

Guidelines for thematic evaluation of collaboration with the surrounding community



Guidelines for thematic evaluation of collaboration with the surrounding community

Published by the Swedish Higher Education Authority 2023

Authors: Anna Lundberg, Markus Lindström, Torsten Blomkvist, Amanda Hansson, Martin Bergman

Reference number: 111-00048-23

Swedish Higher Education Authority • Hammarbybacken 31 • Box 6024, 121 06 Johanneshov

Tel: +46 (0)8 563 085 00 • e-mail registrator@uka.se • www.uka.se

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Background.....	5
Developing methodology in dialogue.....	6
The evaluation process	7
The purpose of evaluation.....	7
The evaluation model	7
Module I: Evaluation of the individual higher education institution	9
Background account.....	9
Assessment areas and evaluation questions	10
Assessment area: Governance and organisation.....	10
Assessment area: Implementation and results.....	11
The design of self-evaluations.....	12
The assessment panel.....	12
Module II: Workshops	14
Module III: In-depth thematic studies.....	15
Appendix 1: The composition of the advisory group	16
Appendix 2: Preliminary timetable	17

Introduction

These guidelines apply to the thematic evaluation of collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs) and the surrounding community. The guidance is based on the national system for the quality assurance of higher education and research developed and implemented by the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) on assignment from the Swedish Government (see UKÄ Report 2016:15).

Thematic evaluations are one of four components of the national system for the quality assurance of higher education and research¹. These evaluations are to be based on tasks of significance to the quality of higher education for which HEIs have a statutory responsibility.

A thematic evaluation should contribute important knowledge, promote development and make national comparisons of how HEIs work and the results achieved within a specific area. Methods of evaluation are developed for and adapted to the theme in question.

The purpose of these guidelines is to support both HEIs and assessors during the evaluation process. The guidelines describe the evaluation model and its various stages, including evaluation questions and the basis for assessment. The guidelines are based on a pilot study conducted during spring 2023, a report on which is available in Swedish on the UKÄ website at www.uka.se.

¹ Any mention of research in the guidelines includes artistic research.

Background

The assignment of HEIs to collaborate with the surrounding community has a long tradition in Sweden and a prominent place in the Swedish Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434). In 2021, the Higher Education Act was amended to state that collaboration should be for mutual exchanges, as well as ensuring that the knowledge and expertise found at HEIs bring benefits to society. Work on collaboration has been ongoing for many years and to various extents at Swedish HEIs. According to the research policy bill *Research, Freedom, Future: Knowledge and Innovation for Sweden* (Government Bill 2020/21:60), these amendments can be expected to lead to a strategic overview that may result in new ways of working.

Collaboration pursuant to the Higher Education Act

As the accountable authority, the Government shall establish higher education institutions for the provision of:

1. courses and study programmes based on scholarship or artistic practice and on proven experience; and
2. research and artistic research as well as development work.

The mandate of higher education institutions shall include collaboration for mutual exchanges with the surrounding community, as well as ensuring that the knowledge and expertise found at the higher education institution bring benefit to society.

Government Bill 2020/2021:60 emphasises that collaboration is highly significant to the quality of education and research. Collaboration is also vital for generating new knowledge and meeting present and future major societal challenges such as crises, skills provision, the green transition and global sustainable development.

On 22 December 2022, the Government gave UKÄ the assignment of evaluating the collaboration conducted by HEIs pursuant to Chapter 1 Section 2 of the Higher Education Act, which states that the mandate of higher education institutions shall include collaboration for mutual exchanges with the surrounding community, as well as ensuring that the knowledge and expertise found at the higher education institution bring benefit to society. The assignment is being implemented in the form of a thematic evaluation. According to UKÄ's appropriation directions, the results of the evaluation are to be reported to the Government Offices of Sweden (Ministry of Education and Research) no later than 31 October 2024.

While all HEIs must comply with the provisions of the Higher Education Act on collaboration with the surrounding community, in the interests of resource-efficiency the evaluation will be limited to HEIs with at least 300 full-time equivalent students (FTEs).

