

The Danish Evaluation Institute and the process of accreditation within the field of higher education

Short presentation of the Danish Evaluation Institute

The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) is an independent institution established in 1999. The mandate of EVA is internationally unique, as it is commissioned by Parliament to undertake systematic and mandatory evaluation of teaching and learning at all levels of the education system; from pre-schooling classes to post-graduate programmes.

EVA's task within quality assurance of higher education

Since 1999, EVA has systematically assessed programmes within higher education. The EVA unit for higher education has been responsible for external quality assurance of short, medium and long cycle programmes.

Between 1999 and 2004, EVA conducted systematic programme evaluations of university programmes, and in 2004 EVA shifted from programme evaluation to institutional auditing of the universities. Four major universities were subject to institutional audits between 2004 and 2006.

Parallel to this, EVA has since 1999 carried out quality assurance relating to short and medium cycle programmes, including the accreditation of 69 medium cycle programmes, 17 institutional accreditations of University Colleges, as well as various system-wide evaluations and studies.

By law, EVA is entitled to engage in revenue-generating activities, and about half of EVA's activities are commissioned instructions, e.g. on behalf of ministries, higher education institutions or non-governmental organisations. EVA's revenue generating activities include a.o. research evaluations, international benchmarking, and policy studies.

In 2007, an Act of Parliament introduced systematic accreditation of all higher education in Denmark (ex ante and ex post) as mandatory external quality assurance. In addition to this, the act introduced a new accreditation agency for long cycle programmes, ACE DENMARK, responsible for accrediting university programmes, with EVA being responsible for accrediting short and medium cycle programmes.

As a consequence, since 2007, EVA's function within higher education has become the following:

- initial accreditation assessment of short and medium cycle programmes;
- clustered accreditation assessment of short and medium cycle programmes;
- initial accreditation and accreditation of existing other higher education programmes (excluding university programmes);
- system-wide analysis within the field of higher education;
- revenue-generating activities within the field of higher education (including the university sector).

Full member of ENQA

EVA is a founding and current board member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

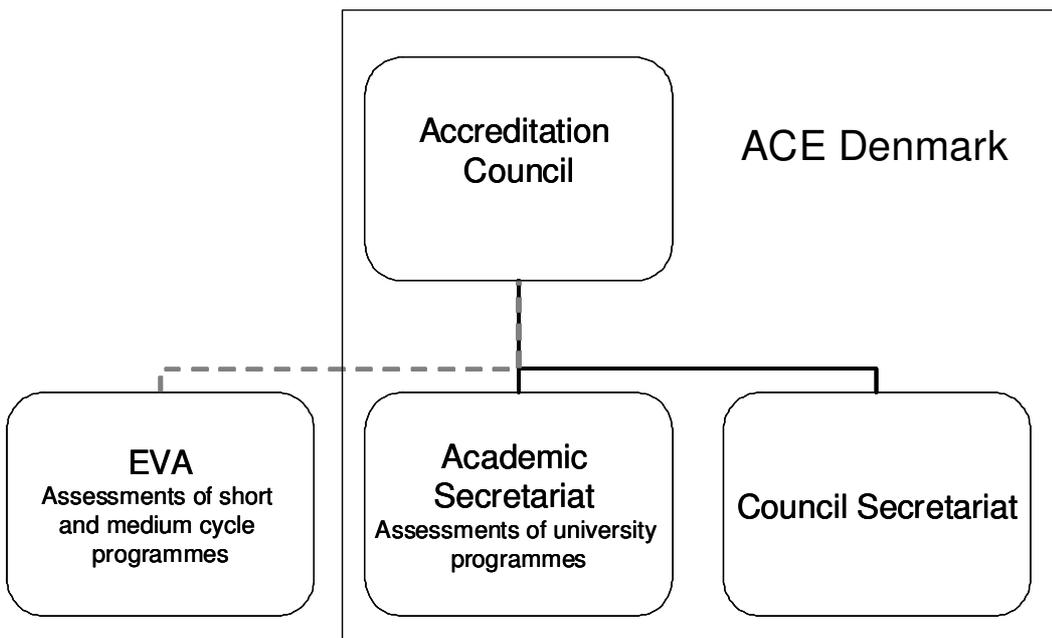
In 2005, as part of an external review, an international panel concluded, among other things, that EVA complies with the ENQA quality standards on all essential issues. Being externally evaluated, EVA is a full member of ENQA. Furthermore, a number of EVA employees are or have been active in international external reviews and joint projects within ENQA.

