Enacting a National Reform Interval in Times of Uncertainty: Evaluation Gluttony Among the Willing

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Abstract This chapter offers an empirical illustration of the governing-evaluation-knowledge nexus by pinpointing a particular situation, a pause between two national evaluation and quality assurance (EQA) reforms, while a new national system was being planned and prepared, but its final design was not yet decided upon. This situation – unusual in the Swedish higher education policy context – adds uncertainty to the situation and opens a potential space for policymakers and higher education institutions (HEIs) to navigate. We draw on interviews and documents collected from four HEIs during this reform interval. We analyse and discuss how the four institutions navigate, coordinate, mobilise, copy, and learn in a situation without a formal national EQA system in place but in which the wider higher education policy context is deeply infused with contemporary trends and international policies and ideas on quality assurance (QA). We found that context and institutional preconditions set their mark on the work undertaken during this interval. We also discerned tendencies of homogenisation and isomorphism. Finally, we highlight the tendency of further expansion of EQA activities.

Introduction

As we presented in the chapter "National Evaluation Systems", national requirements for HEIs to install and maintain internal quality assurance (IQA) work have been in place for around 25 years in Sweden. A number of national EQA systems have existed for evaluating quality in higher education during this period (cf. Segerholm et al. 2014). Previous chapters have shown how evaluative activities in

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C. Segerholm et al. (eds.), *The Governing-Evaluation-Knowledge Nexus*,
Evaluating Education: Normative Systems and Institutional Practices,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21143-1_7

higher education have expanded into internal institutionally based and national EQA systems as an evolving evaluation machinery and that such means of governing are now an important part of policymaking and educational practice (Dahler-Larsen 2012; Westerheijden et al. 2007). We have also drawn attention to the European dimension of EQA. In the chapter "Europe in Sweden", we described how the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), in cooperation with other European organisations for higher education, has promoted the development of national and local systems for higher education in Europe since the beginning of the millennium (*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (ESG)* 2015). We also analysed the extensive national debate from 2014, when the Swedish agency was no longer accepted as a full member of ENQA because the 2011–2014 national EQA system was not considered as meeting the ENQA standards. Simultaneously, heavy criticism from academics and students in this strictly outcome-oriented national system led the government to terminate it in 2014 and appoint an investigator to look into these issues (Segerholm and Hult 2015). These events came together in a quite unusual situation as a break from the way reforms are normally prepared and implemented in Sweden – i.e. well in advance of implementation and following traditions of rational planning and social engineering, in which EQA systems have replaced one another sequentially with no evident "gaps" between systems (see the chapter "Governing By Evaluation: Setting The Scene", the section on the Swedish case). This situation, which we have characterised as a "national reform interval", signifies the time between the termination of the 2011–2014 national EQA system and the formal parliamentary decision in March 2016 to approve the 2016 EQA system. It also includes the work of the responsible agency, the Swedish Higher Education Authority (SHEA), until the final and elaborated upon system was presented in June 2016, which marked the end of the reform interval. Earlier, in March 2015, the government sent out a memorandum for referral to HEIs, students, and university teacher unions (Ministry of Education 2015). This government document gave the HEIs certain cues about what EQA reform to expect, should the parliament approve it.

This chapter offers an empirical illustration of governing by evaluation in higher education in this particular situation. This reform interval implied a pause or break – a situation of some uncertainty but also some expectations concerning the content of the forthcoming reform. This particular situation, we argue, opened a potential space for the HEIs: How would they navigate the situation without an explicit reform decision to relate to while receiving certain government cues about what would be waiting in the forthcoming reform? Would HEIs wait until the final parliamentary decision was made, or would they start to prepare and develop routines for QA in certain directions while remaining unsure whether they had to change it or not? The aim of this chapter is to illuminate the work during this reform interval at the national/state levels and among the HEIs.[1] The following questions guide the chapter.

[1] The chapter draws on our joint empirical research reported and presented in the following conference papers: Lindgren and Rönnberg (2017), Segerholm et al. (2016), and Segerholm and Hult (2015).

- What processes and work were undertaken in the national policymaking arena during the reform interval?
- What policy processes and practices (if any) do the HEIs have for handling and responding to the reform interval situation?
- How can such processes be understood in terms of education governing?

First, we outline our conceptualisation of the reform interval and how it can be theoretically understood as work, processes, and practices within the levels and domains of the state and HEIs. We will then address the first question to describe the reform interval and take a more elaborate look into the frame that the government gave in the above-mentioned 2015 memorandum. This section illustrates what the HEIs had to relate to during the reform interval. A section on the design, methods, and materials that we used in our empirical study of four HEIs will follow this illustration. We will then analyse the four cases, with a particular focus on their work with QA during the reform interval, before concluding with a discussion of our main findings.

