

*The National
Quality Audit of
Higher Education
in Sweden*

National Agency for Higher Education 1996

The National Quality Audit of Higher Education in Sweden
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*Basis, Background, Methodology
and Approaches of the National Swedish
Agency for Higher Education*

The National Swedish Agency for Higher Education
Department of Evaluation and Quality Audit
November, 1995

In this report, the National Swedish Agency for Higher Education (*Högskoleverket*) presents the basis for its implementation of quality auditing at Swedish universities and colleges, as well as a description of what is evaluated and how the evaluation is to be carried out. This presentation will provide an introduction to the basis for the quality audit, together with guidance concerning methodology and approaches.

A more detailed presentation of the evaluative process and its practical application may be found in the two appendices: *The National Quality Audit of Higher Education in Sweden: Guidelines for Institutions* (Appendix 1), and *The National Quality Audit of Higher Education in Sweden: Auditors' Handbook* (Appendix 2). They are intended for (i) Swedish universities and colleges, and (ii) members of the external peer review groups (audit teams) involved in the National Agency quality audits, respectively.

This document should not be regarded as having assumed its final form, but primarily be seen as an instrument for the evaluations intended for the year 1995/96. The experiences provided by these evaluations will form the basis for an ongoing review and development of the approaches and methodology to be used in the coming years.

I Assessment for Improvement

*“Everything should be done as simply as possible –
but not more so.”*

– Albert Einstein

Quality

Most of us have a general idea and intuitive sense of quality and what it means. Yet if we attempt more exactly to define what we mean by quality, we soon run into difficulties. Quite often, speaking about a lack of quality seems simpler. Dictionary derivations of quality and its current definition can of course provide a certain guidance, but it is obvious that such a definition is insufficient to cover the concept as it has been developed in recent years.

It may seem self-evident that quality is a beacon shining forth for all academic activity, educational or otherwise, and research in particular. After all, is not all evaluation of the results of teaching and research based on the concept of quality? And the explanation for our science-oriented civilization’s notable achievements in a large number of fields—is this explanation not to be found in a well-functioning system which tightly controls quality? The connection between quality and control of quality (*quality assurance*) would seem obvious if we compare the quality of scientific articles published in international journals which use rigorous scrutiny through the referee process, and those in journals and publications that lack such a control system.

Yet the discussions familiar to us from recent years concerning the concept of quality would never have taken place if it were a simple and unambiguous concept covering certain measurable properties which usually characterize the popular and unreflecting conception of quality. Nor would the concept have survived the scrutiny and interest it has aroused in recent years if it had not been considered of major importance by universities and colleges as well as society at large.

Dynamic Concept

As the publicly perceived concept of quality has grown more sophisticated during recent years, we have seen a movement from a merely static description of certain properties to above all the acceptance of a *dynamic* concept which instead describes a certain way of acting, an attitude, a certain environment, a culture. This change can be described as the shift from a static concept of quality defined by predetermined quality parameters, to a dynamic force for change, something clearly seen in the conclusions of the recent Swedish government white paper on resources: “Quality is neither an objectively determinable nor an unchanging property of a phenomenon. Quality is a judgement about this phenomenon, made by a stake-holder or interested party—on a given occasion—grounded in a subjective judgement of its value for him or her.” (*Swedish Government Official Reports, SOU 1993:102.*)

The concept of quality in its normative and static sense (i.e. fulfilling given demands and specifications) has not vanished; indeed, it continues to be as relevant and as necessary as ever. Quality as a dynamic concept, however, is a dimension that is dependent on its surroundings and fundamental values, a changeable, evolving dimension that can involve attitudes and outlooks, creative environments, processes and approaches.

It is clear that this expansion and development in the concept of quality entails the risk of it being conceived of as diffuse, far too “soft” to be able to produce necessary changes and improvements. Experience demonstrates, however, that correct use of the concept of quality as a dynamic quantity is the most effective and “hardest” method for obtaining change and renewal. It is highly probable that this applies to the academic world, as well.

As noted above, quality and quality assessment are experienced as both prerequisites for and natural components of higher education and research. The achievements that the research community can point to are to a great extent based on a rigorous and exacting system of quality assessment. Discussions of quality have in recent years to a great extent concerned how to strengthen the status of undergraduate education and create a better environment for improvement, renewal and flexibility.

The need for a well functioning quality assessment system has been emphasized in times of financial retrenchment, in order to obtain the greatest possible value for the resources invested in this sector. This state of affairs is intended to function as a quality-enhancing force. Through careful measurements of quality according to certain norms or quality indicators, the argument runs, the results these measurements yield can be utilized to obtain necessary and desirable improvements in quality.

Nevertheless, experience and the result of this approach intended to produce a change and renewal – thus resulting in quality enhancement – points, paradoxically enough, to the reverse: the result is normally preservative in nature, rather than the desired renewal.

Focus on Undergraduate Education

In order to achieve a true quality enhancement, where quality is perceived as a dynamic measure, the National Swedish Agency for Higher Education has dedicated itself to focusing on, understanding and contributing to the development of the processes that lead to a culture or attitude systematically committed to renewal and improvement, in order to reach an ever higher quality of performance. If it is to retain its credibility in the long run, this quality commitment must lead to measurably higher quality. We must therefore find means that will assure us of this.

