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National quality assurance
system for the period
2007–2012

Preliminary version



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Foreword

This document presents the new quality assurance system for the review and evaluation of higher education during the coming six-year period, 2007–2012.

This system has been developed in the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education's evaluation department in consultation with the institutions and agencies concerned. To begin with the background of the new system and the premises on which it is based are presented. This is followed by a survey of how the system is organised, the components of which it will consist and how they are related to each other. Finally there is a brief description of how the system is to be implemented and followed up.

The appendices present the aspects and criteria that will be applied during the evaluations as well as the six-year plans that have been drawn up.

The programme will be supplemented by descriptions of procedures and instructions for assessors and higher education institutions. The programme will also be subject to continual monitoring and review during the six-year period.

We hope that this programme will contribute to the enhancement of the quality of higher education and stimulate active and creative improvement work at all of the higher education institutions.

Sigbrit Franke

Clas-Uno Frykholm

Background and premises

In developing the new quality assurance system that is to apply from the beginning of 2007, our ambition has been to combine experiences of the current system with new ideas about quality assurance and quality development that have emerged in various national and international contexts. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education has also listened to and included the views of the ministry, higher education institutions, student organisations and other stakeholders. It goes without saying that the new degree ordinance developed as a result of the Bologna Process has been one important point of departure, as have the “standards and guidelines” developed by ENQA.¹

It should be pointed out that not every aspect of the new system is in fact new. It is more a question of a shift of emphasis and modification of the current system.

The current system

The focus of the current quality assurance system is on the evaluation of subjects and programmes and assessments of entitlement to award degrees, supplemented by thematic evaluations. Both the evaluations of subjects and programmes and assessment of entitlement to award degrees are aimed to assure fundamental quality, while the thematic evaluations focus on describing various quality aspects and highlighting good examples of successful quality procedures.

In many ways the quality assurance system works well. Subject and programme evaluations provide a good national picture of quality in various educational areas, while at the same time programmes that do not maintain sound standards are identified and warned of the possible withdrawal of their entitlement to award degrees. All of the programmes evaluated receive feedback in the form of recommendations and proposed measures to enhance their quality.

The follow-up organised after three years shows that nearly all the recommendations are taken into account and that quality is improved.² Experiences are similar from the assessments of entitlement to award degrees, where the shortcomings identified are usually remedied before another application is submitted. The thematic evaluations have served to provide a platform of knowledge and sources of inspiration for development in important areas.

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1. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. ENQA report. ISBN: 952-5539-04-0; ISSN: 1458-1051
 2. Follow-up of the National Agency for Higher Education's evaluations of programmes, Report 2006:25 R

International developments

Within the framework of the Bologna process the ministers of education in the affiliated countries have agreed on certain joint guidelines for the evaluation and quality assurance of higher education.³ These include for instance:

- external evaluation of the quality procedures of the higher education institutions,
- regular appraisals of subjects and programmes,
- official approval, accreditation or certification of programmes,
- a methodology based on self-evaluation and external appraisal,
- the participation of students, subject experts and international assessors, and also
- international cooperation and accreditation of the national quality assurance agencies.

Where the first three points are concerned the “standards and guidelines” state that one or some of these three components may be included, but there is no stipulation about how many or which of them. The document also states that the progress made by the higher education institutions themselves should be considered when designing national quality assurance systems. If the internal quality assurance procedures at an institution are well developed, external appraisal may be reduced correspondingly.

From an international perspective, Sweden has made a great deal of progress where the quality assurance of higher education is concerned. For some considerable time the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education has fulfilled the requirements in the “standards and guidelines”, which was confirmed by the external evaluation of its quality appraisal activities that took place during the autumn of 2005.⁴

The need for changes

The follow-up undertaken by the National Agency reveals that the current system works well, but even so there are reasons for making changes before the next round of evaluations starts. Experiences from Sweden as well as from other countries show that new rounds of quality evaluations that are conducted in the same way as previously do not lead to equally valuable outcomes as their predecessors. The additional information provided is often restricted and it can at times be difficult to summon up the same commitment for self-evaluations as during the first round.

3. See the report referred to in footnote 1.

4. Evaluation of National Agency for Higher Education, Sweden, According to Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. December 2005. Reg. no. 643-1440-05

Another reason for making changes is linked to a potential shift of emphasis where responsibility for quality assurance is concerned. As a result of the large number of national subject and programme evaluations that have been made, the higher education institutions are now much better equipped than they were to assume the responsibility for their own quality assurance and quality development. Increasing responsibility for the higher education institutions themselves also coincides with international developments.

Greater responsibility for the higher education institutions means that the National Agency's evaluations of the quality of subjects and programmes need not be as extensive. At the same time the state must be able to guarantee that reasonable minimum standards are being maintained in all higher education. This can be achieved by undertaking a smaller number of in-depth evaluations of subjects and programmes after an assessment of "the risk of failure to maintain good standards" based on key statistics, monitoring and simplified self-evaluations.⁵ There is also a greater need for international participation in the evaluations. It is important to broaden perspectives and compare Swedish quality evaluations with those conducted in other countries. This means that certain evaluations should be carried out using English as the working language.

There are also grounds for focusing greater attention than before on activities that maintain very high standards. The National Agency therefore wants to test the possibility of providing greater stimulation of local quality procedures by distinguishing centres of educational excellence.

