

Review of NOKUT – the Norwegian  
Agency for Quality Assurance in  
Education  
Report of the ENQA Panel  
May, 2013

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## 1. Executive summary

This report addresses the extent to which the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) complies with the membership criteria of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and therefore with the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Part 3). It is based on a review process, commissioned by NOKUT and coordinated by ENQA. The review procedure included a self-evaluation by NOKUT and a two-day site visit undertaken by an external review panel on 7 and 8 May, 2013.

NOKUT is an independent body, established by the Universities and Colleges Act in 2003. It works with higher education institutions and vocational higher education providers, as well as individuals seeking to obtain recognition of their foreign qualifications, to ensure and promote quality in higher and tertiary vocational education. NOKUT achieves this through supervision and control over the institutions' internal quality systems, accreditation of new institutions and programmes, and revision of their post-accreditation activities. NOKUT audits are concerned with the evaluation of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance systems. NOKUT's *institutional accreditations* are focused on determining an institutional status and the associated degree awarding power. *Programme accreditations* are directed to the initial approval of new study programmes in areas, for which the institution does not have degree awarding power. *Revisions of accreditations* (institutional and programme) are concentrated on the control of institution's or programme's continuous adherence to accreditation criteria. *Cyclical audits* are aimed at the evaluation of the effectiveness of internal quality assurance systems within the higher education institutions and if the institution fails to obtain NOKUT's approval of its system, its authority to establish, or apply for accreditation of new study programmes will be withdrawn.

NOKUT has established and clearly defined external quality assurance processes which include the main stages and processes recommended as good practice in Part 2 of the ESG and which take into account internal quality assurance. External evaluations are conducted in accordance with pre-determined and publicly available procedures. NOKUT's experienced staff and external experts, including students, work together throughout the evaluation and reporting processes to achieve clear and consistent conclusions. NOKUT has carried out regular analyses of the higher education sector and of the impact of its external quality assurance with a view to development and promotion of excellence. This work of the agency progressed to its recent responsibility for selection and appointment of national Centres of Excellence. The review panel found substantial evidence that NOKUT was successful in engaging higher education institutions and students and provided valuable support and advice for their development and enhancement.

The review panel considered carefully a range of documentary and oral evidence which led to judgements of 'full' compliance with ENQA membership criteria 2,3,4,5,7 and 8 and 'substantial compliance' with criteria 1 and 6.

The Panel has made a number of recommendations which NOKUT should consider in its work to become fully compliant with all the ENQA membership criteria. The panel has also provided reflections on the future development of NOKUT and offered a number of suggestions which it believes will assist in strengthening NOKUT's practices.

## 2. Glossary of terms

ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
NOKUT	Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ENQA, 2009
MoE	Royal Ministry of Education and Research
U&C Act	Universities and Colleges Act, adopted by the Norwegian Parliament in 2002, amended in 2005
HEI	Higher education institution
SFU	Centres of Excellence in Education- NOKUT's quality award
NUS	National Union of Students
NHO	Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises
SER	Self-evaluation report
ICT	Information and communication technology
HR	Human resources

## 3. Introduction

### 3.1. Background of the review

The current review was commissioned by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT, or the Agency) in order to verify that it fulfils the ENQA membership criteria and thus the ESG. ENQA regulations require member agencies to undergo external review at least once every five years. As a type 'A' review, it was conducted in line with the process described in *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the EHEA*. The Terms of Reference for the review may be found in Annex 1.

The review Panel consisted of the following members:

- Nick Harris, self-employed consultant (European higher education), UK – Chair
- Patricia Georgieva, Managing Director at Qualifications and Quality Support Centre, Bulgaria – Secretary
- Tue Vinther-Jørgensen, Director of Projects, Unit for Higher Education and Adult and Further Education, Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA), Denmark
- Jean-Marc Rapp, Professor at the University of Lausanne Law Faculty, Director of the Business Law Centre (CEDIDAC), Switzerland – *EUA nomination*
- Olav Øye, student at the Free University of Brussels (ULB) – *ESU nomination*

The review was co-ordinated by Nathalie Lugano from ENQA Secretariat.

NOKUT has been a full member of ENQA since its establishment in 2003, continuing the membership of its predecessor, the Norwegian Network Council (1997-2002). The Agency's latest evaluation with reference to ESG was in 2007/08, when the review panel concluded that NOKUT 'fully complies with ENQA's membership requirements'. On the basis of the Panel judgement the ENQA Board confirmed the full membership of NOKUT in June, 2008.

It should be noted that the present review was concerned solely with NOKUT's tasks related to quality assurance in higher education. Other agency functions, related to external quality assurance of tertiary vocational education, general recognition of foreign higher education qualifications, and information for students, employers and job seekers about the recognition of foreign qualifications fall outside the remit of ENQA's review of NOKUT.

### **3.2. The review process**

NOKUT produced a self-evaluation report with attachments, which together provided a substantial part of evidence that the panel used to inform its conclusions. It contains an informative discussion of the extent to which, in its own assessment, NOKUT adheres to the ESG and ENQA membership criteria. As this is a second review of the agency's compliance with the ESG, the Self-evaluation report provides reflections on the follow-up of earlier recommendations and subsequent developments. This review is based on the information provided by NOKUT in the SER, on different types of NOKUT evaluation reports, on legislation and additional material sent upon request from the panel, and on the information gathered from the interviews during the site visit.

The panel conducted a site visit to validate the self-evaluation and clarify any questions raised in the process of initial analysis. During the two days of the visit the panel met with representatives of staff and management of NOKUT and particularly with those working in the two main departments responsible for external quality assurance and quality enhancement operations, with representatives of NOKUT Board and Director General, as well as with a group of NOKUT reviewers. The panel was also able to meet representatives of the Royal Ministry of Education and Research, representatives of students' and employers' organisation, the two Rectors' councils and the Union of Researchers and Professors. The Panel also met representatives of higher education institutions that had undergone various forms of NOKUT evaluations. A detailed programme of the site visit is provided in Annex 2 to this report. The panel benefited from the discussions that provided a better understanding of the processes currently applied by NOKUT and greatly appreciated the well-prepared visit.

In the course of its work during the visit the Panel considered the level of compliance with the ESG (Part 3) and the ENQA membership criteria. Members agreed judgments on each criterion. Finally, the review panel produced the present report on the basis of the SER and the additional materials provided by NOKUT, and on the site visit and its findings.

### 3.3. Higher education system in Norway

The Norwegian higher education system is governed by the Universities and University Colleges Act, passed by the Parliament in 2002 (subsequently amended in 2005). The Royal Ministry of Education and Research, on behalf of the Government, oversees the operation of the Act and regulates the sector, including the quality assurance framework. The Act, together with the recent Ministerial regulations<sup>1</sup> (last amended in 2010) is of particular significance for the agency external quality assurance method and its main operations. NOKUT was established in 2002 with this Act; the Agency's main tasks are listed in it and the Act empowers NOKUT as the only official quality assurance agency for Norwegian higher education. NOKUT is subject to regulation by the Ministry of Education and Research and the MoE regulatory power incorporates the agency's objective, responsibilities, and instruments, the appointment of experts, the audit and accreditation processes, as well as the standards and requirements, monitoring activities and appeals procedures. Based on the Act and the latest Ministerial regulations, the NOKUT Board adopted an organisation strategy (in April, 2011) as a steering document for the agency's policies concerning its main activities, human resources, communication and investments in infrastructure. An important feature of the current organisation strategy is the 'annual wheel of steering and management', which highlights NOKUT's accountability mechanisms.

In the Norwegian system there are three different types of higher education institutions with different degrees of autonomy in being able to develop their programmes and award their degrees: *university, specialised university and university college*. Universities are fully authorised to award degrees at all levels of higher education (Bachelor, Master and PhD), specialised university institutions are authorised to offer programmes at all levels but within their specific field of specialisation, while university colleges can offer programmes at Bachelor levels and master and doctoral degrees following their specific programme accreditation.

Norway currently has 79 higher education institutions with over 240 000 students. The public sector institutions, which receive budget allocations from the Ministry of Education and Research, include: 8 public sector universities, 9 specialised universities, 40 university colleges and two national academies of arts. There are a few more state institutions which are under the regulation of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of defence. Additionally, there are 20 private institutions that account for about 10% of the students. From the total of 79 institutions 75% bear less than 5000 students, which indicate for a relatively high number of institutions with many very small ones. The structure of degrees is aligned to the Bologna process through the introduction in 2002 of the Bachelor, Master and PhD degree, the ECTS credit system and a national system for quality assurance under the U&C Act. The National

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<sup>1</sup> Regulations no. 96 of 1 February 2010: Regulations concerning quality assurance and quality development in higher education and tertiary vocational education (unofficial English translation, provided by MoE).

Framework of Qualifications in Higher Education was adopted in 2010, following the Bologna reform developments and the introduction of the European Qualifications Framework (2005).