Mind the Gap: Conceptualising the National "Reform Interval"

The notion of an interval indicates a time gap or an intervening time, a pause, or break in activity. To what extent is the present empirical case that we have labelled a "national reform interval" tangent to such notions? What evaluative activities of the state were paused (and what activities were not)? What aspects of work with the design, development, and enactment of IQA systems could be carried out in HEIs without detailed information about the standards against which it would be assessed? Did the HEIs respond differently to the lack detailed information? Did a space, room for manoeuvring that entails a condition for freedom and autonomy, open between two objects (policies)? Perhaps such an interval is not something out of the ordinary but instead is a rather common situation in public administration. If a new policy proposal is put "on hold" until it is enacted legally, the educational sector might expect that the temporary proposal will likely later be enacted as legislation, and, in that case, the situation would not be that extraordinary. In addition, European standards in the form of the ESG were firmly in place, offering guidance for Swedish HEIs, during the interval (Grifoll et al. 2012). Here, notions of "embeddedness" (Jacobsson et al. 2015) and the intertwined relationships between state agencies and international organisations are crucial.

We suggest that a reform interval is a general conditional situation of uncertainty – a rather common, if perhaps intensified, situation. Moreover – as Jacobsson et al. (2015) noted – the values of professionalism and mutual trust typically characterise Swedish state governance. Governing in the form of "micro-steering" can thus rely on subtle and informal means without giving the bureaucracy extensive and detailed guidance. In this case, an interval may imply "intensification" and reac-

tions to uncertainty that raise empirical questions. Here, anticipation and cue giving have been used to explain how agency staff predict or second-guess political intentions and act on these hunches (Jacobsson et al. 2015).

If activities – such as the design, development, and enactment of IQA systems – depend on detailed prescriptions, HEIs could choose to await such information. If the SHEA will externally evaluate them in a certain way, the HEIs may well await such evaluation criteria and then design their IQA systems to target such demands. The interval is an absence of a national policy, with much uncertainty about future policies along with a strategic incentive to "wait". Anticipatory behaviour is associated with risk (Jacobsson et al. 2015), and this in turn raises important analytical questions, such as those regarding how evaluation-making devices and arrangements function in the absence of stated and formal national policies. In other words, does friction, delays, or "loose-coupling" exist between policy and educational management?

The reform interval provided us with opportunities to empirically study issues of governing in the making. Governing, as we noted earlier in this book, includes processes in which several instances and actors are involved in forms of work – including interpreting, negotiating, translating, and enacting policy (Clarke 2015). The stress on the actual work of governing and "doing" policy is arguably also consistent with the concept "enactment" (cf. Ball et al. 2012) in processes of policy interpretation and translation. Translation, as Latour (2005) pointed out, involves processes in which all actors and artefacts mutually transform and are transformed by the environment that they engage in. In this context, we are particularly interested in questions about whether – and, if so, how – enactment during the interval produces "irreversible interactions", i.e. enrols durable changes in social and material elements related to core activities within HEIs.

Our starting point is that translations of QA appear in "different but similar settings, where local resources, material and human, and diffuse sets of discourses and values are deployed in complex and hybrid processes of enactment" (Ball et al. 2012, p. 6). This means that the local context is of importance in understanding policy processes and governing during the interval. The overall characteristics of the Swedish political-administrative system, which manifested in the recent EQA reform processes that we analysed in the chapter "Hayek and the Red Tape: The Politics of Evaluation and Quality Assurance Reform – From Shortcut Governing to Policy Rerouting", include evident attempts to produce and establish policy through dialogue. This makes us devote particular attention to the inherent complexities of governing, given that various actors formulate policy at various levels. Complexity, however, does not contravene with the fact that many Swedish HEIs – at least on the surface level – appear quite similar: They appear as well-integrated organisations with modern, systematic, and thorough practices in terms of routines, strategies, and documentation that aim to enhance the quality of research, education, and cooperation with the surrounding society.

Acknowledging such similarities, we seek to explore how forms of internal HEI work on QA are enacted and evolve through processes of cooperation, imitation, editing, or as fashion (Sahlin and Wedlin 2008). Isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) offers a classic attempt to analyse aspects of such processes in terms

of three mechanisms: for example, coercive isomorphism, which stems from external political pressure from national and international policies and organisations in this case. On the other hand, mimetic isomorphism emphasises organisational responses to uncertainty. This leads to the assertion that if the HEIs experience the studied reform interval as uncertain, they might respond with mimicry. The final mechanism, normative isomorphism, relates to professionalisation. In this context, we are interested in the work, knowledge, and networks of key actors at the HEIs and the extent to which such factors produce relative homogeneity within the sector in the enactment of a national reform interval concerning EQA. Isomorphism in turn draws our attention to questions of rationality. As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) noted, the adoption of new (fashionable) ideas might provide legitimacy rather than improving actual performance, and not all ideas will be rational for all kinds of organisations.

We draw on these theoretical resources to explore policy processes and practices during the reform interval. During the interval, little was known about whether the new EQA system would lead to the further expansion of evaluative activities or whether an eventual expansion would produce better-functioning HEIs. This chapter is a contribution to a discussion on these challenging questions. Next, we turn to the processes at the national level, including the work of government; an appointed single-member commission's efforts in outlining a new EQA system; and the SHEA's task in finalising the system's design.

