

## **AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY**

### **Quality Assurance Developments in the United States and Europe**

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#### ***1. Introduction***

This paper is an edited version of a document prepared for the AUQA Board in 2006 as a follow-up to a 2005 report on world issues in higher education quality assurance. The 2006 paper provides additional detail on some external quality agencies in the United States (US) and Europe that are regarded as comparators and information sources for AUQA. It contains some possible implications for consideration for AUQA's second cycle of audits.

#### ***2. Quality Assurance Developments in the US***

The US has seen many cycles of change due to its century-old accreditation system. Although the accreditation process undergoes continuous improvements and changes, as far as the institutions are concerned, due to the seven to ten-year duration of the process with a mid-term report, every accreditation process has a new and fresh appeal to the institutions. With six regional accrediting agencies that do institutional accreditation for the higher education institutions (HEIs) of their jurisdiction, four national accrediting agencies that again do institutional accreditation at the national level and around 60 specialised accreditation agencies that do program accreditation, the accreditation system of the US offers insights into both change and diversity.

Further, as accrediting agencies are membership agencies of the higher education institutions, they offer typical examples of how accreditation procedures are sharpened over a period of time with the active participation of the HEIs themselves. Change and diversity could be observed in the following major areas:

1. Flexible approaches to self-study (Middle States, New England, Western)
2. Experimentations, projects and quality enhancement approaches (North Central)
3. Shift in focus of assessment (all agencies)
4. Simplification in accreditation requirements (Southern, Western)
5. Multi-stage model of accreditation (Western, Southern)
6. Incorporating elements of audits (Western).

Some of those developments are given in the following pages.

### ***2.1. Flexible Approaches to Self-study***

Partly in response to the growing diversity of institutions, and partly also in response to complaints from institutions about the burden of repeated accreditation visits, most regional accrediting agencies offer different options for how a self-study could be conducted, while the others still insist on the traditional comprehensive self-study. Self-study models of Middle States and New England deserve a mention here.

The **Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)** has four major models for self-study ([www.msche.org](http://www.msche.org), 10 May 2006):

- i. The Basic Comprehensive Model
- ii. The Comprehensive with Emphasis Model
- iii. The Selected Topics Model and
- iv. The Collaborative Model.

i) The Basic Comprehensive Model: This model for self-study enables a college or university to appraise every aspect of its programs and services, governing and supporting structures, resources and educational outcomes in relation to the institution's mission and goals. A typical comprehensive self-study begins with a careful reassessment of the institution's mission, goals and objectives. Once the mission, goals and objectives are reviewed, the self-study process focuses on each of the programs, services, resources and functions of the institution in terms of the standards/criteria set forth by MSCHE for accreditation. Another approach is to discuss the institution in the context of each one of the standards/criteria for accreditation set forth by MSCHE.

ii) The Comprehensive with Emphasis Model: This is a variant of the basic comprehensive self-study model. This is particularly useful for institutions wishing to give special attention to selected areas or issues that affect the institution. It involves an assessment of mission and goals; an overview of the programs, services, resources, and functions of the institution; and an in-depth examination of issues or areas which the institution judges to be of primary concern or significance. For example, the topic may be one of the standards of accreditation or it may be an issue which is common to several categories and of special interest to the campus such as computers and other technologies, off-campus locations, or consortia arrangements with other institutions.

iii) The Selected Topics Model: This model allows an already accredited institution to devote concentrated attention to selected issues, without having to provide comprehensive analysis of institutional programs and services and without having to address all accreditation standards within the self-study report. The defining characteristic of this self-study model is that the review of compliance with those accreditation standards **not** addressed within the selected topics occurs in a manner that distinguishes and separates it from the evaluation team visit focused on the selected topics. This part of the review is based on existing documentation and does not require additional analysis or explanation.

For example, a complex institution might choose to limit its self-study to undergraduate programs. Some other possibilities include the first-year experience, graduate education, and the assessment of student learning. In this model, at least 24 months before the anticipated team visit the institution submits to the Commission a preliminary proposal identifying: the proposed selected topic(s); why the topic(s) are important to the institution; which accreditation standards would be substantively addressed by the proposed self-study; and a description of what type of evidence and documentation the institution has available to substantiate compliance with those standards **not** addressed by the proposed self-study. Depending on the selected topic(s), it may be that some standards will be addressed partially by the self-study and partially through documentation separate from the self-study.

