

Quality assurance and quality development 2024

Report to the Government



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Summary

This report aims to show how the past year's quality assurance work contributed to quality development and high quality in the activities of higher education institutions (HEIs).

In 2024, a number of follow-ups of previous HEI reviews were carried out for HEIs whose quality assurance processes had previously been assessed as *approved with reservations* or *under review*. The follow-ups showed that all HEIs concerned have improved their quality assurance process. For example, several HEIs had introduced or developed procedures for internal evaluations.

As part of its programme evaluation work, the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) issued assessments for ten estate agent programmes that were evaluated. For several of the programmes, the quality was assessed as *under review*, and the evaluation identified important areas for development, such as ensuring that the requisite teaching expertise is available. During the year, UKÄ conducted follow-up on eleven specialist nursing programmes previously assessed as failing to meet the quality requirements for higher education. The follow-up showed that the measures taken by the HEIs were both reasonable and appropriate. Examples of the measures taken by the HEIs include staff recruitment and development of the content and structure of the programmes. All eleven programmes were assessed as being of high quality.

UKÄ conducted nine appraisals of degree-awarding powers in 2024. In the 2023 report, it was noted that the possibility of an extended appraisal period was a quality driver. This trend continued in 2024, when degree-awarding powers were granted on two occasions after an extended appraisal period. Since 2023, UKÄ has applied a procedure to ensure that an application is complete before an assessment panel is appointed. The procedure makes it possible for UKÄ to review the application in certain cases without appointing an assessment panel. One such decision was made in 2024. As assessors are largely recruited from HEIs, the new procedure gives UKÄ better opportunities to be more economical with the resources of both the Government and the HEIs.

A major review that was completed in 2024 was the thematic evaluation of HEIs' work to create conditions for collaboration with the surrounding community. 37 HEIs were included in the evaluation. An overarching picture emerging from the evaluation was that HEIs regard and organise collaboration as an integral part of research and education, but that there is a need for development in terms of, for example, guidelines and support to avoid conflicts of objectives linked to collaboration.

Two thematic evaluations were followed up during the year: the evaluation of how the HEIs work with the qualitative targets for competence and skills in nursing programmes and the evaluation of the HEIs' work to promote and broaden recruitment to higher education. An important area of action that several HEIs worked on in connection with their nursing programmes was strategic work on recruitment and continuing professional development. With regard to broader recruitment, the follow-up showed that most HEIs have now linked the follow-up of efforts to broaden recruitment to their quality systems.

UKÄ disseminated the results of the reviews during the year through measures such as dialogues, exchanges of information and publication on the Authority's website.

In summary, action reports and feedback from the HEIs show that the reviews contributed to quality development and to ensuring high quality in the HEIs' activities.

Introduction

According to the Ordinance (2012:810) with instructions for the Swedish Higher Education Authority, UKÄ must report annually on how quality assurance has contributed to quality development and high quality in the activities of HEIs.¹ This document is the Authority's report for 2024. The report is based on the decisions related to the national quality assurance system that UKÄ made in 2024. The report also addresses other areas of significance for quality assurance of higher education, such as method development and internationalisation.

The national quality assurance system for higher education comprises four different types of review:

- Review of HEIs' quality assurance processes related to education and research
- Programme evaluation
- Appraisal of degree-awarding powers
- Thematic evaluation

Background information about the quality assurance system

The quality assurance system with the four types of review was developed by UKÄ in dialogue with higher education institutions, the Swedish National Union of Students (SFS) and representatives of working life. The system is partly based on the Government communication *Quality assurance of higher education* (2015/16:76) and UKÄ's report *National system for quality assurance of higher education – Presentation of a government assignment* (Report 2016:15). Other important frameworks for the quality assurance system are the Higher Education Act (1992:1434), the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100), ESG 2015², and national and international research guidelines³.

Peer review is a cornerstone of all evaluations carried out by UKÄ as part of the quality assurance system. All reviews within the four review types follow a specific methodology specified in a set of guidelines. The guidelines set out, inter alia, the assessment criteria used in the review.

¹ Section 2, second paragraph of the Ordinance (2012:810) with instructions for the Swedish Higher Education Authority

² *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), 2015. See also UKÄ's translation into Swedish: *Standarder och riktlinjer för kvalitetssäkring inom det europeiska området för högre utbildning* (ESG)

³ *European Charter for Researchers* and the *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* and the national framework for quality assurance of research developed by the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF)

Theory of change and method development

UKÄ works based on a theory of change model for the quality assurance system (Figure 1). This theory has guided the change process since 2020, when UKÄ conducted an external evaluation of the quality-driving effects of the quality assurance system.⁴

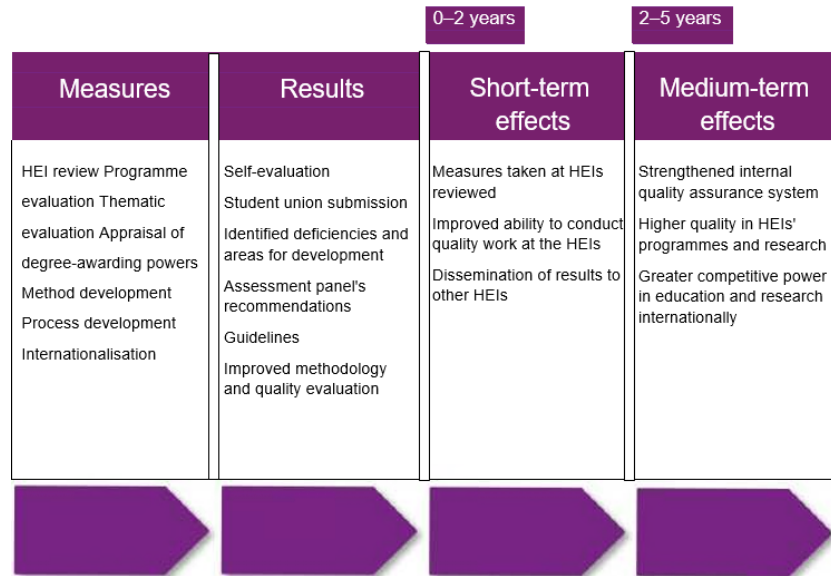


Figure 1: Theory of change for the quality assurance system, UKÄ.

The model summarises the different types of measures initiated by the Swedish Higher Education Authority and gives examples of the results and effects they are expected to create at HEIs in different time frames. The theory of change is important for understanding how the quality assurance system contributes to quality development at the HEIs. The theory of change makes it possible to trace the effects in HEIs to their activities. In this context, it may be worth mentioning that some measures, such as initiating a new review or evaluation, can lead to almost immediate actions in HEIs when the self-evaluation process is initiated. However, it takes longer to recognise the impact of the work.

In 2021, UKÄ began method development work for future reviews aimed at making the reviews more accurate, flexible and less burdensome for the HEIs, the assessors and UKÄ. This method development work was completed in 2023.⁵ UKÄ's work to further develop methods and processes for its reviews continues on an ongoing basis within the organisation. This report presents the work on method/process development in a section focused on method development plus, where applicable, as part of the sections for each type of review.

