

Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research



Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research

Published by the Swedish Higher Education Authority 2019:13

Authors: Kristina Tegler Jerselius and Susanna Lindenskoug

Reference number: 411-542-18

Swedish Higher Education Authority • Löjtnantsgatan 21 • Box 7703, 103 95 Stockholm, Sweden

Tel: +46-(0)8-563 085 00 • Fax: +46-(0)8-563 085 50 • email registrator@uka.se • www.uka.se

Contents

Introduction	4
Reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research....	5
Purpose.....	5
Main principles for reviewing HEIs' quality assurance processes for research	5
Central concepts	6
Assessment areas and assessment criteria	9
Assessment area: Governance and organisation.....	9
Assessment area: Preconditions.....	10
Assessment area: Design, implementation and outcomes.....	11
Assessment area: Gender equality	11
Assessment area: Collaboration	12
Review process.....	13
Assessment basis	13
Important steps in the review process.....	18
Assessment panels	20
Report and decision	21
Annex 1. Guide for student and doctoral student unions when writing the student report.....	24
Starting points	24
Review process in brief	25
Contents of the student report.....	25
Preparation of and decision on the student report.....	27

Introduction

Since 2017, UKÄ's task has expanded to include the quality assurance of research in addition to higher education. Reviewing the quality assurance of research by higher education institutions (HEIs) has been included in the component *Institutional reviews of the higher education institutions' quality assurance processes*. This is a guideline for this expanded assignment. The guidelines are based on the preliminary work reported in UKÄ's *Review of higher education institutions' quality assurance of research – reporting of an analysis and methods development work* (Report 2019:6) and *Quality assurance of research – reporting on a Government assignment* (Report 2018:2).¹ Together with the review of HEIs' quality assurance processes for education, the review of HEIs' quality assurance processes for research is one of four components in the national system for the quality assurance of higher education. For complete information on the national system for quality assurance, see UKÄ's report *National system for quality assurance in higher education – presentation of a government assignment* (Report 2016:15).

¹ At the time of publication of this document, the reports mentioned above are only available in Swedish.

Reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research

UKÄ reviews whether HEIs ensure that research fulfils the quality criteria formulated in the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance.

The reviews are based on the international research guidelines formulated in the *European Charter for Researchers* and *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* as well as the national framework for quality assurance of research as developed by the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF).

The reviews focus on how well the HEIs' quality assurance processes, including follow-up, measures and feedback procedures, help to ensure and develop the quality of research.

The reviews also aim to contribute to the HEIs' quality development since the assessors in their reports highlight both identified good examples and areas in need of improvement.

Purpose

UKÄ's reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes for research aim to confirm that the HEIs' quality assurance processes ensure high quality research and contribute to the HEIs' quality development.

Main principles for reviewing HEIs' quality assurance processes for research

The quality criteria formulated in the Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434) and Higher Education Ordinance (SFS 1993:100) comprise important starting points in the reviews carried out by UKÄ. The Higher Education Act stipulates that the work of HEIs is to reflect a close link between research and education and that this work is to be oriented to achieve high quality. Available resources are to be used efficiently and staff and students are to mutually work to ensure quality assurance processes are followed. General principles for research include that research issues are to be freely selected, research methods freely

developed, and research results freely published. In the course of their work, HEIs are to uphold academic credibility and follow good research practices. The Higher Education Act also stipulates that the mandate for HEIs includes knowledge transfer, community cooperation, engagement and outreach (known as third stream activities) and ensuring that benefit is derived from their research results. Gender equality must always be taken into account and promoted. The Higher Education Ordinance further stipulates that an HEI which is notified or in some other way made aware of suspected misconduct in research, artistic research or development initiatives at the HEI, is to investigate these suspicions.²

In addition to the Higher Education Act and Higher Education Ordinance, both national and international agreed frameworks and guidelines for research play an important role in reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes for research. The international guidelines for reviewing the quality assurance of research which are especially relevant in this regard are the *European Charter for Researchers* and *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* (*Charter and Code*). The *Charter and Code* are supported by the European Commission and have a direct impact on policy issues for research and research policy at the national level throughout the European area. In Sweden, the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF) has also formulated a national framework with overarching principles for quality assurance of research. This framework has been significant in formulating assessment criteria for the review of HEIs' quality assurance processes for research.