The institution, in consultation with the Commission, makes accessible on site, the existing documentation relative to those accreditation standards that the selected topics self-study does not address. Review of this documentation can take place concurrent with the on-site visit or be clubbed with the preliminary visit of the team chair four to six months prior to the on-site visit.

iv) The Collaborative Model: The collaborative review is a cooperative review process in which an accredited institution invites institutional, specialised, or professional accrediting agencies; state or federal agencies; or other organisations to join with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in a review of the institution. These reviewing organisations may choose whether to participate.

The collaborative process usually involves the completion of a single institutional self-study (or other similar process or document), one on-site review using a single visiting team, and one coordinated report by the visiting team. The results of the collaborative review process inform the participating agencies and the public, to varying degrees depending on the agency, of significant strengths and challenges facing the institution and its programs. While each reviewing organisation relies on the same information in reaching its decision, each also uses its own decision-making process and standards and issues its own accreditation or other decision. An accredited institution may invite collaboration by more than two reviewing organisations, but an institution applying for initial Middle States accreditation generally is not eligible for collaborative review.

The **New England Association (NEA)** piloted several options for self-study, designed to make the self-study process be of greater value to the HEIs. An interesting option, called Current Special Study Evaluation, allows for the possibility of making use of a comprehensive or intensive study that the institution already is conducting. Another option that also is much in tune with ongoing institutional operations is the Continuing Institutional Research Evaluation. With this option, the institution may ask the New England Association to accept a product from the institution's regular program of institutional research, provided that it covers the general topics required in the self-study ([www.neasc.org](http://www.neasc.org), 10 May 2006).

The **Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)** has introduced flexible approaches to self-study to enable institutions to explore topics or themes that are related to the institution's own priorities and needs, with special emphasis on the assessment and improvement of student learning.

## ***2.2. The Experimentations, Pilot Projects and Quality Enhancement Approaches***

Some regional accrediting agencies have introduced projects to lead to the continuance of accreditation that may be seen as variations of flexibility in the approach to self-study but would require more concerted effort and serious commitment to the project. The **Higher Learning Commission (HLC)** of the **North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCACS)** has initiated the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) for institutions that wish to integrate the process for reaffirmation of their accredited status with ongoing events of the institution. Launched in July 1999, one of the project's purposes is to try out an alternative process for accreditation review, one that may be more flexible and geared to institutional mission and goals, and that may be more supportive of an institution's own processes of self-assessment and improvement ([www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org](http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org), 10 May 2006).

With AQIP, an institution has the opportunity to demonstrate that it meets the Higher Learning Commission's accreditation standards and expectations through sequences of events that naturally align with those ongoing activities that characterise organisations striving to improve their performance. By sharing both its advancement activities and the results of these actions, an institution provides the Higher Learning Commission with the evidence it needs *both* to make a public quality assurance judgment *and* to support the institution in its efforts to excel at achieving the distinctive higher education mission it has set for itself.

An institution wishing to join AQIP must demonstrate that it understands process-focused thinking and that it has inclusively identified potential Action Projects. NCACS asks AQIP institutions to always have underway at least three Action Projects. If an institution completes a project, NCACS assumes that the institution will begin a new one. The AQIP projects are built around nine common principles called AQIP Categories (Helping Students learn; Accomplishing other distinctive objectives; Understanding students' and stakeholders' needs; Valuing people; Leading and communicating; Supporting institutional operations; Measuring Effectiveness, Planning continuous improvement; and Building collaborative relationships) ([www.aqip.org](http://www.aqip.org), 10 May 2006).

Every AQIP institution has to provide the Annual Update describing an institution's progress on each of its Action Projects. The Commission provides electronic feedback from quality improvement experts on each Project. Every year it conducts a Strategy Forum, which is a three-day event attended by teams from up to eight institutions, to provide institutions with a supportive, facilitated peer review process for Action Projects.

During the first year, AQIP institutions prepare a Systems Portfolio which is a 75-100 page **public portfolio**. It is continually updated to reflect changes in the institution's systems and processes over four years. NCACS calls upon institutions to undergo a Systems Appraisal every four years. The Systems Appraisal is a review of the institution's Systems Portfolio conducted by a team of Commission-trained Reviewers. The review team, through consensus, generates a detailed Feedback report.