In international evaluation circles, one usually distinguishes between *assessment*, or evaluation of quality, and *auditing*, the examination and evaluation of the ongoing implementation of quality programs. Evaluation of quality and evaluation of quality implementation do of course have many aspects in common. The evaluation of quality provides the answer as to whether quality programs have had any effect. When evaluating, it is important that the object of evaluation be carefully defined. In *assessment*, it is the quality that is evaluated, while in an *audit*, it is the processes intended to lead to higher quality that are evaluated. In the latter case, it is therefore important to evaluate the entirety, rather than individual details. The quality audit the National Agency provides of Swedish universities and colleges is intended to determine whether there exists a conscious and systematic approach, a culture, that enables a continual improvement in quality throughout its operations.

One starting point for my concern with quality has been the belief that undergraduate education is at the heart of all university and college activities.

It is my conviction that a fundamental undergraduate education imbued with an awareness of and commitment to quality will lead to enhanced quality in all areas of university life. It will enhance quality in research by emphasizing the necessity of linking teaching to research. It will enhance quality in university interaction with society by demanding that the education offered be one that is relevant and that will enable students to find meaningful employment after graduation.

A Learning Process

The task upon which we are now embarking – the provision of a comprehensive audit or evaluation of quality enhancement programs and their implementation at every Swedish university and college – has been preceded by a long period of preparation, one which has transformed our view of quality and quality enhancement programs.

It is nevertheless important to note and emphasize that as we begin this national program, our choice of the form for the examination and evaluation of Swedish university quality enhancement programs and their enhancement is one that is new and untested. The agency audit is a learning process for all parties concerned, both the auditors and the academic institutions being evaluated, and not least for those who are ultimately responsible for higher education in Sweden: the Government and Parliament. It is not merely my hope, but also my conviction that if implemented with sufficient sensitivity to and knowledge of the academic world and its circumstances, this evaluative process will in itself constitute a quality-enhancing factor. Evaluation is not a question of judging correctly or incorrectly. A more appropriate metaphor would be the Swedish model of the open academic defense of a doctoral thesis, where provision is made not merely for an exchange of convictions and viewpoints, but of course also for an evaluation and examination of the method applied and its reliability.

One metaphor I have previously used to describe quality as an evolving dimension was to describe it as a journey: “Quality is a journey, not a destination.” This journey continues, and it is a wonderfully challenging and exciting task to participate in this journey, not least when I am privileged to share it with such committed and inspired companions.

Stig Hagström
The Swedish University Chancellor

II Quality Auditing by the National Swedish Agency for Higher Education

I Background

I.1 The 1993 Higher Education Reform

One important motive underlying Sweden's 1993 Higher Education Reform was the desire to stimulate renewal and flexibility in higher education and research, as well as strengthening the rôle of the individual student. Since higher education in Sweden is essentially the province of the public sector, it was possible to achieve this by means of a thoroughgoing decentralization that devolved responsibility and authority via what amounted to a radical deregulation of the Swedish university system. The new Higher Education Act and its accompanying ordinance provide universities and colleges with the means for far greater independence in decisions concerning e.g. admissions, forms of study, decision-making structure, types of academic posts and allocation of resources. A largely result-based resource allocation system for undergraduate education was introduced, in order to enable the development of programs and organizations in a result-oriented perspective of renewal.

Quality and efficiency have become key concepts in this connexion. In addition, the Government particularly emphasizes that this reform was also intended to strengthen both quality and efficiency in the operations of the various Swedish universities and colleges. The original intention was that a portion of the resource allocation would be directly related to an audit of the individual university's quality enhancement program. This was, however, never implemented; instead, Parliament specified that examination and evaluation of quality enhancement programs and their implementation was to play an important rôle in governmental decisions concerning higher education.

As the point of departure, each higher education institution is individually responsible for quality in its activities and programs, as well as for finding

forms for its quality enhancement programs and implementing them. In several connexions, the government specified that universities and colleges should actively seek to both assure and enhance quality and efficiency in their operations. In Part 1, Section 4, the Higher Education Act thus states that:

University operations shall be conducted such that a high level of quality is obtained, in education as well as in research and the sphere of artistic development. For both staff and students, it is a matter of mutual interest that university and college resources be utilized effectively, so as to maintain a high level of quality in all university operations.

I.2 Examination and Evaluation of Quality Enhancement Programs and their Implementation

For the individual higher education institution, responsibility for quality entails an obligation and responsibility to demonstrate to the Government and Parliament, and ultimately to the citizenry at large, how it is developing and assuring quality in its operations. Universities and colleges are thus responsible for providing information on their operations and results; the National Agency audit of their quality enhancement programs and their implementation is a part of governmental follow-up and evaluation of Swedish university and college operations. It is therefore the responsibility of the National Agency to apply the goals and guidelines specified by the government in various connexions, examining and testing how universities and colleges have lived up to these goals and guidelines.

The government specifies that what is to be evaluated are systematic quality enhancement programs at higher education institutions. Each university or college is to be evaluated at least once per three year period by a special group of auditors. The evaluation is to start from the institution's specific situation and be based on a holistic perspective whose starting point is that quality enhancement is an integrated part of the university's total operations.

2 Starting Points

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the National Agency evaluation is to establish an instrument for the promotion of continual improvement and renewal in the operations in Swedish higher education institutions. By doing so, the agency seeks to help create conditions that will enable Swedish universities and colleges to become known and recognized for their commitment to quality.