UKÄ's reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes for research are aimed at reviewing whether these processes systematically and effectively help to ensure and improve research quality. The focus of the review is on the HEI's handling of the information generated as a result of follow-ups, peer reviews and evaluation. UKÄ reviews how well the HEI's quality assurance processes systematically identify strengths and ensure they are preserved and developed, as well as how areas needing improvement are identified, followed up and resolved.

Central concepts

A number of concepts used in UKÄ's reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes for education and research are defined below. The purpose is to clarify and highlight how UKÄ uses the concepts, not to be prescriptive in how they should be interpreted or used in general.

² Chapter 1, Section 2–6 of the Higher Education Act and Chapter 1, Section 16 of the Higher Education Ordinance. These provisions apply to higher education institutions that are accountable to the Government. With respect to independent education providers, see UKÄ's report 2019:6 *Review of higher education institutions' quality assurance of research – reporting of an analysis and methods development work*. The report *New procedures for promoting good practice and handling research misconduct* (SOU 2017:10) proposes new legal regulations for handling research misconduct. Compliance by HEIs is assessed in the legal HEI supervision that precedes the quality assessments.

Quality assurance processes



HEIs' quality assurance processes for research

In the institutional reviews conducted by UKÄ, the object of review is the HEIs' quality assurance processes. An HEI's quality assurance processes include its quality system and quality work. The guidelines use the term 'quality assurance processes' most often, while the terms 'quality system' and 'quality work' are used when there is a need to clarify which part of the HEI's quality assurance processes are being referenced.

Quality system

The quality system is the framework (or frameworks, in cases in which HEIs have separate quality systems for education and research) in which quality work is conducted. The quality system encompasses the documented background, in the form of organisation, allocation of responsibilities and internal policy documents, as well as the procedures and methods used to work with both quality assurance and quality improvement. This also includes activities through which the organisation identifies the goals, processes and resources required to achieve the desired result.

Quality work

Quality work is the work carried out within the framework of the quality system. This includes both quality assurance and quality development, i.e. the work carried out to ensure that research operations are high quality, and the work carried out to improve research operations. The quality work is carried out at all levels in the HEI and involve the HEI's staff, students and doctoral students. This work includes continuous peer review as well as strategic work with the research operation. *Systematic* quality work refers to continual improvement efforts within predefined processes and procedures aimed at ensuring and developing the entire research operation.

Peer review

The quality and relevance of research are reviewed regularly both nationally and internationally via integrated and established collegial processes for reviewing quality (*peer review*). Peer reviews with appointed reviewers, structured discussions and written statements are essential for formulating, retaining and developing a good, well-functioning quality culture, and peer reviews also form the basis of quality assurance processes for research. Other assessment processes are applicable to artistic research, but peer review also plays a critical role in these processes.

Collaboration

Collaboration is used in a wide sense. In addition to collaboration with industry and the private sector, there is also collaboration with county councils, municipalities and NGOs, for example. However, joint work methods and activities between HEIs are not covered by this concept. Instead, these inter-academic work methods and activities are considered partnerships.

Assessment areas and assessment criteria

UKÄ's review of the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research focuses on how well the HEIs' quality systems and quality work help to improve and ensure research quality. The review encompasses the following five assessment areas:

- governance and organisation
- preconditions
- design, implementation and outcomes
- gender equality
- collaboration

The reviews include the assessment areas that form the foundation for the overall judgement of the HEIs' quality assurance processes. Each assessment area contains one or more assessment criteria. The assessment criteria are a minimum level for what the HEI must report in the self-evaluation. In addition to the assessment criteria, there may also be other components of the systematic quality work, specific for each HEI, that are relevant to describe and evaluate within an assessment area.³

Assessment area: Governance and organisation

The HEI's quality system supports strategic efforts at all levels. The quality system is effective, well-functioning and is used consistently throughout the HEI. It covers all research and is built with structures, procedures and processes for ensuring high-quality research.

There is clear distribution of roles and responsibilities for the quality work as well as clear principles and work methods for ensuring and improving research quality. The regulations, policies and procedures are well-documented and easily accessible. The quality system, including follow-ups and regular reviews, is designed to encourage participation,

³ The student and doctoral student perspective is reviewed integrated into other assessment areas where it is considered relevant. Examples of relevant areas could include doctoral students' perspectives on matters pertaining to professional development and career support, as well as gender equality and collaboration. Furthermore, the student and doctoral student perspective on the link between research and education may be worth special attention.

engagement and responsibility among staff, students and doctoral students.