Every seven years, a Commission-trained AQIP Review Panel examines each organisation's current Systems Portfolio and its last six years of Action Projects, Systems Appraisals, and other interactions with the Commission. The Panel documents where it finds satisfactory evidence of compliance with each of the Criteria for Accreditation. Institutions judged to making unsatisfactory progress will receive directed advice and assistance, or they will be guided out of AQIP and back to the standard accreditation process.

AQIP also seeks to test whether the 'quality criteria' modeled after national principles developed with the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Awards can be useful to institutions and to the accrediting process.

### ***2.3. The Shift in Focus***

From the 1980s onward, regional accrediting agencies began to adopt a different approach to accrediting standards. Accrediting agencies had grown tired of the continuing criticisms that they focused on 'inputs' and resources and did not consider actual results. Under the new approach, accrediting standards began to shift away from a focus on desirable organisational characteristics and, instead, paid new attention to the actual results or 'outcomes' of institutional efforts.

For example, regional accrediting agencies developed standards that called for new, quantitative evidence on student learning and student accomplishments. To meet these new expectations, institutions develop and monitor detailed sets of data. A relatively simple approach taken by the institutions has been to focus on rates of degree completion. There are also complaints that this is not easy in actual practice, because students may study part-time, change their degree objectives, transfer between institutions, or interrupt their studies. This approach is also criticised for offering a limited view of an institution's accomplishments because it ignores variation in level of student accomplishment or achievement in other, more specific outcomes.

Some accrediting agencies take a different approach, focusing on the process for assuring good outcomes. These agencies do not stipulate what kind of outcomes must be expected, but they require the institution to demonstrate that it is using results from its institutional assessment to improve its outcomes. The regional agencies are trying to balance these approaches. For example, the new framework of WASC focuses on outcomes and results, yet appropriately addresses issues of 'organizational capacity' in the context of how they are used. It is not a matter of having resources; these standards call for a demonstration that the resources are put to use effectively.

Another, more ambitious approach is one that focuses on the actual competencies that students should possess upon completion of their studies. This approach has been adopted by the agencies that accredit specific academic programs. In architecture, for example, accrediting review teams examine an elaborate display of actual student work, with projects chosen to demonstrate the program's standards on dozens of different criteria.

This orientation towards results and outcome has been accepted in principle but in practice problems are substantial. Institutions try to gather evidence from follow-up studies of graduates to document the extent to which graduates have been successful in finding career related employment or satisfaction with their studies. Sometimes, they compile data on the pass rates on licensing examinations of recent graduates. One-time surveys of currently enrolled students are sometimes conducted. Debate continues on how to define outcomes and how to document them.

#### ***2.4. Simplification of Requirement***

Another major development is the steps to simplify standards for accreditation in order to reduce the burden on institutions due to the accrediting process. The new accrediting standards approved by WASC include only four standards. This is a significant reduction from the nine standards of its previous approach. The new approach seeks to reduce the amount of time that institutions spend in reviewing their general operations while expecting stronger institutional attention to internal review processes in support of educational improvement.

In September 2000, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) introduced new criteria for accreditation. Here too, the new approach is intended to simplify accrediting reviews and give institutions greater flexibility. Instead of numerous prescriptive criteria, the review process will be guided by a few, broader principles and institutions will develop a 'prospectus' that presents their own approach to improvement.

Accrediting agencies have also tried to experiment on the simplification of re accreditation requirements. Some program accreditors do not require a site visit but require the accredited institutions to submit necessary baseline data on the program through electronic portfolios and not as a part of a printed report. The Western Association for Schools and Colleges (WASC) and NCACS currently allow for this option to present necessary data through electronic portfolios. This change, reflecting the fact that most US institutions of higher education have electronic data management systems, is likely to be incorporated into the reaccreditation processes by other accrediting agencies over time. In a similar direction, a foundation-funded project has supported a number of public universities in an experiment to produce a completely electronic 'portfolio' of information that would meet accrediting requirements while also informing students, families and the institution's surrounding community about its activities.

### ***2.5. Multi-stage Model of Accreditation***

The regional accreditation agencies follow the multi-stage accreditation model for the standard accreditation process. For example, the NEASC has two stages of accreditation. Candidacy, the first stage, is a status of affiliation which indicates that an institution has met the criteria for candidacy, is progressing towards accreditation, but does not currently meet the standards of accreditation. Attainment of candidacy does not ensure eventual accreditation. A candidate institution has a maximum period of five years, from the effective date of candidacy, within which to achieve accredited status. Gradually accrediting agencies are introducing multi-stage or sequenced reviews for reaffirmation of accreditation. In the accreditation model of NCACS, an institution may be re-accredited for a full ten years but may require a focused assessment after three years on an issue of concern, say student assessment, as recommended by the assessment team.