The purpose of evaluating university and college quality enhancement programs and their implementation is not to measure their results against some national norm, but to examine a publicly financed – and thus government-supported – activity, as given in the conditions and constraints that obtain in higher education and research, together with the specific conditions of various kinds that obtain at the individual higher education institution.

The approaches and methods applied by the National Agency are intended to further the commitment of Swedish academic institutions to self-regulation and improvement in their operations, starting from the goals set for these operations. Our aim is to strengthen the individual institution's own ability to (i) formulate goals and choose strategies for its operations, and (ii) make these goals and strategies manifest, evident and openly communicable within the institution itself, as well as in its relations to the government and other interested authorities, organizations and bodies.

The National Agency has sought to establish a consensus with universities and colleges as to the methods and approaches to be used. There is general agreement that the evaluation is to take place in a developmental perspective. As a consequence, there exists no general national model for quality enhancement programs; instead, the evaluation is to be based on the conditions that obtain in the individual institution. The evaluation is therefore to be regarded as a learning process, both for the individual institutions and for the agency and its auditors, which implies that the level of evaluative ambition can be raised as the evaluative process continues.

2.2 Excellence in the higher education institution

National Agency evaluations are based on a concept of what characterizes excellence in higher education institution. This concept should provide

guidance for the evaluative process and can also indirectly inspire university and college quality enhancement programs, as well as provide a common frame of reference within which goals and visions can be established, particularly for undergraduate education.

In the professional environment of the university or college, where concern for quality is a natural part of institutional activity, there is universal commitment to affirming and fulfilling the demands placed upon the institution and its operations. The good higher education institution will then be characterized in its operations by:

a) self-regulation and learning

The institution will examine and test its activities on a continual basis, carry out evaluations and follow-ups linked to planning and budgeting, establish a factual data base for its activities, respond to the results found therein and implement changes in order to obtain renewal and improvement—including, if necessary, the termination of certain commitments.

b) long-range planning

The institution plans and implements its activities in a long-term perspective, and takes measures that lead to permanent improvement in its operations.

c) an international perspective

The institution learns from, compares itself to and systematically cooperates with internationally renowned peer institutions with similar goals and operations, in order to obtain international recognition for its operations.

d) incisive leadership

The college or university leadership is seen as an active force for change at all levels, in addition to possessing a legitimacy that creates commitment, participation and willing assumption of responsibility throughout the institution.

e) co-operation with external interested parties

The college or university seeks to encourage an ongoing and systematic exchange of views with relevant organizations, authorities and groups in the community at large.

f) equality

The differences in knowledge, perspectives, experience and competence possessed by men and women are seen as quality-enhancing factors in the ongoing development of the institution.

g) focus on the student

The individual student is seen as one of the parties involved in the institution's operations, and an active participant in the search for knowledge.

3 Bodies to be audited

3.1 The auditing of quality enhancement programs and their implementation

In the preparation of the budget for Swedish universities and colleges, the current government regulations specify that quality audits are to concern the nature and implementation of university and college quality enhancement programs.

The audits conducted by the National Agency therefore concern the quality of their quality implementation, i.e. the goals, approaches, plans, systems, methods and organization that these higher education institutions employ when assuring and enhancing quality in their operations.

The National Agency audits are aimed at the quality enhancement activities of institutions, and are seen as a comprehensive activity consisting of various types of strategic commitments that initiate, coordinate and facilitate quality operations in the institute of higher education in question.

The National Agency also carries out other forms of evaluations, e.g. concerning the content and level of degree programs, or the concrete form of education as related *inter alia* to the aims of the Higher Education Act. Another form of evaluation concerns accreditation procedures for institutions wishing to grant university degrees, and the right to establish professorial chairs.

3.2 Overall strategic quality enhancement activities

A National Agency audit will concern quality implementation throughout the operations of the university or college, i.e. the work involved in achieving

and enhancing quality in undergraduate education, research, graduate education and the other tasks of the university or college in question. Evaluative priority will nevertheless be given to quality programs intended to support and develop undergraduate education.

The agency audit begins with the university as an organizational whole, and concerns the systematic and strategic efforts made to promote quality in the university's activities as a whole.

The external evaluation will thus affect quality activities at the faculty and departmental levels, as well as the administrative and other support functions. Its purpose is to elucidate and document the impact and effects of the quality programs as a whole, information necessary for relating the ongoing quality implementation at the university to the goals established for its activities and the situation of the university at that point in time.

Providing overall audits of this type is a complicated procedure. In practice, it implies that the external examination must focus on different parts of the quality implementation by the university or college in question. In this connection, it is of major importance to consider viewpoints or suggestions the university itself may provide about areas appropriate for examination.

3.3 Evaluative aspects

When evaluating implementation of quality enhancement, it is relevant to note the following aspects. The thrust and emphasis for the various aspects of the evaluation will become more precisely specified through a dialogue between the evaluative group and the university in question. Other aspects of relevance for the university may also be brought into consideration at this point.

These different aspects are by no means mutually exclusive, but interlock and overlap in numerous ways.

a) Strategy for quality implementation

What policy, plans and programs have been developed to realize overall goals and ambitions for quality enhancement and its implementation?

- How have the goals been operationalized?
- What form has been given to the organization and distribution of responsibility?

