The Quality Management of Norwegian Universities and its Influence on University Libraries

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years many universities in the western world have been going through different crises, most notably of a financial nature. To date the reaction has been to set up evaluation schemes, to reorganise, to create strategic plans for teaching, research and promotion policy, whilst retaining the classic values of the university. What has not been clearly grasped is that the crisis is very largely one of relevance.

After World War II the universities have developed from being elite institutions for the few to becoming mass production education factories. Within the global knowledge economy, the higher education sector has become a rapidly expanding international market. Furthermore, there are clear signs of a growing partnership between universities and private capital. Academic expertise and values is totally dependent on marketing, as well as on technology that makes it possible to operate in a market that demands flexible methods of teaching, namely the Internet.

Within such a socio-cultural and economic paradigm shift, the universities that will come out on top are those that win the competition for students and meet the demands for excellence in research. To be a budget winner, the universities must create their own image of their academic strengths. This means not only referring to the definite products such as research prizes and PhD-candidates; it will also be necessary to create obligations for the institution concerning academic infrastructure. It is obvious that one of the criteria used in evaluating a centre of excellence is that the institution's library should have the best collections in certain discipline areas and also the best reference services in those same areas.

SOME REMARKS ON THE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY REFORM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The most significant document on quality and quantity reforms within higher education is the Pan-European Bologna Declaration of June 1999. The main elements of this declaration were introduced in Norway through the „White Paper" on higher education submitted to the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget) in March 2001[1]: More independence to the institutions, but at the same time greater responsibility; increased rights to students both with respect to the quality of courses and with respect to the financing of their studies; a new anglo-american inspired degree system with Bachelor and Master Degrees as standard elements; greater emphasis on internationalisation and student exchange, as well as the need for new teaching and learning methods. The revised system will be fully operational before the start of the academic year 2003-2004.

The higher education policy of the early 1990s had given priority to the expansion of higher education to cope with the rapidly increasing number of young students queuing for admission. A few years later, the number of young students started to decline. Life-long learning came into focus. Challenges from the private sector made it apparent that the legal and economic framework for the higher education institutions was outdated, hindering contract activities and co-operation with external institutions. The need for stronger university leadership was also apparent.

The institutional structure of higher education in Norway is as follows. There are 4 traditional universities, 6 schools of higher learning offering specialised professional degree programmes and doctoral programmes, 26 university colleges (state colleges) and 2 national institutes of arts. For a long time, a few state colleges have been working hard, both academically and politically, to become universities. One of the main conditions, relevant in our connection, for an institution to qualify as a university, is that it should have a sound organisation and academic infrastructure, for example good library services for teaching and research.

One of the main points of the 2001 White Paper on the quality reform is that the new degree system will shorten the time of studying with one year. Nevertheless, it very clearly underlines the importance of quality in studies and research. How can that be possible?

More efficient running of the institutions should finance improved quality. Student scholarships should be increased. The White Paper stated that all

institutions are to prepare plans for work on quality and are to implement systems to document the quality work. A quality development instrument will be set up and given the appropriate terms of reference and organisation.

An important requirement of the quality reform is that students must succeed. The White Paper stated that relations between students and institutions must be strengthened. Educational institutions must make provisions to enable closer follow-up of students throughout their studies. New study arrangements will be introduced whereby students are admitted for three-year courses. In order to enhance learning and progression, emphasis will be placed on teaching methods that involve a high level of student activity, combined with assessment that promotes learning by means of regular feedback. Greater emphasis should be placed on the students' participation in the process of selecting and planning the syllabus, teaching methods and seminars. Educational institutions are to enter into agreements with students, which clearly state the rights and obligations of the institutions and students in relations to each other.

CHALLENGES FOR LIBRARIES IN THE QUALITY REFORM

What consequences does the quality reform have on libraries as a whole and especially on university and college libraries?

First of all: The pressure on teaching at the higher levels, together with the training of researchers, will result in the need to strengthen the academic infrastructure since it will be an important support for both this teaching and the research associated with it. It is expected that the need for the library will increase dramatically as the introduction of more project based exercises and problem based teaching replaces the reading list, a method of study that has dominated much of university education during the past 40 years in Norway. Distance learning and decentralised education will also demand new ways of disseminating information. Here it will be important to develop points of contact with the local library services and the study centres of the secondary schools.

Nevertheless, the libraries must be very precise in explaining what values they add to their products and services, and what these values cost. If the cost-benefit rate is too high, they will have a challenge - or even a problem - in the new system. In future research grants will be channelled to those institutions

that give the best return. An institution with a good and effective academic infrastructure will be the most likely one to give such a return.

In addition to the university libraries being centres of documentation and reference for the relevant academic literature, it ought also to be a centre for what one might call an academic culture. The university library ought to be a meeting place for cross-disciplinary milieus as well as the external face of the university. But to be the bearer of an academic culture naturally involves that the university library is engaged in research associated with library studies and documentation. Library research will enliven the whole academic milieu not least through the work on collections.

As the universities will also promote themselves as institutions which lay a particular emphasis on teaching methods that are focussed on problem-based learning, project work, distance teaching and decentralised study, this places particular demands on the libraries as resource centres for this way of organising studies. The library will be a study centre for project work and problem solving, quite different from the traditional reading-list based learning mode. If distance teaching is to become as central as there seems to be political will for, then the question of decentralised library services will need to be given a much higher priority than is the case today. The electronic network will become an essential study aid.

Due to the fact that Norway has a long way to go to reach even the average OECD level for nationally produced research, there is no reason for laissez faire attitudes on information policy. In such a situation, the cheapest way for a country that does not produce much research of its own is to build up the most effective systems for gathering information from where it is produced, storing it and disseminating it to where it is required. The quality reform will require a national programme for the development of a *Norwegian Electronic Research Library*.