### 3.4. Quality assurance in Norwegian higher education and the role of NOKUT

The Universities and Colleges Act and the Ministerial regulations determine NOKUT's responsibilities regarding quality assurance in Norwegian higher education, which include: accreditation of institutions and study programmes, revision of accreditations, evaluation of institution's internal quality assurance systems and system level evaluations of the quality of higher education in Norway. *Accreditation* (of institutions and study programmes) in the Norwegian quality assurance context is an *ex ante* evaluation of an institution or programme, which confers self-accrediting powers to an institution regarding its programmes and awards (institutional accreditation), and/or permission for delivery of programmes and awarding degrees in areas, for which an institution does not have self-accrediting powers (programme accreditation). These two types of accreditations have unlimited periods of validity- once granted to the institution the accreditation lasts. The backstop, or protection against eventual abuse of these powers, is provided through two additional external quality assurance processes, developed and applied by NOKUT: ad hoc *revisions* of an institution or programme, which may end up with a withdrawal of the previously granted accreditation, and cyclical *audits of institutions' internal quality assurance* systems. Institutions that fail to obtain NOKUT's approval of their quality assurance systems lose the authority to establish new study programmes, or (in the case of non-accredited institutions) to apply for accreditation of new study programmes.

Higher education institutions in Norway also have quality assurance responsibilities regarding their provision under the U&C Act and the Ministerial Regulations no.96 of 2010. These explicitly require universities and university colleges to have in place 'a system for their quality assurance work' and to submit their quality work to NOKUT's external monitoring and supervision.

Since the 2008 review the Norwegian quality assurance system has developed, and hence the NOKUT practice. As before, NOKUT continues to operate its broad framework of *programme* accreditations, *institutional* accreditations, *audits* and *revisions*, but these procedures are seen to be part of an interconnected system, sharing the purpose of assuring the quality of 'all higher education provision in Norway' through evaluations at either a programme or institutional level (SER, p.15). The focus of accreditation is on aspects of an institution's activities that allows the determination of its institutional type and hence, self-accrediting status in relation to the programme provision. In this system audit and revision are interpreted by the agency as two forms of control and supervision of existing provision, where audit is understood as 'indirect supervision' of the institution's educational provision via its internal quality assurance arrangements, while 'revision' is seen as direct intervention,



where the institution, or a specific programme is tested against the standards with the possible outcome that an accreditation may be revoked. This view of consistency of NOKUT's various approaches to quality assurance and quality control prompted a series of new developments in the recent years:

- NOKUT made provisions for a more targeted approach to the revision of programmes. The new model, piloted and then implemented in 2012, prescribes a four-steps process, involving mapping of risk-related indicators, data reporting and dialogue with the institution, and finally revision, if the risk assessment concludes that the internal quality assurance processes carried out by the institution may not be sufficient. The model is also considered more flexible, as it allows for dialogue with the institution and helps counteract the areas where quality is at risk, thus avoiding revision and revocation of accreditation.
- NOKUT adopted amendments to its standards and criteria for institutional accreditation, where the requirements for different types of institutions are differentiated.
- NOKUT revised in this period its criteria for audits of internal quality assurance systems, where the number of criteria was reduced from 10 in 2008 to 5 in 2012. No institution has yet been audited under the new set of criteria though.
- The agency made available for open Internet access its archive of reports, which helped improve institutions' ability to learn from each other's practices in quality assurance.

NOKUT has made particular efforts to develop and improve its quality assurance mechanisms, which has to occur within the understanding and support of the Ministry of Education and Research. This is evident from the recent changes to Ministerial regulations, where the agency is given more autonomy to determine its quality assurance processes and procedures, as well as from the Review panel meeting with the representatives of the Ministry during the site visit, where future ambitions were set out.

Higher education institutions in Norway also have a role in quality assurance, as they are legally required to have in place internal quality assurance systems. These are periodically evaluated and recognised against a set of requirements stated in the Ministerial regulations and in NOKUT specific regulations for the audits.

An impact of NOKUT's external quality assurance processes on the higher education landscape in Norway is illustrated through the increased number of new institutions, among them several private ones, and the number of colleges that have transformed into universities as a result of obtaining new institutional status through accreditation. During nearly a decade of NOKUT operations, the number of universities has doubled (from four in 2003 to 8 in 2012) and more institutions are aspiring for this status.

### 3.5. NOKUT's organisation and funding

NOKUT was established in 2003 as a national quality assurance agency for higher education, but since then a range of new tasks had been added to its remit. Since 2004 NOKUT has been responsible for external quality assurance of tertiary vocational education and training. This large and diversified sector is regarded as separate from the academic type higher education. NOKUT also functions as the Norwegian national recognition body and in this role it receives and processes around 4500 applications for recognition annually. In 2010 this activity was explicitly added the task of informing students, job seekers and employers about recognition issues. In this function NOKUT provides guidance to different stakeholders and serves as the national contact point for the recognition of foreign qualifications. Since 2010 NOKUT is also responsible for establishing and managing Centres of Excellence in Education (SFU) at Bachelor's and Master's level programmes, and in 2011 the agency piloted for the first time its model for rewarding programme teams for excellent quality and innovative practices in their provision.

NOKUT's key responsibilities for quality assurance in higher education relate to *accreditation* (institutional and programme), *revision* of accreditations, and *audit* of quality assurance systems within the higher education institutions. NOKUT also undertakes periodic evaluations of the Norwegian higher education system with purely diagnostic and enhancement objectives.

The agency staff is organised with a Director General's Office and four departments, each dealing with multiple responsibilities (see the Organisational Chart of NOKUT). The Quality Assurance Department is the largest, with 23 full-time members out of approximately 73 permanent staff. The Board of Governors is the agency's strategic decision-making body and consists of 7 full members, including the Chair, all appointed by the King. The Board appoints the Director General of NOKUT for a 6-year term, with the possibility of prolongation for a second term.

Organisational Chart of NOKUT<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> NOKUT's Self-evaluation report, p. 81 (NOKUT's Strategic Plan 2010- 2014).



The Department of Quality Assurance is responsible for all external quality assurance activities related to higher and tertiary vocational education in Norway. The Department of Analysis and Development plays an important role in carrying out periodic system-wide and thematic evaluations of the Norwegian higher and tertiary vocational education system. This department is also responsible for statistics and quantitative data and cooperates with other NOKUT departments and external parties on specific projects. The Department of Foreign Education deals with individual applications for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications. It works as a national information centre and advisory body to institutions for the recognition of foreign qualifications regarding their own degrees. The Department for Administrative Services deals with the internal processes that support NOKUT operations and the activities of the other three departments, including budget and administrative steering, human resource management, ICT, archive, internal communication, office facilities and equipment. Several of NOKUT's activities are cross-departmental, like the website publication and update, which is the responsibility of an internal committee, and the NOKUT annual conference on higher education.

NOKUT's principal source of income is the state budget, allocated by the Ministry of Education and Research. Financial regulations allow the agency to have its own source of income from sales of services, but this channel is being used to a lesser extent. About a half of the total budget of NOK 61.87 million for 2011 has been used for activities related to external quality assurance. The budget allocation for 2012 was planned for NOK 57, 4 million (approximately 8.3 million EUR) for all of the agency's activities, but an additional sum of NOK 4 million had been allocated to cover the growth in demand for recognition of foreign qualifications. For 2013 the estimated budget increase of NOK 10 million, compared to the original allocation for the previous year, is related to projections for increased demand on recognition of foreign qualifications.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. ENQA criterion 1 – Activities (ESG 3.1, 3.3)

*Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institution or programme level) on a regular basis. The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the ESG. The external quality assurance activities may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation, or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the member.*

#### **Overall judgement as to ENQA membership criterion 1:**

The review panel concluded that NOKUT is in substantial compliance with ENQA membership criterion 1. See details below.

#### **a) ENQA Criterion 1/ESG 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education**

**STANDARD:** The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

ESG Part 2: Standards and guidelines for external quality assurance of higher education

ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

**STANDARD:**

The external quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

One of NOKUT's external quality assurance procedures – the audit of institutions quality assurance systems- is directly focused on the evaluation of effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes. Audit is described in the SER and evidenced through the sample audit reports as an evaluation of the capacity of the formal internal quality assurance system to produce the necessary information about the quality of all provision and to communicate and manage this information throughout the institution in order to address quality gaps and improve practice. The U&C Act requires that institutions have formal quality assurance systems and the MoE Regulations concerning NOKUT's methodology require that the agency evaluates whether such systems incorporate mechanisms for student feedback on the quality of their study programmes. NOKUT's audit criteria require institutions' internal quality assurance systems to satisfy a set of expectations regarding their characteristics: to engage staff and students; to set clear quality targets and have plans and management for their achievement; to collect and document quality-related information, which is then to be analysed, reported and used for quality improvement. The agency describes its audit criteria as being focused on 'the effectiveness of the QA system as a whole, and how it produces relevant and necessary information about educational quality'. It stresses the fact that its analysis of such information may prompt an in-depth scrutiny of specific programmes or subject areas (SER, p.38). Explicit reference to ESG Part 1 and audit

criteria is provided in the SER. The Ministerial Regulations stipulate that if NOKUT decides that the system does not satisfy its requirements, the institution may lose its right to apply for accreditation of new study programmes, or its authority to offer new ones if it is a self-accrediting organisation.