Developing methodology in dialogue

Collaboration with the surrounding community is a large and diversified field. HEIs go about collaborating in various ways depending on their profile areas, subject areas and non-academic partners. To ensure that the evaluation is relevant and uses resources efficiently, a pilot study has been conducted in which we have studied analyses, evaluations, reports and statistics produced by UKÄ and other government agencies.

Within the framework of the pilot study, we have also conducted dialogues to obtain knowledge and experiences from UKÄ's reference groups², UKÄ's Advisory Council, the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions' Working Group on Collaboration, the Swedish Research Council, sustainable development research council Formas, the research council for working life, health and welfare Forte and innovation agency Vinnova, as well as KLOSSnet, a network of managers at Swedish HEIs intended to develop strategic collaboration. We have assembled an advisory group (see Appendix 1) based on nominations at dialogue meetings. The advisory group has assisted UKÄ in establishing the direction of the evaluation, preparing general questions and developing methods. The advisory group has also assisted UKÄ in designing these guidelines.

UKÄ's decision on the design of the evaluation is based on these dialogues and material gathered in the pilot study.³

² UKÄ's two national reference groups include representatives of employer and employee organisations, HEIs, students and doctoral students and the Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers (SULF). UKÄ's International advisory group has also been consulted.

³ Swedish Higher Education Authority (2023) *Tematisk utvärdering av samverkan med det omgivande samhället – en förstudie* [Thematic evaluations of collaboration with the surrounding community: A pilot study] www.uka.se.

The evaluation process

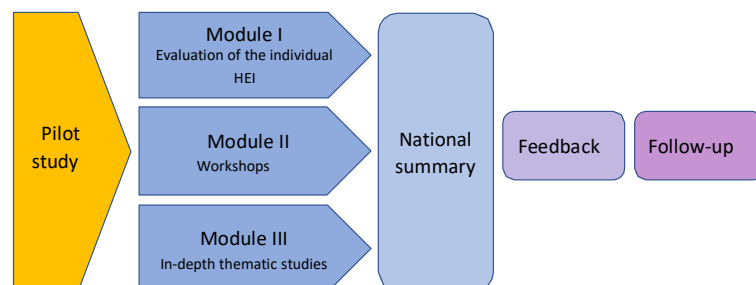
This section describes the purpose of and model for implementing the evaluation, including the main steps. Appendix 2 describes which activities an HEI is expected to conduct or participate in, including a timetable and any deadlines.

The purpose of evaluation

The evaluation is focused on the work of HEIs to create favourable conditions for collaboration on research and education pursuant to the Higher Education Act. The purpose of the thematic evaluation of collaboration with the surrounding community is to:

- evaluate how HEIs go about creating and maintaining good conditions within research and education for complying with the legal requirement for mutual exchanges with the surrounding community and ensuring that the knowledge and expertise found at the higher education institution bring benefit to society (Chapter 1 Section 2 Higher Education Act);
- provide HEIs with an opportunity to evaluate their work with collaboration and to exchange experiences, as well as to promote knowledge and development;
- identify strengths and areas for improvement; and
- create knowledge about how the results of collaboration with the surrounding community are followed up, utilised and disseminated.

The evaluation model



The thematic evaluation consists of three complementary modules. The three modules are freestanding and together they constitute a national summary of how Swedish HEIs collaborate with the surrounding community.

In the first module, each HEI's work on strategic collaboration is evaluated. Each HEI performs a self-evaluation of and receives feedback from an assessment panel on its collaboration with the surrounding community. Most of the work of HEIs takes place in the first module.

In the second module, teachers, researchers, students and non-academic partners affiliated with the various HEIs are invited to attend workshops in order to share knowledge and experience of their day-to-day, practical collaborations on research and education.

The third module consists of studies of specific thematic areas in the field that have been identified as particularly relevant to how HEIs collaborate with the surrounding community. These in-depth thematic studies are conducted by UKÄ. The methods used for the studies may vary depending on the area of investigation.

Together, the three modules provide the basis for a national summary of how Swedish HEIs collaborate with their surrounding communities. The national summary is compiled by UKÄ. It is intended to increase knowledge about the similarities and variations in how HEIs collaborate with the surrounding community at an overall level. In its national summary, UKÄ will also highlight strengths and weaknesses and make recommendations to the higher education sector as a whole regarding how collaboration with the surrounding community can be improved. Thus comparisons are made at an overall level rather than between specific HEIs.