The Reform Interval: The Government's Work Towards a Parliament Decision

As described in previous chapters, the centre-right coalition government – in what we have labelled a fast-paced and "shortcut" style – decided upon and implemented the 2011–2014 EQA system that preceded the reform interval (cf. the chapter "Hayek and the Red Tape: The Politics of Evaluation and Quality Assurance Reform – From Shortcut Governing to Policy Rerouting"). This was done despite early and heavy criticism of its outcome-based orientation and lack of methodological rigour. This was, as we also noted earlier, a system that the ENQA criticised because it did not live up to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (2015) and ENQA (2009). The ENQA review concluded that the Swedish system failed since it did not evaluate HEIs' IQA system and did not give recommendations for improvement. Also, the national agency responsible for the QA could not be considered independent "due to the extent to which their procedures and methods, as well as overall aims and objectives have been dictated by Government" (SNAHE 2012, p. 23).

In 2013, the centre-right government decided to terminate the 2011–2014 EQA system. In these discussions, the ENQA membership was central in the arguments for terminating that EQA system and developing a new one (Segerholm and Hult 2015). The government commissioned the SHEA to develop such a revised system

in 2013, but, in mid-2014, the agency received new directions from the government. At that point, the government commissioned an individual investigator, Professor Harriet Wallberg Henriksson (later director general of the SHEA), to propose a framework for a new national EQA system that would be founded on the following basic principles that the government set forth.

- The system should be cohesive and include the HEIs' internal QA and SHEA's external audits.
- The system should control students' learning (outcomes).
- The system should improve quality and provide HEIs with incentives and guidance.
- The roles of working life (relevance and employability) and working-life representatives should be more thoroughly included in audits.
- The role of students should be clearer.
- European principles on QA should be considered.
- The system should include sanctions, with possibility of revoking licenses for issuing student degrees.
- The system should consider the autonomy of HEIs and be transparent and explicit (Ministry of Education 2015, p. 4).

The government also directed the investigator to confer with the HEIs, the SHEA, students, and working-life representatives. The investigator's report was eventually delivered to the Ministry of Education in December 2014, and, based on that, the new Social Democratic-Green Party coalition government (in office after the 2014 September elections) crafted a memorandum. It was published in March 2015, and it set the overall frame for a new national EQA system (Ministry of Education 2015). In the memorandum, the importance of paying attention to the ESG – along with the need to align the new EQA system with the Higher Education Act and with the requirements for student degrees, as specified in the Higher Education Ordinance – was emphasised on several occasions. The new EQA system was to include the following:

- Accreditation for rewarding degrees and certificates
- Evaluation of the IQA systems at the universities
- Evaluation of a sample of bachelor-, master-, and PhD-level study programmes, foremost aiming to control the adherence to the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance and to contribute to improving quality
- Thematic evaluations – e.g. widened recruitment of students, internationalisation, and gender equality (Ministry of Education 2015, p. 3)

The memorandum proposed that quality should be assessed in terms of student attainment and performance, but a description of the preconditions and processes that influenced would complement the result. Furthermore, the SHEA would be responsible for developing and implementing the new EQA system, based on the government's judgement, laws, ordinances, and principles for QA, which is in line with the Bologna Process. The starting point for the memorandum was that all

higher education programmes should be evaluated through the universities' IQA systems and the SHEA's evaluations of them. In the memorandum, it was also specified that SHEA, as in previous national EQA systems, should appoint an expert panel that should assess the self-evaluations that the HEIs handed in and prepared. The SHEA was supposed to later elaborate upon and specify the information and aspects of quality that should be included. Interviews were also required to be carried out with representatives for the HEIs, including teachers and students. The expert panel was supposed to document its assessment in a report that would form the basis for the SHEA's judgement and decision. The memorandum also stated that this is an internationally established method for QA in higher education. It also said that follow-ups after the assessment can promote quality – as, for example, HEIs learn from each other and from observations from the expert panels.

In carrying out the government mandate to further develop the design for the new EQA system's details, the SHEA organised several hearings with stakeholder groups during 2015. These groups included teacher and student unions, vice chancellor organisations, and organisations for the private market and public sector. However, the parliament was to make the final decision about the system, making the HEIs and SHEA insecure about what to actually expect in the end. In December 2015, the Ministry of Education had processed all incoming referrals on the memorandum, and they made very few revisions before sending their proposal to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, which finally advised the parliament to endorse it. The decision was made in March 2016, with some amendments (Government Petition 2015/2016:76; Parliamentary Decision 2015/2016:155). After this, the SHEA continued to work on the details and the additional requirements on the system that the parliament had decided upon. During spring 2016, the SHEA had regular meetings and dialogues about its work to design the forthcoming EQA system with HEIs, national and international reference groups, and groups representing stakeholders. The agency also organised conferences among other things to present information and get acceptance for their proposed ideas. In June 2016, the SHEA presented their final and detailed design of the EQA system and reported this work to the Ministry of Education in early October 2016.

As the above account demonstrates, the reform interval was not by any means an interruption in policy work at the national level. On the contrary, the politicians, the public commission, and the SHEA carried out extensive work in designing and developing the new EQA system, and this work also fed into the work of other state agencies and nongovernmental organisations. Actors and reference groups from within academia, including all HEIs and student union organisations; labour market actors, including teacher unions; employee organisations; and interest groups, were mobilised in rounds of meetings and hearings.