The HEI works systematically to follow up, evaluate and improve its research operations. The HEI uses information that has been formulated by other stakeholders (such as national research financiers) to strengthen research operations. The information that is produced makes it possible to identify needed developments and to take quality-enhancing measures. It also provides a background for strategic governance and prioritisation. The quality system and quality work are followed up, evaluated and improved by the HEI.

Assessment criteria:

- 1. The HEI has an established quality system in which responsibility and role distribution for quality work is described, along with principles and concrete work methods for ensuring and improving research quality.*
- 2. The quality work supports the strategic work at all levels and involves both management and employees. The quality work contributes to efficient use of the HEI's resources.*
- 3. The HEI ensures that it continually collects, analyses and uses information with a bearing on research quality and relevance as a basis for quality development, strategic decisions and prioritisation.*

Assessment area: Preconditions

Based on its specific preconditions, the HEI ensures through its quality assurance processes that the conditions for conducting research are good. Using information produced within the quality system, the HEI identifies needs for, analyses and takes measures to continually improve research conditions. The HEI sets aside the necessary resources for maintaining high-quality research.

Assessment criteria:

- 1. The HEI provides appropriate support to researchers with regard to the application of good research practices, systematically follows up suspected cases of misconduct and takes the appropriate corrective measures.*
- 2. The HEI creates good conditions for the improvement and renewal of research and the research environment, and for research freedom.*
- 3. The HEI conducts long-term work to ensure access to needed expertise, creates good conditions for professional development,*

and provides well-functioning career support for researchers in all career phases, regardless of form of employment.

4. *The HEI follows up support operations and infrastructure for research and takes appropriate action to improve quality when needed.*
5. *The HEI creates good conditions for strengthening the connection between research and education in its operations.*

Assessment area: Design, implementation and outcomes

Systematic forms of follow-up, evaluation and development of research are in place, and regular follow-ups and independent peer reviews of research are conducted within the research environments.

Using information that is produced through peer reviews, needs for improvement and quality-enhancing measures are identified and taken. Information generated by others (such as national research financiers) is used in the research environments to enhance the research quality.

Systematic processes and procedures are in place to ensure the results of implemented reviews and quality-enhancing measures are published and communicated, with good dissemination within and beyond the organisation.

Assessment criteria:

1. *The HEI ensures that its research environments/research are regularly reviewed from national and international perspectives with the support of peer reviews to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for development. The HEI has systems for capturing and managing the recommendations resulting from such reviews.*
2. *The results generated through follow-ups and peer reviews are published and communicated in an appropriate way within and beyond the organisation.*

Assessment area: Gender equality

The HEI ensures through its quality assurance processes that gender equality is promoted in the conditions and implementation of the research. Gender equality means that women and men have the same rights, obligations and opportunities. This involves both equal gender distribution and highlighting attitudes, norms, values and ideals that impact the conditions facing women and men.

Gender equality initiatives are integrated into the HEI's quality work. This encompasses gender-equal career pathways and gender-equal opportunities for professional development, as well as active gender equality initiatives, so that everyone can conduct research on equal terms. The HEI supports gender-equal working conditions that facilitate combining family and work, children and career.

The HEI systematically works for even gender distribution in groups that prepare and make decisions on research conditions and implementation and that apply gender-equal planning processes. Using information that is produced through the quality assurance processes, the HEI identifies needs for improvement and development. The HEI has systematic processes and procedures for ensuring that planned and implemented measures are appropriately communicated and disseminated within and beyond the organisation.

Assessment criterion:

1. *The HEI promotes gender equality with regard to research conditions and implementation.*

Assessment area: Collaboration

The HEI interacts with the surrounding society and collaboration is systematically factored in as part of the HEI's quality assurance processes. The HEI has formulated processes that support, follow up and stimulate collaboration in the long term, and that also ensure the quality of these collaborative efforts. The HEI also identifies needs for improvement in this area based on the HEI's conditions.

The HEI communicates information about its activities and ensures that benefit is derived broadly from its research results. Where relevant and with consideration for the freedom and integrity of research, the HEI works to enhance research quality and improve research operations through collaboration. The HEI supports and encourages different forms of collaboration and mutual learning.

Using information produced by the quality system and by external players such as research funding bodies and collaborative parties, the HEI identifies needs for improvement and takes measures to improve the quality of collaboration.