The Panel studied the SER and other relevant documentation and discussed NOKUT's approach and criteria with different groups during the site visit. The fact that international standards are referred to in the Ministerial order, and that NOKUT considers ENQA membership and EQAR registration among its key international networking priorities in its plan for development, point to the importance assigned to international good practice, of which ESG Part 1 represent a significant part. The Panel discussed with NOKUT their approach to audit and the criteria they use and pointed to the gaps, identified in the SER. NOKUT emphasised its flexible approach to audits which, in their view, provides the possibility to explore quality issues down to the level of programme and argued that reviewers can decide which aspects of the provider's quality assurance system should be given more attention, thus potentially including each and every aspect of the ESG to be investigated and reported on, if relevant for the particular case. This view was, however, not entirely supported by the Panel discussions with representatives from students and HEIs. The Panel carefully reviewed the available in English audit report (attached to the SER, p. 223- 249) and found that the focus of the experts' discussion was on the formal organisation of the quality assurance system, its ability to generate information about quality of study programmes and to bring further this information to improve the quality of programmes. The Panel also noted in the sample of programme accreditation reports that were provided that these had been concerned with direct assessment of the quality of the programme, rather than with the assessment of the effectiveness of the institution's procedures to ensure the quality on a regular and systematic way. In NOKUT guidelines to institutions regarding their quality assurance systems there is very little reference to the ESG and the emphasis is much more on the preparation for audit process itself.

Based on this evidence the Panel agreed that NOKUT criteria for audit address in a very detailed and useful way the HEI's formal quality system, in which they can develop and monitor the effectiveness of their quality assurance policies and procedures. The Panel recognised at the same time, however, that there is no clear guidance as to what areas of institution's work these policies and procedures might address, in order to ensure the quality of their provision. The way the audit process and criteria are designed provides a room for interpretation. From evidence provided at the site visit by the senior representatives from institutions, the Panel is concerned that this may lead to a more formalistic approach on the part of HEIs to the establishment of their internal quality assurance systems, where robust mechanisms for quality in student learning experience and the achievement of high academic standards could be missing.

Whilst the Panel could understand the logic of NOKUT's approach, and noted its acknowledgment in the SER that it does not address the criteria on a 'one by one' basis, the panel concluded that some of the key areas for quality assurance, provided in ESG Part 1, have not been explicitly reported upon in audits and programme accreditations. NOKUT evaluations of internal quality assurance systems and programmes are thus not considered to be fully compliant to ESG 2.1, since the evaluations do not always give sufficient direct attention to all of the aspects of quality assurance detailed in Part 1 of the ESG. It was only

after extensive discussions that the panel reached a conclusion of ‘Substantial’ rather than ‘Partial’ compliance of NOKUT with this standard.

*Assessment against ESG Standard 2.1: The Review Panel decided that NOKUT is in substantial compliance with this standard.*

#### ESG 2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes

**STANDARD:**

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

A statement of NOKUT’s overarching goals and the quality assurance procedures for their achievement is provided in its strategic document (SER, Attachment 4). NOKUT’s broad quality assurance framework has been designed by the Parliament and the Ministry of Education and Research together with the decision for the establishment of the agency. Before the publication of the legal and regulatory acts a Government policy paper on education reform had been developed and widely distributed for discussion. NOKUT’s mandate and accreditation functions were part of this policy paper and its purpose and activities have been in the focus of public discussion of the proposed reforms. Subsequent developments in the agency procedures have also been discussed with stakeholders, including students, HEIs and their representative organisations. Recent changes in NOKUT’s supervision and control procedures, adopted by the Board regulations of 2011, were also published for wide consultations and the responses summarised and considered before the final decision.

The material presented beforehand and the site-visit discussions with students and other groups of stakeholders’ representatives convinced the Panel that those necessary had been consulted and their views taken into account in the development of NOKUT’s processes and methods. At the same time, however, the Panel gained the view that the agency had been slow in proposing adjustments to its criteria due to its limited powers for introducing any needed change to the established quality assurance framework and the lengthy process of coordination with the Ministry of Education and Research and obtaining agreement by the Government and Parliament.

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.2: The Panel finds that NOKUT fully complies with this standard.

#### ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions

**STANDARD:**

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

The criteria for institutional and programme accreditation and for the revision of internal quality assurance systems are published by NOKUT on its website and in the Board’s Regulations (SER, Attachment 3). Guidance and procedures manuals are developed and

published to help institutions understand and prepare for NOKUT's evaluations (SER, p. 38 and Attachment 8). The training and briefing of NOKUT's external experts is one of the key mechanisms for achieving consistency in interpretation of NOKUT's criteria across the various panels. The agency annual conference for HEIs usually includes a seminar for institutions evaluated in the previous year to discuss common evaluation issues, thus contributing to consistency in interpretation of institutions' quality assurance practices against NOKUT criteria. It is acknowledged in the SER that most of NOKUT's accreditation and evaluation criteria are 'round' statements 'open to interpretation', but it is believed that over time the consistency of interpretation will develop both on the part of the agency expert panels and the HEIs (SER, p. 39). In its strategic development plan for the period 2010-2014, the agency sets as one of its key strategic activities for the period the revision and clarification of its criteria and improvement of its services to institutions by providing information and guidance on its processes and criteria well ahead of the actual evaluations (SER, Attachment 4).

Based on this evidence and the information received from various groups during the site visit, the Panel concluded that before their actual involvement in NOKUT processes and procedures the institutions and programmes have not been fully aware of whether they satisfy the expectations and in what way the criteria may or will be applied.

The agency meets the expectations regarding the last part of this standard guidelines: expert panels' conclusions are based on supporting evidence and together with any recommendations these form the key part of the report, which is approved by the Board or Director General, or the Director of Quality assurance department, if authorised by the Board; Final reports are published by NOKUT; a level of consistency is achieved by having an established pool of trained experts and through the regular opportunity to reflect on past assessments provided by the annual quality assurance conferences organised by NOKUT.

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.3: The Panel finds that NOKUT substantially complies with this standard.

ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose

**STANDARD:**

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

The SER describes the goals and purpose of the external quality assurance processes undertaken by NOKUT (to help ensure that the quality of Norwegian higher education satisfies national standards and to stimulate the enhancement of educational quality) and provides details of institutional and programme accreditation, revision and the audit of internal quality assurance systems. The agency has clear requirements for the selection of expert panels, including explicit acknowledgment by experts of non-conflict of interest, and sets of competences defined in accordance with different procedures and their different purposes (SER, Attachment 3: Board Regulations concerning NOKUT's supervision and control of Norwegian higher education). The meeting of the ENQA Panel with NOKUT reviewers confirmed that the agency involves students and international experts in its panels

and provides them with the necessary information support and guidance before their site visits.

NOKUT external quality assurance processes generally follow the 5-steps model described in the ESG: the audit of institution's internal quality assurance system, for instance, starts with an institutional Report, followed by a site visit from NOKUT expert Panel, which produces a report, and upon approval from the Board or Director General, the final report is published. However, the institutional report of the audited institution is not structured around a self-review and analysis of the institutional quality assurance practices, but rather on documentation from its internal system, including annual quality reports. This kind of reports includes a description by the institution management of the present situation with the quality, and the challenges they meet. The final step of the audit process- the follow-up- is currently missing. The cyclic nature of audits is regarded by NOKUT as a kind of follow-up of recommendations every 6 years (SER, p. 41). The processes of institutional and programme accreditations and revisions start with an application, which according to NOKUT's own view functions as a self-evaluation (SER, p. 40).

From 2013 institutional and programme accreditations will include a follow-up procedure.

The selection of NOKUT experts and composition of panels is predefined and serves the purposes of different review procedures (accreditation, revision and audit). Requirements include experience and expertise in quality management, academic competence (which level varies according to the level of the programme in programme accreditations), competence in institutional management, subject-specific competence, representation from abroad, student representation, and representation from the world of work. The review experts told the Panel they had received various types of training before undertaking the review on behalf of NOKUT: while some attended numerous training sessions, others had received a preparatory meeting and the foreign expert reviewer had received information and briefing on the legal context for the review; the student in the panel attended only a preparatory meeting, which he considered to be part of the preparation for the audit. The Panel (ENQA Panel) were informed (in the interview with students' representatives) that the agency arrangement for the training of its review experts does not always include students.

The non-conflict of interest aspect was also discussed during the site visit. While the Panel recognises that before the appointment of every expert the institution concerned is notified and can flag up if any conflict of interest exists among potential reviewers, and reviewers are asked to declare potential problems in their letter of appointment, the panel sees a room for improvement in the way NOKUT specifies what it regards as potential conflicts of interest for the purposes of its own evaluations.

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.4: The Panel concluded that NOKUT is in substantial compliance with this standard.

#### ESG 2.5 Reporting

##### **STANDARD:**

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.