In the next section, we direct our attention to the processes and practices enacted within the HEIs during the interval. Before we enter this exploration, we will say a few words about the empirical case study reported in this chapter and briefly touch on its design, methods, and materials.

Four Cases: Methods and Materials

The study was designed as a multiple case study (Stake 2006). Four HEIs with varying ages, sizes, specialisations, and geographical locations were selected. They also represented different aggregated outcomes from the 2011 to 2014 system evaluations of study programmes. (See Table 1)

This design arguably fits well with the intended approach for understanding policy enactment at HEI level (Ball et al. 2012), since it gives a voice to HEIs that are located in quite different contexts and have different institutional set-ups. Our selected cases include one old university with a comprehensive number of faculties and academic and professional programmes and courses; one new small university college with one faculty and mainly professional programmes; one well-established specialised university with one faculty and mainly professional programmes; and one medium-sized new university with two faculties and professional and academic programmes and courses. The four HEIs are geographically dispersed, and, in the latest national quality evaluation that the SHEA carried out, they received different results – ranging from not good to very good (only one university in Sweden was assessed as extremely good) (Ericson 2014).

We did a total of 16 individual interviews, mainly during spring 2015 and spring 2016. We interviewed the vice chancellors; central officers who were responsible for IQA at the HEIs, including deans and/or other officers at the faculty level; and a limited sample of those at the department level who were responsible for IQA. We asked the informants about whether and how the HEI prepared for the expected national reform, how they perceived difficulties with preparation work, and how they envisioned and designed a good IQA policy and practice, and we asked more generally about quality and accountability in the HEI. We also collected and analysed policy documents of QA work at different levels in the HEIs, the four vice chancellors' blogs, website information, and other types of written materials from the HEIs.

Table 1 Summary of cases in terms of size, age, profile, and education quality

HEI	Relative size (1–4 from large to small)	Relative age (1–4 from old to new)	Profile/ specialisation	Outcome 2011–2014 EQA evaluation[a] (1–4 from high to low grades)
Pegasus University	2	4	Broad/regional	4
Virgo University college	4	3	Special/ regional	2
Orion University	1	1	Broad/ traditional	1
Hercules University	3	2	Special/elite	3

[a]Internal ranking from 1 to 4 based on results from quality evaluations by the SNAHE and the SHEA between 2011 and 2014 as presented by Ericson (2014)

We heuristically used the idea of enactment in organising and analysing the material. We concentrated on the questions about what, how, and who and context questions concerning the work with the HEIs' policy and practices during the reform interval. We posed the following questions about the collected material. What kinds of activities have taken place at the HEIs? What actors have been central as driving forces? What kinds of processes were undertaken to justify and legitimise the internal work with QA? What cooperation and/or exchange of experiences of IQA with other HEIs took place, if any? Did any resistance take place? What parts of the organisation are mobilised in IQA work?

The Reform Interval: IQA Work in Four Higher Education Institutions

In the following, we begin by describing some of the main characteristics of the cases (with some restrictions to respect confidentiality) before we move on to discuss their activities concerning IQA during the reform interval.

Pegasus

Pegasus is a medium-sized and young regional university. Despite being a comparably small university by Swedish standards, it nevertheless has a quite broad panoply of study programmes and courses – including humanities, information technology, social sciences, behavioural sciences, media, teacher education, natural sciences, health education, science, and technology. Distance education and interdisciplinary education are two cornerstones at Pegasus, and it seeks ways to cooperate with the local community to promote regional development. Pegasus is organised as a line management system with a governing board, vice chancellor, pro-vice chancellor, and two faculty boards. In the 2011–2014 EQA system targeting study programmes, however, Pegasus was one of the most heavily criticised universities. Almost 50% of the programmes or courses were judged as having "insufficient quality", whereas few programmes received the grade "very high quality".

Overall, Pegasus took a quite proactive strategy during the reform interval. Pegasus and two other HEIs decided to make a joint effort to construct a peer review system of assessments for collegial education quality. This endeavour was intended to build on ongoing cooperation that had involved aspects of education and management, though not yet in the area of education evaluation and assessments. Pegasus formed a task force comprising the vice chancellors and additional high-level management in early 2015 to investigate whether – and, if so, how – a collaborative system of assessing education quality could be designed and implemented. The three collaborating HEIs wanted to organise quality assessments

of study programmes and courses based on the overall assumption that collaborating, developing, and exchanging knowledge and experience between the three HEIs would have potential benefits.

These joint education assessments (henceforth "JEAs") should however not be seen in isolation. The JEAs are considered one part of a wider and more encompassing IQA system at Pegasus, which means that the overall organisation of QA includes additional dimensions apart from the JEAs. At Pegasus, JEAs are considered activities under the heading "quality evaluation". The other three main headings for the IQA system are "pre-emptive quality work", "continuous quality work", and "quality follow-up" – aiming to cover, monitor, and assess the prerequisites, processes, and results of the education that Pegasus offers. The JEAs employ a specified set of evaluation criteria, all of which are clearly and explicitly related to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (ESG)* (2015). In addition, each of the universities (or the responsible faculty) has the opportunity to add complementary criteria or questions to the evaluation matrix of the specific round of evaluation. The JEAs were piloted in 2016 and evaluated in 2017 before their more detailed design was finally decided upon.