Yet another reason for introducing changes is the possibility of making the evaluations simpler, less time-consuming and more cost-effective – both for the higher education institutions and for the National Agency for Higher Education.

If the new quality assurance system is to be successful, all the proposals should have legitimacy and be accepted by all the important participants and stakeholders. This has also been one of the points of departure in the development of the system presented here.

Summary – points of departure for the new system

- Greater emphasis on the quality procedures of the higher education institutions themselves.
- External quality appraisal based on risk assessment.
- Greater degree of international participation in the evaluations.
- Distinction of centre of educational excellence.
- Reasonable work loads for the higher education institutions and the National Agency.
- Support for and acceptance of the entire system.

5. It should be pointed out that programmes can also be selected for in-depth evaluation for other reasons.

The structure of the quality assurance system

The new quality assurance system is made up of five different components that interact with and support each other. These are:

- audits of the quality procedures at the higher education institutions,
- evaluations of subjects and programmes,
- appraisal of entitlement to award degrees,
- thematic studies, and
- distinguishing centres of educational excellence.

A brief survey of the various components is offered below.

Audits of quality procedures at the higher education institutions

Two rounds of audits of quality procedures at the higher education institutions have previously been carried out during the years 1995-2002. The earlier audits took place at a time when the institutions were in the process of developing their own systems for quality assurance and quality development. The audits focused on development and were based on a vision of “the good higher education institution”. To a large extent they concentrated on central functions and the appraisal of systems as they were formulated in plans and documentation.

It is assumed that these systems have now been developed and that they have functioned for some time, which means that the impending audits can focus more on the outcomes and effects of the quality procedures at the higher education institutions.

In the short term the results can deal with the enhancement of resources, more teaching staff with research qualifications, new curricula, updated reading lists, improvement of the qualifications of teachers, new teaching methods, greater student satisfaction and improved throughput. More long-term effects may involve what students feel about their programmes after graduation, the possibilities for graduates of finding employment and how employers rate the programmes and the knowledge acquired by the students.

General aspects of quality such as work with student influence, gender equality, diversity, internationalisation, cooperation with the surrounding community and sustainable development will also be assessed. Here too the audits will pay attention to outcomes and effects.

In order to determine how well grounded the quality procedures of the higher education institutions are in operation and how they are conducted

in practice, the audits will also comprise faculty and departmental levels. At each higher education institution two to six areas will be selected for in-depth study. These may be faculties, departments, centres of different kinds or other units that provide teaching at basic, advanced or graduate level. Libraries, IT-support and other administrative units or those offering student support may also be selected for in-depth study. However, settings in which only research takes place will not be selected. The selection will be made after consultation with the higher education institution.

The audits will be based on background material that is available at the National Agency, the self-evaluations of the higher education institutions, quality procedure plans, follow-up, evaluations and other material requested by the panel of assessors. No specific self-evaluation will be required from the units selected for in-depth audit. On the other hand, those selected will be asked to account for the results of their quality procedures by submitting their own documentation of their quality assurance measures and what outcomes they have had. The appropriate instructions and examples of relevant documents will be provided in the form of specific directives.

The aspects to be appraised relate to the suitability of the quality procedures, their results and effects and are expected to be valid for all forms of quality work carried out in higher education.

In all, quality procedures will be assessed from 18 different aspects.⁶ Three levels of criteria are linked to each aspect: initiated, under development and developed. The assessment of each aspect will be based on the written documentation and the interviews conducted by the panels of assessors during their site visits. The general aspects of quality will not merely be appraised on the basis of plans and documentation but also on how they are integrated, implemented and monitored in day-to-day operations.⁷

Every higher education institution will be audited during a six-year cycle. Institutions where circumstances are similar will be audited in the same year.⁸ The methodology used for the audits will resemble that adopted previously, with panels of external assessors, self-evaluation, site visits and written report.

The panels of assessors will draw up a final report in which the quality procedures at all higher education institutions that have been audited during a specific year are described and evaluated. The final report will contain a general section in which shared strengths and weaknesses in the quality procedures will be specified and analysed. The report will also contain specific feedback for the individual institutions and recommendations and proposed measures for improvement.

6. These aspects will be reviewed after the pilot study involving Södertörn University College has been completed. Reactions after circulation of the proposal will also be taken into account

7. The aspects and criteria for the auditing of the quality procedures of the higher education institutions can be found in Appendix 1.

8. The six-year plan for audits of the higher education institutions' quality procedures can be found in Appendix 6.

The National Agency will base its analysis and reflections on the assessors' report and this will result in a decision in which the University Chancellor will make one of the following judgements: The National Agency for Higher Education has great confidence in ... ; The National Agency for Higher Education has confidence in ... ; The National Agency for Higher Education has limited confidence in ... quality assurance procedures at the higher education institution in question. The National Agency's assessment of this confidence will be based on an overall appraisal guided by assessment of the various aspects.

In the cases where the audits reveal such serious shortcomings at a higher education institution that the National Agency has limited confidence in its quality procedures, it will be urged to remedy these deficiencies without delay. The measures adopted will be reviewed after about one year.⁹

Evaluations of subjects and programmes

The new organisation of the evaluations of subjects and programmes will mean that they take place in three stages. Initially the National Agency will compile an overall national survey of the major subject areas that describes the programmes to be evaluated in any given year.