- How have priorities been set?
- How have resources been allocated?

b) Leadership

How is leadership exercised on different levels to e.g. impart visions, create motivation, participation and responsibility, discover and utilize creativity and the ability to initiate, develop competence and strategically implement and follow up on quality enhancement programs?

c) Co-operation among interested parties

In what ways have the external stakeholders (i.e. organizations, authorities and groups relevant to university activities) been identified, their needs and demands determined, and how has the university co-operated with them?

d) Universal participation in quality enhancement

How and to what extent are teachers, researchers, administrative personnel and students committed, involved and responsible participants in developing and implementing quality enhancement programs?

e) Integration

How is quality enhancement integrated into university work and its various components: undergraduate and graduate education, research, and the other tasks of the university?

f) Evaluatory and follow-up systems

What methods, routines and measures have been adopted for periodically recurring evaluations (self-evaluations and external evaluations), follow-ups and the resultant developmental commitments for both university activities and its support system? within its undergraduate and graduate educational programs and its research, the administration and university links to the community at large, business and industry;

- regarding recruitment and further staff development;
- regarding student admissions, support and service.

g) External professional relations

In what ways is the university pursuing national and international contacts and contact networks that will prove to be of long-term and permanent importance for the professional nature and future direction of university activities?

The task of the audit team is to investigate whether – and how – the above aspects are considered in the individual university’s goals and plans for its quality enhancement programs. In addition, the team should form an opinion as to which organization and methodology is being applied, as well as which resources are involved and how they are distributed. Finally, the audit should also encompass the implementation and results of the quality enhancement activities.

4 Approaches and implementations

4.1 General starting points

A crucial starting point in the relation between the auditor and the institution being evaluated is the principle of *responsibility*: the individual university or college is responsible for its activities and reporting its results.

The external evaluation can be considered as a proxy for the interests and demands of society at large, as regards quality and quality enhancement at the institution. The function of the evaluative process is to hold up a mirror to the institution, and through problematization seek to elucidate how the institution is working to attain and enhance quality, what results have been obtained, and which potential improvements can be made in this area.

The role of the institution is to provide documentation, information and a dialogue with the evaluators, in order to indicate how quality enhancement is being implemented. The function of the external audit is:

- together with the institution in question, to arrive at insight into and provide conclusions concerning the quality enhancement programs of the institution;
- in the process, to provide the institution with the basis for ongoing development and improvement of its quality enhancement program and its implementation;
- to present its audit in a manner that can provide the basis for governmental decisions.

The task of the audit team is to initiate discussions, spur self-examination and provide the basis for problem-solving. An open approach of this type to evaluation implies emphasizing the consultative role of the evaluation team,

and providing the institution's own self-evaluation with a decisive role in the evaluative process.

The final thrust and approach of the evaluation will be decided in the dialogue between the institution's administration, the National Agency, and the external evaluation team.

The total time for the auditing process, including self-evaluation and external peer group review, may normally be assumed to involve three to six months. The National Agency intends to complete its review of all Swedish universities and colleges by February 1999, so as to provide a basis for the three-year budget cycle beginning in 2000.

4.2 Institutional documentation

When audited, the university or college is to document its self-evaluation, annual reports (or materials whose appropriate and relevant sections provide the equivalent) and quality enhancement programs. It has the discretionary right to determine the extent to which any additional material should be compiled and presented.

In this connection it is important to consider university documentation, self-evaluation and external evaluation as all forming part of the dialogue between academic institutions and the government, as regards both accountability and budgetary procedures.

4.3 The external evaluation

The National Agency employs special peer groups, or *audit teams*, for this process. Upon appointment by the agency (after consultations with the institutions in question), they will receive introductions and training commensurate with their tasks.

An audit team will normally consist of five auditors, including a student representative, together with the Project Secretary. The auditors will be drawn from both Swedish and foreign universities and colleges, as well as from various sectors of society, organizations, business and industry.

Once the thrust and extent of the audit have been determined, the team will be given access to the material and self-evaluation submitted by the institution in question. In co-operation with the institution, the group will

then plan its further work, including preparing and carrying out the visit to the institution.

4.4 Feedback and follow-up

When the audit team has completed its evaluation, a copy of their preliminary report will be submitted to the institution in question, and institutional viewpoints and comments will be invited.

The auditing process is concluded with a discussion based on the team's report; participants will include the University Chancellor, representatives for the audit team and the institution's administration. At issue are the conclusions to be drawn and the measures that should be taken, as suggested by the evaluation. The team report and the Chancellor's evaluation in connection with the report are then published.

After a specified period of time, a follow-up will take place, in order to assess the effects of the audit. This follow-up is to note which measures the individual institution intended to take after the audit, as well as the extent to and manner in which these measures actually were taken. Furthermore, general effects of the audit can be studied. The result of this follow-up will then provide the basis for the audit that will occur during the next three-year period.

It is the ambition of the National Agency to provide the government and Parliament with a comprehensive description and analysis of university quality enhancement throughout the nation. What is at stake is learning how to utilize the knowledge and experiences provided by these audits so as to encourage positive developments in Swedish universities and colleges.

5 Background and sources

A number of different commissions, bills and Parliamentary reports have provided the basis for the National Agency quality audit project.