The JEA task force met on 6 occasions and organised 2 larger seminars with around 40 participants from the 3 HEIs. Three sub-groups were also formed, and they looked at possible clustering for academic subjects, administrative implementation, and internal and external communication. The JEAs were presented in 2015 at a national higher education conference in which questions of legitimacy and ways to mobilise staff support were emphasised.

When introducing the JEA system at Pegasus, the vice chancellor emphasised that highlighting the ownership issue – i.e. that the HEIs themselves were initiating and implementing the JEAs and that it was not a system imposed "from above" via the SHEA – was important. Ownership was framed in emotional terms: as a "victory". By framing the JEAs in this way, the management hoped to bring about acceptance and willingness to work with the JEAs and the overall IQA practices to which they belonged. Whereas the work within the JEAs was organised with collegial representation, the implementation of the JEAs appeared to run along rather-traditional paths from the top of the organisation down to the bottom; decisions were initiated and taken by the management, processed by the quality group, and then channelled to faculties that were "activated" (Pegasus 2015).

Virgo

Virgo is a small and rather young university college. According to the Virgo website, strategic specialisation and close cooperation with international and local companies and the public sector are its significant features. Research, it is claimed on the Virgo website, provides knowledge, innovations, ideas, and a qualified workforce in cooperation with external stakeholders. In addition, educational activities are organised to facilitate cooperation through mentorship, guest lectures, advisory

boards, and students' written degree projects. Despite its specialisation, Virgo offers programmes and courses in subjects related to informatics, engineering, business, health, and education. This HEI is also organised as a line management system with a governing board, vice chancellor, and pro-vice chancellor. Virgo did well in the quality evaluations in 2011–2014. Apparently, this "success" has built organisational self-esteem and confidence that its study programmes, courses, and IQA system are of high quality. It has one faculty board and the dean is responsible for the IQA. The delegation of authority is built on the principle that the faculty board makes propositions that relate to systems of follow-up and evaluation and propositions for decisions regarding QA and quality development.

The former IQA system at Virgo was described in a quality policy dated 2011, and this description was still on the website in 2016. In other words, Virgo was not in a hurry to reform its IQA system. Furthermore, it was concerned neither about cooperation nor with looking into how other HEIs built their IQA systems, which might be interpreted as manifestations of the above-mentioned confidence. However, during 2015, an inventory was performed for polices, directions, guidelines, and routines at all levels of the institution to make sure that they had in place a coherent system without any gaps. Besides the dean, the representatives for the disciplines and study programmes are important in developing a new IQA system. The faculty board arranged a couple of seminars in 2015 to act on identified absences; for example, one seminar was intended to make explicit the mandate and responsibility for leading roles – such as the ones responsible for study programmes, research groups, disciplines, and doctoral studies. In these seminars' PowerPoint presentations, the success of Virgo in relation to all other Swedish HEIs in the last round of the national evaluations was highlighted. The faculty's message to the responsible actors in the departments and programmes was to not settle down because "the hard part is to *maintain* high quality … and that is why a systematic and continuous development- and QA work is called for" (Virgo 2015, *emphasis added*).

Virgo was aiming at an IQA system that involved proactive and continuous follow-ups as close to educational practice as possible. The idea was to make eventual quality problems visible at an early stage to give support to correct or finishing courses or programmes. It was a system that was designed to permeate a cyclic process: forming a discipline, programme, or course; planning and carrying it through; continuously following it up (formative); conducting regular (summative) evaluations of it; and winding it up. This process had clearly defined roles and mandates, work models, and functions for coordination. It also comprised distinct routines, infrastructure, administration, support systems, key figures, management information support, channels for information and communication, competence provisions, and processes designed for organisational learning. It was a system that was designed to "build a culture of quality" by strengthening the cooperation between the academy and administration. It was aligned with the ESG and oriented towards national goals. It also contained alumni and programme inquiries, self-evaluations, and additional statistical figures. However, in the material, the risk of "unnecessary bureaucracy" was highlighted as an important challenge.

Orion

Orion is a large, old, comprehensive university, with almost all faculties represented (medicine, law, social science, science, and theology). On its website, the university stresses its ambition to lead the world in research and education. Orion has a line management system with a governing board, a vice chancellor, a pro-vice chancellor, a small number of deputy vice chancellors, combined to a certain extent with a collegial management system. The internal quality work is assigned to a special central group that works with issues of evaluation and education quality, and this has been the case for many decades. The formal responsibility for decision-making concerning IQA is with the faculty boards. In the national quality evaluation of higher education 2011–2014, Orion did very well, as did most of the old and well-established universities (Ericson 2014).

Also, representatives (active researchers/teachers) from all faculties and student representatives compose a central committee. The intent of the committee is to support faculties and departments in their work with quality and give advice to the vice chancellor in such matters. Orion had an elaborate programme that was based on academic values and virtues for internal work with quality issues in education, research, and extramural activities in place since 2002 and was revised in 2008. This programme responded to the university's internal demands for quality and was combined with external demands for quality in education to emphasise accountability.