In the next stage these national surveys will be used as the basis of a selection of subjects, programmes or individual courses. This selection is based on self-evaluations, key statistics and other factual material. Programmes which this material suggests may run the risk of failing to maintain sound quality will always be selected for in-depth evaluation. The choice may also be made for other reasons, for instance a programme may have an interesting focus, be innovative or an example of good practice.

The third stage means that the programmes selected undergo an in-depth appraisal. The decision to make an in-depth appraisal is made by the University Chancellor on the basis of material presented by the project administrator responsible.

Evaluations of subjects and programmes will also take place in the future in accordance with a six-year plan. In the next six-year plan changes have been made to coordinate the appraisal of programmes in related subject areas, which will make it easier to provide a national impression of the major disciplines.¹⁰ At the same time this will offer greater possibility of equivalent assessments of programmes in a broad subject area. It should also offer benefits for the hig-

9. The question of whether some form of sanction is needed if a higher education institution fails to take the measures required has been discussed. In Norway, for instance, no new programmes may be launched if the internal quality assurance system does not fulfill certain basic demands. At the moment we can see no need for the introduction of any similar system.

10. The organisation of the six-year cycles is still based on major subject even though this concept has been replaced in the new degree ordinance with "main subject area of the programme". There are reasons for assuming that subject, at least during a transitional period, will be one relevant point of departure when the higher education institutions organise their programmes.

her education institutions as this coordination will mean that the appraisal of faculties will be concentrated to a limited period of time.¹¹

The overall appraisal and the production of the national surveys will, as during the previous round of evaluations, cover all subjects and programmes that lead to the award of at least a bachelor's degree or a vocational qualification. This means that all the degrees in the new degree ordinance will be evaluated. The responsibility for evaluating complete local programmes will, as before, rest with the individual higher education institutions.

One important aim of the national surveys is to provide information about the areas evaluated: where programmes in Sweden are offered; what profiles they adopt; how many undergraduate and graduate students there are at the different institutions; the number of teachers and their educational backgrounds; resources and infrastructure; other factors that significantly affect the programmes and a general impression of the quality of what is offered.

The national surveys will be produced by analysts at the National Agency, who co-opt subject experts for the task of appraising subject-specific issues. The national surveys will be based on data, key statistics and simplified self-evaluations. Web-based questionnaires addressed to different stakeholders, for instance students and teachers, may also be used. On the other hand no site visits will take place during this stage. It is only the subjects, programmes and individual courses selected for in-depth evaluation that will receive site-visits.

What a simplified self-evaluation implies is made clear by the Instructions for simplified self-evaluation being drawn up by the National Agency. The simplification consists of a reduction of the number of aspects to be evaluated and the requirement that every quality aspect has to be analysed has been removed. However, an overall analysis is still required.

In addition to their self-evaluations the programmes evaluated will also compile certain statistical information about their teaching staff, students, degree projects, graduate students and degrees awarded in graduate programmes. On the basis of these data the National Agency will produce the key statistics to be presented in the national surveys. The key statistics will describe teaching resources, teachers' qualifications, resources for supervision, performance level and the proportion of permanently appointed teachers in undergraduate programmes and the qualifications of the supervisors and throughput in graduate programmes.¹²

The simplified self-evaluations with their appendices will also provide the basis for in-depth evaluations. These will adopt similar methods to the current evaluations of subjects and programmes, with panels of assessors and site-visits. Before the in-depth evaluations take place, the panels of assessors will have the

11. The six-year plan for the evaluation of subjects and programmes can be found in Appendix 7.

12. Definitions of the key statistics and what they are based on is shown in Appendix 5.

possibility of requesting supplementary material to cover any gaps in the data supplied. However, new self-evaluations will not be required.

The aspects and criteria for the evaluation of the quality of programmes are worded in general terms and intended to specify the areas and the general standards that programmes are expected to attain.¹³ Before every evaluation these will be formulated in concrete terms on the basis of the programmes involved. This will be the task of the experts in the panels of assessors appointed for each evaluation. They alone have the expertise and the insights required. Their guidelines will be provided by the new degree ordinance and the learning outcomes that have been drawn up in the framework of the Bologna agreement.¹⁴

Just as in the current system, the panels of assessors will draw up an opinion or report on which the National Agency will base any decisions it makes. In cases where the in-depth evaluation reveals shortcomings in quality of a serious nature, the National Agency will also continue to question the entitlement of the higher education institution to award a degree. The institution will then have one year in which to remedy the shortcomings indicated.

Appraisal of entitlement to award degrees

Appraisal of entitlement to award degrees will continue to be an important element in the quality assurance system. The basis for these appraisals has, however, been revised and adapted to the changes in the degree ordinance that are a consequence of the Bologna process. A new degree at advanced level, the degree of master, is to be introduced. Many of the appraisals of entitlement to award degrees will concern master's degrees in the next few years.¹⁵

The National Agency has drawn up a proposal for the quality aspects and criteria on which appraisal of entitlement to award degrees will be based.¹⁶ These criteria are general ones. The concrete criteria that will apply for each specific appraisal must be determined by the panel of assessors appointed. Only they have the expertise and the insight required for such concretisation. The descriptions of degree objectives (learning outcomes) in the new degree ordinance are to provide the guidelines for this task.¹⁷

13. The aspects and criteria for subject and programme evaluations can be found in Appendix 2.

14. A survey of the differences between bachelor's and the various master's degrees in the new degree ordinance is provided in Appendix 4.