For the development of methods and approaches, a number of areas have provided literature and inspiration. A selection would include at least the following:

- Franke, Sigbrit (1992), *Utvärderingens mångfald – några ledtrådar för vilsna utbildare*, Universitets- och Högskoleämbetet, UHÄ
- Kells, Herb R. (1992), *Self-regulation in Higher Education*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers
- Nilsson, Karl-Axel, Kells, Herb R. (1995), *Utvärdering för kvalitetsutveckling*, Kanslersämbetet
- Rolf, Bertil, Ekstedt, Eskil, Barnett, Ronald (1993), *Kvalitet och kunskapsprocess i högre utbildning*, Nya Doxa
- Trow, Martin (1994), *Academic Reviews and the Culture of Excellence*, Kanslersämbetets skriftserie 1994:1
- Trow, Martin (1995), *Two Essays of Quality in Higher Education*, Kanslersämbetets skriftserie 1995:2

In addition, links were established with government authorities and organizations in Sweden, as well as with universities and colleges in countries having experience of quality auditing. Still other contacts provided information about other experiences and viewpoints of relevance for the development of higher education. Among those consulted were:

- Swedish Institute for Quality [SIQ]
- The Swedish National Audit Office [RRV]
- The Swedish National Union of Students [SFS]
- The Swedish Association of University Teachers [SULF]
- The Higher Education Quality Council [HEQC], London
- The Association of Universities in the Netherlands [VSNU], Holland
- *Evalueringssenteret*, Denmark
- A number of higher education institutions in the United States and Canada visited by members of the Chancellor's Office during a special fact-finding mission.

An important part of the development of methods and approaches consisted of the special pilot projects sponsored by the Chancellor's Office. In particular, the Chancellor's Office established a working group, primarily consisting of university and college representatives, that tackled the area of examination and evaluation. Four higher education institutions and four evaluation teams (with members drawn from universities, colleges, the Swedish Institute for Quality and the Swedish National Union of Students) were chosen to participate in an exploratory round of evaluations. The result of this early round and the comments submitted by universities and colleges – discussed on numerous occasions both directly with the universities evaluated and ultimately with every Swedish university and college – played a decisive role in forming current National Agency methodology and approaches.

A selection of the materials and activities connected with the operations of the Chancellor's Office may be found in:

- Reports connected with the pilot project:
- Activities connected with the pilot project:
 - Evaluation seminar on March 10, 1995, with the evaluation teams and institutions concerned;
 - Contact meeting on March 14, 1995, for all Swedish universities and colleges, to discuss the experiences gained from the pilot project;
 - Meeting of Swedish university presidents on March 30, 1995, concerning comments on and conclusions from the pilot project.
- The National Agency subsequently developed its approaches and methods, discussing them with representatives for universities and colleges on two separate occasions. A number of people provided comments that helped shape the present report, which was discussed on *inter alia* the following occasions:
- Methodology seminar on August 24, 1995, with selected representatives from universities and colleges.
- Contact meeting on September 29, 1995 for all Swedish universities and colleges.

*Appendix 1:
Guidelines for Institutions*

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Appendix I: Guidelines for Institutions

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I The Quality Audit

I Preparations

As the first step in the quality audit of a given university or college, a liaison officer from the National Agency reaches an agreement with the institution's administration about the composition of the audit team and the time frame for conducting the audit.

The audit team is composed so as to fulfill requirements of relevant experience, competence and peer recognition. Its composition includes members with academic competence and practical leadership experience from the type of activities conducted at universities and colleges, but also a student representative, as well as a member with experience of fields other than education and research. In addition, each audit team has a Project Secretary.

Documentation relevant to the auditing approach and the like is made available to each audited institution and audit team.

An initial meeting then occurs between the university administration, the Chair and Secretary of the audit team, and the National Agency liaison officer involved in the audit. This meeting takes place at the university or college in question. Its main purpose is to decide upon the framework for the auditing process, primarily to reach an agreement on the purpose of the audit and a delimitation of the concrete aspects that are to be audited.

At this initial meeting, the audit time frame is also considered. An audit is assumed to require five to eight calendar months. Three to six months of this period are normally allocated to compilation of the data serving as the basis of the institution's self-evaluation.

This initial meeting also provides the institution's administration with a forum for indicating its particular situation and special conditions, as well as their perspective on how the audit may best be conducted so as to encourage positive developments at the university or college in question.

The Chair of the audit team can present views and requests about the content and extent of the audit documentation to be presented by the institution. In this connection, it is important to determine *inter alia* which type of quantitative data will provide a relevant basis for the auditing process.

In the initial meeting, the time for the audit team site visit is also set. To facilitate advance planning, a preliminary schedule for the visit can also be discussed during this meeting.

The initial meeting can be combined with information meetings at the university or college, where e.g. the Chair of the audit group and/or the National Agency liaison officer can take part, in order to answer questions concerning the upcoming audit. Experience has shown that the information from the institution administration that reaches those concerned at the start of the audit is of decisive importance for its subsequent success. This information should clearly indicate that the primary purpose of the audit is not control, but the creation of favorable conditions for future development, and that the university is an active partner in the audit process, not a passive object for evaluation.

2 Institutional self-evaluation and documentation

The university or college conducts its self-evaluation, compiles and presents the relevant facts, and provides the following documentation:

- a) The annual report (or the relevant sections thereof), which provides an overall review of the institution's organization and activities, together with any particular or special conditions that should be noted;
- b) The institution's overall quality enhancement program;
- c) The self-evaluation, containing
 - a presentation of how the self-evaluation was conducted;
 - a description (based on the quality enhancement program) of the institution's quality program, indicating major goals, quality targets and preconditions, strategy and prioritized areas, together with the structural components of the quality program, their implementation and results;

- an analysis and evaluation of the university's own quality program and activities, as regards their strengths and weaknesses, and their threats and opportunities;
- conclusions of the self-evaluation, as well as the measures the institution intends to take to enhance its quality program and improve its results.