In 2000, the **Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)** made a change as a part of an effort to improve the self-study and site visit process. First, to give more focus to the site visit, WASC has called for two separate visits. The first visit is to address issues of institutional capacity and resources, while the second visit, several months later, is to address exclusively the issues of educational effectiveness. The new accreditation review process of the WASC, applicable only for already accredited institutions, involves three integrated and sequenced stages – Institutional Proposal, Preparatory Review and Educational Effectiveness Review. In stage 1, the institution submits a proposal two and a half years prior to the Preparatory Review. Each Proposal is reviewed by a peer committee charged with the responsibility of applying Commission criteria to each Proposal and its alignment with the Core Commitments and Accreditation Standards. In stage 2, the Preparatory Review is conducted to enable the Commission to determine whether an institution fulfills the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity. It is intended to be a focused review which includes a site visit. In stage 3, the Educational Effectiveness Review is conducted to enable the Commission to make a judgment about the extent that the institution fulfills its Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness.

The **Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools** requires the institution to provide two separate documents as part of its reaffirmation review: Compliance Certification and Quality Enhancement Plan. The Compliance Certification, submitted fifteen months in advance of an institution's scheduled reaffirmation, is a document completed by the institution that demonstrates its judgment of the extent of its compliance with each of the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards.

The Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), submitted six weeks in advance of the on-site review by the Commission, describes a focused course of action that addresses a well-defined issue or issues directly related to improving student learning. The Peer Review is also in two parts – Off-site Review and On-site Review. The Off-site Review Committee, composed of a chair and normally eight evaluators, meets at an off-site location and reviews Compliance Certifications of a group of institutions to

determine whether each institution is in compliance with all Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards, and with federal regulations. The group of institutions, called a cluster, normally will consist of five institutions similar in governance and degrees offered. At the conclusion of the review, the Off-site Review Committee will prepare a separate report for each institution, recording and explaining its decisions regarding compliance. A report is forwarded to the respective institution's On-site Review Committee which makes the final determination on compliance.

Following review by the Off-site Committee, an On-site Review Committee of peers will conduct a focused evaluation at the campus to finalise issues of compliance with the Core Requirements and Comprehensive Standards, evaluate the acceptability of the QEP, and provide consultation regarding the issues addressed in the QEP. During a typical three-day visit, committee members examine data and conduct interviews in order to evaluate the soundness of the QEP and ascertain whether the institution is in compliance with the Commission *Principles*. The committee offers written advice to the institution, develops a consensus on its findings, and completes a draft report ([www.sacscoc.org](http://www.sacscoc.org), 10 May 2006).

## ***2.6. Introducing Elements of Audit***

The **Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)** has introduced audit-based approach to one of its models. Models include ([www.wascweb.org](http://www.wascweb.org), 10 May 2006):

i) Special Themes: Under this model, in addition to the required elements specified by the Commission, the institution will carefully select a limited number of topics for review in depth; identify expected areas of inquiry or researchable questions for each topic; select a methodology for engaging each topic; and carry out each investigation as a rigorous research-based study. Typically, three or more topics should be selected involving aspects of Educational Effectiveness. At least one of these must give explicit attention to student learning and be supported by concrete data on educational results.

ii) Strategic Planning-Based: Under this model, in addition to the required elements specified by the Commission, the institution would identify a limited number of areas of emphasis in its current strategic plan for in-depth review. The intent is to align the Commission's concern with Educational Effectiveness with the priorities set under the institution's own internal planning processes. The agreed upon topics should be addressed in depth, and should involve significant engagement with evidence of student learning based on educational results. The topics should also emphasise the use of such evidence for improvement of the institution's educational effectiveness.

iii) Comprehensive: Under this model, the institution will produce a single comprehensive document describing how it goes about the process of investigating and assuring educational quality. This could be a comprehensive review of assessment at the institution; a comprehensive examination of how the institution might become more learning-centered; or an extensive review of the entire institution under specific

points of inquiry. In any of these approaches, the institution would be expected to include evidence-based discussions of student learning based on educational results.

iv) Audit-Based: Under this model, the institution would follow an “audit-like” approach to examining key processes for assuring quality in teaching and learning, including such activities as curriculum design and approval; the establishment and maintenance of academic standards; instructional evaluation and improvement; and/or the program review process. A major intent of this audit process is to determine the degree to which the institution’s own design for such processes is actually being carried out in practice at the institutional, school, departmental, or classroom level. As a result, the heart of the “audit” would involve selecting particular examples – for example, a few academic programs, courses, or instructional staff – and examining these in-depth to determine alignment. Institutions electing this approach have sometimes used external “audit” models to guide them – for example the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award framework or the Academic Audit approaches adopted by both UK and Hong Kong.