Assessment criteria:

1. *The HEI works systematically to promote broad utilisation of research and to strengthen research quality and relevance through collaboration and mutual learning.*

Review process

Assessment basis

Evaluation materials include the following:

- a self-evaluation from the HEI
- a student report from student and doctoral student unions
- two site visits with associated interviews
- documentation about selected audit trails

All assessment materials are considered in the assessment. The review process also factors in other data which UKÄ produces, see the section ‘Other data’.

The HEI’s self-evaluation

The self-evaluation is an important document in the review of the HEI’s quality assurance processes. To facilitate a fair evaluation of the HEI’s quality assurance processes for research, it is important for the HEI’s presentation in the self-evaluation to be complete and exhaustive. The self-evaluation is to be at most 50 pages, 12-point font. The HEI is to submit its self-evaluation to UKÄ within twelve weeks from the initial meeting.

The purpose of the self-evaluation is to:

1. Provide an overview of the HEI and its organisation.
2. Describe and analyse the HEI’s quality assurance processes for research and its various components.
3. Describe and analyse how, through its quality assurance processes, the HEI systematically ensures high-quality research.

Provide evidence of how the HEI knows the selected processes ensure the quality of the research and identify further improvements.

The documents listed below are to be included with the self-evaluation as attachments. The HEI is to also include a summary of the most central policy documents for the quality work. The assessment panel can then, when required, request supplementary documentation to verify or explore specific

parts of the self-evaluation. The following documents are to be included with the self-evaluation:

- Established procedure for quality assurance and improving the quality of research
- The HEI's strategy (or strategies) for research
- The HEI's latest annual report or equivalent
- Organisational chart
- Work plan and delegation of authority for quality assurance processes for research
- Summary of the most central policy documents for the quality assurance processes for research (such as action plans)

No other documents should be required to read and understand the HEI's self-evaluation.

Writing a self-evaluation – Guidelines for the HEI

The self-evaluation template consists of two parts. The first part provides a broad introduction to the HEI's quality system for research. The purpose of this initial part is to allow the HEI to provide an overall description and explain its quality system. The second part consists of the five assessment areas: Governance and organisation; Preconditions; Design, implementation and outcomes; Gender equality; Collaboration, which are the core of the assessment. The HEI may refer back to the first part as needed. When reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research, the student/doctoral student perspective is not a separate assessment area but can be integrated into other assessment areas where relevant.

Part 1 in the self-evaluation: the HEI's quality system

Under the first heading of the self-evaluation "The HEI's quality system", the HEI is to provide an overarching presentation of its quality system. The self-evaluation is to be 3–5 pages, 12-point font. Include the following:

- an overarching presentation of how the quality system for research is designed, including an illustrative process overview of all levels of the quality system
- how long the existing system for quality assurance and improving the quality of the research has been in use and the principles upon which it is based
- a presentation of the overarching plan for quality assurance of research and what methods are used, such as peer review.

The purpose of this introduction is to allow the HEI to provide an overarching description of how the quality assurance processes are designed and intended to work.

Part 2 in the self-evaluation: The assessment areas

In the second part of the self-evaluation, the HEI is to describe and analyse its quality assurance processes based on the five assessment areas.

Here, the HEI describes its quality system and the systematic quality work in relation to the assessment criteria. It should show how the HEI identifies, preserves, and develops its strengths through the quality assurance processes. It should also show how areas in need of improvement are identified, followed up and addressed. The HEI should show how the quality assurance system is developed based on the information and experience that is generated. Explain how the current quality assurance system has evolved over time, what lessons have been learned and how the HEI has used them to improve and develop its quality assurance processes.

It should be clear whether the HEI has a centralised or decentralised organisation for the quality assurance processes. A description and explanation of the chosen method of working with research quality should be provided. Please also provide examples of an issue which the HEI has worked with and which illustrates how the quality assurance processes function overall.

Provide evidence that the quality assurance processes are well-functioning and effective. Explain how the outcomes of previous follow-ups and peer reviews have been put to use and lead to high-quality research.

Student report

In the reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes, the student and doctoral student unions are invited to submit a written document to UKÄ, known as a student report. The purpose of the student report is to give the unions, or equivalent bodies, the opportunity to present their views on and experiences with the HEI's quality assurance processes.