Once the evaluation is completed, UKÄ will invite HEIs to a feedback conference in order to exchange experiences. As the focus of the thematic evaluation is knowledge, learning and development, this feedback conference is a vital component of the evaluation process. The national summary of collaboration between HEIs and the surrounding community will be presented, including the challenges identified and good examples of how HEIs go about creating favourable conditions for collaboration. It will also be an opportunity to discuss and reflect on how the evaluation was carried out.

The results of the evaluation will be followed up after two years. Prior to the follow-up, the evaluated HEIs will submit a report on the measures taken based on the recommendations in the assessment panel's report (Module I). In their reports, HEIs are expected to analyse the recommendations made to them and report on the measures they have taken to develop and strengthen collaboration with the surrounding community. UKÄ will appoint an assessment panel to carry out the follow-up.

Module I: Evaluation of the individual higher education institution

In Module I, each HEI will be individually evaluated. Collaboration with the surrounding community will be evaluated in two assessment areas: *governance and organisation* and *implementation and results*. HEIs will be asked to perform a self-evaluation based on evaluation questions. This self-evaluation will be assessed by an assessment panel comprised of experts from the higher education sector and other sectors of society (see the section “The assessment panel”). The assessment panel’s recommendations to each HEI are graded as “should” or “may”. The panel does not make an overall judgement. UKÄ will only follow up “should” recommendations. The focus of the evaluation in this module is not on comparing HEIs but rather on offering feedback to each institution as a basis for its future development.

The evaluation questions are open-ended, allowing each HEI to describe, evaluate and justify how it goes about collaborating with the surrounding community based on its specific profile and conditions. In addition to the evaluation questions, HEIs are given a list of aspects that they should consider when answering the questions. The HEI is not however limited to these aspects in its answers. The evaluation covers collaboration on both research and education and the HEI is required to describe both areas in its self-evaluation.

The HEI is also asked to attach a background account to its self-evaluation describing its specific conditions for collaboration in terms of both opportunities and challenges. This account helps the assessment panel to consider the HEI’s collaboration with its surrounding community in context.

The next section contains instructions on formulating this background account and answering the self-evaluation questions. This is followed by instructions on the scope of self-evaluation and on uploading the various documents in the self-evaluation to UKÄ’s collaboration platform.

Background account

Describe the HEI’s profile and specific conditions for collaboration with the surrounding community, such as its range of courses and programmes and research specialisations, from a regional, national and international perspective. Give a brief account of the opportunities and challenges associated with collaboration.

Provide an overall account of the HEI's collaboration with the private sector, the public sector and civil society, as well as with the individual citizen. The background account should be no more than 2 pages in addition to the 15 pages of the self-evaluation.

Assessment areas and evaluation questions

In this section, we present the general questions to be answered in self-evaluations. HEIs are free to structure their self-evaluations as they see fit, as long as they clearly address all of the evaluation questions. It is beneficial if the HEI can place its answers in the context of its background account. As one aim of evaluation is to promote knowledge and development, it is positive if the HEI can describe any areas for improvement in its answers.

Assessment area: Governance and organisation

Assessment in this area deals with how the HEI governs and organises its work to create good conditions for collaboration on research and education. The questions are answered by **describing, evaluating and justifying** the manner in which the HEI governs and organises its collaboration with the surrounding community. You should also describe any risks and challenges associated with prioritisations and strategic choices concerning collaboration.

1. What does the HEI want to achieve through collaboration with the surrounding community?

Consider the following aspects in your answer:

- How the HEI's overall strategy and objectives for collaboration can be understood in the context of the institution's specific profile and conditions.
- How significant societal challenges are weighed up when prioritising and making strategic choices about collaboration.
- How the HEI makes trade-offs in its collaborations with, for example, the private sector, public sector, civil society and the individual citizen.
- How consideration has been given to potential goal conflicts in, for example, relationships with non-academic partners or balancing collaboration with academic freedom.

2. How does the HEI create a framework and preconditions for collaborating with the surrounding community on research and education?