As it shows, regional accrediting agencies have taken different positions, and initiated various models for maintaining the accreditation status. The regional agencies allow for alternative approaches, but place the burden on the individual institution to propose and state the rationale for an alternative model. While the accrediting agencies encourage the HEIs to use alternative models to suit the institutional context, HEIs seem to be maintaining a strong preference for comprehensive self-studies. The accrediting agencies also emphasise that the model chosen is less important than the long-term usefulness of the self-study process. It should be noted that the accrediting agencies expect that all of the standards for accreditation be addressed by the institution through the self-study or other documentation, regardless of the model or approach that is selected.

It should be noted that the picture of change and diversity described above is not devoid of problems. The difference in standards and accreditation processes among the regionals has been under severe criticism for a long time. With increase in new providers of education who are not bound by geographical jurisdictions and with HEIs establishing partnership arrangements and multi-campus in different parts of the country, effectiveness of regional accreditation is being questioned. Lack of interaction among the regionals adds to the criticisms. Although the regionals are trying to have a common platform to discuss these issues by coming together as the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) and in spite of the efforts of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) that tries to ensure minimum standards among the regionals through its recognition process, problems of inconsistency continue.

Lack of interaction and consistency in approaches of the regionals is also seen in the way they deal with the overseas operations of their HEIs. The current arrangements are diverse and seen as inadequate by many receiving countries. There is no national approach to quality assure the overseas educational activities of the US institutions.

### 3. Learning from Developments in the US

The developments in the US highlight the following:

- There is an acknowledgement that HEIs need flexibility in the scope and nature of their self-study. AUQA has recognised this from the beginning and HEIs have been given the flexibility to plan their portfolio in a way that suits their objectives and help them to demonstrate that they achieve those objectives well.
- The recent US attention to flexibility has to be seen in the context that accreditation is a compliance measure, related to minimum standards, now used by the US government as well as the institutions. Therefore, the agencies have had to revert to a slightly more compliance-oriented approach. Consequently, even in a theme-based audit, the HEI has the responsibility to provide evidence for compliance with all accreditation standards and the accrediting agencies have the responsibility to affirm whether the HEIs comply with the standards.
- In the US, from an inspection-oriented approach, as the accrediting agencies move towards new models of quality assurance, they give more attention to students and learning outcomes.
- Interaction with US accreditors indicates that although HEIs supported focused assessments and special topics in principle, in practice the HEIs prefer the comprehensive model. There are also concerns in some regions (NCACS-HLC that has around 1000 members) about how two different approaches can affirm the same set of outcomes. The implication for AUQA is that for around 40 SAIs giving different options may not be very useful although selection of a small range of special topics should be considered.
- The Middle States, which is known for its flexible approach to self study, has learnt from experience that not all topics allow the accreditors to have a 'whole-of-institution' view and MSCHE expects the HEIs to choose the special topics from one of the three areas: Finance, Planning, and Assessment. The implication for AUQA is that in the event of opting for the special topics model, AUQA may predetermine some broad areas that would allow audit panels to have a better understanding of the 'whole-of-institution' while at the same time focusing on the selected topic.
- The new accreditation models of the US are now moving towards audit approaches. The accrediting agencies mention business excellence models and the Baldrige model from where AUQA has taken its ADRI (Approach, Deployment, Results, Improvement) model. The fact that AUQA already has a model that is being considered now in the US should be noted.
- Lack of a national approach to the transnational education activities of the HEIs and variation in standards among the regional accreditors continue to be concerns in the US. These are areas where the current practices of AUQA are well regarded by the international community.