The student report is written using a special template and should not exceed eight pages. If an HEI has multiple student and doctoral student unions, UKÄ would like the unions to collaborate and submit a joint student report. However, this is something the unions may determine themselves. A joint report should be no more than ten pages.

In the student report, the student and doctoral student unions can both relate to the assessment areas and highlight other issues which they consider important for the HEI's quality improvement. UKÄ has produced a guide to help student and doctoral student unions to write a student report. See Annex 1.

It is important to point out that the HEI's quality assurance processes are a shared concern for the HEI's staff, students and doctoral students, and that a student report may not negatively impact students' opportunities to participate in the self-evaluation process.

Audit trails

In addition to the descriptions and evidence provided in the HEI's self-evaluation, area audit trails are also included as part of the supporting documentation for the assessment. The purpose of the audit trails is to review how well the HEI's quality assurance processes function in practice in a few selected environments where research is conducted. Audit trails are a way to implement random sampling of the HEI's quality assurance processes.

Choice of audit trails

Audit trails are selected and justified by the assessment panel after the first site visit and then the HEI is notified. The number of audit trails varies depending on the size of the HEI. At larger HEIs, the assessment panel usually chooses three to six audit trails; at medium-sized HEIs, two to four audit trails; and at smaller HEIs, one or two audit trails.

Documentation connected to audit trails

Within 15 business days from the HEI being informed of the assessment panel's selection of audit trails, the HEI is to submit the documentation which the assessment panel and HEI have agreed upon. The documentation is to be uploaded to UKÄ Direkt and it is to consist of documents that already exist at the HEI.

Examples of documentation which can be requested include records from research board meetings; the HEI's own research evaluations; or follow-up and improvement plans for a certain area within the quality work. To help the assessment panel

work with the material, the HEI is also to include a page with a brief description of the documents.⁴

Other data

Prior to the reviews, UKÄ produces documentation about the HEI. This documentation is to be factored in by both the HEI and the assessment panel. The documents can include such information as the results of UKÄ's previous supervision and evaluation activities, and key figures and national statistics on finances, staff and scholarly/artistic production. The documentation can be used as the basis for questions during the site visits and can also help in the selection of audit trails. The material will be available for the HEI in UKÄ Direkt in conjunction with the initial meeting.

Background information

UKÄ's quality reviews use background information produced by UKÄ. This background information aims to give the assessors of the HEI reviews a greater understanding of the HEI and its profile. The background information includes quantitative time series that supplement information in the HEI's annual report, and this information is not to be assessed. Because the background information is not assessed, the information produced may vary depending on the HEI.

Key figures

UKÄ produces key figures prior to the review. These are also not for evaluation. However, the assessment panel evaluates the HEI's analysis and handling of key figures. One overarching purpose of the key figures is to assess the extent to which the HEIs have information about the key figures and the extent to which they act based on this knowledge. To maintain high-quality practices, deviations should be able to be identified and the HEIs should subsequently be able to explain the deviation and, if merited, take action. In the review of the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research, key figures are included on the following areas:

Finances

- Share of total revenues for research and third-cycle education that is external funding.

⁴ A template found on UKÄ's website is to be used.

Staff

- Share of research and teaching staff with a third-cycle degree.

Scholarly/artistic output

- Field normalised citation analysis
- Publications per research/teaching staff

The reviews use the analysis of key figures as one of several bases and this analysis may serve as a basis for questions at site visits, for example. They can also be used as the basis for choosing audit trails.

UKÄ Direkt

All written documents are uploaded and registered by the HEI on UKÄ Direkt, which is the HEIs portal for UKÄ's online case management system. UKÄ will also upload information to UKÄ Direkt that the HEIs need prior to and during a review, for example guidelines and self-evaluation templates, as well as the user manual for UKÄ Direkt. Each HEI has an administrator for UKÄ Direkt who distributes login information to the HEI's other users and can answer questions about UKÄ Direkt.

Important steps in the review process

Initial meeting

As a first step in the evaluation process, UKÄ arranges an introductory initial meeting for those HEIs to be reviewed. Participants to attend are:

- two representatives from each HEI;
- one representative from each student and doctoral student union at the HEIs;
- the chair of the assessment panels;
- and staff from UKÄ.