15. The National Agency is itself entitled to withdraw entitlement to award degrees at basic and advanced level. The Agency has also expressed a desire for this to apply to degrees at graduate level as well.

16. Aspect and criteria for appraisal of the entitlement to award degrees can be found in Appendix 3.

17. See Appendix 4.

The method used for these appraisals will resemble an in-depth evaluation of a subject or programme, with a panel of external assessors, a site visit, expert opinion and a decision by the University Chancellor.

A description of the master's degree and the learning outcomes can be found in the Higher Education Ordinance that will take effect from 1 July 2007. Programmes leading to the award of a master's degree are to have a specific focus to be determined by each higher education institution itself and comprise advanced study within a major area. The ordinance also states that the National Agency is to ascertain whether the quality and extent of the academic environment in the subject area is adequate to enable the institution to offer a programme with close links to programmes at graduate level.

In other words, the current narrow concept of "major subject" is to be replaced by "major area" to describe advanced study in relation to programmes at basic level. How the concept of "major area" is to be interpreted will form part of the appraisals to be made.

The National Agency will appraise applications from the higher education institutions that are not entitled to provide PhD studies in a discipline that is relevant for the programme that will lead to the award of a master's degree. The applications are to specify the degree title desired in the form of a pre-determiner or post-determiner that indicates the area of specialisation. These applications will be appraised continuously as and when they are submitted. Applications submitted by 15 October will, if possible, be appraised during the same academic year.

Thematic studies

In order to shed light on more general aspects of quality, the National Agency has undertaken a number of thematic evaluations of areas that are central to quality in higher education. The themes studied so far are gender equality, student influence, diversity, cooperation with the surrounding community and internationalisation. Currently the student support offered by the higher education institutions is being evaluated.

The aim of these evaluations has been to provide a national overview of how certain aspects of quality are being dealt with. This kind of national overview, where the doings of all the higher education institutions are studied at the same time, also makes it possible to make comparisons and highlight examples of good practice. The idea is that these evaluations should provide inspiration and spur other institutions to improve quality.

The experiences from the thematic evaluations have been positive and they should continue. However, these evaluations have provided surveys and their emphasis has been on describing and appraising rather than on probing, analysing and explaining.

We envisage an increasing need of thematic studies which are intended to disclose new knowledge about higher education in Sweden. At the moment

three thematic studies of this kind are taking place, in which external researchers have been engaged to cooperate with the National Agency in studying issues that play an important role for the quality of programmes. Within the framework of these projects different forms of examination and degree projects are being compared and also the links with research of various programmes at different higher education institutions. There are many examples of other areas that would be interesting subjects for similar studies, for instance teachers' working conditions and academic governance.

Thematic studies should be regarded as an integrated aspect of the quality assurance system in which the results of evaluations of higher education institutions or of subjects and programmes can be probed into more deeply. Thematic studies can also be initiated in other ways, for instance issues can be raised by the Ministry, the higher education institutions, students, future employers or other stakeholders.

We believe that there will be a great demand for the results of these studies. The aim is that they should be used as the basis for discussions that will lead to knowledge-based improvement measures at the higher education institutions.

Centres of excellent quality in higher education

Hitherto, most of the components of the system that have been described are intended to monitor quality with a focus on the lowest acceptable levels. There are few incentives for educational organisations that already maintain high standards to seek further improvements in what they offer. This is the main reason for the introduction of a distinction for centres of excellent educational quality.

Distinguishing centres of educational excellence at national level is new for Sweden, although awards of this kind exist in several other Nordic and European countries, among them Norway, Finland and England.

The aim of distinguishing centres of educational excellence is to stimulate quality enhancement and to inspire others by offering examples of good practice. One important element in this – possibly more important than the award itself – is the process that arises at higher education institution level and the light shed on its operations when an application is submitted. The feedback from the panel of external assessors and the positive publicity that results from the award of the distinction are, of course, also important.

Applications are voluntary and the higher education institutions themselves decide which educational organisations they want to nominate as particularly excellent. These may be units, departments, sections, centres or organisational collaboration between different units. They may be offering programmes at basic level, advanced level or graduate level.

The educational organisations that apply for the distinction have to submit a report which offers a convincing description and analysis of how they operate

and how this benefits the learning of their students. They must also provide convincing evidence of their results and the way in which they are particularly outstanding. To provide guidance, the National Agency has listed a number of aspects on which appraisal will be based.¹⁸ In order not to restrict the opportunity to apply for the distinction the National Agency has opted to specify these at a general level. The Agency assumes that a centre of educational excellence will have local learning outcomes and clearly formulated criteria for their attainment. In addition to the general aspects, the higher education institutions must also account for and analyse their own circumstances and the criteria for and attainment of the centre's local learning outcomes.

Evaluation will be carried out by panels of highly qualified, international experts who are particularly familiar with issues relating to centres of educational excellence. Site visits will be made to the organisations that can be considered to have any chance of being awarded the distinction on the basis of their applications. The requirements for the award of the distinction will be very stringent. We expect that only a few organisations are likely to be considered for this award each year.