Consider the following aspects in your answer:

- Division of responsibility and organisational structure. Feel free to give examples of the functions and organisational placement of units and posts within the HEI.
- How collaboration is integrated with and considered in the regular governance system and operational planning, such as when allocating resources.
- Incentives to collaborate and the value placed on collaboration, including in recruitment, the acquisition of qualifications and staff mobility.
- How the HEI ensures that collaboration is for mutual exchanges.
- How the HEI takes account of potential differences between subject areas.
- Give examples of methods and knowledge-driving measures used to strengthen collaboration on research and education.

Assessment area: Implementation and results

Assessment in this area deals with both how the HEI follows up the implementation and results of collaborative activities within research and education and how the results of such follow-ups are put to use. Documentation is one important component. Answer questions by **describing**, **evaluating** and **justifying** how the HEI works with follow-ups.

3. How does the HEI follow up activities in collaboration with the surrounding community and the results thereof?

Consider the following aspects in your answer:

- How the HEI follows up and documents the implementation and results of collaboration with the surrounding community. If you use performance indicators in your follow-ups, describe and justify your choice of indicators and reflect on the outcomes.
- How the HEI follows up the benefits of collaboration for its own organisation and for non-academic partners and the surrounding community.

4. How is the information obtained from following up collaborations between the HEI and the surrounding community used?

Consider the following aspects in your answer:

- How the results of follow-ups are used at university-wide level as a basis for strategic decisions about and the prioritisation of collaborations with the surrounding community.
- Provide examples of how the results of follow-ups are used to support and develop collaboration between study and research environments and the surrounding community based on their different conditions, strengths and challenges.
- How the HEI works systematically to disseminate the results of follow-ups outside its own organisation.

The design of self-evaluations

It is important that self-evaluation is unambiguous and exhaustive. The assessment of the HEI is based on the self-evaluation and its appendices. The following instructions apply to self-evaluations:

- Use UKÄ's template for self-evaluations, which will be sent together with these guidelines to all HEIs that are to be evaluated.
- The completed self-evaluation should not exceed 15 pages excluding the background account, which should not exceed 2 pages.
- You may upload a maximum of five appendices to your self-evaluation. These may be established documents that are relevant to answering the evaluation questions.
- Upload the self-evaluation and appendices to UKÄ's collaboration platform no later than 19 January 2024. Instructions for uploading material to UKÄ's collaboration platform will be distributed at the kick-off meeting and sent to every HEI that is to be evaluated.

The assessment panel

UKÄ will appoint an assessment panel based on nominations from HEIs, student unions (via the Swedish National Union of Students), organisations representing Swedish commerce and industry and other interest organisations. Given the focus of the evaluation, it is important that a good balance is achieved on the assessment panel between representatives of the higher education sector and representatives of the surrounding community. The composition of the assessment panel shall ensure good knowledge of collaboration between HEIs and the surrounding community. The assessment panel shall have experience of practical and strategic work with collaboration on research and education. It would also be beneficial if the assessment panel has research-based knowledge of collaboration.

Perspectives on collaboration from various societal sectors is also important. Finally, as far as possible we will ensure that the assessment panel has an even gender balance and geographical spread.

UKÄ will only appoint the assessment panel after circulating its proposal to the HEIs. The assessment panel consists of:

- representatives of HEIs;
- student and doctoral student representatives;
- representatives of working life and other non-academic partners from various societal sectors; and
- assessors with experience of working in countries other than Sweden.

The assessment panel will assess and offer an opinion on the work of each HEI. In its opinion, the assessment panel will make specific recommendations to each HEI on what should and may be developed in each assessment area. Each HEI will receive the opinion before it is put to a decision by UKÄ.

As part of Module I, the assessment panel is also tasked with writing a summary and performing an overall analysis. This will be an important basis for the national summary to be compiled by UKÄ.

Module II: Workshops

During spring 2024, UKÄ will arrange a series of workshops on collaboration with the surrounding community. Invitations will primarily be sent to active teachers, researchers and students affiliated to the various HEIs, as well as to non-academic partners from various societal sectors.

The purpose of the workshops is to provide input on day-to-day practical work with collaboration on research and education for the national summary, from the perspectives of both HEIs and non-academic partners.