NOKUT publishes two types of reports on higher education: (a) reports from its various quality assurance procedures; and (b) reports based on system-wide research and analyses of the Norwegian higher education. The reports are available on the website (Norwegian version). The Panel checked three reports of type (a)(translated in English for the purposes of this review) attached to the SER (attachments 13, 14 and 15): one for institutional accreditation, one for programme accreditation and one for audit of internal QA system. The Panel then asked for more recent reports, and NOKUT provided three reports from programme accreditations (two of them translated in English and one in Norwegian). These reports have been also checked by the Panel. The examples of type 'a' reports were generally well structured and with clearly identifiable sections of description of evidence, analysis by the panel of experts, and conclusions and recommendations for improvement. NOKUT provides panels with a report template to ensure consistency of the structure of the reports. All reports are produced with practical assistance and facilitation of NOKUT's project manager. NOKUT expert staff also serves as panel secretaries and thus can participate in the drafting of the reports. Audit and institutional accreditation reports are considered by the Board, which issues the final decision; programme accreditation reports are considered for final decision by Director General of NOKUT. Reports follow a template structure and are quality checked before their publication. All the reports uniformly contain a section dealing with the fulfilment of the legal and specific NOKUT's regulations for audit, or accreditation. This uniformity does not prevent the review experts from discussing broader issues of quality and organisation of institution or programme, which adds value to these reports and provides basis for recommendations for improvement beyond the scope of the standard requirements. The Panel also reviewed summaries of 6 analytical reports (type 'b') from a total of 15 published by NOKUT in the period between 2008 and 2012 (SER, Attachment 16). These reports result from research projects undertaken by the Analysis and development department of NOKUT and the Panel found that they provide valuable insight about major developments in the higher education in addition to NOKUT's work on maintaining the minimum standards for quality in higher education.

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.5: The Panel decided that NOKUT fully complies with this standard.

#### ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures

**STANDARD:**

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

NOKUT procedures for audit, accreditation and revision are prescribed by the U&C Act and Ministerial regulations and until recently these did not allow for systematic follow-up. Recent changes in these regulations, however, provide more opportunities for the agency to develop and implement additional procedures to those determined by the Government. For institutional and programme accreditations subsequent revisions may include into their agendas checks on how the institution or programme is addressing the recommendations. In

the SER NOKUT specifically notes that recommendations that fall within the standard requirements have to be immediately followed if the institution is to obtain the accreditation, and in the post-accreditation period the agency will monitor the compliance with the standard requirements through revision. This view was, however, not fully supported by the interviews with representatives of HEIs, who also recognise the role of the agency as an 'educating' factor, helping universities and colleges to develop in order to meet the new challenges.

During the site-visit, the Panel discussed the issue with different groups of the agency staff and management and formed the view that NOKUT may be overly focused on its external scrutiny events, instead of also seeking to help steer institutions' approaches to improvement through a structured follow-up procedure. The agency is (legally) preoccupied with its broad framework of quality assurance responsibilities and these may be an obstacle to NOKUT being able to realise a supporting role to institutions in the follow up after the publication of report. The agency has, however, a declared wish to find a balance between control and improvement and better serve the needs of the sector.

The Panel concluded that the current arrangements do not fully comply with this standard but under the new legislation NOKUT is not prevented from organising a follow-up on accredited institutions and programmes and particularly on approved quality assurance systems and the Panel learned that from 2013 a systematic follow-up will be organised for all accredited institutions and programmes.

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.6: The Panel finds that NOKUT currently has substantial compliance with this standard. This is expected to change to full compliance from late 2013.

#### ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews

**STANDARD:**

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

NOKUT conducts periodic reviews of institutions' internal quality assurance systems every 6 years. Institutions' responsibilities regarding their internal quality assurance are broadly defined in the U&C Act and in Ministerial regulations, where the arrangements for regular collection of student feedback on their study programmes are outlined (SER, Attachments 1 and 2). Based on these legal requirements, NOKUT determines more detailed criteria for quality assurance systems and evaluates higher education providers against these. The first cycle of audit reviews of NOKUT took place between 2004 and 2010. Before the start of the second cycle, NOKUT revised its criteria and reduced them from 10 to 5. These changes have been discussed before the adoption of the Board's decision; the new audit criteria are published together with guidelines to institutions (ESG, Attachment 8). The new NOKUT regulations emphasise institutions' own responsibility to organise continuous monitoring and review of the quality of their programmes and modes of study, based on an annual review cycle. The Panel learned during the site-visit that the agency proposed a longer cycle

of audits (every 8 years) due to its limited resources and raised concerns about the possible adverse effects on the institutions development and improvement.

Assessment against ESG 2.7: The Panel concludes that NOKUT is fully compliant with this standard.

#### ESG 2.8 System-wide analyses

##### **STANDARD:**

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

In 2006 NOKUT set up a Department of analysis and development to provide sector-wide information through research on specific topics and with the aim to help improve quality in higher education. Since 2008 NOKUT published 15 reports from studies covering various quality-related themes (e.g., *Mapping the Institutions' Perceptions of the Usefulness of Internal Quality Assurance Systems* (2008); *On Reporting Quality* (2009); *NOKUT's Experience from External Quality Assurance of Doctoral Education* (2010); *Recommendations given by Expert Panels in Accreditation Reports* (2011); *Master Degrees at Private and State University Colleges* (2012)). In its Thematic priorities (2012-2014) NOKUT plans to launch more research projects, covering quality-relevant issues. These include a study of work-based learning opportunities provided by Master level programmes in public and private university colleges, research into the quality of distance education, opportunities for research-based education in Norway, identification of examples of good practice, etc. (SER, Attachment 5).

The Panel found that in a short period of time NOKUT has published a large number of projects thus making a significant contribution to system-wide analysis and in many cases these studies take forward the information NOKUT collects from its reviews to address concerns about quality, or particular quality aspect, in a particular sector, or type of institution. The panel was impressed by the very positive feedback from stakeholders it met during the site visit on this particular aspect of the agency's work.

Based on the evidence from NOKUT publications and the interviews during the site-visit, the Panel concluded that this aspect of the agency's work represents an example of good practice; it informs strategic planning and identification of priorities for the next period, supports policy development and contributes to the promotion of quality and excellence across the higher education sector.

Assessment against ESG 2.8: The Panel finds that NOKUT fully complies with this standard and commends the agency work in this aspect.

**Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 1/ESG Part 2: External quality assurance processes: Substantially compliant.**

#### **b) ENQA Membership Criterion 1/ESG 3.3 Activities**

**STANDARD:** Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

NOKUT undertakes its audits of each institution's internal quality assurance system on a regular basis: the cycle of audits is currently set at 6 years. The first round of audits was completed in 2010. The start of the second round was scheduled for 2012 with the time between the first and second round being used for revision of the criteria. Audit is part of the core quality assurance functions of NOKUT, together with accreditations at programme and institutional level, and revisions. Accreditations at programme and institutional levels are based on ex ante evaluations and once awarded, the accreditation status is valid for unlimited period of time. In recent years a total of 20 institutional audits have taken place – 10 in 2011 and another 10 in 2012.

The Self-evaluation report, legal regulations and information from the interviews during the site-visit, all made it clear to the Panel that external quality assurance activities of NOKUT are undertaken on a regular basis, with one cyclical element of these, the audit, whose regularity is built into the agency's mandate. Accreditations, revisions and audits are also in the core functions of NOKUT.

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 1 (ESG 3.3): The Panel concluded that NOKUT is fully compliant with this standard.

#### 4.2. ENQA criterion 2 – Official status (ESG 3.2)

*STANDARD: Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European higher education area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.*

NOKUT was established by Act of the Parliament (the U&C Act) as the national quality assurance agency, but higher education is only one of its 'arms'. The agency has also responsibilities for quality assurance of tertiary vocational education, for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications and, recently, it became also the national contact point for information related to recognition of professional qualifications for regulated professions in Norway. This means that NOKUT has a broader remit that goes beyond the quality assurance in higher education. NOKUT is led by a Board of Governors, which is responsible for institutional accreditations, approvals of quality assurance systems and programme accreditations at PhD level. The Board decisions also concern the methodologies of the agency evaluations, the strategic development plans and action plans, resources and finance. The Director General manages the agency office on a daily basis and also has delegated powers from the Board related to the recognition of foreign qualifications and accreditation of programmes at Bachelor and master levels. NOKUT's work is overseen by

the Ministry of Education and Research, which receives the agency's annual activities reports. NOKUT's activities are also subject to regulations of the Public Administration Act.

The Panel found that NOKUT is a formally recognised professional body, established by the act of Parliament and operating within the law and regulations of the Ministry of Education and Research and therefore has a legitimate status of the only national quality assurance agency for higher and tertiary vocational education in Norway.

The interviews with the Rectors, representatives of HEIs and employers' organisations, the National Union of Students in Norway and the Ministry of Education and Research convinced the Review Panel that the agency is highly respected organisation, appreciated for its commitments to quality evaluation and quality enhancement, and strongly supported in its recent efforts to improve the infrastructure and quantitative and qualitative database for its work.