- Quality enhancement is discussed in all the new approaches. There is an increasing tendency to prefer the term 'quality enhancement' over 'quality improvement'. Although the approaches remain basically the same, they have been presented differently, giving more emphasis to enhancement.
- Strengthening of 'follow-up' with HEIs and ensuring continuing dialogue with HEIs are observed.
- Some elements of the multi-stage accreditation model that help in the continuing dialogue with the HEIs might be considered.
- As an aim to simplify requirements for re-accreditation and related documentation is found among all the accrediting agencies, AUQA may also consider how the documentation to be provided by the auditees can be simplified.

#### **4. QA Developments in Europe**

##### ***4.1. Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) in Scotland ([www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/ELIR/default.asp), 10 May 2006)***

Over the past decade the higher education sector in Scotland has participated in a range of initiatives in the external assurance of quality and standards. The outcomes of these activities have demonstrated that, in general, Scottish higher education institutions had in place effective quality management systems relating to the experience of students and the standards of their awards, and that the subject provision experienced by students was highly satisfactory or better. Building on these foundations, national and institutional activities in relation to managing quality and standards have been changing to focus more explicitly on the enhancement of the learning experience of students.

The new enhancement model consists of the following five inter-related elements:

1. A comprehensive framework of internal review at the subject level within the higher education institutions. The nature of internal reviews will be decided by individual institutions but will share certain agreed features including the use of trained reviewers and also externality within review teams
2. An agreed set of public information provided by the institutions
3. The effective involvement of students in quality management through a variety of mechanisms
4. Quality enhancement engagements. These take the form of a structured program of engagements each year which will involve the sector in a series of developmental activities on themes selected by the sector. These themes may be drawn from the outcomes of internal and external reviews and the outcomes of these engagements are likely to impact on the reflections of institutions as they consider their own quality enhancement strategies. (The work of the enhancement themes is planned and directed by the Scottish Higher Education

Enhancement Committee (SHEEC). SHEEC manages the program in the context of a five-year plan. Past themes have included Assessment, Responding to Student Needs and Employability. Current themes are Flexible Delivery, Integrative Assessment and The First Year.

5. The institutional review process. This is an enhancement-led peer review process which, while providing information on the security of the institution's management of quality and standards, is focused on the institution's strategic management of quality enhancement.

The enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) is one of five main elements (item 5 above) of the new integrated approach to quality in Scotland. The approach was fully implemented in higher education institutions from 2003 to 2004. It is important to note that ELIR recognises that quality enhancement involves quality assurance as well. For the purposes of ELIR, enhancement is defined as taking deliberate steps to bring about continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students.

The ELIR process consists of four integrated elements: an annual discussion with each institution; once in the cycle, the submission of a Reflective Analysis (RA) (similar to the Portfolio); a review visit following the submission of the RA (in two parts); and, each year, sector-wide feedback on the learning points from ELIR activity across the sector. ELIR teams comprise five individuals: one student reviewer (or reviewer representing student interests), three reviewers who are not students, and one review secretary. The student reviewers will have particular, although not exclusive, responsibility for pursuing lines of enquiry relating to the student experience and the effectiveness of student involvement in institutional processes for the strategic management of quality enhancement. Teams will be asked to express their level of confidence in one of three standard forms: broad confidence; limited confidence; or no confidence.

At the annual discussions following the publication of the ELIR report, the reaction and follow-up activity within the institution will be discussed. For the annual meeting following the first anniversary of the publication of the report, the institution will be asked to provide the Agency with a written response to the report which will become part of the agreed profile. SHEFC also may wish to request institutions to undertake follow-up action in specified areas. Annual meetings are not confined to the ELIR report. They are also used to discuss the international subject reviews of the institutions.

QAA Scotland will do a reflective overview of this approach which will be built up over the four year cycle with an initial report being produced in year 3. The reflective overview will consider the effectiveness of ELIR in meeting its objectives.

#### **4.2. The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) ([www.eva.dk](http://www.eva.dk), 10 May 2006)**

The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) establishes a project team as well as an evaluation group for each round of evaluations. The project team is typically

composed of one or two evaluation officers, one evaluation assistant (a student) and a representative from each of the three units specialised in respectively methodology, communication and administration. All team members are employed with EVA. One of the evaluation officers leads the project and is responsible for the communication between the institutions to be evaluated, the project team and the evaluation group. The project team is responsible for the practical work of the evaluation including the responsibility for writing the final report.

The project team makes a preliminary study to get an overview and ensure that the evaluation covers relevant areas of focus. The preliminary study specifically leads to establishment of an evaluation group, appointment of the institutions to be evaluated and, finally, to the formulation of the terms of reference. The terms of reference are then approved by the EVA board.