The aims of the system and its inherent structure

Overall aims

The quality assurance system is intended to function as a coherent system in which the various components interact with and support each other. The National Agency's evaluations will continue to have three main aims – monitoring, development and information – but different emphasis will be given to each of these aims in the system's various elements.

The audits of the quality procedures at the higher education institutions, which have previously focused on development, will now also contain an element of inspection with predetermined aspects and evaluation criteria. The national survey produced during the subject and programme evaluations will mainly be for information purposes, whereas the in-depth evaluations will focus more on inspection. There has always been an explicit inspection aspect to the appraisals of the entitlement to award degrees but indirectly they offer strong incentives for development when quality requirements are not fulfilled. The thematic studies have primarily been intended to provide information but indirectly they lead to quality improvement. The development aspect can most clearly be seen in the distinction of centres of educational excellence.

Extent and emphases

The extent of the various components varies. Evaluation of subjects and programmes – which occupies about 80 per cent of the time, energy and resources

18. Aspects and criteria for appraisal of centres of educational excellence are listed in Appendix 8.

currently allocated by the National Agency for evaluation – will be reduced to about half, 40 per cent, but will still comprise the largest component in the system. The scope that this will then allow will be used among other things for auditing the quality procedures of the higher education institutions, which we calculate will require about 30 per cent of our resources. About 15 per cent of the resources will be allocated to appraisal of entitlement to award degrees,¹⁹ while 10 per cent will be available for thematic studies. The selection of centres of educational excellence will be the smallest component in the system. Initially we calculate that about 5 per cent of our resources will be required for this purpose.

Interaction between different components

Certain synergies can be attained from the interaction of different components in the system. There may be advantages to reviewing more general quality aspects such as gender equality, cooperation with the surrounding community and internationalisation – which have previously been appraised in subject and programme evaluations or in specific thematic studies – during the audits of the higher education institutions' quality procedures. Governance and administrative issues, which are central in institutional audits, may provide help in understanding the findings of subject and programme evaluations. In cases where the subject and programme evaluations reveal that it has not been possible to maintain good standards at a certain institution, it will be possible during institutional audits to raise questions about whether this had been discovered by the institution's own quality assurance system and, if so, what measures this had prompted in the institution. Correspondingly, it will be possible to see if there is any link between centres of educational excellence and sound quality procedures. Thematic studies can shed light on and advance our knowledge about various phenomena and results revealed by other evaluations.

One ambition in the new quality assurance system is to acquire greater understanding of the prevailing circumstances in which quality measures are undertaken, what processes are involved and what results are achieved.

19. To begin with considerably more resources may be needed for this purpose if there is major onrush of applications for entitlement to award master's degrees, but we expect the situation to stabilise after one or two years.

Implementing the quality assurance system

Timetable

During the spring of 2007 the current quality assurance system will be gradually phased out while at the same time elements of the new system will be phased in.

During the autumn of 2006 a pilot study is already being undertaken in which the National Agency is auditing quality procedures at Södertörn University College according to the new evaluation model. From the following year and up to 2012 six to nine higher education institutions will be audited every year according to a predetermined plan. In this plan the institutions are divided up so that those with similar circumstances will be audited during the same year. The start-up meetings for the first round are expected to take place during the autumn of 2007.²⁰

The evaluations of subjects and programmes will also be conducted according to a six-year plan. This has been structured to enable subjects in similar disciplines to be reviewed in the same year. Coordinating subjects in the same subject areas during each year can also help to provide some degree of readiness for the evaluation of the new, broader master's programmes which are likely to be created as a result of the new degree ordinance.²¹

The evaluations of subjects and programmes will begin with start-up meetings with the course providers concerned in the autumn of 2007. They will be followed by the institutions' self-evaluation processes, which will finish during the spring of 2008. This means that the first in-depth evaluations of subjects and programmes will begin in the spring of 2009, at the same time as the new national surveys are being produced. A complete evaluation of all subjects and programmes according to the new system will therefore not be complete before 2014.

The deferral of the subject and programme evaluation has been deliberate to create scope for the large number of applications for entitlement to award master's degrees that we expect to be submitted during the first two years of the period.

It should be noted here that a special evaluation of teacher-training programmes will be arranged as the result of an earlier decision. The evaluation of teacher-training programmes will use the old model with initial meetings taking place in February 2007, self-evaluations during the spring of 2007, site visits during the autumn of the same year and a report to be submitted in March 2008.

20. The six-year plan for the audits of the higher education institutions' quality procedures can be found in Appendix 6.

21. The six-year plan for evaluations of subjects and programmes can be found in Appendix 7.

The appraisal of entitlement to award degrees will offer the National Agency an opportunity to test the new aspects and criteria that have been drawn up as a result of the new degree ordinance before the subject and programme evaluations begin. They can also offer the higher education institutions guidance in their decisions to introduce master's programmes.

As has already been mentioned, the National Agency has already begun several of the new types of thematic studies. In the future, we expect to undertake one or two thematic studies every year. We will also conduct one or two thematic evaluations during the coming six-year period.

The first call for applications for the distinction of "Centre of educational excellence" will be sent to all the higher education institutions in January 2007. Evaluation of the applications and site visits will take place between May and October of the same year. The first awards will be made in December 2007. It is intended to repeat the same procedure annually during the coming six-year period. A decision will be made about the continuation of the award after 2012 after evaluation of the experiences gained.²²

Initially there will be a small-scale test of reviews and evaluations where the working language is English. The first will be the appraisals of the applications for the distinction of centre of educational excellence. These applications are to be written in English.