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 2: The Panel concluded that NOKUT is fully compliant with this criterion.

#### 4.3. ENQA criterion 3 – Resources (ESG 3.4)

*Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes, procedures and staff.*

NOKUT's budget allocation for 2012 was planned for NOK 57, 4 million (approximately 8.3 million EUR) for all the agency's activities, but additional sum of NOK 4 million was allocated to cover the growth on demand for recognition of foreign qualifications. For 2013 the estimated budget increase of NOK 10 million, compared to the original allocation for the previous year, is related to projections for increased demand on recognition of foreign qualifications. NOKUT's principal source of income is the state budget, allocated by the Ministry of Education and Research. Financial regulations allow the agency to have alternative source(s) of income from sales of services, but this channel is being used to a lesser extent. Financial data from previous years show that about a half of the total budget has been used for activities related to external quality assurance. NOKUT undertakes additional work, commissioned by the Ministry, in relation to system-wide analyses and the assessment of the Centres of Excellence in teaching and learning. The budget for commissioned work earmarked for 2012 is NOK 1, 17 million (SER, Attachment 6).

Since its establishment in 2003 NOKUT's permanent staff has doubled and currently the agency employs 73 members of staff, of which 20 are directly involved in quality assurance procedures related to higher education. In addition, NOKUT hires between 200 and 300 external experts annually to form the expert evaluation panels. But the growing demand for

recognition of foreign qualifications has put the agency resources under pressure in recent years, with a 25% increase in such work in 2013 alone.

The Panel discussed the financial and resource situation of NOKUT with its Director General, with directors of various departments and the Ministry representatives, and were satisfied that the Ministry and NOKUT worked together to find a solution to the problem of resource allocation with an organisation in which some aspects of its work/responsibilities are unpredictable. The Panel found, for instance, that the Ministry provided regularly additional financial resources to help NOKUT meet the need for hiring more external experts. NOKUT is also preparing to move soon to new premises, which are expected to better meet its needs for more space and appropriate equipment.

The number of accreditations for tertiary vocational education and small study programmes is relatively higher than other procedures. NOKUT's management and the Board think that a lot of resources are tied up by accreditation procedures (fixed in ministerial regulations) that affect a small number of students. The consequence is that much less time is spent on large institutions. Whether this is problematic is up to stakeholders and education policy makers to decide.

Overall, the Panel concluded that NOKUT has a stable financial basis for its operations.

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 4: The Panel finds NOKUT to be fully compliant with this criterion.

#### 4.4. ENQA criterion 4- Mission statement (ESG 3.5)

*Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.*

*This statement should describe the goals and objectives of the member's quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of its work. The statement should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the member and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statement is translated into a clear policy and management plan.*

The U&C Act describes NOKUT's powers, which encompass its mission to supervise, control, support and stimulate institutions to ensure a high quality level of their education provision (SER, Attachment 1). Building on this document, Ministerial regulations further specify the tasks of the agency as a national quality assurance body in the field of higher and tertiary vocational education (SER, Attachment 2). NOKUT Board Regulations (SER, Attachment 3) describe the quality assurance goals and objectives of NOKUT in greater detail and these are translated into the strategic development plan (2010-2014). NOKUT's strategic document (SER, Attachment 4) presents the core values of the organisation, defines its main goals and formulates strategic priority areas for its work. NOKUT's mission

statement is published on its website and is defined as follows: 'to ensure and promote quality in higher education through quality controls, accreditation of new and existing courses and institutions, in-depth analyses and recommendations to educational institutions' (SER, Attachment 10).

NOKUT's Board is responsible for approving and ensuring the realisation of the Strategic Development Plan and is the main decision making body in relation to policy and planning.

The Review Panel concluded that all requirements of this standard are satisfied by NOKUT.

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 4: Fully compliant.

#### 4.5. ENQA criterion 5- Independence (ESG 3.6)

*Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.*

*An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:*

- Its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);*
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;*
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.*

The U&C Act and Ministerial regulations describe NOKUT as 'a professionally independent state agency', where the Board 'has overall responsibility' for its activities and decisions. The SER points in this relationship to the fact that 'political authorities cannot overrule its decisions, or instruct its proceedings' (SER, p. 37). In accreditations, revisions and audits NOKUT has the power to determine its procedures and criteria, as long as they comply with the tasks, determined by the U&C Act and the Ministry regulations. The Ministry does have a role in defining NOKUT's accreditation and audit criteria, as in its regulations they are specified for each type of procedure, but the agency is not restricted from specifying additional ones. Any changes in the core criteria of the Ministry, however, would be a time-consuming process. Although the Ministry is the body awarding the institutional status on the basis of accreditation results, reported by NOKUT, it does this job in accordance with agency accreditation decisions.

Although representatives of institutions, employer organisations and students sit in evaluation panels, NOKUT is independent of the institutions as its final decisions are made by its Board and Director. HEIs can however influence the criteria and procedures as part of their role in NOKUT's consultation procedures. The seven full members of the Board are



appointed by the King in Cabinet (i.e., the Government) for a four-year term, except for the student member, who is appointed for two years. The Board has an 8<sup>th</sup> member, appointed by NOKUT's staff, whose voice is restricted to matters affecting the agency's administration.

From the information provided in the report and the attached documentation, as well as from the interviews with different groups during the site-visit, the panel were convinced of NOKUT's decision-making independence. Its operational independence is however limited to the extent that Ministry is involved in defining the quality assurance framework and criteria. As concerns audit criteria, NOKUT's freedom is determined within the Ministerial regulations and the U&C Act that specify the requirement for institutions' quality assurance systems to have mechanisms for collection of student feedback on the quality of programmes. The agency is free to specify its own criteria in addition to those defined by the Ministry, to translate them into guidelines and procedures manuals and is independent in appointing the panels, defining the structure of evaluation reports and making decisions on the basis of these reports.

NOKUT is restrained by the legal and regulatory framework in which it has to operate and currently this affects the extents to which it can prioritise certain aspects of its work (see also comments under 4.3 Resources). It is, however, clear that the agency has an increasingly influential role in the current review/revision of this framework and enjoys independence in the detail of its operations and, importantly, the decisions made as a consequence of its evaluations.

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 5: The Panel finds NOKUT to be fully compliant with this criterion.

#### 4.6. ENQA criterion 6- External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members (ESG 3.7)

*i. The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available.*

*ii. These processes will normally be expected to include:*

- *a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;*
- *an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;*
- *publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;*
- *a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.*

*Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.*



NOKUT's self-evaluation report established that the processes and criteria for accreditations (institutional and programme), audit and revision are published in NOKUT Regulations, while more detailed descriptions of specific type of procedures are provided in application manuals. NOKUT's process for audits of internal quality assurance systems is described in details in the 'Information Letter' to institutions. The Review Panel could verify that NOKUT Regulations are also published on the agency website, while the application manuals were not available in English.

The SER also discussed that NOKUT processes may vary, but provide a common pattern:

- A starting point for all evaluations, except audits, is an application by the institution, followed by administrative assessment by NOKUT (in the case of programme accreditation), which, if successful, continues with expert assessment by a panel, including a site-visit (two site-visits for all audits, but site- visits for programme accreditations are limited to 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle and revisions of programme accreditations only) and the production and publication of the report with recommendations for improvement.
- NOKUT panels for audit and institutional accreditation include a student representative, and an international expert (for institutional accreditations, audits and PhD programme accreditations), which together with the recommendations section in all reports represent a good practice example in the agency processes;
- Institutions are consulted about the reports and invited to provide feedback to the panel's evaluations which, in the case of programme accreditations, is used as a basis for additional evaluation, where conclusion may differ from the original.

The Review Panel discussed the evaluation processes with NOKUT review experts and also spoke to institutional representatives concerning their experience of the various processes. The Review Panel studied copies of evaluation reports related to institutional accreditations and audit, where members could verify broadly the standard model followed in NOKUT processes, as described above. It should be pointed, however, that process of accreditations of new programmes differs from this as it seems not to include a site visit from the experts and there is no student member involved in the panel.

The extent to which the evaluation procedures and their criteria take into consideration the standards and guidelines described in ESG Part 1 is discussed above under the perspective of ESG 2.1. Here the Panel wishes to point out that NOKUT's flexible approach to the use of the criteria by its panels of experts in the audit evaluations could compromise the consistency and comparability of the audit reports, however it was not possible to investigate this further due to the limited number of audit reports available in English.

The absence of a structured follow-up procedure in some of NOKUT's processes was discussed in some detail at 3.1 above, in the context of Panel's considerations of the ESG Part 2. From NOKUT's perspective, the element of 'additional evaluation' in the reporting process assumes a follow-up as the institution is forced to take immediate action to address the issues raised by the Panel and provide relevant feedback to evaluators. But the examples of reports did not fully support this conclusion as there found to be recommendations for improvement which go beyond the ones representing conditions for accreditation and there was no structured way to follow-up on how institution addresses them after the accreditation. While, through the programme accreditation process, NOKUT encourages institution to follow up the recommendations, this is not mandatory if they are not part of the 'conditions for accreditation'.