EVA establishes an evaluation group for each evaluation that is composed of people possessing special academic expertise in the area that is evaluated. Members of the project team do not become members of the evaluation group. The evaluation group is responsible for the academic contents of the evaluation and for the recommendations of the report. Usually EVA recruits a member from one of the other Nordic Countries to obtain an international perspective of the evaluation.

One or more supplementary surveys are included in the evaluation. Consultancy agencies and market research institutes typically carry out the surveys for EVA. The supplementary surveys together with the self evaluation reports (along the guidelines provided by the project team) and the site visits form the basis for the recommendations of the evaluation report. The findings of the surveys are available as separate appendices in Danish after the report has been published.

The evaluation group and the project team usually visit all institutions to be evaluated. During the visit, the evaluation group has the opportunity to talk to staff, students and management team. The purpose of the visit is to obtain further documentation for the report. Prior to the visit, the project team prepares a checklist of topics to cover for the evaluation group based on the self evaluation reports. The project team prepares minutes after each visit. The minutes of the visits are for EVA's own use only.

Program evaluation results in a single combined report while institutional evaluations result in separate reports for each institution. In the report, the evaluation group presents its conclusions and proposals for quality improvement of the educational program. The report also contains a description of the aim and process of the evaluation and analysis of the documentation. Prior to publication, the report is given to the institution to comment on the report and correct any factual errors.

The institutions are responsible for following up on the evaluation. According to the act issued by the Danish Ministry of Education, all evaluated institutions must prepare a follow-up plan. The plan takes into consideration the recommendations of the

evaluation report but it may also include initiatives that the institutions choose to launch on the basis of the self evaluation. Public announcement of the follow-up plan must be made not later than six months after the report has been published and it must be made electronically from the institution's homepage.

**4.3. *Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) of UK***  
**([www.qaa.ac.uk/review/iqer/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/review/iqer/default.asp), 10 may 2006)**

A proposal for the new audit system for higher education in England and Northern Ireland has been published for consultation by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), designed specifically for further education colleges which provide higher education funded by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE). The new method reflects what has been learned from the current method of institutional audit, and takes into account the recommendations of an independent review (chaired by Dame Sandra Burslem, Vice-Chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University) which found that audit was fit for purpose and cost-effective but recommended some improvements for the next (2006–12) cycle of audit.

QAA proposes that this new review method should take a form similar to institutional audit but tailored specifically for colleges. The method has been designed bearing in mind that the colleges are not awarding bodies. It also acknowledges that QAA is not the only quality and standards body that the colleges deal with, as they provide information principally for awarding bodies and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate's (ALI). The method tries to eliminate duplication of effort by relying on colleges' and their awarding bodies' internal procedures and work carried out by other similar and cognate bodies.

The proposed method will take the form of an Integrated quality and enhancement review (IQER). The method consists of two complementary activities: enhancement-focused developmental review and a formal assessment through summative review. The developmental review process targets key areas in the college's management of its responsibilities for quality and standards in its higher education provision. The summative review process evaluates how the college engages with the Academic Infrastructure and manages its responsibilities for the standards of higher education programs validated and approved by a variety of awarding authorities and how it assures the quality of the learning opportunities provided for its students in accordance with the awarding bodies' requirements.

The scope and number of developmental reviews for individual colleges are identified through a risk-based approach. All colleges will have at least one developmental review. The maximum number of developmental reviews in the five-year period will normally be two but exceptionally may be three, depending on the outcomes of previous developmental reviews. Each developmental review focuses on a developmental theme. The first developmental review for all colleges takes student assessment as its theme. The colleges are invited to propose a preferred theme if they have a second developmental review. This developmental review could, by way of example, be a specific college department, areas that demonstrate good practice, a

collection of programs, or a subject grouping, which would benefit from the developmental process. QAA lists the developmental themes available for colleges participating in subsequent developmental reviews.

The outcomes of developmental reviews are reported in the form of an evaluative narrative and recommendations, whereas for summative reviews, there are judgements (of confidence, limited confidence or no confidence for two areas, namely Academic standards and Quality of learning opportunities, and evaluative comment on the third area, namely Teaching quality information). Developmental reviews and summative reviews both result in a written report containing conclusions, features of good practice, recommendations for enhancement and, where appropriate, matters for further consideration by the college and its awarding bodies. Both reports incorporate an action plan devised by the college in consultation with the awarding bodies, in response to the findings of the review.