The National Agency also expects to test the use of English as a working language in one or a few audits of the higher education institutions' quality procedures. Some of the subject and programme evaluations may also be conducted with English as the working language, probably not, however, during the first year when the new system is introduced.

The decision on which audits and evaluations are to be undertaken with English as the working language will be made in consultation with the higher education institutions involved.

Follow-up

Different forms of follow-up are important in all quality assurance systems. The National Agency will therefore continue to place great importance on follow-up. The higher education institutions that have taken part in audits of their quality procedures during a specific year will be invited to a feedback conference about three months after the publication of the report. This will allow discussion of the audit process and of the final report. A great deal of attention will be paid to the judgements made and improvement measures proposed.

The purpose of the feedback conferences is to acquire opinions from the higher education institutions that could lead to improvements in future audits

22. The timetable for the work with the distinction of Centres of Educational Excellence can be found in Appendix 9.

and also to initiate a discussion of how work with quality at the institutions can be improved.

Both the quality audits and the in-depth subject and programme evaluations will be followed up after three years. This will take the form of questionnaires sent to the higher education institutions and the programmes concerned. The aim of the three-year follow-up is to find out how the institutions and the programmes have dealt with the recommendations of the panels of assessors and any measures they may have proposed. The very fact that this follow-up takes place is in itself also a factor that stimulates quality.

In addition to the follow-up with the higher education institutions and the programmes evaluated, follow-up also takes place with the panels of assessors. Specific follow-up is also arranged with all the student representatives participating in panels during the year. This kind of follow-up is intended to provide continuous improvement of the National Agency's evaluations.

Finally, external review and evaluation of the National Agency's quality assurance system is arranged. This is carried out by independent researchers and international panels of assessors. These evaluations will also continue during the coming six-year period.

Appendix I: Categories and criteria in evaluating quality assurance procedures

Goals and general principles

	Criteria	Criteria	Criteria
Categories	Initiated	Under development	Developed
1. The higher education institution's goals for quality assurance procedures	Goals for systematic quality assurance procedures established.	The goals incorporate a large part of the institution's activities but are limited in terms of application.	The goals incorporate most of the institution's activities and are part of a whole.
2. Policy, organisation and accountability	Documentation of policy, organisation and accountability exists.	Documentation of policy, organisation and accountability exists and is utilised.	Policy, organisation and accountability are well integrated and documentation is generally available.
3. Support for and broad participation in quality assurance procedures at all levels, including among students	Information about quality assurance procedures has been given to teachers, students and other employees.	Quality assurance procedures are well known among teachers, students and other employees, who also participate.	Quality assurance procedures are well known among teachers, students and other employees, who also participate actively and to a great extent.

Implementation

4. The higher education institution has a system for following up all activities	Follow-ups occur randomly.	Follow-ups occur with some regularity and provide useful information.	Follow-ups occur on a continuous and systematic basis, and provide useful information.
5. Results of follow-ups are analysed	Results are analysed occasionally.	Results are analysed with some regularity which provides useful information.	Results are analysed on a continuous basis and systematically at all levels, which provides useful information.
6. Action plans are drawn up as a result of analyses	Action plans are occasionally drawn up.	Action plans that are drawn up provide good grounds for applying measures.	Action plans are drawn up on a continuous basis at all levels, and provide good grounds for applying measures.

7. Action plans are implemented and the effects analysed	Implementation occurs sporadically and some effects are analysed.	Implementation occurs of action plans which have been drawn up, and effects are analysed.	Implementation occurs and effects are analysed on a continuous and systematic basis.
8. Follow-ups and development of the quality assurance system	Some routines exist for revisions and development.	The quality assurance system is followed up with some regularity.	The quality assurance system is followed, revised and developed on a continuous and systematic basis.

General

9. Routines for the introduction, development, revising and discontinuing of training and other programmes	Routines are in place.	Routines are in place and are followed and developed in most units.	Appropriate routines are in place and are followed and developed in all units.
10. Routines for hiring competent personnel and for competency development	Routines for hiring and for staff development are in place, but not as an integrated part of quality assurance procedures.	Routines for hiring and for staff development are in place at the central level and are followed in most units.	Routines are in place and are systematically used to find and hire the best candidates, and staff development is used systematically and strategically.
11. Cooperation internally and with other higher education institutions nationally and internationally	Some cooperation internally and with other higher education institutions nationally and internationally.	Cooperation is frequent internally and with other higher education institutions, nationally and internationally.	Cooperation is frequent internally and with other higher education institutions, nationally and internationally, and is used as a basis for internal development.
12. Cooperation with external stakeholders	Some cooperation with external stakeholders.	Cooperation with external stakeholders is frequent.	Cooperation with external stakeholders is frequent and is used as a basis for internal development.
13. Internationalisation	Plans for internationalisation exist.	Plans for internationalisation are followed up in most units.	Systematic follow-ups give rise to continuous improvements.
14. Gender equality and diversity	Plans for gender equality and diversity have been drafted.	Plans for gender equality and diversity are followed up in most units.	Systematic follow-ups give rise to continuous improvements.