The Danish accreditation system and the role of EVA

In March 2007 the Danish Accreditation of Higher Education Act was passed. This law lays down a new national quality assurance system in Denmark. The system implies that all new and existing higher education programmes must be systematically accredited.

The Accreditation Act also specifies the establishment of an independent accreditation institution, which has now established itself as ACE Denmark. ACE Denmark consists of a Council and a Council Secretariat, both of which are concerned with the accreditation of programmes from the entire spectrum of higher education. Furthermore, ACE Denmark also includes an Academic Secretariat, which conducts accreditation assessments of university programmes.

The relationship between EVA and ACE Denmark can be illustrated as shown below.



The Council's basis for an accreditation decision rests upon accreditation assessments carried out by independent QA agencies, and two agencies are specified in the act:

- accreditation assessments of new and existing university programmes will be conducted by the Academic Secretariat, under ACE DENMARK;
- accreditation assessment of new and existing short and medium cycle programmes will be conducted by EVA;
- accreditation assessments of other new and existing higher education programmes will be conducted by EVA.

Institutions are entitled to use other agencies for the accreditation assessments. If they choose to do so, they must provide their own finance.

EVA's accreditations - criteria, method and process

EVA has conducted accreditations since 2004. Between 2004 and 2006, EVA carried out accreditations of 69 medium cycle programmes, and institutional accreditations of 17 University Colleges. These were conducted according to a first generation accreditation concept, encompassing existing programmes and higher education institutions, while securing compliance with the legislative frameworks, and with focus on the institutions' internal quality assurance.

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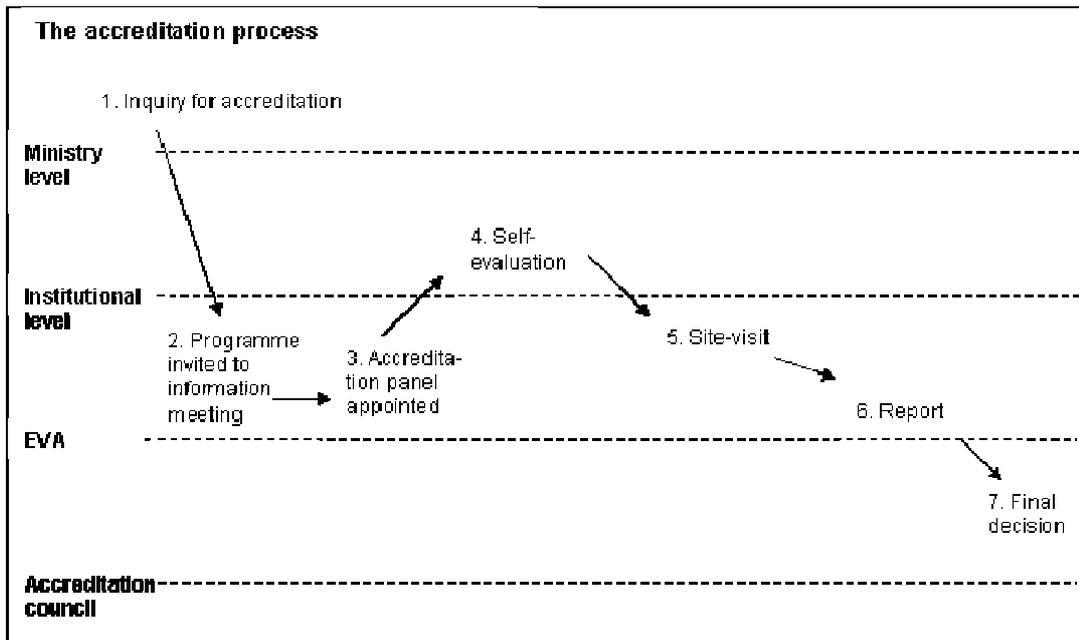
The above mentioned Accreditation of Higher Education Act states that all programmes must be accredited according to criteria based on quality and relevance. Furthermore, it introduces two new types of accreditation:

1. accreditation of new programmes;
2. accreditation of existing programmes.

Prior to the Accreditation Act, approval of new programmes was granted by the relevant ministry.