⁴ *Evaluation of the national system for quality assurance of higher education*, p. 16. (Faugert & Co, 2020)

⁵ For more information on the method development work, see the report *Improving quality – a developed methodology for UKÄ's reviews* (UKÄ 2024. Reg. no. 412-00045-24)

Reviews and follow-ups included in the report

As part of the work to review HEIs' quality assurance work, UKÄ carried out six follow-ups of HEIs whose quality assurance process had previously been assessed as either *under review* or *approved with reservations*.

After evaluating ten real estate brokerage programmes, UKÄ made its decisions in February 2024. UKÄ conducted a follow-up of specialist nursing programmes assessed as under review in the specialisations prehospital emergency care, district nurse and psychiatric care. When the evaluation was completed in March 2023, the quality of 13 programmes was assessed as “under review”. Only 11 of these were included in the follow-up carried out in 2024, as two HEIs had chosen to discontinue the programmes in question.

UKÄ examined nine applications for degree-awarding powers in 2024. UKÄ decided to approve six of these applications (or to propose that the Government grant the degree-awarding powers sought).

A major review that was completed in 2024 was the thematic evaluation of HEIs' work to create conditions for collaboration with the surrounding community. UKÄ also conducted a follow-up of the earlier thematic evaluation of how the HEIs work with the qualitative targets for competence and skills in nursing programmes, as well as the thematic evaluation of the HEIs' work to promote and broaden recruitment to higher education.

A landmark review completed in 2024 was the coordinated review of contract education, which combined different review methods within the framework of UKÄ's assignment.

In 2024, UKÄ completed a supervisory review of the naprapath and chiropractor programmes. This supervisory review examined whether the programmes meet the quality requirements that apply to programmes at universities and colleges.

Review of HEIs' quality assurance processes

There are two purposes behind UKÄ's reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes: to check that the HEIs ensure that their activities maintain high quality and to contribute to the quality development of the HEIs. The reviews focus on whether the HEIs' quality assurance processes contribute to ensuring and developing the quality of education and research in a systematic and appropriate manner.

In 2024, six follow-ups were carried out of HEIs whose quality assurance process had previously been assessed as either *under review* or *approved with reservations*. The follow-ups were based on the guidelines in force at the time of the original review.⁶ Review of an HEI's quality assurance process concludes with UKÄ assigning a status based on the assessment panel report. There are three possible assessments: *approved*, *approved with reservations* and *under review*. An HEI with the status *approved with reservations* has two years to submit an action report to UKÄ.⁷ This report shall specify all of the measures that the HEI has implemented to remedy the deficiencies in all assessment areas assessed as unsatisfactory.

For an HEI assessed as *under review*, the HEI shall determine a suitable time for submission of its action report, in dialogue with UKÄ. The report specifies the measures implemented to remedy the deficiencies in the assessment areas assessed as unsatisfactory. In the follow-up, these assessment areas are re-examined in their entirety.

Three new HEI reviews were initiated in 2024. No HEI reviews were concluded during the year because the reviews in the previous HEI review cycle were not completed until 2023. In addition to the follow-ups, an important activity in 2024 was the planning and preparation for future reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes.

⁶ *Guidelines for reviewing HEIs' quality assurance processes* (UKÄ 2020. Reg. no. 411-00156-20)

⁷ The text describes conditions that existed in accordance with previous guidelines. Information on follow-ups of the reviews initiated from 2025 onwards can be found in *Guidelines for reviewing the HEIs' quality assurance processes for education and research* (UKÄ 2023. Reg. no. 412-00398-23) or later version.

Implemented measures led to improvements in quality assurance systems

Of the six HEIs followed up in 2024, five had previously been assessed as *approved with reservations*.

One HEI had been assessed as *quality assurance processes under review* in the previous review. A common reason or contributory factor for the assessments was a rating of unsatisfactory in the assessment area “Governance and organisation”. The table below shows which assessment areas were included in the follow-ups and how many of the six HEIs were previously assessed as “unsatisfactory”.

| Assessment area | Number of HEIs previously assessed as “unsatisfactory”. |
|--|---|
| Governance and organisation | 3 |
| Conditions | |
| Design, implementation & results | 2 |
| Gender equality | 3 |
| The student and doctoral student perspective | 2 |
| Working life and collaboration | 1 |

During the follow-ups, the assessment panels found that the HEIs had taken many reasonable and appropriate measures to improve their quality assurance systems. As a result of the follow-ups, UKÄ assessed five of the six HEIs as having *approved quality assurance processes*. After the follow-up one HEI went from an assessment of *under review* to an assessment of *approved with reservations*. The table below shows the HEIs concerned and their assessment before and after the follow-ups:

| HEI | Assessment before follow-up | Assessment after follow-up |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Mälardalen University | Quality assurance processes under review | Quality assurance processes approved with reservations |
| Linköping University | Quality assurance processes approved with reservations | Quality assurance processes approved |
| Stockholm University | Quality assurance processes approved with reservations | Quality assurance processes approved |
| Södertörn University | Quality assurance processes approved with reservations | Quality assurance processes approved |
| University of Skövde | Quality assurance processes approved with reservations | Quality assurance processes approved |
| University of Gävle | Quality assurance processes approved with reservations | Quality assurance processes approved |

Examples of measures implemented

The measures implemented by the HEIs include the introduction of regular internal evaluations of degree programmes, integration of the gender equality perspective, and updated internal rules of procedure. The following are examples from the HEIs' action reports:

- The University of Gävle implemented a series of measures to improve quality assurance processes and make them appropriate to the current organisation and conditions of the HEI. The HEI worked extensively to phase out, revise and establish policy documents. This led to clearer specification of the areas of responsibility for different functions. Instructions and templates for operational planning were included in the remedial work and were refined to better include results from the quality system. As quality improvement measures can take time to implement, the operational plans now apply a three-year perspective.
- The University of Skövde presented a revamped approach to annual programme follow-up. Two previous processes were combined into a new guideline for annual programme follow-up. Support for the programme follow-ups includes templates and annual dialogues between the departments and the HEI's management. Students are given the opportunity to participate, and documentation from the follow-up is made available digitally to all staff and students as well as the student union.
- Linköping University implemented several measures to strengthen its systematic efforts to take gender equality into account in the content, design and implementation of programmes. Among other things, the HEI updated its guidelines for course syllabuses, introduced a new common course evaluation question, and clarified the responsibilities of directors of studies to support and follow up on gender equality work.
- Mälardalen University introduced a time-based internal evaluation cycle that enables longer-term resource planning. All degree programmes and third-cycle subject areas are evaluated by external reviewers. Dialogues are to take place both between reviewers and the relevant teachers at the HEI and between the reviewers and the responsible faculty board.
- Stockholm University intensified its systematic efforts to promote the opportunities and conditions for students and doctoral students to exercise influence. Among other things, the HEI created new information pages on the university's staff website, updated templates for their internal programme reviews, and created an online training course for student representatives. The HEI also ensured that student influence is addressed in the Swedish language courses taken by the majority of the HEI's international students and doctoral students.
- Södertörn University reports a number of changes that make the HEI's quality assurance process more manageable and transparent. The HEI made its dialogue-based approach clearer, for example by integrating a form of dialogue into the HEI's model for the evaluation and follow-up

of education and research and by ensuring the dialogues are documented.

Method and process development

UKÄ's reviews are subject to ongoing method development. This applies to both internal procedures and processes as well as more outward-looking aspects of the reviews. A new review period started in 2024 that is expected to last until 2030, which means that the method and process development that took place in 2023 through the spring of 2024 has now begun to be implemented in practice. Here are some examples of new activities that have begun to be implemented in connection with the three reviews that started in 2024.

