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# General Guidelines for Self-Evaluation in the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education's Quality Evaluation System

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**General Guidelines for Self-Evaluation in the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education's Quality Evaluation System. 2011–2014**

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# Introduction

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education has been given the task of evaluating the results of courses and programmes. Here, ‘results’ refers to how well the specific courses or programmes meet the requirements laid down in the Higher Education Act and the qualification descriptors in the ordinances that are linked to it. The National Agency’s evaluations will assess to what extent students’ achieved learning outcomes correspond to the intended learning outcomes. The material on which the experts base their assessments are independent projects (degree projects) produced by students, the higher education institutions’ own self-evaluations, questionnaires sent to alumni and the students’ own perceptions of the outcomes of their programmes of study in relation to the targets in the qualification descriptors. The self-evaluation is important for the National Agency’s evaluations but should also offer an important tool for the work of the institutions themselves on the quality assurance of their courses and programmes.

The self-evaluation comprises three sections. The first, and most important, is intended to enable a more extensive and complete account of outcomes than that offered by the independent projects. In its self-evaluation, a higher education institution should therefore present, analyse and assess the outcomes achieved in relation to all the targets on which the evaluation is based. This account must aim to demonstrate to the experts that the students (and therefore the course or programme) meet the targets in the qualification descriptors. Some presentation of the circumstances and processes may however be included to enable the institution to account for how it assures that the students do achieve the targets. However, it is not the circumstances and processes that will be evaluated by the experts but the educational outcomes, i.e. goal attainment. According to the appraisal of the Government in its bill entitled *Fokus på kunskap – kvalitet i den högre utbildningen [Focus on knowledge – quality in higher education]* (Govt. bill 2009/10:139 p. 21) it is important to assess the usefulness of programmes for the labour market in the National Agency’s evaluations. This should therefore be taken into account in the self-evaluations.

The aim of the second section is to account for the circumstances that have a manifest impact on the outcomes of programmes. One such circumstance consists of the teaching resources used in the programme evaluated. For this reason the higher education institutions should, in their self-evaluations, present information about teachers’ qualifications and the availability of teaching resources and analyse this information in relation to the targets that apply for the qualification to be awarded. The higher education institutions also have the possibility of accounting for, and analysing, relevant information on the students’ preconditions and presenting arguments about how these may have affected the outcomes of a programme.

In the third section the higher education institution has the possibility of accounting for other circumstances that may be considered particularly important for the evaluation of the programme. These may for instance include local targets for the programme or the role played by the independent projects in the programme.

This document contains general guidelines on self-evaluation on which the guidelines for each evaluation are based.

## One self-evaluation per qualification

One self-evaluation should be made for each qualification (professional, general or artistic). This means that if the qualifications awarded at a higher education institution in a specific main field of study include Bachelor's as well as 60 and 120-credit Master's degrees, a separate self-evaluation should be conducted for each of the three qualifications.

The self-evaluation should be based on the current circumstances that apply for the programme, preferably from the current semester and the two immediately preceding it. Exceptions may be made from this time frame, for instance if certain courses have not been offered during the period. If exceptions are made, they should be accounted for and justified.

The institution should cite the sources on which the analysis is based and preferably also give the year and month for each source, for example the year and month in which a sample examination was set. The sources should not, however, be attached to the self-evaluation. They should on the other hand be made available for the assessors upon request, for instance before a site visit.

The institution is able to refer to the same source in its responses to several questions if considered appropriate, and may also refer to the same source for fields of study that are close to each other or for several qualifications, e.g. 60 and 120-credit Master's degrees. In such cases any section that is unique for one self-evaluation should be clearly identified, e.g. "This example applies only to X as the main field of study".

The self-evaluation should not exceed 20 A4 pages in all. When the self-evaluation process has been completed and has been officially endorsed by the institution, it is uploaded to HSV-Direct by the individual responsible at the institution.

## Section 1 – Goal attainment

The purpose of section 1 is to account for, analyse and appraise the students' goal attainment in relation to the qualitative targets included in the evaluation. In this section therefore the institution should present arguments to show that the selected qualitative targets and their component elements have been attained by the students and how. This analysis should be based on different forms of material. The targets to be included in the evaluation and the criteria to be used are chosen by the assessment panel. The representatives of the programmes to be evaluated are then informed and given the possibility of expressing opinions on the targets and criteria selected. Subsequently the targets and criteria are determined by the National Agency.