The self-evaluation should consist of no more than 25 pages.

The self-evaluatory process, with its professional reflection and critical self-analysis, is the most important component in the entire quality audit and should therefore be well planned, supported and organized. It is the responsibility of the individual institute of higher learning to find the forms appropriate for its own self-evaluation. Experiences of self-evaluation of various types are to be found in many universities and colleges, and the methodology of self-evaluation is described in a number of publications. Guidance may to some extent be obtained in e.g. Kells and Nilsson, *Evaluation for Quality Assurance and Improvement* (1995; also available in Swedish as *Utvärdering för kvalitetsutveckling* (1995)). It should however be noted that the method for self-evaluation described by Kells and Nilsson primarily concerns evaluation of degree programs within an individual university or college.

The task of the external auditors will to a great extent be based on facts concerning various conditions in the areas that have been selected as focal points. Data will therefore be needed from *inter alia* the auditing and follow-up material routinely produced in the ordinary state of affairs. Access to evaluative information, on the other hand, can often be limited: an evaluative basis is linked to specific situations and it may therefore be necessary to make special efforts to obtain e.g. judgments by teachers, students and other stakeholders as regards the questions raised by and during the audit.

3 Examination and analysis of the material

At the agreed-upon time, the university or college provides the National Agency liaison officer with 10 copies of the material in question. The audit team uses a two-step pattern to examine and analyze the material submitted by the institution.

As a first step, the individual members of the audit team independently analyze and evaluate the quality program at the university or college, based upon the material submitted. Each evaluator assesses the quality program upon the basis of *inter alia* the following questions:

- Are the university's goals and strategy for the quality program clearly formulated?
- Is the self-evaluation sufficiently analytical, are e.g. strengths and weaknesses clearly formulated, examined and documented?
- Does the report contain a clear description of the measures the institution intends to take to deal with its weaknesses?
- Is there any information missing in the material submitted by the institution?

In the second step, the audit group conducts a joint discussion and analysis in order to form a consensus from their individual judgments, and to agree upon the presentation concerning the strengths, weaknesses and potential for improvement that – previous to the site visit – the team believes exist regarding the institution's quality program. Questions that may be posed in this connection include *inter alia*:

- Is there agreement between the university's goals, underlying ideas and ambitions, the operational frame and the strategic approach?
- Do the strategy and its guidelines, in the form of its quality policy, goal specifications, priorities, plans, organization and resources, agree with the practical implementation of the quality program?
- Does the quality program contain the requisite structural components (in the form of quality routines, evaluation systems and the like) that will enable the institution to attain the specified goals?
- Do the quality program and its implementation work well as regards factors such as leadership, participation and cooperation with external stakeholders?
- Do the operations achieve concrete and goal-related results in the form of improvements that have changed quality levels in undergraduate education, research, graduate education and the other tasks of the institution?
- Does the quality program encourage consideration of and adjustment to the needs and demands of external organizations, groups and authorities in a relevant manner?

In connection with this meeting, the audit group also prepares in detail for their activities during the site visit. The university or college is consulted about the plan for the site visit.

4 The site visit

The audit group carries out their site visit to the university or college, a visit expected to take two to three days. The duration and depth of the visit will vary to fit the size and complexity of the institution in question.

The site visit is intended to verify the picture of the institutional quality program that the audit group has received from the written material submitted, gain an impression of the physical environment and clarify points that the audit group found unclear. It also serves to create a dialogue with the institution's representatives at various levels, awakening their insight into and co-operation in the creation of an environment favorable to development and change.

It is important that the site visit be well prepared by both the audit team and the institution itself. The visit should be steered by a time and activity plan that specifies which people or groups of people are to be interviewed and which joint meetings the audit group is to have with the university authorities or other individuals or groups in leading positions therein.

The prerequisites for a successful site visit include: careful and well coordinated preparations between the institution and the audit team; that the people and groups that meet the audit team during the site visit accept the purpose of the visit; and that the institution and the audit team have together produced a delimitation and specification of what is to be audited.

5 The Report

In connection with the site visit, the audit team compiles its report. This report is based on the joint analysis and conclusions reached by the team in connection with their pre-visit meeting, as well as the impressions received and the conclusions reached as a result of the visit. The contents of the report should consist of four main sections:

Part 1 contains a short summarizing description with general observations concerning the university or college and its quality program.

Part 2 contains a presentation of the audit team's approach and choices, and the reasons for these choices.

Part 3 contains a more detailed review of the strengths and weaknesses of the various areas investigated and the reference areas.

Part 4 contains the audit team suggestions and recommendations concerning improvement of the quality program and its further development.

A preliminary version of the report is presented to the university or college in question; the institution then has two weeks to submit views and comments on both the content of the audit team report and the evaluative methodology employed (and how the latter can be improved).

6 Feedback

The evaluative process is completed via a feedback visit for discussions between the university administration, the University Chancellor and the Chair of the audit team. At this meeting, the auditing process is itself evaluated and conclusions are drawn regarding measures to be taken as a consequence of the internal and external evaluations actually carried out, as regards both the institution's quality program and the methodology involved. Based on the audit and the report, the National Agency and the University Chancellor then evaluate both the audit and the institution's quality program.