Shortly after the government memorandum was presented in spring 2015, a task force comprising a chairperson, two representatives from the faculties, three student representatives, and three experts from Orion's central administration, was selected by the vice chancellor. This group started to map activities already in existence in the faculties and tried to identify what was needed so that they could live up to the expectations expressed in the government memorandum. From the very beginning, the group was determined that Orion's new IQA system needed to be minimalistic, allowing the faculties to add what they found important and develop slightly different models – depending on their variations of disciplinary and scientific traditions – and directions for the study programmes. The intent was for the new system to be as little of an inconvenience as possible but be adapted to the national system proposed in the government memorandum.

The task force met continuously during 2015 and spent considerable time in presenting their work to internal groups – such as the vice chancellor and head management group, all faculty boards, heads of departments, and student unions. In so doing, their ambition was to collect ideas for improving the evolving design of Orion's IQA system and provide an opportunity for criticism to be channelled. This process aimed at legitimising the new system and at making the implementation smooth. The task force faced the challenge of designing an IQA system that did not add requirements of collecting, documenting, and reporting information. A small international advisory group was formed for support and critical comments during this process (Orion 2016). The task force's final proposal was circulated within the university during spring 2016.

Orion's new IQA system includes evaluations of study programmes and courses that should be undertaken systematically at least every 6th year by "at a minimum two external assessors and at a minimum one colleague from a different faculty" (Orion 2016, p. 6). All evaluations within the new system should take the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Ordinance, and the ESG as a starting point. The evaluation process includes a self-evaluation, external review from assessors and colleagues (peer review), and the involvement of teachers and students in the entire evaluation process, and it should lead to an evaluation report that includes the central results from the peers, the self-evaluation report, and suggestions for what measures need to be taken (Orion 2016). The faculty boards should summarise what needs to be done, be responsible for follow-ups within a year, and organise public access to all evaluations.

The new system was met with overall positive reactions among staff. Two observations are important. First, knowledge about and involvement in the new IQA system were not distributed within the whole university. Also, resources for the new QA system were considered a problem, even by the task force:

> Of course, there are many who say "how is this supposed to work? How much time are we supposed to put down on this?" (…) and that is perhaps people who do not think evaluations are that important, rather an unnecessary evil. (Orion faculty representative 2016)

The vice chancellor awaited detailed demands from the SHEA before making the final decision on IQA system's design. In the meantime, preparatory work was done: "Either way, the vice chancellor will most probably announce resources for a small number of pilot evaluations before that, as part of Orion's preparations" (Central task force informant 2016).

Hercules

Hercules is one of Sweden's specialised HEIs with university status. It is regarded as a distinguished and internationally recognised educational and research institution. It is a relatively small university with a university board that has overall responsibility. Special boards – similar to faculties – for education, research, and graduate education are at the level below this. The university board has an external chairperson and a vice chancellor, and the deans of the special boards are the top-level managers of the university.

The board of education makes policy decisions regarding EQA for the university. A special unit is responsible for developing specific assessment instruments, and teachers and programme managers are responsible for collecting information required for the IQA system. Over the years, Hercules has done relatively well in quality evaluations but has also received criticism.

Around 2010, Hercules developed a dedicated strategy and took action to strengthen its work with QA because one of the university's major study programmes had failed in the national quality evaluations. The university internally mobilised the board, deans, and heads of the departments that were involved in the criticised

programme. Furthermore, an external quality expert was appointed with the mission of reviewing the university's QA system, including the internal evaluations of undergraduate programmes conducted before the national quality evaluation. One recommendation was to develop a clearer system for QA that would strengthen the overall accountability structure. Prior to the introduction of the SHEA's new model for the quality assessment of HEIs, the university's infrastructure for IQA and concrete methods for evaluating study programmes and courses were also gradually tightened. To make the programme managers, heads of departments, teachers, and students aware of the evaluation forms to be used, the university established communication channels via the intranet, the established framework of decision-making. In addition, the IQA was further adapted to the ESG. Surveys and instructions for quality assessments are found in the indicators for assessing the ESG's quality. Furthermore, training and curricula were deliberately and systematically adapted to the wording of the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance.

Hercules allocated resources to maintain and develop IQA, while work was also performed at several levels as part of the mission that the departments have no resources for completing. In efforts to develop and improve the IQA, Hercules cooperated with several other HEIs in a network. The network aims to share experiences and compare ideas and ways to implement QA without any binding joint decisions.

Hercules's IQA is a cyclic evaluation model that is based on national and internal learning outcomes, and it evaluates, documents, and thus clarifies information on processes and preconditions for goal attainment. It includes student surveys, specific evaluations, thematic evaluations, exit polls, alumni surveys, course evaluations, working-life surveys, and additional evaluations.