One new activity is open digital meetings in connection with the start of new reviews of HEIs' quality assurance processes. The meetings are open to all, staff and students, and are aimed at all HEIs under review. The purpose of the meetings is, inter alia, to facilitate the HEIs' preparatory work. Two open digital meetings were conducted in 2024, with more than 100 participants in the October 2024 meeting. Participants first received general information about the reviews and were then given the opportunity to have any questions they had answered at an early stage.

Another methodological change that UKÄ began to implement in 2024 is that the HEIs are no longer bound to a template for their self-evaluations. The HEIs write a self-evaluation, but are free to organise it and choose, among other things, the extent to which they want to describe research and education as integrated or separate quality assurance systems. The aim of the change in methodology is to make the self-evaluation work more effective and more appropriate for the HEIs. A further example concerns site visits. Previously, reviews of an HEI's quality assurance process were carried out with two site visits, which involved UKÄ and the assessment panel visiting the HEI and conducting on-site interviews with representatives of the HEI. In 2024, UKÄ development of the review method resulted in one of the site visits being replaced with an initial digital meeting between the HEI and the assessment panel. This meeting gives the HEI the opportunity to present its quality assurance system and clarify initial questions that may have arisen when the assessors read the self-evaluation. This change saves time and resources for UKÄ, the assessment panels and the HEIs.

Programme evaluations

UKÄ's programme evaluations serve two purposes:

- to verify the results of the programmes (i.e. that the programmes meet the requirements and objectives of the Higher Education Act regarding high quality)
- to contribute to the HEIs improving the quality of their programmes.

A programme evaluation results in an assessment on a two-level scale, i.e. either *high quality* or *under review*.

If the quality of a programme is assessed as *under review* in an evaluation, the HEI's powers to award the associated degree are under review. The HEI must then submit an action report to UKÄ within one year, after which a follow-up is carried out. The follow-up is an assessment of the reasonableness and appropriateness of the measures taken and the HEI's analysis of the deficiencies identified. If the programme is still assessed as *under review* after the follow-up, UKÄ will revoke the associated degree-awarding powers. For independent higher education providers, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the Swedish Defence University, UKÄ can propose to the Government to revoke the degree-awarding powers.

An HEI with a programme whose quality is assessed as *under review* may choose to discontinue the programme. If such a decision is sent to UKÄ within the specified time frame, UKÄ may choose to cancel follow-up of the HEI's programme. The HEI then retains its degree-awarding powers. The programme discontinuation decision must state that no more students will be admitted to the programme.

In 2024, UKÄ made programme evaluation decisions for ten programmes (real estate brokerage programmes) and for follow-up of eleven specialist nursing programmes.

Programme evaluation of real estate brokerage programmes

In February 2024, UKÄ decided on assessments for the real estate brokerage programmes included in the evaluation. The evaluation covered ten programmes at eight HEIs. The evaluation included both standard higher education programmes (first- or second-cycle programmes) and contract education programmes. Some of the HEIs have an estate agent programme. Other HEIs offer the education as part of another programme in which students are trained for other professions in the real estate industry.

One HEI offers as an elective continuing vocational training component of another programme. All of the programmes in question met the educational requirements set by the Swedish Estate Agents Inspectorate for the student or participant to be registered as an estate agent.⁸ Seven of the ten programmes were assessed as *under review*. The table below shows how many programmes, in different categories, were included in the evaluation and what assessments the programmes received.

| Programme | High quality | Under review |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| Bachelor's degree ⁹ | 2 | 3 |
| Higher education qualification ¹⁰ | 1 | 0 |
| Contract education ¹¹ | 0 | 2 |
| Continuing vocational training programme ¹² | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 3 | 7 |

Major differences between real estate brokerage programmes

The assessment panel identified many differences between the programmes. One significant difference was the varying degrees of focus on real estate brokerage by HEIs – particularly in relation to how programmes ensure students' ability to seek and evaluate knowledge in real estate brokerage at a scholarly level. Some HEIs' course syllabuses had developed wording clearly related to real estate brokerage or the supporting subject areas included in the FMI requirements. Other HEIs had course syllabuses with more general references to the ability to evaluate knowledge at a scholarly level. For some programmes, there was no wording at all in the course syllabuses that had a clear link to seeking and evaluating knowledge in real estate brokerage at a scholarly level.

Another area in which there were major differences between programmes was human resources. Some HEIs had sufficient staff resources with employed teaching expertise in law, economics and building technology, where resources were well matched to the scope and content of the programme. Other HEIs relied more heavily on contractors or other temporary staff. The assessment panel finds that there are several challenges associated with a programme that relies heavily on external expertise.

⁸ Estate agent is a regulated profession. The government agency Swedish Estate Agents Inspectorate (FMI) sets the requirements for registration as an estate agent and registers the applicants who satisfy the requirements.

⁹ University of Gävle, University West, Karlstad University, KTH Royal Institute of Technology and Malmö University.

¹⁰ Luleå University of Technology.

¹¹ University of Gävle and University West.

¹² Halmstad University and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

Seven of the ten programmes were assessed as under review

The table below shows the programmes that were assessed as *under review* and the assessment criteria that the respective programme failed to meet.

| Programme | Assessment criteria not met |
|---|---|
| University of Gävle – Estate agent programme, Bachelor's degree in business administration | Human resources |
| University of Gävle – Contract education, SF Mäklarskola | Human resources Goal attainment of ability to seek and evaluate knowledge in real estate brokerage at a scholarly level |
| Halmstad University – Continuing vocational training programme with real estate brokerage specialisation | Human resources Goal attainment of ability to make independent and critical assessments Goal attainment of ability to independently identify, formulate and solve problems Goal attainment of ability to seek and evaluate knowledge in real estate brokerage at a scholarly level |
| University West – real estate economist programme, Bachelor's degree in economics | Human resources Goal attainment of ability to independently identify, formulate and solve problems Goal attainment of ability to seek and evaluate knowledge in real estate brokerage at a scholarly level |
| University West – Contract education, estate agent | Human resources Goal attainment of ability to make independent and critical assessments Goal attainment of ability to independently identify, formulate and solve problems Goal attainment of ability to seek and evaluate knowledge in real estate brokerage at a scholarly level |
| Karlstad University – Real estate economist programme, Bachelor's degree in business administration | Human resources Goal attainment of ability to seek and evaluate knowledge in real estate brokerage at a scholarly level |
| Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences – Continuing vocational training programme, real estate brokerage | Human resources Goal attainment of ability to make independent and critical assessments Goal attainment of ability to independently identify, formulate and solve problems Goal attainment of ability to seek and evaluate knowledge in real estate brokerage at a scholarly level |

The fact that most of the programmes evaluated were assessed as under review shows that the evaluation identified important areas for development, which is in line with UKÄ's ambitions for method development in recent years.¹³ The programmes will undergo follow-up in the spring of 2025. However, the HEIs concerned already notified UKÄ in 2024 that three of the above programmes have been discontinued.