In early 2007, the Ministry of Education requested EVA to develop second generation accreditation concepts and criteria, targeted at new and existing programmes respectively. This work has been conducted as two development projects, which involved formulating draft criteria and pilot-testing them on 14 existing and 12 new programmes. Based on the experiences of the pilot-testing, as well as EVA's experience with the first generation accreditations and input from a variety of stakeholders, EVA has revised the concepts and criteria, and final concepts and sets of criteria are now being developed. These are currently being implemented in departmental orders.

As the Accreditation of Higher Education Act is still in the process of being implemented, the specific details and procedures relating to accreditation and the accreditation assessments have not yet been definitively laid down. However, it is likely that the accreditation process and procedures will be as illustrated in the following figure:



Criteria for decision and assessment

EVA's accreditation assessments are based on explicit and published criteria. These will be available in the various frameworks (legislation and self-evaluation guidelines) and will be easily obtainable for the parties involved through for example EVA's website. When conducting accreditation assessments, EVA will in advance determine and make public concepts and criteria for the reports and site visits (hence ESG 3.7, external QA procedures and processes; ESG 3.8, accountability procedures). The reports will be published and made available to the general public on the EVA website.

The different steps in the accreditation process are explained below.

Inquiry for accreditation

The accreditation process begins with a formal decision to accredit a particular set of programmes. Programme representatives are invited to an information meeting where they are given in-depth information about the application of criteria and the procedure of the assessment (hence ESG 3.8, accountability procedures).

Panel

An external accreditation panel is subsequently appointed by EVA for each specific accreditation. The panel as a group should include the following knowledge profiles: subject specific knowledge of the programme; employer perspective on the programme; and pedagogical knowledge. Currently, EVA is considering the possibility of having a student viewpoint represented on the panel as well.

The panel plays an important role in terms of ensuring a responsible and qualified assessment of the various degrees, and EVA functions as a secretariat to the panel. EVA is thus responsible for the methodological, procedural and practical aspects of the accreditation, whereas the panel is responsible for delivering a professional and specialised assessment of

the accredited programme (hence ESG 2.4, processes fit for purpose; ESG 3.7, external QA procedures and processes; ESG 3.8, accountability procedures).

Self evaluation

Each programme prepares a self evaluation report, structured according to the criteria for programme accreditation. EVA ensures that the programmes receive guidance on the specific meanings and applications of the different criteria to ensure a consistent approach (hence ESG 2.3, criteria for decisions).

Site visit

The panel and EVA conduct a site visit to each existing programme under accreditation. The purpose of the site visit is for the accreditation panel and EVA to clarify and validate the information provided in the self evaluation report. The visit also provides an opportunity for the programme to further elaborate on the report (hence ESG 3.7; external QA procedures and processes; ESG 3.8; accountability procedures).

Draft report and factual verification

Following the site visit, EVA will prepare a draft report on each programme based on the accreditation criteria. Each programme under accreditation will have the possibility to take part in a hearing process, to explain incorrect or missing information before the report is finalised (hence ESG 2.3, criteria for decisions; ESG 2.5, reporting; ESG 3.7, external QA procedures and processes; ESG 3.8; accountability procedures).

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Decision

Thereafter, the Accreditation Council decides whether it will grant each programme positive accreditation, conditional positive accreditation (only with existing programmes), or reject accreditation. For the conditional positive accreditation, the follow up process will be conducted by EVA.

Following the decision of the Accreditation Council, the relevant ministry will provide the final approval of the programme.

System-wide analysis

The accreditation assessments will be organised as clustered assessments that ex post will be used as a basis for comparative sector description and analysis. This could for example be an assessment of all nursing programmes in Denmark simultaneously, followed by ex post draft meta-analyses on the basis of the clustered programme assessments of the nursing programmes. These analyses can thus result in national pictures of a sector as a whole, and are seen as important in relation to the informative role of EVA in generating knowledge of education quality for students and society, and helping institutions improve.

Internal quality assurance

EVA's accreditation activities, including the appointment of external experts, are subject to an internal quality assurance system, as are all of EVA's activities. The purpose of EVA's quality work is to assure and develop the quality of the services and products which EVA provides, as well as to develop EVA as a professional organisation and workplace. Being externally evaluated in 2005, EVA's quality work complies with the ESG.