15. Student representation	Student representatives are included in decision-making and drafting groups at the higher education institution.	The higher education institution has routines for guaranteeing that part-time students and distance learning students are represented as well.	The higher education institution continually follows up how student representation is working at different levels, and applies measures when necessary.
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Results and effects of quality assurance procedures

16. Ensuring that quality assurance procedures lead to results in the form of evaluations carried out, studies, etc.	Studies are conducted and some results are reported.	Studies are conducted and results are reported for most units.	Studies are conducted systematically and their results are reported.
17. Ensuring that quality assurance procedures lead to results in the form of improvements to activities	Studies are conducted and some results are reported.	Studies are conducted and results are reported for most units.	Studies are conducted systematically and their results are reported.
18. Ensuring that quality assurance procedures lead to effects in the longer term	Studies are conducted and results are reported.	Studies are conducted and results are reported for most units.	Studies are conducted systematically and their results are reported.

Appendix 2: Aspects and criteria for the evaluation of subjects and programmes

Circumstantial factors

Teaching resources

- that the number of permanently employed teachers and others is in proportion to the dimensions of the programme,
- that the teachers have the academic qualifications, teaching qualifications and other skills required to teach and offer supervision in the programme,
- that the teachers have genuine opportunities to enhance their skills and carry out their own research/own artistic development work,

Educational setting

- that the programme is offered in an environment in which research/artistic development is taking place,
- that the programme provides the conditions to enable a critical and creative approach,

Infrastructure

- that undergraduate and graduate students have good access to books, IT-resources and other equipment that may be necessary,

Organisation of the programme

Regulatory documents

- that the syllabuses contain learning objectives (expected study outcomes) that have been formulated in accordance with the degree ordinance,

Teaching, reading lists and examinations

- that teaching, reading lists and examinations are designed so that they ensure that there are links with research/artistic development and progressivity,

Outcomes

Attainment of degree outcomes

- that requirements are clearly documented, for instance in the form of grade criteria or the like, and are made explicit in instructions for examinations, degree projects and other forms of examination,
- that the higher education institution can demonstrate that its undergraduate or graduate students attain degree objectives and learning outcomes.

Appendix 3: Aspects and criteria for the appraisal of entitlement to award degrees

Circumstantial factors

Teaching resources

- that the number of permanently employed and other teachers is in proportion to the estimated extent of the programme,
- that the teachers have the academic and teaching qualifications as well as other skills required to teach and offer supervision in the programme,
- that the teachers have genuine opportunities to enhance their skills and carry out their own research/artistic development work.

Educational setting

- that the programme is offered in an environment in which research/artistic development is taking place,
- that the programme provides the conditions to enable a critical and creative approach,

Infrastructure

- that undergraduate/graduate students have access to texts, IT-resources and other equipment that may be necessary,

Organisation of the programme

Regulatory documents

- that the syllabuses contain learning objectives (expected study outcomes) that have been formulated in accordance with the degree ordinance,

Teaching, reading lists and examinations

- that teaching, reading lists and examinations ensure that there are links with research/artistic development and progressivity,

Outcomes

Attainment of degree outcomes

- that requirements are clearly documented, for instance in the form of grade criteria or the like, and are made explicit in instructions for examinations, degree projects and other forms of examination,
- that the higher education institution can show that the programme will provide undergraduate/graduate students with good possibilities of attaining the degree outcomes.

Appendix 4

Please see the Higher Education Ordinance for a survey of learning outcomes for Bachelor's and Master's Degrees.

Appendix 5: Key ratios in the evaluation of subjects and programmes

Programmes at basic and advanced level

All figures are accounted for per level

Teaching resources	=	$\frac{\text{Full-time equivalent students}}{\text{Full-time equivalent teachers}}$
Teaching qualifications	=	$\frac{\text{Full-time equivalent students}}{\text{Full-time equivalent teachers with PhD's}}$
Supervisors' qualifications	=	$\frac{\text{Number of theses examined}}{\text{Full-time equivalent teachers with PhD's}}$
Performance level	=	$\frac{\text{Annual performance equivalents}}{\text{Full-time equivalent students}}$
Proportion permanently employed	=	$\frac{\text{Full-time equivalent permanently employed}}{\text{Total number of full-time equivalents}}$
Graduate programmes		
Supervisors' qualifications	=	$\frac{\text{Full-time equivalent graduate students}}{\text{Full-time equivalent professors, research fellows}}$
Throughput	=	$\frac{\text{Total new enrolments four to six years ago} - \text{Total awarded PhD's of this group up until previous year}}$

Appendix 6: Six-year plan for quality assurance audits

2007 – University colleges that do not offer graduate programmes

University College of Borås
Dalarna University College
University College of Gotland
University College of Gävle
University College of Halmstad
Kristianstad University College
University College of Skövde
University College West
Södertörn University College

2008 – New universities and university colleges with graduate programmes

Jönköping University Foundation
University College of Kalmar
Karlstad University
University College of Malmö
Mid-Sweden University
University College of Mälardalen
Växjö University
Örebro University

2009 – The older universities

Göteborg University
Linköping University
Lund University
Stockholm University
Umeå University
Uppsala University

2010 – Specialist institutions of higher education

Blekinge Institute of Technology
Chalmers University of Technology
Stockholm University College of Physical Education and Sports
Stockholm School of Economics
Karolinska institutet
KTH – Royal Institute of Technology