The audits of the National Agency are one aspect of a continual following-up of the performance of Swedish universities and colleges, where each individual institute of higher learning is to be the object of such an audit at least once per three year period. A preliminary agreement is therefore reached about the timing of the next evaluative cycle, as well as the general thrust and level of ambition for that cycle.

II The Role of the National Agency in the Audit

The National Swedish Agency for Higher Education and the University Chancellor are responsible for planning, administering and co-ordinating the auditing process at the national level. The ultimate responsibility for the audit rests primarily with the University Chancellor, while the responsibility for carrying out the process devolves upon the Agency's Department of Evaluation and Quality Audit.

For each audit, it is the responsibility of the National Agency to

- create a formal base for the project by appointing and introducing the external audit team, supplying information and guidance to the auditors and the university or college in question, participating in the initial joint meeting, providing subsequent advice, support and service of various kinds to the university/college and the audit team, and arranging the feedback meeting that concludes the project;
- assume responsibility for compiling experiences from the project, thus laying the groundwork for ongoing improvement in the methodology employed;
- account for both audits and results to the Government and the Riksdag.

For each individual audit, the National Agency appoints a liaison officer responsible for various administrative and organizational tasks, as well as for monitoring the project as it is implemented.

III A Step-by-Step Sketch of the Audit Process

- The National Agency and the university/college determine the time frame for the audit.
- An external audit team is appointed by the National Agency.
- An initial meeting is held between the university/college administration and the Chair of the audit team, together with the National Agency liaison officer.
- The university/college carries out its self-evaluation.
- The audit team participates in an introductory seminar.
- The university/college supplies the audit team with documentation, including the self-evaluation.
- First individually, then as a group, the audit team examines and analyzes the material and plans the site visit in detail.
- The audit team conducts its site visit.
- The audit team compiles its report.
- There occurs a feedback meeting of the university/college administration, the University Chancellor and the Chair of the audit team in connection with the compilation of the final version of the report.
- After a specified period of time, follow-up actions evaluate the effects of the audit.

*Appendix 2:
Auditors' Handbook*

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I The Quality Audit

I Preparations

As the first step in the quality audit of a given university or college, a liaison officer from the National Agency reaches an agreement with the institution's administration about the composition of the audit team and the time frame for conducting the audit.

The audit team is composed so as to fulfill requirements of relevant experience, competence and peer recognition. Its composition includes members with academic competence and practical leadership experience from the type of activities conducted at universities and colleges, but also a student representative, as well as a member with experience of fields other than education and research. In addition, each audit team has a Project Secretary.

Documentation relevant to the auditing approach and the like is made available to each audited institution and audit team.

An initial meeting then occurs between the university administration, the Chair and Secretary of the audit team, and the National Agency liaison officer involved in the audit. This meeting takes place at the university or college in question. Its main purpose is to decide upon the framework for the auditing process, primarily to reach an agreement on the purpose of the audit and a delimitation of the concrete aspects that are to be audited.

At this initial meeting, the audit time frame is also considered. An audit is assumed to require five to eight calendar months. Three to six months of this period are normally allocated to compilation of the data serving as the basis of the institution's self-evaluation.

This initial meeting also provides the institution's administration with a forum for indicating its particular situation and special conditions, as well as their perspective on how the audit may best be conducted so as to encourage positive developments at the university or college in question. The Chair of the audit team can present views and requests about the content

and extent of the audit documentation to be presented by the institution. In this connection, it is important to determine *inter alia* which type of quantitative data will provide a relevant basis for the auditing process.

In the initial meeting, the time for the audit team site visit is also set. To facilitate advance planning, a preliminary schedule for the visit can also be discussed during this meeting.

The initial meeting can be combined with information meetings at the university or college, where e.g. the Chair of the audit group and/or the National Agency liaison officer can take part, in order to answer questions concerning the upcoming audit.

2 Institutional self-evaluation and documentation

The university or college conducts its self-evaluation, compiles and then presents the documentation to be used in the actual audit.

The self-evaluation is fundamental, as it furnishes the basis for the auditing process.

3 Examination and analysis of the material

Before the process begins, the auditors receive an introduction in seminar form. During this introduction, they are also informed about the time frame and work schedule for this particular audit.

At the agreed-upon time, the university or college provides the National Agency liaison officer with 10 copies of the material in question.

The audit team uses a two-step pattern to examine and analyze the material submitted by the institution.

As a *first* step, the individual members of the audit team independently analyze and evaluate the quality program at the university or college, based upon the material submitted. Each auditor thoroughly examines the material presented by the institution, particularly its self-evaluation, where the following basic questions may serve as guidelines for the auditors:

- Are the university's goals and strategy for the quality program clearly formulated?
- Is the self-evaluation sufficiently analytical, are e.g. strengths and weaknesses clearly formulated, examined and documented?
- Does the report contain a clear description of the measures the institution intends to take to deal with its weaknesses?
- Is there any information missing in the material submitted by the institution?

The individual analysis assumes that each auditor presents his/her comments on the materials submitted, as well as noting his/her conclusions or assumptions regarding strengths/weaknesses and potential for improvement. The various team members also individually present their suggestions concerning areas to focus on in the site visit, questions to ask, assumptions to test and criteria to compare against. The individual analyses and suggestions are then compiled and distributed to the entire team via the Project Secretary, in preparation for the next step.