A special circumstance related to the programme evaluation of real estate brokerage programmes is that the programmes are conducted within the framework of general degree-awarding powers (and the HEIs may thus have broad programme offerings within the frame work of the degree-awarding powers concerned). This limits or complicates UKÄ's ability to revoke degree-awarding powers. If special reasons exist, UKÄ can initiate programme evaluations of individual programmes. An example of such a reason is that quality deficiencies are deemed to exist even after a follow-up has been carried out.

Eleven specialist nursing programmes underwent follow-up

The postgraduate diploma in specialist nursing is continuing professional development at the second-cycle level. To qualify for the specialist nursing programme, the applicant must hold Bachelor of Science in Nursing and be a licensed nurse. The programme leads to a postgraduate diploma in specialist nursing in a particular specialisation.

The original evaluation of the postgraduate diploma in specialist nursing included a total of 40 programmes in the three specialisations of prehospital emergency care, psychiatric care and district nurse. UK* presented the results of the evaluation in last year's report to the Government.¹⁴ The table below shows the number of programmes in each specialisation that were assessed as *under review* and were therefore included in the follow-up conducted in 2024:

| Programme | Under review |
|--|--------------|
| Postgraduate diploma in specialist nursing, specialisation district nurse | 6 |
| Postgraduate diploma in specialist nursing, specialisation psychiatric care | 6 |
| Postgraduate diploma in specialist nursing, specialisation prehospital emergency care, | 1 |

¹³ For more information on the method development work, see the report *Improving quality – a developed methodology for UKÄ's reviews* (UKÄ 2024. Reg. no. 412-00045-24)

¹⁴ *Quality assurance and quality development 2023 – Report to the Government* (UKÄ 2024. Reg. no. 411-00281-24)

More detail on the programmes assessed as under review

Many of the programmes assessed as *under review* had minor deficiencies. Some HEIs had more extensive deficiencies, related to factors such as human resources, learning environment, research basis or fulfilment of several qualitative targets. A general pattern was that the deficiencies often related to difficulties in ensuring goal attainment in the knowledge forms of competence and skills during placement (verksamhetsförlagd utbildning, VFU). Although many HEIs have been actively trying to increase the number of positions with a clinical connection for a long time, challenges remained with a lack of current clinical anchoring for teachers.

Prior to the follow-up, two HEIs chose to discontinue their specialist nursing programmes specialising in psychiatric care. UKÄ therefore decided to exclude these programmes from the follow-up.¹⁵ Both HEIs cited, among other things, staff shortages as the reason for discontinuing the programme. Thus, a total of eleven programmes were included in the follow-up.

Measures taken to improve programme quality

All eleven programmes that underwent follow-up were subsequently assessed as *high quality*. The HEIs' action reports shows that the areas commonly identified for remedial action were the programme's conditions in terms of human resources and learning environment. Several HEIs reported that they had strengthened their teaching expertise by recruiting senior lecturers, lecturers and/or visiting professors. With respect to the learning environment, several HEIs made changes to placement (VFU). For example, the HEIs have increased the scope of placement and implemented measures to improve legal compliance for examinations in connection with placement. Here are some examples of measures described in the HEIs' action reports:

- Blekinge Institute of Technology (specialisation psychiatric care) recruited an associate professor and combined this with other support measures to develop research in the specialisation subject at the HEI and ensure that the link between research and education was strengthened.
- The University of Gävle (specialisation district nurse) revised the structure of the programme and created a new course on scientific method and theory, with an examination that ensures that students can identify nursing programmes relevant to the profession in relation to the link between science and proven experience.
- Linköping University (specialisation district nurse) increased the number of placement days and revised the assessment information to adapt it to the different areas of activity in which placement is carried out.

¹⁵ The discontinued programmes that were excluded were:

- Lund University: specialist nursing programme, specialisation psychiatric care
- Malmö University: specialist nursing programme, specialisation psychiatric care

- Luleå University of Technology (specialisation prehospital emergency care) hired a temporary adjunct clinical lecturer with specialist training in prehospital emergency care.
- The Swedish Red Cross University (specialisation psychiatric care) introduced a specialisation-specific course syllabus that replaced a previous course syllabus that was common to multiple specialisations. The university also updated the reading lists of several courses.

Method and process development

In recent years, UKÄ has strived to adopt an approach that enables us to more actively and systematically use review results, analyses, experiences from supervision and external monitoring, as well as dialogue with the sector and other government agencies, as a basis for decisions on reviews. This applies in particular to programme evaluations and thematic evaluations.

In 2024, UKÄ launched a programme evaluation of programmes leading to a Bachelor's degree in biomedical laboratory science¹⁶. The evaluation started after a selection process based on the approach described above, which was developed in dialogue between UKÄ and the HEIs. As described above, an important change that UKÄ began to implement in 2024 is an increased element of dialogue. UKÄ's ambition is for the dialogue to contribute to the evaluations being adapted to best meet the development needs that exist within the programmes. The dialogue will also make evaluations more fit for purpose. Prior to the evaluation of biomedical scientist programmes, a dialogue meeting was held with representatives of HEIs, students and working life. During the meeting, the participants first discussed the programme's strengths and areas for development in order to get a common picture of the programme. The links between the identified strengths and areas for development and the programme's qualitative targets were then discussed. The meeting was characterised by active participation. The information from the dialogue meeting formed the basis for UKÄ's decision to carry out the evaluation.

Dialogue meetings also take place in connection with the completion of evaluations. After UKÄ made its decision regarding the evaluation of real estate brokerage programmes, a dialogue meeting was held with the HEIs concerned and the assessment panel. The meeting began with the assessment panel sharing their overall impressions from the evaluation. This was followed by group discussions on various questions, including the effects of the evaluation. The answers to these questions showed, for example, that the evaluation provided support for the HEIs' change efforts and that several HEIs had already implemented or initiated concrete improvement measures, such as the revision of course syllabuses.

¹⁶ The evaluation of programmes leading to a Bachelor's degree in biomedical laboratory science will be completed in the spring of 2025 and will thus be addressed in the report for 2025.

Appraisals of degree-awarding powers

An appraisal of degree-awarding powers takes place after an application has been submitted to UKÄ. The purpose is to assess whether the HEI meets the necessary prerequisites for students or doctoral students to achieve the objectives which the Riksdag or Government has set for the degree to which the programme will lead. Appraisals of degree-awarding powers are conducted for the following degrees:

- degrees at the first- and second-cycle level, including professional qualifications, based on the provisions of the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance, and
- degrees at the third-cycle level based on the provisions of the Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance, as well as the positions set out in Government Bill 2008/09:134 *Doctoral education with profiling and quality*.

The degrees for which HEIs must apply for degree-awarding powers varies between different universities, colleges and independent higher education providers. For some degrees, there are general decisions that certain public-sector HEIs may award, for example, Bachelor's and Master's degrees without applying to be granted degree-awarding powers. Independent higher education providers must apply to be granted degree-awarding powers for all types of degrees. Public-sector HEIs apply to UKÄ be granted degree-awarding powers. The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, the Swedish Defence University and independent higher education providers apply to the Government, which generally forwards the matter to UKÄ for an opinion on the application. UKÄ's handling and assessment process is generally the same, regardless of whether the applicant is a public-sector HEI or an independent higher education provider. The text below therefore makes no distinction between cases in which UKÄ formally decided on rejection and cases where UKÄ proposed to the Government to reject the application.

A prerequisite for UKÄ granting degree-awarding powers is that all assessment criteria are met.