Policy Enactments in the Reform Interval

The case descriptions above have offered empirical illustrations of policy processes and practices during a reform interval in four HEIs. Earlier, we discussed the national and governmental policy work that was taking place at this point. Our study indicates that the enactment of EQA policy is rather lively at the national level, within the four HEIs and across the entire higher education sector. It is also clear that contexts and conditions matter regarding how the four HEIs tackled this interval between two national EQA systems, resulting in a period of uncertainty and preparation that took on different forms across the studied cases. Processes of developing and revising existing IQA policies and practices were initiated and developed differently in the four cases in relation to their respective QA histories – that is, both in relation to what they had done and in relation to how they had been assessed by the SHEA in the 2011–2014 national EQA system. Depending on their size, they also could use very different economic resources for QA-related activities. Orion has had a special unit for this purpose for decades, whereas Virgo – being a small and young institution – had to rely on the dean tackling this job. We note that the four HEIs started

their IQA work at different times during the reform interval; some were more proactive and initiated internal work quite early on and did so before the government decision and even before formal intentions and written directions were formulated (Pegasus, Orion), and others waited a bit longer (Hercules, Virgo).

This means that some of the difference in speed, intensity, and comprehensiveness of the work with preparing IQA systems between our cases can be understood by relating those activities to the contexts and characteristics of the individual HEIs. We approached the analysed work of governing and of policy in term of enactment (Ball et al. 2012). We discerned that the enactments during the reform interval were numerous and varied, and each case had its own IQA story to tell. At the same time, there are apparent similarities across the analysed cases. Despite the uncertainty during the reform interval, HEIs tended to take (some form of) action: They have all developed IQA policies. They have been invited to participate in the state commission of inquiry to produce a new national system in a process of dialogue, consensus seeking, and decision-making. The HEIs have distributed tasks and responsibilities in the form of roles and task forces; have arranged meetings; have produced documents, including external and internal evaluations, policies, plans, directives, models, PowerPoint presentations, and memorandums; and have organised activities (seminars, hearings, mail dispatches, blogs, and other means of information) to anchor and get support and approval for their planned and evolving IQA systems, be it in various ways.

The HEIs' work with IQA design was clearly a top-down affair, and procedures were initiated and steered from the organisational centre to its peripheries (if it ever got that far). Top-level administrators and vice chancellors initiated and mobilised the work, and this was largely not a matter for staff on the ground. Another signifying trait in these processes is the perceived need and talk about dialogue and trust, as well as avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy. The rhetoric of enhancement (see Saunders 2014) has been embraced – quite explicitly in many cases – and this conceptualisation of quality and improvement is voiced and embraced in the HEI processes. In many ways, quality is perceived as a constant, ongoing, and non-separable part of everyday workings. However, somewhat paradoxically, and as we will return to below, processes and designs are firmly steered from the top down.

Governing "Between" Reforms: Anticipation and Action

In this final section, we will discuss the reform interval in terms of governing. One first observation is that to the extent that a national policy is "absent", European input in the form of ESG functions as apparently naturalised sources of guidance. As one of our informants said:

> We meet each other. It is great. The last two meetings have been about what do you do and how do you handle this, have you started to adjust [to the forthcoming but not yet approved external demands, our note], how do you do it? We give each other advice. Some of us have reviewed how the present IQA systems comply with ESG and then shared this with the rest of us. And that is great. (Hercules, Faculty representative 1)

This informant voices a striking similarity across cases, namely, that there are important homogenising forces serving as a cue giver during this reform interval: the ESG. All HEIs not only have explicit and visible references to these standards but the standards are also explicitly communicated and disseminated externally between HEIs and within them. In November 2015, the agency SHEA published a translated version of the ESG in Swedish, and in our reading of the HEI policy documents, we clearly discern how this has moved into the HEIs' vocabulary. On the one hand, the act of translation signifies the importance attributed to this document on a national level, but the informants in our data also seem familiar with the English version of the ESG and assigned them central roles in their internal IQA work before this translated version was published.

HEIs are thus "embedded" within the European policy community, where the ENQA offers "norms and directives which require domestic compliance at the very least consideration" (Jacobsson et al. 2015, p. 2). It is also notable how actors within the higher education sector engage in information-seeking and brokering activities where they pick up messages provided by the political level or the SHEA. Thus, as noted by Jacobsson and colleagues (2015, p. 4) "micro-steering in the shape of 'steers' and other subtle signals or even anticipated reactions among the civil servants allows the core executive to control the bureaucracy".

A Temporary Motor Failure in the Evaluation Machinery?

We would also like to return to an idea introduced in the chapter "National Evaluation Systems" – the ideal typical notion of evolving "evaluation machinery" in higher education. There are a number of observations that we find interesting in this context. One of them regards "permanence", which is one important characteristic of evaluation machines (Leeuw and Furubo 2008; Dahler-Larsen 2012). The findings presented in this chapter suggest that the institutionalisation of an evaluation machinery through, for instance, the promotion of evaluation culture within the HEI sector make the machinery sturdy in case of temporary motor failure. HEIs take on evaluative work as a form of decentralised spare engines that secure the permanence of the evaluative activities. Permanence during the interval is secured by other characteristics of the machinery. Notably, modes of organisational responsibility have been installed in HEI organisations and in the minds of certain key actors working within the evaluation field, that is, "evaluators" that are working *within* and *between* organisations rather than external to them. This group, which we already have introduced in this book as "qualocrats", can be seen as the offspring of a "marriage between administration and evaluation" (Leeuw and Furubo 2008, p. 165) and is most likely an important reason that HEIs responses to the reform interval are so similar. This group of actors carries and possesses certain knowledge in and of EQA in higher education, which is brokered and promoted, and moves in the wake of meetings to initiate cooperation across HEIs, as well as to and from the policymaking arena, the ministry, and the political administration.