In the *second* step, the audit group conducts a joint discussion and analysis in order to form a consensus from their individual judgments, and to agree upon the presentation concerning the strengths, weaknesses and potential for improvement that – previous to the site visit – the team believes exist regarding the institution's quality program. The auditors come to an agreement on the choice of focal areas, questions for the various areas investigated, and on hypotheses and criteria. The questions should be specific to the institution in question, i.e. formulated as based on the givens for the institution to be audited. Questions that may be posed in this connection include *inter alia*:

- Is there agreement between the university's goals, underlying ideas and ambitions, the operational frame and the strategic approach?
- Do the strategy and its guidelines, in the form of its quality policy, goal specifications, priorities, plans, organization and resources, agree with the practical implementation of the quality program?
- Does the quality program contain the requisite structural components (in the form of quality routines, evaluation systems and the like) that will enable the institution to attain the specified goals?
- Do the quality program and its implementation work well as regards

factors such as leadership, participation and cooperation with external stakeholders?

- Do the operations achieve concrete and goal-related results in the form of improvements that have changed quality levels in undergraduate education, research, graduate education and the other tasks of the institution?
- Does the quality program encourage consideration of and adjustment to the needs and demands of external organizations, groups and authorities in a relevant manner?

In connection with this meeting, the audit group also prepares in detail for their activities during the site visit. The university or college is consulted about the plan for the site visit.

4 The site visit

The audit group carries out their site visit to the university or college, a visit expected to take two to three days. The duration and depth of the visit will vary to fit the size and complexity of the institution in question.

The site visit is twofold in purpose. First, it seeks to verify the information in the submitted material or the group's own assumptions, and to gain an impression of the physical environment. During the visit, the audit team will seek to obtain a basis for their audit, in the form of accessible facts concerning various conditions.

The second purpose is to create a dialogue with the institution's management, teachers, researchers, students, administrators and other personnel, awakening their insight into and co-operation in the creation of an environment favorable to development and change.

Questions of interest in this connection include e.g.: What are you seeking to achieve, and why? How are you doing it? How do you know that it works? What are you doing to improve your approach?

It is important that the site visit be well prepared by both the audit team and the institution itself. The visit should be steered by a time and activity plan that specifies which people or groups of people are to be interviewed, which joint meetings the audit group is to have with the university authorities or other individuals or groups in leading positions therein, and

the summing up the audit team itself is to produce during this process. It is important to keep the group together, so that all the auditors participate in all meetings.

A successful site visit requires several factors: the auditors should all have examined the material carefully and be thoroughly familiar with the institutional documentation; auditor observations should be systematically documented; each auditor must accept that their primary task is to discover and formulate interesting opportunities for development, not to find and point out mistakes; and finally, that the audit team should sum up their observations immediately upon concluding their visit to the institution in question.

5 The Report

Immediately upon concluding their site visit, the audit team compiles their report, which is to be completed within two weeks of the visit. At an early stage, the audit team should decide the concrete details of how it is to be produced.

The report is based on the analysis and conclusions reached by the team in connection with their pre-visit meeting, as well as the impressions received and the conclusions reached as a result of the visit. The contents of the report should consist of four main sections:

Part 1 contains a short summarizing description with general observations concerning the university or college and its quality program.

Part 2 contains a presentation of the audit team's approach and choices, and the reasons for these choices.

Part 3 contains a more detailed review of the strengths and weaknesses of the various areas investigated and the reference areas.

Part 4 contains the audit team suggestions and recommendations concerning improvement of the quality program and its further development.

A preliminary version of the report is presented to the university or college in question; the institution then has two weeks to submit views and comments on both the content of the audit team report and the evaluative methodology employed (and how the latter can be improved).

6 Feedback

The evaluative process is completed via a feedback visit for discussions between the university administration, the University Chancellor and the Chair of the audit team. At this meeting, the auditing process is itself evaluated and conclusions are drawn regarding measures to be taken as a consequence of the internal and external evaluations actually carried out, as regards both the institution's quality program and the methodology involved. Based on the audit and the report, the National Agency and the University Chancellor then evaluate both the audit and the institution's quality program.

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II Distribution of Roles and Responsibility

Members of the Audit Team, including the Chair

The task of each member of the audit team is to

- participate in the introductory seminar
- take part in the group's joint pre-visit meeting
- individually examine, analyze and evaluate the university/college in question, on the basis of its submitted documentation and the site visit
- participate in the site visit
- if requested, write part(s) of the report
- submit recommendations for future improvements in the audit methodology

The Chair of the Audit Team

In addition to being an auditor, the Chair (with the aid of the Project Secretary) is to

- prepare and carry out the introductory meeting with the institution's administration
- head and coordinate the audit
- convene and conduct the team's joint pre-visit meeting
- plan and prepare the site visit
- head the site visit
- assume responsibility for producing the report
- conjointly with the University Chancellor, conduct the feedback meeting with the institution's administration
- assume responsibility for documenting the experiences of the audit

The Project Secretary of the Audit Team

The task of the Secretary is to

- help conduct the introductory meeting
- participate in the introductory seminar
- arrange, participate in and document the group's meetings
- help conduct the site visit
- write a draft of the written audit report

The National Swedish Agency for Higher Education

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For each audit, it is the responsibility of the National Agency to

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- The audit team conducts its site visit.
- The audit team compiles its report.
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- After a specified period of time, follow-up actions evaluate the effects of the audit.

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