The overall objective of this initial meeting is to provide the HEIs with insight and understanding of the review, and its content and focus. Another important purpose is for the HEI to be given the opportunity to present its background, organisation and strategic goals to provide UKÄ and the assessment panel chairs with insight and understanding of the

HEI. The meeting includes an opportunity for the HEIs and student and doctoral student unions to ask UKÄ and the assessment panel chairs questions about the review process.

During the meeting UKÄ presents what other documentation (see the section ‘Other data’) is included in the review and a schedule for the review round.

Two site visits to the HEI

During the site visits, the assessment panel interviews representatives from different levels and functions within the HEI, such as management, researchers, doctoral and other students and any other staff groups. Representatives from the HEI’s collaborative partners may also participate in the interviews.

Students participating in the interviews should be appointed, if possible, by a student organisation that either belongs to a student or doctoral student union or has union status itself at the HEI. The HEI and student and doctoral student unions are asked to make sure the individuals who have been appointed to participate in the interviews receive all the necessary information. No more than one week before the interview date, the HEI and student and doctoral student unions notify the responsible project manager at UKÄ which individuals have been nominated to participate in the interview. If the student and doctoral student unions find they are unable to recruit students, UKÄ, in consultation with the HEI’s quality officer or other designated person, will ensure that students are recruited for the interviews.

The first site visit

The purpose of the first site visit is to give the assessors a chance to ask remaining questions based on the HEI’s self-evaluation and to identify the audit trails to be reviewed during the second site visit. The first site visit usually takes one business day. The HEI’s self-evaluation, together with the other documentation collected by UKÄ, is the basis for the assessment panel’s questions. Near the time of the first site visit, the assessment panel is to determine, in dialogue with UKÄ’s project managers and the HEI’s representatives, which type of documentation the HEI is to deliver for each audit trail.

The second site visit

The purpose of the second site visit is to, via the selected audit trails, review whether the HEI’s quality assurance processes

function systematically in practice to ensure high-quality research. The second site visit is more comprehensive and requires one to three business days, depending on the size of the HEI. This site visit takes place about eight weeks after the first one.

Assessment panels

The assessors are recruited according to the usual nomination procedure in collaboration with the HEIs, student and doctoral student unions via the Swedish National Union of Students and labour market organisations. UKÄ determines the members of the assessment panels. The group is to consist of at least five assessors (one of which is appointed as chair of the panel):

- three expert assessors;
- one expert in collaboration;
- one doctoral student representative.

Collectively, the panel is to have sufficiently broad and extensive expertise to assess all assessment areas included in the review. At least one of the assessors should be or have been working abroad. Collectively, the assessment panel is to be very familiar with the Swedish higher education system and international higher education systems, and also have extensive knowledge of and experience with quality work for research at different levels. The assessment panel is also to include someone with experience of management work within an HEI and if possible within another form of organisation outside of academia. The group is also to have someone with experience of gender equality assurance procedures. As a quality assurance measure, the HEI can comment on the assessment panel's composition, for example, to point out conflicts of interest, before the panel is officially appointed by UKÄ.

The assessors' assignment begins with an introduction to UKÄ's assessment and work methods. The introduction aims to clarify the task and expectations.

The assessors' assignment includes:

- discussing assessments of assessment areas and assessment criteria;
- participating in meetings during the review process;
- through the chairperson, being represented at the initial meeting with the HEIs included in the review;
- reviewing the various assessment material, explaining the

judgments in writing and specifying what material they are based on;

- jointly preparing questions for interviews with representatives from the HEI, students, and any representatives of collaborative partners the HEI works with;
- summarising the assessments in a joint statement, including the assessment panel's overall judgement and proposed decision;
- participating in the final preparation of the report before UKÄ takes a decision.

The document “Information for assessors” provides, together with the instructions for each component, support to assessors.⁵

Report and decision

Assessment panel's report

The assessment panel's report indicates whether the HEI meets the assessment criteria for the reviewed assessment areas. The assessment panel's judgements and reasoning are to clearly present what is not judged satisfactory should there be a negative judgement. For the reports to also help improve quality at the HEIs, the assessors are to include their own reflections and highlight strengths and good examples.

The assessment panel's draft report will be sent to the HEI for comment before UKÄ makes its final decision. The purpose of this is to give HEIs the opportunity to comment on any factual mistakes in the report. The period for comment is three weeks. The assessors read the HEI's responses and make changes to the report where relevant. The final report from the assessment panel forms the basis for UKÄ's decision. The HEI's written response will be attached to the report.