Examples of questions that may be addressed include:

- What are the motivations to collaborate?
- What are the conditions for collaboration?
- How are the results utilised, followed up and disseminated?
- How is the strategic work and support of HEIs perceived?
How can it be developed from the perspectives of teachers, researchers, students and non-academic partners?

The workshops will also be an opportunity to exchange experiences of the challenges presented by collaborations in various areas of research and education, as well as good examples of how to overcome them. So, knowledge, learning and development all play an important role in the evaluation process.

Invitations will be sent to registrars at the HEIs, as well as quality coordinators or equivalent functions. UKÄ will also send a number of questions for delegates to reflect on prior to the workshops.

Module III: In-depth thematic studies

The third module consists of in-depth thematic studies conducted by UKÄ. The purpose of these studies is to contribute to the national summary of Swedish HEIs' collaboration with the surrounding community. The studies will examine specific thematic areas that we consider particularly relevant to how HEIs collaborate with the surrounding community. These areas will be identified in a pilot study and in collaboration with the evaluation's advisory group. The decision on which in-depth thematic studies will be conducted will be made during autumn 2023, at which time we will also inform HEIs of which areas have been chosen. The studies will be conducted in parallel with Modules I and II.

Appendix 1: The composition of the advisory group

UKÄ has appointed an advisory group prior to commencing our thematic evaluation of collaboration with the surrounding community. We have invited HEIs, the Swedish National Union of Students and industry organisations to nominate members through dialogue. The advisory group consists of 12 members who are active at HEIs or in the surrounding community.

In our opinion, the advisory group has a combined breadth and depth of expertise that can support UKÄ in establishing the direction and approach of the evaluation. Between them, the members of the group have a wealth of experience and knowledge of collaboration within various subject areas, strategically and within both research and education. In appointing the advisory group, our aim has been to achieve gender balance and representation from a wide geographical area and many HEIs, as well as international experience. Representatives of working life bring knowledge and experience of collaboration from beyond the higher education sector. The student representative is registered in a third-cycle programme.

The members of the advisory group are:

- Anna Jonsson, Lund University
- Christina Sundman, Region Stockholm
- Emil Görnerup, Confederation of Swedish Enterprise
- Erika Augustinsson, Region Blekinge
- Gunnar Sivertsen, Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education
- Gustaf Bjurhammar Birck, Uppsala University
- Gustav Bohlin, VA (Public and Science)
- Lisa Bomble, University West
- Maria Landgren, Vinnova
- Marika Hedin, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ)
- Per Fagrell, KTH Royal Institute of Technology
- Peter Värbrand, Linköping University

Appendix 2: Preliminary timetable

Described here are the activities HEIs are expected to implement or participate in during the evaluation and when these are due to take place.

Activity	Period/deadline	Content
Nominations to the assessment panel	Letters will be sent to vice-chancellors, the Swedish Union of Students and representatives of the surrounding community. The deadline for nominations is 20 September 2023.	See the section “The assessment panel”
Kick-off meeting	10 November 2023	At the kick-off meeting, we will present the guidelines and address any practical issues concerning the timetable. The meeting will be attended by representatives of the HEIs to be evaluated, representatives of the assessment panel and staff from UKÄ. The kick-off meeting will be held digitally.
Self-evaluation	The deadline for submitting self-evaluations to UKÄ is 19 January 2024.	See the section “The design of self-evaluations”
Workshops	Workshops will be held during spring 2024. Invitations will be sent to HEIs in December 2023.	See the section “Module II: Workshops”
In-depth thematic studies	UKÄ is responsible for the in-depth thematic studies, which will be conducted during autumn 2023 and spring 2024 in parallel with Modules I and II. It may be decided to gather information from HEIs by, for example, holding interviews.	See the section “Module III: In-depth thematic studies”
Preliminary opinions from Module I circulated to HEIs.	HEIs respond to the opinions during spring 2024. More details will be given at the kick-off meeting.	See the section “The assessment panel”
UKÄ makes decisions on the opinions in Module I	Late spring/early summer 2024.	See the section “The assessment panel”
Feedback conference	UKÄ invites stakeholders to a digital feedback conference in January 2025.	See the section “The evaluation model”

Follow-up	The results of the evaluation will be followed up after two years.	See the section “The evaluation model”
-----------	--	--

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 certainty for students.

uka.se