Background information about assessment criteria

In eight out of nine appraisals of degree-awarding powers decided in 2024 were handled in accordance with the guidelines decided in 2023.¹⁷ According to the requirements set out in the guidelines, all assessment criteria must be met for an application to be granted.

¹⁷ *Guidelines for applications for degree-awarding powers – General principles* (UKÄ 2023. Reg. no. 412-00066-21)

- Main field of study/Field of study/Professional qualifications¹⁸
- Staff
- Learning environment for students/doctoral students
- Resources
- Policy documents
- Ensuring the qualitative targets are met

Outcome of appraisals conducted in 2024

Nine appraisals of degree-awarding powers were conducted in 2024. Six were for professional qualifications and three were for general qualifications. The table below shows the year's applications and their outcomes.

| Degree | HEI | Higher education provider | Outcome |
|---|---|---------------------------|----------|
| Master of Arts in Secondary Education with music as subject taught | Stockholm University College of Music Education | Independent | Rejected |
| Master of Science in Tourism and Sustainable Destination Development | Dalarna University | Public sector | Granted |
| Master of Science in Engineering | Malmö University | Public sector | Granted |
| Master of Science in Upper-Secondary Education with mathematics as subject taught | Lund University | Public sector | Granted |
| Bachelor of Science in Religious Studies and Theology | Stiftelsen Sankt Ignatios | Independent | Rejected |
| Master of Science in Eastern Christian Studies | Stiftelsen Sankt Ignatios Folkhögskola | Independent | Rejected |
| Master of Science in Engineering | Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences | Public sector | Granted |
| Postgraduate Diploma in Special Needs Training with specialisation in language, writing and reading development, plus specialisation in mathematics development | Luleå University of Technology | Public sector | Granted |
| Master of Science in Psychology | Luleå University of Technology | Public sector | Granted |

¹⁸ The guidelines specify that there are different versions of the assessment criteria, adapted for different types of degrees

Appraisals of degree-awarding powers verify that the HEIs' planned education meets the requirements set. HEIs whose applications are granted can continue their work to establish the programmes and award degrees to students who achieve the qualitative targets. HEIs whose applications are rejected must comply with the results of the appraisal and decide whether to reapply.

Failure to fulfil the assessment criterion “Staff” is a common factor

A common factor among the three rejected applications was deficiencies linked to the assessment criterion “Staff”. In one of the cases, the assessment panel found that the HEI had not ensured access to professor expertise. In the other two cases, it was found that the reported teaching expertise was insufficient in relation to the breadth of the degree-awarding powers sought. Another area in which deficiencies were commonly identified was “Ensuring the qualitative targets are met”. In this respect as well, two out of the three applications failed to fulfil the relevant assessment criterion.

The outcome of the appraisals of degree-awarding powers conducted in 2024 is in line with conclusions from previous years, i.e. that most rejections could be traced back to the assessment of how the HEIs ensure that students meet the qualitative targets. Teaching resources have also been an area of deficiency for many applications.¹⁹

Extended appraisal period continues to yield positive results

A clear quality-driving feature of appraisals of degree-awarding powers is the possibility to extend the appraisal period. An extension may be granted if the application is deemed unsatisfactory, but the deficiencies in the application are minor and clearly defined. In such cases, the assessors may propose in their report that the HEI be given the opportunity to submit a supplemented application within six months, based on the assessment panel report. The report indicates which assessment criterion/criteria are not met, and what the supplementation should contain for it/them to be assessed as met.

An extended appraisal period was applied in two of the appraisal cases approved in 2024, thus maintaining the positive trend observed in last year's report to the Government.

¹⁹ The report *Appraisals of degree-awarding powers 2017–2021. Experiences and conclusions, the outcomes of 73 applications processed during the period were analysed* (UKÄ 2022)

Implementation of new procedures to improve resource efficiency and follow-up

The guidelines that entered into force from spring 2023 has made it a stricter requirement for an application to be complete before UKÄ appoints an assessment panel. Since May 2023, UKÄ has been able to determine at an early stage whether enough information has been provided to justify the appointment of assessment panel to evaluate the application. If UKÄ finds that there is insufficient information to appoint an assessment panel, the HEI is given the opportunity to supplement their application. If the supplementation is not received by the set deadline or is deemed insufficient, UKÄ may examine the application and make a decision without appointing an assessment panel. UKÄ made one such decision in 2024, in a case with an independent higher education provider (without existing degree-awarding powers) that applied for degree-awarding powers for five different degrees in a single application.

The new procedure gives UKÄ better opportunities to make economical use of its resources. With complete applications, the assessment panels can work more efficiently with its resources, which shortens the process from application to decision.

In 2024, UKÄ began a follow-up of all degree-awarding powers granted between 2018 and 2023. The follow-up is intended to determine how and to what extent the plans expressed in the applications are realised by the HEIs.

Thematic evaluations

Thematic evaluations are intended to provide important knowledge and comparisons in areas relevant to the quality of HEI activities. As the aim of thematic evaluations is to contribute to the HEIs' own development work, there are no sanctions attached to them. A thematic evaluation can be initiated in different ways. They can be initiated by UKÄ following the type of selection work described above, or through an assignment to UKÄ from the Government. The method for the thematic evaluations is adapted to the theme in question, but should as far as possible follow the methods applied for other reviews in the national quality assurance system. When an evaluation is completed, UKÄ presents a national picture but also provides feedback to each HEI.

In 2024, UKÄ completed a thematic evaluation of HEIs' work to create conditions for collaboration with the surrounding community. The evaluation included 37 HEIs. UKÄ also conducted follow-ups of two previous thematic evaluations: HEIs' work on promoting and broadening recruitment to higher education and HEIs' work on qualitative targets for competence and skills in nursing programmes.

Thematic evaluation of HEI collaboration

In December 2022, UKÄ was tasked by the Government to carry out an evaluation of HEI collaboration. The point of departure was the requirements in Chapter 1, Section 2 of the Higher Education Act (1992:1434), which states that the mandate of HEIs shall include collaboration with the surrounding community. The purpose of the collaboration is to generate mutual exchanges. According to the assignment, the evaluation was to be reported to the Government Offices of Sweden no later than 31 October 2024. UKÄ completed its thematic evaluation of HEI collaboration at the end of October 2024. At that time, a national picture, assessment panel reports for all 37 HEIs included in the evaluation, and two thematic follow-up studies were published.

Implementation in the form of three stand-alone and complementary modules

The thematic evaluation consisted of three stand-alone modules:

- Evaluation at the HEI level
- Workshops on the practicalities of collaboration

- In-depth thematic studies that touched on:
 - the merit of collaboration expertise
 - collaboration with the public.

Evaluation of higher education institutions

The first module of the thematic evaluation examined the work of 37 HEIs to create the conditions for collaboration in research and education in accordance with the Higher Education Act. The evaluation followed developed guidelines and was based on two assessment areas: *Governance and organisation* and *Implementation and results*. For each assessment area, there were evaluation questions that the HEIs answered in a self-evaluation.²⁰

The first module of the thematic evaluation resulted in a report for each HEI containing descriptions and assessments of the relevant HEI's work to create the conditions for collaboration. In its report, the assessment panel provided graded recommendations, formulated based on what the HEI *can* and *should* do. A total of 331 recommendations were made at the HEI level, which means that each HEI received an average of nine recommendations. The HEIs can now take the assessors' recommendations into account in their work and in the development of their activities. By 2 November 2026, the HEIs must submit reports on the measures taken in response to the *should* recommendations. UKÄ will then conduct a follow-up of the evaluation.