Decision

The overall judgement of the HEI's quality assurance processes for research is given on a three-point scale. UKÄ decides whether to approve the quality assurance processes, to approve the quality assurance processes with reservations or to decide that the quality assurance processes at the HEI will be under review. UKÄ's decision is based on the assessment panel's report and the considerations of UKÄ.

⁵ The document “Information for assessors” is available on UKÄ's website.

Approved quality assurance processes

An overall judgement of “approved quality assurance processes” means the HEI’s quality assurance processes for research are well described, well argued for and well functioning in practice. They are systematic and effective at all levels of the HEI, from leadership level to departmental level. All assessment areas are judged as satisfactory.

Approved quality assurance processes with reservations

With the overall judgement of “approved quality assurance processes with reservations”, the HEI’s quality assurance processes for research are fairly well described, well argued for and well functioning in practice. The decision clarifies which assessment areas are not satisfactory, which the HEI is to follow up and take action to remedy within a certain period of time.

Quality assurance processes under review

With the overall judgement “quality assurance processes under review”, there are several significant deficiencies in the HEI’s quality assurance processes for research with regard to how they are described, argued for and how well they function in practice. The inadequacies are extensive and the assessment panel’s opinion is that the quality assurance processes at the HEI must be re-reviewed in their entirety.

Follow-up

When quality assurance processes are approved

HEIs with approved quality assurance processes for research are followed up through meetings, surveys, conferences and in other ways.⁶ The procedures are the same for all components of the quality assurance system.

When quality assurance processes are approved with reservations

The HEIs with the assessment “approved quality assurance processes with reservations” are followed up in the assessment areas judged as not satisfactory. The HEI is to present the measures it has taken no later than two years after the decision. UKÄ appoints an assessment panel that follows up the measures. Online interviews and site visits are included in the follow-up if needed. If the follow-up review leads to a

⁶ These follow-ups include all HEIs, regardless of decision.

positive assessment from the assessment panel, then the HEI's quality assurance processes for research will be approved in their entirety by UKÄ. If the HEI's quality assurance processes for research still do not meet the assessment criteria in the follow-up review, this means that an additional follow-up review will be conducted after a period agreed upon by UKÄ and the HEI on a case-by-case basis.

When quality assurance processes are under review

The HEIs whose quality assurance processes for research are under review are followed up in all assessment areas. This means a new, complete review of the HEI's quality assurance processes for research will be conducted two years after UKÄ's decision at the earliest. An assessment panel will be appointed to review the self-evaluation and other documentation. Online interviews and site visits are included in the new review. If the review leads to a positive assessment from the assessment panel, then the HEI's quality assurance processes for research will be approved in their entirety by UKÄ. If the HEI's quality assurance processes for research are still under review after the new assessment, then a follow-up will be carried out after a period agreed upon by UKÄ and the HEI on a case-by-case basis.

Annex 1. Guide for student and doctoral student unions when writing the student report

This guide was developed to provide guidelines to the student and doctoral student unions with union status at HEIs included in the Swedish Higher Education Authority's (UKÄ) reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes. The guide describes the review process and the function of a student report as one of several supporting documents in the review. This guide is designed for use as a complement to the document *Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research*.

Starting points

UKÄ's reviews of the HEIs' quality assurance processes are intended to make sure that the HEIs' systematic quality assurance procedures ensure high quality of research and to contribute to the HEIs' quality development for research.

The purpose of the student report is to give the student unions the opportunity to present their views on and experiences with the HEI's quality assurance processes (quality system and quality work). A student report is an opportunity for students to submit viewpoints on the HEI's quality assurance processes and on actual conditions that are affected by these processes. For example, this could include doctoral students' views on the environments in which research is conducted and their opportunities for skills development and career support. Moreover, the student report may address doctoral students' views on gender equality and collaboration in research as well as students' opinions on the HEI's efforts to strengthen connections between research and education. However, UKÄ does not require a student report.

UKÄ wants to emphasise that a student report **does not** replace the student participation that is assumed to take place during the HEI's work on the self-evaluation.

Review process in brief

UKÄ recruits an assessment panel consisting of experts in quality assurance of research, a doctoral student representative and an expert in collaboration. The assessment panel's starting points are the assessment areas and assessment criteria developed by UKÄ in dialogue with representatives from the higher education sector and other relevant organisations and originate in the Higher Education Act, the Higher Education Ordinance, and in both national and international frameworks.