The complaints and appeals system for NOKUT's decisions is a responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research, where the Department for Higher education appoints a Complaints Board, chaired by a person with qualification of a judge of second instance. The Board convenes 3-4 sessions annually and its membership represents a balance of educational and legal expertise. The Review Panel interviewed the Board Chair and was pleased to learn that in the very few cases when the NOKUT's decisions were changed by the Complaints Board, the change did not affect the substance of the decision but rather dealt with the period of termination of the institution's particular activities.

The Review Panel concluded that NOKUT evaluation processes, criteria and procedures broadly meet the requirements of this membership standard and in some respects it has strengths (involvement of students and international experts in the panels, two site-visits, recommendations for improvement in each report, publication of reports). But in the area of follow-up procedures it does not fully meet the expectations.

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 6: The Panel concluded that NOKUT is substantially compliant with this criterion.

#### 4.7. ENQA criterion 7- Accountability procedures (ESG 3.8)

*Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability. These procedures are expected to include the following:*

- i. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;*
- ii. Documentation, which demonstrates that:*
  - the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;*
  - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts, Committee/Council/Board and staff members;*
  - the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;*
  - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. a means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection*

*mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.*

*iii. a mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years which includes a report on its conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA.*

The SER points to the fact that NOKUT's internal quality assurance system had been amended and the new policy document - 'Quality assurance of NOKUT's core activities related to the supervision of Norwegian higher education'- was published on the agency's website, with its mission, goals and description of the system. The overall goal is to provide information for steering and management of agency's operations and support the achievement of its strategic tasks as they are expressed in the NOKUT's strategic development Plan and annual operational plans and thus to contribute to the quality and effectiveness of its evaluation processes, and to the overall development of the agency as a learning organisation. The main feature of NOKUT's quality assurance system is the 'annual wheel of steering' to streamline its planning process with its different types of evaluation and other key activities. NOKUT pointed that its aim in establishing the 'wheel of steering' was to improve the dialogue between the Board and the Ministry and with other external authorities. Another role of the steering wheel was to become an instrument for guiding the implementation of the agency's strategic plan and for monitoring how well the strategic priority areas are succeeding over time. Through this new arrangement approach, NOKUT has established a process of quality assurance of its own operations which includes:

- Analysis of achievements on the basis of quality assessment reports from the previous year and development of measures for improvement
- Continuous monitoring of the implementation of improvement measures
- Regular meetings (twice a year) of the Board and NOKUT Director General with the Ministry to discuss issues, but informal meetings may also take place on an ad hoc basis
- Status reports to the NOKUT Board on the financial situation and development projects
- Collection of user/stakeholder feedbacks
- Risk analysis and assessment of NOKUT overall achievement of goals.
- Production of quality assessment reports, which form the basis for the next analysis of achievement and a new cycle of quality assurance 'wheel'.

In addition, an inner 'wheel' of annual steering is designed to address staff development and the dialogue between NOKUT's staff, Human Resource department and the agency leaders. The inner quality circle includes annual meetings of HR Director and staff to identify and agree training needs and development; assessment of staff competence and productivity, employee feedback questionnaire, a follow-up of the employee questionnaire results and

assessment of staffing needs. All the different elements of the process are continuously monitored.

Detailed description of NOKUT's internal quality assurance methodology, quality indicators, responsibilities and documentation could be found in the 'Quality Handbook', which is published by NOKUT. The responsibilities for the system and for the regular review and updating of the Quality Handbook rest with the Director and Assistant Directors of the Quality Assurance Department.

NOKUT also organises annual quality assurance conferences for institutions which have undergone evaluations and expert evaluators. These provide opportunities for open discussions to reflect on evaluation processes and their outcomes and provide opportunities for exchange of good practice.

NOKUT's expert staff and members of the evaluation panels work closely together in the processes of evaluation and report-editing to help ensure consistency and quality of NOKUT evaluation reports.

The Review Panel discussed the quality assurance arrangements set by NOKUT with the staff and management, carefully reviewed the materials presented and considered that these measures clearly constitute a model of self-monitoring that is applied on a regular basis and with a serious commitment to collect feedback and reflect on its activities and their impact on the evaluations and evaluation reports. The cyclical annual steering 'wheel' embodied a formally agreed and implemented pattern of self- review and reflection on an on-going basis, which reveals the systematic approach of the agency to its responsibilities.

The regular annual quality assurance conferences, the formal annual and informal ad hoc discussions between NOKUT and the Ministry are also important sources of reflection.

On this basis the Review Panel concluded that NOKUT has properly addressed its own quality assurance responsibilities through regular systematic review of its own processes and that the model the agency applies includes mechanism to improve on the basis of analysis and reflection on its own achievements.

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 7: The Panel finds NOKUT to be fully compliant with this criterion.

#### 4.8. ENQA criterion 8- Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims

*i. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgments and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups*

*ii. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency.*

*iii. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.*

The on-going monitoring process adopted by NOKUT as part of its internal quality assurance system, has already been discussed by the Review Panel under section 4.7 above. The Panel wished to add that NOKUT has in place various mechanisms to ensure consistency of evaluation judgements:

- members of the evaluation panels are recruited from a stable pool of trained and experienced experts;
- the agency uses competent staff to serve as panel secretaries and facilitate the process of evaluation, and also either draft or check the quality of the reports;
- the annual quality assurance conferences provide a forum for discussion of the criteria and for better understanding of how they are interpreted and implemented by different panels;
- reports from previous evaluations of the institution under consideration and quantitative data on the institution's performance constitute important inputs to panels' work thus providing continuity between the various evaluations of the same institution;
- the open internet access to the archive of NOKUT evaluation reports provides good grounds for comparisons and helps both institutions and panel teams for consistent interpretation of criteria. The Review Panel learned from the interviews with the Rectors councils and reviewers that the open access archive, established by the agency, was highly appreciated. In addition, NOKUT provides its panels with a template for the reports structure, which helps to ensure the consistency and comparability of reports.

The appeals system, as discussed in section 4.6 above, is established in the Ministry of Education and Research and institutions can direct their complaints to the Complaints Board there. NOKUT procedures for evaluation include the submission of draft panel reports to the institution for checking the factual accuracy and this allows for corrections and amendments to be made before the final decision and publication of the report.

NOKUT has been a member of ENQA since its establishment and its membership was confirmed in 2008, following an external review that was coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research.

NOKUT leaders and staff regularly take part in ENQA seminars and other events and contributed to ENQA reviews of quality assurance agencies. The agency had been represented on the ENQA Board for two periods.

On the basis of the above Review Panel considered that NOKUT meets the requirements of this criterion.

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 8: The Panel finds NOKUT to be fully compliant with this criterion.

## 5. Conclusion and recommendations

In the light of the Self-evaluation report, documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the Panel concluded that in its work NOKUT is fully compliant with the majority of ENQA membership standards and the only areas where the agency is substantially compliant but needs further improvement are:

- ENQA Membership Criterion 1 and section 3.1: external quality assurance built on the results of internal quality assurance;
- ENQA Membership Criterion 6: External quality assurance criteria and processes used.

The Review Panel congratulates NOKUT's determination to use its control and supervisory powers for further development of HEIs and enhancement of the quality of their provision and recommends to the agency that it:

1. Strengthens further its audits in order to fully address the ESG Part 1 by guiding evaluation panels and institutions regarding the kind of processes and procedures they are expected to devise in order to improve the standards of their awards and the quality of learning opportunity for their students
2. Introduces options for follow-up of recommendations in evaluation reports in order to monitor more closely developments in quality assurance systems and study programmes. This is particularly important with the view of the fact that NOKUT accredits on the basis of ex ante evaluation of new programmes and the validity of accreditation is not time- limited
3. Considers how to make sure that students' contributions add value to the work of experts' panels and they are well supported by an adequate to their needs training
4. Defines the non-conflict of interest it applies in its procedures for nomination and appointment of experts, which would help both its experts and the institutions under review to easily detect and prevent cases of conflict of interest.

## 6. Reflections on NOKUT's further development

It is evident from both the SER and this report that NOKUT has made a clear progress in refining its operations since its membership review in 2008. This is to a large extent due to the commitment and professionalism of its staff, proved by the serious attitude they demonstrated in preparing for this review in terms of both the self-review process and the site visit.

It is clear for the Panel that the present legal and regulatory framework in which NOKUT works sets limitations to the streamlining of its numerous external quality assurance activities and to timely methodological change and innovation. A noticeable aspect of this is the imbalances between the time and resources spent on evaluations of small institutions and their programmes and the large ones, where the majority of Norwegian students study. Such imbalances are linked to the growing number of small institutions,

which raises an issue about whether the current quality assurance framework may promote a steady fragmentation of the higher education sector, rather than consolidation and improved competitiveness. The panel notes however that there are also national/regional development issues that are clearly linked to such matters.