Understanding Governing in the Reform Interval: Standardisation and Homogenisation

The enactments during the interval and the similarities that we have identified seem to evolve through such cooperation and exchange of experience of IQA work or what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) label normative isomorphism. Here, Virgo turns out to be an exception, as it is quite self-sufficient and exposes a sense of self-esteem due to their good turn out in the previous national quality evaluations, as we understand it. Another similar feature is the fairly top-down-oriented strategies all four HEIs use in how they have organised the work in developing their IQA systems. In a Swedish context, this is interesting because the so-called autonomy reform from 2010 gave way to a legal framework, meaning that the HEIs can organise their delegation of authority and formal internal decision-making as they please with the requirement that there are scientifically competent persons and students represented in these instances. In all our cases, the delegation of authority when concerning EQA rested with the faculty (scientifically competent instance).

However, the IQA work was steered and governed from the centre and top. As far as we can tell, whether the preparations reached out to the departments and to the "street level" of the HEIs is questionable. This behaviour, where central management at the HEIs takes the helm, may be ascribed to the uncertainty felt during the reform interval, similarly to what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) call mimetic isomorphism. In times of uncertainty, this conceptual explanation suggests that central management overtakes responsibility from the more collegial instances to achieve some unified policy direction. We suggest that this is perhaps also a question of trust, where in Sweden trust in collegial responsibility within the HEIs seems to be presently decreasing (SOU 2015:92). This is also shown by the move in several HEIs to so-called line management systems (Sørensen et al. 2015, p. 6). Line management systems, where the decision-making power rests with formal leaders (not necessary scientifically trained) in the organisation, have evolved as a fashion in HEIs in Sweden (Sahlin and Wedlin 2008). Issues of quality in research and education, traditionally a responsibility for faculty and colleagues (researchers and teachers), are increasingly becoming the responsibility of managers (of an organisation and the economy) and quality and evaluation experts (Forsell and Ivarsson Westberg 2016; Hall 2012). In the chapters "Re-launching National Evaluation and Quality Assurance: Governing by Piloting" and "Evaluation Machinery, Qualocrats, and the Seemingly Inevitable Problem of Expansion", we return to the issue of an emerging cadre of "qualocrats" who are doing EQA work in Swedish higher education.

There are also some striking similarities in our cases when it comes to how parts of the IQA systems are to be carried out, where the internationally common model of external reviewers[2] is to be used as well as that of so-called self-evaluations. It is

[2] External reviewers may include peers (like in peer reviews, the collegial way of assessing the quality of scientific work). In the Swedish case, "external" refers to a HEI external group of peers, students, and representatives from other areas of society like employers.

hard to say if this is an imitation of an international discourse of evaluation in higher education, an imitation of earlier Swedish national systems, or an imitation of fellow HEIs in Sweden. It may well be more like a fashion, since this model is applied in so many HEIs globally. If the stress on the ESG – also visible in all our cases – is taken into account, Sweden and, as a result, the HEIs apparently feel coerced to accommodate to those in one way or another.

Another similarity is the conflict between a wish to develop and design rigorous IQA systems and avoidance of an expansion of bureaucracy in terms of having to collect/produce and systematise more information, install more functions related to QA (e.g. QA officers at the faculty and department level), and constantly revise and follow-up QA activities and the entire system. This is by no means a new concern and has been observed in several public sectors in terms of an audit explosion (Power 1996), audit society (Power 1999), or evaluation society (Dahler-Larsen 2012; see Ek 2012; Lindgren 2014 for Swedish examples). This conflict, and in our cases, a readily acknowledged concern, relates to our final observation. It has also been corroborated in our interviews: There is a general expansion of evaluative activities in what is developed and planned in the four HEIs. Thus, adding to the observations in the chapter "National Evaluation Systems" on the expansion of and evaluation in higher education in Sweden, this chapter has shown that the interval has not stalled the continuation of this overall growth process.

Finally

The issue of expansion is interesting from several perspectives. Even though increasing audit often includes control of control in terms of modes of self-evaluation, it is traditionally imposed on organisations from above or by external powers. This Swedish case illustrates a somewhat different development, where the policy interval has fuelled an uncompelled evaluation expansion within a "willing" higher education sector (c.f. Jacobsson and Nordström 2010). In other words, HEIs are not necessary *victims* of "evaluation rage"; rather, they seem to indulge in a kind of "evaluation gluttony" where enactments of EQA systems risk becoming too costly, too excessive in quality and quantity, too hasty, and too greedy.[3] Apparently, HEIs – to a larger or lesser extent – see augmenting IQA systems as an important means of solving quality-based problems. They thus dedicate more time and energy, professional knowledge, and work to increasingly specialised roles and organisations of IQA. In the following chapters, we will continue to explore these issues as the reform interval comes to an end, and the 2016 national EQA system is developed (the chapter "Re-launching National Evaluation and Quality Assurance: Expectations and Preparations") and implemented (the chapter "Re-launching National Evaluation and Quality Assurance: Governing by Piloting").

[3] This type of gluttony is discussed among others by Aquinas (1265–1274).

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