To support development and capacity building, the developmental review report is not published and remains confidential to the college, the awarding body(ies), HEFCE and QAA. The formal follow-up procedure is the next review undertaken by QAA. The summative review report is published and contains judgements and a summary of the developmental review outcomes. A representative of QAA follows up all college action plans to review progress one year after the summative review report is published.

QAA encourages the college to consult its students on the contents of the self-evaluations, but also invites students, through their representative body, to make their own written submission to the developmental review team and/or to the summative review team. The written submission provides a further means by which students, through their representative body, can make the IQER team aware of matters of primary interest or concern to them. It is, however, an entirely voluntary part of the IQER process, and no college will be penalised if its students do not wish to make a written submission.

QAA proposes two variants of the IQER method, one for colleges with 51–99 FTEs and the other for colleges with up to 50 FTEs. The principles underlying the method are the same as those set out for all colleges. The difference is in the size of the panel and the number of days of the site visit.

Overall, the revised process aims to allow greater flexibility in the audit method, while retaining the basic purpose of institutional audit. The main changes are:

- emphasis on objectives of the institution
- a continuing emphasis on student participation
- a flexible audit trail procedure to replace discipline audit trails
- a shift in focus towards enhancement by focusing on the strategies which institutions are using to enhance the quality of their provision, and which build upon quality assurance

- the development of a more effective interaction between the audit team and the institution, stressing the importance of the use of the institution's normal processes and documentation rather than documentation prepared for the audit.

Interaction with UK academia indicates that in spite of all the flexibility and consideration to institutional objectives, in practice, this approach to quality enhancement is perceived by many as a process more towards compliance, checking whether the institutions have in place effective quality enhancement strategies.

Another development in Europe is the business excellence model developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). The new QAA Framework of UK is moving towards this model. The main thrust of this model is the RADAR, which in the business excellence models of New Zealand and Australia is called the organisation's Objectives and the ADRI respectively.

## **5. Learning from the Developments in Europe**

The developments in Europe highlight the following:

- Developments in UK, as in the case of the US, indicate a move towards business excellence models. The fact that AUQA has taken its ADRI model from the business excellence models and based its investigations on the ADRI model since the beginning in 2001 must be noted.
- QAA of UK acknowledges that its IQER has to build on quality assurance. In Scotland, as elsewhere, there is scepticism among academia that quality enhancement cannot be done without quality assurance. The ELIR itself acknowledges this. Therefore, in the shift towards quality enhancement it is important to retain the role of quality assurance.
- Strengthening the 'outcome' related data to be provided in the Portfolio and encouraging their public disclosure can be considered.
- Developments related to IQER and ELIR give a due place to the strategies which institutions are already using to enhance the quality of their provision, and the external reviews build upon internal quality assurance. There is also a move towards using each institution's normal processes and documentation rather than documentation prepared for the audit.
- Emphasising the role of students in the institutional quality enhancement activities needs consideration. Scotland gives a clear role to the student representative in the evaluation itself; Denmark limits student involvement to the project team and planning the evaluations. It also gathers inputs from students through surveys and interviews. QAA of UK encourages students to make written submissions that inform the audits.
- Strengthening the process of using the 'progress reports' for follow-up needs attention and some practices of Scotland and UK that involve annual discussions and a developmental approach may be useful. The shift may be

towards ensuring a more effective interaction with the institution and continuing the dialogue with the institutions even after the audit, with the spirit of consultancy rather than in terms of monitoring progress.

- The merits of the Preparatory Visit to the auditee (this achieves objectives similar to the part 1 visit of ELIR) as an important stage in the audit sequence should be emphasised.
- The proposal being discussed in UK has an arrangement where the reports of developmental reviews are not made public.
- In the case of program evaluation conducted by EVA, the same evaluation team visits all the institutions and this is possible partly due to the manageable number of evaluations and the definite period within which all evaluations of a particular program are conducted.
- Use of surveys is one of the main features of EVA evaluations and surveys cover various user groups including students, parents, alumni and employers. The survey outcomes are published. The EVA experience indicates that external surveys could be very expensive. Although AUQA conducts surveys for the agency audits, it does not conduct surveys in the case of institutional audits. AUQA audits look into the survey outcomes that are already in place in institutions, an approach which supports the view that audits should build on existing institutional processes.