At an overarching level, the assessment panel found that collaboration is clearly described by the HEIs in terms of objectives, implementation and follow-up. However, there are some ambiguities and areas for development regarding how collaboration relates to overall goals and ambitions, how different governance and support systems work in tandem, how the development towards open science affects the collaboration remit, and how different levels within the HEIs relate to each other. Another observation from the assessment panel was that the HEIs' self-evaluations rarely indicated how resources for collaboration are managed. Two overarching recommendations from the assessment panel to the HEIs were thus to:

- review and align objectives at different levels of the organisation. External parties should be involved to a greater extent in this work, which can also clarify the link between collaboration, education and research.
- get a clearer picture of the costs and funding of collaboration activities. This would enable a more informed discussion on prioritisation and dimensioning of the collaboration activities.

²⁰ *Guidelines for thematic evaluation of collaboration with the surrounding community* (UKÄ 2023, Reg. no. 111-00048-23)

Workshops

As part of the second module of the evaluation, UKÄ organised a number of workshops in April 2024, at which teachers, researchers, students and collaboration partners met and exchanged experiences. There were approximately 100 participants in total. The aim of the workshops was to gain knowledge of how the daily and practical work of collaboration is conducted, and to enable the exchange of experiences and the sharing of both challenges and good examples.

Two lessons learned from the workshops were:

- It is a challenge for HEIs to anchor the content of visions and policy documents and to create links to the practice of core activities. Although there are policy documents that prioritise and encourage collaboration, the conditions for implementing practical collaboration do not always match the ambitions.
- Collaboration skills are a key issue, and work is needed to specify what they consist of and how they can be developed and disseminated within the higher education sector and HEIs through various forms of continuing professional development.

In-depth thematic studies

UKÄ also conducted two in-depth thematic studies in areas identified as particularly relevant to the HEIs' collaboration with the surrounding community. One in-depth study focused on the merit of collaboration experience, while the other focused on collaboration with the public.

National picture

The overarching question answered by the three modules is how well the HEIs conduct their work to create the conditions for collaboration in research and education in accordance with the Higher Education Act, and how this work can be further developed in a desirable direction. In the national picture, UKÄ highlights both strengths and areas for improvement and makes recommendations to the higher education sector as a whole to develop collaboration with the surrounding community. The national picture thus serves as a cohesive framework for all three modules in the evaluation.

Some general results from the national picture, related to the HEIs' governance and organisation of collaboration:

- The HEIs have strategies and objectives for collaboration, but these are often general in nature. In goal and strategy documents, there is a need to more clearly define what is meant by collaboration and how it is to strengthen education and research at the HEI.
- Many HEIs need to involve external parties more in the processes concerning collaboration to create good conditions for mutual

exchange. Students could also be more involved in the processes, especially in the case of collaboration organised in different platforms.

- HEIs often lack systematic and knowledge-based approaches to identify, manage and prevent the conflicts of objectives that may arise in the context of collaboration.

In relation to implementation and the results of HEIs' collaboration, the following were expressed

- The follow-up of collaboration is often integrated into the regular quality assurance systems for education and research, but it is often unclear what scope collaboration has in these systems.
- There is a need to systematise and clarify how collaboration is captured in the HEIs' quality systems and to document the follow-up of collaboration. The HEIs also need to develop measures and methods for following up on the benefits of collaboration.
- The HEIs are ensure that the perspective of external actors is included in the evaluation and follow-up of collaboration and that students and doctoral students are also included in these processes to ensure that conditions for mutual exchange are created.

The thematic evaluation generated knowledge about and acted as a facilitator in the HEIs' collaboration with the surrounding community. The evaluation also enabled comparisons between HEIs and resulted in recommendations that the HEIs can use in their further development. The upcoming follow-up (see the section *Evaluation of higher education institutions* above) will provide more information on the impact of the evaluation.

Follow-up of the thematic evaluation of nursing programmes

At the end of October 2021, UKÄ made a decision on the thematic evaluation of nursing programmes. The evaluation focused on the HEIs' work to provide students with good conditions for achieving the qualitative targets in the knowledge form of competence and skills. In its report, the assessment panel provided graded recommendations to a total of 25 HEIs. A follow-up of the evaluation was conducted in 2024. In this follow-up, the measures of all HEIs except one were judged as being reasonable and appropriate. For one HEI (Mid Sweden University), the assessment panel found that the measures taken were not reasonable and appropriate. The assessment panel recommended that UKÄ initiate a programme evaluation of Mid Sweden University's nursing programme, as stated in the decision.²¹ In October 2024, UKÄ

²¹ *Follow-up of thematic evaluation of programme leading to Bachelor of Science in Nursing*. Decision. Reg. no. 411-00381-23. (UKÄ, 2024)

decided to conduct a programme evaluation of Mid Sweden University's nursing programme.

The thematic evaluation of nursing education, as well as the follow-up of the evaluation, resulted in several measures at the HEIs. The HEIs' action reports show, for example, that several HEIs have worked to develop a strategic plan for recruitment and continuing professional development for their own teachers, with the aim of planning for and ensuring that skills needs are met in the short and long term. Several HEIs also worked to clarify the link between the programme's objectives, learning activities and examinations. Other common measures included starting to develop structured learning activities to improve interprofessional learning in the programme, increasing the number of clinical placements, and measures aimed at strengthening the skills of supervisors in the activities relevant to placement (VFU). The evaluation contributed to increased knowledge and development, which is in line with the ambition for the review type. The fact that the thematic evaluation of nursing education also led to a programme evaluation shows that the different types of review are interconnected and complement each other.

Follow-up of the thematic evaluation of broadened recruitment

In February 2022, UKÄ made a decision on the thematic evaluation of HEIs' work to broaden recruitment. The evaluation was conducted as a Government assignment based on the requirement introduced into the Higher Education Act (1992:1434) in 2002, which states that HEIs shall “actively promote and broaden recruitment to higher education” (Chapter 1, Section 5, fourth paragraph). 40 HEIs were included in the evaluation. The evaluation followed developed guidelines and was based on two assessment areas: *Governance and organisation* and *Design, implementation and results*. In its report, the assessment panel provided graded recommendations, formulated based on what the HEI *can* and *should* do. A follow-up of the evaluation was conducted in 2024. The follow-up showed that the evaluation led to quality-driving processes.

The assessment panel for the follow-up assessed that the HEIs, in most cases, had followed the recommendations in full or in part, and that the measures implemented relate to the given recommendations to a high degree. Many HEIs took measures to create frameworks and conditions for work to broaden recruitment, for example by establishing special bodies, integrating broadened recruitment into the governance system, and clarifying the division of responsibilities. The follow-up showed that many HEIs have established a special coordinating function for work to broaden recruitment, while others handle coordination locally. The work to broaden recruitment is now more clearly linked to the HEIs' quality systems. Another good example was the development of models and methods for monitoring and improving the recruitment of under-

represented groups. There were also new examples of collaboration with schools, such as “open houses” and projects in which students act as study coaches for school pupils.