### **Examples of material that can be used**

Each institution is free to choose the material on which to base its analysis of goal attainment. For the sake of equivalence in the evaluations, it may, however, be appropriate to use the following five types of material:

Material dealing with examination

1. Summaries and analyses (preferably illustrated with examples) of the different kinds of work and tasks undertaken by the students, e.g. essays, project work or laboratory reports. The institution's own analysis of the independent projects (degree projects) may also be used here.
2. Summaries and analyses (preferably illustrated with examples) of examination tasks and questions.

Material from follow-up surveys and analyses of how processes are linked to outcomes

1. The results of evaluations and follow-up of different kinds, for instance the results of course evaluations, programme evaluations, semester evaluations, main field of study evaluations or alumni follow-up surveys.
2. Descriptions and analyses of how intended course learning outcomes, teaching, teaching material and examinations are linked to each other so that students will attain the relevant qualitative targets.
3. Descriptions and analyses of how several courses are based on each other so that students will attain qualitative targets or their component elements.

The institution should consistently account for, analyse and appraise the material in relation to the selected qualitative targets or their component elements. This presentation should state how representative examples are, i.e. how often and in which courses similar examples can be found. One recommendation

is to select examples from repeated and extensive courses. Programme specific criteria will exist for each target to support the appraisal of the experts and to assist the institution, for instance in structuring its presentation and analysis.

## Section 2 – Educational circumstances

### **The qualifications and availability of teachers**

In section 2 of the self-evaluation the institution is asked to describe and analyse its teachers' qualifications and their availability for the specific programme and also to present arguments on how this helps the students to attain the targets included in the evaluation. This account should deal with all the targets included in the evaluation and contain information about the types of posts at the institution, academic titles and specialisations, relevant expertise, relevant professional experience (outside higher education), extent of the posts, degree of research activity and the amount of teaching in the programme. The presentation should take the form of an aggregate analysis for all the targets that is supplemented by a table provided by the National Agency.

### **Students' preconditions**

Another circumstance that the institution is offered the possibility of accounting for in its self-evaluation is the situation of the students. Institutions that successfully undertake the work of widening participation must not be placed at a disadvantage in the evaluations. If this kind of process can be considered to have a manifest impact on the outcomes of a programme, it should be taken into account. For this reason, the institutions have the possibility of presenting relevant information, in their self-evaluations, about the preconditions of their students and arguments about how these have affected the outcomes of a programme. The tariff value of students' grades on admission to a programme may indicate their possibilities of attaining its targets. If an account of this kind is to be able to affect the overall evaluation, there must be manifest differences between the preconditions of the students in comparison with similar programmes at other higher education institutions.

If an institution considers that the preconditions of its students should be taken into account in the evaluation, its self-evaluation should contain the following:

1. An account of factors relating to the situation of the students and arguments about the significance these factors may have for the programme's outcomes.
2. Demonstration through a comparison with similar programmes at other higher education institutions that there are manifest differences in the preconditions of the students.

## Section 3 – Other circumstances

A great deal of weight is attached to students' independent projects in the National Agency's evaluations. It may therefore be important for the assessors to be aware of some fundamental facts about the independent projects included in each programme.

For this reason the higher education institution should provide the following information:

1. How many credits does the independent project comprise in the programme under evaluation?
2. If the programme leads to the award of a predetermined qualification, in which semester is the independent project normally scheduled?
3. Do the students normally work on their own or together with others and, if so, how many individuals does a group normally contain?

It is also possible to account for other circumstances that the institution considers particularly important for the evaluation of the programme concerned and that have not been presented earlier in the self-evaluation. Such circumstances could be: local targets, the profile of the programme or the proportion of students who take courses in the main areas of study as part of a predetermined degree programme or alternatively as freestanding courses.

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education is an authority that deals with issues concerning Swedish universities and other institutions of higher education. The Agency's tasks involve quality reviews, the supervision, monitoring and development of higher education, producing reports and analyses, evaluation of foreign qualifications and the provision of information for students.

More information on our website [www.hsv.se](http://www.hsv.se).