear	Mostly clear	Altogether clear	Don't know/ na	N
a. Written information from NOKUT	3.8	7.5	41.8	45.3	-	53
b. Information provided in oral communication with NOKUT	3.8	5.7	37.7	45.3	7.5	53
c. Information available at the NOKUT website	1.9	3.8	52.8	30.2	11.3	53

Satisfaction

Table A4. 44 Survey of institutions of tertiary vocational education: Satisfaction with NOKUT procedures, percent

Were you satisfied with how NOKUT performed the evaluation with respect to:	Unsatisfied	Partly satisfied	Fully satisfied	No opinion/ Not applicable	N
Communication with NOKUT about the application and review	3.8	28.3	66.0	1.9	53
The qualifications of the evaluation committee	7.5	30.2	54.7	7.5	53
The report from the evaluation committee	15.1	37.7	45.3	1.9	53
Your overall satisfaction with how NOKUT conducted the evaluation	5.7	39.6	54.7		53

Table A4. 45 Survey of institutions of tertiary vocational education: Satisfaction with NOKUT procedures by result of application, percent

Your overall satisfaction with how NOKUT conducted the evaluation	The application was approved	Part of the applications was approved	The applications was not approved	Total
Unsatisfied	4.1	50.0		5.7
Partly satisfied	38.8	50.0	50.0	39.6
Fully satisfied	57.1		50.0	54.7
N	49	2	2	53

Table A4. 46 Survey of institutions of tertiary vocational education: Satisfaction with NOKUT procedures by type of school, percent

Your overall satisfaction with how NOKUT conducted the evaluation	Public school	Private school	Total
Unsatisfied		13.0	5.7
Partly satisfied	40.0	39.1	39.6
Fully satisfied	60.0	47.8	54.7
N	30	23	53

Results and follow up

Table A4. 47 Survey of institutions of tertiary vocational education: Opinions about results and follow up, percent

So far, what positive or negative effects has the evaluation had /for the school/education concerning:	No effects	Clearly negative	Partly negative/ partly positive	Clearly positive	Don't know	N
a. Effects on the quality of the education provided	7.8		13.7	76.5	2.0	51
b. Effects on the quality assurance of the education	3.9		9.8	82.4	3.9	51
c. Effects on the criteria for the recruitment of teaching staff	19.6		15.7	47.1	17.6	51
d. Effects on the scholarly reputation of the school	9.8		3.9	70.6	15.7	51
e. Effects on the development of new education/courses	3.9	2.0	19.6	62.7	11.8	51
f. Effects on the cooperation between administrative and scholarly staff	13.7		17.6	56.9	11.8	51
g. Effects on the internal resource allocation at the school	26.0		32.0	28.0	14.0	50

Table A4. 48 Survey of institutions of tertiary vocational education: Perceptions of impacts of the evaluation/accreditation, by result of the application process, percent

Overall, what kind of impact do you believe the NOKUT evaluation/accreditation has had on the school/education?	The application was approved	Part of the applications was approved	The applications was not approved	Total
High positive impact	55.3			51.0
Moderate positive impact	40.4	100.0	50.0	43.1
No impact	2.1			2.0
Moderate negative impact				
High negative impact				
Don't know/too early to say	2.1		50.0	3.9
N	47	2	2	51

Table A4. 49 Survey of institutions of tertiary vocational education: Perceptions of impacts of the evaluation/accreditation, by type of school, percent

Overall, what kind of impact do you believe the NOKUT evaluation/accreditation has had on the school/education?	Public school	Private school	Total
High positive impact	65.5	31.8	51.0
Moderate positive impact	27.6	63.8	43.1
No impact	3.4		2.0
Moderate negative impact			
High negative impact			
Don't know/too early to say	3.4	4.5	3.9
N	29	22	51

Table A4. 50 Survey of institutions of tertiary vocational education: Perceptions of effects on the development of new education/courses by type of school, percent

So far, what positive or negative effects has the evaluation had /for the school/education concerning:			
Effects on the development of new education/courses	Public school	Private school	Total
No effects		9.1	3.9
Clearly negative		4.5	2.0
Partly negative/ partly positive	13.8	27.3	19.6
Clearly positive	75.9	45.5	62.7
Don't know	10.3	13.6	11.8
N	29	22	51