Review of contract education at higher education institutions

UKÄ has long worked in accordance with three different review assignments with corresponding lines of activity: review of efficiency, legal supervision, and review of quality assurance. In 2022, UKÄ initiated efforts whereby the government agency's different review assignments, and associated review methods, can complement each other in coordinated reviews. Two objectives were to review based on development needs in the sector and to achieve a benefit that is greater than what UKÄ's separate reviews can achieve individually. Contract education was selected as the area for a pilot review. Contract education at HEIs was chosen as the area for coordinated review due to factors such as the fact that contract education is an important instrument for lifelong learning and skills provision, and that several welfare programmes are carried out as contract education. The review was completed in the spring, and a report was published in June 2024.

The aim of the coordinated review of contract education was to contribute to development of the activities of HEIs and to increase knowledge about contract education in the following five areas:

- the scope and focus of contract education
- how HEIs handle and organise contract education
- how HEIs comply with statutes and regulations on contract education
- how HEIs ensure the quality of credit-bearing contract education
- contract education as a type of education.

The review was conducted in several stages, with UKÄ collecting data from the HEIs on two main occasions: an initial data collection covering all HEIs providing contract education, and an in-depth review involving a selection of HEIs. With the in-depth review, the aim was to shed light on issues affecting several HEIs by reviewing just a small number of them. UKÄ selected fifteen HEIs for the in-depth review. The selected HEIs were asked probing questions relating to one or more of the perspectives of quality assurance, efficiency and compliance. UKÄ appointed an assessment panel for the in-depth review eight HEIs' quality assurance of contract education. The assessment panel then submitted a report to UKÄ discussing the results of their review. The report begins with general recommendations to the sector and UKÄ, followed by separate statements on each of the eight HEIs that answered probing questions on the quality assurance of contract education. The

assessment panel's review of the HEIs' quality assurance of contract education did not result in any established assessments from UKÄ. The assessment panel's statements were included in the collective data making up UKÄ's report and are presented in their entirety as an appendix.

The review revealed signs that both the HEIs' internal quality work and the national quality assurance system for contract education could be strengthened. The review did not show signs that contract education is having a negative impact on regular education, but it did show that HEIs could work more systematically on monitoring and evaluating contract education.

Another important finding from the review was that several HEIs consider the provisions on contract education to be difficult to interpret, and are calling for clarification of the regulations. UKÄ therefore intends to start work in 2025 to develop new legal guidelines on contract education.

The coordinated review of contract education provided valuable information for the HEIs' quality development and ideas for UKÄ's activities, which in turn can strengthen legal compliance at the HEIs. Even though the review did not lead to any final assessments by the Swedish Higher Education Authority, UKÄ assumes that the HEIs will take the recommendations that emerged from the report into account and that the HEIs will review the procedures and processes mentioned in order to make the necessary improvements.

Supervisory review of naprapath and chiropractor education

Skandinaviska Naprapathögskolan AB and Stiftelsen Skandinaviska Kiropraktorhögskolan offer naprapath and chiropractor programmes. These programmes are not regulated professional qualifications under the Higher Education Ordinance. According to an earlier government decision, students are eligible for student finance for these programmes. The Government also previously decided that the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education is responsible for supervisory review of the programmes (and later clarified that supervisory responsibility has been transferred to UKÄ). The supervisory review is intended to ensure that the programme meets the quality requirements that apply to programmes at higher education institutions.²²

In 2023, UKÄ launched a supervision project for the programmes. UKÄ then developed and applied customised guidelines for supervisory review, with peer review as a cornerstone. The supervisory review was completed in 2024, resulting in one opinion report per programme. These reports highlighted both strengths and areas for development. The assessment panel concluded that the programmes meet the general quality requirements for higher education under the Higher Education Act (1992:1434). UKÄ decided accordingly. There will be no follow-up of the supervisory review, but since supervision is a permanent assignment for UKÄ, it is likely that new supervisory reviews will be initiated in the future. In the dialogue with higher education providers, it emerged that the feedback given during the supervisory review has had and is expected to continue to have positive effects on the development of the programmes.

²² Government decision of 22 June 2022, reg. no. U2022/02486 and U2022/02485

Method development

On 28 September 2023, UKÄ was tasked by the Government to make proposals on how the national quality assurance system can be developed to further improve quality and promote excellence in Swedish higher education. The assignment was reported to the Government in September 2024.²³ Based on the purpose of this report, it may be particularly relevant to highlight the following elements from the report on the Government assignment:

- UKÄ's opinion report templates were revised in 2024 so that good examples are clearly highlighted.
- Good examples are to be presented and discussed at the feedback conferences or dialogues held by UKÄ after a review. In order to have a broader reach, HEIs that did not participate in the review will also be invited to contribute to the discussion and learn from the good examples.
- UKÄ plans to introduce regular student surveys that will provide underlying information for all of the government agency's activities. UKÄ hopes that the results of the student surveys will be put to good use by the HEIs and become an important element in the HEIs' quality development.
- UKÄ is introducing a new assessment scale for the HEI reviews, making it possible to acknowledge successful development measures and working methods. The aim is to motivate HEIs in their quality development work, highlight successful examples, and inspire them to further develop programme quality.

The changes outlined above can be related to the theory of change in the introduction of the report. For example, it is reasonable to assume that review results that more clearly highlight areas for development and good examples will increase the dissemination of the results and thus lead to more positive effects.

²³ *Improving quality and promoting excellence in Swedish higher education – Proposals for development of the national quality assurance system (UKÄ 2024)*

Coordination of networks for follow-up, evaluation & analysis

According to the Ordinance (2012:810) with instructions for the Swedish Higher Education Authority, UKÄ is responsible for and shall coordinate a network between the government agencies that follow-up on, evaluate and analyse activities at higher education institutions.²⁴

The following government agencies are a part of the network:

- Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning (Formas)
- Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte)
- Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR)
- Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ)
- Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems (Vinnova)
- Swedish Research Council

In 2024, UKÄ convened the network's management team on two occasions. The meetings focused on discussion and input to UKÄ's government assignment to map what impact evaluations to be conducted within the framework of the network had on administrative burden at higher education institutions.²⁵ The network's management team decided that methodology seminars are to be the main activity to be carried out to achieve the network's purpose and objectives. Methodology seminars were then organised in conjunction with the meetings. In June 2024, UKÄ organised a seminar in which participants shared experiences from UKÄ's assignment to investigate academic freedom. In October, Formas organised a methodology seminar on systematic research reviews. Experiences of data collection, analysis work and contacts with stakeholders were shared at the event. By allowing agencies to familiarise themselves with each other's working methods and methodological choices, the network's methodology seminars can eventually contribute to the development of the agencies involved. The network's activities provide an opportunity for joint learning between agencies regarding, for example, the implementation of evaluations and analyses. Over time, the knowledge is expected to help the individual agencies to produce a more comprehensive knowledge base than before. This can lead to more accurate evaluations and a reduced reporting burden for HEIs.

²⁴ Section 7a

²⁵ Appropriation directions for budget year 2024 concerning the Swedish Higher Education Authority. Amendment decision, 25 April 2024.

International

In recent years, UKÄ has significantly increased its participation in international quality assurance contexts. In 2024, UKÄ developed a plan for internationalisation that aims to create good long-term conditions for the agency's international involvement.