- The assessment panel analyses the assessment criteria included in the review. The assessment material for the reviews consists of a self-evaluation from the HEI, one or several student reports, two site visits, and documentation on the selected audit trails. All assessment materials are considered for the assessment.
- Where relevant, other supporting material is to be considered by both the HEI and the assessment panel. These documents include the results of UKÄ's HEI supervision, evaluations and key figures produced by UKÄ. The material serves as the basis for questions during the site visits and can also be the foundation for the selection of audit trails.
- The assessment panel conducts an initial site visit with representatives from the HEI, students, and any collaborative partners with which the HEI works. The purpose of the first site visit is partly to give the assessors a chance to ask remaining questions based on the HEI's self-evaluation and partly to identify the audit trails which the assessment panel will follow during its second site visit to the HEI.
- The assessment panel carries out a second site visit at the HEI to talk again with management, staff and students. The purpose of the second site visit is to, via the selected audit trails, review whether the HEI's quality assurance procedures function systematically in practice so that the quality system and quality work that are pursued ensure high-quality research and promote outstanding research.
- The assessment panel formulates preliminary assessments in a report and shares these with the HEI so that the HEI has the opportunity to comment on any factual errors. The HEI is responsible for verifying with the parties concerned, such as the student and doctoral student unions.
- The assessment panel reviews the received comments and then submits its final judgement in a report to UKÄ, which determines whether to approve, approve with reservations, or to place the HEI's quality assurance processes under review.

Contents of the student report

The student report is to include students' opinions of the HEI's quality assurance processes based on the five assessment areas and associated assessment criteria. UKÄ abstains from stating in detail what the student

report may include to avoid directing or limiting its content, but otherwise, in the text above it has highlighted several assessment criteria which may be especially relevant to touch upon from a student perspective.

Assessment areas:

- governance and organisation
- preconditions
- design, implementation and outcomes
- gender equality
- collaboration

The student report does not need to include evaluations of all the assessment areas. Rather, it can focus on specially selected areas on which the students have opinions. In addition to issues related to the assessment areas, the student and doctoral student unions may also highlight other issues that are considered important for quality improvement.

The document *Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for research* provides a complete description of the method for review of the HEIs' quality assurance processes. It includes the assessment areas and assessment criteria based upon which the HEI is to describe and evaluate its research operations, and from which the assessors base their assessments. These guidelines are based on the national system for quality assurance in higher education and research that UKÄ has been assigned by the Government to develop and implement.

Scope of the student report

The student report should not exceed eight pages, or ten pages if multiple student unions submit a joint report. It should be in 12-point font.

Reference material used in the student report

Please make clear whether the student report has been approved by an organisation connected to the student and doctoral student unions. Furthermore, it will help the assessment panel's work if the content of the student report refers to different surveys or official documents which are available. However, the student and doctoral student unions are not expected to carry out their own surveys to produce a student report. Examples of existing reference material are:

- any previous surveys of students by student and doctoral student unions with a bearing on research at the HEI;
- any surveys of students by the HEI with a bearing on research at the HEI;
- issues which student and doctoral student unions are pursuing or have recently pursued with a bearing on research at the HEI;

- meeting notes or protocols from meetings of the student and doctoral student unions or HEI meetings with a bearing on issues pertaining to research operations;
- HEI's or student and doctoral student union's adopted documents with a bearing on research at the HEI.

Preparation of and decision on the student report

It is important that student and doctoral student unions have thought through the preparation and adoption of the student report. A suitable approach, for example, is to send out a proposal for the report for comment to any organisations connected to the union, such as study councils, subject groups, advisory councils or the equivalent at the HEI.

If there are multiple student and doctoral student unions at the HEI, then UKÄ recommends the unions collaborate on a joint student report. If this is not possible, the unions may submit separate student reports. A third option is for the unions to write some parts together and others separately.

Keep in mind

The student report is an official document in the review of the HEI's quality assurance processes. The student report is also a public document that can be accessed by everyone once it has been submitted to UKÄ. The HEI and students will have the opportunity to comment on the student report during the interviews conducted with management and staff.

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (Universitetskanslersämbetet – UKÄ) is to contribute to strengthening Swedish higher education and Sweden as a knowledge society. We review the quality of higher education programmes, we analyse and follow up trends within higher education and we monitor the rights of students.

uka.se