For researchers it is important that a library can make available the best possible relevant information, as quickly as possible, no matter where in the world it is to be found. The library must give added value to these products via the best possible gateways. In addition it is necessary that relevant research material produced by the home institution is made available through the library, that is to say, doctoral and MA theses, research reports, conference reports, posters, grey research material of all kinds. The more of this that can be made electronically available, the better. The library must develop good systems for producing, storing, retrieving and making available all such material.

In meeting the information society of today and tomorrow, the basic challenge facing libraries is to combine the responsibility for disseminating knowledge on the one side, with the development of effective information systems which adapt libraries to the new work and study methods that are coming in the wake of information technology. However, the development of a virtual library system will demand specific funds from the authorities in Norway to make possible the conversion process. These funds must be at the level of those of the other Nordic countries. Through the Norwegian Council for Higher Education we are now working on such plans on a national level, and we hope they will be realised next year.

The institutions of higher education must each make their own internal arrangements so as to ensure that training in the use of library based sources of knowledge are part of all discipline based studies. The library must, in co-operation with the academic disciplines, set up academically related problem-based documentation and reference training courses, in which the students learn to find their way through the information jungle, in the search for relevant information on specific issues. It will be a good training for students to teach themselves how to fetch relevant information on a specific theme. Through such co-operation, it is also possible to show how modern information processing and forms of presentation can contribute to the opening up of new possibilities with regard to subject content. Dynamic illustrations and utilisation of multimedia materials are keywords here.

Within this framework there is also to be a digital centre into which will be gathered the production of teaching materials, the digitalisation of documents, the publishing of digitalised and paperbased products, the production of film, video, and audio programmes.

The gathering and dissemination of knowledge will give rise to new disciplines, such as *information literacy*. The reason for this is that, in order to get hold of the most relevant information in a particular field, or on a particular problem, it will be necessary to have in place a quality assurance system that will enable us to assess critically the enormous amount of information we are all faced with, when we log onto the Net. At the university level there will be a growing need for a critical approach to information, for an ability to analyse and assess information. The acquisition of the skills required for this task may well reduce the time devoted to the sheer accumulation of knowledge. It is true that the acquisition of such skills has always been a defining characteristic of university studies and a major asset of a university education on the labour market. But for the information society of today and tomorrow, such skills are absolutely essential. A major task for universities of the future will be

to monitor the quality of information taken from the Net. Increasingly, seminars of the future will be focussed on the need to assess the provenance of information. What one knows will increasingly have to be viewed in the light of how one knows it. Where does knowledge come from and how can one ensure that the sources of it are reliable? Source criticism will be vital for all disciplines as, traditionally, it has been in the training of historians and journalists.

In addition to the higher education quality reform, as a result of the great governmentally initiated reforms to raise the standard of competence for the whole population generally, universities and colleges will be presented with new challenges, especially in the demand for flexible educational routes, combined with a desire for a stronger injection of project- and problem–based study modes and lifelong learning. Such challenges will ensure that training in modern information retrieval and processing will play a decisive role.

To strengthen teaching in the institutions of higher education, the library should stand out as a powerful academic service centre, strongly engaged in the production of digital teaching aids, pedagogic development work and in the documentation, reference and information fields. Through relevant knowledge sources, electronic gateways and other reference and documentary sources within a multimedia library concept, this unit, called a learning centre, will take care of all information processing both for students and staff within the institutions, and for the society outside them.

The basic idea of the learning centres in England is to teach students to work independently. To do that, one must make the library more than just a place where one borrows books and uses the reading room. One wants to integrate several functions, as did the traditional library based on books being borrowed from open collections. These other functions include digital services where each study bench is equipped with data machines linked to the Net, with access to full-text databases, digitalised teaching material and other information that can be fetched from the Internet, E-mail, multimedia facilities such as sound, picture, video and film, video-based lectures, locally prepared teaching material, net-based discussion groups, workstations organised in such a way that several students can form self-help groups within the library itself, as well as access to other kinds of *learning material*, for example physical models etc.

In addition to its reference and documentation functions, a learning centre has its own *production centre* where teaching aids can be created in its own TV studio: The editing of video lectures and other digital learning materials

can be carried out; older paper-based materials can be digitalised; anthologies, text books, and conference reports can be published alongside the production on demand of copies of MA and doctoral theses and other self-created research of the institution. Students too will use the learning centre to produce their own work, arising from their project and problem based study assignments. It will also be possible for a learning centre to provide opportunities for study and exam assignments to be completed other than as written work. For example, they could be presented in a multimedia format, as displays, physical products or exhibitions.

A third element of a learning centre is the integration of an *educational department*'s standards in the development of teaching aids, flexible learning and further and post-education. To tie such an agency into the learning centre will contribute to the creation of a good framework for it within the institution and direct its activity towards an academic service function.

Through these three functions, the learning centre will be amongst the most important fundaments for providing the academic services which the students of today and tomorrow expect from an educational institution in which they are to invest their study capital. Besides such a service unit will be the best way for institutions to meet the new further and post educational reforms.

It is, however, important to see the entire Norwegian library system as a common resource. The strategy must be not to plan on the basis of the individual library or of proprietary rights to it, but to see the users' need to exploit all the library resources of Norway without organisational or administrative hindrance. In the absence of a national co-ordination of the Norwegian library system, the universities, the academic colleges and the state colleges should set up an organisational network which will give users the same rights and opportunities to access their basic services. Furthermore access to digital services should be co-ordinated with the public library system.

REFERENCES

1   Report No. 27 to the Storting (2000-2001).