Luleå University of Technology
Stockholm Institute of Education
SLU – Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

2011 – Certain independent higher education institutions

The Erica Foundation
Ersta Sköndal University College
Gammelkroppa School of Forestry
Johannelund Theological Seminary
The Red Cross University College of Nursing
Sophiahemmet University College
University College of Music Education
Stockholm School of Theology
Örebro Theological Seminary

2012 – University colleges of fine arts and creative arts

Beckmans College of Design
University College of Dance
University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre
University College of Arts, Crafts and Design (Konstfack)
Royal University College of Fine Arts
Royal College of Music in Stockholm
University College of Opera
National Academy of Mime and Acting

Appendix 7: Six-year plan for evaluations of subjects and programmes

The new six-year plan has been organised to enable the evaluation of related subjects at the same time. This will make it easier to produce the national surveys and improve the possibilities of organising appraisals on equivalent terms. At the same time it has been endeavoured to ensure that at least three years will have elapsed between the publication of the latest evaluation report and the implementation of the next evaluation. In one or two cases it has been impossible to comply with both criteria.

2008 – Humanities, teacher training and education

Classical archaeology and ancient history
Archaeology
Archive and library studies, museology
Children's and youth culture (Theme: Children)
Egyptology
Ethnology (Theme: Ethnicity, IMER)
Philosophy subjects
History
History of science and ideas
Cultural studies (Theme: Q, Social and cultural analysis, Culture and media production)
Theology and religious studies

Teaching qualifications for the folk high schools
Teaching qualifications

Education subjects
Degrees in special education

2009 – Social sciences

Work science
Demography
Dietetics/Domestic science (Theme: Food)
Economics (incl. Public finance and administration, Service management)
Economic history
Peace and conflict studies
Informatics
Cognitive science

Cultural and social anthropology
Psychology/Psychology qualifications /Psychotherapy qualifications
Sociology (Theme: Health and the community, Theme: Technology and social change, Technology and scientific studies, Theme: The elderly and ageing)
Political science

2010 – Humanities, languages

Linguistics/Linguistic science (Theme: Communication, Graduate school: Language and culture in Europe)
Literature
Non-literary translation

English
Finno-Ugric languages
Classical languages
Modern Greek
Oriental and African languages
Romance languages
Swedish/Nordic languages
Slavic/Baltic languages
German/Dutch
East Asian languages

2011 – Natural sciences and technology

Biology subjects (Theme: Water)
Computer science subjects
Physics subjects
Chemistry subjects
Mathematics
Environmental science
Statistics

Physical planning
Master's programmes in engineering
Bachelor's programmes in engineering
Master Mariner and maritime programmes
Graduate programmes in the technological sciences

2012 – Natural sciences, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, physical education and medicine

Agrarian programmes

Geography

Earth sciences

Human ecology

Physical education studies

Cultural geography

Programmes at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Pharmacology

Graduate programmes in the faculties of medicine

Public health science

Health and medical care administration

Managing health and welfare organisations

Dentistry

Professional qualifications in medicine and care

2013 - Humanities, social sciences and fine arts

Gender studies (Theme: Gender)

Journalism

Law subjects

Media and communication studies

Study and career guidance

Tourism studies

Artistic subjects:

- fine art
- design and applied art
- interactive media
- music
- dramatic performance and direction

Film studies

Musicology

History of art

Theatre studies

Appendix 8: Aspects and criteria for the appraisal of centres of educational excellence

The organisations that apply for this distinction must be very well organised and eminent in their fulfilment of both national and local objectives in their programmes. The following aspects and criteria are provided as guidelines.

In order to be appraised for award of the distinction the application must clearly indicate

- that there is an organisational structure, a quality assurance system and infrastructure that function exceptionally well,
- that the organisation is run by a competent management/administration and committed teachers with the relevant knowledge, experience and capacities,
- that the organisation is firmly underpinned by an explicit and robust academic and/or artistic foundation and/or tried and tested experience,
- that the teaching and forms of examination used in the organisation are designed in accordance with the contents and objectives of its programme,
- that student learning is fostered in an eminent manner, and also
- that the centre's students attain exceptional results.

The application should also indicate clearly

- the factors of educational success
- why these lead to exceptional results.

Appendix 9: Timetable for the selection process for centres of educational excellence

January: The National Agency circulates an invitation to Vice-Chancellors to apply for the distinction of “Centre of educational excellence for 200X. The application form and guidelines for the application will be published on the National Agency for Higher Education’s web site.

1 May: Closing date for submission of applications and material for appraisal to the National Agency for Higher Education.

May–June: The staff of the National Agency and the panel of experts will conduct a preliminary appraisal on the basis of the material attached to the applications. A small number of applications will then go on to a second assessment round. Site visits of one to two days will be made to the organisations selected for further appraisal.

August–October: The panel of experts analyse the material presented in the applications and their findings during the site visits and make their evaluations.

November: The National Agency reaches a decision and announces which organisations are to receive the distinction of centres of educational excellence for 2007.

December: Key figures from these organisations will be invited, together with the Vice-Chancellors of their higher education institutions, to Stockholm where the distinction will be conferred ceremoniously. Alternatively the distinction will be awarded at a ceremony during the National Agency’s quality conference.