Background information about why UKÄ works with internationalisation

- The increased internationalisation in the higher education sector in relation to education, research and collaboration places new demands on quality assurance. Quality assurance of higher education is increasingly transnational. Many countries in Europe are able to carry out reviews abroad and recognise reviews carried out in other countries. This is not the case in Sweden, where UKÄ is the only quality assurance organisation and reviews of HEIs and programmes are carried out by UKÄ.
- UKÄ's national quality assurance system is based, inter alia, on standards and guidelines agreed within the European Higher Education Area as well as European guidelines for research. Sweden should endeavour to live up to agreements within the Bologna Process and implement the Bologna tools that have been agreed.

In order for UKÄ to be able to develop quality assurance methods and processes, the agency needs to collaborate with other countries' quality assurance organisations. Collaboration takes place through international knowledge exchanges, working groups, assessor assignments, meetings, courses and conferences. In addition, it is crucial for both UKÄ's activities and Swedish higher education to monitor and, when relevant, influence international developments. More concretely, internationalisation for UKÄ's quality assurance relates to how we are affected by increased internationalisation in the sector and how we need to relate to it in different ways, how we may work more internationally and how we may further integrate international dimensions into our reviews.

Europe is rapidly moving towards an increasingly internationalised higher education sector. The European Commission, which is pushing for greater implementation of the Bologna objectives and agreed tools, has come up with several initiatives with far-reaching consequences for the higher education sector. One of these initiatives is the call for funds to form a so-called European University – 24 Swedish HEIs are now part of such alliances. The development of the European University is leading to more international joint programmes and alliances that need to be quality assured, without increasing the workload for the HEIs. UKÄ therefore needs to follow and relate to the development of transnational quality assurance within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Another current issue is that of a European degree and European degree

labelling. Here too, UKÄ is following developments both internationally and here in Sweden – for example by participating in meetings organised by the Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) and through dialogue with the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF).

UKÄ's international quality assurance activities are divided into five partly overlapping activities: participation in networks, UKÄ's international advisory group, continuing professional development, communication, and self-initiated projects and analyses.

UKÄ has been a member of ENQA since 2020 and registered in EQAR (The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) since 2021. One member of staff is a member of the ENQA Agency Review Committee and is part of ENQA's pool of assessors. In recent years, UKÄ's remit has been broadened to include quality assurance of research to a greater extent. Together with the corresponding agency in France, Hcéres, UKÄ has led a working group within ENQA aimed at mapping to what extent and in what way quality assurance of research takes place within EHEA. The work will be finalised in the form of a report and a webinar in early 2025. In 2024, extensive preparatory work was carried out for the ENQA review that UKÄ will undergo in spring 2025. The self-evaluation work was led by a small group of employees but involved the entire agency.

Two members of the evaluation department at UKÄ represent Sweden in thematic working groups within the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) that work with quality assurance and the social dimension, respectively. As already mentioned, we lead a working group within ENQA. UKÄ is also a member of the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education, NOQA, where we presented the results of our report on transnational quality assurance at the annual conference in 2024. UKÄ regularly participates in the EQAF (European Quality Assurance Forum) conference, and QAN (Quality Audit Network), which brings together quality assurance agencies within ENQA that carry out institutional audits, chose to hold its annual conference at UKÄ. UKÄ also hosted an ECA meeting (European Consortium for Accreditation) with a seminar on student influence. One of the staff members is a member of the board and, together with another person, has developed a training programme aimed at new investigators or project managers in quality assurance. One staff member participates in CoARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment) meetings both nationally, as an observer, and internationally to follow developments.

In 2023–2024, UKÄ worked in partnership with UHR to conduct a survey aimed at Swedish HEIs. The survey was conducted as part of UHR's government assignment to map the Swedish HEIs' conditions for participating in the European University initiative. UKÄ's survey questions concerned the HEIs' experiences of transnational quality

assurance of the European University and joint programmes. The responses indicated that there are a number of obstacles, such as obstacles related to quality assurance of joint programmes. The European procedure for quality assurance of programmes is only used to a small degree and was not well known among the HEIs at the time of the study. The responses also indicated that HEIs would like to see more national cooperation between HEIs and relevant government agencies on these issues, in order to better manage developments. During the work with the survey study, UKÄ observed that there are joint degree programmes at Swedish HEIs that have been evaluated by foreign quality assurance organisations without UKÄ being informed of this. This is evident from, inter alia, DEQAR's (Database of External Quality Assurance Results) list of joint programmes that have been quality assured by EQAR-registered quality assurance organisations. UKÄ is now developing a procedure for systematically collecting such information.

Dissemination of results

Articles on its website, publications, webinars and feedback conferences are some of the tools and channels used by UKÄ to disseminate the results.

UKÄ's website

On the UKÄ website contains Höskolekollen, a display tool for reviews within the national quality assurance system.

All decisions and opinions from reviews of the quality assurance processes of HEIs, programme evaluations, appraisals of degree-awarding powers and thematic evaluations are published on an ongoing basis in a graphical, comprehensible format. In addition to Höskolekollen, UKÄ also publishes articles on review results. For example, articles on the thematic evaluation of HEI collaboration, and on the coordinated review of contract education, were published after completion of these reviews.

Dialogue and dissemination of results in connection with reviews

UKÄ endeavours to maintain a dialogue with the HEIs before, during and after a review or evaluation. Kick-off meetings and the like are valuable opportunities for HEIs to ask questions about the upcoming review, the assessment criteria and the documentation they are to submit. The meetings can also provide a forum for sharing experiences, for example on approaches and methods for a quality-driven self-evaluation process. The two sections on method and process development above (in the chapters on reviews of HEIs' quality assurance work and programme evaluations) report on the kick-off and dialogue meetings of the previous year.

Feedback conferences are usually organised after reviews and are important opportunities for reflection and exchange of experience between the HEIs and UKÄ. In most cases, the chair or representatives of the assessment panel also participate. Two feedback conferences were organised in 2024. In October, a feedback conference was held for the evaluation of real estate brokerage programmes. The meeting began with the assessment panel presenting its view of the evaluation results. The participating HEIs were then invited to present good examples and discuss various themes. In January 2024, a feedback conference was organised for thematic evaluation of nursing programmes, in preparation for the follow-up. An important element of the conference was that HEIs were able to present good examples (which had been selected in advance

by the assessment panel and UKÄ). During the conference, the approximately 70 participants also had the opportunity to discuss matters in groups and provide feedback to UKÄ. Several of the responses indicated that the evaluation contributed to development, for example by providing support for previously identified development needs.

Mappings and analyses conducted during the year

In addition to the reviews mentioned in the report, UKÄ released the following publications related to quality assurance in 2024:

- *Transnational quality assurance – Swedish higher education institutions' experiences of quality assurance of the European University and joint programmes*, reg. no. 51-00258-24
- *Improving quality and promoting excellence in Swedish higher education – Proposals for development of the national quality assurance system*, reg. no. 111-00481-23
- *The impact of evaluations on the administrative burden in the higher education sector – a mapping*, reg. no. 111-00214-24
- *Improving quality – a developed methodology for UKÄ's reviews*, reg. no. 412-00045-24

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) is tasked with strengthening higher education in Sweden and assuring Sweden's status as a knowledge society. We review the quality of higher education, analyse and follow up developments in the higher education sector and monitor legal compliance for students.

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