The panel was impressed by the considerable support that NOKUT receives not only from its key stakeholders but also from the Ministry of Education and Research, which recently amended its regulations in order to provide opportunity for NOKUT to determine supplementary requirements for accreditation. The Panel believes that the Ministry should consider how NOKUT may be further 'trusted' with the prerogative for rationalisation of accreditation, audit and revision methodologies, since the agency clearly has the necessary knowledge and expertise to decide what is not working well and what should be changed.

The Panel noted during this review not only the general issue of follow-up in regard to the expectations of the ESG but in particular follow-up in relation to audits. Currently audits are taking place every six years, but there is a proposal for the extension of this period to eight. The Panel has concerns that given the rapidity of change in higher education, NOKUT may wish to consider introducing a structured follow-up of audits. Panel concerns that over a period of six years it is possible a lot to change were partly supported by the fact that in a subsequent audit one institution with an apparently established quality assurance system failed to convince NOKUT that it continued functioning appropriately to support the quality of its programmes. A follow-up would provide useful information on the operation of the internal quality assurance system and help institutions to meet the new challenges linked to the quality of higher education. Finally, the Panel wishes to highlight two areas where it believed NOKUT's approach to external quality assurance was commendable: the sector-wide research and its own accountability system. The continuous study of the developments in the national higher education system and publication of reports is a notable attribute of the agency work and brings numerous benefits to its external quality assurance processes. The review panel also wishes to emphasise the fact that NOKUT is not only working to maintain threshold academic standards and quality, but also to promote excellence, as demonstrated by its recent role in nomination and appointment of national centres of excellence.

## 7. Annexes

### Annex 1: Terms of reference for the review

External review of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

#### **Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

December 2012

##### **1. Background and Context**

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is a professionally independent government agency that contributes towards quality assurance and enhancement in higher education and tertiary vocational education. NOKUT's tasks include foreign higher education qualifications as well as Norwegian higher education.

NOKUT conducts quality controls and stimulates the quality development of educational provision at Norwegian universities, higher education colleges and colleges of tertiary vocational education.

NOKUT recognises foreign higher education qualifications in response to applications by individuals and provides information to holders of foreign qualifications about Norway's various mechanisms for the recognition and authorisation of foreign qualifications.

NOKUT was established in 2003 as part of the Quality Reform legislation on higher education. NOKUT's areas of responsibility and operational mechanisms are regulated by the Act Relating to Universities and Colleges, the Act Relating to Tertiary Vocational Education and the associated Regulations issued by the Ministry of Education and Research.

Through its activities, NOKUT works to maintain society's trust in the quality of Norwegian higher education, tertiary vocational education and recognised foreign higher education qualifications.

NOKUT has been Full member of ENQA since 2003. Full membership was confirmed following an external review on 11 June 2008.

##### **2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

This is a type A review, as defined in the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*. It will evaluate the way in which and to what extent NOKUT fulfils the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will also provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether NOKUT should be reconfirmed Full Member of ENQA. The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards the reconfirmation of Full Membership.

##### **3. The Review Process**

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*.



The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-evaluation by NOKUT including the preparation of a self-evaluation report;
- A site visit by the review panel to NOKUT;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the Review Committee of the ENQA Board;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency.

### **3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members**

The review panel consists of five members: Four external reviewers (one or two quality assurance experts, representative(s) of higher education institutions, student member) and a review secretary. Three of the reviewers (including the review secretary) are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the national agencies, and are drawn from senior serving members of Board/Council or staff of ENQA member agencies. The fourth external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA). The nomination of the student member is asked from the European Students' Union (ESU). One of the panel members serves as the chair of the review.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide NOKUT with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the NOKUT review.

### **3.2 Self-evaluation by NOKUT, including the preparation of a self-evaluation report**

NOKUT is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-evaluation process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-evaluation is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-evaluation report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation: background description of the current situation of the Agency; analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a summary of perceived strengths and weaknesses;
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which NOKUT fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the ESG. The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of four weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

NOKUT will draw up a draft proposal of schedule of the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2 days. The approved schedule shall be given to NOKUT at least two months before the dates of the visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by NOKUT in arriving in Oslo, Norway.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and NOKUT.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under article 2. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ENQA membership criteria. A draft will be submitted for comment to NOKUT within two months of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If NOKUT chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by NOKUT, finalise the document and submit it to NOKUT and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

### **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

NOKUT will consider the expert panel's report and inform ENQA of its plans to implement any recommendations contained in the report. Subsequent to the discussion of the evaluation results and any planned implementation measures with ENQA, the review report and the follow-up plans agreed upon will be published on the NOKUT website.

### **5. Budget**

NOKUT shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,750 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,750 EUR
Fee of the 3 other panel members	8,250 EUR (2,750 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	5,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,250 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses (approximate)	6,000 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000 EUR for a review team of 5 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, NOKUT will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to NOKUT if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

### **6. Indicative Schedule of the Review**

The duration of the evaluation is scheduled to take about 10 months, from December 2012 to October 2013:

Agreement on terms of reference and protocol for review	December 2012
Appointment of review panel members	December 2012
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	January 2013
Self-evaluation completed	March 2013
Briefing of review panel members	February 2013
Review panel site visit	May 2013
Draft of evaluation report to NOKUT	July 2013
Statement of NOKUT to review panel if necessary	August 2013
Submission of final report to ENQA	September 2013
Consideration of the report by ENQA and response of NOKUT	October 2013
Publication of report and implementation plan	October 2013

## Annex 2: Site visit schedule

### Schedule for the Review Panel visit to NOKUT

Arrival Day 06 May, 2013		
Panel meets in late afternoon for planning session		
<b>Day 1 , 07 May, 2013</b>		
N of meeting	Time	Participants
1	9.00-9.30	Review Panel getting settled in
2	9.30-10.05	Meeting with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Terje Mørland</b>, Director General of NOKUT</li> </ul>
Break		
3	10.15-11.00	Meeting with the NOKUT Team responsible for the SER <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior adviser <b>Jon Haakstad</b></li> <li>• Senior adviser <b>Pål Bakken</b></li> <li>• Senior adviser <b>Ole Espen Rakkestad</b></li> </ul>
4	11.00-11.50	Meeting with the Directors of the NOKUT departments: 'Quality Assurance' and 'Analysis and Development': <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tove Blytt Holmen</b> (Director for Quality Assurance)</li> <li>• <b>Ole-Jacob Skodvin</b> (Director for Analysis and development)</li> <li>• <b>Gro – Hanne Aas</b> (Ass. Dir. QA – institutional domain)</li> <li>• <b>Trine Johansen Meza</b> (Ass. Dir. QA – programme domain)</li> </ul>
Break		

5.	12.00-12.45	<p>Meeting with the NOKUT staff in the 'Quality Assurance' and 'Analysis and Development' Departments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior adviser <b>Wenche Froestad</b> (QA)</li> <li>• Senior adviser <b>Knut Arild Nydal</b> (QA)</li> <li>• Senior adviser <b>Luna Lee Solheim</b> (QA)</li> <li>• Adviser <b>Ingunn Dørve</b> (QA)</li> <li>• Danish Senior adviser <b>Stein Erik Lid</b> (A&amp;D)</li> <li>• Senior adviser <b>Turid Hegerstrøm</b> (A&amp;D)</li> </ul>
Panel's lunch	12.45-13.30	Served in the Panel's room
6	13.30-14.30	<p>Meeting with the representatives of the NOKUT Board</p> <p>13.30 – 14.10:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professor <b>Borghild Barth- H. Roald</b> (chair)</li> <li>• Professor <b>Øystein Lund</b></li> <li>• Manager <b>Inge Jan Henjesand</b></li> </ul> <p>14.10 – 14.30:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professor <b>Petter Aaslestad</b> (former chair)</li> </ul>
7	14.30-15.15	<p>Meeting with NOKUT staff from administration, committees and legal office (including NOKUT Work Environment Committee)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dept. Director <b>Kathrine Dahlslett Graff</b> (Adm.; HR)</li> <li>• Adviser <b>Marte H. Moe</b> (workplace environment)</li> <li>• Senior Adviser, Communication Unit <b>Nina Fjelde</b></li> <li>• Archive manager <b>Sissel Ødegård</b></li> <li>• Adviser <b>Annette Birkeland</b> (legal competence)</li> </ul>
Break		
8	15.30-16.30	<p>Meeting with NOKUT reviewers, including a student who served as NOKUT reviewer (primarily involved in quality audits)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professor <b>Eyvind Elstad</b> (University of Oslo)</li> <li>• Director of Studies <b>Bjørn Monstad</b> (University of Agder)</li> <li>• Professor <b>Ingvar Bosaeus</b> (Gothenburg University)</li> <li>• Prof. em. <b>Kirsti Koch Christensen</b> (University of Bergen)</li> <li>• Student <b>Amund Aarvelta</b> (University of Oslo)</li> </ul>

9	16.30 - 17.30	Panel's wrap up session after day 1
	Evening	Panel's dinner
<b>Day 2, 08 May, 2013</b>		
1	9.00-9.30	Panel meets to confirm priorities for Day 2
2	9.30-10.30	Meeting with representatives of the Royal Ministry of Education and Research, Department of Higher Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dept. Director <b>Rolf L. Larsen</b></li> <li>• Dept. Director <b>Grethe Sofie A. Bratlie</b></li> <li>• Dept. Director <b>Anne Grøholt</b></li> <li>• Senior adviser <b>Karin-Elin Berg</b></li> <li>• Senior adviser <b>Kristian Hegertun</b></li> </ul>
Break		
3	10.45- 11.30	Meeting with the representatives of the National Union of Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Nils Magne Killingberg</b> (NUS; academic affairs, member of the NOKUT Board)</li> <li>• <b>Erin Nordal</b> (NUS; international affairs)</li> </ul>
4	11:30- 12:15	Meeting with the employers organizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director <b>Are Turmo</b> (Confederation of Private Norwegian Enterprises (NHO))</li> <li>• Special adviser <b>Trond Bergene</b> (Spekter- organization representing hospitals and public transportation)</li> <li>• Special adviser <b>Jorunn Leegaard</b> (Association of Local Authorities (KS))</li> <li>• Special adviser <b>Jorun Sandsmark</b> (Association of Local Authorities (KS))</li> </ul>
Lunch		
5	13.00- 13.40	Meeting with the representatives of the two Rectors Councils <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice-rector <b>Olgunn Ransedokken</b> (RC; Chair of Education Committee)</li> <li>• Director General <b>Ola Stave</b> (RC; Head of Administration)</li> <li>• Mrs. <b>Guri Bakken</b>, Assistant Director General, Norwegian Association of HEI's</li> <li>• Rector <b>Ingun Moser</b> (Network of Private HEIs)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director General Aleksander Nikolic (Network of Private HEIs)</li> </ul>
6	13.40-14.15	<p>Meeting with the representatives of the Union of Researchers/Professors (their selection, up to 5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professor <b>Manfred Heun</b> (Norwegian University for Life Sciences) (NTL)</li> <li>• .. (expecting one more name)</li> <li>• Professor <b>Thorolf Krüger</b> (Bergen University College)(FF)</li> <li>• Danish Adviser <b>Fredrik Nordmann Skår</b> (University of Stavanger) (FF)</li> <li>• Adviser <b>Cecilie W. Lilleheil</b> (University of Oslo) (FF)</li> </ul>
7	14.15-15.00	<p>Meeting with the representatives of the Higher Education Institutions that has undergone NOKUT reviews (Both positive and negative decision cases should be present) NOKUT selection (up to 5 representatives)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Danish Rector <b>Lise Iversen Kulbrandstad</b> (Hedmark Univ. College)</li> <li>• Dean of Studies Margrete Hestetun (Lovisenberg University College)</li> <li>• Pro-rector Frode Eika Sandnes (Oslo and Akershus Univ. College)</li> <li>• Rector <b>Dag Jørund Lønning</b> (Norwegian University College for Agriculture and Rural development)</li> </ul>
Break		
8.	15.15-15.50	<p>Complaints Board –including 1 student (Ministry of Education and Research selection)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Court Judge <b>Rolf Strøm</b> (chair); <b>(On Skype)</b></li> </ul>
9.	15.50-17.30	<p>Panel's final wrap up session and concluding meeting with NOKUT's Director General <b>Terje Mørland</b>, <b>Jon Haakstad</b> and <b>Tove Blytt Holmen</b> (Department Director for Quality Assurance)</p>

### Annex 3: List of materials used in the review of NOKUT

No	Document title	Language	Source	Date Received	On the Web	ESG
1.	<b>Self-evaluation report (SER)</b>	English	NOKUT	06 March, 2013	Yes	All

2.	<i>The Universities and Colleges Act (pp. 54-55)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March, 2013	yes	2.1; 3.2; 3.3
3.	<i>Ministerial Regulations concerning quality assurance and quality development in higher education and tertiary vocational education (pp. 56-63)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March, 2013	Yes	2.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.5; 3.6
4.	<i>NOKUT Board's Regulations concerning NOKUT's supervision and control of the quality of Norwegian higher education, 27 January, 2011 (pp. 64-77)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March, 2013	No	2.2; 2.3; 2.4; 3.1; 3.3; 3.5; 3.7
5.	<i>Strategic plan; Strategy for further development of NOKUT 2010 – 2014 (pp. 78- 90)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March, 2013	Yes	3.5; 3.8
6.	<i>NOKUT's Thematic Priorities 2012 – 2014 (pp.91-101)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March, 2013	Yes (in Norwegian)	3.1; 2.8
7.	<i>Report and Plan 2011/12: NOKUT's Activity report for 2011 and plan for 2012 (pp. 102- 139)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March, 2013	Yes (in Norwegian)	2.8; 3.8
8.	<i>Budget Allocation Letter for NOKUT 2012 (pp.140- 144)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March, 2013	No	3.4
9.	<i>NOKUT's evaluations of quality assurance systems for educational activities at universities and colleges (Information letter to institutions) (pp. 145-146)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March, 2013	Yes	2.1, 3.7
10.	<i>Mandates for external experts (pp. 147- 149)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March, 2013	No	2.4
11.	<i>NOKUT's internal system of quality assurance (pp. 150- 153)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March	Yes (in Norwegian)	3.8
12.	<i>A presentation of the NOKUT portal (pp. 154- 156)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March	Yes	3.8
13.	<i>External stakeholders' assessments of NOKUT's performance (pp. 157- 165)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March	No	3.8
14.	<i>A Sample institutional accreditation report (pp. 166- 222)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March	Yes	2.5; 3.1
15.	<i>A sample audit report (Evaluation of institutions' internal quality assurance) (pp. 223- 249)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March	Yes	2.5; 3.1

16.	<i>A sample programme accreditation report (pp. 250- 281)</i>	English	NOKUT	06 March	Yes	2.5; 3.1
17.	<i>NOKUT's analysis and development reports (pp.282-309)</i>	English (Summaries only)	NOKUT	06 March	Yes	2.8
Documents requested and received by the Panel before the visit						
18.	The Quality Handbook	Norwegian	NOKUT	16 April, 2013	Yes (in Norwegian)	3.8
19	NOKUT Ethical guidelines adopted on 11 April, 2011	Norwegian	NOKUT	16 April	Yes (in Norwegian)	3.8
20.	Amended Law and Ministerial regulations (after 2009)	English (extracts only)	NOKUT (clarification that the versions in Attachments 1 and 2 are the latest ones)	16 April	No	2.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.5; 3.6
21.	A sample of NOKUT's evaluation and accreditation under the new scheme (after the amendment of NOKUT's criteria in 2011): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evaluation report on a Bachelor in Digital Forensics programme at Noroff Institute;</li> <li>2. Eval. Report on a Master's programme in Management of Demanding Marine Operations at Aalesund University College;</li> <li>3. Eval. Report on a PhD programme in Computer Science at Hogskolen Gjøvik</li> </ol>	2 reports in English; 1 report in Norwegian	NOKUT	16 April	Yes (on Norwegian site)	2.5; 3.1
22.	'Adjustments in the Regulations concerning NOKUT's supervision and control of the quality of Norwegian higher education'	English	NOKUT	16 April, 2013	Yes	2.2
23.	The set of quality performance indicators referred to in the Quality Handbook	English	NOKUT	16 April	Yes (Norwegian)	3.8
24.	A list of institutions and programmes evaluated/accredited and their	English	NOKUT	16 April	Yes (Norwegian)	



	QA systems audited in 2012					
25.	Visit Schedule	English	NOKUT + Panel	Finalised on 06 May	n.a	
Documentation Provided by ENQA						
26.	Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the EHEA	English	ENQA	February		
27.	ENQA Code of conduct for review experts	English	ENQA	February		
28.	Panel CVs	English	ENQA	07 March		
29.	Terms of Reference for the Review of NOKUT	English	ENQA	13 March		
30.	2008 Evaluation of NOKUT. Report 1: NOKUT and the ESG for external quality assurance agencies	English	ENQA	30 April		
31.	2008 Evaluation of NOKUT. Report 2: NOKUT's national role	English	ENQA	30 April		
Documents prepared by the Panel						
32.	List of Documents (this document)	English	Panel	29 April		
33.	Briefing Paper	English	Panel	29 April		
34.	Visit Questionnaire	English	Panel	06 May		

#### Annex 4: Review Panel Members

The NOKUT Review panel consisted of the following experts:

- Nick Harris, self-employed consultant (European higher education), UK – Chair
- Patricia Georgieva, Managing Director at Qualifications and Quality Support Centre, Bulgaria – Secretary
- Tue Vinther-Jørgensen, Director of Projects, Unit for Higher Education, Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA), Denmark
- Jean-Marc Rapp, Professor at the University of Lausanne Law Faculty, Director of the Business Law Center (CEDIDAC), Switzerland – *EUA nomination*
- Olav Øye, student at the Free University of Brussels (ULB) – *ESU nomination*